



SUMMARY KEYWORDS

evangelism, people, unethical, gospel, Jesus, evangelize, world, hear, evangelist, myth, ben, ethical, marketing, Christians, God, Christianity, Christian, understand, episode,

Kevin Palau 00:03

Hey, this is Kevin Palau and this is the City Gospel Movements podcast where we have conversations about church unity, serving cities and sharing the good news.

Ben Jack & Lizzie Burke 00:17

You're listening to exploring evangelism myths. It's a collaborative podcast series by City Gospel Movements and Advance. We're your hosts. I'm Lizzy Burke in Portland, Oregon. And I'm Ben Jack in Manchester, England. Join us as we explore five common myths that hold people back from sharing their faith. Welcome to the first episode of Exploring evangelism myths. I'm Lizzy Burke, and I'm here with my friend, Ben Jack! Hey Lizzie!

Lizzie Burke 00:44

Yeah, Hey! Good to hear from you. So we are exploring this first myth evangelism is unethical. And we really purposely placed this at the very beginning of the series, because we need to discuss whether evangelism is unethical or not. Should we even be evangelizing right Ben?

Ben Jack 01:02

Right, exactly. I mean, if you're not going to start your whole series on evangelism with just asking the question, should we even do this? Is this ethical, then uh don't bother starting. Because this is where it all begins. So we need to deal with this one first.

Lizzie Burke 01:09

Absolutely, and you'll be hearing from some people that we've got to interview for each topic in this series. And we're really excited for these interviews. They were super fun to conduct. We had a whole team interviewing people in the UK, people in the US about what their thoughts on evangelism were. And, we want you to feel a sense of empathy. Like you can hear yourself in these interviewees because they are believers just like you trying to figure out what evangelism looks like in this day and age. And the other reason we want to include these interviews, is because we want you to know we're not the only ones coming up with these myths that there are other people thinking, different thoughts about evangelism, wrestling with evangelism. So, welcome to the conversation. Welcome to wrestling through what evangelism looks like in this day and age. And, also, I mean, of course, we don't want you just hearing my voice and Ben's voice. So it's fun to mix it up with some different audio clips.

Ben Jack 02:06



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Definitely answer on a range of accents as well. We blessed you with all sorts of crazy accents, hopefully, you'll be able to understand everybody that you listen to, especially me, especially me with my weird British accent.

Lizzie Burke 02:17

Oh, Ben you're gonna-you're the highlight of this series, your accent.

Ben Jack 02:20

Do you know where wherever I travel in the world, people most frequently asked me if I'm from Australia, rather than the UK. Apparently I sound Australian. So if anyone is listening from Australia, I apologize for misrepresenting you Around the Worlds. But it is what it is.

Lizzie Burke 02:35

And we love you, Aussies. Thanks for tuning in. Okay, I want to give you a little outline for these episodes, because we kind of systematically work through each myth. And we start off when we ask what is the myth? So we already introduced the myth evangelism is unethical. And then we ask why is this a myth? Why do we think this way about evangelism? Then we tackle what's true about the myth, because every myth has some truth in it, then we tackle what's problematic. And then we talk about where do we go from here. So now you're going to hear some of the voices of the people we interviewed. And you'll start to hear thoughts about why people kind of believe evangelism is unethical. You'll hear people feel uneasy about evangelism, not sure what to think they'll talk about pressure. And so see if you can put yourself in their shoes and say I relate with what one of these people says when it comes to evangelism?

Guest #1 03:28

How do you feel when you hear the word evangelism? I think I find it quite a scary word. I think on one hand, it's sort of a label that people give themselves or we give other people you know, I'm an evangelist, they're an evangelist. And so it's almost like an occupation. But we're all supposed to be evangelists, which I think is why I find it scary, because it doesn't come really easily. To me, I kind of want to keep the peace, I don't want to ruffle feathers, I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable.

Guest #2 04:00

Because we live in a culture that makes you pick a side. And so because of that, people don't know how to like, even express their values, because a lot of times we're afraid to say what we think. And alongside that comes like, and this is kind of broad or not super on topic, but like people don't really know how to resolve conflict either. And so when we do have moments of like, Oh, I actually don't agree with your values. We don't know how to, like resolve those. And so he leaned away instead of lean in.

Guest #3 04:25



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If I'm being honest, I like slightly recoil a little bit. And it's probably because of, you know, you see those people with Bibles on the streets, like shouting at people and that's what a lot of people associate with evangelism. Then it also makes me nervous because like Oh, gosh, I have to go out and like put myself out of my comfort zone and talk to someone. And then part of me is like, Oh, this is the real deal.

Guest #4 04:49

I think there's a stigma even within many denominations of Christianity, when it comes to terms like evangelism or evangelical because they've been laden with a lot of political connotations.

Guest #5 05:03

I think people are afraid because they don't want to invest in trying to be a good faithful presence and witness to their co workers or neighbors. And they don't want to bring them to an environment that's going to be awkward or too churchy, or intolerant, and that's going to scare their friends away. They like real the fish all the way in. And they don't want someone to just at the last minute, snip the line.

Lizzie Burke 05:32

Now, Ben, you have a story about posting on Facebook and kind of receiving some backlash when you were putting yourself out there sharing a little bit about your faith, and you are an evangelist. And so you are constantly running events and writing books and talking about Jesus. But when you put this post out, you got some backlash that I think was kind of interesting. Can you can you share that story?

