

## **Personal Evangelism in Biblical Perspective: iShare—Why?**

**Acts 8:1-8**

**By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)**

*January 8, 2012 – Morning Sermon*

Our reading is in Acts 8 today. This is the Word of God. It's the truth. Acts 8:1- 8 says

[1] And Saul approved of his (Stephen's) execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. [2] Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. [3] But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. [4] Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. [5] Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. [6] And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. [7] For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. [8] So there was much joy in that city.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

The ministry theme this year is iShare. At Briarwood God has given us a mission statement that comes from His Word which is for God's glory we are committed to equipping Christians to worship God and to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. That mission is set in a vision which is for coming generations (of new believers, pastors, leaders and missionaries) Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled church where every member is both a minister and missionary. To keep on track with our mission and our vision every year we try to take one crucial dynamic of the Christian life and ask the Lord to help us from His Word by His Spirit to focus on that.

This isn't 'we deal with that so we're done with that' so we move on to something else. No, what we are doing every year is trying to focus on it in such a way that we take that dynamic of the Christian life and build it into the fabric of the lives of

the believers in the lives of this church. This year it's iShare and it's very simply this. We're asking God to build in the lives of every believer and in this church a heart of passion to share Christ with lost people. Creating a culture that is intentionally committed to sharing Christ person to person. We want God to build that culture in our church because the individuals in our church as a people give praise to God because somebody shared the Gospel with us, we came to Christ and now Christ has given us this privilege where through us we bring the message of Hope to the darkness of sin where people can be set free from their distant soul brought to Christ. That's what we are asking God to do, for this to be a way of life, not just for a year but a life of sharing Christ personally with other people.

In this sermon which will take us in this series about another six to seven weeks of iShare, we'll cover iShare why, iShare what, iShare to whom, iShare how, and we'll walk our way through all this. This morning I have a very specific purpose. This may sound childish but I'm childish. Would you take one hand, raise it and hold two fingers up? I want to nail down for you two things that you have to know and believe in order to engage in sharing the Gospel with other people. You can put your hands down now. I feel like I've been to a flower child rally, transported back to my college days looking at all those hands up.

I want to go further than that. I'm a grandfather. My dad's father was a baseball player so that's what I got from him. My other grandfather was a builder, a fence maker, just an unbelievable guy. I am the type of guy when I'm doing a job that requires a ladder I will go up and down that ladder 50 times to finish the job and my grandfather would be the guy who goes up the ladder one time to get the job done. The reason he could do that is because he would say before he started "Let me study on this for a while." He was one of those guys who would measure twice and cut once. I am one who would measure once and cut 13 or 14 or 15 times. He was that kind of a builder.

One time he was building something and I was working with him. We nailed these things together and when we finished I said "Okay what's next granddaddy?" He said "We're not through yet." I said, "Well, it's nailed in." He said, "No, son you have to set the nails. You have to set it deep." So he pulled the nail punch out and nailed it in to set it deep.

There are two things in this study I want you by God's Spirit to have set deep as a believer. There are two things you have to know if you are engaged in personal evangelism. I think it's pretty obvious to some degree as we've looked at Nehemiah, our nation, our city and all that's around us and realizing the dawn of Christ's coming is not far off. I really believe He's coming soon. I long for a Gospel Awakening that changes lives, cities, hearts and families. I yearn for it. It's being built into my heart and life and that's why the book of Acts has been so engaging to me. Here is why.

In the book of Acts you have the first Gospel Awakening that ends up shaking the world and not the last Gospel Awakening. There have been other Gospel Awakenings but the very first Gospel Awakening that begins in Jerusalem spreads like a tidal wave that goes to India, Egypt and gets all the way to Europe in less than 25 years after the ascension of Jesus Christ. An enemy of the Gospel says of this "These people have turned the world upside down." That's the Gospel Awakening that moved through a hostile environment, uncharted waters to the destination of bringing men and women to Christ and extending the Kingdom of God. It was powerful what was done.

So instead of what kind of technique can I come up with, I'd like to go right back to the book of Acts and see how that happened there. What is it that gives birth to a Gospel Awakening through a revived church? I know God uses a revived church to accomplish it but what is it that gives birth to it? In Acts 17 where they have shaken the world let's work our way all the way back to ground zero. Here is Jesus who died on the cross, rose again, He appeared for 40 days, sent His disciples back to the upper room, they go to prayer and are engaged for ten days of protracted prayer in both waiting and seeking the Lord. It's interesting to note how they were waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit yet seeking at the same time. Both resting and seeking were engaged.

