

## WHAT IF'S OF EVANGELISM....#2

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Have you ever read any books or taken any Evangelism courses in your life? I am going to suggest that most “evangelism techniques” that you may or may not have learned are based on a North American consumer orientated model. They basically take sales and marketing techniques and modify them for evangelism. The problem is that we are not selling cookies or cardboard boxes and we shouldn't be doing anything with the thought of anything in return – we should be sharing out of love. That fundamental difference will change how you look at people and view evangelism.

Let me unpack that....

Most evangelism “techniques” (I dislike that word but that is what they are) are basically marketing techniques. Let me share how:

First, we often try and make the Gospel look as appealing as possible by skipping over important but controversial or potentially awkward parts (like giving total control of your life to God). This is just like some sales people - they don't lie - but they carefully skip negative information to make the product they sell look better or more appealing.

Second, have you ever been to Walmart and have seen how they all wear their smocks (their company vests) with their name tags and big, bright promotional buttons...that is how some people see their Christian lives in evangelism. They put on their Christian persona while “selling” Christianity but leave it behind when they go off to live their “private, everyday” life. That sense of hypocrisy is seen and noticed in society.

Third, we can often look at people as possible consumers or potential buyers of Christianity. We can consciously or unconsciously look at a person and love them and care for them for the purpose of sharing our faith with them and then if it looks like they are not willing to accept it or that possibility looks distant then we move on. We have all heard of stories about people who have just inherited a lot of money or won the lottery and they walk into a store, but because of how they look no ones gives them the time of day. Then the person goes down the street and buys what they were looking for and returns and shows it to the salesperson who missed out on the commission if they had only helped that person. I think that salesperson can be us in that we have determined people's spiritual levels or potential and have chosen whether or not we should take the time or energy to love them.

Fourth, in church (in general) we often do the numbers game or give people praise for their recent conversion numbers. Think about that.... When someone tells you they have lead someone to Christ do they take a step up on your spirituality list? Or when you lead someone to Christ do you go to church and tell of your recent “sale,” with your motivation of being bumped up on that perceived spirituality list rather than because of the pure excitement of someone you love coming to Christ? It is an interesting thought.

The truth is that success is not measured by conversion numbers, but it is measured by how we show love. In scripture we are not commanded to lead everyone to Christ (and the one with the most amount of conversions (sales) get the most reward), but it says that we are to love everyone. Jesus says that we will be judged by whether or not we loved and showed practical love – clothe the naked – feed the hungry.(Matthew 25:31-46) In other words, that our love for others, including our enemies, goes beyond the theoretical to the practical. We are called to love – Christ doesn't reward conversions but rewards love. I have a theory that in these days growing churches (I mean those growing out of conversion growth) do not grow because they have the best children's program or youth program, but because they are committed to love. And the love they show is not for the purpose of conversion, but pure love without expectation of anything in return – of loving only because Christ first loved us.

Now to the obvious question: What if we looked at evangelism differently? What if we were freed from the expectations, sales reviews, etc.? What if we looked at our mission as just to love... period? And a natural product of that was the gospel in acted and spoken word. We can never gain any more of God's love – it is full and pure without limitations. We can't earn our way to heaven and Jesus isn't going to ask us how many people we led to Christ, just did you love people – period. Jesus, our perfect example, did not lead everyone he came in contact with to believe in God through the life of himself. Many people who heard his message rejected it, but he did love everyone perfectly.

What if...instead of trying to find ways to move the conversations we have to “slip” in the gospel, we just integrated it into our lives and lived it out? I don't mean just at church or in church public life, but integrate it in our everyday lives so that when someone asks me how my weekend went I just don't talk about my Saturday project but I also include my Sunday “God experience.” That is not to say that we need to add something to all of our conversations or to make all of them “spiritual” – but my point is that we have, out of fear or whatever, intentionally left our relationship with God out. We tend to view “spiritual” conversations as having to be “big” and somehow make an impression on someone or have it go somewhere. But what if we just live honestly before people without consciously or unconsciously hiding our spirituality? Let's face it, our world is not hiding their spirituality anymore but we still shelter it in our relationships for fear of it being uncomfortable – although I would argue that this awkward feeling is often times our own and not shared by those we are talking with.

We live in a commercial, consumer driven society and Christ's call for us is to not treat the message of salvation as a product we are trying to sell but as a message of love we need to live.

Once again these articles are intended to provoke thought and discussion and I am open at anytime to dialogue with you about them.

Next Month: What if we lost our fear of sharing our faith?