

HOW TO DISCOVER YOUR EVANGELISTIC STYLE



REAPING The HARVEST

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The whole gospel, to the whole world, by the whole church

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Only a tiny fraction of the unbelievers in the world can be reached by the stereotypical evangelist. The unbelieving world is made up of a variety of people young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, urban and rural with different races, personalities, values, political systems and religious backgrounds. Isn't it obvious that it would take more than one style of evangelist to reach such a diverse population?

Someone in the multifarious group is a person who needs an evangelist of your exact age, career, level of spiritual understanding, exact personality, background and interest! You don't have to become someone that you're not in order to be an effective evangelist. There are many styles of effective evangelism as suggested by Bill Hybels. Let us look at six possible evangelistic styles: *confrontational*, *intellectual*, *rational*, *invitational* and *practical*.

Confrontational (You crucified the wrong man!)

Peter, the transformed fisherman, had a confrontational style of evangelism. In Acts 2 we read Peter's dynamic Pentecost sermon. "Listen carefully to what I say," he began, then proceeded to explain Jesus' fulfillment of the ancient Scriptures and His identity as the Christ. In conclusion he said, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this Christ" (Acts 2:36). "You crucified the wrong man! You killed the Son of God!" Pierced to the heart, they asked Peter, "What shall we do?" Peter replied, Repent and be baptized... Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:37-40).

Peter exhorted and challenged them. He confidently charged in and hit them with a frontal assault. And it was so effective that three thousand people trusted Christ that day (Acts 2:4). Some people will only be reached when they are confronted courageously and straightforwardly with their sin and their need to repent.

And Peter was just the person to do that. He was an "action" person. He was almost always the first person to speak, move, and act. We remember him as the one who walked on water and fell in, but he was the only one who got out of the boat, the only one willing to take the first step. In the Garden, when Jesus was arrested, Peter grabbed a sword and whacked off a guy's ear. He loved to create action. It didn't bother him at all to stand up in front of the masses on Pentecost Day and create a little havoc.

Some people will only come to Christ if they are "knocked over the head with truth" and confronted by someone like Peter. God has equipped certain believers with the combination of personality, gifts, and desires that make it natural for them to confront others.

Did God make you that way? Then get out there and confront. Offer your personality and passion to the Lord, and ask the Holy Spirit to surround your natural confidence with sensitivity and discernment. Then pray that God will lead you to people who need someone to look them straight in the eye and say, "Here's the truth. What are you going to do about it?" They're out there.

Intellectual (Think it through)

Though he could be confrontational like Peter, the apostle Paul often used an intellectual approach to evangelism. In Acts 17 we read that Paul reasoned with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks, "explaining and proving" Christ's resurrection (Acts 17:3). He conversed with the intelligentsia and debated with the philosophers of Athens. In his famous sermon on Mars Hill, he ingeniously used the Athenians altar to an unknown god as an introduction to his representation of the true God.

I can imagine Peter in Athens. "What's wrong with you people? Tear down that altar to an unknown god! Repent and worship the true God!" His confrontational approach would never have worked with the intellectuals. They needed a more persuasive, academic approach, like

Paul's. We read that in Thessalonica, "Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women" (Acts 17:4). In Athens, likewise, "A few men became followers of Paul and believed... also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others" (Acts 17:34).

Paul was highly educated, extremely intelligent, and capable of putting together cogent arguments. By nature he loved analyzing, studying, contemplating, and reasoning. He knew that some people needed to grapple with tough questions before they could come to faith in Christ.

What about you? Could you be an intellectual evangelist? Are you an effective debater? Do you enjoy examining evidence and reasoning through to a conclusion? Do you like to wrestle with difficult questions? Do you love it when cultists come to your door? Then take your calling as an intellectual evangelist seriously. Read, study, and train yourself.

Testimonial (He changed my life)

The ninth chapter of John records Jesus healing of a blind beggar. Neighbors questioned if he really was the same man they'd seen begging since his birth. Pharisees wondered who healed him and questioned the godliness of someone who healed on the Sabbath. Others concluded that only a sinless man could perform such deeds. Finally they asked the blind man himself what he thought of his healer. His answer was pure and simple. "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25)

His simple testimonial only piqued more controversy, so he expanded his explanation. "Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (John 9:32, 33). Draw your own conclusions he seems to say. I've drawn mine.

