

Straight Street for Church Planters Unit 8 - Evangelism

Helpful Web Sites

www.namb.net/root/evangelism

www.namb.net

www.lifeway.net

Desired outcome from this unit: For participants to reflect on the lostness of man and how God desires to use the participants to lead lost people to Christ. The participants will also consider their level of evangelistic training and their understanding of evangelistic approaches. The participants will be challenged to share their faith using an approach of their choosing.

Desired outcome from the Basic Training unit on Evangelism: For the church planting team to develop an evangelism strategy that is based on the identified ministry focus group.

The North American Mission Board, SBC Evangelism Group defines evangelism in the following way:

God's act of working through believers empowered by the Holy Spirit to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to every person and people group with the purpose to persuade the lost to come to salvation.

- **Acts of God**—We confess that salvation is of God. He has taken the initiative, while we were yet sinners, to send Christ into the world. He convicts people of sin and convinces them of the truth of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation.
- **Gospel of Christ**—Salvation is due to Christ's redemptive work on the cross. He was the sacrifice for sin and was the first fruit of the resurrection. Salvation is due solely to the work of Jesus Christ and is not based on any form of human effort.
- **Come to Salvation**—Everyone is commanded to repent toward God and to place their faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is appropriated by faith alone and the only saving object of Christian belief is Jesus.

Scripture Helps:

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9, NAS).

I. What is God saying to me in His Word?

Read the following passages of Scripture and note the two references to Paul's testimony before and after his conversion (Acts 9:10-22, NIV):

"In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered. The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.' 'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your

Reflection and Thoughts

“A postmodern culture will debate religion, politics, and morality. The one thing it will not debate is...your personal experience. That’s why your story/testimony is a powerful tool for 21st century evangelism.”

The NET – NAMB

“Your personal testimony is a powerful tool for sharing the gospel....use it often.”

saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.’ But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, ‘Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?’ Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.”

Can you imagine the concern and anxiety that Ananias must have experienced when God told him to go and meet with Saul? Perhaps he must have been thinking, “But Lord, I have heard about this man. He has a reputation for persecuting Christians.” Even those who later heard Saul preach in the synagogue were amazed. They too remembered or had heard from others about his reputation for persecuting followers of Christ.

As you work through this unit, keep in mind the word testimony. You will be asked to consider your testimony, the good, the bad, and the ugly of it. You will be asked to write your personal testimony using this simple outline: what my life was like before knowing Christ, how I came to know Christ, and what my life is like since coming to know Christ as my personal Savior. You will also be challenged to learn how to share your personal testimony in 2-5 minutes and to share it with someone before attending Basic Training for Church Planters.

Consider how God used Saul’s personal testimony to reach many people for Christ. Have you considered how God could use your personal testimony to reach others for Christ? “Your personal testimony is a powerful tool for sharing the gospel, use it often.”
The NET—NAMB

Activity – Scripture Search

You will need a Bible and a concordance for the following activity.

What Scripture(s) best described your life before knowing Christ? Write the reference(s) below.

What Scripture(s) best describes your life at this time? Write the reference(s) below.

What Scriptures do you think best describe the condition of lost man? Write the reference(s) below.

List several Scriptures that describe new life in Christ. Write the reference(s) below.

List several Scriptures that you think would be appropriate to share with a lost person that would help them to understand that they: (write out the Scripture text and reference)

are lost –

have sinned –

are loved by God –

can experience forgiveness of their sin –

can have a real and meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ –

can grow as a Christian –

Using your personal testimony is just one approach to sharing the gospel. Please read the article at the end of this unit “Finding the Approach That Fits You.” In it you will discover six personal styles for sharing Christ.

II. What is God saying to me through others?

In *Basic Training for Church Planters*, Unit 8: Evangelism, you will learn about the need to penetrate key people networks. Jesus often demonstrated the importance of penetrating people networks. The calling of Matthew led to an invitation to a party; thus, a new network was penetrated. The calling of Andrew led to the calling of Peter. Every contact has potential for opening new doors to opportunities for sharing the gospel. In the New Testament, it was not unusual for entire households to be evangelized. Priority should be given to penetrating key people networks.

