



Models of



EVANGELISM



Priscilla Pope-Levison

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INTRODUCTION

Bathsheba Kingsley was charged in 1741 with stealing a horse and riding away on the Sabbath without her husband's consent, which she did in order to preach the gospel in neighboring towns. She justified herself to the church council, which included Jonathan Edwards, by claiming that she had received a revelation from heaven and was merely obeying God's will. Bathsheba Kingsley was an evangelist.

Sarah Osborn hosted a women's prayer group for over twenty years. By 1766, the group grew to as many as 350 people, including men, women, children, and enslaved people, who flocked to her house for nightly prayer meetings and religious conversation. Sarah Osborn was an evangelist.

Harriet Livermore sang and preached to a standing-room-only crowd in Congress on January 8, 1827, with President John Quincy Adams in attendance. She preached to Congress three more times between 1831 and 1843. Harriet Livermore was an evangelist.

Jarena Lee traveled by foot, stagecoach, and boat from her home in Philadelphia throughout New England, north into Canada, and west into Ohio. She preached wherever a location presented itself—in churches, schools, camp meetings, barns, and homes. Her 1836 autobiography was the first published by an African-American woman. Jarena Lee was an evangelist.

Isaac Hecker converted to Catholicism in 1844. He and five other American-born priests formed the Congregation of St. Paul (or the Paulists) in 1858, as an apostolate to non-Catholics. They held evangelistic missions throughout the country. Isaac Hecker was an evangelist.

Jennie Fowler Willing never birthed her own child, but she encouraged women, especially mothers, to utilize their influence and authority in the service of evangelism. In an article published in 1896, Fowler Willing extolled the mother's power in evangelism. "Among the mightiest of undiscovered forces," she advised, "the mother's power for good ranks all."¹ Jennie Fowler Willing was an evangelist.

Mattie Perry founded Elhanan Training Institute in Marion, North Carolina, for penniless students called into evangelistic work. Her curriculum provided them with Bible classes and practical training. Working with her father and brother, she refurbished, furnished, and readied twenty-five rooms of the derelict Catawba Hotel in time for the watch-night dedication service on December 31, 1898. Mattie Perry was an evangelist.

Emma Ray and Mother Ryther were an interracial pair who visited brothels in Seattle's wharf district on the cusp of the twentieth century. Brothel owners gave them permission to visit and quieted the dancing and music so that Ray and Ryther could hold evangelistic meetings in the parlor. Emma Ray and Mother Ryther were evangelists.

Anna Prosser was healed after living with a disability for ten years. Armed with renewed health, she began to volunteer in a Woman's Christian Temperance Union rescue mission in Buffalo, New York, and she convened a Saturday evening Bible study for laboring men. Each Christmas she provided as lavish a feast for them as she could afford. When she felt called to open a new mission, the men elected to go and assist her. From then on, when talking about the mission, Prosser used the pronoun *we* to signify their partnership. Anna Prosser was an evangelist.

David Goldstein, a convert to Catholicism from Judaism, co-founded the Catholic Truth Guild in 1917 as a traveling evangelistic organization run and staffed by Catholic laypeople. With support from Boston's archbishop, William O'Connell, Goldstein traveled in a customized Model-T throughout New England in the summer and across the continent to California in the winter, holding outdoor evangelistic meetings along the way. David Goldstein was an evangelist.

Raymond Leong emigrated from southern China to Detroit and worked in a hand-laundry business. After becoming a Christian in 1953, thanks to the

1. Jennie Fowler Willing, "The Mother's Power in Evangelism," *Guide to Holiness* (December 1896): 220.

outreach efforts of local churches, he recruited other Chinese laundry workers to join group Bible studies. These evangelistic efforts led to the founding of the Detroit Chinese Bible Church. Raymond Leong was an evangelist.

Iva Dardanet spoke to her neighbor at the nondescript backyard clothesline of a post–World War II tract home built on the potato fields of Long Island, New York. In her strong Southern accent she asked, “How about a nice cold Coca-Cola?” Her neighbor, Norma Levison, accepted the neighborly gesture and within a matter of months made a commitment to Christ. Iva Dardanet was an evangelist.

Members of Oak Lane Presbyterian Church rang doorbells in their downtown Philadelphia neighborhood in the late 1960s for their visitation evangelism program. This led to neighborly compassion—for example, purchasing hospital beds for the suffering—as the church demonstrated love to its Philadelphia neighbors in practical ways. Oak Lane was changed in the process: they became a more ethnically diverse church that reflected the changing demographics of their neighborhood. The members of Oak Lane and their pastor, Richard Armstrong, were evangelists.

Rodney Woo—while serving as senior pastor of Wilcrest Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, from 1992 to 2010—led its transformation from an all-white church to one that is thirty-five times more racially diverse than the average congregation in the United States. “Wilcrest Baptist Church is God’s multi-ethnic bridge that draws all people to Jesus Christ who transforms them from unbelievers to missionaries,” announces the church’s vision statement.² Rodney Woo and the members of Wilcrest Baptist Church are evangelists.

Samira Izadi Page, born a Shia Muslim, fled Iran in 1989. Eventually, she crossed into the United States at the Texas border by walking through the Rio Grande and turned herself in at the border checkpoint. In Dallas, she became a Christian, earned two seminary degrees, and founded Gateway of Grace, an organization that mobilizes congregations to connect with refugees. Samira Izadi Page is an evangelist.

According to a recent Barna Group study, “A startling six in 10 Americans believe that any ‘attempt to convert others’ to one’s own faith is ‘extreme.’ More than eight out of 10 ‘nones’ say so! To be clear: A majority of US adults, and the vast majority of non-religious adults (83%), believe that

2. “Nations Reaching Nations,” Wilcrest Baptist Church, 2020, <http://wilcrestbaptist.org>.

evangelism is religiously extreme.”³ That majority may just be right. After all, Bathsheba Kingsley stole a horse—committing a crime to be an evangelist. Harriet Livermore, after preaching to Congress for the last time, spent all her money traveling four times to Jerusalem to evangelize there and to witness to the impending, literal return of Jesus; she died alone in a Philadelphia almshouse and was buried, as she had requested, in an unmarked grave. Richard Armstrong, the pastor at Oak Lane Presbyterian Church and convener of its visitation evangelism program in downtown Philadelphia, made no bones about the fact that evangelism can be extreme. “The first effect of our Christian witness,” cautions Armstrong, “may not be reconciliation but alienation, not peace but a sword, not confession but conflict. That is the risk we must take, for our calling is to be God’s agents of reconciliation in such a world.”⁴

Yes, the majority of American adults may be right when they claim that evangelism is religiously extreme. Yet they may be off the mark as well. Evangelism is not inevitably extreme. Sarah Osborn did not set out to orchestrate a multiracial meeting for hundreds of people. What she did was open her home for the women in town to gather in prayer. Iva Dardanet asked a neighbor if she wanted a Coke. That conventional invitation led to invitations to church and eventually to my mother-in-law’s lifelong, durable, vibrant faith. Rodney Woo’s vision for a multicultural church circulated in his veins even before he was born. His half-Chinese father served as a missionary to Hispanic people, African-American people, and Vietnamese immigrants in the border town of Port Arthur, Texas. Woo’s multicultural experience intensified as he attended an all African-American elementary and middle school. Woo would claim that it is only natural—not religiously extreme at all—to expect churches to cross racial and ethnic lines in their communities.

