

Invite and Involve
Ephesians 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 4:5
John Breon

Who are influential people in your life? Who has had the greatest impact on you for God? As you think about those people, wouldn't you like to have that kind of influence on someone else? Wouldn't you like to be that kind of person for others? That's what we're talking about when we talk about evangelism.

Remember, the church's mission is to make disciples. Part of how we do that is evangelism or witness.

All of us have something to share. If you are a Christian, you are gifted. We've received grace as the gift of Christ, faith as a gift to believe in Christ, and salvation as a gift for living in Christ now and forever. To such gifted people God also gives spiritual gifts.

In Ephesians we read about some of the gifts God gives the church to equip it and build it up. "Evangelist" is one of those. The word evangelist is used only two other times in the New Testament. Philip is an evangelist (Acts 21:8). Paul encourages Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim 4:5). The evangelist in the NT church was one who preached or proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ. "Evangel" is good news. An "evangelist" shares the good news. "Evangelism" is the process of sharing the good news and involving people in a response to it. The NT evangelists probably traveled into places where no one had yet heard the gospel and would share it there. Some of them may also have located in a particular church and would help the church understand the gospel and develop its own witness.

Not all Christians are evangelists in the way the NT uses the word. We each have gifts appropriate for the ministry God calls us to do. But all Christians *are* called to be witnesses, to share the faith, to share our faith with the people in our lives. Not every player on a baseball team is the pitcher. But every player needs to be able to throw. We're not all evangelists, but we all witness.

Not just individual Christians witness, but all together we do the work of evangelism. We see the Church as Evangelist. How can we do “the work of an evangelist”?

We might first ask, “Why evangelize?” Because the church exists for others, for those who are not yet members of the church. We are not just to receive comfort and feel good about ourselves. That’s part of life in the church, but God made the church to be people who proclaim and live out the good news. We are good news people. The church is the meeting place of the kingdom of God with the world. It’s through people that God encounters people.

During wartime in Britain, a group of people gathered to discuss the distribution of a small amount of food that was left. It was understood that each church represented would try to take care of its own members. An Anglican priest said, “All who belong to my denomination, follow me.” A Presbyterian said, “You Presbyterians, all of you, come with me.” The other denominations followed suit. Then, in a moment, the quiet unassuming Salvation Army officer rose and said, “All you fellows and gals who belong to nobody, follow me” (homileticonline, 4/23/03).

Are we here just for ourselves and people who are like us? Or can we see ourselves as being here for people who belong to nobody? If our congregation were suddenly no longer here, who would miss us?

E. Stanley Jones suggested that winning others to Christ through evangelism is founded on five things:

1. *The nature of God.* God is love and love is outgoing, sharing its highest with those whom it loves.
2. *The nature of the Christian faith.* At its center it is the revelation of God in a person—Jesus Christ. It’s natural to introduce people to him.
3. *Our own nature.* We each have an urge to regard others. Winning others to Christ puts this urge into operation at the highest point where we share our deepest selves. When we give a dollar to a beggar we might feel better, but we don’t feel *good*. We feel good only when we share our deepest self. “This I do when I share my experience of Christ with another and seek to win him or her to the

highest. That fulfills me. Then I know the deepest happiness I am capable of knowing.”

4. *The nature of the relationships we have with others.* Someone has said that we are part of every person we have met. If that’s true, why not pass on our best? At the same time, we need to share this new life in order to keep it. Nothing is ours until we share it. The expression deepens the impression.
5. *The nature of human need.* People are lonely, scared, confused. They wonder if life has meaning beyond what they’ve discovered. People are dying—dying on the inside and literally dying. And people who don’t somehow come to know God in Jesus Christ die and go to hell—or stay in hell. But no one has to. God wants to use the church to meet people’s need to know God and live abundantly and eternally in Christ. (*Motivation for Evangelism*)

