

III. L.E.A.D. in Biblical Perspective
Lifestyle of Evangelism and Discipleship
“Building Bridges in Life that Bring Others to the Bridge to Life”
Acts 2:37–47

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
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I'd like to start by looking at Proverbs 11. I couldn't help but think of Toyota's advertisement that says 'You're lights are on go shut them off' while thinking of Christians where I'd say 'You're lights are off go turn them on.' And don't worry the battery is not going to run out. The Lord can give the strength and power to keep the lights on all the time. Don't hide the light of the Gospel or put it under a bushel but put it up on the stand so everybody can see it. This part of our theme this year to know how to build bridges into lives so that we can bring them on the Bridge to Life.

Proverbs 11:30 says [30] *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures (wins) souls is wise.* In other words, believers bear the fruit of life. Their lives are devoted to life. The NIV translation of this verse uses the word 'wins' souls and the ESV uses the word 'captures' souls. I went back to see why in terms of vocabulary the decision was made to transition the word from wins to captures and generally I don't like a whole lot of change from earlier versions but I have grown into this not only because of the consistency of what the word actually means but also because of what that conveys. When you capture something you think strategically about it. You think intentionally about it. So how do we capture souls?

That's a little bit of what I'm wanting to talk to you about. I want to talk to you about the wisdom of how to capture souls. The metaphor I'm using is how to build bridges into the lives of people – bridges of life to put people on the Bridge to Life. I want to communicate in this study in the area of personal evangelism how to build bridges personally. Then I contemplated the title of this study as to how it goes along with our theme this year and thought L.E.A.D. bridge building to bring people to the Bridge to Life. Then I remembered we were between two series with one being on I Peter which we will come back to and this will help us as we study more about evangelism and discipleship. Peter is the one that tells us to always be ready to give an account of the hope that is in you (I Peter 3:15) and how we can be evangelistic and winsome as we contend for the faith.

I want to introduce the theme with a number of passages of Scripture so then I thought I'm not interrupting this series because we have also been doing the seven distinctives (which come in pairs) of a Gospel healthy church and the third one we are on is intentional evangelism and discipleship. It's amazing to think how that series unites with our whole ministry theme and what I'm doing now is really a development of that. So I could have put these bridge studies for the purpose of lifestyle evangelism and discipleship right under that third distinctive. This study is a little bit of a stand-alone in terms of what these bridge buildings are and we are going to look at seven bridges you can build to put people on the Bridge to Life.

One of the keys in bridge building and personal evangelism is realizing there is a little bit of a difference between proclamation evangelism done in a pulpit and personal evangelism done in a relationship. So here are the seven bridges we are going to learn about. One is we will learn how to build a relational bridge to share the Gospel with people. Two we will learn how to build a conversational bridge to share the Gospel with people. Thirdly, will be a testimony bridge in sharing the Gospel. Our testimony is not the Gospel but it can be a bridge to share the Gospel.

Fourthly, we will look at mercy ministry as a bridge. Fifthly is hospitality as a bridge to evangelism. Six is common interest as a bridge to evangelism. We have an event coming up that will utilize this bridge and that is the Sportsman's Blast for those who are interested in hunting and the outdoors. The final bridge is the bridge of events where events are used in evangelism. Those are not necessarily the order they will be given in but those are the seven bridges we'll be looking at.

Related to all this and bridge building is the ability to use questions. In thinking through how we bring people to the Gospel there will be something common to all these bridges. To evangelize you have to verbalize. One of the differences between proclamation evangelism which is what I do when I preach a sermon where I will eventually get to the part that addresses people who don't know Christ, is how I do that on a personal level and using one of these bridges to get to the part of sharing the Gospel. One of the things that all seven of these bridges have in common is something that I would like to introduce in this study and that is the use of questions.

There is a very simple, transferable way to share the Gospel. Sometimes it is called one verse evangelism. The Navigators were the ones who first came up with this. A number of years ago they gave us the privilege and the rights to develop it and we have turned it into what we call Bridge to Life training. This is an excellent way to share the Gospel and I love using this for multiple reasons but that is not what I was trained on in sharing the Gospel. I know many were trained through the Campus Crusade mechanism of the 4 Spiritual Laws little booklet. I really enjoyed EE – Evangelism Explosion and I have always been a proponent of this. In fact, we still teach EE here at Briarwood.

I love EE because I felt it is a wise and strategic way to capture souls because of a number of things. I started it in the very first church I pastored in Miami, Florida and then I introduced it at the second church I pastored in Charlotte, North Carolina. I have so many incredible stories by using EE and I will tell you one. There was a man I was training in EE and his name was Harry. Now that ought to be a show stopper of a Harry training Harry in EE. I took Harry and another man named Jim and we went to a home to share the Gospel. A lady answered the door but her husband had just left yet she invited us to stay and go ahead and share. That night we had run out of trainers so I was actually training two groups in EE. So I got everything started for Harry and Jim and when I got to the part of sharing the Gospel I handed it off to Harry to take it from there. So I said to the lady, "Ma'am I have to go check on someone but I'll be right back so Harry would you continue to share what I've just begun?" Harry said "Oh yeah."