The majority of Americans, then, are both right and wrong. Evangelism can be both—sometimes extreme, sometimes not. Either way, there remains something invigorating about it. Being actively engaged in evangelism encourages the evangelist to keep her own faith alive and resilient because she is motivated by a sense of optimism, of leaning into the possibilities that materialize when she engages others with the Christian gospel. Consider Mattie Perry, who recognized that evangelists and missionaries need training before heading out into full-time ministry. When no one else stepped up, Perry, despite a lack

3. Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age: How Christians’ Approach to Sharing Their Faith Has Changed in 25 Years* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018), 23.

4. Richard Stoll Armstrong, *Service Evangelism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 72.

of education and financial backing, founded a religious training school for students who could not afford a college or university education. Consider, too, Anna Prosser, how she wanted to give to others in gratitude for her healing after living ten years with a disability, so she spent her time and resources at her local rescue mission with those who were utterly destitute. Also consider Samira Izadi Page, who took her experience as a refugee and transformed it into an organization that serves—in the name of Jesus Christ—refugees of all faiths who have settled in Dallas, Texas.

The history of evangelism is a diverse litany. Male and female, rich and poor, itinerant and local, Catholic and Protestant, extreme and natural, public and private. Evangelists come in all shapes and sizes.



The English word *evangelism* is not so much a translation as a modified transliteration of the Greek word *euangelion*, which is composed of two parts: the preposition *eu*, meaning “good” (as in *euphoria* or *euphemism*); and the root *angelos*, meaning “angel” or “messenger.” The content of evangelism is the gospel, the *euangelion*, the good news. The one who brings good news, the messenger, is an evangelist, a *euangelistēs*.

Jesus brought a message of good news, the *euangelion*. The first mention of Jesus’s message, depicted in the earliest Gospel, uses precisely this word: “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news [*euangelion*] of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’” (Mark 1:14–15). The word *euangelion* occurs twice in this encapsulation of Jesus’s vocation: Jesus proclaimed the good news of God (*to euangelion tou theou*) and told people to “repent, and believe in the good news” (*metanoete kai pisteuete en tō euangeliō*).

Although we can trace the history and practice of evangelism to Jesus, definitions of evangelism vary widely. D. T. Niles, a Sri Lankan leader in the mid-twentieth-century ecumenical movement, set out one of the simplest definitions of evangelism: evangelism is “one beggar telling another beggar where to get food.”⁵ Southern Baptist evangelism professor Delos Miles offered a broad

5. Here is a fuller context for this famous line, in a chapter titled “The Non-Christian”: “Evangelism is witness. It is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food. The Christian does not offer out of his bounty. He has no bounty. He is simply guest at his Master’s table and, as evangelist, he calls others too. The evangelistic relation is to be ‘alongside of’ not ‘over-against.’ The Christian

definition, based in part on Mark 1:14–15: “Evangelism is being, doing, and telling the gospel of the kingdom of God, in order that by the power of the Holy Spirit persons and structures may be converted to the lordship of Jesus Christ.”⁶ Central to Miles’s definition is the directive that evangelism can be transformative for both individuals and structures. Essential, too, is the presence of the Holy Spirit, which signals that evangelism is not a mechanical process.

Contemporary author and speaker Martha Grace Reese derived a definition based on interviews with over one thousand individuals from hundreds of churches: “At its core, evangelism is people sharing with others their personal understandings that life is better, richer, truer if one has faith in Christ and lives in a faith community.”⁷

Pope Francis offers yet another definition, highlighting the centrality of hospitality in the task of evangelism. “Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone,” he advises. “Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet.”⁸

No one definition of evangelism is universally accepted, yet common to those presented here is the promise of evangelism that issues invitations, forges relationships, relieves hunger, quenches thirst, restores fruitfulness, and reconciles estranged parties. If a single biblical text can encapsulate this vision, it is Isaiah 52:7:

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

In this lovely encomium, the verb *euangelizō* (“to bring good news”) appears twice in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). The

stands alongside the non-Christian and points to the Gospel, the holy action of God.” D. T. Niles, *That They May Have Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), 96.

6. Delos Miles, *Introduction to Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983), 47.

7. Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006), 6.

8. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican Publishing House, November 24, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, III.15.

messenger brings good news of peace and salvation—which, in the context of Isaiah 40–55, is restoration to wholeness and return from the harsh realities of Babylonian exile. In essence, the promise is of a return to a place of safety and prosperity, which, when we think about it, is a splendid description of the purpose of evangelism.

The eight models of evangelism selected for this book exemplify the broad expanse that makes up evangelism.⁹ In short, the models vary dramatically. Think here about the difference between personal evangelism (a one-on-one experience, often among friends) and a revival (a highly orchestrated, typically large rally focused on a message proclaimed to everyone simultaneously). Or ponder the difference between media evangelism, which employs the latest in technological advances, and liturgical evangelism, which is grounded in millennia of worship and catechetical traditions. Given this wide spectrum—this alone is one of the contributions of this book—each reader will no doubt gravitate to some models, resist others, and perhaps (and I encourage this) combine elements of several models, in concert with one another, to develop a distinctive model of evangelism uniquely suited to a particular context.

These eight models are organized from the most intimate to those with the widest possible reach:

- Personal: developing a one-on-one relationship that provides a comfortable context for evangelism
- Small group: convening eight to twelve people for a short-term, focused study on the gospel
- Visitation: knocking on doors, getting to know neighbors' needs and religious inclinations, and initiating conversations about the gospel
- Liturgical: integrating evangelism into the church's worship as it follows the Christian calendar

9. I chose evangelism models that met three criteria: (1) demonstrated longevity, having been practiced for at least a generation and in most cases much longer; (2) provided a substantial body of literature that discussed four foundations, biblical, theological, historical, and practical; and (3) represented a significant number of proponents. In some cases, when several models closely overlapped, I merged them into one model. For instance, in personal evangelism, I integrated lifestyle evangelism as step 1 in the model and discipleship evangelism as step 4. The eight models discussed here do not exhaust the potential models; nevertheless, they represent a wide, diverse, and timeless swath of the ways evangelists have engaged—and continue to engage—in evangelism.