I began to notice that whenever God gives birth to a Gospel Awakening there are two essential life lines that bring forth that Gospel Awakening. One of them is protracted, persistent, intercessory prayer. Acts 1 gives us the 120 people who are persistently over a period of days with protraction pursuing God for the power to do what seems to be absolutely absurd. Think of the absurdity of this. Jesus says "I want you to make disciples of all the nations" and they could think 'well that's what God promised Abraham.' Genesis 12 says that in you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Go and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. Back then there was no Facebook or twitter or printing press. It's hostile, pagan governments and Jesus says "Go and take the Gospel to the ends of the earth."

The first thing they do is they don't come up with a technique but they go to their knees in persistent, protracted prayer saying "Oh God, Jesus said 'I will be with you to the end of the age' and has promised the Holy Spirit. May the power of the Holy Spirit set us free to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the utter most part of the world. We need Him." So they seek the throne of grace and lay hold of it in persistent and protracted prayer.

The second lifeline is passionate, persuasive preaching of the Gospel. There is prayer and the Word. By the way, what were the two things we focused upon last year? It was prayer and the Word. These are the lifelines. God, would You build into us persistent, protracted, engagement in intercessory prayer and would You raise up a ministry of the Word of God? Have you noticed that not only in church history but in the book of Acts that every time God moves He moves His people to seek Him in prayer and He raises up Gospel preachers who preach the whole

counsel of God. God always does those two things. That's exactly how this tidal wave that shakes the world with the Gospel begins. How does it begin? It begins conceived in a prayer meeting in Acts 1 and then it's birthed in a sermon. Not only from that sermon but that sermon is preached where they go from 11, to 120 and then to 3,000 and that's just counting the men. It is amazing what is happening here with these essential lifelines of prayer and the Word.

Let me go a step further. When God does a Gospel Awakening through a revived church He gives birth to it through prayer and the Word but then He marks it. There are birth marks. When the Gospel Awakening gives birth there are two birth marks that are always attached to it. Three thousand come to Christ and then a description of the church is given. Acts 2:42-47 says

[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

He doesn't say how many like it did earlier when it said 3,000 but everyday people were coming to Christ. Why? There are two birth marks when God moves in the lives of the people. Prayer and the Word give birth to a Gospel Awakening and there are two birth marks. One is a vertical and the other is horizontal. The vertical is worship. When God moves people start worshipping and they worship two ways. They worship by gathering together. They gathered in the temple to praise God. Then when they scattered they worshipped with their life. In fact, their lives were so different – whatsoever you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God – that they were praising God with their lives and people were saying “My goodness look at what's happening.” They had favor with all the people. Here they are in a hostile environment but they are admired by the way they live their lives of worship that flow from their gathered worship. So worship is not only the assembled privilege of giving praise to God when we come together but it's the way we live to the glory of God when we scatter into our rolls and relationships in life.

Not only are they marked by worship but the second thing they are marked by is their witness. Jesus said “You shall be my witnesses.” They have a witness of word and deed. They witness with their life. Look at them sacrificially and generously giving themselves to each other. They are selling their possessions. Jesus said “They'll know you're My disciples because you'll bear witness. They'll know you're My disciples by how you love one another.” You can see that deep,

sacrificial, serving love that they are giving to one another. The world is looking and saying, "Where do you get that?!" The worship of life led to a witness in life that was drawing people to the Fountain of Life. Where is that Fountain of Life? So that Gospel witness of deed was being done.

It was not only that but it was the Gospel witness of Word. They were sharing their faith. They were iShare missionaries. How do I know they are sharing? It is because it says the Lord was adding to their number those who were being saved. How do people get saved? They are saved by faith in Christ. How does faith come to you? Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. So you not only have a preacher like Peter preaching but there was the 120 out there sharing their faith. 3,000 came to Christ and now the 3,000 (just counting the men) are all out there sharing their faith. What is the result? More and more are coming to Christ, why? They not only have the witness of deed but they have the witness of Word. They are sharing their faith.

