

What We Value: Intentionally Innovative

October 24, 2021



Vision '22

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Session Outline

1. The Exhortation Toward Innovation (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)
2. The Example of Innovation (Acts 17:16-32)
3. Seeking Innovation Through Intercession (John 17:6-26)

Theological Theme

With both passion and discipline, Paul used every method at his disposal to take the initiative to form relationships with people who do not know Christ for the sake of the gospel.



Leader Guide

What We Value: Intentionally Innovative

Introduction

- ❓ In your mind, what makes a good friend? Who are the types of people you naturally gravitate toward?
- ❓ Why is it important that we develop real and genuine friendships with people who are different from us?
- ❓ Why should we seek to have relationships with people who do not know Jesus?

We value people who have shared interests with us, who share our sense of humor, or who care enough about us to meet us where we are. As followers of Jesus, our lives should be leveraged to make much of Him, and part of that includes developing relationships with people who do not know Him. In this we follow Paul's example. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul talked about how he met people where they were and did not expect them to be where he was. When we make friends with non-believers, we shouldn't treat them as projects or people we are "working on." Rather, we should treat them as friends who have chosen a way that seems right to them (Proverbs 14:12), but will not lead them anywhere. Through the context of relationships, we develop the openness and mutual respect required to share our hearts with them.

When we think about sharing Jesus with others, we often think first of mission trips and unreached people groups around the world. While that is an important component of sharing Jesus, we can't forget that there are people God has already put in our lives who need to know Him.

Session Summary

As a church, we value intentional innovation. That means we take our responsibility seriously to steward God's people and His resources for His glory. We do that in a couple of ways. One is that we have a strategic plan so that we can align God's people and resources to all point in the same direction through our campuses and ministries. Second, we celebrate the work of God that He is doing in and through our lay leaders, who often have some of the most innovative and creative ways to connect people to Jesus Christ.

1. The Exhortation Toward Innovation (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

The connection between being a slave to all (v. 19) and becoming like them (vv. 20-23) would have been clear to the Corinthians. In their culture, a slave was an outsider who brought no rights with him and had no claims on the society that maintained him. A slave even had to accept the religion of his new owner's household. While Paul did not adopt the religions of those among whom he worked, he adapted himself to his environment as much as his faith would allow.

- ❓ In what ways did Paul make himself a slave to Jews and Gentiles in his community? What was his goal in pursuing relationships with these groups?
- ❓ How does understanding where someone is coming from put us in a better position to share the gospel and disciple new believers? Give an example if you have one.

Paul's ability to adapt his life and culture according to the context in which he worked would have been strategic not only for the initial communication of the gospel but also for the ability to disciple them as new members of Christ's body. Gentile converts would not have to adopt Jewish culture to be members of Christ's community, and Jewish converts to Christ would not need to become Gentiles or reject their Jewish heritage and lifestyle as part of their recognition of Christ's lordship. Everyone comes to Christ from a different place, and God uses those differences to build His kingdom, a family made up of people from every culture.

The gospel motivated Paul and compelled him to reach others. While we must never "dumb down" the message, we can evaluate the way we sow the gospel seed and look for ways to become more effective evangelists. We can take the time and make the effort to understand life as others see it, and then engage them with the gospel from that perspective.

The accommodations Paul made in his relationships were both social and personal, but he never compromised the essentials of his faith. We cannot compromise our faith to reach the lost, but the sacrifices we do make will be appreciated by our friends. Taking the time to understand the unique place someone comes from communicates that you care for them.

To develop the needed discernment for building these types of relationships, we need to be people who are completely dependent on the Word of God. When the truth of God's Word is deeply ingrained in our hearts and minds, we will be able to discern the truth from a lie and see

All Things to All People

Paul's "self-imposed slavery" gave him the freedom to accommodate Jews and Gentiles alike and therefore speak the gospel in a forthright manner, unhindered by cultural hang-ups. He exemplified this freedom among Jews when he circumcised Timothy (whose mother was Jewish) to maximize the gospel witness in Jewish areas (Acts 16:3). Among Gentiles who were without the law, he yielded his rights in order to maximize the gospel's advance. For example, he would not take a wage if taking a wage would cause those "without the law" to stumble.

how far is too far. Additionally, we will be able to bring God’s Word to bear on the things we are experiencing with our friends. Stepping out in faith, particularly with our relationships, can be scary at first. But God desires that all people come into a saving relationship with Him, and in His kindness, He uses us in this mission.