- Church growth: establishing new ports of entry that receptive people can easily join in order to be introduced to the gospel
- Prophetic: challenging individuals and structures to pursue the gospel in word and deed and in its social, political, and economic fullness
- Revival: an organized, crowd-based gathering that typically includes music, an evangelistic message, an invitation, and follow-up
- Media: appropriating media ranging from the printed word to the internet for an evangelistic purpose

The organization of this book is straightforward with a chapter devoted to each model. Each chapter follows the same format:

- opening with an anecdote or observation to set the stage for a discussion of that model
- analyzing the primary *biblical* bases of that model
- exploring at least two *theological* themes that anchor each model
- conveying a brief *historical* discussion of several notable, principally North American, practitioners of that model
- providing a step-by-step *practical* breakdown to facilitate implementation of that model
- offering an appraisal of each model

This book, then, provides a study of eight influential models of evangelism under these same rubrics: biblical, theological, historical, and practical.

The analysis in each chapter is eclectic, by which I mean that the presentation of each model is drawn from a wide, representative range of proponents and approaches rather than from only one approach or proponent as *the* representation of the model. For instance, in my analysis of visitation evangelism, I draw from James Kennedy's highly orchestrated, salvation-centered Evangelism Explosion alongside Richard Armstrong's service-oriented model. Both represent visitation evangelism, but they represent it in noticeably different ways. This approach allows the reader to view a model from a multiplicity of perspectives.

When proponents of these models did not provide adequate biblical, theological, historical, or practical underpinnings, I supplemented and strengthened their approaches by filling in gaps and underscoring emphases. You will see

traces of my hand in the “Biblical Foundations” sections, where I include significant supplementary study of texts that have often been cited without enough comment on original languages, historical context, and literary artistry.

You will see more traces in the “Theological Foundations” sections because I frequently found the theological articulation of these models to be somewhat superficial. Evangelism falls under the rubric of practical theology, but these models, on the whole, tend to lean toward the practical at the expense of the theological. To provide consistency of theological reflection, I often incorporated insights from Avery Dulles’s *Models of the Church* to draw out theological implications related to ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church). Dulles’s book also served as the inspiration for this book’s title, *Models of Evangelism*.

You will see traces of my hand in the “Historical Foundations” sections too, since I am first and foremost a historian. I have analyzed these models with what I hope will be seen as historical perspicacity and insight.

In the “Practical Foundations” section of each chapter, you will see my hand largely in selection and organization. These models, on the whole, do not lack practical strategies, but no one, to my knowledge, has provided a comprehensive, organized, and accessible analysis of how to implement each of them. *Models of Evangelism* does.

My hand is heaviest toward the conclusion of each chapter, in the “Appraisal” section, in which I raise several questions about each model. These questions are intended to provide an evenhanded evaluation of each model. Then, to facilitate interaction by the reader, each chapter closes with five reflection questions. The last question is always the same: *Which other model of evangelism best complements this model?* This question is essential to the book—and the ongoing work of evangelism—because the impression this book may give is that evangelism requires the mastery of a single model (personal, small group, visitation, liturgical, church growth, prophetic, revival, media). On the contrary, a vital, promising future for evangelism will happen only as individual models combust to create a model uniquely suited to each particular context. Such a combustion is the promise and potential of *Models of Evangelism*.

ONE

PERSONAL

To envision how effective a model of evangelism can be, in which one person shares her faith one-on-one with another, simply recall a time when you got caught up in a friend's enthusiasm for the amazing food she ate last night at a trendy downtown restaurant, or the movie he saw over the weekend that you just *have* to see, or—yes, this is true—a revolutionary new hair product, as Kevin Harney experienced: “I once saw a woman come up to her friend and say, ‘Smell my hair.’ It seemed like a strange request. But to my surprise, the other woman leaned over and took a big whiff. This led to an extensive conversation about a particular hair-care product. They chatted for a good ten minutes about it. The first woman touted the benefits of her new shampoo with great enthusiasm and passion. The second listened, asked questions, and seemed quite intrigued.” Harney, an advocate of personal evangelism, goes on to make the point that “we evangelize all the time. . . . The truth is, when we are zealous about something, when we really love it, we talk about it. We invite others to experience it. We want to share the joy.”¹

It sounds so easy, but talking about a hair-care product or a restaurant is much easier—and typically far less liable to resistance on the part of the hearer—than conversing about religion. Who doesn't want to eat a delicious

1. Kevin Harney, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 13–14.

meal, watch a good movie, or have hair with, oh, that perfect luster and bounce? But religion? Faith? Christianity? A recent study by the Barna Group documented two reasons in particular why people do not talk often about faith: avoidance and ambivalence.

- Religious conversations always seem to create tension or arguments: 28%
- I'm put off by how religion has been politicized: 17%
- I don't feel like I know enough to talk about religious or spiritual topics: 17%²

The conundrum that avoidance and ambivalence presents is that fewer and fewer Christians in the United States are willing to engage in what is the most effective model of evangelism. As Tom Stebbins writes, “The gospel spreads most effectively across an existing network of trust relationships.”³ What then to do? If you are someone who resists the very thought of personal evangelism, I would ask you to suspend your hesitation, put down your crossed arms, and quiet your criticisms just long enough to read carefully the rest of the chapter, in which you may find some surprising, even admirable, qualities of personal evangelism that you have yet to encounter or consider.

Biblical Foundations

Though it is possible to find countless examples in Scripture of individuals sharing good news one-on-one, there are enough illustrations in John's Gospel to prompt us to begin there. In John 1:39, Jesus responds to a question from Andrew, one of John the Baptist's disciples, by inviting him to “come and see” where he is staying. Andrew then finds (*heuriskei*) and brings (*ēgagen*)—the Greek verb *agō*, perhaps better translated as “led”—his brother, Simon Peter, and the two brothers end up becoming two of the twelve disciples (1:40–42). In the next verse—the next day chronologically—Jesus finds (*heuriskei*) Philip and calls him to follow (v. 43). Philip responds affirmatively and then invites a more skeptical Nathanael—who cannot believe that anything good could

2. “Why People Are Reluctant to Discuss Faith,” Barna.com, August 14, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/reasons-for-reluctance>. These are three of the top four responses given.

3. Tom Stebbins, *Friendship Evangelism by the Book: Applying First-Century Principles to Twenty-First-Century Relationships* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1995), 72.

come from Nazareth—with the simple words, “Come and see” (v. 46), which Jesus had spoken earlier.

So many simple words in this first chapter of John’s Gospel, words that encapsulate the essence of personal evangelism. *Come and see. Found. Led. Found. Come and see.* In the first chapter of John’s Gospel, the good news spreads one by one via personal invitation among friends and family, underscoring a central thrust of personal evangelism: the gospel spreads most effectively and efficiently across an existing network of relationships.

Two chapters later, Jesus interacts with another person, Nicodemus, “a leader of the Jews” (John 3:1). This time, Nicodemus is the one who initiates the encounter, with questions he wants to discuss (vv. 1–21). After Jesus’s crucifixion, Nicodemus shows up with a large amount of spices and helps Joseph of Arimathea place Jesus’s body in the tomb (19:38–42). Whether Nicodemus ever comes to believe in Jesus as the Messiah is a question left unanswered; his response in this respect is not at all like Andrew’s and Philip’s. The ambiguity that marks Nicodemus’s final appearance in John’s Gospel is something for which we can be grateful, since it is true to life: spiritual conversations can be tricky and tentative, and they often end without a clear decision, a certain conversion.