Harry was one of the most intentional evangelists I had ever met. He was over the top intentional and so excitable. I should have known that maybe I shouldn't have left but I did. I got the other group started which included my sister Vicky and then said to Vicky, "Why don't you finish this because I have to go back to the other group." So I drove back over to the house that Harry and Jim were at and I was met in the front lawn by Jim who said "Harry, hurry up you need to get in here quick! We're going to end up in jail!" So I went in and the other Harry had gotten so excited that he had that lady backed up into a corner on his knees and the Shekinah glory was coming off his bald head right at that woman. Her eyes were so big and Harry was just praying her right into the Kingdom right there. Jim said to me "You need to stop this!!" I would say my takeaway from this is don't try to lead two groups at one time.

So why do I love EE? It had a great way to learn how to share the Gospel. It put the Gospel in a shareable fashion although I think Bridge to Life does a better job of doing this but

secondly it introduces a passion for lost people to us. Jim Kennedy said ‘We’re just going to start by visiting visitors who come to the church and then people say ‘we don’t have any visiting the church or at least not many’ so maybe you don’t have a lot because people aren’t bringing them and two maybe the Lord isn’t going to trust you with any visitors until you learn to deal with the ones He is bringing to you.’

Another reason EE is great is that you take people with you to show them how to do it and that is what I’d like to see happen as we learn these seven bridges. This is a way to use small group discipleship to learn how to use these seven bridges when sharing the Gospel with others, where those who know how will show those who don’t so they can see how to do it. OJT is crucial here – On the Job Training. Evangelism is not only taught but it’s also caught and that is one of the great things about EE commitment.

So for me EE is great because it was on the job training, a transferable understanding of the Gospel, a passion for the lost and here is a fourth reason I liked EE. It used questions. It doesn’t start off by what a preacher does in proclamation by giving answers but it started off with questions. There were two questions – the transitional question and the qualifying question. The transitional question is ‘if you died tonight do you know where you would spend eternity?’ and the qualifying question is ‘if you did die and stood before the Lord and the Lord would say ‘why should I let you into heaven? Then what would you say?’ Then the other question you are taught in EE is ‘Can I have permission to share with you that one of the reasons the Bible was written is so you could answer the first question (transition question)? And the way that you know you have eternal life is the answer to the second question (qualifying question).’ Then you can say ‘Would you give me just ten minutes to share that with you?’

In all of my life of EE in asking people that third question of permission, the number of times they said ‘no’ was less than the number of fingers I have on one hand but even those I was able to get around because then you are taught to go to your testimony after that. Then your testimony becomes the bridge to share the Gospel with them also. As you get to the end in EE training you learn two more questions. One is ‘do you understand what I just shared with you?’ and then the question I introduced in EE training when I was teaching others this is ‘Is there any reason why you shouldn’t receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior?’ I love that question better than ‘would you like to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior’ because if they answer ‘no’ to this question then I’m done but by asking ‘is there any reason why you shouldn’t receive Jesus’ they have to answer ‘yes’ to say ‘no’ and to answer ‘no’ they will have to say ‘yes.’ So if they don’t want to receive Jesus then there is a reason and so the door is still open because the next question would be ‘what is the reason’ or ‘Tell me what that reason is, I would love to hear it.’ And now the conversation continues. So this the presence of questions in EE is one of the reasons I love this strategy to share the Gospel. I also realized that in personal evangelism Jesus did that as well time and time again.

I was talking with one of my daughters about this one time and she kind of gave me an acronym for this and it kind of matched with what I had done with my life. For instance if I met with someone who I know didn’t know the Lord then I would show up with an index card. At the top of the index card it would have “WAIT.” “WAIT” stood for ‘why am I talking’ for what I ought to be doing first is listening and to listen I need to ask them a question. That plays right into their hand. Bobby Parks was right when he said ‘When you ask people a question, everyone has an opinion and they think you deserve to hear it.’ So the other thing I have written on this index card is three questions I will ask that person so that I can find out some information. You learn to use questions.

I wish I could tell you that this was all the brilliance of Harry Reeder who thought of this but this is just merely me learning what Jesus did time and time again. It is amazing to see how many times people would come up to Jesus with a question and He wouldn't answer it but would respond by asking them a question or He would say 'I'll answer your question if you answer this question.' With Jesus we see so many times He used bridges in relationship or to see those bridges being built. I want to give you just a couple of these examples. Let's start by looking at Mark 10. There are about 3 instances in Mark 10 but I'm only going to cover one of them.

