

Paul's Outreach to Different Audiences

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"Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."¹ So was the answer of the recently risen and ascended Lord to his servant Ananias, who wondered if the Lord's idea to restore sight to Saul of Tarsus was a good one. One could understand some of his hesitation, but the Lord's level of certainty in his command was clear. Ananias didn't need to be told thrice and went at once to Judas' house on Straight Street. As he went, did he contemplate these words of his Lord? He is going to be your instrument to do what? Carry your name before the Gentiles, and their rulers, and the people of Israel. Why Lord, who does that leave out? Is Saul going to take your name and what you have accomplished before everyone?

And the answer of course is yes. It is abundantly clear to us who have the pleasure of reading St. Luke's history of Paul's mission endeavors. It is difficult to overestimate the effects of the Lord's Word as proclaimed by Paul. Consider all the locations in which Paul proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ: Syria, Arabia², Jerusalem, Tarsus, Cilicia, Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Macedonia, Greece, Asia(Turkey), and Rome, all of which do not exhaust the list or include places following his first Roman imprisonment. But Paul did not proclaim the gospel to locations. He proclaimed it to the people in those places. And as you think about all the different people and different backgrounds Paul would have met in his work, the "different" in the topic of this paper grows immense. It makes the "all" Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 9 (I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some) much more staggering.

We share with Paul the commission Jesus gave to his church. Go and make disciples of all nations. Go and proclaim the gospel in Word and Sacrament to all people. We also share with Paul a call from the Lord Jesus into the public ministry of his church. And while there is certainly a distinction in the geographical scope of our call and his, the urging of our Savior to share his name with all with whom we have contact remains the same. It is beneficial for us to consider how Paul carried out his work, because while we may not travel as far as Paul did, the number of different audiences before us continues to increase and vary.

¹ Acts 9:15,16 – All Scripture references will be NIV84.

² Eckhard Schnabel argues quite persuasively that in the time Paul spends in Arabia he is not just solitarily studying the Scriptures but is already carrying out mission work among the Nabateans. I found his reasoning rather convincing. It can be found on pg 60-64 of *Paul the Missionary*.

Some Broad Considerations and Cautions

One will not go lacking as he looks for studies and resources on the Apostle Paul. Even specifically with the mindset of his outreach approach, there is plenty of grist for the mill. The topic given to me was “Paul’s Outreach to Different Audiences” and so I am choosing to narrow the focus to what information we have about Paul sharing the gospel with those who do not know it. This means I will lean for the most part on what is found in Acts, as many of the epistles are written to groups of believers to strengthen and encourage them. Of course there are instructions to young pastors and congregations that will prove beneficial to our task, but Acts is our focus.

I hope that as we look at some of this information together, I can take some things for granted. I am confident you don’t need me to tell you that when Paul preached in the synagogue in Acts 13 he used the Old Testament as his source. And in Athens among the Greeks he used the natural knowledge of God rather than the Old Testament.³ I also don’t think you need me to walk through every step of Paul’s missionary journeys in detail. You have studied this, and if you need a refresher there are much better sources than what I can provide for you.

We will focus our attention on how Paul went about his working of reaching out to basically everyone with the good news of Jesus and his resurrection. There are of course some limitations to what we can say. We do not have Paul’s Bible Information Class materials preserved. We don’t hear which illustrations he used with God’s Great Exchange. But we do know he preached Christ crucified and resolved to know nothing but that as he went about his work. (Which I pray is our goal as we use good Bible Information Classes and presentations like the Great Exchange.) We will instead look at some guiding principles we can take from what we do hear of Paul’s outreach and see how they might look in our time and place.

