

Towards A Biblically Based Relevant Evangelistic Strategy

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(Just in case you are interested as to why I would pen such a document on this, please see the addendum.)

I am intensely interested in developing a biblically based and yet relevant strategy to proclaim the gospel in the 21st century world. If you also share that passion, I hope this document helps you on your journey. Of course this is not an effort to develop something new. The “development” in this task is to discover the 2,000 year strategy that has always been here.

I have never come across a disciple of Jesus who did not want people who are lost in sin to be saved by grace through faith. **Yet I have found a widespread disinterest (sometimes antagonism) towards evangelism.** I know that is an extremely negative statement but I honestly believe it is the truth that I have found in my circles of fellowship. I find this incongruous with the clearly revealed will of Jesus and the example of the early church as reported to us in the New Testament. Why are Christians so often resistant to spreading the good news of God’s love for every human and His desire for them to be in His family?

Could one of the reasons for this disinterest be that the evangelistic strategy presented to disciples is one that is unsuitable or irrelevant? I believe it could be and so I began a journey to see if there is an underlying evangelistic strategy in the New Testament that is workable in the 21st century context. Here are some notes of where I am in the journey so far. They are only notes, so feel free to develop them yourself and put some meat on these bones.

Biblical Task of Evangelism

What is the task of evangelism? We look for an answer from scripture. Not from pragmatic considerations (we need it to grow). Not from historical considerations (we have always done it). Let’s look at some scripture.

*“He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”
Mark 16:15, NIV.*

Gospel = EUANGELLION = good news

Preach = KERUSATE = proclaim

The task Jesus gives us is to proclaim the good news to the whole world. We often forget that this is the basic task in our efforts to grow the kingdom when get caught up in all the “busy work” of our church and our lives.

*“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and **teaching them** to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”” Matthew 28:18-20, NIV.*

The task is to turn people into disciples of Jesus by teaching them. Jesus doesn't use the term, evangelism, but He is describing the task.

Teaching what? To obey what Jesus had commanded them. We are not just to teach facts. We are to teach people how to obey God ie. how to put these facts into practice.

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my **witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”” Acts 1:8, NIV.*

The first experience of evangelism by the early disciples is outlined here.

It speaks of them being witnesses ie. those who would testify of what they saw.

What they had seen was the good news. They have related their testimony to us (John 17:20) and we pass on that testimony. We echo their testimony. We, therefore, participate in the witness process.

*“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the **gospel** I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this **gospel** you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was **buried**, that he was **raised on the third day** according to the Scriptures,” 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, NIV.*

God clearly identifies the gospel here, among other things.

It is the story of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is NOT faith, repentance and baptism. That is what you do to obey the gospel. They are not the gospel. This is an error that many of us (including me) got caught up in.

*“Those who had been scattered **preached the word** wherever they went.” Acts 8:4, NIV.*

Literally “bringing the good news”

Again the two aspects of the task of evangelism.

1. The proclaiming
2. The message proclaimed.

The task of evangelism is to proclaim the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus to everyone.

The Methodology of Evangelism

How does the proclaiming of the good news of Jesus take place?

Simply, it is one person passing on the message to one (or more people). We have seen that any disciple can and should do this (Acts 8:4). It is not just for the gifted teachers and preachers.

The means (specific method) of doing this varied in the early church and depends on the situation.

*“19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by **all possible means** I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, NIV.*

The Holy Spirit teaches us that **the means is totally dependent on the situation**

The means has a lot to do with **relating to people in the situation you find them** eg. Becoming like a Jewish person, or becoming like a weak person.

More on this scripture later.

Note: Though a person could hear the good news without the help of a person (reading the Bible for themselves) it appears in scripture and in experience to be a rare occurrence.

Evangelistic Strategy - Overall

Biblical Basis for Having a Strategy

God’s Plans

God certainly has plans. They are eternal.

