

## **EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM: Magnifying the Lord**

### **Worship and Witness Include Bragging on God**

Kevin had watched Christians and wondered if he should respond to Christ's personal promptings. For two years, he dated a young lady who was a wonderful example of Christian love and virtue. Her churching parents served as positive examples, too.

One day Kevin listened to Bob, one of his coworkers, tell about an accident where a man was swept down river by the flood current. The endangered man swam and fought the angry water, but without success. Suddenly, the river threw the swimmer into a narrow channel near an eroded bank. The man grabbed an exposed root and pulled himself to safety.

Bob simply concluded his story, "That guy can thank God He provided something to hang onto."

Kevin came forward to publicly profess his faith at an altar two Sundays later. As we talked about his decision to follow Jesus, he described the influence of watching godly lives for two years and hearing a story about God resulted in his transformed life.

Today, evangelism is often a process. The process included observing, evaluating, and weighing the values and the cost. A new convert today probably has gone through a process of decisions. That is, each decision to move closer to Christianity became a step toward the big step of yielding to Christ the Savior.

The effective evangelist understands that decision-making process. In fact, the Christian who wants to influence the outsider will begin to think as the outsider thinks. A change in thinking on the part of the Christian witness may require an expanded understanding of evangelism.

Evangelism must be done with sensitivity and intentionality. But it must be done. The Church is commanded to make disciples. Wise are God's people who know evangelism involves a process and who know what some of the factors are in that process.

#### **1. Holy living forms a foundation for effective evangelism.**

The life of holiness is a launching pad for being believable. The witness interacts lovingly with the observing friend, neighbor, or coworker. When the unbeliever sees the congruency between the witness and the message, s/he may begin to accept the message.

Evangelism spreads where deeds of love and service have been performed. God's prevenient grace appeals to others through the good we do and the help we offer. That is to say God is at work in the

unbeliever's heart in many ways. When the yet-to-be-saved person bumps into acts of loving, Christ-like service, God uses this experience to draw the unsaved person closer to Himself.

## **2. Friendship with unbelievers multiplies evangelism.**

With an estimated 90 percent of church work directed toward the people who are already part of the church, the outsider is easily neglected. The church, with intentionality, must find ways to connect with the world. God's people can find ways to intersect with unbelievers.

Jesus seemed to find it easy to do that. He was often found among those of questionable reputation and socially unacceptable behavior. One of the finest commentaries on His ability to interact with the world was, "He is a friend of sinners."

Mark, new at the tennis club, attempted to get to know Sid, one of the better players. Sid at first ignored Mark—refusing even to exchange hellos in the hallway. Sid's angry behavior and cheating on the score alienated him from most other tennis players. Finally, Mark was able to play against Sid, who won handily. Mark complimented him and asked for some helpful pointers. On a few occasions, Mark protested some of the unkind and sharp-edged comments that others aimed at Sid. Sid, as a result, began to chat with Mark.

When Mark walked into a restaurant one weekend, Sid jumped to his feet, yelling across the busy establishment, "Hey, Mark, how are you doing?" Mark knew he had won a friend and had built a bridge to Sid.

## **3. Telling your story carries evangelistic impact.**

Are you one of those scared witnesses who is afraid you won't be able to answer all the questions or recall all the Bible verses? Then you need to know one of the most evangelistic things you can do is to simply tell what Christ has done for you. Some people call this "giving your testimony." For 2,000 years, Christians have known the value of a personal testimony. Be alert to "God sightings" and to opportunities to share them with non-yet-saved persons.

The witness is one who hears. Listening to the voice of God will give supportive material for a convincing witness. When we report what we have seen and heard, we magnify the Lord. We help people see Him for who He is.

I was speaking in a humanities class at a state college. After class, one young man lingered. His conversation was mild but disturbed. Finally, he blurted, "I just don't see God the way you do. You make Him sound likable. I guess the reason I have never really believed in God is that I have always thought of Him as negative and judgmental."

“Well, I too, would have a hard time believing in a God like you describe,” I replied. “My experience, although it may not answer all of a person’s questions, is that God is loving, kind, and fair. He wants the best for us.” My perspective on God seemed to make a difference in his thinking. He was willing to consider the possibility.

#### **4. The evangelism process requires Christians become spiritual advisers.**

Evangelism is not as much telling as it is guiding. When we understand where people are in their spiritual journeys, then we can encourage them to take further steps to draw near to God.

Don and his wife, Mary, attended our worship service. Our church responded by sending three people to their home. Don was home alone when they came by. Eventually, our conversation moved to his relationship with God. Sharon, one of our team members, talked with him about how God loves him. Don showed an interest in spiritual conversation, but suggested we come back to talk with his wife as well.

We returned once more to talk with Don and Mary. They both expressed a desire to find peace with God. They talked about how their lives had not been all they had hoped they would be. We approached them about accepting Christ, but they delayed. They were more interested in talking about his former marriage and its failures. Putting their lives together as husband and wife had been particularly difficult. We listened. The opportunity did not seem right to again suggest they receive Christ, but we prayed together before we left.

As we traveled back to the church, the visitation team discussed what had happened. Our best guess was they needed to see how we felt about them. We each hoped we had displayed an accepting attitude.

They encouraged us to return again in a couple of weeks. We did so. This time, Sharon asked Don if he was ready to accept Christ. Don said, “Yes, I really am. Mary and I have talked about doing that and thought we might.” That evening, Don and Mary prayed for forgiveness. The only emotion expressed was one tear in Don’s eye, but their lives changed. Don later entered evangelism training, and he, himself, led two people to the Lord within the next eight months.

Spiritual advising consists of understanding and caring for people while sharing good news. When people feel they are accepted, they are more apt to consider a change of heart and mind. The spiritual adviser recommends Christ to people for their benefit.

#### **5. Evangelism results from the Church in ministry.**

God’s people, those who reflect the beauty of Jesus, have an impact upon the lives of others.

I struck up a conversation with a van driver shuttling me to a hotel. He told me he believed in God but never attended church. “You have some pleasant days ahead, for you will genuinely appreciate a church

that will accept you, encourage you and pray for you. "I never thought about that," he commented with a smile. "Perhaps I will look for a church."

As the Church, united and loving, interacts with the world, the Christlikeness of Jesus will be evident. The Church is the bodily presence of Jesus in the world.

#### **6. Evangelism successfully envisions God for others.**

Effective evangelists understand people make a decision about God because of how they *feel* about God. The task of the evangelist encompasses re-envisioning God so people are attracted to Him.

Praise is a way by which we picture God for others. Praise and witnessing include bragging on God. People hear and are impressed by claims about His love, goodness, mercy, and justice. The psalmist invited us to "magnify the Lord...let us exalt his name together" (Psalm 34:3. NRSV). Inside the church praise is called worship, but praise outside the church is witness.

---Lyle Pointer