One other big picture caution that we will want to get out of the way is simply this. We are not Paul. And this is ok. God has blessed each of us with different gifts, abilities, and yes, even life experiences and situations. Paul’s was very unique to reach every audience with the gospel. You consider the world in which he worked. How many audiences could he immediately connect to because he was a Jew who was a Roman citizen who had studied Greek culture?⁴ Truly “God intended to accomplish great things through Paul; therefore he blessed him singularly with the multiplicity of gifts needed to carry out the mission committed to him.”⁵ I don’t think I can suggest a parallel of such an inclusive background in our setting. This does not mean we will give up on any audience with the gospel. It is simply a realization that what came naturally to Paul might be outside our reach, and even when we put forth faithful effort to grow connected to an audience, we may never achieve the same level of connection that Paul did.

Not only was Paul uniquely prepared for his work, so also was the world. Part one of Professor Valleskey’s book *A Portrait of Paul* dives into areas such as the Diaspora, Hellenization and the Pax Romana. Each brought benefits to Paul’s work. The one most worthy

³ There, I told you anyway, but that’s the last time.

⁴ Professor Wendland in his paper “The Apostle Paul and Culture” calls Paul “a bicultural kid and a citizen of Rome,” who “was able to move quite easily between the Hellenistic world and the Jewish world.

⁵ David J. Valleskey *A Portrait of Paul: Making Disciples of All Nations* NPH, pg vi.

of thought in my mind was the Diaspora and the many synagogues established that served as starting points everywhere Paul went. Whenever he arrived somewhere, he knew he had somewhere to speak.

We are also not Paul in the scope of our call. Jesus saw fit in his wisdom to have Paul share the Gospel with a plethora of different audiences. We might make it too simple at times by saying Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles included a lot of audiences. Corinthians were different from the residents of Cilicia. Athenians and the people of Lystra were different audiences. Paul was called to move with the Gospel throughout a large chunk of the globe. You and I are not. While one of the goals of this paper is to encourage all of us to consider what varied audiences we can reach with the good news, for some here, there may be a reality that right now your different audiences are young Norwegians, old Norwegians, male Norwegians, and female Norwegians.⁶ The norm however is most likely somewhere in between. We may not see as many audiences as Paul did, but in every place the opportunity to meet and evangelize a growing diversity of audiences exists.

Paul had a rather consistent pattern to his work. He would arrive in a locale and go to the place where he could immediately have a hearing, most often the synagogue.⁷ He would begin his work there and normally continue to preach as long as he was able. Once that window was closed, most often due to rejection and persecution by some, he would move to another avenue to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles and any who would listen. It is worth noting this pattern, because it is different from most of our settings. We have an established place and ministry. We work to connect with the people who are for the most part established around us. This gives us the chance to build connections with those audiences, but it is also different from Paul's experience (apart from some longer stays in Corinth and Ephesus).

We will consider some of Paul's different audiences as outlined in the Lord's words to Ananias above, but not in the exact same order. A predominance of our thought will be given to Gentile audiences, but we will start with the Jews to whom Paul proclaimed the gospel.

Before the People of Israel

As mentioned above, Paul's method of operation was to begin with the Jews who gathered in the places he traveled. This made sense for several reasons. Paul was a Jew, who clearly longed for his fellow country man to know what he now knew about Jesus of Nazareth. He was not starting from scratch as he proclaimed the good news to them. Jesus truly was the fulfillment of God's promises in the Old Testament that these people heard and believed. Most practically, he was guaranteed an audience because he would be welcomed to speak a message from the Scriptures to those assembled. Wouldn't it be nice to have a location in town where you could simply go and proclaim the gospel, rather than working the streets to invite people to come to your place where you will speak? This was a nice feature of Paul's setting indeed.

⁶ I will gladly leave it to the reader to suggest this as a title for Dr. Seuss.

⁷ Acts 13:5, 14:1, 17:2, 17:10, 18:5, etc. Especially note 14:1 where the text goes out of its way to mention Paul did this, "as usual."

