

# Engaging Others<sup>1</sup>

*I find evangelism hard. The problem with being an evangelist is that people assume that you find evangelism effortless; but I don't find it easy, and never have. For me, telling people about Jesus has often been nerve wracking. But it has been joyful.*

– Rico Tice, *Evangelist*<sup>2</sup>

A few days ago, I was doing an internet search using key words such as “work of evangelism” and this popped up: “Free Downloadable Guide – Evangelism Made Easy”. For most people, evangelism is not easy. I don't find these kinds of *headlines* useful. In fact, I find them discouraging. But even though evangelism can be challenging, it is something every ordinary follower of Christ can do.

There are good books on evangelism available to believers. I have benefited from several of them. In this chapter, I will not attempt to re-write what has already been produced but will provide a few ideas to help those who are getting started in this important task. Everyone needs a bit of encouragement and guidance, so I will provide some pointers that I think will be helpful. Please know from the start that there is a learning curve in the area of evangelism. Training and preparation are essential. At the end of this chapter, I will provide a list of recommended books to help you continue this journey.

In this chapter we will cover 1) personal preparation, 2) people in our lives, 3) practical motivations, 4) practical thinking about evangelism, 5) practical things we can do, and 6) practical readings.

Evangelism is best viewed as a team sport. God called together a team, His people the church, to engage in this important endeavor. Teams encourage, sharpen, and support each other in numerous ways. And teams can accomplish more than any one individual acting alone. We can see that across practically all sports. Evangelism needs the home foundation of the church and the encouragement and prayer support that comes from the team members. None of us can walk in the way of the cross as a solo mountain climber who needs no support team.

## Personal Preparation

I have had several great hobbies in my adult lifetime – softball, jogging, flying, fishing, and photography to name a few. In fact, I believe everyone should have a hobby. We all need to engage our minds in something other than the regular work routine that we carry. We should be careful to not let a hobby become an idol of the heart. But kept in the proper perspective hobbies can refresh us for the work we are engaged in. My point here is that each hobby I have engaged in required a learning process to be able to enjoy it. And that was part of the fun. I spent a lot of time reading about photography, for example, and learning about f-stops, aperture openings, shutter speeds, film speeds, exposure meters, medium tones, depth of field, and about “placing” a tree in just the right spot in the frame. I acquired about 14 books on photography during that hobby and devoured each of them. It was all great fun.

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<sup>1</sup> From chapter 14 of *The Gospel, Evangelism, and God's Call to Witness*.

<sup>2</sup> Rico Tice, *Honest Evangelism*, (Epsom, Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2015, 2016), p. 11. Please read this really fine book. It will be a tremendous encouragement to those who find evangelism difficult.

We should expect no less when we engage in the activity of evangelism. There is a learning process that includes reading, talking with others, training, and practice. Here are some things you can begin to do in the area of personal preparation for evangelism.

**Learn the biblical gospel.** By now you probably know what I mean by that. If we don't know the biblical gospel we have no message. We must understand it, protect its integrity, and be prepared to discuss all of it. We should prepare ourselves mentally, spiritually, and emotionally to speak the whole gospel message and understand that certain parts of the gospel may not improve our personal popularity.

**Pray**, as Paul prayed, for open doors for the sharing of the gospel. "At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak" (Col. 4:3). Also refer to: Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Rev. 3:8. Pray also for the combination of love and courage to speak the hard parts such as God's righteousness, judgment, and wrath.

**Prepare your testimony** of coming to faith in Christ. Write it out on paper or at least write it in outline form. It should be about 3 to 5 minutes in length. Incorporate elements of the gospel into it and present it in a way that exalts Christ and how He has saved your soul. The sharing of one's testimony is not the same thing as sharing the gospel, but it can be a bridge to sharing the full gospel message. The more you incorporate the individual elements of the gospel into your testimony the more effective it will be.

When I share my testimony, I discuss the struggle I had in turning from a life centered on myself to trusting in Christ and living for His purpose. Even though I knew the gospel message, I rejected Jesus as Lord. And in that rejection, I knew I was under the wrath of God. **The wrath of God was very troubling to me as it should have been.** I could never get away from that inconvenient reality. It was distressing to me and there was only one solution. Christ was the only one who could rescue me from the coming wrath.

