

Session 4

Spiritual Growth and Living in Jesus

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Methods for Preparing and Giving a Teaching

Shifting Gears by Focusing on Jesus Christ

What, in practice, is the focus of churches that we have experienced? Very often it is the building up of an adequate, efficient, well administered plant to which people are invited to be spiritually nourished. “For the most part,” says George Green, “our churches are spiritual filling stations nourishing the saved.”

In the past we worked on the supposition that if we nourished our church-going people sufficiently they would then be motivated to go out and evangelize. That has not happened. Many churches are thus self centered and suffer from koinonitis. The sheep have a close warm fellowship and grow fat and comfortable. Is this the model of church which Jesus gave us? Not, if we reflect on the Great Commission.

In the early church, evangelization was central – Christians then saw themselves as a sent people, the light, and the leaven. They saw that the church exists by being involved in evangelization in much the same way as a fire exists by burning.

Somewhere along the way we lost our fire. So we must redefine our goals:

The missionary situation of the church in the 20th century calls for a church in which each member, as he/she comes up against the unbelieving world, will be able to bear effective witness to his/her faith, both in word and action. It requires Christian congregations in our communities that know they have a battle on their hands for the souls of men/women and are equipped to move into the community and find opportunities for bringing the Christian gospel to bear upon the paralyzing unbelief of men and women. In humiliation we must confess that we are not ready for the missionary situation that is upon us. The word ‘missions’ denotes an activity sponsored by us in non-Christian lands or in distant parts of our lands, or in underprivileged sections of our city, and not the occupation of ordinary church members. Our churches ‘have’ missions. but they are not themselves missions ... The real problem is to get people in our churches to think of the church as a mission and of themselves as missionaries ... By what authority is Jesus’ definition of disciples and the whole New Testament definition of the church ignored? Jesus did not invite men/women to become good characters and supporters of a religious institution, but rather to embark with him on a mission for the redemption of the world. Those who shrank from wholehearted participation in his mission he turned away, even though they were enthusiastic about his teachings and admirers of his Person. Every believer had a ministry, a priesthood, to discharge in relation to his fellow persons, and therein lay the evangelizing power of the early church which made it able to conquer an empire.

– James Smart

So the assumption that involvement in evangelization will come as a result of nurture is wrong.

Steps to Spiritual Maturity

The order of events in the spiritual growth of the parish (and individual) is as follows:

1. Evangelization

- a. Acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus
- b. Baptism in the Holy Spirit
- c. Commitment to be Disciples of Jesus

2. Discipleship

Continuing growth and equipping disciples for ministry through prayer, sacraments, the teachings of the Church and education on the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

- a. Transformation in the Holy Spirit
- b. Living a life led by the Holy Spirit
- c. Identifying and using gifts in Ministry

3. Stewardship

A disciple response: “Finally: the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others.” *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #24

- a. Time
- b. Talents and gifts
- c. Treasure

Important Functions of a Parish

It is a training center where the People of God are discipled and equipped for their respective areas of ministry and mission.

Our Present Goal

“To equip God’s People for the work of the ministry.” (Eph. 4:11-12)

We equip you to go forth and share the good news in your oikos, and so build the Kingdom.

Living in Jesus Christ

Approaches to Answering Common Complaints

1. “All they talk about in church is money, money, money...”

We could respond to this comment by saying something like:

- “You know I have gotten so much from *Holy Spirit Church* that I could never really repay it all.”
- “I sort of feel it is my home, and so I try to assume responsibility for giving my share.”

We should explain how we look on our contribution as an act of worship – way in which we express thanks to God for what he has done for us.

The church has the same problems with regard to finance as our home does, except that it is amplified 1,500 times. The only source of income is the donations of the members.

Example of Expenses

Power and Light.....	\$3,500.00
Helping the Poor.....	600.00
Telephones.....	900.00

Who but the parishioners will pay these expenses?

2. “My life is all messed up, so God does not want me”

This person is in bondage through despair. Very often we will find that such a person has enthroned his/her own god. It can be, job, family, house, money, or personal pleasure. This emphasis submerges their guilt and sinfulness.

In trying to help this person:

- a. We could bring him/her back to earlier times and locate a religious period. “Did you go to church when you were young?” We should keep reminiscing on that period, swapping our own experiences. We have now brought to the surface memories that will be reflected on long after we leave.
- b. We could share a witness about our own family, how we had problems and how we got strength to carry them from the Lord.

