# Literature Review

When discussing factors affecting Christian students’ effectiveness in personal evangelism, which is crucial in creating and sustaining a spiritual movement, it is wise to look at references to personal evangelism. Unfortunately, no previous research on Ethiopian university and college students focuses on their effectiveness in on-campus evangelism. However, citing other articles and research conducted outside the country to help validate the factors that could affect Christian students’ effectiveness in sharing Christ with students at school is necessary.

The apostles of Jesus Christ are also good examples to evaluate our practices in the light of their model to overcome our weaknesses regarding personal evangelism. “The Bible is the authority for doing theology, and as such, it is the authority for mission” (Shambare and Kgatla, 2018, p. 4). The Bible is the first and foremost authoritative, fitting, and dependable book that gives numerous pieces of evidence regarding personal evangelism as it does to other areas.

Thinking of good examples, Jesus Christ is the first to look. The Bible says, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21 [NIV]). Jesus’ ministry on earth was only for three and half years but was impactful and successful. Within this period, He laid an unshakeable foundation that His disciples are still building on and will continue until He returns. His success secrets (which anyone acts upon) can produce the same success story in one’s life.

## Holiness and Spirit-Filled Life

At the Seventh Affirmation on the International Conference of Itinerant Evangelists–Amsterdam ’83, more than four thousand participants affirmed, “We need and desire to be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit as we bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ because God alone can turn sinners from their sin and bring them to everlasting life” (Graham, 1984, p. 65). The Spirit-filled life was not an option for the early Church or an extra for today–it is a necessity. We can and must preach the Gospel, but in the final analysis, the Spirit interprets the word to the hearer and quickens them. Shambare & Kgatla (2018) stated, “The Church, with integrity, searches for and defines itself as inadequate but adequate with Christ and the Holy Spirit, which enables it to read the signs of the time and strengthens its discernment to take corrective action” (p. 2). God works in and through His people toward accomplishing His eternal purpose.

We cannot manipulate God’s sovereign work; nevertheless, we understand that the results are in God’s hands; it will give us freedom from anxiety and fear of failure. There is no need to force people to believe in the gospel message because God is at work through the Holy Spirit when faithfully proclaiming the Gospel. According to Graham’s (1984) record, Sir Marcus Loane of Anglican Archbishop of Sydney emphasized that it may be all too easy to think that the age of evangelism has ended. However, this thinking leads to the blight that rests on the Church, whose vision has failed. The Church becomes nominalism when vision and outreach fail (p. 7). We must trust the Lord to do His mission for humanity and cooperate with Him in which He wants us to participate.

Many Christians fail to share the Gospel because they fail to show Christ in their actions and compassion. Our effort must extend beyond evangelistic revivals and crusades to incarnational evangelism–being, doing, and telling Good News where we live and work. Clipsham (1964) believed that holiness and evangelism are crucial elements that need great emphasis and are essential to the church’s health (p. 269). Preaching the Good News is not the only way we declare the Gospel of Christ. Our lives also should be witnesses to others of the reality of Christ. Nowadays, God’s people should value integrity for communications that back up their preaching with their lives. “As people accept Christ, they form small groups that have grown into churches. Church plants came about because of effective evangelism” (Chai, 2018, p. 124). Our preaching should be from within, out of what we are. God called His people to holiness–separate from the world’s moral evils.

## Awareness and Priority

For the Apostles of Jesus Christ, evangelism was not a program but a way of life. They took each day as an opportunity for them to witness the power of the crucified, risen, and soon-coming Lord. Bosch (2011) indicated that “an apostle is, essentially, a witness to the resurrection” (p. 50). The fulfillment of Christ’s promise of the Holy Spirit and His commission to “Go” resulted in an irrepressible consciousness that constrained them to evangelize.

Believing students and Christian students’ fellowships that do not prioritize evangelism are making it no priority. Stott (1975) affirmed, “Moreover, if within our mission priority should be given to evangelism, then also, within evangelism priority should be given to those who have never heard, or never truly heard, the Gospel” (p.291). Evangelism and mission must be the first among many fellowship activities.

Christian students must understand that the gospel message is powerful wherever they preach it, and to whomever they preach it. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” Romans 1:16 [NIV]). It can reach the hearts of all so that this spectacular and supernatural gospel may ultimately extend to the thousands of students on campus and beyond. We are God’s mouthpieces, responsible for the opportunities He gives us to share with all who will hear.

Many tasks come to our mind when we think of spending time with the Lord, fellowshipping with fellow Christians, and planning to increase opportunities to get closer to our nonbeliever friends to share Christ with them. Stott (1975) affirmed that “there is now in many parts of the world an unprecedented receptivity to the Lord Jesus Christ” (p. 291). Therefore, churches and mission agencies must mobilize believers to prayer and direct mission involvement.