**Cultivate friendships among non-believers.** Many people over the years have told me that they do not have any non-Christian friends. But this is not how it should be. We have too often walled ourselves off from the non-Christian world and that is not a good thing. Jesus never did that. He hung out with some notable sinners. He made friends with people who had terrible reputations in the eyes of the world. It was so flagrant at times that it destroyed Jesus' reputation among the arrogantly self-important. May we be so blessed.

**Establish an evangelism partner.** A few years ago, an evangelistically minded friend and I began *unofficially* acting as evangelism partners. When I was to meet with someone I wanted to share the gospel with, I would ask my friend, Matt to pray for me that I would have the courage to raise the subject of the gospel and seek an opportunity to share it with my non-believing friend. He would make the same request of me, and I would pray for him as he engaged a friend for Christ. It became a habit with us, and we continue to do this nearly 10 years later. It has been a source of encouragement, prayer support, and

accountability. I highly recommend this practice. Pray for God to give you an evangelism partner.<sup>3</sup>

**Commit to learning about evangelism** and to becoming faithful in this great work that God is doing in the world. There is a learning curve to engage in and most of us need help and encouragement along the way.

There is one other aspect of evangelism that I should mention. It's called "crossing the pain line".<sup>4</sup> We can talk to people about the weather, sports, work life, and many other topics, but when we bring up the subject of the gospel we are crossing the pain line. Many people think they are okay with God and that when they die, surely they will go to heaven. In practically every movie or TV program today, when someone dies, it is often said of them, "they are in a better place now". But that may not be true. And lost people sometimes become offended or even angry if we share what the gospel has to say about life after death.

When we talk about sin, the need for repentance, and the coming judgment we are "crossing the pain line". People in general do not want to hear about sin and may respond negatively. When we tell others that Jesus is the only way to heaven they may become offended and think we are being intolerant. This does not mean we refrain from speaking the gospel, but that we should prepare ourselves for a possible negative response. A good preparation for crossing the pain line is to plan an escape route if things go in the wrong direction.<sup>5</sup> If the response is anger or a vitriolic outburst, politely retreat and talk about the weather or something else. Not everyone, though, will respond negatively and in fact many people I talk to respond merely with apathy. I hate apathy and that may be a worse response. But some, maybe a small minority, will respond to the call of the gospel message and give their life to Christ and avoid the wrath of God that awaits them otherwise.

## People in Our Lives

The goal in evangelism is to have a meaningful conversation about the gospel with those who are lost. The gospel is the message that God uses to remove the veil, the blindness that is covering the eyes of those who are perishing (2 Cor. 4:3-6; also Acts: 11:13-14; Rom. 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:23-25).

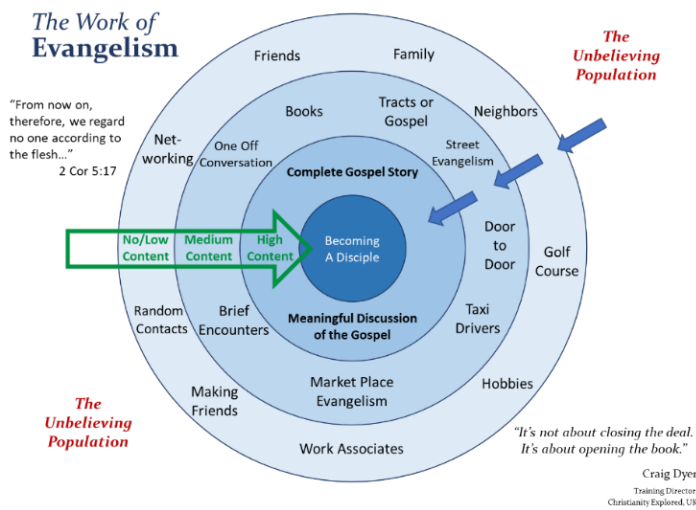
The concentric diagram below can be helpful in visualizing the work of evangelism. We can think of the non-believing world around us in terms of family, friends, neighbors, work associates, random contacts, and others. All of these relationships provide opportunities for engaging someone with the gospel. The best opportunities I have had to discuss the gospel are with people who know me and trust me and with whom I have a relationship.

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<sup>3</sup> One day in Sunday school Matt Bonner and I were discussing our evangelism partnership and another gentleman overheard us. He suggested that what we were doing would be a good model to teach others to replicate. So, a thank you to Doug Hixson for his observation and suggestion.

<sup>4</sup> Rico Tice, *Honest Evangelism*, (Epsom, Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2015, 2016), pp. 14-15. Rico Tice discusses the "pain line" throughout this outstanding must-read book. My strong recommendation for first readings and preparation for evangelism is to read *Honest Evangelism* first and then read *Tell the Truth* by Will Metzger. You will be off to a great start with these two books.