Who is the audience that most closely resembles Paul's launching point with the Gospel in each place he visited? It is a challenging question to consider. An answer that shouldn't be bypassed, but is troubled, is the obvious one. The Jewish audience is still the Jewish audience. Professor Daniel Leyrer in an exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 9:20 writes, "To whom may we compare the Jews and those under the law in Paul's day? How about Jews who live under the authority of Old Testament ceremonial law today."⁸ I would of course agree. If you find a Jewish audience today who is waiting for the Messiah, you could take Paul's sermon in Acts 13 and with little adaptation share its truths with such a person. You could point them to David and how he was waiting for the son who would be his Lord. You could point them to one who would reign forever on David's throne. You could do what Paul did. You could reason with them from the Scriptures that the Christ needed to suffer and die.

The challenge is that such a Jewish audience seems to be few and far between. Many Jews today are Jewish more by culture and ethnicity than by Torah teaching and Prophet proclaiming. (This audience is still of course one we would want to reach with the Gospel. It just might not be the closest comparison to the audiences Paul had in the synagogues scattered throughout the Mediterranean area.) Even the Jewish people today who are "practicing" and more of an Orthodox brand of Judaism, might not be ones whose first contact point is simply showing that Jesus is the Messiah. They may need to be shown the need for a Messiah. Most Jews today have lost the narrative of Scripture.⁹ Throughout the Old Testament, the intertestamental period, and into the apostolic age, the Jewish people believed the story of their people was leading somewhere. Even when apostate, they were convinced our story is predominant. That belief took a drastic shift as the history of the people seemed to go off the rails due to failed rebellions against Rome, a destroyed temple and Jerusalem, and no sign of regaining independence. The goal for the practicing Jew became understanding and explaining the law rather than waiting for the Messiah. Again to be clear, this does not mean we would not look to share the Gospel with a Jewish audience. Some of our brothers in the Twin Cities and elsewhere might have a great opportunity to do just this. It just seems that your goal will be broader than arguing with them about the Old Testament Scriptures.

So is there a comparison to be made today with the audience Paul had in the synagogues in the first century? I think there are some interesting parallels between those Jews and many people today we would categorize as the de-churched. The Jews in these synagogues knew the Scriptures. They were willing to listen and were looking for the answer. They just were missing the key that was Jesus as the Christ who suffered and rose. It is not surprising that as Paul proclaimed this message some heard and believed and some reacted violently. While the amount of people who are pure un-churched continues to grow and we will need to address this audience as well, let's not miss the fact that a portion of the un-churched today are the de-churched. They know something about Scripture, even if it is simply some cobweb covered accounts from when their parents took them to Sunday school. They may still have that gnawing feeling that something is missing, even on top of the work of the natural knowledge. They may be more

⁸ Leyrer, Daniel "All Things to All People: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 with applications to North American Outreach"

⁹ This way of describing this is one I heard from Dr. Michael Wise at a TED talk on February 4th, 2016 at Northwestern College in St. Paul. It was part of an event called Loving God with your Mind: A Celebration of Christian Scholarship.

willing to give you at least the time of day and a listen to your message. They just are missing the key. The clear truth about Jesus and what church is really all about.

This is the audience to whom we need to listen, remove some false Christian caricatures, and reason with them from the Scriptures. While we rightly focus on the sad realities of a growing amount of biblical illiteracy and how that impacts our efforts to share the gospel, let's not miss the audience who is also present in unprecedented amounts among us. Rather than letting the de-churched slide into the un-churched, can we reason with them from the scriptures and enjoy the fact that they will give us that opportunity?

A Chance to Reflect & Discuss

In your conversations and follow up visits with individuals who would be considered "de-churched" what teachings seem to be the ones that are most often misunderstood?

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Discuss together with a few of your brothers what implications that might have for your ministry.

Before the Gentiles

Arguably the single greatest example of Paul's outreach for us to consider is the message we have recorded in Acts 17 in Athens. It is the clearest example of how Paul approached the work of sharing the gospel with someone who did not know the Old Testament Scriptures, which more and more of our audiences are becoming. There are also some interesting connections to his first stop in Lystra in Acts 14, but for now we will focus on Athens.