- ❓ Application: Paul focused his evangelistic efforts on a variety of people (Jews and Gentiles). What are some of the social or ethnic groups in our community that need to hear the gospel message? What personal sacrifices and accommodations are needed to form the types of relationships Paul described?

2. The Example of Innovation (Acts 17:16-32)

Athens was the intellectual center of the Roman empire, but the situation there disturbed Paul. He encountered all sorts of people from many religious backgrounds and was deeply agitated at the city’s widespread idolatry. More than thirty thousand statues were erected to gods. Luke wrote that Paul was “deeply distressed,” which denotes fury and sadness—a deep grief over the idolatry.

- ❓ Verse 17 says Paul met with people in both the synagogue and the marketplace. Why might he have gone to both places to share the gospel? What are the different perspectives of the people in those two places?
- ❓ What is the benefit of engaging with people where they are for the sake of evangelism?

Much of Paul’s ministry was to Jews in the synagogues, teaching them about the Messiah, and he continued that practice in Athens. But he extended his ministry to the marketplace because it was the center of Athenian social and economic life. It was there that Paul dialogued with Athenian philosophers (v. 18). Note this key point: Paul’s troubled spirit at the rampant idolatry in Athens led him to engage in a local witness opportunity, not insulate himself from that pagan culture. Paul took the time to get to know the city and the people.

The philosophers in Athens, curious about this new religion, led Paul to a meeting of the Areopagus. The Athenians were religious but needed to be introduced to authentic religion. Paul used their altar “To an Unknown God” as a springboard for his message about the one true God.

Paul began with the people’s needs, pointing out their idol to an unknown God (v. 23). He then introduced them to that God through some of His chief characteristics (vv. 24-29). Next, he emphasized their need to

move from ignorance to repentance and belief in God because the day of judgment is coming (v. 30). He closed by pointing them to Jesus as the only way to salvation (v. 31).



Application: Why do you think Paul began his address to the Areopagus with a compliment? How might we sincerely compliment a non-Christian as an approach to wise witnessing? What pattern did Paul set for us as we share the gospel?

Paul made the gospel understandable for his listeners. When he called for commitment, some believed and others found an opportunity to ridicule Paul and reject God. It's important to remember that God doesn't hold us responsible for people's responses. God just expects us to be faithful by sharing the message of Christ and trusting the Holy Spirit to work through us.

3. Seeking Innovation Through Intercession (John 17:6-26)

In what has been called His "high priestly prayer," Jesus prayed that the disciples might experience the oneness He had with the Father. Jesus did not need to pray aloud for the Father's sake, but for the disciples to know His heart as He prayed for them. Verses 6-11 include the acknowledgment of the Father's gifts, the Son's actions, and the disciples' responses.

Jesus had revealed the Father to the men the Father had given Him. No one can know God except as the Son reveals Him. Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus reveals God's nature and His purpose to redeem people through faith in Jesus. The world would reject the disciples as it had rejected Jesus. Thus, He prayed that the Father would protect them by the power of God's name—His being or nature—and that they might be one as Jesus and the Father are one. Their unity would enhance their witness to the world.

Jesus did not pray that God would take the disciples out of the world. Their faithful testimony about Jesus would be the only way lost people could hear about salvation through Him. Jesus's plan was not to take believers out of the world but to reach the world through them. Jesus stressed the nature of the disciples' mission in the world. He was sending them into the world even as the Father had sent the Son into the world. Jesus was sending them as the Father's emissaries into an alien environment to witness about redemption in Christ. The disciples were to continue the same mission of Jesus: to persuade people to accept God's grace in Jesus.

- ❓ How does the way Jesus prayed for His followers and the things He prayed for us encourage and embolden us to creatively pursue reaching others for His sake?
- ❓ Why do we need to depend on God as we seek to be all things to all people in the way Paul both described and modeled?

Jesus prayed for His disciples, but His prayer was not for them alone. He included people who would follow Him in future generations: those who would believe in Him through their (the disciples') message.