Ben Jack 05:52

Yeah, I mean, I get backlash all the time about evangelism. There is people that say to me, oh, you know, you shouldn't really be doing this. And you shouldn't be telling people to- that they need Jesus and that Jesus the way the truth and the life and, and that's just par for the course, as an evangelist, you're going to get that feedback. But, I think the average person, the average, Christian has also started to get that kind of feedback on things that they post on Facebook and I, I've had that happen to me, I, I posted something at one time, where I basically just say, hey, look, I'm interested to know what methods of gospel communication people use, you know, four spiritual laws, or Jesus at the door kind of methods do you use to help people understand the gospel? Let me know. And, lots of my Christian friends jumped in and told me those methods, but a few of my non-Christian friends jumped in and basically were like, "Look, why are you asking this question? Why are you so obsessed with making other people believe the same things that you believe just let people live the lives that they want to live?" And of course, Christians are worried about posting stuff up for coming across as being too pushy, or too preachy? And, and the kind of responses that will come back to them as they post those things. So the question then becomes, just like we've been hearing in those clips, should we actually be engaging in this stuff? Is it okay? Is it ethical? Or should we just kind of let God do what God's gonna do and let let people live the lives that they want to live?

Lizzie Burke 07:04



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Yeah. And that really leads us to the question, why does this myth exist? And we've discussed, if it's people who determine whether evangelism is ethical, or God, so who determines whether evangelism is ethical or not, people? or God? because like you're saying, Ben, your friends are saying, "hey, let us live our lives. Don't force your beliefs on us." And we've talked about the great irony in this mindset, that if people are determining whether evangelism is ethical or not, it's kind of self-refuting to say you should just let people live how they want to live, because that is in itself a belief in a worldview. Right?

Ben Jack 07:41

Right, exactly. You're basically telling me to do something that you yourself are not doing you're you're saying, Let people live how they want. And I'm like, Well, I'd like to live in a way that I can let other people know about Jesus, except like that you can't do it (accept like that) any other way accept like that. Yeah. So, these, these statements are kind of often self refuting, and not necessarily that well thought through. Uhm, and so you know, I understand why people might have concerns and why people want to be like, "Oh, just let live and let live." But ultimately, it doesn't work. Because God sets the standard. If we truly believe that God is the Creator of all things, then it's God that sets the moral standard. And actually, the fact that we need the gospel is precisely because we've broken God's moral standard in the first place.

Lizzie Burke 08:22

Yeah, you know, and I think in this day and age, in many ways, if we feel uncomfortable, if we feel uneasy about something, we label it wrong, you know, or unethical. And in this conversation about evangelism is unethical. We are saying that it's not people who determine whether evangelism is ethical or not, it's God. And so just because something's uneasy, we can't let our emotions determine whether something's right or wrong. So if God is the one determining whether evangelism is ethical or not, we need to look at what the Bible says.

Ben Jack 08:54

Absolutely. And we need to realize that there might be different reasons why different people are saying it's unethical. What part of it are you actually saying is unethical because for example, people don't necessarily view marketing in general as being unethical. Right? They see marketing as being something that is okay. As long as you're not using unethical like you're telling lies to get people to buy your product, then it's okay. It's okay for like Coca Cola to try and convince me to buy their product instead of buying Pepsi's product. We're okay with that. But when it becomes overly politicized, or overly coercive or somehow intolerant, in its messaging, and I think the intolerance one is probably the biggest challenge for Christian evangelism, people see it as being intolerant of other worldviews.

Lizzie Burke 09:38

You know, as we were discussing this episode, we talked about how myths are often created by two things. One is the theological blind spots, and the other is simply wrong theology. And when it comes to this myth, evangelism is unethical, a theological blind spot. One example of many is God wants me to be comfortable and safe and secure. Well, that's one part of the story. We have versus you and



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Matthew, like, take his yoke upon you his yoke is easy. His burden is light in Peter, cast your cares upon Him because He cares for you, but there are also verses like, take up your cross and follow me. You are a slave to righteousness. And so yes, God wants you to be safe and secure. But there's also things he may call you to do that are very uncomfortable and make you feel uneasy, but it doesn't mean that it's bad or wrong or unethical. And then there's wrong theology, right?

Ben Jack 10:27

Well, straight away, Lizzie, you're making a really good point there, because you're also showing that there can be people. So the things that I was talking about where it may be, it becomes a bit intolerant, and people view it as being a bit intolerant, that perhaps is coming more from the side of the world. And so that's a worldview saying, evangelism is unethical. But then within the church, people might say, "Ah say it's a bit unethical, it's not okay, because it's it makes other people feel uncomfortable. And, you know, my theology says that God just wants everybody to feel comfortable and happy, and okay" so, perhaps evangelism is unethical, because at that point, so you can have a problem in the world thinking it's unethical, you can have a problem with people in the church thinking, it's unethical. But you're absolutely right. It ultimately comes back to theology, what the Bible say about who God is, who we are in light of who God is, and what God has done, and therefore what we need to do in response.

Lizzie Burke 11:11

So what's true about this myth, you know, because every myth has some aspect of truth in it. That's why people believe it. And the first part about this myth that we want to highlight is true is people do believe evangelism is wrong. Barna did a study in 2019. And because I work at Luis Palau Association, and am in this space talking about evangelism, I hear this stat a lot that 47% of millennials agree, at least somewhat that it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith, in hopes that they will one day share that same faith. And you know, I mean, that's shocking, because when I hear that stat, I hear it, almost 50% of millennials think evangelism is wrong. Full stop.

