

The Evangelistic Church (1)

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Date: 05 December 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thanks very much, David. And as David said, there are some copies of the Solace magazine at the table at the back. There is also a sign-up sheet if you want to leave your name and contact details so that you'll get onto the communist collective list and you can be involved in the work of Solace.

Well, it's a great pleasure to have Alistair I. MacLeod as one of the speakers of this conference. Alistair is well known to us and he's, for the past few months, been the associate preacher down at Back Free Church.

And we're glad that now a wider audience like this conference can benefit from his insight. And it gives me great pleasure to invite him to come and speak on the Evangelistic Church.

I'm hesitating to see if my voice actually works.

It's a strange coincidence that Robin Sidsurf in Edinburgh and myself and back should wake up yesterday morning croaking.

[1 : 2 8] But I realize now, having reflected on it, that he emailed me a couple of days ago so it'll be a computer virus. The Evangelistic Church.

I said, first of all, thank you to the Presbytery for inviting me and making me study this topic over the last few weeks.

It was good for me. I'm not known as an evangelist, so I'm perhaps a strange choice. My strategy in St. Andrew's was simply get somebody to talk with me over coffee.

Get somebody to agree to read one of the four Gospels. And get somebody to come to church. That was it. When I was asked to do this, I realized I needed to talk to somebody who knew a lot about it and who could recommend what I should read.

And I took a trip to Edinburgh for a day or two to look through the libraries and to talk to Neil McMillan in particular. I emailed Neil and said what I'd been asked to do.

[2 : 5 0] And I was surprised to be asked to do it. And he wrote back very quickly, warm email. Just the man for the job. I'd love to meet with you. Let's have lunch.

So I went to meet him outside the Free Church bookshop at the appointed time. And he came along on time. And to his credit, he was honest.

Oh, he said, I thought I was meeting Curly. Alistair Curly. He had seen Alistair. He'd seen evangelism in the Highlands.

And he'd assumed it was Alistair Curly. But I got a free lunch out of it. Now you've got a handout. I'm going to work through a few topics just now.

Maybe 45 minutes or so and then half an hour for discussion. So we'll see how far we get. Earlier we read from 1 Corinthians 15, which of course is the great resurrection chapter in the New Testament letters.

[4 : 0 1] Paul begins, Now what is the Church of God in Corinth to do with the Church of God in Carloway?

They are very different. Well, chapter 15 opens with a reference to the Gospel. That's the first thing I want to highlight.

Four quick things in this chapter. Reference to the Gospel which Paul preached. Or the good news which he good newsed, literally. And the Gospel which they received.

And then for verse 3, Paul summarizes the content of the message. Note the elements of the Evangelion. There's a person, Christ. There's his death and its meaning.

Four sins. There's the reality of the resurrection. And there's a reference to all this in the Scriptures. According to the Scriptures.

[5 : 08] That's still our focus in Carloway as in Corinth. The promises of the book. In which we find the person who died and who rose again.

And whose Gospel is to be received by sinners. So evangelism is sharing the core good news of what Christ has done for sinners.

Second thing I want to note in this chapter is a set of commands in verses 33 and 44. Now I do not want to apply these to Carloway.

Carloway except to make the point that they are about lifestyle. The kind of lifestyle that the church and Christians should exhibit.

And you can look at them for yourselves. Paul is critiquing these people for not living as the church should. People who are living in hedonistic, prosperous, pleasure-obsessed Corinth and who are not living as they should.

[6 : 16] Then at the end of the chapter, thirdly, verse 58. Paul has another command. Extentiating the positive. Calling on the church to abound in the work of the Lord.

What is that work? Well surely the work of the Gospel which includes evangelism. If you look at the context following this. In verse 9 Paul talks about his own work.

Another word for work. A wide door for effective work has opened to me. Then in verse 10 Timothy is doing the work of the Lord.

Same thing he'd said to Corinthians. See the point? He's talking to Corinth about their doing the work. He's doing the work. Timothy's doing the work. They're engaged in the same work in different ways.

So Carloway 2 is still part of the one apostolic church. With the same message and the same mission. Called to a lifestyle and called to a work.

[7 : 21] The work of the Gospel. And the fourth thing is to note that the whole context here is about eternity. It's a chapter about bodily resurrection.