Mark 10:17 says [17] *And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* Boy, if I was asked that question I would have launched into how to do that but Jesus doesn't do that. Jesus does something that will enable the man to answer the question more pointedly to find out where this man is so instead of answering the man's question He asks him a question. Let's continue in the text.

Mark 10:18–22 says [18] *And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. [19] You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"* [20] *And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."* [21] *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him,* (this arrogant, self-righteous ruler or another way to look at it is this deceived sinner) *and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."* [22] *Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

Jesus got to where the core was to show the man where he was a sinner and the idolatry that was ruling and reigning in his life. Yet notice how Jesus immediately used questions. Now let's look at Luke 20. Again, there are so many of these instances I could share with you but we don't have time to get to them but let me just share this one with you.

Luke 20:1–8 says [1] *One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel (proclamation evangelism), the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up [2] and said to him (now Jesus will move to personal evangelism), "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority."* [3] *He answered them, "I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, [4] was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?"* [5] *And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you not believe him?'"* [6] *But if we say, 'From man,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet."* [7] *So they answered that they did not know where it came from. [8] And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."*

This is what questions give you the opportunity to do. It gives you an opportunity for another meeting. Sometimes your questions very softly or almost delicately work in the other person's heart to draw them into the answers and into that conversation and further conversations. I call it washing their feet and rubbing them dry and it's so comfortable they want to come back and talk to you again. But there are sometimes when you ask a question you don't wash their feet and tend to that but you will put a stone in their shoe that will bother them until they get back and talk with you again. I have to confess I like the second one more than the first one but we need to learn to do both of them. One is where your questions are drawing them in very sweetly and the other one causes a probing that they just can't handle where they will be back to talk with you again. These people in Luke will be back to talk with Jesus again with

more questions later on and He will have more questions for them as well. So here Jesus is teaching us to learn to use questions.

Now I want to throw in a little bit of a qualifier here. Proverbs addresses this multiple time but in Proverbs 26:4–5 it says [4] *Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.* [5] *Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.* I think ‘Jesus, I’m a very simple man, do I answer the fool or do I not answer the fool?’ So what His Jesus saying in this Proverb? This is what we call a antithetical parallelism where two things seem in contrast to each other but they are there to get a point across.

Who is the fool? The fool is the one who has a world and life view that says there is no God. So when you are talking with one who is professing there is no God don’t enter the conversation from their world and life view. They don’t set the parameters, profile or paradigm of the conversation and the greatest way of changing the parameters is by asking questions. So I will not let their questions of me dictate the parameters but I will use questions of them to expose the inadequacy of their world and life view. That is what He is telling us to do. Do not answer a fool according to his folly and his folly is that there is no God but then answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own eyes which means you set the parameters that show the foolishness of his position and where he is.

When you are asking questions, it’s not just thoughtless questions for you have thought through them for the questions allow you to find out where this person is. First of all the question is dealing with the person as someone made in the image of God. The reason for questions is two-fold. One is that you are getting information from them about their life and where they are looking for salvation. By the way, everyone has a savior. The question is, whether it is Jesus or not. Everyone knows their life is broken and that something is wrong. Everyone in their flight to idolatry is looking for a savior that they have manufactured. So in asking questions, you find out where they are, where they are broken, where they are hurting etc.

With questions you also find out what they are trusting in. We see this in the EE questions when the question is asked, if you were to stand before God and He said ‘why should I let you into heaven’ what would you say, then all of a sudden you’re about to find out what they are trusting in by how they answer that question.

The second reason for questions, is that they can set up the next meeting, either by the tenderness of it or by the stone that you put in their shoe so that when they walk away they are wanting to come back to talk to you about it. You will have that experience day by day if you think through the asking of the questions. It is these questions that are built into all seven of these bridges that you will learn how to put into place as you and I begin to talk with people.

There are moments where we don’t have time for multiple meetings and multiple questions. This can come when people are in crisis, like when a plane may be going down unexpectedly. There will be moments when the crisis has already cemented the relationship so there won’t be a need for questions that build bridges.

We see differences in proclamation evangelism and personal evangelism as well. In proclamation evangelism much of my time prior to the sermon I preach is thinking of two things – what is the text saying about Jesus that I need to communicate and the people I’m preaching to, where are they and what are their questions. In preaching you are trying to evoke the questions you want them to ask and anticipate their questions but in personal evangelism you get the chance to ask the questions from which they will start giving answers that will lead to more questions and then it will give you more room to eventually share what you know are the right answers in their life.