In the fourth chapter of John’s Gospel, one of the most successful examples of Jesus as an evangelist occurs in a most unlikely, even unseemly, encounter with a woman whose sexual promiscuity is legendary. In Jesus’s longest conversation, he talks alone with the Samaritan woman at the Sychar well in the heat of the noon sun (4:1–42). Jesus prompts the conversation with a simple request. “Give me a drink,” he says (v. 7). The woman proceeds to ask several questions, which Jesus answers, and the conversation continues, touching on topics from her personal life to divisive religious issues. When the disciples return, the woman leaves her water jar at the well and rushes back to town with these words on her lips: “[He] told me everything I have ever done” (v. 29). As a result of her testimony, the townspeople come to Jesus to hear more for themselves. Jesus stays for two days, and many, whose curiosity was piqued initially because of the woman’s words, come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

The Gospel of John is not the only New Testament book to offer clear models of personal evangelism.⁴ The book of Acts, which narrates the story

4. More examples abound throughout the Gospels, such as Jesus calling up to Zacchaeus as he crouches in the tree for a better view (Luke 19:1–10) and the many people Jesus heals, like the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1–20). In these stories, Jesus meets people where they are

of the early church, contains a breathtaking account of personal evangelism involving Philip and an Ethiopian eunuch (8:26–40). Note Philip’s responsiveness to God’s messenger. Immediately and obediently, he gets up and goes to the wilderness road that stretches from Jerusalem to Gaza. Immediately, obediently, and swiftly, he follows the Spirit’s direction to go over to the chariot—by running toward it (vv. 29–30). He opens the conversation with a simple question: “Do you understand what you are reading?” (v. 30). The eunuch reacts, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (v. 31). Then he invites Philip into the chariot to talk further.

Note how Philip allows the conversation to unfold at its own tempo. The eunuch, not Philip, raises the question, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” (v. 34). Philip honors the question and connects what they read in the Isaiah scroll to the good news about Jesus. He begins precisely where the eunuch is and deftly leads the conversation from the prophet Isaiah to Jesus Christ.

Philip does not take charge of anything in this story. He reacts eagerly to the Spirit’s prompting to approach the chariot. Then, after asking a simple opening question, he responds to the eunuch’s request. Philip’s ability to respond rather than control the conversation appears especially clearly in the eunuch’s request to be baptized. Without a word from Philip, the eunuch commands the chariot to stop; the two of them then head into the water together, where Philip baptizes him and leaves the eunuch to continue on his way rejoicing. What a story to inspire a responsive and supple approach to personal evangelism!

Picture this pair sitting side by side, a black man and a (relatively) white man, a sexually crippled man (a eunuch) and a robust man with four daughters (Acts 21:9), bouncing along in a chariot on a desolate road, united solely by the scroll of Isaiah that is draped over their knees. It’s a sight to behold. . . . An unexpected pair, a shared scroll, an out-of-the-way location, yet at the very center of God’s work. One by unexpected one, the people of God grew. One by surprising one, the church of God was enriched. And why? Because Philip found himself in unexpected places, listened to the Spirit, was willing to take the initiative, open to questions and requests, and contented to sit and study scripture at another person’s pace.⁵

and addresses their need for healing, restitution, or further learning; they respond in turn by bringing others to encounter Jesus.

5. Jack Levison and Priscilla Pope-Levison, *How Is It with Your Soul?* (New York: United Methodist Women, 2014), 71.

Theological Foundations

Personal evangelism finds its orientation in two theological foci: Christology and Pneumatology. The christological aspect to which advocates of personal evangelism primarily appeal is the incarnation, the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus. Jesus, the divine Word who from the beginning was God, was born as one of us fully and bodily. John 1:14 offers a lovely, earthy image of Jesus's pitching his tent (*skēnoō*) in humanity's midst: "The Word became flesh and lived [*eskēnōsen*] among us."⁶ The related noun, *skēnē*, shows up in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where it refers to the tabernacle as the earthly place where God's presence dwelt.⁷ As God's glory shone from the tabernacle, so Jesus shone forth God's glory: "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (v. 14). Through his incarnation, Jesus became "a visual aid" for the invisible God.⁸ "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9).

Jesus was sent into the world to make known the invisible God. He entrusted and commissioned his disciples with the same task: to make the invisible God known in the world. God sent the Son, who in turn sent his followers to communicate the good news of God's salvation in the person of Jesus Christ (John 17:18). As Rebecca Manley Pippert writes, "God didn't send a telegram or shower evangelistic Bible study books from heaven or drop a million bumper stickers from the sky saying, 'Smile, Jesus loves you.' He sent a man, his Son, to communicate the message. His strategy hasn't changed. He still sends men and women—before he sends tracts and techniques—to change the world."⁹

Devotees of personal evangelism also identify the Holy Spirit as the divine instigator and guide for personal evangelism. We read in the previous section how the Holy Spirit directed Philip to his encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch

6. The Greek verb *skēnoō* can mean "to live," "to dwell," "to shelter," or "to pitch a tent." For instance, *eskēnōsen* (in Gen. 13:12 in the Septuagint) possesses the meaning of pitching a tent: "Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom." All English translations of the Septuagint are from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, trans. and ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

7. See Exod. 40:34–38 in the Septuagint.

8. Joseph Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 1993), 31.

9. Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 30.

(Acts 8:29–30). As with Philip, divinely ordained appointments can happen out of the blue. Years ago, during the last meal before Christmas break in a nearly empty college cafeteria, a friend of mine sat across the table from a fellow student whom he knew only in passing. He half-heartedly talked with her, hoping to finish his meal quickly to get on the road for home to relax after taking a slew of exams. Somehow the conversation veered to the topic of my friend's participation in a Bible study, and he ended up telling her about his yearlong pilgrimage to Christianity. After about fifteen minutes, my friend was startled to realize the student was actually interested in what he was saying. As they continued the conversation, my friend felt prompted to ask if she would like to pray to receive Christ. She said that she would. They prayed together, said goodbye, and never saw each other again. A wilderness road. A deserted college cafeteria.