You know the setting of his sermon well. He is hanging out in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy to meet up with him. He goes about business as usual, starting with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as with anyone in the marketplace who will listen to him. When some of the philosophers get involved, the discussion moves before the Areopagus. When they ask him to explain his ideas and teaching, he uses their idol to an unknown god as his springboard to talk about the natural knowledge of God. He moves from natural knowledge to revealed knowledge of who God really is and ultimately to the heart of the gospel, the resurrection.

One large encouragement I enjoyed from looking at Paul's outreach to Gentile audiences was the evangelical patience he displayed. We are told in Acts 17 that as Paul saw all these

different idols and false gods in Athens, “he was greatly distressed.” It is easy to understand why. Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, and in regards to the law a Pharisee. He had the Shema memorized long before any of us. He was sensitive to the command of God regarding graven images in a way we might not be due to his experience. They bothered him and probably angered him. Yet what did Paul do? He studied them. He looked closely at them. He said here is one for this god and one for this goddess, which are nothing in the world. Wait, here is one to an unknown god. Despite the repulsion he would have had to these idols, he wanted to know what these people were worshipping and what opportunities there might be to use this to gain a hearing for the truth.

Are we as evangelically patient with some of the audiences God has put in our place and time? Do we use some of the surface sins as an open door to connect to their problem with sin, or do we slam the door closed because we are repulsed by that sin? There are some obvious examples of this, but allow me to throw you a simple one. How about the 2nd Commandment? I just started class with a couple that I have been playing volleyball with for a few years. Great friends. But let’s just say the OMG occurrence is high. So far we have only covered law and gospel and the great exchange. When I get to the commandments, we will obviously discuss what the Lord wants us to do with his name. What an opportunity it will be to say here is why that name of the Lord you use so freely is such a great thing! What you worship as something unknown, as simply a word that means wow in your vocabulary, I will explain to you as a powerful, soul saving name.

This patience is not a license to excuse sin. Paul got his hearing and pointed out the ignorance of these false gods and how the worship of the true God was drastically different from what they were doing. It is waiting to strike with the sword of the Spirit at the heart, rather than chopping off someone’s head.

Perhaps the key to understanding what Paul does in Athens is put forward by Tim Keller in his book *Preaching*. There is much in his book that is beneficial, but the biggest take-away in our vein of thinking is understanding what Paul did in Athens. He employed the “Yes, but no, but yes” method.¹⁰ The basic idea is rather than choosing between conforming to a culture or simply challenging a culture, one connects to it in order to confront it. Paul connected to the Athenians by showing a knowledge of their spirituality and proclaiming some truths about God to which they would have no objection. But Paul also speaks the message that is confronting falsehood. He does not hesitate to say, I am going to proclaim to you what you do not know, as well as clearly proclaiming the resurrection. He “takes some of his listener’s right beliefs and uses them to criticize their wrong beliefs in light of the Scripture. He shows them that their beliefs fail the test of their own premises.”¹¹ In short, one needs to know where he can step into a particular audiences understanding with an agreement on the truth, and then bring the truth of God’s Word to confront the errors that are present in their beliefs.

Isn’t this what Paul was getting at when he says he would make himself a slave for others in order to share the gospel? I will play by their rules. I will work to connect with them, not so that I can tell them everything they are doing or thinking is fine, but so that I can say, yes, but no.

¹⁰ Tim Keller *Preaching*: Viking Publishing, pg 98ff.

¹¹ Ibid, pg 101.

It allows us that opportunity to come beside someone who is different from us, to acknowledge those differences, and to use those very differences as the point of turning attention to the yes God reveals to us in his Word.