Jesus prayed for believers' oneness with God (vv. 21-23); for their unity, showing that God sent Jesus (v. 23). He also mentioned in His prayer that God loves believers just as God loves His Son (v. 23); that believers will be with Jesus and see His glory (v. 24); and that God's love is to be in believers (v. 26). Jesus asked the Father that all future believers be one in the same way the Father was in the Son and the Son was in the Father. When Christian fellowships are divided today, people may wonder whether Jesus's prayer was practical or powerful. Can all Christians truly experience a unity that transcends differences? The church's failure to live up to Jesus's intention does not devalue His purpose or His ability to fulfill that purpose.

Jesus's high priestly prayer shows His deep concern for unity among His followers. Unity is not uniformity. Unity does not mean holding the same opinions or agreeing on every matter. Unity among Christians means loving one another with Jesus's love, obeying His commands, and working together in His redemptive mission. Love for Jesus, faithfulness to Him, and needing one another to do His work will unite His people for maximum effort for Him.

- ❓ Application: What is the result of unity among believers? How does our unity influence our ability to innovate as we seek gospel advance? What do we learn from Jesus's prayer about partnering with God in our witnessing efforts?

Conclusion

Like Paul, there are things we must do and places we must go to engage in local witnessing opportunities. Of course that doesn't mean we compromise our faith, but it does mean we work to build relationships with people who don't yet know Jesus Christ—relationships that are free of judgment and condemnation. Involving ourselves in the lives of others and inviting the unchurched to church requires discipline, practice, and commitment on our part.

- ❓ Is there a particular way you feel God is leading you to form new relationships with unbelievers? How will you commit to seeking out these relationships this next week?
- ❓ How can the experiences of other Christians who are different than you help you understand the relationships with the non-Christians you are trying to befriend? How can you lean on the natural diversity of the body of Christ to reach others?
- ❓ How does today's study encourage you to pursue innovation and unity within our body as means of making disciples?

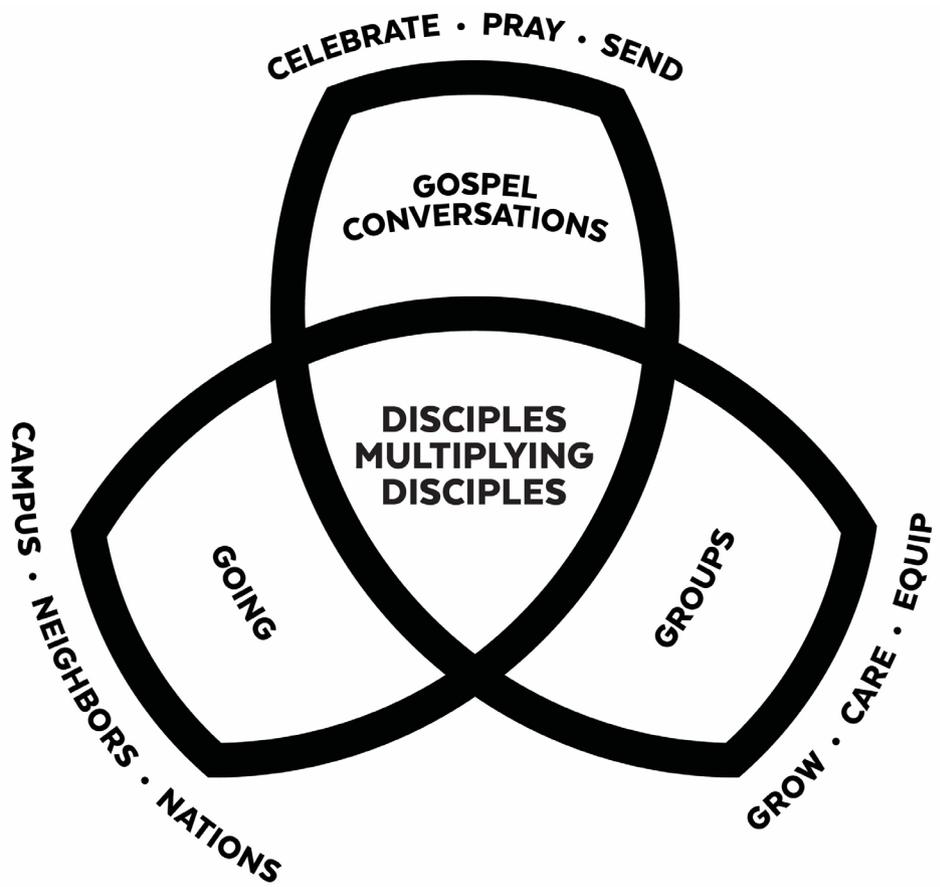
Prayer of Response

Praise God for making the world full of people made in His image who are different than you. Pray that God would give you grace, favor, and sensitivity toward these people. Ask that He would help you find innovative ways through the guidance of His Spirit to point them to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Additional Resources