Now that this Gospel tsunami is taking off from Jerusalem, Satan will retreat right? Wrong, Satan assaults. The book of Acts tells you that he uses both of his assault plans. I call it the Evil Empire strikes back. Satan attacks from the outside and the inside. From the inside he attacks with dissention and from the outside he attacks with persecution. In this case he starts on the inside first. There was so much financial resources coming in and the elders (Apostles) are so overwhelmed that they are just kind of doing mercy ministry to widows. They are all Jewish so they only know Hebrew widows so Hellenistic widows were being overlooked so everyone thought they were being racists, prejudice, and bias. They realized what they were doing and thought if they do a better job at mercy ministry then they would have to neglect prayer and the Word and didn't want to do that because then they felt they wouldn't have a heart to ministry to people. So they decide to raise up deacons. Deacons came to administrate the church, do the mercy ministry and handle the stewardship of the church so the elders could focus on overseeing, shepherding, teaching, discipling and the ministry of prayer and the Word. Satan's assault plan is turned inside out and it becomes a great moment in the life of the church.

How great of a moment was it? It says in Acts 6:7 that after they give the account of the dissention in the church the leadership's response then says "and the Word of God kept spreading and many more came to the faith, even the priests." When the church responded to the dissention redemptively, purposely, thoughtfully both to enhance mercy ministry and maintain spiritual depth even the priests were vulnerable to evangelism. So the Gospel is spreading and it keeps spreading.

Satan is thinking assault plan number one didn't work so he'll quit. No, he goes to assault plan number two. He says there is this guy name Saul who is the Osama Bin Laden of his day. Saul is a religious terrorist. Satan gives him legal standing, resources and he'll have him go kill Christians, put them in prison and destroy

this movement. Let's nip it in the bud right here in Jerusalem before it gets to the world. So Saul along with others bring their charges and they pick a leader out to make an example of and his name is Stephen. They stone him to death. He dies following his Savior with peace in Christ saying "Lord, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing." Now what happens?

Let's go back to Acts 8. This becomes the crucial moment. What will happen now that the church in Jerusalem is being persecuted? Acts 8:1 says *[1] And Saul approved of his (Stephen's) execution.* When I read this I think Saul did you know you are about to get a name change? You will not be Saul for you will be Paul and instead of a religious terrorist you'll be the greatest church preacher, church planter and evangelist we've ever had but he doesn't know that yet. He is out there killing Christians. He would tell those killing them "Good job, now put them in prison." It goes on to say in Acts 8:1 *...And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions* (here's the crucial moment – it has been granted unto to you not only to believe in Him but to suffer for His sake) *of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.* They start preaching Jesus.

I want you to notice something. iShare you and it's not just me but you. They shared, not the pastors. They are still back in Jerusalem. It says they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the Apostles. They are still back in Jerusalem. Now let's look in Acts 8:4- 5 says *[4] Now those who were scattered* (the church, lay men and women, people like you and me and they didn't die in a pile of self pity) *went about preaching the word. [5] Philip* (a good example who is a deacon) *went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.* Samaria is bound in the darkness of paganism and sin. Philip comes and shares the Gospel. What happens to that city? Great joy came to that city.

You live in a nation and a culture that is in cynicism and despair. It is unbelievable the cynicism that permeates every aspect of our culture. Everything is negative, everything is anger and the answer to it is not going to come in this next election. I want a good election. I want to be engaged. I want to be a Christian citizen and God will use that but the joy that this nation needs will only come through the Gospel and the Gospel comes through men and women like you and me sharing it with people. That's where it will come from. It's not so I cast my vote and got that guy elected and so I'll go back to business as usual. No, it's not going to come from Hollywood or Wall Street or Pennsylvania Avenue. It's going to come from the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the people of God sharing it, planting, cultivating and watering the Gospel personally in the lives of people – iShare.

Satan has been thwarted again. When he brings dissension, what happens? More evangelism happens where even the priests were converted. When he brings persecution what happens? He just sends thousands of iShare

missionaries to Judea and Samaria. I don't want to over read this but when Jesus said "You will receive power and I want you to be My witnesses. I want you to share in Word and deed. I want you to share in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world." Where have they been for seven chapters? They have been in Jerusalem. Did they have a mission's conference to send people to Judea and Samaria yet? No and I know this is pure speculation. Satan brings persecution and that was actually Jesus' mission conference for the church because when the persecution came they went out to Judea and Samaria. So they went. They were all scattered and the leaders were still back in Jerusalem. The people became iShare missionaries.

What happens in Judea and Samaria? A church in Antioch was planted and that was the first time they called us Christians because of the power of the Gospel in Antioch. Joy came to the city of Samaria and from there they will take Barnabas and Paul. They will send them to the world and then in Europe they will say "These people have turned the world upside down." So He takes the dissention tactic and the persecution tactic and turns it inside out because the people are sharing Christ individually and the Gospel is moving throughout the whole world.

