

Sermon Growth Guide

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Who Shares the News? | Romans 10:14-21

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Key Verse: Romans 10:17 - "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ."

Big Idea: Every follower of Jesus is called to share and show the good news.



Foundations

Romans 10:14-21 is part of Paul's larger discussion in Romans 9-11 about the identity of God's people and God's faithfulness to His promises. Many Jews assumed that belonging to God's people was determined by physical descent from Abraham. Paul, however, argues that God's people are defined by faith. Through Jesus, God is gathering a people from every race and nation, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Paul makes it clear that God has not abandoned Israel. Paul starts chapter 10 with a prayer for the salvation of Israel. Paul quotes Moses, the Psalms, and Isaiah, to argue that Israel's unbelief cannot be blamed on a lack of opportunity to hear. God's message has been proclaimed, and God has continually revealed Himself to His people.

This passage is about God's grace and humanity's responsibility. God reaches out, sends messengers, and makes Himself known, yet many still resist His invitation. Even so, God remains faithful to His promises and continues His work of gathering a people for Himself.

As those who belong to Christ, we are part of that people. We are recipients of God's grace and participants in His mission, joining God's work of making the good news known so that people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will one day call on the name of the Lord.

Understanding God's Word

Read Romans 10:14-21.

Together, outline Paul's chain of questions in verses 14-15. How does each step depend on the one before it?

In verses 15-17, Paul moves quickly from the beauty of gospel proclamation (v.15) to the reality of disobedience (v.16) to the necessity of hearing the message (v.17). How would you explain the tension that Paul is wrestling with here?

Paul quotes Moses, the Psalms, and Isaiah in the final verses. Why are these Old Testament witnesses important to Paul's argument? What do they reveal about God's character?

Applying God's Word

John Stott writes that evangelism is not defined by results but by faithfully sharing the good news. As a group, identify one way you can encourage one another to grow in sharing and showing the gospel this week. How can we become a community that helps people hear and experience the good news of Jesus?

Witnessing God's Word

Paul celebrates "the feet of those who bring good news." This week, prayerfully identify one person God may be sending you toward. Take one intentional step to listen, serve, invite, encourage, or even share your testimony. Also, perhaps take time to remember or thank someone whose feet brought you good news.

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When I say the word “evangelist,” who do you think of? A street preacher with a Bible in one hand and a microphone in the other? Do you picture Billy Graham at a crusade? Maybe you have a mentor in mind--like my friend who told me of her “spiritual grandmother,” a woman named Nazelie Elmassian. Anytime she went to the grocery store, she would say to the cashier “Have you heard the Good News? Jesus loves you!” She may not be the quintessential definition of an evangelist according to scholars or historians. But this one woman touched the lives of thousands of grocery store cashiers in Southern California. Nazelie knew she was sent to bring the good news to anyone who would listen, even those who were bagging her groceries.

In our series, The People of God, we continue our journey through Romans 9 and 10, and next week we’ll enter chapter 11. As Pastor Tim has shared, theologian N.T. Wright calls these three chapters a puzzle; yet he also says this section is a crucial climax of the letter, because here, Paul continues to lay out important gospel truths and address God’s covenant faithfulness to Israel.

Paul wrote the letter of Romans in the midst of significant cultural and spiritual shifts. The gospel was spreading. Gentiles were embracing Christ rapidly while many of the Jewish people continued to reject the good news. This is why Paul was in anguish, and why he was addressing the diverse church in Rome. He wanted them to know that Israel’s resistance to the gospel was not the end of the story. And in today’s passage, Paul shares his evangelistic strategy, outlining how everyone can receive salvation; Paul shares why His people continued to reject the gospel; and Paul shares hope – hope in a God who continues to reveal Himself, send messengers, and patiently pursue even those who refuse to follow Him. This is an invitation to grasp just how beautiful it is that God has chosen each and every one of us to have a role in His plan for the nations.

Last Sunday, Pastor Tim led us through the beginning of this chapter reminding us that anyone, everyone can receive salvation. Paul wrote in verse 13, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13) So now, we step into a clear progression -- four questions that demonstrate how we can invite everyone into new life in Christ. Paul writes, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:14-15a)

This is the How: Paul’s Evangelistic Strategy. And it is actually clearer if we reverse it:

- 1 Jesus SENDS disciples
- 2 Disciples PREACH to people
- 3 People HEAR the Good News
- 4 Hearers BELIEVE in Jesus
- 5 Believers CALL ON Jesus
- 6 Those who call on Jesus are SAVED

If you look at the progression, you can see that each one is essential for the next one to occur. This strategy looks easy to understand. Straightforward. Be sent, preach, people will hear and believe, and then they will call on Jesus, and everyone will be saved. Done. But is this strategy truly that simple?