Regardless of our busy schedule in classes, study time, and office, God called us all to witness the Good News, and God knows we are passing through such busy schedules, yet He wants us to find a way to make it reach non-believers around us. Bosch (2011) stated that “repentance, conversion, and forgiveness become a dominant theme in the ministry not only of Jesus but also of the apostles and evangelists after him and of John the Baptist before him” (p. 105). So, whether we are busy with our daily activities, we have time. It will not be difficult for us to initiate Gospel conversations with others so that they respond to the message.

## Understanding the Urgency

If we do not believe that evangelism is what we pay the evangelists and staff to do, we do not blame it on them–because such a perspective is first unbiblical and, second, unproductive. “Urgency is an indispensable part of the work of an evangelist” (Graham, 1984, p. 58). Evangelism is every believer’s responsibility, so we must feel the urgency at least for three concerns:

* Jesus taught that each individual has an eternal destiny–heaven or hell. The eternal destiny of each individual depends on a decision made in this life—no decision for Christ after death. Hebrew 9:27 [NIV].
* We have no assurance of continued physical life tomorrow. Therefore, there is an urgency to the gospel because life can end at any moment. Someone we speak to may never have another opportunity to hear the gospel and accept Christ. 2 Corinthians 6:2 [NIV])
* A delayed decision can result in a hardened heart to the call of God’s Spirit. The Bible warns us against being hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. Therefore, the evangelistic message always contains a note of urgency born out of the teaching of the Scripture.

We do not know when Christ may return–but what if it was today? “The greatest responsibility–the highest priority–is evangelism, reaching a lost world for Christ” (Graham, 1984, pp. 124–125). Would Christ find us working for Him? Would He find us living a life of holiness that honored Him? Would He find us doing all we could to share the glorious gospel of salvation with others who do not know Him? Clipsham (1964) affirmed, “Mission is not merely part of the Church’s task, it is an essential part of its nature, and the Church’s neglect of its missionary calling can only lead to spiritual death” (p. 276). There is no higher calling and privilege than to be a part of God’s plan for evangelism today. There also is no greater responsibility.

## Prayer and Faithfulness

In church history and all evangelistic movements down the centuries, there has been a significant movement of the Holy Spirit, and the Lord seems to first prepare the soil by prompting the prayers of his people. So, Graham (1996) affirmed: affirmed “The lives of the outstanding people of God of both the Old and New Testaments, and down through the church's history, were characterized by much prayer. Anything of value in the kingdom of God is initiated in and dependent on prayer” (p. 220).

Many Christians are good at praying for those who have physical needs. Nevertheless, many Christians are sadly lacking in praying for those who have the greatest need–a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is biblical and essential to intercede for nonbelievers so that they will open their hearts to the Good News. When the apostles were under persecution, weary of their ministry, and threatened by the religious authorities, they needed three steps to renewal:

1. They considered the Scriptures.
2. They prayed.
3. They have been filled afresh with the Holy Spirit.

The result? They all get filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly speak God’s word. “After they prayed... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31 [NIV]). We can not snatch nonbelievers from the bondage of evil unless we tie up Satan in prayer and prepare the hearts of the nonbelievers for the Gospel message.

## Knowing the Gospel Message and Method

Evangelism includes clearly articulating the gospel message so that the hearers may understand it well enough. Therefore, we need to know what it means to proclaim and prioritize the Good News; otherwise, how could we even think about communicating it to others? We must realize we are alive now because God wants us to help others know Jesus personally. Weatherspoon (1945) believed:

The message is one: Christ is the answer to every spiritual need. The objective is always the same: to bring men face to face with Christ and His claim upon them, the claim of His authority, and His sacrificial, redemptive love. But lost men are different. And for everyone, there is in Christ his “missing piece,” which will redeem, repair, and fulfill his life. Let the preacher find the people of his community and preach to them not merely about something, and preaching will come alive. (p. 65)

A clear understanding of the gospel message leads to successful evangelism because, in one way, success in evangelism is consciousness. However, as a famous saying by Albert Einstein goes, "If you cannot explain it simply, you do not understand it well enough." Therefore, Christian students need to be wise enough to develop and grow themselves with the best understanding of the gospel message and methods to explain it to non-believers around them simply. Not knowing the exact gospel message and the appropriate and contextualized method of delivering it overwhelms the hearers. It does not help them accept it; instead, it offends them and pushes them away. Graham (1984) stated:

That is what evangelism is all about–“spreading the Gospel of Christ.” It is more than a method, however; it is also a message. It is the message of God’s love; of man’s sin; of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection; and of God’s forgiveness. It is a message that demands a response–a response of faith followed by discipleship. The term “evangelism” encompasses every effort to declare the Good News of Jesus Christ so that people may understand God’s offer of salvation and respond in faith and discipleship. (p. 8)

We all are part of God’s mission to the world and must help every believer understand God’s mission and live accordingly. Bosch (2011) highlighted:

Missiology’s task, furthermore, is critically to accompany the missionary enterprise, to scrutinize its foundations, its aims, attitude, message, and methods–not from the safe distance of an onlooker, but in a spirit of co-responsibility and of service to the church of Christ. (p. 419)

Knowing the gospel message and the method matters a lot.