“Thank God I have the church where I have so many brothers and sisters who help me carry my burdens. Our Disciples of Jesus Group is such a consolation in this area. Let me tell you about it...”

3. “Years ago I was treated badly by a priest so I left”

It is best to never confront a specific incident. Do not take the stance of being the mighty defender of the church.

Listen with sympathy to the story. It may be true or it may be not. There are so many ways of responding:

- a. “I can tell you a better one than that...” This diffuses the incident and he/she knows (without our saying so) that we reacted in a completely different way.
- b. “It all goes to show how human ... how unkind we all can be at times.”

In the Scriptures, people were very unkind to Jesus. They even threw him out of his own town of Nazareth. They called him a Samaritan, illegitimate, possessed by Satan. Yet He did not give up.

Invitation: “It is time to put it all behind you. Come in and experience our Prayer Group. Everyone there is a hurt person like you ... Join the club ... You will like it.”

4. “I disagree with the Church on a lot of issues, so I stopped going”

The Catholic Church has the wisdom of two thousand years. She takes the mandate of Jesus “*To teach all things that I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:20) seriously. Often in history her stand on various issues proved itself to be true. Jesus told the church, personified in Peter:

You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be considered loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:18-20).

On issues on faith and morals the successors of Peter have authority to teach. The Catholic Church takes a firm stand on issues like abortion, divorce, contraception, and homosexuality.

Invitation: “There are so many interesting and important issues which we discuss in our Prayer Group meeting. Your insights will be welcomed, and you can learn a lot. I have.”

5. “The Church does not want me, since I am divorced”

It is never true to say that the church rejects anyone. Some people who are divorced are under the wrong impression that they are excommunicated. This is not so. If a divorced person has not remarried that person is free to receive the Sacraments. If a divorced person is remarried, without an annulment of the previous marriage from the church, then that person is not free to receive the Sacraments. He or she should speak to a priest of the parish to discern what can be done to rectify the situation.

Those who are divorced and are remarried without a church annulment, even though they cannot receive the Sacraments, are welcome to attend Mass and to be involved in church activities.

We should not abandon the Lord since he never abandons us. People in this situation should be encouraged to do the best they can in the circumstances in which they find themselves. It should be emphasized that if they persevere in good faith, they may be very surprised to see how the Lord will open doors for them.

6. “I couldn’t take all of the changes, so I quit”

Most of the changes which came in the Catholic Church in recent times are the result of Vatican Council II.

Pope John XXIII called that council so that the church might present herself more clearly in a rapidly changing world.

The Latin Mass

Latin became the language of the Mass at a time when it was the spoken language of the people. Even after it became a dead language (not spoken by ordinary people), it was still retained in the Mass.

That was changed by the Constitution on the Liturgy at the Vatican Council. There was no change in the substance of the Mass. Even when the bride changes her dress, she is still the bride!

“Many of the changes I did not like at first, but now I can participate better, like pray and sing with the community and get more satisfaction out of Mass.”

Invitation: “Come in and experience it. It is too important to neglect. It is the same Mass in a different garb.”

7. “I don’t need the Church; I worship God in my own way.”

We are not free to worship God in the way we like but rather in the way he tells us. He has told us through Jesus in the Bible.

There are two dimensions to the worship to which we are called:

- a. **Personal:** One-to-one relationship with Jesus, which is developed especially through private prayer.
- b. **Communal:** Jesus founded a church (Matthew 16:18) to which He gave authority. Jesus said, “He who hears you hears me and he who rejects you rejects me” (Luke 10:16).

8. “Why must Catholics go to Mass on Sundays?”

The third commandment says, “Remember you keep holy the Sabbath day.”

The church specified, and has authority to do so, the manner in which we are to fulfill this third commandment.

The Catholic Church, like a good mother, knows what is good for her children and insists on their obeying. How often parents say, “Eat your vegetables or you won’t grow up healthy and strong.”

To come into full growth as a Christian, Sunday Mass is essential. We gain spiritual strength from one another in community.

That is the way Jesus meant it to be.

Dealing with Rejection

As we think about bringing people to commitment to Christ, it is imperative to know why people reject Christ and how to deal with those reasons.

Level One: Sharing

Most people in our oikos whom we are serving are rejecting Christ because of one of three reasons.

- **Ignorance:** They have never heard the claims of Christ. We must overcome this by sharing the truths of Christ.
- **Hearsay:** They have heard rumors about Christianity that have been falsely believed.
- **Distortion:** Their view of Christianity has been distorted by exposure to the wrong kind of Christians; or the wrong kind of teaching about Christ.