Look at Paul. He wrote these words as a missionary who had experienced imprisonment, beatings, shipwrecks...countless obstacles to this work of evangelism. He knew that in order for people to hear of Jesus, he would have to navigate the vast Roman Empire. He faced barriers like language, travel, politics and persecution. But Paul never lost sight of the fact that Christ had sent him. That was the simple part: He didn’t question his calling, and he clearly understood the mission.

Today, we continue to face enormous obstacles to people hearing, believing, and receiving salvation. An estimated 3 billion people—nearly one-third of the world’s population—still live with little or no access to the gospel. Many reside among the thousands of unreached people groups where there is no church presence. The strategy remains the same, and our mission is clear, but cultural barriers, politics and geographic isolation continue to hinder access to the gospel.

There are disciples who are being called, trained, and sent every single day from all over the world. Yet there is another barrier that the church is actually responsible for: a lack of resources. Here are some statistics: For every \$100,000 that Christians earn, \$1.89 is given toward ministry among unreached people groups; if every American Christian gave just \$15 a year toward church-planting movements, organizations like our partner Frontier Fellowship could increase their training and sending efforts to even the most remote regions of Asia and the Middle East. As your Missions Pastor, I am compelled to share this fact I learned: every year, Americans spend more on Halloween costumes for their pets than they give to frontier missions initiatives. The resource barrier isn’t a lack of wealth, it is a question of stewardship: How we are investing the resources God

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has entrusted to us and are they are being used to advance His mission among those who have yet to hear the gospel?

Those are the more tangible things that complicate the spread of the gospel. However, there are also barriers that are more spiritual in nature. John Stott said, "Nothing hinders evangelism today more than the widespread loss of confidence in the truth, relevance, and power of the Gospel. When this ceases to be good news from God and becomes instead 'rumors of God,' we can hardly expect the church to exhibit much evangelistic enthusiasm!" (John Stott, *The Biblical Basis of Evangelism*) Has our enthusiasm faded? Have we overcomplicated the strategy? In a city and nation where there are little to no obstacles to sharing the gospel, what actually stops us from telling others good news? To figure this out, let's get back to the basics.

If we are going to start anywhere, the Bible is a good place to start, right? In his address to the first Lausanne (Low-zahn) Conference, Stott shared the biblical basis for evangelism. He defined evangelism as "the announcement and sharing of the euangelion, the Good News of Jesus Christ." He continued, referring to Jesus and the disciples, the book of Acts, and the early church, sharing that Evangelism is about faithfulness, not results; it is defined by the message, not the methods; and evangelism is fueled by confidence in the truth, relevance, and power of the gospel, not confidence in our abilities, training, or eloquence. Evangelism is sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is about faithfulness, not results. Evangelism is defined by the message, not the methods. Evangelism is fueled by confidence in the truth, relevance, and power of the gospel, not confidence in our abilities, training, or eloquence.

You see, evangelism doesn't have to be a big scary word. You don't have to be specially trained. You don't have to love public speaking. Can you share a message, confidently and faithfully? Whether you are a brand new Christian or you've been walking with Jesus for decades, all of us have the ability to share the good news. To be evangelists! In her book, "Stick Figures Save the World," Pam Arlund declares that sharing Jesus does not have to be complicated - we just need to tell Jesus stories! We can tell our story, tell stories in the Bible, even tell the stories of how Christ is moving in the lives of other Christians. Use stick figure drawings if necessary. Because even when we use stick figures, the message is beautiful. And we share in the beauty as carriers of that message. Paul understood this! In verse 15 he quotes Isaiah, writing: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:15b). In the kingdom of God, beautiful feet are willing feet.

Paul makes a shift in verse 16, turning back to his lament. He writes, "But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?'" (Romans 10:16) Both Isaiah and Paul witnessed God's people refuse to believe even though they had every opportunity to hear God's message. Paul has just laid out a clear progression: people are sent, they preach, people hear....then there's the crucial point where they believe, they call on the Lord, and that leads to salvation. So, if the gospel has been proclaimed, why did an entire people, who had been chosen by God, reject Him?

In verses 18-21, Paul steps into that tension and addresses it through another series of questions. He begins with, "But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: 'Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.'" (Romans 10:18) Paul uses Psalm 19, which is David's celebration of how creation declares God's glory throughout the earth - as if he is describing creation as a preacher whose sermon never ends. Yes, the message was heard. Next, he writes, "Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, 'I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.'" (Romans 10:19) By quoting Moses, Paul shows that Israel's response should not have been unexpected. Moses had predicted that God would use other nations to provoke Israel to jealousy, revealing that His mercy would one day extend far beyond their borders. God's mission turned outward so that His people would return to Him as those who were blessed to be a blessing.