You don't need me to tell you that this audience is becoming more predominant in our homes and communities. This is not a reason to despair. The Word still works. It is a reminder of why Jesus told us we are in the world, though not of it. The life we live in the body is by faith in the Son of God who gave himself for me. One of the many ways we live for Christ is by sharing his name with a world that is continually losing its familiarity with him. Be in the world (yes!) but not of the world (but no!), and proclaim the Savior of the world (but yes!).

A Chance to Reflect & Discuss

What do you do to connect to audiences who are different than you?

Any good examples you have used or seen to connect to someone, and then use that very connection to correct the error a group or individual is caught in?

Before their Kings

One area that I am not planning to explore all that thoroughly, but is worth mentioning in keeping with the Acts passage above, is Paul did witness before rulers. Whether you think of Sergius Paulus on Cyprus, the trio of Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, or even Caesar, Paul shared the gospel in front of some powerful people.

Paul clearly adjusts his proclamation for the audience in this sense. When he speaks before Felix, and Festus and Agrippa, he speaks to them the way one would speak to a ruler. A little flowery. Dare we say schmoozing? Not that he watered down or schmoozed with the gospel, but he addresses them in a way that showed them honor. He recognized and acted as though speaking to rulers and not just John Smith in Thessalonica.

But maybe the point that stands out in this instances even more is the exchange Paul had before Agrippa. You recall that Agrippa and his wife come to pay their respects to Festus, and while there Festus talks to Agrippa about Paul. This leads to a hearing of his case. Paul again recounts his conversion on the road to Damascus and uses it to get to his main point every time, the Christ had to suffer and die and rise. Festus reacts a little violently and as Paul defends himself, he looks to Agrippa to confess agreement with Paul. Agrippa seems like a sharp guy, because he understands what Paul is doing and says, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"¹² Paul answers with his prayer that whether it takes a long or short time, he hopes Agrippa and all who hear him would believe.

¹² Acts 26:28

The part of this chapter that I find encouraging is Paul took every opportunity he could. As far as we know and would expect, he had not met Agrippa before, or at least was not well acquainted with him. He is here under arrest, waiting to head to Rome to stand before the emperor, and yet he takes his shot. He does so not in a sloppy haphazard way. But he does it with some urgency and bluntness, so much that Agrippa noticed what he was trying to do. This account convicts me. It convicts me of sometimes slow-playing it too much. Do we want to build a solid relationship with someone, especially when they are coming from a different background than us? Absolutely. But watch out that we don't wait for the decorative flags to be added to the bridge before we cross it with Christ. Take the shot. And do it well.

Different Audiences to Notice

I hesitate to spend much time with this particular section or thought, the reason being that I do not presume to know your ministry the way that you do. I can speak to my situation in Cottage Grove and share a few examples that I have grown aware of. I would rather give you a few moments to consider this for yourselves. But a few examples are worth noting, in no particular order.

Ethnic culture – It might be an insult to list this category due to its obvious nature, but its importance demands it. Whether your setting is urban or rural, chances are there are or will be an opportunity to connect with another ethnic culture. In Cottage Grove we have a small but present population of native Africans. It has been enjoyable to share the gospel with several and learn a lot about places like Eritrea. It also is worth noting that the first generation children who have their feet in two cultures and times, form almost a third group that demand their own unique approach. If you know a particular group or culture is in your area, find ways to learn more about them, preferably by speaking to individuals in the group.

Political – Did you know politics could be a divisive issue?¹³ It is doubly worth noting for those in the Twin Cities area, but a good reminder for us all. We as a church body tend to have a politically conservative lean, or at the very least a reputation of it. Obviously, our church does not have a political party affiliation, nor is it necessarily sinful for Christians to see political issues differently and vote accordingly. Just be aware of the reputation that is out there. I have a prospect who has a WELS background, but has been un-churched for quite some time. I was working with him to meet and discuss baptism for his new daughter. In one of our back and forth via text message, he said something along the lines of, "There is something I have to get off my chest." And I messaged him back and said, "Ok, shoot." His response? I need you to know that I am a proud democrat union voter. A confession if there ever was one! As surely as we want to reach Jew and Gentile, we want to reach Republican and Democrat. Watch how you address some of the hot button social issues in your BiC. Make clear we teach this is a sin because of what God's Word says, not a political party. Distinguish what a child of God will follow as God's will, and what is open for debate and discussion among his people. Expose the "pet sins" of each party with a fair approach.