And Paul is saying as he said already to the Corinthians. The body should matter to you. And now he's saying because you'll be embodied forever. And the point is important that evangelism is always to be done in the context of eternity.

As Christians witness in a particular time and place. Whether it's 1st century Corinth or 21st century Carloway. Everyone around us is headed for one of two places where they will spend eternity.

So these four things. Every church is given the one gospel. Every church is called to publicly embody a new lifestyle.

Every church is to give itself to gospel work. And every church is to live in the light of eternity. As we turn now to the numbered points on the handout.

[8 : 38] I want to suggest these as marks of the evangelistic church. Marks of a community.

I toyed with the idea of making every heading about community. You could put community instead of culture. So it's a sort of community culture for every church.

You probably won't be impressed where I picked up on the word culture for this. But I was listening to Alex Ferguson talking about leadership.

And he made the point that he had tried to inculcate a particular culture in each team he'd had.

And he'd had to change the culture in each place. So he said, for example, in Man U when he went. Some of the top players, they had a drinking culture. So he had to get rid of the drinking culture.

[9 : 38] Other players were talking about the fact that even in the under-19 team, when they went anywhere, they wore the club blazer. And they were told that they were representing the club in the hotel they stayed and wherever they went.

So there was a culture of representing this club and its history and its heritage. Many of you have the same thing in your workplaces. There will be a particular culture.

I heard it the other night in the news, people going into a school in England. They'd gone in and they'd changed a school that was underperforming. What did you do? They said, we changed the culture.

The culture, for example, and expectations from teachers and pupils who didn't expect very much of school. And they changed the culture so people had higher expectations of each other.

And expectations of what they could do after school and expectations in parents. I talked to somebody the other day who was going for a job with Apple. And the main thing was that they understood the Apple culture.

[10 : 44] The workplace culture. So we need a culture as churches. And sometimes we need to change a culture. So let me begin with a gospel culture.

Let's be gospel people. The gospel of Jesus needs to be at the center of every church's life and work.

I believe in gospel-centered churches. Sometimes that's misunderstood. If I was to put it more fully, it would be Christ in the gospel.

You hyphenate that phrase. Christ in the gospel-centered churches. But the good news of what Christ has done should be at the center of everything.

The church is and thinks and sees and does. Go back to the opening of 1 Corinthians 15. The gospel I preached to you, which you received, now note these words, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.

[11 : 53] If you hold fast to the word I gospel to you, unless you believed in vain. For I deliver to you as of first importance. Notice, these Christians, and this is crucial, they still stand in the gospel.

They are still being saved by the gospel. They are to hold fast to the word of the gospel. And so they need to be reminded of the fundamentals of the gospel.

We never leave the gospel behind. To take just one illustration in the New Testament of the abiding centrality of the gospel, think of Galatians 2, where Paul critiques Peter.

The voice is going a bit. Galatians 2, 11 to 14. Here is a letter where Paul is contending for justification by grace through faith alone.

The same for Jew and Gentile. Nothing to be added. And you remember Peter comes to Antioch. He sits with the Gentiles, but under pressure from Jerusalem, he begins to eat apart from them.

[13 : 01] And he led the other Jews with him. What's the fundamental problem, according to Paul? Verse 14. Their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel.

That's it. The gospel decides. Think of it. Here is Peter, the disciple, the apostle, the evangelist, the theologian, the legend.

But he is simply brought back to the gospel and its implications. And I think it's the same right through the New Testament. In every area of life and ministry, everything is to be calibrated by the gospel.

A little section here I won't go into on misunderstandings of this. Some people say, well, is this really putting God at the center? I think it is.

Christ in the gospel center churches. Others say, is this not dumbing down? I don't think it is. The whole New Testament tells us to test everything we believe and do by the gospel.

[14 : 07] So I'm saying to you, the gospel should saturate our churches. And I honestly believe that this is where evangelism needs to begin.

The gospel, of course, will be preached in every evangelistic service. It will be dramatized in every baptism and communion.

And it will be heard at every wedding and every funeral. But it should fill all our services. Gospel praise. Gospel prayer. Sermons which, whatever their topic, bring us under the sound of the gospel.