Activity – Identify networks.

List any key people networks that you are attempting to penetrate in the community where you will be planting a church.

“God is at work in the lives of nonbelievers and invites us to join Him.... God is in the redemption business, as demonstrated in His activity through His Son.”—Basic Training for Church Planters

What will be your plan to penetrate these key people networks? (Will you share your personal testimony, using servant evangelism events and/or evangelistic tools such as The Net or Faith, et cetera?)

List the names of lost people who you are praying for.

What are you doing to cultivate relationships with them?

What is your plan to share the gospel with these people? Will you share your personal testimony with them?

List the names of laborers for the harvest that you are praying for. “Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matt. 9:38, NKJV).

List other evangelism resource Web sites that you are familiar with.

Activity – Review the Engel Scale.

For most nonbelievers the conversion process is lengthening. One excellent tool for helping the planter understand his target audience's spiritual awareness is the Engel scale. This linear scale,¹ which resembles a number line, depicts a series of steps from complete unawareness and ignorance, to a maturing commitment to Christianity.

The Engel Scale

The Engel Scale classifies awareness in a range of steps from -8 to +3, as follows:

- 8: Awareness of a supreme being but no effective knowledge of the gospel
- 7: Initial awareness of the gospel
- 6: Awareness of the fundamentals of the gospel
- 5: Grasp of implications of the gospel
- 4: Positive attitude toward the gospel
- 3: Counting the cost
- 2: Decision to act
- 1: Repentance and faith in Christ
- REGENERATION**
- +1: Post-decision evaluation
- +2: Incorporation into the body
- +3: A lifetime of growth in Christ—discipleship and service

Negative one is the crucial step, but not necessarily an isolated event. It demands a patient process. God, of course, can make it an instantaneous event, but it is usually a *process* that leads to this event.² Following conversion (step 0), the new believer begins to evaluate the decision, is incorporated into a

¹There are different versions of the Engle scale. Malphurs describes a slightly different version than I have reproduced (Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches*, 275).

²Engel erroneously places repentance before regeneration. Theologians have historically held that regeneration precedes (and enables) repentance.

fellowship of believers, and becomes one who actively shares the gospel. The planter's task is to partner with God in order to move people toward understanding—toward the point of repentance and faith in Christ. The effective evangelist-planter will learn to recognize that people are at different stages when they come to worship services.

Prospect Development

The development of prospects for evangelism is an important matter for church planting. It is not a difficult thing to do. Once again, the planter must be intentional in this task. The most obvious way to find prospects is through door-to-door survey. It is a good and time-tested method though less effective in affluent areas. Immediately below you will find several ways to develop prospects for evangelism.

Relationship Building

Intentional relationship building begins with meeting community leaders. Planters often meet leaders by becoming a team or club chaplain, by becoming involved in a community organization, or by personally contacting the mayor and other government leaders.

If you, the planter, intentionally build relationships, people begin to know who you are and why you are there. Some may even come to your church. Intentional relationship building with community leaders adds credibility to your church.

Marketplace Farming

Marketplace “farming” is the process of consistently making contacts with friends or neighbors—building relationships leading to an opportunity to share Christ. Church planters should know their neighbors. The planter cannot afford to spend all of his time with church people. Rather, the planter should become acquainted with the unchurched living nearby. This process of “marketplace farming” is also an intentional process.

For instance, upon moving to a new area, you can move your bank account into that community, purchase your gasoline and meals and groceries from local businesses and become acquainted with the clerks and servers by name. *We must be intentional* about meeting people.