Underlying this encounter is the conviction that the Holy Spirit inspires what to say, as my friend discovered. The evangelist is not on his or her own. A principal promise in the New Testament is that the Holy Spirit inspires testimony that points to Jesus. In Acts 1:8, for example, Jesus makes clear that the Holy Spirit will provide power to Jesus's disciples for their mission: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In a personal evangelism conversation, "the Spirit gives us both the words to say and the opportunity to say them. Our sensitivity to what to say and when to speak can be heightened by prayer and allowing ourselves to be led to those who are ready to hear the story of God's love."¹⁰

Equally foundational to this model is the belief that the Holy Spirit convicts people of their need for transformation. This is not something human beings can engender; transformation is left to the individual and the Holy Spirit. Our role is to help bring people to the point of decision, to accompany them through it, and to nurture them afterward. Think here of a progressive dinner: "Sharing the Good News of God's love at the point of conviction is like serving the last course of a progressive dinner. The Spirit has created the hunger. We simply serve the meal. . . . We are responsible for contacts, not for conviction. And even our contacts are made in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit."¹¹ Understanding the critical role of the Holy Spirit in personal

10. Duncan McIntosh, *The Everyday Evangelist* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1984), 15.

11. D. McIntosh, *Everyday Evangelist*, 54.

evangelism encourages us to witness to Jesus Christ with the sure knowledge that we are not alone and that the task does not rest only on our shoulders. This partnership with the Holy Spirit allows us to relax—and even to enjoy speaking to people about Jesus.

Historical Foundations

One of the most renowned evangelists of all time, the influencer of American revivalism for successive generations—including those of Billy Sunday and Billy Graham—became a Christian through personal evangelism. What an evangelist he would go on to become! Estimates put the number at one million converted under his preaching. To prepare for his revivals, he set up an efficient evangelistic organization that visited one city after another for weeks at a time. He modeled this same efficiency during what some consider his apex, the 1893 World's Fair Campaign.¹² Each day of the campaign, his organization sponsored as many as five meetings in scores of venues that included ten churches, seven halls, two theaters, and five tents. Determined to “beat the World's Fair” with electrifying, crowd-pleasing events, he, along with his hand-picked team of evangelists and several hundred other workers, kept up a breakneck pace. On a day touted as the campaign's best, September 23, 1893, his evangelistic organization scheduled “sixty-four different meetings held in forty-six places, with an estimated attendance of from sixty-two to sixty-four thousand people.”¹³

So how did Dwight L. Moody come to faith? Through the personal evangelism of his Sunday school teacher Edward Kimball. Moody had come to Chicago to work as a salesperson in his uncle's shoe store; the arrangement with his uncle included Moody's mandatory church attendance. After spending some time encouraging Moody to read the Bible and take it seriously, Kimball showed up at the shoe store on April 21, 1855. While Moody was putting away shoes in the back room, Kimball asked him point-blank to commit his life to Christ. He did and that very day Moody began sharing his faith with others. (Another wilderness road, by the way—the back room of a Chicago shoe store.)

Best known for his revivals, a model of evangelism we will explore in chapter 7, Moody also made a profound impact on young Christian leaders through Moody

12. Jean Miller Schmidt, *Souls or the Social Order: The Two-Party System in American Protestantism* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1991), 99; Thekla Ellen Joiner, *Sin in the City: Chicago and Revivalism, 1880–1920* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 85.

13. Joiner, *Sin in the City*, 106.

Bible Institute, as well as through his annual summer school for college students. This summer program sparked in attendees a commitment to evangelism and mission. John R. Mott, who attended the first summer school in 1886, wrote to his parents about his experience: “Here are 225 young men all of whom are solid Christians and moreover who are all imbued, with the YMCA characteristic—*work for souls*. I know of no other such meeting in this country at least. They are all impressed with the feeling of responsibility also—I doubt very much if there is a fellow here but what will enter some active religious work.”¹⁴

Personal evangelism to and by college students remains a backbone of campus ministry organizations like InterVarsity, Navigators, and Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ), to name a few. These organizations bolster personal evangelism by providing resources and training. One of the most widely used resources in personal evangelism, the Four Spiritual Laws, was developed in the mid-1960s by Bill Bright, founder of Cru.¹⁵

Fast-forward nearly a century to one of the most publicized conversions in the twentieth century, which occurred when a friend shared the gospel with Chuck Colson, former Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon. Colson described himself as a self-made man who found success in college and law school, in the Navy, and as a high-powered lawyer. After the presidential election in 1968, Nixon asked Colson to work at the White House, where they had offices next to each other. Four years later, after orchestrating a landslide victory for Nixon, Colson decided to return to his law practice, but his life took a dramatic detour at that point. He found himself feeling empty, “battle weary after being in the White House,” and of course, Watergate was on the horizon.¹⁶ Colson went to the home of his friend Tom Phillips, another self-

14. C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott (1865–1955): A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 26. Mott gave inspiration and leadership to the twentieth-century ecumenical movement and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946.

15. The Four Spiritual Laws consist of these statements: (1) God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life (John 3:16; 10:10); (2) Humanity is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, we cannot know and experience God’s love and plan for our lives (Rom. 3:23; 6:23); (3) Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for our sin. Through him we can know and experience God’s love and plan for our lives (John 14:6; Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3–6); and (4) We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God’s love and plan for our lives (John 1:12; 3:1–8; Eph. 2:8–9; Rev. 3:20). Bill Bright, “Would You Like to Know God Personally?,” Bright Media Foundation & Campus Crusade for Christ International, <http://www.4laws.com/laws/englishkgp/default.htm>.

16. The material for and quotations in these paragraphs, unless noted otherwise, come from a recorded speech Colson gave, which is available on YouTube. Chuck Colson, “Chuck Colson Gives His Testimony,” Columbia University, 2008, YouTube video, 34:27, https://www.youtube.com/view_playlist?p=B7F7760E341D34BE.

made man and the CEO of a large corporation. Colson immediately noticed a change in Phillips's demeanor; Phillips seemed completely at peace. The reason? "I've accepted Jesus Christ," Phillips told Colson, "and committed my life to him." Phillips then read aloud a chapter from C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*. The chapter he chose was "The Great Vice." "I listened to that and realized Lewis was writing about me," Colson said. "Everything I had done was all for me."

Colson left Phillips's home and tried to drive away but could not because he was weeping. Having grown up without any religious influence or "moral compass for the first 41 years of his life," he had never heard anybody talk like that about God.¹⁷ He sat in the car for about an hour and called out to God for the first time in his life. The next morning, he quickly located a copy of *Mere Christianity* and read it through. He got out a yellow legal pad and made two columns, one headed by the statement "There is a God" and the other by "There isn't a God," and he thought carefully through the questions that confronted him. Then, he made his decision. "In the quiet of being on the Maine coast away from Watergate, before I was considered a target of the investigation, I simply quietly surrendered my life to Christ."

In 1974, Colson ended up in Alabama's Maxwell Prison, a "culture shock going from an office next door to the president of the United States to a prison cell." There he began a Bible study with seven men—a motley group composed of three people convicted of substance abuse, a swindler, a car thief, a moonshiner, and the president's former Special Counsel. After serving seven months of his four-year term, he was released. He founded Prison Fellowship in 1976, a ministry serving inmates, the formerly incarcerated, and their families. He also became a leading advocate for criminal justice reform. In recognition of his work among inmates, Colson received the prestigious Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in 1993.¹⁸

Practical Foundations

There is a stark simplicity to personal evangelism. It requires no theological degree. It demands no need to control a conversation. It necessitates no

17. Jonathan Aitken, "Remembering Charles Colson, a Man Transformed," *Christianity Today*, April 21, 2012, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/aprilweb-only/charles-colson-aitken.html>.