And I think it should permeate our church courts and our prayer meetings and our youth work and our women's meetings and our relationships and everything else.

I'm going to put it this way. The gospel is not a sort of basic food item that you outgrow as you mature. It's the table at which you feast all your life.

[15 : 11] So we need to eat and drink at that table all the time. To taste again and see that God is good. To remind ourselves anew of the grace of the gospel.

To continually recover our excitement about the gospel in Christ. And if the gospel is at the heart of everything that we are and think and say and do and how we do everything.

Then the gospel will be communicated in the most natural way. By our simply being the church. And by our doing church as a gospel church should.

A gospel culture. Secondly, a reforming culture. I always call this a culture of repentance.

But it will come to the same thing in the end. I mean by a reforming culture. That we need to look at ourselves as churches. I don't believe there's any evangelistic force as powerful as a living, loving, local church.

[16 : 29] And we believe as David has stressed already and as Saul has stressed us. That God works through his church. That evangelism should be church based.

If that's true. If we believe that evangelism is church based. Then one of the things we need to do. Is look at our churches with realistic eyes.

We need to look in before we look out. Think of it this way. As we invite people to come to church. What are we inviting them to?

And what would we like to invite them to? Two basic questions. As you think of inviting people to church. And to your church. What are you inviting them to?

As the church is. And what would you love to invite them to? If the church could change. As you perhaps think it should.

[17 : 40] Now I don't need to persuade you. I'm sure of the importance of the local church. And I'm not going to go through material here. On that. There are also different ways of assessing the health of a church.

You can begin with a New Testament epistle. Like 1 Corinthians. And compare your church with it. Or you can look at your church. And think of the things that you are and do.

And then compare that with the Bible. Either. Whichever way you work. It's an interesting exercise. To use the Bible as a touchstone. And think about my church.

To think about things like. You know. For a minister say. The balance of the diet. I've given to people over the last six months. I need to think of that. Or we think of the quality of our worship.

You know. Is our singing excellent? Or the health of the prayer meeting. How full should it be? Or the functioning of the eldership.

[18 : 41] Or the depth of our fellowship. Or the attractiveness of our lives. Or our welcome to the visitor. Or our attitude to traditions of the past.

Or the number of our meetings. The sheer number of things we have on. And so on. We take ourselves to the well church clinic. And ask the great physician.

To offer his diagnosis. And his remedy. Remedy. So. I'm saying to myself. This is a call for repentance. As churches. We were thinking about evangelism last night.

And the call to the world. To repent. Well. If we call the world repentance. Sometimes it needs to begin. With the household of God.

Remember what Peter says. In 1st Peter 4. And note the reference to the gospel again. I won't keep pointing them out. But. I was struck myself. How often the word gospel is there.

[19 : 40] In passages like this. It is time for judgment to begin. At the household of God. And if it begins with us. What will the outcome be.

For those who do not obey. The gospel. Of God. So churches need to be open to change. By definition. If we are not perfect.

Then we need to be open to change. If we are not open to change. Then we are not open to repentance. Because repentance means change. Now.

Change isn't easy. And change can be painful. And change will be sacrificial. But. If it is a change. In line with the gospel.

And if it is change. For the furtherance of the gospel. Then that change is to be embraced. By a church that is always repenting. And therefore.

[20 : 38] Always reforming. It is a great thing to be positive. About my church. I am positive. About my church.

And I think this is a real witness. In our pleasure. In what we do. That we are thrilled to be Christians. And thrilled to be part. Of living local churches.

It is a great thing. To be excited. About my church. And to want. To see that church. Become even more like. What the Lord would want it to be.

So that we say to people. Quite easily. Come along. With me. To church. It is great. It is great. Thirdly.

A missional culture. We have just looked in. Let us now learn. To look out. I like the word missional.

[21 : 40] A lot of people don't like it. They say it is a new word. And they don't like it. But. I think it is an attractive word. And I want to commend. Missional. Mindset.

A mindset. That looks out. And thinks about. What is out there. And wants to see people. Come in.

I think that is particularly urgent. We all recognize. In a context. In a context. Where. In some places. Our traditional. Adherent. Base.

Seems to be. Collapsing. Perhaps the church. That I remember. As. A boy. Coming here. On holiday. To Lewis.