¹³ Sorry, gratuitous sarcasm has no place in a paper.

Education – We are fooling ourselves if we do not consider someone's level of education as we speak to them. We will need to be ready to connect with them in some particular areas. I had the joy of taking a young couple down the road from church through BiC. She was a history and biology major. There were parts of that BiC that took a little bit longer than average. We spent time talking about the formation of the canon. We discussed age of the earth and spent extra time on the Real Presence. Overall I met with them almost every Friday for seven months. I put together extra documents built upon some of our dogmatics notes. It was fitting. Nothing changes in regards to how someone is brought to faith. The Holy Spirit works through the Word and brings this miracle about. But to ignore where someone is at in regards to their education is going to cause us to miss some of the areas where the sinful flesh has built up roadblocks to that word.

Wealth/Social Class – While we to the best of our new man's ability do not show favor to anyone based on their wealth, it would be unwise to not consider how someone's wealth can affect the point of contact. Would Paul have presented the gospel the same way to Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, as he did to Onesimus, a runaway slave? Same gospel? Absolutely. Same point of contact with them? Doubtful. We must watch our hearts to avoid partiality, but it is not wrong to be aware of how wealth may play into someone's struggle with sin and may serve as an avenue to point out the surpassing richness of God's mercy.

A Chance to Reflect & Discuss

One particular audience that I believe my congregation
and myself are doing a good job reaching out to is _____

Some ways we are doing this are....

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One particular audience *that I know is present in my*
community and we could do better at reaching is _____

Ideas to do this?

Goals to consider

How will this look at Paul help us to share the gospel with the different audiences present in our life and ministry? Permit me a few closing thoughts and some possible goals.

The desire to share the gospel with different audiences can be boiled down to two parts. Growing more comfortable interacting with lots of different types of people. And growing more comfortable tailoring the way we share God's Word to lots of different people. Am I doing both?

Do we actively seek to become more adept at connecting with all the different audiences that present themselves in our respective ministry? It is exciting to think about the universal nature of sharing the gospel. It is for everyone. Our great God wants us to take it to everyone. The challenge of course is continuing to attempt to do that. It is easy to settle into our own comfortable ways. "Though I'm willing to confess that God's ways are higher than my ways, I still like my ways. I like my friends. I like my language. I like my music. In short, I've developed a comfort zone and I like my comfort zone. You probably like yours."¹⁴ None of us like the uncertain feeling of being vulnerable. It feels like day one of freshman year of high school. So many things we don't know. Do I stand here? Say this? What is that person thinking? Do I look like a fool? Am I willing to endure that feeling of discomfort? Am I willing to become a slave to this person even though it feels so uncomfortable?

Are we as pastors doing this? Can you fill out the wheel of friends who need Jesus? If you can't is it because you have grown comfortable spending all your time with your people and perhaps a few individuals who are Christian of another stripe with whom you have the occasional gentleman's duel with? I am confident you and your congregation work hard to enlarge and use a prospect list. Are we doing that personally? Is our personal prospect list lacking? When you give a postcard to the church to invite people to Easter, do you hand out several as well? Are you only interacting with one audience?

I am convinced this is one of those parts of our life that the greatest part of the battle is being aware of it and struggling with it. The day that I think I no longer need to work at connecting to people God has put in front of me and that I have it pretty well figured out, is the day I start to lose chances to know people and bring them in a pointed way the gospel. If I am aware of how different from me people in my community and church are, I may never be Paul in how well I connect to them, but I will be striving to do it and this will have an effect.