*“8 Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 **His intent** was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his **eternal purpose** which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” Ephesians 3:8-12, NIV.*

*“9 And he made known to us the mystery of **his will** according to **his good pleasure**, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” Ephesians 1:9, 10, NIV.*

Our Plans

1. Must be based on God’s plans. What was His plan? To make known His wisdom to the whole world (3:10)
2. Must flexible when it becomes clear that God’s plans are different. See Acts 10:6-10
3. Must focus on the task we have been given by God ie. the proclaiming of the message of the good news to everyone. Put another way, our plans must focus on connecting people to God through the proclaiming of the message of Jesus.

A Connection Strategy

Connecting – at its core, evangelism is a task of disciples of Jesus working towards connecting people to God through connecting them to the good news of Jesus.

Connection Points – the task of evangelism begins to occur at connection points between disciple of Jesus and others.

1. Geographic connection points

*“14 From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the **synagogue** and sat down. 15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.” 16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!” Acts 13:14-16, NIV.*

*“17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the **market-place** day by day with those who happened to be there.” Acts 17:17, NIV.*

*“42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from **house** to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” Acts 5:42, NIV.*

Any place where people are. The example of the early Christians is one of going to where people are NOT the tradition that is common today of trying to get people to come to our places (church buildings etc.). Paul went to people’s house of worship, their market-places, their homes. Who did he learn that off? His saviour. He did the exact same thing in trying to get people reconnected with God.

2. Relational Connection Points

This is the main strategy outlined in 1 Corinthians 9:19-24 that we briefly touched on before.

- Become like a Jew or Gentile – national or racial relationships. How do we do that?

- Become like a Weak Person – circumstantial. The weak are those who lack power for a variety of circumstances eg. Poverty, illness, immaturity etc. How do we do that?
- Family - *“I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”* 2 Timothy 1:5, NIV. How do we do that?
- Work – Outside of our families and friends, our work relationships are some of the most significant and time hungry ones that we have. How do we do that?

3. Non relational Connections Points

Asking a question of a stranger – John 4:4-9 – even if societal norms say you shouldn’t.

Intentionally at God’s prompting – Acts 8:29 ff.

Despite the fact that the initial connection point is not relational, it soon develops into one if the gospel takes hold.

I am surprised that many of our efforts focus on these non relational connection points when we have so many relational ones that we often haven’t explored.

However this does not discount this as a valid area of connection. It is just not as fertile a field as the relational one.

An Invitation Strategy

There are **many roles** for disciples to work at in the journey of a lost one to becoming a disciple of Jesus and their development as a disciple.

However there is **one role** for everyone and it is the role of **invitation**. Everyone can invite. From age 8 to 80 everyone can invite.

Invitation is used by Jesus to describe the kingdom.

Positively - *“Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.”*
Matthew 22:9, NIV.

Negatively - *“I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.”* *Matthew 25:43, NIV.*

The key question then is, “What do I invite people to?” This will depend on your situation and on the situation of the people you are reaching out to. We will look at this in the next section.

Evangelistic Strategy in 21st Century Sydney

Where are our Connection Points?

Where are most of the connection points with non-disciples in our lives?

Along the paths of our lives ie. our neighborhoods, our affinity groups, our workplaces, our commuter paths, our cyber world social networks etc.

Therefore this is where our evangelistic energy as individuals and as a church should focus

NOTE: This has **not** been the strategy of many who have advocated and practiced a “church focused” strategy. The fact of the matter is that you will meet very few of your non-disciple friends etc. at church meetings. To focus our evangelistic energy on church meetings is like a fisherman fishing in pond where there are no fish. Our church gatherings are important but they are rarely the initial connection point for non-believers. That doesn’t mean we won’t have lots of them in our meetings, just that those meetings won’t be the initial connection points.

All these connection points are mostly characterized by existing relationships. Even the most isolated of Christians has these connection points. Write down a list of 10 people this month whom you will personally have contact with in the course of your life.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Think about these people.

- Their situations.
- Their needs, both perceived and unperceived.
- Pray about them and how you can begin helping them connect with the gospel of Jesus.
- Start to look at these people differently.
- They are people God has sent into your life for you to help with the good news of Jesus. No matter who they are, they need Jesus.
- Don't judge them. You would be surprised at the sort of people who come to faith. Consider Paul the apostle. He was a Jewish terrorist when he came to faith.
- Pray again about each person (by name if you know their name).