Used to be a pool. To fish in. Now it's got to be a boat. To fish from. Or to change the image.

[22 : 38] The gospel. Needs to ring out. From us. As it did. From the little church. In Thessalonica. First Thessalonians. One. Eight. Now.

The early church. Faced the challenge. Of developing. A missional mindset. Didn't it? Because it was a Jewish church. And they needed. A missional mindset.

Towards the Gentile world. Now. A lot of the early story. Is about that conflict. Trying to get. The early Christians. To think. In a missionary way.

About. The Gentile. World. I also want. Here. To ask you. Just to think. Very briefly. Of. The theme. Of motivation.

In the New Testament. Missional. Motivation. As the Bible. Outlines it. I won't go through this. In detail. Because you all know. These things. But they're worth.

[23 : 34] Thinking about. As a sort of package. Or some of them. At least. The motivation. Of obedience. Say. To the great commission. The motivation.

Of the love of Christ. The love of Christ. Compels us. Says Paul. Motivation. Of gratitude. For undeserved. Grace.

The motivation. Of compassion. Like the Lord. Moved. Moved. Moved. Moved. By the needs. On the peril. Of a lost world. The motivation. Of jealousy. Like.

Paul in Athens. Act 17. Moved. With jealousy. Provoked. By the idolatry. Around him. The motivation. Of stewardship.

We've been given. A sacred trust. In the church. And we are. Indebted. To others. To hand it on. To them. As Paul says. About himself. Motivation.

[24 : 31] Of eternity. Knowing people's. Lostness. And there's a judgment. To come. Knowing therefore. The fear of the Lord. We persuade. Men and women. And we too.

Will face the judges. Paul makes clear. And we will give stewardship. Of our own. Use of talents. And opportunities. The day will disclose it. First Corinthians 3.

Revealed. By. Fire. Fire. So there are all kinds of motivations. For us to be. Missional. How does a church move.

From what's sometimes called. A maintenance mindset. To. A missional. Mindset. Well there are.

101 things. That could be said here. But. I do think that. Ministers. Have a crucial responsibility. Here. In. In their teaching.

[25 : 26] And in the way. Simply that they go. About. Things. That people. Hear. And see. Somebody. Who is.

Missional. I don't like telling. Ministers. What to do. And I'm not going to do that. But. All of them here. You know better than I do.

What's involved. In this. And it's a challenge. To all of us. All the time. And I think. Especially. I mean. So many other. Responsibilities. You know.

I don't want to. Pick on people. But. How somebody. Copes. With what James. For one. Has to do. Administratively. Here. And with the.

The general assembly. In principle. Clark. And. All of you. Have. Other responsibilities. As well. As busy. Congregations. It was just.

[26 : 23] The wakes. And the funerals. And all the other things. That ministers. In Lewis. Have. They're hugely busy. And I know. How difficult. It is. But. We all also know.

The difference. That. You see. In a congregation. Sometimes. When. There's a change. Of leadership. And they've had somebody. Who wasn't.

Mishnah. And they get somebody. Who is. Mishnah. And you can see things. Changing. You know. We do. Set the tone.

In all kinds of ways. In our teaching. And in our. Our attitudes. And people sometimes. Catch. Things. From us. As it were. That.

Being mishnah. Can be taught. But I think. It also. Can be. Caught. By our own. Attitudes. And concerns. For others.

[27 : 18] Another thing. I've no business. Speaking about. Is. The responsibility. Of the leadership. Of the congregation. Because I don't know. I'm not a member. Of a session here. People think. I'm an associate minister.

But I'm not. I'm just a slave. Who gets an email. Once a month. Telling me. What preaching. I'm going to be doing. In the following month. And two or three days later.

There's also. Subsequent email. Well. Why forgot to say. Could you also do this one. And this one. Thinks I was born yesterday. But. That's all I do. I just do supplies.

I'm not in the session. I'm not in the press. But I'm not involved here. In that kind of way. But. I think it's one of the great challenges. In many places. To get.

Elderships. To be missional. I need to be careful. What I say. When unfortunately. Something is being recorded. But nobody will know.