There is also an encouragement here to continue in our personal spiritual growth in God's Word. This is important for ourselves, for our King wants to meet with us, strengthen us, and bless us through his Word. But it is also important for others. Growing in the Word will mean we will grow in many ways to say the one way to life and salvation. Growing in the Word will help us to avoid the danger of looking at different audiences and complete a manual in our mind. When it is this type of person, I will do this. When it is this other type, I will do that. This will not work because rarely will two audiences be exactly the same. We don't have much recorded

¹⁴ Leyrer – Exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

in the ways of Paul sharing the gospel with individuals (Jailor, Agrippa, others?). But can't we be confident we know what Paul would do with individuals? He would connect with each person as best as he could, to confront them with what he had been confronted. The risen Son of God. Growing in the Word means when we do get chances to connect with different audiences we will be ready to connect them to the one thing needful in a way that is fitting for them.

Another thought is to find a good balance between planning our ministry and being methodically flexible in our work. Planning has been a topic that our district has spent a good amount of time encouraging and implementing, and I am convinced that is a good thing. Paul had plans in his ministry. He had plans in each city he arrived in. He seemed to choose some cities rather intentionally to be a hub in each area. He had certain areas he desired to reach. Paul didn't just say well I plan to take the gospel to all people. That was his desire and wish. He planned ways to do it. But Paul was also flexible. If plans for his mission trip needed to change, he changed them. If the Spirit of Jesus told him you should go this way, he went. If an opportunity to proclaim the gospel in an unplanned situation presented itself, he took it.

Many forms of planning encourage a church to look for its niche or the specific way it can share the gospel with more people. You might have a niche figured out. You might have a ministry plan in place. Great! Work that plan. But also watch out that a robotic commitment to the plan doesn't cause you to ignore opportunities to proclaim the Gospel to someone who might be outside of your plan. Continue to evaluate your plan to make sure it allows for reaching more than just one type of person with the gospel. I don't need to go on regarding this point. I trust my brothers who have a heart for the lost, not for perfecting a plan.

Without undoing all (the damage?) this paper has done, a good balance to strike is to recognize that connecting to cultures and audiences is important work. It is important part of gaining a hearing to share the gospel. But it is not the gospel. You might be fully plugged into a culture and group. It may be one of your peers. And you might know the best way to share the gospel with them, and the individual's stubborn sinful heart may still refuse the truth. And there might be an individual that despite your best efforts, you are clueless about their situation and background. You might make embarrassing mistakes seeking to share the gospel with them. You might unintentionally insult them. But the Holy Spirit still works through his word and brings that person to life with faith in the living Lord. Knowing your audiences is not a Means of Grace. It is an avenue to apply the Means of Grace. It is important, but its importance comes from how it fits with placing the gospel on someone's heart.

Ultimately, we like Paul want to reach all people with the good news of our Savior. We want to become all things to all men. Sure if you were speaking the words of 1 Corinthians 9 you would probably pick different audiences than Jew, Gentile, those under the law and those not having the law. But I am confident you want to reach all the people God has placed in your life, in your neighborhood, and in your church on any given Sunday. The part of this work that is in our hands is to realize how many different audiences we have to whom we preach and proclaim. You and I will not perfectly connect with every audience. That is ok. The Word of God is living and active to overcome those shortcomings. We simply should be faithful in our efforts to remove what blocks we can to someone hearing that Word of God.

And then brothers, rest secure in the power of God's Word. We can have the same confidence and freedom to adapt that Paul had. We do not have the same background or training. We do not have the same call or world. We do not have the same gifts he did. But we do have the same living and breathing word. We have the same Lord who promises us the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Rest on him. Rest on the fact that as important as it is that we give our best efforts to understanding and connecting to different audiences, he will work through his truth. The one who sends us to make disciples of all nations, knows how to cut and heal the hearts of all nations, tribes, people, and languages. May Jesus give us his heart that wants all audiences to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

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