³ “...*the church planter cannot assume that people understand*”

³ How to Plant a Church CD 0390. A Study Guide by Dr. Ed Stetzer, North American Mission Board, SBC. Produced by Seminary Extension of the Southern Baptist Seminaries, Council of Seminary Presidents, William E. Vinson, Jr., Director, Southern Baptist Convention Building, 901 Commerce Street, Suite 500, Nashville, TN 37203-3631.

who Jesus is or what sin has done, even in North America.”

Activity – Share your faith with someone daily.

“Finding the Approach That Fits You”

Six personal styles for sharing Christ

Excerpted from the book *Becoming a Contagious Christian* by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg

This was the end. He'd written off personal evangelism and was ready to invest his time and energy elsewhere. It wasn't that he didn't believe in it anymore. He knew it was important, biblical and the only hope for helping people find Christ. Clearly, it was something somebody ought to be doing. But not him. Not anymore.

What had soured my friend's attitude toward spreading the faith? He'd had a heavy dose of reaching out in ways that didn't fit him.

You see, he'd signed up for a summer-long tour of duty helping a church with evangelism. He loved that church, enjoyed the people he was partnering with, and became enthralled with some of the conversations he had with spiritual seekers along the way. The problem, however, had to do with the approach that their group employed.

The primary way they tried to spread the message was through a direct, cold contact, knock-at-the-door-talk-fast-before-they-close-it methodology. They also handed out church invitations and gospel pamphlets to individuals on the street—people who often made it clear they weren't interested.

At the end of their eight-week effort, the only person who had received Christ was the brother of a woman from the church. His name was Tony, and they'd met at a dinner at Tony's sister's home. He and my friend hit it off naturally, and through the friendship that developed, the gospel was communicated and a commitment was made.

When summer ended and my friend returned home, he was thankful he had signed up but was glad it was over. Evangelism, he concluded, is for people with a certain kind of personality and temperament, a kind he clearly didn't have.

Ironically, a year later we hired him at Willow Creek Community Church to direct our evangelism ministries, a role he's fulfilled since 1987. I'm talking about Mark Mittelberg, the coauthor of this book. His life's passion is leading people to Christ and teaching others how to do the same.

What happened during that year? What did Mark discover that caused such a change in his attitude? He learned he could be effective in spreading the message of Jesus Christ without trying to fit into someone else's mold. He found out he could be himself.

After spending many years helping seekers come to faith, I've been fascinated to find that one of the biggest barriers to effective outreach is the problem of misconceptions. And that's true on both sides of the evangelism equation.

On the seeker side, the misguided ideas people have about God's character and His church preclude them from making an open and honest spiritual search. Their inaccurate image of God and what serving Him would be like pushes them away from Him. But when people's mistaken notions of God's nature are replaced by an accurate understanding of His grace-filled and compassionate heart, they become much more open to trusting Christ. And when they discover the acceptance, joy and purpose that come from being part of a biblically functioning body of believers, they'll be drawn in even further.

On the believer side of the equation, misconceptions about the outreach enterprise itself tend to inhibit people from getting involved. In fact, I'm convinced that one of the greatest impediments to individuals in churches getting active in personal evangelism is that many Christians misunderstand what it actually entails. The dreaded "E word" fills them with fear and guilt.

To illustrate the kinds of perception problems I'm referring to, let me call in one of my key witnesses: You. I'd like to know what image comes to your mind when you think of the word "evangelist." Does it evoke enthusiasm for reaching your irreligious friends and family members? Or do you, like most of us, have some negative associations that come to mind with the mere mention of the word?

I've asked this question in enough groups to know that, on hearing the words "evangelism" or "evangelist," many people immediately conjure up memories of infamous televangelists, known primarily for extracting large amounts of money from their well-meaning followers. Or they think of the stereotypical street preacher, megaphone in hand, blaring out barely intelligible indictments about the end of the world and the impending judgment of God.

Admittedly, many people do have a few positive images of evangelism. But the fact that so many individuals make such unflattering associations points to the immensity of the problem.