- *Oneness Embraced* by Tony Evans
- *The Beautiful Community* by Irwyn Ince Jr.
- *For God So Loved the World* by Walter Strickland II and Dayton Hartman

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



For Next Week

Session Title

- What We Value: Crossing Cultures

Main Passages

- Acts 15:1-21

Session Outline

1. The Conflict of the Council (Acts 15:1-5)
2. The Conclusion of the Council (Acts 15:6-21)
3. Peter's Example (Acts 10:1-6, 13-16, 19-20, 27b-35, 43-45)

Memorize

Now I do all this because of the gospel, so that I may share in the blessings.

- 1 Corinthians 9:23

Historical Context of 1 Corinthians

Purpose

Paul's purpose in writing 1 Corinthians was to motivate the Corinthian church to acknowledge the Lord's ownership of them and the implications this had in their lives. Key topics Paul addressed in this overarching theme of the ownership and authority of the Lord include Christian unity, morality, the role of women, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection.

Author

First Corinthians ascribes Paul as its author (1:1; 16:21). Biblical scholars are almost unanimous that Paul wrote the letter. He wrote it during the last year of his three-year ministry at Ephesus, probably a few weeks before Pentecost in the spring of AD 56 (15:32; 16:8; Ac 20:31).

Setting

First Corinthians is the second letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. He had written them an earlier letter, of which no extant copy exists, that included an admonition not to mix with the sexually immoral (5:9). The writing of this second letter (1 Corinthians) was prompted by oral reports from Chloe's household about factional strife within the church (1:11). Paul had also received reports about an incestuous relationship among the membership (5:1), factions that arose during observance of the Lord's Supper (11:18), and confusion over the resurrection of the dead (15:12). As a result, Paul addressed these issues in 1 Corinthians. Apparently as he was writing the letter, he received a letter from the Corinthians asking his opinion on various issues (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). Therefore, he included his replies within this letter to the Corinthian believers.

Special Features

First Corinthians is the most literary of Paul's letters. With a variety of stylistic devices—irony, sarcasm, rhetorical questions, alliteration, antithesis, personification, framing devices, hyperbole, repetition, picturesque words (with local color), double meanings, and other wordplays—Paul attempted to persuade his readers. He wanted to communicate to the Corinthians the necessity of accepting the Lord's authority over their lives.

Extended Commentary

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

9:19. As a missionary in the Mediterranean world, Paul had to deal with many different cultural standards. In these varying circumstances, he committed himself not to exercise his right to pursue the norms of his own cultural preferences, and not to insist on his freedoms under the gospel. This argument is much like his forfeiture of his right to eat meat.

The apostle began this discussion with a strong assertion: I am free and belong to no man. In the ancient world, a slave had little freedom. Masters dictated most of what their slaves did. By asserting his free status, Paul restated an indisputable truth: he was free and did not have to conform himself to the preferences of others.

Nevertheless, Paul voluntarily made himself a slave to everyone. He gave up his rights to his own preferences in order to serve other people. He did this to win as many as possible, to further the kingdom of Christ. The desire to see many people come to faith in Christ overrode Paul's desire for his individual rights.

9:20–21. To illustrate just how far he was willing to follow this policy, Paul described two extremes of his multicultural ministry. First, he ministered to those under the law and to those not having the law—Jews and Gentiles. In the ancient world, the differences between these two groups could be enormous. Clothing, holidays, eating habits, religious beliefs, family practices, etc. were often very different between Jews and Gentiles. This diversity required great flexibility from Paul because he wanted to win those under the law and to win those not having the law.

Paul's description of these groups was not precisely symmetrical. He did not speak of those who had the law versus those who did not have it. Rather, he spoke of those who were under the law and those not having the law.

Under the law, on the one hand, was Paul's technical terminology for people under the curse of the law because they sought justification before God through obedience to the law of Moses (Rom. 6:14–15; Gal. 5:18). Paul understood the ways of Jews who sought to find favor with God through obedience to the law. They did not merely have the law, but they actually became its victims because reliance on obedience to the law always leads to frustration and failure.