All of this has to be saturated with prayer. We need wisdom and the Bible says when you lack wisdom you ask for it. God, I'm about to enter into a situation and I need Your wisdom. I want to share with you a time I didn't do that. I was a very enthusiastic young man sharing the Gospel and God has given me some success as a youth pastor. I got invited to do a youth crusade which I did and they told me there was a young lady there who was a Jehovah's Witness who wanted to talk to me. I was ready for that and as I stepped into that I began to dismantle the Jehovah's Witness cult, what it said about God and salvation and I began to dismantle her. I realized that I was not winning that person to Christ. I was winning an argument but I wasn't winning her. Right in the middle of our conversation I was so convicted I said to her "Would you mind if we got back together another time to finish this conversation at your house with your dad and mom there?" She said 'ok' but I could tell it was not a wholehearted okay mostly because she didn't really want to talk to me anymore.

I left and went back to the motel room. I got on my knees and prayed to God "Please forgive me for I did not treat this person with respect and love. I did not treat her with dignity. Please forgive me and somehow teach me what to do between now and tomorrow night." God very graciously answered that prayer. God graciously worked in that young lady's life that next night and I received a letter a few weeks later that she had come to Christ and was now involved with the church that had hosted the crusade. I realized that day that there are so many times we begin to rely on ourselves, our abilities, our gift of gab and then we kind of get into the jousting of the ideas. We need to treat people as people in personal evangelism. This has to be bathed in prayer. God, give me wisdom. Wisdom is identified by a peaceable, gentle, reasonable heart according to James.

Secondly, we need to be tuned in to God's providence. We kind of call this in the evangelical world the Divine appointments and the Divine points of connection which we need to be ready to see every day. My maternal grandfather was an incredible man and I learned so much from him. I had none of his gifts. That man could build anything from anything and it would last forever. It was amazing. I have three tools at my house – hammer, screwdriver, pliers – and my wife and I feel that anything that requires more than that we will call somebody. Fixing things is not my gift at all and I'm fully aware of that. My simple point is that as you contact people you begin to look for those points of contact. My grandfather was the man who would measure twice and cut once and when he went up the ladder he didn't have to come back down because he had already planned out everything he needed before he went up.

When my mother would ask her father to come help us with something he would answer her by saying "Evy (short for Evelyn), let me study on it." I used to love to hear him say that. He would study on it and then he would go right to it. When I went out with him on Saturdays he would go fill up the car with gas and buy me a candy bar, when I was a kid. I would spend that time talking with him but we'd also talk with those who came out to 'service' the car (fill it up with gas and check things since back then the gas stations were known as service stations). Before we left the service station my grandfather would say "Cap'n..." which seemed that somehow we would end up being related to that fellow. He would start asking them questions and before long it seemed we would be related to whomever we were talking to at that station.

If you will think through and ask enough questions you will find the point of contact that will lead you to the bridge and maybe they are hungry. Hospitality evangelism will work pretty quickly if that's the case. It may be a need so the mercy bridge is going to work pretty quickly. Ask the questions and find out God's providence in these Divine appointments and what the connections are. The connection you may find out is not you. So you may need to connect them

with another person who would be a lot better with this person's need, situation, or circumstance than you. So your bridge then is just to get them hooked up with someone else. This is to be prayer saturated and Providence sensitive when you are building these bridges.

Here is one of my favorite times to do what Jesus did in asking these questions. I will get another opportunity this year and it's at a place called Caesarea Philippi. At one time this was the place people did child sacrifices, worship of the god Pan and it was from there Jesus had His Disciples and said He would set His face to go to Jerusalem. Before He does it He asks His Disciples a question.

Matthew 16:13–14 says *[13] Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" [14] And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* Here the Disciples were affirming Him. In our language today they were basically saying 'Jesus You are a celebrity preaching rock star. Everybody is downloading Your sermons. You would believe how many hits Your website is getting. Then Jesus moved from that question to a qualifying question.

Matthew 16:15–18 says *[15] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" [16] Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [17] And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. [18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

I really believe one of the keys to gathered proclamation evangelism in this church awaits for God's people to do personal evangelism when we scatter starting today and throughout this week where everyone evangelizing everybody everywhere every day and learning how to build bridges, learning how to ask the questions. That is one of the exciting things that God would allow us to do together. Then one of your tools in your tool box would be to invite that person to come to church with you one Sunday and then a follow up afterwards to go somewhere to ask them a question like, 'what did you think about what you heard tonight?' Perhaps you could put a book in their hand and tell them you would be interested in what they think of it and would love to discuss it.

It is amazing how many times these questions will open the door for us so let's build the bridges. We will learn about seven of them starting in the next study. With all the bridges you will have to use questions. All of them are personal evangelism that will enhance proclamation evangelism as the Holy Spirit guides you in building bridges to bring people to the Bridge of Life. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the Lord Jesus, our Savior and thank You for entrusting to us and commissioning us to go and make disciples, communicating the good news of the Gospel with people as people, asking questions where eventually they'll find Jesus as the answer, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.