So that empire strikes back and that church in Jerusalem responds. A tidal wave of Gospel movement takes place and people are coming to Christ all over. The eleven become 120. The 120 become 3,000. The 3,000 are added everyday with evangelism and then in the next chapter there are 5,000 and again this is just counting the men. Then comes dissention and now the priests are getting converted. Then comes persecution and now they go to Judea and Samaria. Joy comes to Judea and Samaria. The darkness disappears and the light comes to the lives of God's people and they are sharing the faith. People are coming to Christ and the landscape has transformed so much that they looked at these people and said "Christians – Christ followers." Then they take their two best guys and say "This is pretty good so take it to the world." Then they send out Barnabas and Paul (Saul). Then it explodes in Ephesus and then goes to Rome. Before you know it they are standing up in places like Athens, Thessalonica, Philippi and all the way in Europe in less than 25 years. They have turned the world upside down. They are sharing Christ as a worshipping people - iShare.

Here is a brief takeaway. There are two things I want to share to set the nail before we go any further on iShare. Our desire is that God would bring within us a culture of personal evangelism (me personally sharing) sharing Christ with other people. Lord, set deep what I need in my life. Here are two Biblical realities that we want to set deep in our understanding. The first one is no one can or will come to Christ apart from God's sovereign, searching, saving and sufficient grace bringing them from death to life. You just can't do it. Do you remember Nicodemus? Nicodemus told Jesus He was a pretty good teacher and of course he did it at night. Jesus reached into the night of his soul and said "You can't see or enter the Kingdom of God until you're born again." He didn't say "Nicodemus

come to Me and you can be born again” but He said “You can’t come to Me until you’re born again.”

Why? Ephesians 2 says we are dead in our sins and God caused you to be born again to a living Hope. The Bible says there is none righteous, no not one. There is none who seek for God. There is none who understands. God has to give eyes to see and a heart to believe. So immediately I’m right back to prayer. Holy Spirit, take hold of people that I’m sharing with because I can’t convert them but You said You’d be with me always to the ends of the age. You do Your work. They have permission to come to Christ. Praise the Lord! Abraham and all the families of the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Go preach the Gospel to all the nations. Doesn’t the Bible say “Whosoever will may come?” Absolutely! The door of salvation has now been opened up to the whole world.

For God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life, John 3:16. You don’t have to be a Jew, male, female, black, white, rich, poor for He is bringing men and women from every nation and the Gospel has been opened up to the whole world. The Gospel is to be spread over the entire field – rocky ground, hard ground, thorny ground, good ground. You don’t know the ground but you just throw the Gospel out there. Call men and women for the door has been opened. You may come but you can’t come until the Lord gives you the ability to come. That’s why we get together every Sunday and sing “Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I was lost but now I’m found and I was blind but now I see.” He did it from beginning to end. He did it.

I want to show you a verse on this. How many of you went to school and they taught you a game called “Mother may I?” Our teachers did that for a reason. It was used to tell you the difference between the words may and can. Whosoever will, *may* come. John 6:44 says [44] *No one **can** come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.* When I was learning this game in second grade I became a subject of personal example. One day I raised my hand and said “Can I go to the restroom?” She said, “Absolutely.” So I got up to go and she said “Sit down.” I said, “But you said I could go?” She said “I said you could go but you don’t leave this room until you ask permission, ‘may I go?’” Let me fill in the blanks from my tenth grade biology teacher, “I’m well aware that you are biologically capable of going to the bathroom for you can go but you’re not leaving this room until you get permission.”

What Jesus has done through His victory on the cross defeating sin, death, hell and the grave is provided this glorious atoning work that has opened the door sufficient to go to the Gospel to all of the world. You may come but no man can come, why? It is because they are dead. So if one of my brothers falls over dead and I have a pill for him and I say “Take this pill for it will bring you life.” What is he going to do? He will do nothing because he can’t take the cure until he has been given the ability to take it. Nicodemus you can’t see or enter the Kingdom



until you're born again. It's not come to Christ and you get born again. It is Christ comes to you, you're born again and now you can come to Him.

So no man can come to the Father unless the Father draws him. That is the same word used in the Bible about taking water up out of a well where you draw the water up. So I have a well here and I go to the well. I'm thirsty and I look down at the water in the well and say "Water you may come up to me." The water will do nothing because it's under the law of gravity but I drop the bucket in the well and then I draw it up. Now I have water so Jesus has done a glorious work to bring the water of Life to us. You may come but we're under the law of sin and death in the bondage of sin and there is none who seek Him or want Him. There is none who will come to Him for we are dead in our sin but then God drops the bucket of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God and brings sinners from the dungeon of death and darkness of sin and He raises them up.