Ben Jack 11:54

Right? I mean, that's crazy. I mean, you are one of those millennials as you so that's your, that's your people group, like help me help me to understand how to get my mindset around that. Because if these same millennials believe that Jesus is who He says He is, and they have a relationship with him, where do you think the disconnect is coming? from thinking? Yes, Jesus is the hope of salvation, and the only hope of life and life in all of its forms today and forevermore, but, I don't necessarily think it's right, to let other people know about that I have to understand that disconnect.

Lizzie Burke 12:23

Well, even the way that you described Oh, Jesus his life forever more, du-du-du-du-da, like that's beautiful. That's amazing. I want my friends and family to know that but I think when millennials hear evangelism, there's so much associated with it, like inconsiderate, inappropriate, soliciting, marketing, right, butt our nose into people's lives and solve problems they don't think they have. And like you said, you know, so often we live in a "you do you" culture, so let people live their lives. And if it's not hurting



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anyone, it's fine. Don't try to mess that up. And so I think when millennials hear this, you know, do you agree that evangelism is unethical? Or do you think evangelism is wrong? We associate evangelism with all these things that we do think are not wise, not right, not loving. And we say, yeah, if that's what evangelism is, I don't feel comfortable with that.

Ben Jack 13:13

Do you think Lizzie that, maybe it's got something to do with the fact that our evangelism has become so much about behavior, ie, we go out and try to win people to the church and kind of say, right, come and behave the right way. And if you behave the right way, you will receive all the blessings of God, which of course, we know that that that's not the gospel, the gospel is not behave the right way. It's, it's give your whole life to Christ. It's accept his logic, and that will lead to behavior. But it's not just rouge behavior management, it's the transformation of the heart. Do you think maybe some of the millennials, and anybody else who has a problem with it is, is ultimately not struggling with people knowing Jesus, they're struggling with the idea of going out and saying, stop doing this, stop doing that start doing these things instead?

Lizzie Burke 13:52

You know, I think that's part of it. For sure. I think there's a sense that we don't want to have people listen to us, and then check all the boxes that they ascribe to certain beliefs, and we'll live a certain way in their behavior. But I also have heard recently, and maybe you've heard this too Ben that Christians need to be re-convicted of the good news. And in many ways, I think millennials wrestle with like, well, if I'm just trying to get my friends to come to church or not do these behaviors. How is that really good news? You know, like, why would I, you know, put my relationships on the line to do this evangelism work, when I'm not even fully convinced that it's good news. So you know, what's true, people believe that evangelism is wrong. But and this is the second point. People also believe that it's part of our faith, and the best thing that could happen to someone is to know Jesus. And this is really interesting to me, because in the same study that Barna did in 2019, they found out that 97% of all practicing Christians, so this is in every generation, not just millennials, 97% of all practicing Christians believe that part of their faith means being witness about Jesus. And the best thing that could ever happen to someone is for them to know Jesus.

Ben Jack 15:06

Wow!

Lizzie Burke 15:06

That's a huge discrepancy, right? 47% to 97%.

Ben Jack 15:11

As soon as you said that, I'm thinking to myself, man, there's a whole generation of Christians who are living in a crazy tension. Because the majority of them think that the best thing that can happen to their



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friend is to know Jesus and that half of those same people are thinking, but I shouldn't go and tell them about it. What's happening? Where is this coming from?

Lizzie Burke 15:28

Yes. So maybe you're -you're listening to this episode right now. And you're raising both hands and both feet saying, "That's me! I feel this tension, I love Jesus. But I feel really uneasy, uncomfortable, not sure how to feel about evangelism. But I want my friends and family to know Jesus." And so, it leads to what's the problem with this myth? What is the problem with thinking that evangelism is unethical?

Ben Jack 15:28

Yeah. Well, alright, you know, this is probably a good point in the podcast seeing that this is a podcast about exploring evangelism myths, and we're talking here about whether evangelism is ethical or not. For us to actually get to grips with what evangelism itself actually is. And so if we, if we were gonna, like offer a definition of evangelism, maybe that would help us to have a better conversation about this. I would even be interested to know in the Barna studies, for example, which are really illuminating and fascinating, it would be interesting to know kind of exactly how the question was phrased it was the word evangelism used? Was any explanation of it given? I don't think it was, I think it was more about sharing your faith, wasn't it in the questions that were asked. But I think when most people hear the word evangelism, or the more old fashioned times kind of proselytization, they have such a very specific idea of what that means. But my definition of evangelism would simply be, "The Holy Spirit empowered proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, to the whole world, in the hope that they might accept the forgiveness of God, and be reconciled to him today and forevermore."

Lizzie Burke & Ben Jack 16:54

And I think that's an important like, now, that's not the only definition of evangelism in town is different ways to define it. But they should all be basically of a similar nature. What we have there is, is Trinitarian, we've got Father, Son, Holy Spirit in there. Why? Because God is the object of our evangelism, it's empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the object of the good news. It's ultimately about reconciliation. But-But hopefully, what we're seeing here is, this is not about coercion. This is not about twisting people's arms. This is actually just about presenting, as we sit as Christians, the good news, the truth, that others may come to see it as their hope as well. Yeah, and when it comes to this evangelism, which I think is excellent, and we'll be repeating this throughout the series. You know, the Bible is clear that this type of evangelism, the Holy Spirit empowered proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Bible's clear Go, go tell the good news. You know, we see that in Matthew 28, with the great commission, we see that, you know, at the beginning of Acts, when the believers are called to go out Judea, Samar- all over the world, you know, and share the good news. And so, like we mentioned at the beginning of this episode, is it people who are determining whether evangelism is ethical or whether it's God, and if it's God, we need to look to the Bible and the Bible is really clear about evangelism is a command a responsibility, a privilege and a joy for all believers.