18. "Our Approach," Prison Fellowship, <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/about>.

hyperspirituality. It certainly requires no sacred space. A cafeteria will do, as will a shoe store, a home, or a prison cell. At the same time, there are practical foundations that can enhance the practice of personal evangelism.

1. Begin with Lifestyle Evangelism

Lifestyle evangelism, a term coined by Joseph Aldrich, underscores the key point that for Christians, their lifestyle should communicate the gospel even before they speak a word. *Lifestyle* encompasses everything about us—what clothes we wear and what food we eat, where we live and work, whom we spend time with, and how we organize our day. Whether we recognize it or not, our lifestyle requires countless choices each and every day, and it communicates what we hold most dear, what we prioritize. Whether we recognize it or not, people notice our lifestyle and draw conclusions about us from it. This happens everywhere, including in the workplace. One bank employee relates how he started to watch Miles's life, who was one of the bank's vice presidents: "He asked Miles one day what made him so different. Miles invited him to meet him for breakfast and shared Jesus Christ with him."¹⁹ This story illustrates Aldrich's claim that "Christians are to be good news before they share the good news. The words of the gospel are to be incarnated before they are verbalized."²⁰

It goes without saying that integrity is key to a Christian's lifestyle. Actions and words on behalf of the gospel must be congruous with one's lifestyle, mutually enhancing and edifying. Hypocrisy communicates more loudly and forcefully than pious words, even the right pious words. Among those who reject Christianity, the reason most often given is that Christians are hypocrites; they act one way in public and another in private. The gospel is blunted by a lifestyle that lacks integrity. In North America, we have had the unfortunate and unwelcome opportunity to see this over and over again in the sexual misconduct and greed of prominent evangelists.

Hypocrisy does not belong only to the sphere of the famous and infamous. All Christians must be people of integrity. If our eye causes us to stumble, Jesus tells us, we should cut it out and throw it away (Mark 9:47). Hyperbole, to be sure, but to the point. Examples of hypocritical evangelists fill the pages of novels and the images of films. These are easy to spot and to

19. Stebbins, *Friendship Evangelism by the Book*, 153.

20. Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism*, 19–20.

parade as public knowledge. But no less significant is the integrity that attracts unbelievers in the normal course of life, far from the roar of revival tents, television shows, and podcasts. We demonstrate the good news through our lifestyle, when we turn toward a neighbor who is from a different ethnicity, class, culture, country, language, or political party; when we demonstrate compassion; when we run toward chariots; when we oversee a bank or an office with honesty; and when we locate ourselves in the company of addicts, a swindler, a car thief, and a moonshiner. Integrity is an essential ingredient in a lifestyle that evangelizes.

2. *Raise Your Evangelistic Temperature*

“Every follower of Jesus has an evangelistic temperature,” Harney explains. “It can be hot, cold, or somewhere in the middle. This temperature impacts the way we live and interact with those who are far from God.”²¹ The evangelistic temperature of many American Christians is cool and growing even cooler, according to a Barna Group study. When Christians were asked in 1993 about their agreement with the statement “Every Christian has a responsibility to share the gospel,” 89 percent of respondents agreed. In 2018, the same statement received only 64 percent agreement, which indicates a 25 percent cooling off in evangelistic temperature over twenty-five years.²² Blame for a downturn in evangelism often falls on the caricature of a hard-core, overbearing evangelist, but the reality is different—and more home grown. Evangelism is a topic and a practice that Christians want nothing to do with; they remain reluctant, even embarrassed, to talk about their faith to anyone.

How can we Christians move beyond this aversion to personal evangelism? One place to begin is with an honest assessment of your evangelistic temperature. Think numerically along a scale of one to ten, with one being “Ice Cold (personal evangelism is never on your radar screen, and you are extremely apprehensive about it)” and ten being “Sizzling Hot (personal evangelism is your daily default setting).”²³ Where are you currently on the scale? Being truthful at the outset, when it comes to personal evangelism, provides a baseline for gauging later on whether you have become warmer bit by bit, as you implement the practical foundations that follow.

21. Harney, *Organic Outreach*, 62.

22. Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age: How Christians’ Approach to Sharing Their Faith Has Changed in 25 Years* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018), 18.

23. Harney, *Organic Outreach*, 63.

One way to warm up your evangelistic temperature is to invest more deeply in your own spiritual life by developing spiritual disciplines. Richard Peace explains: “Conscious spiritual formation as part of one’s training to be an evangelist and as part of one’s lifestyle as an evangelist would yield a depth of spirituality that would impact positively the work of evangelism.”²⁴ Daily prayer. Daily Scripture reading. Participation in a community of faith that challenges you to be a Christian in less comfortable circumstances. Praying on a regular basis for the spiritually uninterested or disconnected people you know, with whom you cross paths. As a reminder to pray for these people, post a list someplace where you will see it throughout the day.²⁵ Pray especially that the Holy Spirit, as we discussed above, will prepare them—and *you*—for a faith-related conversation.

Another way to warm up your evangelistic temperature is to seek out those who have a high evangelistic temperature and listen to their stories. Perhaps accompany them on an errand or in a situation where they are engaged in personal evangelism. Become an informal protégé. Then be ready to act, because their encouragement and experience may be contagious.

3. Foster the Relationship

Building a relationship of trust, credibility, and communication through your presence is fundamental to personal evangelism. Through this relationship, you will be able to demonstrate your love, care, and respect for others by listening to them and getting to know them better. My mother-in-law cultivated relationships with many people through all sorts of venues, including “The Pajama League” at Mid-Island Bowl on Long Island, which in the 1960s consisted primarily of mothers who bowled while their kids were in school. In that league, she met Joan and Mary. They became friends. Friends for years to come. Mom invited them to a retreat at a rustic church camp in the Catskill Mountains. She invited them to join a Bible study of eight to ten women that met around her dining room table every Tuesday morning. She invited them to her daughter’s wedding at a church where her family worshiped, and Joan and Mary were struck by its simplicity and authenticity. Finally, after years of friendship and hospitality, both Mary and Joan came to faith, becoming devoted Christians.

24. Richard Peace, “Evangelism and Spiritual Formation,” *Theology, News & Notes* 51, no. 3 (October 2004): 11–12.

25. For a resource on prayer, see Levison and Pope-Levison, *How Is It with Your Soul?*, 7–27.

Then there were Doug and Helen, whom she met while selling Avon products. A knock on their door led to an invitation to her home and an evening Bible study. There were also Sallie and John, who would drive my father-in-law home from the train station after a long day in Manhattan. Mom invited them in for something cold to drink in the summer, something warm in the winter. This led to further conversations, friendship, and their lives transforming to follow Jesus Christ.