Every single one of you that are reading this that know Christ, are a walking redemption miracle. There was a day that you were in the grave of sin and dead. Then the Gospel came and Jesus Christ set you free from the grave. He brought you and by faith and repentance you came to Christ. Praise God from whom all blessing flow. It's not my techniques or my passions that can save people. It's Christ that saves from beginning to end.

Here is my second takeaway. God's sovereign, searching, saving and sufficient grace comes to people through people. Andrew went to Peter. Matthew went to the people he stole from. The woman at the well went back to all the men she used to get money from as a prostitute and brought them to Jesus at the well. God by His Spirit with His Word uses people to save people. So God will use you and me. Your friends and family that don't know Christ are shrouded in darkness. They are in the dungeon of sin. They are chained in rebellion and you are bringing a message that a sovereign, searching, saving, sufficient grace will set them free from the power, penalty, practice and presence of sin. He gives them a new heart, a new record, a new life and is preparing for them a new home in which there is no sin and no ability to sin.

Let me tell you how sufficient this grace is. He will not only use a Philip but that very Saul who is persecuting the church will be saved. The religious terrorist of his day will become the greatest evangelist and church planter that ever lived. It is a sufficient grace. I don't know where you are today but there is no sin in your life that Jesus cannot or will not forgive if by His grace you come and put your trust in Him and repent. There is only one and that is if you say 'no' to the Holy Spirit who is telling you to come to Christ. That puts you in the position of unalterable judgment but if this day He has said for you to come, then you come and all your sins are wiped away. It is a sovereign, searching, saving and sufficient grace.

I want to try and illustrate it this way in closing. My father was in baseball and was sold from the Carolina league when we lived in Greensboro when I was seven years old and we moved to North Charleston. We lived in these Naval barracks that had been translated into some kind of living quarters and I was enrolled in North Charleston Elementary School. My daddy told me at seven years of age that I ought to be walking to school. Those were great days when you could actually walk to school. There was this area called Park Circle and there were eight roads. He told me that we were on Montague and on Saturday he walked the path with me that I would walk to school on. He told me I would go around this circle and go down this road and it would be two blocks down that road to the school. So it was five blocks down, go around the circle, two blocks there and you'll be there.

My dad said I was a young man now and I could do this. Those of you who don't know about North Charleston there are three rivers that converge and there is a paper mill that is there. On that Monday morning when I left before I got two blocks that morning belch of smoke from the paper mill with the midst from the river and the fog that rolled in from the ocean it was like it was still night. I went down five blocks, got to Park Circle, went around and went down the wrong road. I came back and went down another wrong road. It kept getting darker and darker and darker. That was it for me. I had started to panic. What I didn't know was that my daddy did not have a lot of confidence in me. He wanted me to learn but he knew that this may not work.

My daddy had called the school and asked if Ike Reeder had gotten to his second grade class. They called back and said "Ike who?" They told him I wasn't there yet. My dad got in the car and I remember panic had started to set in with me and out of the darkness that was absolutely oppressing me with all the fears that were starting, I heard my dad's voice. "Son, come here, I'll take you." I will never forget that moment as long as I live. Then approximately fourteen years later I heard the Father say "Son, come in." My grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, Mrs Allison my fifth grade Sunday school teacher, Laverne Campbell all kept sharing with me.

If God has got you there, God has you there for a reason. God said to Paul when he got to the city, "Paul, keep preaching", why? "I have many people to be saved in this city." So my dear friends, He has us here for a reason and we will not be quiet. Here are a people who are wrapped in the despair of sin throughout our culture, headed for a Christ-less eternity and you and I can slip the key into the dungeon door. Jesus Christ can cause the chains to fall off. Their distant soul can hear from you the very Word that will bring them from the darkness of sin to the light of glory in Jesus Christ. That's why iShare. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the glorious opportunity and privilege to not only to have received grace upon grace through men and women who have shared with us but that You determine to work through us. Father we would lay hold of the throne of grace in prayer. Please bring the preaching of the Word and discipleship to build us up with those life lines. Then Father make us a worshipping people in gathering and scattering but God our God, allow people to see the glorious testimony of saving grace in us and from us. Father, it is a wonderful thing to have a witness in deed that our lives open the doors for people but Father, they can't come to Christ until they believe and faith does not come by seeing but by hearing the Word of Christ. So Father, let Your people speak for when they speak, Jesus speaks and His sheep will hear His voice and follow Him. Praise Your Name, Amen.

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