

Personal Evangelism

I feel that the biggest barrier to effective outreach is the problem of misconceptions.

This I feel is true of both sides of evangelism - those trying to reach out with the Good News and those that are trying to be reached.

People without any church background have mistaken notions of God's nature and His Church that precludes them from any desire to associate with either.

Their inaccurate image of God and what serving Him would be like pushes them away from Him.

When people's mistaken ideas are replaced with an accurate understanding of God's grace-filled and compassionate nature they become more open to trusting Christ and the message He brought to mankind.

Then when they discover the acceptance, joy and fulfilment of becoming part of a Biblically functioning body of believers, they will be drawn even closer to Christ.

On the other side of the equation, misconceptions about the out-reach enterprise itself tend to inhibit people from getting involved.

I'm convinced that one of the greatest impediments to individuals in churches getting active in personal evangelism is many Christians misunderstand what it actually entails. The dreaded "E word" fills them with fear and guilt.

What comes into your mind when you think of the word "*evangelism*"? Does it evoke enthusiasm for reaching your irreligious friends, family members or neighbours? Or does it bring to mind rather negative thoughts, those of the street preacher, with a megaphone in hand, blaring out barely intelligible indictments about the end of the world and impending Judgement of God? Or the image of some infamous televangelist known mainly for extracting large amounts of money from well-meaning followers?

In one national survey asking respondents to rank various professions for their honesty and integrity, T.V. evangelists came out almost bottom. Out of the seventy-three occupations, only organised crime bosses and drug dealers ended up lower on the scale.

Has your passion for communicating your faith to others been dampened by the thought that you will have to become something that's contrary to your own personality to accomplish it?

This kind of thinking is a tragedy for the church and even worse for people we are trying to reach. We need to understand that God knew what He was doing when He made you and called you into His Service.

God custom-designed you with your unique combination of personality, temperament, talents and background, and He now wants to harness and use these in His Mission to reach this messed-up society.

God hasn't called us all to spread His Truth in the same way. Instead, He built diversity into the fabric of His body of believers.

Starting with a need then trying to plug people into fulfilling that need is **not** a good way to motivate people to spread the Message of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:11 The Holy Spirit distributed spiritual gifts to each person “*as He determines*”; perhaps it would be a better approach to first recognise the gift given by Holy Spirit then help the person utilise that gift to fulfil outreach in a way that God designed just for them.

The New Testament shows us how God equipped six people in different ways to fulfil outreach needs.

1. Peter’s Confrontational Approach [Acts 2:14-41]

Whatever Peter did, he did it un-hesitantly and with full force; he didn’t mince words. In **Matthew 16:15** Peter was the one who declared flat-out that Jesus was the Messiah, then a few verses later we find him challenging Jesus’ stated mission, trying to correct the Son of God! Peter was the one who tried to walk on water to be near his Master and tried to decapitate the enemies of Jesus. All Peter needed was to be convinced he was right, and then there was almost no stopping him. He was direct, bold and right to the point.

Is it any wonder that God chose Peter as his spokesman on the day of Pentecost? It was a perfect fit. God needed someone unafraid to take a stand right there in Jerusalem where Jesus had been crucified a few weeks earlier. God wanted thousands of people who were there to know in no uncertain terms that they had crucified the Messiah, and that they needed to call on God for His Mercy and Forgiveness. Peter was custom-designed to fill this job, and empowered by the Holy Spirit 3,000 people repented, were baptised and put their trust in Christ the same day.

Some people are waiting for this type of approach to challenge them into doing something with the truth presented to them in such a confronting way. If you don’t feel this is you, let’s look at the other five options to see if you fit into any of them.

2. Paul’s Intellectual Approach [Acts 17:11-34]

Though Paul certainly could confront people with the truth when necessary, the hallmark of his approach was his logical and reasoned presentation of the Gospel message.

The letter to the church at Rome is the best example of this; we find a sound explanation of the central truths about God’s Nature, our sin and Christ’s solution.

When you consider Paul’s background, this organised, logical and well reasoned presentation doesn’t come as a surprise.

Can you think of a better person for God to send to the philosophers in Athens, where Paul presented an ingenious argument, starting from the Athenian idol to an unknown god and moving all the way to the only true God and His resurrected Messiah.

These philosophers would not have related to Peter’s direct “*turn-or-burn!*” approach. They needed logic that conclusively proved its point.

I’m sure that there are people who you know who don’t like easy answers or platitudes like “*you’ll just have to accept it on faith*”. Paul’s logical, well presented style of approach is becoming more and more important as our society becomes more secular. Many people now need to hear the Gospel not only declared but also defined and defended.

Is this the approach that fits your personality?

3. The Blind Man’s Testimonial Approach [John 9:1-34]

Although we know less about the blind man healed by Jesus than we do about Peter or Paul, one thing we can be sure about is that something happened in his life that was worth talking about.

No sooner was he able to see, than he was thrust in front of a hostile audience and asked to explain what had happened.

The blind man refused to enter into a theological debate with them, like Paul would have done: he avoided confrontation, unlike Peter; such responses did not fit who he was. Instead, he spoke of the experience that had changed his life, *“One thing I do know: I was blind but now I see!”* That is a difficult declaration to argue with, and hard to escape the implications of such a testimony.