Paul ends this chapter with hope again with the words of the prophet Isaiah: "And Isaiah boldly says, 'I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.' But concerning Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.'" (Romans 10:20-21) Paul points to the surprising scope of God's grace and the enduring patience of His mission. God is drawing near to people who were not even seeking Him: the Gentiles. And He continues to hold out His hands to Israel despite their disobedience.

This is good news - because the Lord continues to do this today. Yet, many Christians carry one of two misconceptions: If I share the gospel faithfully, people should respond. Or, if people don't respond, I must have failed. Paul rejects both of those ideas. The reasons people do not believe in Jesus often have less to do with the message we are sharing and more to do with the state of their human heart. We are not responsible for someone's change of heart, surrender, or transfor-

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mation. That is up to the Lord. And if we believe that our God continues to pursue people with patience, grace, and mercy, then we are compelled to do the same.

Lesslie Newbigin shared many lectures on what compels us and why we still shy away from our calling of evangelism. He explains, that while Christians have a responsibility to share the gospel, evangelism should never be driven primarily by guilt or obligation. Reflecting on the Great Commission, he wrote, "Evangelism is an overflow of Pentecost, an overspill. It is not law but gospel." (Lesslie Newbigin, *Evangelism and the whole mission of the world church*) So, Evangelism is the natural response of people who have encountered the risen Christ. You see, if evangelism were simply about transferring information, Paul would have stopped at verse 15. But because people are often resistant, skeptical, wounded, or indifferent, God has given them more than just a message, He has given them the church!

Evangelism is not designed to be done alone. Jesus did not build His mission around a single charismatic messenger. He called twelve disciples and formed a community that would carry His message to the world. From the beginning, evangelism has been a team effort with creation and with the Creator. The church's call is to demonstrate the power of the gospel through our shared life as the people of God. Just look at the book of Acts! Read those stories of the early church. Stories of fellowship, and unity, and shared meals, and caring for the poor: all with a spirit of joy. An overflow.

Michael Frost writes that the movement of the gospel today depends on us embodying the good news as a community so that unbelievers can observe and enjoy what living for Jesus is all about. He says, "...evangelism is best done slowly, deliberately...it takes time and multiple engagements. And it must occur as a communal activity, not only as a solo venture." (Michael Frost, *Surprise the World*) Isn't this good news? That evangelism is not confined to a pulpit. More often, sharing the good news looks like meeting up for coffee, an invitation to church, or being patient, kind, and willing to listen. God calls ordinary people, in ordinary places, doing ordinary acts of faith to draw others into the extraordinary kingdom.

One of the greatest gifts that happens in mission partnership is that we get to learn from one another. Last fall, when visiting our partner church in Egypt, the leaders told us about the numerous Muslims who were just showing up at the church asking about the Scriptures. They were having dreams and visions of Jesus. Creation itself was

calling them to know more. So, the church had to come up with a plan to respond. Today, hundreds of Muslim background believers are still gathering for worship and being disciplined weekly. But notice: the church hadn't done anything special - there was no campaign or specific outreach. They were just living their lives, serving, and overflowing with joy that was impacting their community. Their work as evangelists wasn't even about going out, it was about staying put and working together as a community to answer the call as the Body of Christ.

Let's turn back to Romans 10, which says, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." (Romans 10:17) Faith comes from hearing the message, and we, the People of God, are the messengers. The result of our commitment and our willingness to let the joy of knowing Jesus overflow? More ears hearing, more hearts believing, more people calling upon the name of the Lord.

So, I ask you all again: who do you think of when you hear the word evangelist? I think of an elderly Vietnamese woman. In 2007, I was there with a group from my seminary - people praying in a crowded room for hours - she made a request for motorbike to help her reach the villages. Our leader, Don knelt down in front of her, placed his hands on her dusty feet, and said, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!" We then laid our hands on her and prayed over her calling to the numerous villages in her region. She was an evangelist - one who didn't just have feet that were beautiful; she had feet that were willing. When you think of evangelists, do you picture yourself? You absolutely should!

Because it will take us all - the people of God - to reach those on the other side of the world or those on the other side of the street. What does that look like for you? How will God use your gifts for this work? Maybe it means hosting a Bible Study, doing consistent acts of service, giving to a full-time missionary or even just asking the cashier at King Soopers if they know that Jesus loves them. Because when we are all willing to share our story, His story, just imagine how God will open up our lives to show others the beauty, and experience the joy, to invite them to be a part of the greatest story ever told.

To God be the Glory.