<sup>5</sup> Credit to Rico Tice.



**Parents.** If you are a father or mother, your children are obviously a top priority for teaching the gospel. There are many good helps for teaching children the Bible's story. I have listed a few below. Spend time with your children telling them your story of repentance and trust in Christ. Teach them the doctrines of the gospel.

**Grandparents.** You can play a vital role in shaping grandchildren. A few years ago, I read through the entire *The Action Bible* with two of my grandchildren. Now I am reading a biography of John Newton with them. After each chapter we discuss what Newton was going through or his courage in speaking the gospel, and other aspects of God acting in his life. They will remember their grandfather telling them about his faith and how Christ saved his life when he was a young adult. They will remember discussions with him about the gospel. This is something they will remember all of their lives. My prayer is that it will encourage them to walk in the way of the cross.

**Siblings, family members, and friends.** Many in this category may live in different cities than we do but they can be engaged via telephone, Skype, Zoom, or other media. We can invite them to read through a book of the Bible with us. It is non-threatening to a non-believing friend and does not require much preparation. It can lead to meaningful discussions of the gospel. Currently, I am reading through a book of the Bible with one of my sons who lives 250 miles away. We began doing this more than a year ago. Two days ago, I sent a friend a link to a Christianity Explored video and he has promised to watch it. He too lives in a different city, and I am hoping he will be willing to discuss the gospel by phone.

**Co-workers and others.** We have many connections with people through the course of our lives. Some are brief encounters, and some become long-term working relationships. Can we see the lost people in this group of contacts?

You may have heard the saying: "Right living begins with right thinking". This is especially true in evangelism. It is essential that we have a biblical theology of evangelism. If we do, we will view the people in our lives through a biblical lens. Paul gives us that lens when he writes: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:16). This means we are not to view people based on the standards of the culture around us but based on the measuring stick of the gospel message. Paul goes on to write in that same paragraph that God is using His people to make His appeal to the lost (2 Cor. 5:20). But what do we see when we see other people? Do we see the possessions they own or the way they dress or the car they drive? Do we only see the trappings of success, or do we see lost people? Jesus can see lost people everywhere. He is not blind. Can we see lost people everywhere? Are we blind?

Our goal is to engage our relationships for God's glory and for the good of others. If we care about lost people, as we certainly should (just ask Jonah about that!), we will make an effort to entice them to have a meaningful examination of the gospel with us. This often takes time and may involve many invitations and promptings over several years for a person to be willing to hear the gospel. We should think of people as being in a process in coming to faith. We should think in terms of moving friends from no gospel content to a discussion of the whole gospel story. People need to hear the full gospel. And this may take time and a significant amount of persistence and pre-evangelism work. But the stakes are huge. Where a person spends eternity really matters. It is truly a life and death drama that is playing out before our very eyes. But can we see it? And do we have enough courage and love to act accordingly? If you do not, at the risk of repetition, please go interview Jonah (chapter 3 of this book) and ask him what he would have done differently if he could have a do-over of that moment in his life.

## Practical Motivations

I addressed motivations in Chapter 10 earlier in this book. But to keep them in focus it may be worth a brief review. These are the top four motivations driving my life.

1. **Love.** If we love other people we will warn them of the impending disaster of God's wrath which is hanging over their life. The dominating love of Christ compels us to share this story of redemption with the lost (2 Cor. 5:14). Love for other people is the most powerful motivator for me. If I care about my friend, I will cross the pain line in an attempt to share this message with them.
2. **Accountability.** We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of whether we were faithful in sharing the gospel with the lost (2 Cor. 5:9-11).
3. **God has commanded it.** We have seen this mandate from Genesis forward through the Old Testament and into the New Testament. Reaching the lost is an ingrained part of God's character.
4. **People who die without Christ spend eternity in Hell.** This is the great tragedy of the fall in Genesis chapter 3. The only relief from the curse of death is trusting in Christ. Believers must fully digest this reality and let it shape their view of everyone around them.

## Practical Thinking About Evangelism

Most people do not know the biblical gospel. Some, depending on their upbringing and the culture they grew up in, may know certain aspects of the gospel or possibly a distorted version of it. We should not take for granted that people among our family and friends have an accurate understanding of the gospel.