In fact, *The Day America Told the Truth*, a book by James Patterson and Peter Kim, reports that when a national survey asked respondents to rank various professions for their honesty and integrity, TV evangelists came out almost at the very bottom, below lawyers, politicians, car salesmen and even prostitutes. Out of the 73 occupations compared in this integrity rating, only two ended up lower on the scale: organized crime bosses and drug dealers! Fair or unfair, it's easy to understand why so many of us struggle with our perceptions at this point. We want to honor God by directing those around us toward His love and truth, but we wonder what we'll have to become in the process.

Has this problem affected you? Has your passion for communicating your faith been dampened by the thought that you'll have to become something that's contrary to your own personality? Or have you, like Mark, tried to adopt an evangelism style that doesn't fit you at all?

This kind of thinking is a tragedy for the church. And it's even worse for lost people. In fact, I believe it originated as a satanic scheme to defeat the expansion of the Kingdom of God. And while it's been an extremely successful strategy, it's time for the church to put a stop to it. How can we do this? By understanding the great news that's both freeing and empowering: God knew what He was doing when He made you. He did! He custom designed you with your unique combination of personality, temperament, talents and background, and He wants to harness and use these in His mission to reach this messed-up world.

That means He wants to use you in a fashion that fits the person He made you to be. God doesn't call us all to spread His truth in the same way. Instead, He built diversity into the fabric of His body of believers. And until we realize that, we'll find ourselves needlessly imitating each other's outreach efforts, wastefully duplicating some approaches while harmfully squelching others.

So, you may be wondering, what exactly did Mark learn that so transformed his outlook on evangelism? Well, he had been attending our church's midweek worship services where I was teaching a series called, "Adventures in Personal Evangelism." On one of those nights I explained a pattern I'd noticed of how characters in the Bible took differing approaches, or styles, to communicate their faith to others.

That was new information to Mark. It opened his eyes to the fact that there's no one "right way" to spread the gospel message. And, in particular, he heard about an approach Paul used that seemed to fit him well.

The message Mark heard that night unlocked the door to his future involvement in spreading the faith. He felt free. He discovered what I hope will be liberating news to you: that you can be yourself! And, in the process, you'll be able to have maximum spiritual impact on others.

A common mistake in many arenas is to look at a need and then find a person to fill it. For example, in the world of business, people are routinely hired to fill positions not because they have any passion for that particular area, but because they meet the minimal qualifications to get the task done. In education, students frequently choose college degree programs not because they really care about the subject matter, but because projected market demand seems to dictate it. And in churches, teachers are often chosen to instruct the second grade Sunday school classes not because they necessarily love and care about children, but because they're willing and available.

Is it any wonder that these institutions struggle so much with absenteeism and high turnover? After any initial enthusiasm wears off, the person feels misplaced and begins to burn out.

Starting with the need and plugging people in is not a good way to develop long-term careers or passion-driven lifestyles. And this is certainly true when it comes to motivating Christians to spread the message of Christ. Yet most of the evangelism and missions appeals I hear are pitched just that way: "There's a world of hurting and lost people out there, and God needs you to sign up for our program to help them."

But if, as it says in 1 Corinthians 12:11, the Holy Spirit really distributes spiritual gifts to each person, “just as He determines,” then perhaps we can rely more on His work and turn our procedure around. Why not start with each individual believer and try to help him or her discover what kind of role God has designed for him or her to fill?

Let’s look at the way God equipped six people in the New Testament to fulfill differing outreach needs. In the process, we’ll discover six biblical styles of evangelism. As I describe each one, ask yourself if it might fit you.

Peter’s Confrontational Approach

It’s no secret that Peter was a “Ready-Fire-Aim” kind of guy. Whatever he did, he did it unhesitatingly and with full force. When Jesus asked the disciples in Matthew 16:15 who they thought He was, Peter didn’t mince words; he declared flat-out that Jesus was the Messiah. Then a few verses later he challenged Jesus’ stated mission head on. Can you imagine trying to correct the Son of God? You might, if you have a confrontational style yourself!