But what do I invite them to?

Invite them into your life. Depending on the situation you might invite them to

1. Dinner at your place
2. A BBQ with friends
3. A drink after work
4. A day trip to the beach, mountains etc.
5. An activity of your children and theirs.
6. A movie, sports event, shopping trip etc.
7. A cup of coffee etc. at your place or out and about
8. A small group church activity
9. Sunday Church
10. Etc. Etc.

The invite is the beginning of the journey. Get ready for the ride.

A Connection Approach

Be a friend. Jesus has called us to love people. These people that he has allowed into our lives are not contacts, prospects or potential conquests. They are people and they need a friend.

Learn how to be a friend. Some of us are really good at making friends and some of us are not. If you are in the latter category, learn from the people you know who can make friends readily. Watch them. Ask them how. It often is not something that comes naturally and you have to learn it to complete the task Jesus has given you.

Is Jesus your friend? Often Christians do not react well to this challenge to make friends. One reason for that may be that their spiritual life is not characterized by a relationship with Jesus as a friend. Too many Christians have a transactional relationship with Jesus. He does things for them and they do things for Him. God calls us into a deeper relationship, one of a friend. This a transformational relationship. Friends change people's lives. Transactional relationships rarely do.

NOT a Teacher/Student relationship – I am not saying that teaching isn't going on. It must happen. However I am talking about the dynamic of the connection with people. We make a mistake when we begin (and end) with the "I am your teacher and I am going to teach you the truth" approach. It really reminds me of how some religious people in the apostle Paul's life. *"Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; 18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth--" Romans 2:17-20, NIV.*

Love people. It's a choice. Choose to love people. Just like God chose to love you. As ugly as you were, God chose to love you. As ignorant of God's ways, God chose to love you. In the context of that love, He taught you and continues to teach you. He says things to you that you will only take from a friend.

Addendum

George's Journey in Evangelism

I have seen evangelism presented in the kingdom in some strange and wonderful ways. While there are elements of truth in each of these, they are fundamentally flawed.

Salesmanship Evangelism – along with all the jargon of the sales techniques and the inherent climate of manipulation.

Osmosis Evangelism – the practice of “shining our light” without actually talking about Jesus in the hope that people will be drawn to Jesus. This is the “no offence” approach or the “no evangelism” approach of evangelism. It is hoped people will become Christians through some form of osmosis.

Lollypop Evangelism – Promising the solving of all your problems if you come to Jesus. Included in this approach is the promise of wealth and prosperity. In some extreme cases the promise is for physical health.

Our Church is the Best Church Evangelism – One extreme example of this approach is proclaiming that one's church is the only true church so you should join it. Another is to proclaim that one's church is the most successful (most baptisms, best worship, best discipleship process, best coffee etc.) and you should join it. A lot of talk about the church and very little talk of Jesus.

Cathedral Evangelism - This is the “if you build it they will come” idea. Build impressive state of the art facilities and rely upon the spectacular shows to draw the lost to Jesus. Nothing wrong with state of the art facilities or engaging worship but when a church relies on “impressing” people into Christ they appear to be at odds with the approach of Jesus in the New Testament.

I mention all these because I have subscribed to each of them at one point in my life in Christ. They are not completely faulty but I have found that each of them dysfunctional enough to consider them out of sync with the purpose and example of the kingdom we find in the New Testament.

People have come to Christ in the context of each of these ways. I became a disciple of Jesus through one of them. I'm not trying to find the one true evangelistic strategy, the so-called “silver bullet”. I am trying to get behind all the hype, false standards and over reaching to get to a strategy of evangelism that represents the kingdom of Jesus. It is a personal journey and some might see it as unnecessary as they are doing quite well and that's okay. I am not trying to judge the church, that's God's job. I am trying to personally navigate this essential and vital part of the kingdom.