Ben Jack 18:14



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Yeah, and that joy thing is really important. Like I see so many people approached evangelism like it's some horrible duties like the draft, it's like they've been drafted to go into a war that they didn't ever want to be harmed. They don't even think like the war is just or right or whatever. And it's like, no, hold on, hold on a second. What we've been drawn into here is the greatest privilege that there is this side of eternity, which is to partner with God in finding his lost children, and bringing those last children back into his loving embrace.

Lizzie Burke 18:40

That's beautiful. I love that. Okay, so the second problem that we see with this myth is that we forget we are already evangelizing and being evangelized whether we recognize it or not. And Ben, you already mentioned, you know, with marketing, we're constantly being evangelized, like, hey, Pepsi is better than coke or Coke is better than Pepsi. You know, the interesting thing is the term evangelism isn't actually an explicitly Christian word. It means bringer of good news. But it has a specific use in the Bible in the U.S., because that's where I am and located. We recently had our presidential elections and Joe Biden was-he won the US presidential election, and people in the streets of my city, the day it was confirmed, he was elected, were shouting in the streets, "You guys, this is the best day you don't understand Joe Biden won the election." And, you know, we're not we aren't trying to be partisan here. Because in 2016, when Donald Trump won, people were doing the same thing in the streets shouting this, you know, what they believe is to be good news. And in many ways, we forget that we're being evangelized and evangelizing whether we recognize it or not.

Ben Jack 19:50

Absolutely, and it's how you perceive the news that's being shared. So you know, one side showing this is the best day ever, you know, you democrat and then the republicans think it was the worst day ever and four years previous the those roles were reversed. So there's a matter of perspective. And I think this is one of the unique things about Christian evangelism is that irrespective of how you perceive it, there is an absolute truth at play. And Jesus either is the hope for all the worlds he either is the only way to the Father God or he isn't. It's not ultimately about how you perceive it. It's simply whether it is true or not. And because we have come to a place as believers, where we absolutely wholeheartedly think this is an absolute truth for all people, we therefore have a responsibility to go and at the very least, let people know that truth. And it goes beyond mere marketing. But you're absolutely right. We've been marketed to all day every day by companies and corporations. And, but but evangelism in for the Christian is not just marketing. It's far more than that. Incidentally, though. Who do you think is one of the kind of biggest evangelists in the world right now?

Lizzie Burke 20:52

I mean, I work at the Luis Palau Association.

Ben Jack 20:55

Luis would be up there, right, Luis, you know, a few years ago, Billy Graham, passed away a couple years ago, and his son Franklin is still cracking on around the world as well. And we could name lots of



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men and women who are preaching the gospel to the multitudes. But you know, one of the biggest evangelists in the world right now is Greta Thunberg, the, you know, climate change activists who say sailing around the world, she's a teenager, she's sailing around the world and, and she is evangelizing she's trying to bring the world the bad news, actually, that the climate seems to be, you know, changing irreversibly in bad ways. And if we don't change our behavior, then there's going to be a big problem for future generations. She is it proselytizing. She is trying to get the world to change, not just its opinion, but the very way that people live? Yes. And now, generally speaking, I mean, obviously, there's people that don't agree with her viewpoint and would kind of reject it. But, But the general populace seems to be on board with her and kind of saying, yep, you go, girl, good for you, Greta Thunberg. And it's like, okay, so that evangelism is okay. But then a Christian comes along and says, Well, I've got something far more important to climate change your eternal destination. And actually, it's in the life that you live now, as well. And it's like, oh, no, no, no, we don't want to talk about that. And so you can see how it's a problem when we start to just arbitrarily decide what's okay to evangelize and what's not okay to evangelize.

Lizzie Burke 22:14

Yeah, You know, and like you said, evangelism, it's not or an evangelist is not solely used by Christians, because many of you listening have probably heard the term brand evangelists as a popular secularist term. And interesting, Ben, you were the one who informed me that Guy Kawasaki, who was a Christian who worked at Apple was the first one to coined that term brand evangelists.

Ben Jack 22:36

Yeah, I'm pretty sure he was the first guy who was kind of employed by a major corporation as essentially their brand evangelist. And he's kind of working in their marketing department. But one of his big jobs was not simply to market on behalf of Apple, which is interesting. One of his big jobs was to get Apple's customers so buzzed on the product, that they themselves would then go and be evangelists on behalf, you know, word of mouth marketing. And that was his main job was to get the ordinary consumer shouting about the product, because they loved it so much.

Lizzie Burke 23:08

Yeah.

Ben Jack 23:09

Well, that's what Jesus is trying to get us to do about Him and who he is and his love.

Lizzie Burke 23:12

Yeah, you know, I think this is because we've talked a lot about marketing right now. But I think we want to emphasize evangelism as a Christian is not marketing. Let me just say that again, because it's really critical. Evangelism as a Christian is not marketing. And-

Ben Jack 23:27



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Help us to understand that Lizzy, unpack that for me.