Even so, many Jews in Paul's day were so committed to this lifestyle that they filled their lives with all kinds of biblical and extrabiblical observances of law. Although Paul knew these practices had nearly condemned him to God's judgment early in his life (Rom. 7:8–11), he cared so much about the Jewish community that he observed their customs and laws when he was with them so the gospel might take root in them.

On the other hand, not having the law meant that the Gentiles were “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). They did not have the extensive rules of Scripture, but followed pagan rituals and lifestyles free of Jewish restrictions. Although Paul did not approve of all pagan lifestyles, he observed their customs and laws when he was among them so the gospel might spread among the Gentiles.

Paul was very flexible as he went from one community to another, but he knew where to draw the line. When he was with religious Jews, he always remembered that he did not seek justification through the law and was not subject to its curse (though I myself am not under the law).

Likewise, when with Gentiles who did not observe the laws of Scripture, Paul conformed his outward behavior to theirs in many ways, but he did not stray into paganism. Rather, he always remembered that he was bound to keep the law in Christ (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law).

Christ’s law is not opposed to the law of Moses. Jesus himself said, “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). Christ’s law is the moral teachings of all the Scriptures as they were taught by Christ and his apostles. Paul often affirmed that God’s law was designed as a guide for Christians (Rom. 2:26–29; 8:7; 1 Tim. 1:8). Yet, here he made it clear that God’s law for Christians is interpreted in the light of Christ’s coming, and thus has become Christ’s law. While he sought to help others by becoming like them, Paul refused to fall into sin for the sake of others.

9:22. Paul added another class of people to whom he condescended besides Jews and Gentiles, one that drew attention to his concern for the Corinthian church—the weak. The strong and knowledgeable people in the Corinthian church refused to make allowances for the weak among them. The strong insisted on eating meat sacrificed to idols because they correctly understood their freedom to do so, but thereby they sinned against weaker brothers and sisters.

In contrast to them, Paul became weak by willingly conforming his behavior to that of the weak. By limiting his freedom in this way, Paul made certain that he did not cause weaker brothers and sisters to fall into sin.

In summary, Paul claimed that he had become all things to all men. Foregoing his rights to pursue his own preferences, he submitted to everyone so that by all possible means he might bring some to salvation. Paul’s chief concern was to build the kingdom of Christ through the conversion of the lost. He refused to allow his own freedoms to prevent others from following the ways of Christ. In this regard he exemplified the principle with which he had begun this section: knowledge alone “puffs up” and makes a person not care about the well-being of others, but “love builds up” (8:1). Love for others leads a person to perform those actions that bring as many people as possible into the kingdom of Christ.

9:23. Paul was motivated for the sake of other people and for the sake of the gospel. He was concerned to see the good news of salvation in Christ proclaimed and believed throughout the world. He wanted the kingdom of God to come in full. He made himself the servant of all people in order to further these ends. Yet, Paul’s motivation for this course of action was not entirely altruistic. He knew that God would reward him for his service. He sacrificed his own rights so that he might share in the gospel’s blessings.

Paul’s last words raised the stakes in the matter of meat sacrificed to idols. Those who pursue their own rights even when this results in the destruction of the weak reveal the true condition of their hearts. As the apostle John put it, “Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20). The strong and knowledgeable at Corinth had correctly understood their rights, but they had forgotten the importance of love for others. Disregarding the weak in the Corinthian church would eventually bring the judgment of God.¹

References

1. Pratt, Richard L. *I & II Corinthians*. Edited by Max E. Anders. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000.

Author Bio

Tony Evans (Oneness Embraced)

Dr. Tony Evans is the founder and senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, founder and president of The Urban Alternative, former chaplain of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys, and present chaplain of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks. His radio broadcast, *The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans*, can be heard on over 1,200 US radio outlets daily and in more than 130 countries. Dr. Evans launched the Tony Evans Training Center in 2017, an online learning platform providing quality seminary-style courses for a fraction of the cost to any person in any place. The goal is to increase Bible literacy not only in lay people but also in those Christian leaders who cannot afford nor find the time for formal ongoing education. For more information, visit: <http://www.TonyEvans.org>.

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