## Are You Sure About Your Salvation?

Claiming to be a Christian but not sure about salvation leads to confusion and a lack of confidence. Not being sure about salvation dramatically affects the individual’s life, misrepresenting the group they claim to belong to and evangelism. Graham (1996) stated:

Assurance of salvation is the awareness of belonging to Christ and having complete confidence that He has given us everlasting life. Many Christians lack this kind of assurance. Because of ambivalence about their relationship with Christ, they do not experience the joy of the Lord. The only thing they are entirely sure of is that they have doubts. Uncertainty can stem from not being truly converted, trusting feelings rather than God’s Word, sin, and disobedience in the life of the Christian. (p. 44)

By trusting the Lord for His promises and the Holy Spirit to assure salvation, one can be sure of his/her salvation. “The presence of the Spirit is the presence of Holy Love, which is the point of it all. Also, importantly, the Spirit functions to provide one with the assurance of salvation (preserving grace)” (Isaac, 2009, p. 114). We know the reality of salvation through an encounter with and personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. Through Christ, we have redemption (God has repurchased us by paying for our sins), justification (we are cleared of guilt and cleansed by grace), and forgiveness (God accepts us back and “forgets” our past sins). Amazingly, God, through the sacrifice of Christ, proves Himself to be just in justifying the ungodly who have put their faith in Jesus.

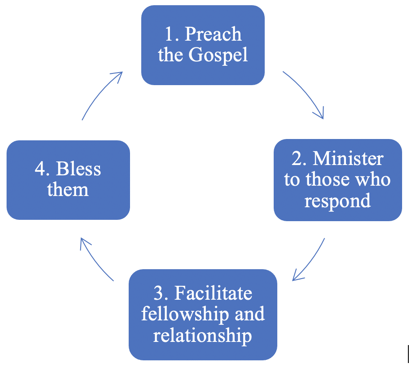
## Relational Evangelism

Many Christians think of evangelism as that they could win people for Christ with a random approach and keep doing it as if it is the best method of evangelism. In most cases, sharing Christ with strangers is just trying to win them by chance, and it fails because “the problem with this approach is that the gospel requires a radical life change, and not many people are about to listen to strangers telling them to change the way they live. What do they know about others’ lives?” (Qureshi, 2014, p. 158). On the other hand, Qureshi (2014) argued that, with some exceptions, “If a true friend shares the same message with heartfelt sincerity, speaking to specific circumstances and struggles, then the message is heard loud and clear. Effective evangelism requires relationships” (p. 158). The Bible supports the effectiveness of relational evangelism. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved–you and your household” (Acts 16:31 [NIV]). Therefore, the relational evangelism method is the best way of sharing Christ with others without rejecting the other forms of evangelism methods.

According to Forster (2011), posted on the Lausanne Movement page, if we (as a Christian community) were to describe the most common models of evangelism used by Christians, they would probably fit the following pattern:

Figure 1

Most Common Model of Evangelism



This pattern may work reasonably well in the church, but it is ineffective from Monday to Saturday, during which Christians spend most of their waking hours. When we look at Jesus’ model of evangelism in Luke 10, we see He encourages his disciples to apply a different strategy.

1. The witness should start by blessing people, “When you enter a house, first say, peace to this house” (Luke 10:5 [NIV]). People want to experience blessing, acceptance, and love, which is simple and easy. Sometimes, it is just a sincere compliment or a practical act of caring (like helping a co-worker to reach a deadline).
2. Jesus commands believers who go out to preach the gospel to build relationships with people (Luke 10:7). Simple principles in mind: treat each person as special (Phil. 2:5–7 [NIV]) and always share the fruit of love (Matt. 7:16 [NIV]).
3. Jesus says that once we have blessed people and built friendships with them, we should minister to their needs. “Heal the sick who are there” (Luke 10:9 [NIV]). When there is a good relationship with people, they experience blessings and develop trust, leading them to open up.
4. Finally, sharing the gospel with them (Luke 10:9 [NIV]). When a person’s need is met, we will have a golden opportunity to share the good news. When God answers prayers or someone finds the help they need, the witness can gently share the gospel message.

Qureshi (2014) gave his encounter as a testimony in his book Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A devout Muslim encounters Christianity, which tells us that a relational approach in evangelism matters a lot:

In my case, I knew of no Christian who truly cared about me, no one who had been a part of my life through thick and thin. I had plenty of Christian acquaintances, and I’m sure they would have been my friends if I had become a Christian, but that kind of friendship is conditional. There were none that I knew who cared about me unconditionally. Since no Christian cared about me, I did not care about their message. (pp. 159–160)

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