Testimonial style evangelists neither confront nor intellectualize. They simply tell the story of the miraculous work of Jesus Christ in their life. They say, "I was spiritually blind, but now I see. Jesus Christ changed my life, and He can change yours." Testimonial evangelists are usually not the people who became Christians as children and followed a steady path of spiritual growth. Typically they have fairly dramatic stories of renewal and transformation.

In the evangelism seminars at our church we strongly encourage people to write out a brief testimony and become familiar enough with it that they can present it clearly and comfortably. We've found that being prepared with a concise, non-preachy explanation of their conversion frees them to witness effectively in the settings the Holy Spirit orchestrates. Many seekers don't need to hear a sermon; they just need a solid, sane, normal Christian to share with them a slice of their transformed life.

Relational (Live it out)

In Mark 5 we read of a man tormented by an unclean spirit. Living among the tombs, he behaved like a wild man, constantly crying and gnashing himself with stones. One day Jesus met him and cast the unclean spirit out of him. The man was so overjoyed that he begged Jesus to let him join him as an itinerant evangelist. Jesus refuses to let him come. He said, "Go to home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how He has had mercy on you"(5:19). He told him to be a relational evangelist, one who shares his faith with those he's close to.

Jesus, in effect said, "Don't go knocking on doors doing 'cold turkey' evangelism with people you don't even know. You have family and friends who need to know what I have done for your life. Go home and live a transformed life in their presence. Diligently pray for them, and then wait for divinely appointed opportunities to tell your story. Be available when someone says, "How can I get what you have?"

Some feel guilty because they can't go to Africa or India and "reach the lost." All the while, God needs someone just like them to be an evangelist right where they are. Could that describe you? Do you have friends and family members who don't know the Lord? If so, begin

to pour your time, concern and prayers in their direction. Make yourself available to be God's personal agent to them.

Invitational ("Come and hear")

Most people are familiar with the story of the Samaritan women at the well (John 4). After a lengthy conversation with Jesus, she became convinced that He was the Son of God. She excitedly left her water pots and ran into the city. Instead of trying to recreate the conversation in her own words, she begged the people of the city to come to the well and hear Jesus for themselves. They did and verse 39 tells us that many of the Samaritans believed in Him.

The Samaritan woman was an invitational evangelist. She knew she wasn't prepared to articulate the message in a powerful way. So, she invited her friends and acquaintances to come and hear someone who could explain it more effectively. They don't have a dramatic testimony to share. They're not particularly relational. They feel they have nothing to offer as an evangelist. Perhaps God wants them to do just what the woman at the well did. Invite people to "Come and hear."

Do you think you might be an invitational evangelist? Then get aggressive! Find out about events specifically designed for unbelievers. Find out about Christian concerns and special events. Look for a church that provides opportunities for seekers and new believers. Use the valuable evangelistic style God has given you to make a mark for eternity.

Practical (How can I help?)

One of the most endearing people in Scripture is a woman named Dorcas. She tremendously impacted her city by doing deeds of kindness. She made garments for the poor and forgotten and distributed them in the name of Christ. She may never have knocked on a door; it's unlikely she ever preached a sermon. Yet through her acts of service she pointed people to the God who could transform human hearts and fill them with love (Acts 9).

Dorcas was a practical evangelist. She used her unique serving gifts as tangible expressions of the Gospel message. Like her, you may have a tender spirit and helpful heart. You may be very effective evangelists as you connect sharing Christ with serving people.

Have you been intimidated by outspoken evangelists who make you feel like a second-class citizen because all you can do is "serve people"? Please don't feel that way. Serve with a joyful, compassionate heart. Be assured. There are many unbelievers who know exactly what they need to do to become a Christian. The one thing they lack is someone like you to soften their heart through your acts of service. Be that person for them!

Which Link are you?

A person's coming to Christ is like a chain with many links. There is the first link, middle link, and a last link. There are many influences and conversations that precede a person's decision to convert to Christ. I know the joy of being the first link at times, a middle link usually and occasionally the last link. God has not called me to only be the last link. He has called me to be faithful and to love all people.

Authentic evangelists know they're just one link in the chain of conversion to Christ. But they also know that every link is important. They know they need to do their part. They know they need to reach out to the Lord with their personal evangelistic style.

Jesus calls you to enter the people business. He calls you to be a difference-maker for eternity. Will you accept the challenge?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Based upon what you have read, which evangelistic style best suits your personality? Give the reasons for your conclusion