Lizzie Burke 23:29

Yeah, definitely. Because I think the very fact that secular organizations and people have used this term evangelism shows how poor our understanding as Christians is about evangelism, because we started to conflate things and allow secular culture to determine how we as Christians share the gospel. And so I have a few kind of comparisons in contrast between evangelism and marketing. And so marketing is transactional pay for this, you will, get this, marketing is transactional, versus evangelism as a Christian is sacrificial. I'm laying down my life so that you may know Jesus. Marketing aligns with the storyline of the world. That's why we're all for it. You know, marketing isn't something people are totally pushing back against. But evangelism aligns with the storyline of the Bible, which is, in its essence, countercultural, And then finally, marketing is empowered by money. I mean, ads, social influence, number of followers versus evangelism is empowered by the Holy Spirit, through human weakness and willingness. Sometimes the best evangelists are those who have a stutter, but who are willing, you know, and so, hopefully that gives a little bit more context to evangelism, especially in contrast to marketing. And right now we want to introduce another voice in this episode, Alycia Wood she was a person I got to speak to in preparation for this episode, and she works with Ravi Zacharias international ministries. She is an apologist who has been speaking to universities and in men's and women's prisons, all about this idea that Jesus is Lord. And, I really enjoyed speaking to her because she in her little bio said, "I like talking to people who view Jesus and Christianity as ugly or unbelievable." And, I think my conversation with her really helped me to understand some of the contradictions and subjectivity that many people kind of put around evangelism so take a listen to this really interesting conversation I had with Alycia Wood. What do you say to Christians who have really negative connotations with evangelism, and they even see evangelism as maybe unethical? What are some of the reasons Christians view evangelism as unethical? Because it comes with a lot of baggage these days, the term evangelism?

Alycia Wood 25:44

It definitely does. And some people have some very, I guess you would say strong opinions on this. Because so often in our culture, we see any form of discussion where maybe people aren't in full agreement as unethical. And so really, when we look at this word, unethical, we need to understand that ethics is talking about morals, it's talking about things that are right or wrong. So essentially, when we say that Christians shouldn't evangelize or it's unethical, we're since you're saying it is immoral to evangelize, think about that. It's morally wrong to evangelize. That is a massive problem to say, and when we really start reflecting on that a bit for our own selves. And so people need to understand the very nature of evangelism is to communicate the biblical worldview is contrary to your view, right? Jesus evangelized, he shared the message with people. And so Jesus didn't commit a moral wrong. So we really can't say that we are when we're following his example. But yeah, there's a lot of reasons why people think it's unethical because it tells people that their actions are sinful, or they can't live in the way they want. It's unethical because it implies that people can believe false things that send them to Hell, even if they're a quote unquote, good person. Other people think it's unethical, because it points out



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differences between friends and family members and can cause tension when all we want to do is just get along and be buddy, buddy. But I think ultimately, you know, it's unethical for some people, because the reality is that truth is just painful to share sometimes. And I think this is where tolerance has hurt us as a society. We don't want to do anything that might hurt somebody's feelings. And you know, we've changed the definition of tolerance over the time tolerance used to mean, I disagree, if what you're doing is I'm going to tolerate it, I'm going to put up with it. Like a mother would say to a child, I don't tolerate this behavior, okay, I don't want this, I won't accept it. We have changed tolerance. And now mean, I accept everything. We've changed the definition of the word, which is basically its exact opposite. And now we've almost handcuffed and muzzled ourselves to be able to talk about anything that's healthy, and disagreeable. And so often, we are just leery to talk about anything that might cause tension, even if it's a truth. You know, if I was to make a bad decision in life, I would want my friends to tell me I don't want them to sit back. We don't want Yes, men, always around telling you just agree with everything we do. I think it actually is helpful to tell people truth, it may seem unethical, but it is not morally wrong, to tell somebody truth.

Lizzie Burke 28:16

So, what does ethical evangelism look like? Because I hear you talk a lot about tolerance and disagreement in our culture. But what does ethical evangelism look like in your mind?

Alycia Wood 28:27

Well, before I answer this question, I want people to think of humanity this way, the worst thing that can happen to somebody is not that they die. The worst thing that can happen to somebody is not that they die. The worst thing that could happen to somebody is that they die and do not know Jesus. That is the worst thing that can happen. And when you think about that kind of invocation about the what the worst thing that could happen to somebody is, it changes the way in which you think about evangelism. Okay, what does ethical evangelism look like? To me, ethical evangelism, the way of doing evangelism, right is I do think it can be done in a way that's harmful and wrong, means I oftentimes try to look at commonalities between what Christianity teaches and what people ultimately are looking for a wish was true. So, if you could say, if God is this, what would he be like? They might list some things. And oftentimes, it's like, well, I would wish that there would be a meaning to my life, or I wish that I as a human had value that I was important that I was seeing that I was heard. Some people might say, I wish that this guy would give me a clear definition of right or wrong. I wish this guy would let me know whether or not there's an afterlife, or what happens after death, whatever might be. And what I try and do is say, Well, let me tell you how Christianity answers those particular questions. And so just by saying, this is something that somebody already wishes were true, how can I let them know what is actually in Christianity. We have great answers that other religions will have answers for that not just Christianity, but I think Christianity has the best answers for this. Additionally, I think ethical evangelism, it does involve caring for the hurting, and the poor and the oppressed and the outcast like Jesus did. So I think ethical evangelism is a combination of actions, coupled with the words of Christ. And if you have one or the other, not only is it not Christ like, but it isn't even evangelism anymore.



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Lizzie Burke 30:13

So when you're talking about ethical evangelism, it's more of a dialogue. You're not saying, you know, you have to believe these things and live this lifestyle. You're saying, hey, these are the questions you maybe asking this is how Christianity speaks to them. But it's also not just words, it's not hypocritical, saying you need to believe these things and not do anything about them?