Hearsay and distortion are overcome by serving and loving the outsiders so they can get a true picture of what a Christian is.

Levels Two and Three: Sharing and Explaining

At these two levels people hear a logical explanation of the gospel. If they reject Christ at these levels it is because of:

1. Lack of Real Understanding

We must remember that to hear the gospel is not necessarily to understand the gospel. In dealing with this problem, it would probably be a good idea to let somebody else share Christ with them. Often, we have found that by hearing the same truths from a different person the logjam is removed.

2. Intellectual Hang-up

Often there are questions they may have about the doctrines of the church. Most problems in this area can be traced back to a false idea of what the church really is.

Level Four: Dealing with Rejection

At this level, people believe the gospel to be true. Rejection can still come. It can come through one of these five ways.

1. Rejection of the Lordship of Jesus Christ

They may be unwilling to let anyone be Lord of their life. This often happens when people feel satisfied with their own lifestyle. This is one of the scariest reasons for rejection because this person believes the message but wants to keep self on the throne. We must confront the person with the danger of this position and the truth that if he/she believes, he/she will let Christ be Lord.

2. Family and Peer Pressure

In many cases, accepting Christ will mean the loss of relationships. We have to agree with any person who feels this, that it could be true. Jesus himself spoke of this happening (Matthew 10:34-35). On the other hand, accepting Christ could be the very thing that will bring family and friends to Christ.

3. “I don’t deserve it”

The person feels he/she is not good enough to receive Christ’s love and forgiveness. This rejection can also be expressed by “I am too sinful” or “How do I know God will accept me?” We can deal with this by showing that God saves only the sinners and that because he is God, his power to forgive is much greater than our ability to sin.

4. Cannot give up Sinful Habits

This person fails to understand that Christ will give the power and motivation to overcome even the worst addictive sin habits.

5. Delay

This person feels that if given enough time, he/she can “get his/her act together” and then be presentable to Christ. The best approaches to use with the person who is delaying are that:

- You may not have a tomorrow (John 4: 14; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Psalms 144:4).
- If you wait to get your “Act together,” you never will.

Our Approach

“The work of evangelization presupposes in the evangelizer the ever increasing love for those whom he/she is evangelizing” (Pope Paul VI)

Individual Study: Attitude Survey

Ask five people to respond to these questions. The people can be strangers or members of your oikos. Start by saying, "I am involved in a class that is trying to give me a better understanding of how different people think. Could I ask you five brief questions?" If you are talking to strangers, introduce yourself first.

What do you think the greatest problem people have today?

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

Person 3: _____

Person 4: _____

Person 5: _____

What is the thing in your life that gives you the most satisfaction?

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

Person 3: _____

Person 4: _____

Person 5: _____

What is the most frustrating thing for you?

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

Person 3: _____

Person 4: _____

Person 5 _____

What would you describe as your purpose (or goal) in life?

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

Person 3: _____

Person 4: _____

Person 5 _____

Do you think organized religion (or church) is relevant or irrelevant to most people today? Explain.

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

Person 3: _____

Person 4: _____

Person 5 _____

Bible Study: Levels of Rejection

The Four Levels of Dealing with Rejection

Level 1	Levels 2 & 3	Level 4
Hearsay, Ignorance, or Distortion	Lack of Understanding Intellectual Hang-up	Sin and Guilt Trap, Rejection of Lordship of Jesus, Family and Peer Pressure

Think of the following people in scripture and why they were rejecting Christ in the passage given. Remember the reasons for rejection. Read each passage and mark it as you read by underlining it, etc. Then as a group, discuss each of the people mentioned in the particular passage.

1. Rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-23):

2. Pharisees (John 11:46-53):

3. Nicodemus (John 3:1-5):

4. Woman at the well (John 4:15-20):

5. Unbelieving thief (Luke 23:39):

6. Agrippa (Acts 26:27-29):

7. Ephesians (Acts 19:23-34):

8. Athenians (Acts 17:16-21):

Session 4: Study Checklist and Completion Sheet

Name:

Group Leader:

- Read Chapters 4 and 5 in *Evangelization in the Modern World*
- Complete the Attitude Survey
- Complete Bible Study
- Read *Go and Make Disciples*: (1) “Why We Evangelize?” and (2) “How Evangelization Happens”