When Peter was in the fishing boat and wanted to be with Jesus, he didn’t hesitate to do whatever it took to get close to Him, even if it meant trying to walk on water. And when their enemies came to take Jesus away, Peter was ready to cut off their heads.

All Peter needed was to be convinced he was right, and there was almost no stopping him. He was direct, he was bold, and he was right to the point.

Is it any wonder God chose him as His spokesman on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2? It was a perfect fit! God needed someone unafraid to take a stand, right there in Jerusalem, the city where Jesus had been crucified a few weeks earlier. He wanted to let the thousands of people who were there know in no uncertain terms that they’d crucified the Messiah, and that they needed to call on Him for His mercy and forgiveness.

Peter’s personality was custom-designed to fill the bill. With the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, he stood quite naturally and confronted the people with the facts. And God miraculously used his efforts; 3,000 people trusted Christ and were baptized that same day.

As exciting as that historical event was, we need to turn our focus to today. Do you realize that there are a lot of people in your world who won’t come to Christ until someone like Peter holds their feet to the fire?

I have a friend who for years played church and pretended to be a Christian. He’d heard lots of good teaching, knew the gospel message inside and out, and could quote numerous Bible verses. The only thing he lacked was a confrontational evangelist who could get in his face about his need to start living the truth he knew. Then one day God sent one. This man looked my friend in the eye and told him he was a hypocrite.

That made him angry, but it made him think. And within a week’s time he’d committed his life to Christ, a decision that has transformed his life over the last 20 years.

Some people are just waiting for a contagious Christian who won't beat around the bush, but who'll clarify the truth of Christ and challenge them to do something about it. Could that Christian be you? Do you resonate with Peter's approach, or are you ready to move on to the other five options?

Actually, this is the style that's more natural for me. It's not hard for me to look people directly in the eye and ask them where they stand.

I enjoy confronting and exhorting those in need of God's grace. Other people who have this style include Chuck Colson and, in his own unique fashion, Billy Graham. But don't despair. You don't have to start at their level. God can use confrontational Christians at all degrees of development.

If this approach is for you, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to know how, when and where to direct your words and challenges, as well as the wisdom you'll need to do it with an appropriate mix of grace and truth.

Paul's Intellectual Approach

Though Paul certainly could confront people with truth when necessary, the hallmark of his approach was his logical and reasoned presentation of the gospel message. Read any of the letters he wrote —Romans is the best example — and you'll see that he was a master at laying out a sound explanation of the central truths about God's nature, our sin and Christ's solution.

When you look at his background, Paul's organized mind doesn't come as a surprise. He was highly educated, tutored under a man who was reputed to be one of the finest teachers in the land. In his writings, you can see his natural tendency to argue point-counterpoint with imaginary foes who might challenge his positions. Paul was an intellect to be reckoned with.

Can you think of a better person for God to send to the philosophers in Athens? The account is in Acts 17, where you'll find Paul presenting 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.

His approach was so effective that some of his listeners became believers.

It's interesting to note the wisdom God displays in His choice of spokesmen. These philosophers would not have related to Peter's direct, "turn-or-burn!" approach. They needed logic that conclusively proved its point.

And I'll bet there are people in your circle who are just like them. They don't want easy answers or platitudes like, "You'll just have to accept it on faith." To their ears that sounds like, "Leap before you look. Who knows, you might get lucky." They want to know why they should leap at all.

Perhaps you're a Paul. Is the intellectual approach one that fits you? Are you an inquisitive type who enjoys working with ideas and evidence?

This style has become more and more important as our society has become increasingly secular. So many seekers need to hear the gospel not only declared but also defined and defended.

This is the style Mark identified with that night several years ago. The pattern he observed in Paul legitimized his own interest in studying philosophy and apologetics (the defense of the Christian faith). Since then he's flourished evangelistically as he's marshaled the evidence supporting Christianity to reach seekers individually and in large groups. And he's built ministries designed to further those efforts.