Alycia Wood 30:32

Yes, Jesus, sit in a chair for his three years of ministry and just tell people and just speak with words. He spent time acting, healing, being with people who are hurting, like He was active, right. And I think all of these moments or events or the way He had compassion on people, made people warm up to Him, the way He stood up for the outcast made that outcast, even find a home in Jesus arms. It's the combination of the both and you're right. And sometimes we turn into words, well, you're going to hell I see. A lot of times you're going to hell and, and you know, well, you're an idiot for not believing this. And the Bible says what it says isn't too bad for you for not believing it. Like you don't really hear Jesus talk like that, unless he was talking to the Jewish people. In other words, Jesus used those kind of words, when he was speaking to the religious people. That's when he was bold like that, but with the person who was not, he had a different approach. His behavior made it so that his words were more warming. And so I think that yeah, I think you're absolutely right. We need to be careful how we phrase things and how we communicate things. We don't compromise on the gospel, don't compromise on the truth. But how we communicate it is key. And-and I think that's probably the thing that we need to work on most is how do we better communicate? Which is why I think saying to somebody, well, you know, if there was a god, what would you like him to be like? What would what would he be? Now you're having them point out the things morality, meaning and stuff like this, that matters to them. And then you're looking to Christianity? You're still competing, communicating gospel message, but in a way that's much warmer.

Lizzie Burke 31:58

That's a great question. If there was a god, what would they be like? Okay, you said you love talking to people who find Christianity, ugly? Or unbelievable. Okay, how do you talk to people like that? And why do you get so excited about people who say, Christianity is ugly, unbelievable, I can't believe you believe it.

Alycia Wood 32:16

I know, I actually really love it. So I'm the complete opposite of culture, who says I only want a-to I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, and I only want to talk to people in a nice conversation that doesn't stir the pot. I'm like, you can come to me and stir the pot all you want. It's okay. You can be honest with me, I'm not gonna fall apart. If you say I think this Christianity thing is a bunch of, you know, Hocus Pocus or whatever. Like, I actually want to hear what you disagree with. Tell me be honest with me, I'm not gonna fall into the ground and a bunch of tears, right? In other words, I want people to speak. When people find it ugly and unbelievable. I want them to tell me what's going on. Because you know what, a lot of times, in fact, most of the time that people come to me with these issues, they're actually real.



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Like, they haven't made them up. They've had experiences, the church has done something stupid, a Christian has done something stupid, and they have legitimate hurts and pains and reasons to be against Christianity and God. So I want you to tell me, you can lay it all out on the table. And the second thing I will do is I will not, under any circumstances, make excuses for sin. If the church is wrong, if the Christians are wrong, I'm not going to make excuses for their behavior. I will apologize where we need to be I will admit, yeah, that was wrong, that that happened to you. That was wrong, that somebody said that to you, or treated you that way, or embarrass you in that way. But when the church is sin, I'm not going to make an excuse. Let's own that we need to start to own where we've done wrong. And then also to realize, Okay, wait a minute, maybe you're not trying to be unreasonable here, at least Yeah, even as I'm telling you why I disagree with you, you and I have already found a common ground. And that we both find that this is a genuine mistake by the church or Christians, and all of a sudden they have a disagreement, we have a common ground. And now, the third thing is I can pick one of those things that they said one of the issues that they raised, and I can say, Okay, well, let me just give you some thoughts on this particular thing. or explain how Jesus maybe would have handled it, or how that Christians should have handled it, because of what the Bible teaches and tells us to do. So I can use one of the things that they say as a launchpad into another discussion that's actually going to help them understand what the gospel message really is. You know, I've been a Christian apologist now for seven years. The first two as an intern and the last five is a full on speaker and I will tell you, that I have to spend so much time reshaping what people think Christianity actually teaches. Because people have been so misled by false teachings and experiences. And for me, it's a constant breaking down what they think it is, and trying to reshape and rebuild the into something new. And so I that's why I like when people come to me with these things. It gives me another opportunity to do that. Uhm, and so hopefully some people can use some of the things that I said as good advice for them when they enter into those conversations.

Lizzie Burke 35:02

You know, what I appreciated most about that interview was her definition of tolerance. Because I think that as we reflect and recognize how our very definitions of terms like tolerance changes over time, we realized that when people are determining whether something's ethical or not or right, we are in a in and of ourselves are a moving target. And that is really problematic.

Ben Jack 35:23

Yeah, absolutely. That's really helpful. So with that in mind, where do we go from here?

Lizzie Burke 35:27

You know, the first thing I think we need to do is recognize that persuasion is loving. And coercion is not as good. Yeah, I honestly, as I was researching, I came across a professor who studies cults. And that might seem a little extreme, but he had this, interesting quote- yeah I no, it was and I want to read this quote, because I think it helps us understand that persuasion really is loving. So he said, "We are by nature proselytizing animals, much of our conversation involves persuasion, in our efforts to persuade cover a wide variety of issues, including religion, persuading others about our convictions is



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an essential part of our own dignity, indeed, to try to persuade other persons of the error of their ways is, in fact, a way to honor others. Indifference is, in the end, an insult to the other person." What do you think of that? No, that sounds fascinating to me