It may be tempting to shy away from personal evangelism in favor of keeping the relationship light and friendly. After all, discussing religion, like discussing politics, can be extremely thorny and tense, and we want to avoid making others feel awkward around us. Yet we must also recognize something else: often, this disquiet is our own and not our friend's at all. If this is a relationship in which we care about each other, then the other person may well want to hear about and understand what is most important to you.

If you feel discomfort, remember, too, that you have been praying for your friend and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life—and in yours. You can, therefore, trust that the Holy Spirit is present and the ground plowed.

4. *Share the Gospel*

There comes a time, in this model, to share the gospel; at that point, there are many ways to proceed. We will consider a few here.

Ask questions. Begin with an open-ended question, like Philip's simple one with the Ethiopian eunuch: "Do you understand . . . ?" Questions alleviate the impression that you are preaching at someone or proselytizing.²⁶ Questions are invitational; they set up the conversation as a dialogue. These sorts of questions probe gently yet persistently: *What did religion mean to you as a child, and what does it mean now? What is your image of God? At what point are you in your spiritual pilgrimage?*²⁷ *What do you think about Christians and Christianity?* Your friend will in turn ask you questions, perhaps these

26. The ecumenical movement defines proselytism as "whatever violates the right of the human person . . . to be free from every type of physical coercion, moral restraint or psychological pressure which could deprive a person or a community of freedom of judgment and responsible choice." *Common Witness: A Study Document of the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches*, WCC Mission Series 1 (Geneva: WCC, 1984), 24–25.

27. Aldrich calls this the "pilgrimage" question and claims that it works when other questions do not. Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism*, 193.

same questions, and your conversation about the gospel will develop into a rhythm of asking and answering questions.²⁸

Tell your faith story. Another way to engage in personal evangelism is to tell the story of how you have experienced God in your life and why you decided to follow Jesus Christ. Duncan McIntosh writes, “It is a good exercise for both our faith and our memories to recall how we realized and now realize our part in God’s story. . . . Each of your answers may be a thread which could connect you to someone with similar ideas and images who may need to hear the gospel.”²⁹ (This story is often called a *testimony*, but that’s a churchy-sounding word that can put people off from the outset.) Be sure to emphasize God’s actions in your story more than your own part so that you point to God as the trustworthy one. This approach to telling your story within God’s all-encompassing story imparts a sense of humility because it is not all about you. At the same time, it is hard to refute or debate your story of God’s saving grace, since it is peculiarly your own. As James Kennedy relates, “No one can argue with your own experience of Christ. It is your own story, told in your own words.”³⁰ Because it is your story, you are its incarnation. In the words of Delos Miles, “You give flesh and blood and reality to the good news.”³¹

Use a rubric. Different from and yet complementary to the first two approaches is to introduce the gospel in a brief, often prescribed format. Several popular condensations include the Romans Road,³² the Four Spiritual Laws,³³ and the bridge diagram.³⁴ These programmatic formats provide helpful touchstones that can easily be expanded when there is time and openness. If these seem too canned or condensed or unpalatable, immerse yourself in the works

28. This has been called the “Socratic approach” to evangelism. George Barna stands by the Socratic approach to personal evangelism because it begins by asking others for their version of the answer to the meaning of life and the existence of God, it helps to develop a relationship between the conversation partners, and it acknowledges that evangelism will take time. For more on Barna on the Socratic approach to evangelism, see Ron Crandall, *The Contagious Witness: Exploring Christian Conversion* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 158.

29. D. McIntosh, *Everyday Evangelist*, 17.

30. James Kennedy, *Led by the Carpenter: Finding God’s Purpose for Your Life!* (Nashville: Nelson, 1999), 90.

31. Delos Miles, *Introduction to Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983), 181.

32. The Romans Road presentation varies but generally includes these verses: Rom. 3:23; 6:23; 8:1; 10:9–10; 10:13; 12:1–2. See Harney, *Organic Outreach*, 230.

33. See note 15.

34. The diagram consists of a chasm bridged by the cross. Humanity is on one side of the chasm, and God is on the other, a picture that underscores the gulf between humanity and God. Jesus’s cross fits across the gulf, enabling those who trust in Jesus to cross over to God’s side. For a full discussion of this diagram, see Harney, *Organic Outreach*, 234.

of a substantive Christian writer, like Tom Phillips did with C. S. Lewis. You are not the first to travel this road, so find someone intelligent and faithful who can do the talking for you. This was key to Chuck Colson's conversion. Yet another format is to walk through a creed, like the Apostles' Creed, which presents God's salvation history from creation ("I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth") to new creation ("I believe . . . in the life everlasting. Amen").

When the opportunity presents itself to introduce the good news, resist the temptation "to unload the entire evangelistic dump truck the first time the conversation turns to spiritual things."³⁵ As you have been patient up to this point and invested time, energy, care, and prayer into the relationship, continue along the same vein.

5. *Follow Up*

Personal evangelism is a long-term endeavor. Chances are that the first time you verbalize the gospel won't be the last. Your friends may remain undecided, unsure, uncertain. Follow up to hear their feedback, and in light of their response, rephrase, rework, or find another way altogether. Sometimes your friends will ask for further information on a specific point; be sure to look into it and get back to them. Sometimes your friends need reassurance that your love and care will continue, regardless of their faith or lack of it. Attending to these concerns will be persuasive in and of itself because it attests to an ongoing relationship. Think about the apostle Paul in this regard. He maintained contact with people who, in some way, responded to his message; he visited them again, wrote letters, and sent an ambassador in his place if he could not go in person. "Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing," he counseled (Acts 15:36). We know, too, from his letters, how much he followed up with those whom he introduced to Jesus Christ.

Remember, too, that when your friends decide to follow Christ, your interaction with them is not done. They are not projects to be completed, a means to an end. An important part of following up includes connecting them with a church, a small group, a Bible study, or online resources to help them deepen and strengthen their fledgling faith. Another often overlooked aspect of following up is to mentor your friends in personal evangelism so they can become evangelists to others. In the early hours after such a momentous

35. Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism*, 187.

transformation, they may be eager to share their experience with others, like the Samaritan woman was. Or consider the Gerasene demoniac. After he was healed, he wanted to stay with Jesus, but Jesus sent him back to his home with these words: “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.” And the demoniac listens, “He went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed” (Mark 5:19–20). As Stebbins writes, “He [the demoniac] was to be a living letter for everyone to read. He was sane, not mad; holy, not unclean; gentle, not ferocious. Truly he was ‘a new creation; the old [had] gone, the new [had] come!’ (2 Cor. 5:17). His witness was to be among his old acquaintances where oftentimes it is most difficult to witness, but where our witness bears the most abundant and abiding fruit.”³⁶