This is also the primary approach used by such well-known Christians as Josh McDowell, D. James Kennedy, and Ravi Zacharias.

The Blind Man's Testimonial Approach

Though we know less about him than we do about Peter or Paul, we can be sure about this; the blind man healed by Jesus in John 9 had seen something happen in his life worth talking about.

He'd been blind since birth, and regularly sat begging from people passing by. But his routine quickly changed when Jesus came along and gave him the gift of sight. No sooner was he able to see than he was thrust in front of a hostile audience and asked to explain what had happened.

It is interesting that the man refused to enter into theological debate with them (John 9:25), though Paul probably would have been happy to oblige them with a few compelling arguments. And he steered away from confrontation, whereas Peter might have given them a shot of truth. Those responses didn't fit who he was.

Instead he spoke from his experience and confidently said, "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" That's a difficult declaration to argue with, isn't it? It's pretty hard to escape the implications of such a testimony, even from a fledgling Christian.

Notice that in verse 3 Jesus said this man had been born blind "so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." That's an example of what I've been saying: that we are custom-tailored for a particular approach. God had been preparing this man all of his life for these events and his telling them in a way that would point people toward Christ.

And 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 a believer's life. They might 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, like the man who had been blind, feel comfortable telling others how God led you to himself? Even if you haven't done that yet, does this idea excite you? Stories like yours can be powerful tools.

Examples of people who effectively use this testimonial approach include Dave Dravecky, the former baseball pitcher who lost his arm to cancer, and Joni Erickson Tada, a quadriplegic woman whose account of how God helped her through her tragic accident points people clearly toward Him.

It's important to point out that effective testimonies don't have to be dramatic. Don't exclude yourself from this approach because you have a garden-variety testimony. Maybe you went to church and were religious all your life before you realized that those things didn't make you a Christian. But the story of how you moved from religion into a relationship with Christ will be more relevant to most of your acquaintances than a sensational story of someone coming to Christ out of a life of witchcraft and drugs.

As a matter of fact, the difficulty of personally relating to the dramatic testimony may give your friends an excuse. "People like that need religion!" they might say. But your everyday story will relate to their everyday life and show them that they, too, need the grace and leadership of God that you've found.

And if you do have a more dramatic story, ask God to lead you concerning how much detail to give and to whom to tell it, so that they'll hear the aspects of your experience they can connect with, and be drawn to seek what you've found in Christ.

Matthew's Interpersonal Approach

By any standard, he was an unlikely candidate. Tax collectors just weren't known for becoming evangelists. Yet that's exactly what happened to Matthew. After accepting Jesus' call to become one of His followers, he decided to do whatever he could to bring along as many of his friends as possible.

So, as we saw in Luke 5:29, he put on a big banquet for all of his tax-collecting buddies in an effort to expose them to Jesus and the new life He offered. Unlike those who utilize the other approaches we've examined, Matthew didn't confront or intellectually challenge them, nor is there any mention of his telling them the story of what had happened to him. Those were simply not his styles.

Rather, he relied on the relationships he'd 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. He did all of this because he genuinely cared about them, and he wanted to influence them toward considering the claims of Christ.

The vantage point of friendship gives us the highest possibility of influence in the lives of others.

From my experience, those who have the interpersonal style of evangelism specialize in this area. They tend to be warm, people-centered individuals who enjoy deep levels of communication and trust with those they're reaching out to.

And many people will never be reached until someone takes the time to build that kind of intimacy with them. Maybe you're an interpersonal evangelist. Do you enjoy having long talks over a cup of coffee with a friend you're trying to reach? Can you patiently

listen to other people's concerns without rushing in to tell them what they need to do? Do you enjoy having people into your home, sharing a meal, and spending time in conversation?