Lost people are in a process of coming to faith. We can envision that process as a continuum or a timeline with one end being far away from God and the other end being near to God. And for someone to move from the far end to the near end may take a considerable amount of time. One book on evangelism that I read many years ago stated that a person needs to hear the gospel 7.6 times on average before coming to faith.<sup>6</sup> This means we must take the long view about evangelism. The proper understanding of evangelism is that it is not a "one and done" event. It is not "present the gospel, make a decision, and move on". People

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<sup>6</sup> William Fay with Linda Evans Shepherd, *Share Jesus Without Fear*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), pp. 11, 19.

need time to process what the gospel means, the cost of following Christ, and how they should respond. And this takes time.

For some believers, a serious impediment to engaging others with the gospel is a fear of being asked a question they cannot answer. It is good to be prepared with as many answers as possible, but it is okay if a believer does not have a particular answer to a question. In fact, it provides an opportunity to have a follow up conversation with that individual when an answer has been found. Even though having good answers is useful, it is the content of the gospel that God uses to bring dead souls to life. We should link answers to questions with gospel content as much as possible. We should always point people to Scripture as the only source of spiritual truth.

## Practical Things We Can Do

Once the believer has an opportunity to engage someone with the gospel message there are multiple ways to go about it. Here are a few ideas to consider. I have used all of these methods at different times.

1. **Small group or large group** using the Christianity Explored course. This material leads people through the Gospel of Mark in seven sessions. Each session has a short video (11 to 18 minutes in length) and there is a handbook with questions for discussion. It gives people time to digest the content of the gospel in a safe environment.
2. **One to one** using the Christianity Explored course, simply reading through one of the four Gospel accounts in the Bible together, reviewing a gospel tract, or sharing a sequence of Bible passages such as with the *Evangelism Explosion* format. This can be over a cup of coffee or over the phone once a week. It provides an opportunity for the non-believer to ask questions and to have dialogue over passages in the Bible.
3. **Technologies** today afford the opportunity to do both of the above two methods over Skype, Zoom, other video conferencing apps, and even over the telephone. I have used the Christianity Explored materials over Skype and over the telephone with both small groups and one to one.
4. **Books and resources to give away.** I find it useful to have a gospel tract or a Gospel of Mark to give away to people. In fact, the Gospel of Mark is my favorite gospel “tract” to give away. It is short, concise, and rich with all of the elements of the gospel written by an expert evangelist under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

## Practical Reading

*Honest Evangelism* by Rico Tice, (Epsom, Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2015, 2016). This book has been such an encouragement to me and to many others. It covers the basics of evangelism and helps the average believer realize that they too can be active in evangelism and that evangelism is not for “professionals” only.

*Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person* by Will Metzger, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed). This is like a *handbook* for evangelism that is well rounded and covers most aspects of evangelism. It was most helpful to me when I discovered it in about 2007.

*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J. I. Packer, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, original edition 1961, Americanized 2008). This is an absolute classic on the theology of evangelism.

*Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did* by Randy Newman, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004). This book helps those active in evangelism to be better listeners and to be armed with appropriate questions to engage others with.

*Mere Evangelism* by Randy Newman, (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2021).

*Our Guilty Silence: The Church, the Gospel, and the World* by John Stott, (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, first edition 1967, 1997). John Stott challenges the church to fulfill its evangelistic responsibility. It is very difficult to find.

*Becoming a Contagious Christian Participants Guide: Communicating Your Faith in a Style That Fits You* by Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel, and Bill Hybels, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995, 2007). Everyone has a different style in relating to people. This book is excellent and especially for its teaching on six styles of evangelism.

*The Cross of Christ* by John R. W. Stott, (Leicester, England: IVP, 1986, 2004).

## **Resources for Children**

*The Action Bible*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010). It covers both the Old and New Testaments and is for ages about 9 years old and up.

*The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2007). Excellent for younger children.

*ESV Student Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

## **Book/Materials to Give Away**

*The Gospel of Mark* (Christianity Explored Edition, ESV), (Epsom, Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2016). This small paperback in the ESV has 13 pages of helps to assist someone unfamiliar with the Bible to know how to read the Gospel of Mark. <https://www.thegoodbook.com/ce-marks-gospel-esv-pack-of-20>.

*The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

*Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001, first published 1952).

*Why I Am a Christian* by John Stott, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

*The Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life*, by Dale Ralph Davis, (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2016)

*Basic Christianity* by John Stott, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, first edition 1958, Americanized 2006).