[28 : 13] Who this was. That I bumped into. In the call. Recently. Somebody in leadership. In the church. In the church. In Lewis. Who said. That he didn't agree. With this conference.

He wanted me to know. Because he said. You people are now. Trying to do the Lord's work. For him. That's how he read evangelism. As a senior.

Free church elder. In this island. Always talk about evangelism. Is people trying to do. The Lord's work. For him. He says.

We used to just pray. And the Lord brought revivals. We didn't do anything. Now people are doing this. That and the other. And the church is declining. As if that was the reason.

For decline. That we're trying to do too much. So there. He may be the only one. With that perspective. But even if there's one. His mindset.

[29 : 09] Needs to be changed. So that the leadership. Of our congregations. Are missional. In their attitudes. When I told that story.

To someone. They said. Well. Of course. It's because he's older. Well. Let me refer you. To the vision of Caleb. At 85 years of age.

Who could say. In Joshua 14. Give me. This mountain. Still active. Still going forward. Lord. We want people.

Who say. Give me this mountain. Give me this. Community. For the Lord. Jesus Christ. Seemar being controversial.

Just one more thing. Missional churches. Will also have a certain. Flexibility. In practice. To go back. I keep going back.

[30 : 06] To 1st Corinthians. 1st Corinthians. That's where I began. All this thinking from. To tell you the truth. I actually started. Doing something. Just on 1st Corinthians. And I did a lot of work.

That was Corinthians. And Carly. Away. And. The laptop. Died. And I know nothing. About computers. And it just. Got another laptop.

So I. I hadn't backed it up. I lost everything. And I didn't have the heart. To go back. To what I'd been doing. So. I pretty much. Started afresh. With what I could carry. In my head.

From 1st Corinthians. So I keep going back. 1st Corinthians. 1st Corinthians. 11. 1. Paul says. Be imitators. Of me. As I am. Of Christ.

Now what's he talking about? Well. If I quote. Some things he said. In this section. On freedom. That's led up. To this. This appeal. Chapter 9.

[31 : 05] For example. 19 to 23. Though I am free. From all. I've made myself. A servant to all. That I might win. More of them. I've become all things. To all people. That by all means.

I might save some. I do it all. For the sake of. The gospel. Then he concludes. At the end of chapter 10. Give no offense. To Jews. Or to Greeks. Or to the church.

Of God. Just as I try. To please everyone. In everything I do. Not seeking. My own advantage. But that of many. That they. May. Be saved.

Be imitators. Of me. As I am of Christ. I pity that. Be imitators. Of me. We put it in chapter 11. Since people started. Using chapters and verses. But it's concluding.

What's being said. In chapters 9 and 10. He's saying. I become all things. To all men. I try everything. With everyone. So I might win. Some of them. So you. Corinthian church.

[32 : 00] Be imitators. Of me. As I am. Of Christ. You can't be. Missional. If you're not.

Free. To do. What God. Wants you to be. Where he has placed you. You need. To be. What God. Wants you to be. Where he has placed you.

Today. That's being. Missional. Fourthly. A culture. Of witness. Let's be a community. Of witnesses. I think.

We're all called. To witness. I guess. I don't need. To argue. That. From scripture. With you. Salt of the earth. The light of the world. Or. A simpler thing.

As. Jesus. Promising. That the spirit. Of mission. The spirit. Of evangelism. Would come down. And he came down. At Pentecost.

[32 : 56] Did he come down. Just in the apostles. No. He came down. On the whole church. I think. A very significant detail. The promised spirit. Of evangelism. Comes down.

On the whole. Waiting church. Because every Christian. Is to be a prophet. And. An evangelist. Witness.

As you know. Is first of all. The witness. Of your life. A life. That adorns. The gospel. To return. To the words. Of the Lord. In Matthew 5.

Let your light. Shine before others. That they may. See your good works. And give glory. To your father. God. Who is. In heaven. The same thing. Said by Peter.

Live such good lives. Among the pagans. That though they accuse you. Of doing wrong. They may see your good deeds. And come to glorify God.

[33 : 50] On the day. He. Visits us. First Peter 2. We are to. Seek by God's grace. To be. Like. Christ. Christ.

One of the books. I was reading. An American. Young American. Preacher. And evangelist. Told about driving home. One evening. And watching the full moon.

