

Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey

By Rick Richardson

- The paradigm that dominated much twentieth-century evangelism might be called "Evangelism as Closing the Deal on a Sales Call."
- If they aren't extroverted, persuasive, an expert on their product, skilled at responding to the questions that will come up, and able to be pushy and assertive when it comes to making the close, then they don't identify with evangelism as part of their life and gifts.
- If we believed that God is at work everywhere and we're more like a detective discovering clues and a guide sharing wisdom, then evangelism would feel very different. We can look for God to be at work always and everywhere.
- Let's try seeing ourselves as travel guides on a spiritual journey rather than traveling salespeople on a call.
- Often we think of evangelism as sharing our strengths, having it all together spiritually. We think that's what it means to be a witness.
- Good travel guides know that stories of failure and struggle and doubt, of wrong turns and missed opportunities, are as important and compelling for other travelers as stories of success. They are the "humanizing" dimension of the story of the journey.

- Your authority in part comes from your authenticity, the authenticity of your struggles and your flawed humanity.
- Evangelism is telling the story of God's ultimate victory over the darkness, in our world and in our own soul. Evangelism is inviting people to take their part in that big story.

New ways to connect and communicate the good news:

Collaboration verses activism

- Our old model directs us to share the good news with everybody all the time, whether we know them well or not and whether spiritual conversation is appropriate or not. We must build friendships, talk to strangers, study the Bible with unchurched church people, share the gospel, call them to Christ and then follow up.
- What if we rediscovered the role and reality of the Holy Spirit? What if we saw ourselves as collaborators rather than activists, looking for clues about where God is already at work, expecting God to nudge us, being in an attitude of prayer whenever we were with unchurched church people?

Journey versus event.

- Our model of conversion has pushed us to draw lines in order to figure out who's in and who's out, and we look for a one-time event, a decision, that distinguishes people on the outside from those on the inside.

- The Holy Spirit has been pursuing conversations with people he loves on a spiritual journey for the past two millennia.
- The relational evangelism model can itself be a box. We can build trust and friendship with people but never get to the point of challenge. People are not loved when we build trust but never communicate truth.
- We can learn to look to the Holy Spirit, build trust, and share ourselves and our faith authentically with others, whether we have just met them or known them for years.
- If we are looking for risk-free evangelism, we will never influence people toward Christ.

Rediscovering the Holy Spirit

- Nothing would transform our pictures and practices of evangelism like rediscovering the role of the Holy Spirit and learning to go along for the ride.
- The first task of anyone who longs to reach out to others is learning to listen to God and collaborate with the Holy Spirit.
- John 5:19: Here is Jesus' secret to powerful evangelism. He is a collaborator, a partner. He does only what he sees the Father doing.
- How much better if we begin to intentionally listen and discern what God is already doing so we can ride the wave of the Holy Spirit's witness in the lives of others.
- Many people feel guilty that they don't witness more often. Learning to listen to the Holy Spirit could relieve a lot of guilt. We look to God to

nudge us, and if God doesn't lead us in a particular situation, we can often let go.

- How do we learn to see and hear what the Holy Spirit is up to? Three primary skills can help us.
 1. First, we can listen to the whispers and nudges of the Holy Spirit to show us where God is at work in the lives of those around us.
 2. Second, we can ask great questions of others to find clues for where God is already at work in their lives.
 3. Third, we can collaborate with God in prayer for seekers and skeptics and with seekers and skeptics.
- We have been taught to focus on people's beliefs when we ask them questions: What do you believe about God? Who do you think Jesus is? Do you believe we are sinful? How do we become reconciled to God? What must we do to be saved? Unfortunately, people in post-Christian society aren't that interested in talking about their beliefs. Those questions don't really engage them, nor do they help you discover where God might be at work.
- People want to share their experiences, hear your experiences and talk about spiritual reality.
- Great experience focused questions to find clues for where God is already at work in their lives:
 - Do you have any religious background, and does it mean anything thing to you today?

- Have you ever had what you would consider a spiritual experience? What was that like?
 - Have you ever had an experience of feeling close to God? What happened?
 - Do you think there's a God? What do you think God might be like?
 - What do you think about prayer? Do you think it works? What do you think it does?
- God wants to make tangible his rule and authority and power, especially where people are not following him.
 - But God's Spirit seems to love to meet seekers and skeptics where they are and to stretch out his hand to minister, even miraculously, whenever they ask. And we get to collaborate with the Holy Spirit.