Ben Jack 36:20

Yeah, well, you know, the aim of proselytization is to create proselytes. And a proselyte is someone who's come over to your way of thinking, whether it's a behavior or belonging, or an identity and acceptance of identity, or any-any of those things. So, if we kind of inherently desiring to win people over to a movie that we just saw a restaurant that we went to nine times out of 10, it's probably well, intentioned may be more than 9 times out of 10 is well intentioned, like we have had a good experience, we want people to have that same experience. I know that when I show when I show my wife a movie from the 80s, that is, you know, that is the greatest movie ever made or something. And she's like, what is this old movie that you're showing me that I have no interest in- it kind of hurts a little bit. I'm like, wounded because I really wanted her to like get on board because I thought she would enjoy it. But of course, there's part of me that actually wants her to enjoy it for my benefit. And I think that the difference in evangelism is that persuasion is not for our benefit, we're not trying to persuade or coerce in any way shape or form for our own benefit, it is truly an exclusively for the benefit of the other. God aint gonna love us any more If we win more souls to him, we can't get more favor with him in that in that way, we're purely going out because we know the value of what we have received. And we want to pass it on for the benefit of the exclusive benefit of the other.

Lizzie Burke 37:40

You know, I think that's a really good point, Ben, and we just want to emphasize coercion, which is using your individual or institutional power to force people to believe what you believe and ultimately live a lifestyle you want them to live. Yeah, it's not what we're talking about. And I just think we can emphasize evangelism is an invitation to a way that we think is the way the truth and life you know,-

Ben Jack 38:01

Right, right.

Lizzie Burke 38:01

That's very loving.

Ben Jack 38:03

And I think most people who have a problem with evangelism, say that it's unethical, probably have coercion in mind manipulation, you're tricking people. And that's where the bulk of the issue lies-not totally. But the bulk of the issue lies normally in that.

Lizzie Burke 38:16

Yeah. Okay. Second, where do we go from here? Gain a better perspective on disagreement and a culture of polarization?



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Ben Jack 38:24

Yes, this is so important. We are terrible at disagreeing in this culture-

Lizzie Burke 38:30

Yeah, we are!

Ben Jack 38:30

Like we just assumed-

Lizzie Burke 38:31

Kidding!

Ben Jack 38:32

Oh, I see what you did there. If we disagree about something, then we assume that like we hate each other, and we've just lost, completely lost the ability to disagree.

Lizzie Burke 38:43

Yeah, and it's interesting, because in another Barna study, we found out that the number one reason Christians don't want to talk about faith is because religious conversations seem to create tensions or arguments. And so the motivation then is, oh my gosh, I don't want to feel tense. I don't want to feel awkward. I don't want to feel like we're gonna highlight our disagreements. So we're fearing and avoiding those are our motivations. But really, the motivation for evangelism as a Christian is love. And it's very clear in Second Corinthians like we're compelled by love to be reconciled, not out of fear that we're going to be in an awkward conversation.

Ben Jack 39:17

Yeah, that's beautiful. And the third one is that the myth is primarily sociological rather than theological. And we've let our emotional discomfort determine whether something is okay or not, rather than what the Bible says what God has said, which goes right back to what we were saying at the start of this podcast, who ultimately is going to decide this isn't going to be God? Or is it going to be people what the Bible tells us that the God is very pro-evangelism he and it's not for us, it's for his sake. And he's saying go go, go make disciples and the Great Commission is not just exclusively on its own go and make disciples coming before it is the great commandment Love the Lord your God with everything you got. And love your neighbor as you love yourself, just like you were saying, there's the the compulsion is love.

Lizzie Burke 39:57

Yeah. And it's interesting. You know, if you think about it, I guess I didn't think about until this moment. But churches 20-30 years ago, evangelism was very popular. And people were teaching on evangelism, having conferences on evangelism. But what has become a sociological issue, where



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evangelism is slowly more unpopular has eroded our theological understanding of evangelism. And it's been rotting the church's theology in a subtle way. It's not like a frontal attack on orthodoxy. But it's like the death of 1000 cuts, where people are now saying, Oh, we shouldn't even evangelize. But that's because it's a sociological, we're feeling this discomfort with it. And ultimately, we need to decide, okay, the gospel of Jesus is another storyline on offer in the world. It is countercultural, so when are we going to decide we will proclaim the gospel, even if it's unpopular, we feel awkward, or seen as ignorant or lose power, we need to really wrestle with that.

Ben Jack 40:51

We sure do, and we also need to be aware that number four, just because we've experienced poor evangelism methods, doesn't mean that we should throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Lizzie Burke 41:00

Yes, and I think this is kind of the climax of if it's, we've experienced really bad methods. People talk about colonization, coercion, all this stuff. Well, yeah, but that's not the evangelism that we're talking about. Those are unwise, unethical methods. But the biblical understanding, we need to honor-and I think, you know, I was I was reflecting on this. We've seen people use preaching in unwise, outdated, unethical ways, really. But do we throw out that practice as believers? No, we just do it in ethical, wise, relevant ways. And the similar goes with tithes and offerings. People have asked for tithes and offerings for unethical reasons. But do we say Oh, then we shouldn't do tithes and offerings? No, because that's biblical. We just need to do it in a biblical, loving, wise way. And so we need to rethink the way we do this practice. But we don't throw out the practice.

Ben Jack 41:53

Exactly. And the point is that evangelism is not conceptually unethical, in and of itself, the idea of proclaiming the good news to the world, in the hope, that by God's spiritual power, that person might move from a place of death, to a place of life. There's nothing unethical about it, it's most ethical thing that you can do, but it can become unethical in our practice, we could go into the world, with evangelism not being unethical. And then the way that we do it, it can become unethical because we coerce people, we trick people and ultimately, normally you can make it about yourself, and that's where the problem is going to become.