Through. The windshield. As he would say. And his three year old daughter. Ivy. Was fascinated. By the full moon. And she said.

The moon. Is huge. And then she said. The moon. Is so sunny. And of course. Being a young.

Hip. Cool. Reformed. Preacher. He wanted to correct her. Like he's always correcting people. But then he realized. She was right. The moon.

[34 : 43] Is sunny. Because it has no light of his own. It's just a great. Reflector. Of the light of the sun. So this man says. The moon.

Is to be our model. As a church. To reflect. The light of Christ. To shine for him. As he puts it. In the theological. Solar system.

Jesus. Is the sun. And we are the moon. And we are to reflect. Him. The witness of life. There's also the witness of lips. Lips that are ready to speak.

The gospel. The same letter. As Peter. I've just read. In chapter two. Telling them to live good lives. Among the pagans. Showing their good deeds. In the next chapter.

Chapter three. He talks about giving an apologetic. Making a defense of the faith. To anyone who asks you. A reason. For the hope. That you have.

[35 : 41] Or read the beginning of Colossians four. Paul asking for prayer. For his own. Verbal witness in prison. For openings to speak. And for clarity of speech.

And then he says to them. Conduct yourselves wisely. Towards outsiders. Make the best use of the time. And let your speech. Always be gracious.

Seasoned with salt. So you know how to answer everyone. He goes from his own. Witness of words. To their witness of words. He associates his.

Speaking. With their speaking. Because once again. He sees that all in this together. Now all but a few of us find it. Very difficult I think.

To speak the gospel to others. We have genuine fears. Which hold us back. Maybe we could talk about some of them. Perhaps sometimes. I have excuses as well.

[36 : 40] Which hold me back. It might be interesting for you to reflect. If you think back to an opportunity. That you were given. To speak about Christ. To a non-believer.

Did you take it? And if not. Why not? That's a very helpful practical question. If not. Why not?

When I was in Edinburgh there. Talking to Neil. I went for a haircut. And. The girl starts talking about various things. And there was a moment.

When there was a golden opportunity. To say something. About the gospel. And I didn't. And I wondered afterwards. Using this question.

Why didn't I? And it was. An embarrassment. About other people. Listening into the conversation. I honestly think.

[37 : 36] If it had been just the two of us. One on one. I would have found it quite easy. For some reason. Because there are people sitting on each side. I didn't do it.

Now. You might not be as. Hopeless as me. But. You won't be. But. Think about it. When were you given an opportunity.

And if you didn't take it. Why didn't you take it? Let's assess ourselves. Very useful book. In a bookstore. Called Honest Evangelism. By Rico Tice. He talks about two life skills.

He's found to be essential. In witnessing. Ask questions. And chat. Your faith. Now. I've heard people say. That they found it. The simple advice.

To ask questions. To be. Life changing. In terms of their witness. Open questions. Open questions. That encourage. That. That means a question. Doesn't.

[38 : 30] Get the answer. Yes or no. People can't answer. An open question. Without saying more. Than yes or no. And then. Allows you to listen. And understand. What they think.

And it opens up. A conversation. That's more natural. And it's. It's beginning. Where they're beginning. You ask them. And they say. What they think. And you pick up on that. And speak to them.

And Rico's second point. Is about making. Faith. A natural part. Of everyday conversation. Conversations. Maybe. When you answer. A question. About what you did.

At the weekend. He says. Or how you're coping. With something difficult. In life. Or why you're so busy. Just now. Or whatever. Just. Taking the opportunity. To say something. When the opening.

Comes. That's his advice. Anyway. And. As the title. Of his book. Suggests. He's very honest. And realistic. In the book. And he's honest. About the hostility.

[39 : 26] We encounter. Often. In speaking. About Christ. But he's also clear. That there's a. Deep hunger. In many. Many souls. In a. In a whole culture.

And so he sums it up like this. I like this. Hostility. And hunger. That's what you'll find. As you tell others. About Jesus. And you have to risk.

The hostility. To discover. The hunger. You have to risk. The hostility. To discover. The hunger. Now.

I think it's important. I don't think it's done. Here. But I know it's done. In some places. I think it's important. Not to hammer people. On this topic. Of witnessing. They probably have enough. Guilt about it.