A couple of well-known examples of the interpersonal style are Becky Pippert and Joe Aldrich, both of whom have written helpful books on the subject. Churches around the world need a lot more of their members to develop this kind of approach with their own friends and family members as well as the lost people in their wider communities.

The Samaritan Woman's Invitational Approach

Don't you love the way God picks unlikely people to fulfill His divine purposes? We've seen it with the blind man, with Matthew, and now with this woman from Samaria. And, as you get more involved in personal outreach to others, you'll probably feel this way about yourself. I sometimes look at God's activity of touching people through me and say to myself, "Who'd have ever thunk it!" 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: she was a Samaritan, she was a woman and she was living an immoral lifestyle. Back then, any one of these would be enough to disqualify her from being taken seriously by society. But do you think that stopped Jesus? You can read in John 4 how He 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 realize 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. This simple invitation resulted in His staying in their town for two days. Many of the woman's friends declared, in verse 42, "Now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

There are many people who would make great strides in their spiritual journey if someone would go to the effort of strategically inviting them to a seeker-friendly church service or outreach event.

And a lot of non-Christians are open to this approach. A recent poll by researcher George Barna showed, for example, that about 25 percent of the adults in the United States would go to church if a friend would just invite them. Think about it: one in four of your friends would be willing to join you! The primary question you'll need to answer is what kinds of events—church services, concerts, movies, plays or other programs in your church or community—would be appropriate to bring them to. Consider their perspective and interests in order to make the best choice.

Although invitations are a great way for all of us to reach out to others, some people, like the woman at the well, have a knack for getting people to go places with them.

Do you find yourself constantly widening the circle of people involved in your activities? Have you found that when there's an outreach event going on your minivan is getting a bit tight? Maybe it's time to trade it in on a full-size van so you can expand your evangelistic efforts!

It's hard to think of well-known examples of people with the invitational style. Many of these Christians tend to stay out of the limelight. But when you see one you'll probably know it. They love to pick up strays. They're the unsung heroes who make outreach events successful by filling them with people who need to hear the message.

Mark knows someone named Nancy who has this style. A few years back his friends threw a birthday party for him. There were about 30 people there, including one guy he'd never seen before. Later, this man took out a violin and played "Happy Birthday."

Mark thought it was a nice gesture, but he still wondered who this person was. Finally, someone filled him in. The violinist was trekking across the country alone, and Nancy had met him at the train station.

She decided to bring him to Mark's birthday party, just in case he might meet some contagious Christians who'd be able to help him come to Christ.

Now that's the invitational approach!

Dorcas' Service Approach

The Bible says in Acts 9:36 that 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're calling 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 notice 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 more quiet types, these people enjoy expressing compassion through tangible forms of action.

Though this style tends to get less press, and it often takes a much longer period of time before producing spiritual results, it's one of the most important approaches. Service-style evangelists touch people nobody else can reach.

Ginger had a brother who was into New Age ideas and was disinterested in Christianity. So she did what came naturally to her and her confrontational style—she challenged him with the claims of Christ. When that didn't seem to make a dent, she

studied and came to him with reasons why he should change his position. Nothing got through. Finally, all hope seemed to dissipate when he moved his family to join a New Age religious sect.

But God had another card up His sleeve. When Ginger's brother moved into his new home, he soon met the people who lived next-door. These people were constantly doing things for him, like helping him get settled in, lending a hand when something needed to be fixed, bringing over food when someone in his family was sick. Just ordinary acts of service—done out of their love for Christ.

They brought down the wall between Ginger's brother and God, brick by brick. Within a year's time, he had committed his life to Christ, moved his family back home, and celebrated his first communion sitting next to Ginger at one of our worship services!

Can you see why this style needs to be celebrated? Those neighbors will probably never be famous, but God is using their efforts to reach those the rest of us haven't got a clue how to.

You may not have the knowledge of Paul or the courage of Peter and the Samaritan woman. But you're a whiz at making meals or fixing cars. I hope you can see how things can be done in a way that points people to God.

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