



“Evangelism” is not a Dirty Word

By Greg Hicks

SO, YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN. . . What exactly does that mean? For one thing, it means benefits. Benefits like salvation, and like fellowship with and support from warm, caring people who genuinely love us. Benefits like communion with the God of the universe. Pretty good deal, Huh?

But being a Christian also means responsibility. We—all of us—have a job to do. We've been given the task of reaching the world with the Gospel, the “good news” that Jesus Christ dies on the cross for everyone—boys, girls, men and women...even teenagers. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus said, “...All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always[s], even unto the end of the world.” (KJV) We have our orders . . . want a piece of the action?

It's a job we obviously can't do alone, but we can all have a part. And we can start right where we are. Do you feel ready?

Probably not.

Most of us consider ourselves ill-prepared to tackle a challenge as seemingly overwhelming as reaching the whole world.

We're not even sure if we can reach our next-door neighbor or our friends at work. So where do we start?

One of my early evangelism experience influenced me toward a preference for “relationship evangelism”—sharing the Gospel with people I already know (although if the chance comes up, I'll still share it with anybody, anywhere). These were the days of the “I Found It,” “Turn or Burn,” “Get Right or Get Left” bumper stickers. It was 1981 and my church adopted as their motto for the year, “Everyone win one in ‘81.” Basically, you were supposed to bag a pagan before the year was over.

One week, somebody in my Sunday School class suggested going downtown on a Friday night to hand out tracts and witness to the party-hardy street-cruiser crowd. As I handed out my first tract that night, the person promptly held it up, flicked his Bic and laughed at me wickedly as it went up in flames. Needless to say, I was slightly discouraged. The rest of the evening brought roughly the same response from the crowd. Later that evening, when we all got back to the church, we shared war stories and agreed that it was great to be on the firing line and to “suffer for Jesus.”

Since then, I have been taught that what I did that evening was called the “confrontational-intrusional” approach to evangelism, otherwise known as “cold turkey” evangelism. It has its place and it can surely be used by God to save souls, but it's hard on you and can sometimes leave a negative impression on the person you're trying to reach. Few people like having something shoved down their throat.

Now the fad is “lifestyle” or “relational” evangelism. And guess what—it works! Because they spell out the process so clearly, I would like to share eight steps in relationship evangelism that are very practical in nature:

Step 1. Initial Contact. These are people you've met at work, in the neighborhood, at social function, your barber or hairdresser, the grocer, etc. To establish contact, you have to choose to be where people are, be friendly, take the initiative, and leave the person with a positive impression. Be complimentary (Acts 26:2,3). To meet people, consider having a neighborhood open house, a block party or barbeque, join a club, get your kids in little league. At work, take advantage of coffee and lunch breaks, business trips, office parties, meetings, seminars, etc.

Step 2. Become Better Acquainted. These are people with whom you are past the “just met” stage. Ask question about them, e.g., where they're from where they went to school, family background, etc. Look for common interests. Be patient—don't force the relationship. And, most importantly, don't hide your Christianity—fly the flag early! Activities you can share with them might be recreational, shopping, a game night at home, dessert or dinner at you house (or theirs), even just watching TV. At work, you could car pool, join a bowling league, talk while working, eat lunch together, etc.

Step 3. Serve Them. Expect opportunities for service and be alert to them. Your goal is his (her) success in life. Remember

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