As it is. But. Probably all of us. Know of churches. Where every sermon. Ends with another application. About. Witnessing. In the world. What people need.

[40 : 20] Is encouragement. I think that's the great word. Encouragement. And the kind of preaching. That equips them. To. Know. And understand. The gospel.

Better. Preaching. That inspires. And refreshes them. Every Lord's day. In the word. And preaching. That sends them. Back into the world. Better. Able. To share.

And defend. What they believe. I also think. That Christian fellowship. Is absolutely vital. Here. As we help. One another. In our lives.

As witnesses. You know. In fellowships. For example. I was asking. Somebody recently. They were talking about. The things they discuss. In fellowships. And I asked.

What kind of things. Do you discuss. In fellowships. And. Well. I was glad. I wasn't. In the firing line. At some of these fellowships. I didn't even understand. The questions.

[41 : 15] Never mind. Be able to. Get involved. In the discussion. Deep. Deep things. I said. Have you ever discussed. Witnessing. No. Have you ever discussed.

The sort of things. People say to you. About your faith. And the problems. They raise. And the objections. They have. And the things they say. About the church. Or whatever. No. No.

We don't talk about that kind of thing. We talk about deep things. Well. I think. A fellowship. Could be very useful thing. As people share their stories. You know.

Tell their stories to each other. Refine their stories. And discuss the problems. They have. In sharing the faith. And the questions. People raise with them. And the things. They found difficult. To answer. And the comment.

That they didn't know. What to say back to. So that iron. Sharpens iron. As we learn. From one another. Many other things. We might do.

[42 : 10] And witness. Of course. Don't have time. To go into them. But. St. Andrews. Used to encourage people. To have a gospel. That they could hand. To a friend. And encourage them.

To meet with them. And read a gospel. And we did a lot of that. People would meet up. For coffee. And cafes. And they'd be reading. Through a gospel together. And talking about it. Books.

DVDs. Solace magazine. We've just heard. About all kinds of resources. We can use. As we chat to people. As we get deeper. Into issues with people.

As we try to help them. Understand. The gospel. Now if you'll give me. Another five minutes. To the half hour. We've done 40 minutes.

So. I want to get into. This fifth point. Which is actually. A very long one. On a culture of invitation. And. Do some of it anyway. In. So a culture of invitation.

[43 : 07] Is saying. Let's invite people. In. Now. There are a few things. I'll mention under this. That could also be. Under the next topic.

It would be difficult. For me to know. Where to put. Some of these topics. You might. Want some of the. Under five. To go under six. A lot of it depends. On where you do it.

As a venue. Some of the things. I'll say here. You could do. In your church hall. So it's a matter. Of inviting people in. The same thing.

Could be done. Out in a hotel. So it's a matter. Of engaging out. In the community. So. But put them. Where your context. Wants to put them.

I think invitation. Is a really important. Idea. And I think. It should be an easy thing. For us to highlight. From our tradition. We have a long tradition. Of invitational preaching.

[44 : 04] I think the best. Invitational sermons. I've ever heard. Have been. Here on this island. Passionate. Gospel. Free offer.

Gospel. Preaching. With the invitation. To come to Christ. We also have a long tradition. Of invitation. Don't we. As far as our. Hospitality. Is concerned.

We still talk about. Traditional. Hebridean hospitality. A warm welcome. And more food. Than you know. What to do with. So. Invitation. Should be an obvious word.

For us. In terms of church. And home. In evangelism. So let's invite people. To church. Now. I know.

That's an old fashioned. Thing to say. And I've been told that. For a long time. But. I believe. In inviting people. To church. Church. And we did a lot.

[44 : 57] Of that. In St. Andrews. Inviting them. To an ordinary. Service of worship. I mean. You know. If visitors witness. A connexion. Singing from the heart.

If they hear. Earnest prayer. For the church. And for the world. If they hear. Relevant preaching. And they see. A connexion. Listening.

Well. And if they sense. There's a reverence. To God. And a love. To one another. Then. They may be challenged. By the reality.

That is evident. They won't agree. About a lot. Of what they've heard. But they can't deny. That these people. Have something. And they really. Mean it.