Taking time to mentor in personal evangelism multiplies exponentially the number of evangelists—and, of course, the number of believers—in this world. This principle has been called by a variety of names, like “the multiplication principle” or “the Master Plan of Evangelism.”³⁷ My spouse, Jack, recalls how, when he was a college freshman, an upperclassman named Kenny introduced him to the miracle of multiplication: “‘If you mentor [Kenny called it *discipling*] someone for six months,’ he’d tell me, ‘and both of you mentor someone for six months and all four of you mentor someone for six months, by the end of ten years, you will have helped over a million Christians to be equipped to follow Jesus better.’” Yes, you read that right: over a million Christians active in evangelism. It’s simple math. It’s explosive math. It’s math that all of us can do. Kenny would use a checkerboard to illustrate how this worked: the first square would have one penny, the second, two; the third, four; the fourth, eight; and so on. To help you fathom the miracle of multiplication, here is Kenny’s chart:

	First Six Months	Second Six Months
Year 1	1 (mentor) + 1 (protégé) = 2	2 (mentors) + 2 (protégés) = 4
Year 2	4 (mentors) + 4 (protégés) = 8	8 + 8 = 16
Year 3	16 + 16 = 32	32 + 32 = 64
Year 4	64 + 64 = 128	128 + 128 = 256
Year 5	256 + 256 = 512 (total involved)	512 + 512 = 1,024
Year 6	1,024 + 1,024 = 2,048	2,048 + 2,048 = 4,096

36. Stebbins, *Friendship Evangelism by the Book*, 82–83.

37. Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993).

	First Six Months	Second Six Months
Year 7	$4,096 + 4,096 = 8,192$	$8,192 + 8,192 = 16,384$
Year 8	$16,384 + 16,384 = 32,768$	$32,768 + 32,768 = 65,536$
Year 9	$65,536 + 65,536 = 131,072$	$131,072 + 131,072 = 262,144$
Year 10	$262,144 + 262,144 = 524,288$	$524,288 + 524,288 = 1,048,576$

Such follow-up multiplies personal evangelism—and persons as evangelists.

Appraisal

Boiled down to its essence, personal evangelism is the simplest of the models in this book. Personal evangelism can take place anywhere—at work, on a plane, in a coffee shop, in a college cafeteria, at a shoe store, at home. This model doesn’t need a distinctive location like the liturgical, revival, or visitation models do. Personal evangelism can take place anytime two people meet. No need for others to join in as with other models, like small group or church growth evangelism. Personal evangelism is free, except for the occasional cup of coffee purchased or meal served. No need for a budget as with other models, like media or revival evangelism. Personal evangelism can be done by anyone—a Sunday school teacher, a friend, a seatmate on an airplane. You don’t need to prepare in advance like you do for visitation, liturgical, or small group evangelism. Personal evangelism needs no set place, no set time, no set form, and no set preparation; it demands no church, no cost, no organization.

At the same time, personal evangelism can be the hardest model in this book. Consider its nomenclature: *personal*. Strip every accoutrement away, and it’s about me as an evangelist. I will bear the brunt of embarrassment; I will face the risk of rejection; I will be liable to the charge of ignorance; I will confront the reality that I am not yet a candidate for sainthood. Not surprisingly, then, in the rough-and-tumble, to-and-fro of daily life, I, like many who responded to the Barna survey, find dozens of other tasks to perform in order to avoid this one: simply sharing, sharing simply the good news of Jesus Christ with other people one-on-one.

How Can We Spark a Passion for Personal Evangelism?

Since motivation—or *lack* of motivation—is a key obstacle to this model of evangelism, let’s consider a few modest ways to spark a passion for personal evangelism.

Remember that the primary mover in evangelism is the Holy Spirit. While it seems like it is all about *me* or *you* as an evangelist, in reality it is the Holy Spirit who prompts, leads, convicts, teaches, and transforms. The primary practice of an evangelist is not, surprisingly enough, to evangelize; rather, it is to pray for openness to the principal evangelist: the Holy Spirit. With this realization, Christians are back to the basics of prayer. We pray for all sorts of things—for healing, for a successful surgery, for reconciliation, for peace and justice—so why not pray for the Holy Spirit to lead us into meaningful conversations and the meaningful relationships that cradle them?

Something else you can do is to identify someone already motivated about evangelism and learn from him. Apprentice yourself informally to her. Ask questions about how they engage in personal evangelism, how they overcome fear or embarrassment. Ask them for an honest account of their worst and best experiences. Find out what they wish they had known at the outset. Let them encourage you, teach you, mentor you, pray for you.

And don't forget to be patient with yourself. If you feel discomfort about conversations with those who do not believe, then give yourself time and space to become comfortable. Begin perhaps by practicing with other Christians. This is not artificial. Every dancer or musician or athlete practices. Every student studies. Every actor rehearses. And who can imagine a comedian who has *not* told jokes standing at a mirror? An evangelist is the keeper—and giver—of great news, life-changing news, world-changing news. Learning to share that news intelligently and winsomely will take practice—like any other activity worth doing well.

Next, send up some test balloons. Call to mind those first invitations in the Gospel of John. *Come and see*. Remember Philip's opening question, "Do you understand what you are reading?" Simple enough. Send a text to someone, inviting them to coffee or to a church service or for a walk. Connect with an old friend on social media and see where it leads—remembering always that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world before you and around you, certainly in ways you cannot yet see.

Practice listening, too. When you begin a conversation about faith, open with a question, then listen intently. Most people want to talk. They will not find a listening ear offensive. After you offer someone an invitation—"come and see"—sit back and listen and pray.

Is the Church Irrelevant to Personal Evangelism?

From what you have read about personal evangelism, it may seem like the church, the body of Christ, is irrelevant. Where, after all, is the church in a cafeteria or a shoe store? This is the impression that one of the bestselling books on personal evangelism gives when it includes just one chapter—the *last* chapter—on Christian community. The author claims, “We are not called to be ‘Lone Ranger’ Christians,” but the organization of the book and the short shrift given to the church says otherwise.³⁸ Not until the last three pages of the last chapter does the author even mention the church—and then does so largely to criticize what the church does wrong, such as door-to-door visitation evangelism. All in all, the church is depicted as forgettable and forgotten, except for what it does wrong.

This view of personal evangelism is misleading. Think again of the first chapter of the Gospel of John, where individuals were being brought into a tight-knit community of Jesus’s followers. Or think of Philip, who was a servant in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5–6) and the leader of a revival in Samaria, which the church in Jerusalem authorized (8:4–25), before he launched that conversation on a wilderness road. Think of Dwight Moody, too, how his personal interactions with Edward Kimball took place because he received a mandatory sentence of attending church! The church may not be on the edge of personal evangelism—that is the job of individuals—but it certainly provides sustenance and grounding and a community to bolster the evangelist. It is the source of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, and worship. It catechizes Christians so they know how to respond to questions and comments. And it is the laboratory in which Christians learn to talk about faith and, more importantly, to listen carefully to others.

Reflection Questions

- How do you appraise personal evangelism?
- What implications does personal evangelism have for you? For your church?

38. Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker*, 234.

- If you were to engage in personal evangelism, how would you share the gospel message?
- If your church were to promote personal evangelism, how should it begin?
- Which model do you think best complements personal evangelism? Why?