Note in **John 9:3** Jesus said this man had been born blind *“so that the Work of God might be displayed in his life”*.

God had custom-tailored this man for this particular approach. God had been preparing this man all of his life for those events and his telling them in a way that would point people towards Christ.

There are a lot of people who live and work around you who need to hear a similar testimony about how God is working in your life. Some people may not respond very well to a challenge or an argument, but a personal account of someone's coming to faith would influence them powerfully. Could that story be yours? Do you feel comfortable telling others how God led you to Himself? Does the idea excite you? Stories like yours could be powerful tools in God's Hands.

One important fact is that testimonies don't have to be dramatic to be effective, so don't exclude yourself from this approach because you have a simple, un-dramatic testimony. A story of how you moved from religion into a relationship with Christ will be **more relevant** to most people than a sensational story of coming to Christ out of a life of witchcraft and drugs; that is **not** the everyday life of most people.

4. Matthew's Interpersonal Approach [Luke 5:27-31]

By any standard, Matthew was an unlikely candidate: tax collectors just are not known to become evangelists! But that is exactly what happened to Matthew.

After accepting Jesus' call to become one of His followers, Matthew decided to do whatever he could to bring along with him as many of his friends as possible, by exposing them to Jesus and the new life He offered.

Confrontation, intellectually challenging or testimonial story telling were not styles that Matthew felt comfortable with. Rather, he relied on the relationships he had built with these men over the years and sought to further develop their friendships. He invited them into his home. He spent time with them and ate with them.

Matthew did all of this because he genuinely cared about them and wanted to influence them towards considering the Claims of Christ. The vantage point of friendship gives us the highest possible influence in the lives of others. Many people will never be reached until someone takes the time to build this kind of intimacy with them. Maybe you are an interpersonal evangelist? Do you enjoy having long talks over a cup of coffee with a friend you are trying to reach? Can you patiently listen to another person's concerns without rushing in to tell them what they need to do? Do you enjoy having people in your home, sharing a meal and spending time in conversation? Churches around the world need a lot more of their members to develop this kind of interpersonal evangelism.

5. The Samaritan Woman's Invitational Approach [John 4:4-42]

Don't you love the way God picks the most unlikely people to fulfil His divine purposes? A blind man, a tax collector and now a woman from Samaria. God seems to delight in using ordinary, everyday kinds of people in surprising and exciting ways.

The Samaritan woman had three things going against her:- a) she was a Samaritan; b) she was a woman; c) she was living an immoral lifestyle. Back then, any one of these would be enough to disqualify her from being taken seriously by society.

Jesus ignored all the conventional wisdom and political correctness of the day by striking up a conversation with her.

It didn't take long for the woman to realise that the man she was talking to was no ordinary Jewish teacher. His prophetic insights and authoritative answers convinced her of His claim to be the Messiah. So what did she do? She immediately went to her town and brought a bunch of people to the well to hear Jesus for themselves.

A lot of non-Christians are open to this approach. The strength of your friendship with them would persuade them to join you by invitation to some special event in your church; a film, concert or fellowship evening. Consider their perspective and interests in order to make the best choice of event to appeal to them. Some people, like the Samaritan woman at the well, have the knack for getting people to go places with them. Maybe you're one such person? Do you find yourself constantly widening the circle of people involved in your activities? If so, this style of personal evangelism could be the one God has tailor-made you for.

6. Dorcas's Service Approach [Acts 9:36-42]

Dorcas was "*always doing good and helping the poor*". She was well-known for her loving acts of service which she performed in the name of Christ. Specifically, she made robes and articles of clothing for widows and other needy people in her town.

She was, in effect, a quiet practitioner of what we call the service approach to evangelism. It would have been very hard for people to observe her activity and not get a glimpse of the Love of Christ that inspired her. In fact, her work was so important that when she died a premature death, God sent Peter to raise her from the dead and put her back into service. People who take this approach find it relatively easy to serve others. It's how God made them. They naturally see needs others don't see, and they find joy in meeting them, even if they don't get a lot of credit for it. Often the more quiet type of person enjoys expressing compassion through tangible forms of action, such as practical service to those in need.

Though this style tends to get less press than the other styles, and it often takes a much longer period of time before producing spiritual results, it's one of the most important of all evangelistic approaches. That is because service-style evangelists touch people nobody else can reach.

7. Being Yourself [1 Corinthians 12:4-11]

I hope you've been encouraged as you've read about these different approaches to spreading the faith. Maybe you've breathed a sigh of relief as you've realised that you can be yourself, and that God knew what He was doing when He made you.

Let me emphasise that nobody fits perfectly into just one of these styles. In fact, you'll probably find opportunities to use all of them. The point is that God designed diversity on His team; and each member is stronger in some styles than in others. You may come up with other styles, and that's fine too. The important thing to know is that most contagious Christians are those who've learnt to work within the design God has given them. They identify approaches that work for them, and then they develop and deploy them to advance the Kingdom. They also team up with other Christians who have different styles so that their combined strengths can be used by God to reach virtually any kind of person.