And it's something. The visitor. Doesn't have. So. I want people. To come to church. I want families. To come to church. And I want people. To come back. After their first. Visit.

[45 : 52] Now. If we want. Non-believers. To come. This was raised. Last night. By invitation. We need. I think. To make it easier. For our people. To think of inviting.

Others. We might begin. By asking. People. Why they don't. Already invite. Family and friends. To come with them. So that we might.

Then deal with the fears. That they have. And the issues. They raise. It might also be useful. To think. Of what. It would feel like. For many people. To come into.

What. For them. Will be an alien. Environment. So. We think. Through the whole. Experience. Of. Somebody. Wondering. Whether to come. And why they wouldn't come.

And maybe. Why they might come. If a friend. If a friend. Took them. And we think. Through the experience. Of the coming. Towards the entrance. And coming into the church.

[46 : 46] And trying to make the whole thing. As welcoming. And easy for them. Physically at least. As possible. And most importantly of all. Go back to 1st Corinthians. We're under biblical obligation.

To remember the unbeliever. And the conduct of the service. 1st Corinthians 14. 23 to 25. Paul insists. On the principle.

Of intelligibility. To the unbeliever. He privileges. Intelligible speech. Over tongues. Because.

He says. An outsider. May be present. And he wants. The outsider. The unbeliever. To understand. What's going on. So that hopefully.

Having understood. They might be convicted. And converted. And he's saying. If they don't follow it. It's hopeless. But if they follow. What's going on.

[47 : 42] They might be convicted. And converted. So that's why. All of us. As ministers. Try to. Explain. What we're doing. In a service. And try to make it. Clear. What we're doing.

And what we're doing next. We try to preach. As clearly. As we can. We try to speak. As far as we can. In the language. Of the day. And maybe. Anticipating.

Unbelievers. Objections. And questions. And. Even if the. God. The serms. Directed. Maybe to Christians. We seek. That the gospel. Might shine.

Through. We're still. In the middle. Of section five. But. I'll leave it there. Just with one. Little story. And then we'll go into discussion. The questions are just. Just ideas.

You don't need to follow them. But. In line of this. Remembering the outsider. Hope it's okay. To tell. The story.

[48 : 37] About a church. A free church. Down. In the south. Of this country. And. The.

The minister. Wasn't going through. A series at this time. And he's just preaching. On odd texts. That. Struck him. And he preached.

One night. On Ezekiel. It's at the beginning. Of chapter nine. Where. An angel. Is going to mark.

Though. On the forehead. Those who weep. And groan. Over the abominations. Done. In. In Jerusalem. And. He went through. Chapter. Eight.

And half of chapter nine. On. All of these abominations. And what they were. And then the slaughterers come. And they kill everyone. And the only people.

[49 : 31] Don't get killed. Are the ones who are weeping. And groaning. And moaning. Over the abominations. This was on a Sunday evening. And there were two young women. Who'd be coming to that church.

For two or three months. And who were enjoying it. And enjoying. The. The preaching ministry. And were very. Enthusiastic. Sick.

About the church. And that was the night. That unknown to the minister. They invited a colleague. Who knew absolutely nothing. About the bible. Or the gospel. They invited a guy.

And the minister. Didn't see the guy. And. The idiot. Carried on. And did his. Thirty five minutes. On. The abominations.

And. Afterwards. He was speaking. To these two girls. And. The young man. And the young man.

[50 : 26] Was just. Confused. And horrified. By what he'd heard. It was the. Weirdest thing. He'd ever heard. In his life. And he said. I will never come back.

To a church again. This is what church. Is about. And these two girls. Were absolutely. Absolutely gutted. One of them. In particular.

And a little while later. They weren't coming. To that church. Anymore. And they went to church. Where they could guarantee. That if they took a friend. The friend. Would be under.

The sound. Of the gospel. The story. Haunts me still. Because. As you can probably guess. It happened in Leith. And the minister.

Was me. And I've never. For forgiven myself. For what I did. That night. And for the disappointment. And the faces. Of these two girls.

[51 : 24] Having persuaded. A friend to come. That the friend. Simply heard. Weirdness. From the word of God. Rather. Than the gospel.

I'll leave it there. Just a minute. I'll leave it there. I'll leave it there.