

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-30 Assessing Effective Methods – Holistic in Scope

Imagine a situation in which the owner of a business builds a very profitable company through corruption. He mistreats his employees, paying them only small wages with no raises. He forces them to cheat customers by leaving items out of packages, hoping they will never notice. He overcharges people and refuses to refund their money. He makes his products cheaply, knowing they will wear out quickly. He does all this to make as big a profit as he can. One day he accepts Christ. He is wondrously born again and repents of his wicked ways. The problem is that there is still a corrupt system in his business that needs redemption as well. This story shows us the importance of broadening our concept of salvation to include also the world around the new believer.

A story from the Bible also illustrates the holistic approach. Jesus had come home to Capernaum. People gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door. He preached the Word to them. Four men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man on a mat. Since they could not get to Jesus, because of the crowd, they carried him up the outside stairs to the roof of the house. They made an opening in the roof by digging through it. Then they lowered the mat the man was lying on right down where Jesus sat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there thinking, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Immediately Jesus knew what they were thinking and he said to them, “Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home” (Mark 2:1-11). The man got up and walked out in full view of them all. Four men had brought their friend to Jesus. They worked together to get him where Jesus could minister to his needs. Jesus saw all this man’s needs. He met the spiritual need first, based on their faith. Then he met his physical need as well. The man’s life, his family’s life, and his larger community was forever changed!

Historically, views about accepting Christ have focused on the individual’s response to God’s grace. Public altar calls and crisis decisions have been the norm. Non-western cultures understand that accepting Christ is often a family or group process. It may take place over a period of time, not all at once. As a result, the salvation experience may be understood to be far-reaching in the family or group or town.

A person’s accepting Christ brings them into a community of love. Each member has great worth. Their broken relationship with a holy God is restored. God’s intent is to make every aspect of the believer’s life whole, including the spiritual, emotional, and material aspects. Accepting Christ is the decision whereby the process of wholeness is begun. It is holistic in that it extends redemption beyond the person to include the communities of which they are a part. The church is a model of God’s redemptive work. In its separateness from a broken world system, the church is a haven of wholeness. It offers healing for those drawn by the Spirit into God’s kingdom. Yet by its involvement with the world around it, the church impacts the lonely, the hungry, and those in bondage of various kinds. Jesus said, “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and

sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt 25:40). The church is a picture of the kingdom of God on earth.

The quest for wholeness takes place in three spheres: in the inner person, the church, and the community. The goal of the believer is to be “transformed into his image” (2Cor 3:18). This takes place in the inner person, not the outer person, or even the intellect. It is a matter of the heart. It is seeing with Christ’s eyes, feeling his compassion and love, and extending his hand to others.

The individual within the community of faith will begin to achieve the wholeness that comes from communion with him. And the church itself will grow into a group of disciples, mature believers who can win others to Christ. The message that is proclaimed in the New Testament is that one cannot serve Christ as the Head and have no relationship with his Body on earth. It emphasizes the individual-in-community using the pictures of the body and the family. Christ, who forms and directs the community, imparts his authority to the fellowship. With authority comes responsibility. True love requires you to be accountable to those loved and to the one who gives the authority. Wholeness in community requires a sensitive heart, especially on the part of leaders, to maintain the bonds within the group. And redeemed believers should be committed to genuine involvement with a community of faith—beyond attendance. We need each other for maximum growth in grace and effective witness.

So, the holistic scope of the spiritual journey is seen in the forming of individuals into a healthy Christian community. God, however, intends redemption to extend beyond the confines of the church to the global community as well. Paul called it “the world.” Evil structures that keep humans in bondage are built within cultures. The apostle Paul warns his readers “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). As described in the opening story of this lesson, the business owner who built his company based on greed and deception needs Christ. But beyond his personal redemption, there is a need for the system he created to experience godly transformation as well.

In these last five lessons we have offered keys to assessing your evangelism methods. Try to evaluate your outreach. Is it holistic? Are you discerning the activity of God in your situation? Are people accepting Christ? Our prayer is that you would also use these lessons to teach those under your leadership, to see whether their methods are effective. By doing so, you and others will be as fruitful as possible for the kingdom.

This lesson is **important** because the church ministers not only to individual persons, but also to their larger worlds. As such, it models the redemptive power of God to the whole community.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that accepting Christ impacts the whole person: body, soul and spirit, and should also go beyond that. God wants to redeem every aspect of our lives, our family’s life, and even the world around us. Since beliefs about soul winning directly influence our witnessing practices, we must not focus only on an individual’s decision. Their becoming a disciple of Christ will extend their healing influence to the community.

Review Questions

1. Since beliefs about soul winning directly impact our witnessing practices, what is the main idea about accepting Christ that you should get from this lesson? [Pause 5 seconds].

A. If you answered, “We need to understand that accepting Christ impacts the whole person, yet goes beyond an individual to include the world around them,” you are right.

2. In what way is salvation said to be holistic? [Pause]

A. If you said, “It is holistic in that its scope extends redemption beyond the sphere of individuals to include the Christian and communities they are a part of,” you are correct.

3. In what ways is the spiritual journey essentially one toward a restoration of the wholeness that God originally intended? [Pause]

A. If you said that accepting Christ is followed by change within the individual—the recovery of the image of God—and a wholeness of every aspect of the believer’s life, including the spiritual, emotional and material aspects, you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to evaluate the methods that you have used in the past to witness to others. Did you use practices that recognize the necessity to minister to the whole spirit, soul, and body of the individual? If not, how could you adjust them in some way to do so? Think back on the five keys for assessing the effectiveness of your methods. How could you create a discussion with others about these assessments and apply them to specific methods you are using?