Lizzie Burke 42:27

Mm-hmm. And five, do the necessary study, reflection and practice, to learn how to do effective evangelism in our day and age in our culture. I listened to an interview with Carrie Newhoff he is a Canadian podcaster. And he was interviewing Tim Keller. And you know, Keller has been doing ministry for decades. And yeah, and it was so interesting, he asked him, okay, when you were first starting off, how did you kind of frame the gospel? What was the most effective way that spoke to that culture that generation? And Keller said, I shared that the gospel is Jesus offering us true freedom.

Ben Jack 43:06



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Uhhh!

Lizzie Burke 43:07

And that really resonated with that generation, but now Carrie's like, Okay, if you were starting off, and you're talking to young pastors, young ministers today, what would you frame the gospel as? And he said, Oh, I want to do it totally differently. I would say the gospel is Jesus offers the truest identity. That is the gospel that this generation needs to hear. And again, we're not saying change the gospel. But Tim has done the thoughtful, hard reflection, to say, what does our culture need to hear? What are the questions? What are the pain points? And how does the gospel speak to that? And I thought it was interesting. You know, he wasn't going to use 20 year old methods and a perspective on sharing the gospel. He was going to ask what is relevant evangelism look like today? And I think Keller and his examples inviting us to do the same reflection.

Ben Jack 43:56

Yeah, it's the gospel of the Bible in the clothes of today. Like, how are you going to dress the truth, not to make it more palatable, but to make it more understandable. And this is what I see. When I see people repackaging the gospel. A lot of the time I see them repackaging it to make it more palatable. And it's like, No, no, we don't need to make it more palatable, we just need to make it clear. And as soon as you make it more palatable, that's when you're likely in danger of turning it into something that it's not and ruining it and messing it all up. But it but just taking its essential truth and saying, How can I help you understand this with real clarity? And let me tell you, I fully agree with Tim Keller, that identity is the number one way Now certainly in the West, to proclaim the gospel to a world who was so fixated on identity. But of course, ironically, there will be people that will say it's unethical for you to identify a challenge that people have like a challenge over their identity, and then try to slot your gospel communication in to manipulate them in their moment of need, and in their insecurity. And it's like, No, you've missed it. The point is, we recognize the need, because the need is what it is, and we recognize the solution of Jesus for that need, because the solution is what it is it has been and it always will be Jesus.

Lizzie Burke 45:03

Yeah, yeah, that's good. Okay, finally, tell stories of healthy, good biblical evangelism much more often. And we're gonna have an episode on this. But this is really important. We need to tell more stories.

Ben Jack 45:15

We do. I mean, we'll save it for future episodes a good way of hooking people into future podcasts, but storytelling is so so important. It's important that we tell the great God story so that the world knows who he is that we tell our stories so that the world knows what God has done in and through our lives and is doing through our lives. And then we tell each other in the church, the stories of what God is up to, in and around the world, still bringing people to salvation to faith and trust in Him today. And it builds confidence. Yes, that actually, this thing, this thing works. And when you talk to somebody about Jesus, more often than not, they don't actually go, 'oh, you're an unethical creep' get away from me'. More



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often than not, people are open to have an interesting conversation as long as you go about it in a loving way.

Lizzie Burke 46:00

Yes, just so to sum it up, what is the myth we talked about today? Evangelism is unethical. Why does this myth exist? It's because we are caught in this tension of putting people in the place of determining whether something is ethical or not, instead of God. What's true? Well, people do believe evangelism is wrong, but for variety of reasons. And we kind of parse that out. And they also believe that the best thing that could happen to somebody is for them to know Jesus. So there's this tension. So the problem with the myth, there's this myth of misunderstanding about evangelism. And we forget that we're already being evangelized. And then we just walked you through six different things that you can do to go from here, when it comes to the myth that evangelism is unethical.

Ben Jack 46:44

What it's been great to explore with you today, Lizzie, this myth of evangelism being unethical. And hopefully, we've helped you to think that through a little bit more, but keep thinking about it and keep thinking about how it affects your life in your day to day response to who God is and what he wants to do in through your life. Next time out. Lizzie, what are we going to be talking about?

Lizzie Burke 47:01

Yes, thank you for listening. And we are excited to talk about the myth that evangelism is best done by pastors and extroverts. So if that resonates with you, tune in next time, share this episode, and we will talk to you soon.

Ben Jack 47:15

Bye.

Kevin Palau 47:19

Thank you for listening to another episode of the City Gospel Movements podcast, a ministry of the Luis Palau Association, you can subscribe to our podcast on Apple, Spotify and Google Play. leave us a review or reach out to us on social media to keep the conversation going. You can find us on Instagram and Facebook at City gospel Movements.

Lizzie Burke 47:38

We'd like to give a special thanks to the Luis Palau Association team; to Joy Bongiorno for producing this episode. Kevin Palau out for your radio voice intro. Stephanie Wieber. you the boss. No literally. Spencer Reed for listening to hours of interviews and being a Google Doc ninja and Kaedyn Lashway for running the show and telling us what sounds good and what doesn't. From the message trust. Shout out to Peter Thompson for responding to emails quicker than Ben jack and for not getting fired. And finally, this series would have not happened without our interviewees, Charlie, Jonathan, Caitlin, Paul, Christine, Jim, Rob, Marissa, Lydia, Manny, Sally and Bruce. Thank you.