Bob Tuttle tells about being in a crowded restaurant with several of his students. He asked, “What would it take for me to stand on top of this table and say to the people here, ‘Friends, I know you have a right to enjoy your meal without my interruption, but I have something to say. If you will give me just two minutes to share with you the good news of the power of God available through faith in Jesus Christ, I will never bother you again.’” Tuttle could see students rolling their eyes, as if to say, “Please God, don’t let him do it.” Then one student said, “You would have to believe that everyone here was going to hell.” Tuttle responded, “Wrong! You could never ‘guilt’ me into making a fool of myself. I refuse to believe that anyone goes to hell because of my disobedience. Where’s the justice in that? Only one thing could motivate me to do such a thing—*compassion*. I would have to see everyone here as God sees them, as I see my own children.” The students got the point, but they were still relieved that it was only an academic question (*Can We Talk?* 101-02).

Most of us have plenty of motivation for evangelism. Most of us want to be faithful witnesses for Jesus. But we may feel like we have to do it all or do it in a certain way that’s not real for us. That’s why I’m emphasizing the whole church doing the work of an evangelist. No one of us has to win

everybody. And no one of us can win anybody by ourselves. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to make people stop loving sin and start loving Jesus. The Holy Spirit can speak to people alone, but the Spirit usually chooses to work through the church's witness. We bear witness both individually and in what we do together.

Maybe we fear rejection and that keeps us from sharing faith with others. But God can use every encounter. If someone says no to our invitation, God is still at work. Tuttle tells about talking with a man who was in jail. The man put his faith in Christ. The next day, Tuttle went to talk to him again. The man said, "I was thinking—it probably takes an average of twenty-five witnesses before someone says yes to Jesus. You think just because you were number twenty-five that you did it all. And you stink!" (This story is in several of Tuttle's books and he's told it repeatedly in sermons and seminars). Encounters, witnesses, 1-24 are just as important as number 25. God uses them to prepare a person. I like what the apostle Paul says along this line: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). I also believe numbers 26-50 are just as important. Those witnesses help get us established and growing in Christ.

We may assume that we don't have what it takes to share our faith or to tell someone else the good news. We think we don't know enough or we're not gifted enough. But we can trust God to give us the gifts we need in each situation. We can believe that God works through our weaknesses. We can realize that we're not alone—we can learn from each other and encourage each other.

Some of the greatest fishermen are not humans, but pelicans. Some time ago, there was a story about some pelicans that were fishing off the coast of California. Working in that same area were fishing boats. The men on the boats were cleaning their catch and leaving the parts they couldn't sell, throwing them back into the ocean at the water's edge. The pelicans observed what was happening and decided that they could just eat the waste without having to work for their food. So for weeks, they sat waiting for the fishing boats to come. After a while, the fishermen discovered that

the waste could be sold also. When they stopped dropping the fish waste into the sea, it caught the pelicans unprepared. They just sat there on the shore and waited. They grew thinner by the day and seemed unable to do anything about their sad plight. Why? The authorities concluded it was because they had forgotten how to fish. Then the wildlife officials hit upon a plan. They brought pelicans from another area to teach these poor starving birds how to fish again! (Charles Turkington, *On Forgetting How to Fish*, The Foundation for Evangelism, www.evangelize.org, July 6, 1999).

Does the church remember how to fish?

In the book *Evangelism Through the Local Church*, Michael Green offers three definitions of evangelism that help us not only understand what it is but also how we do it:

1. *Overflow*. We are so full of joy about Jesus Christ that it overflows. Our joy is natural, obvious, and spontaneous.
2. "One beggar telling another beggar where to get bread." That's humbling isn't it? Those who share the gospel are not better than those with whom we share it. We are all beggars, but some of us have found where we can get bread. This also draws attention to the needs of those who receive as well as the generosity of the One who gives. We are needy, but God has an abundant supply of forgiveness, love, life, joy, peace.
3. Then Green quotes Archbishop William Temple's definition of evangelism:

To evangelise is so to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that people shall come to put their trust in God through him, to accept him as their Saviour, and serve him as their King in the fellowship of his church. (8-9)

Evangelism is part of the church's mission. It is good news about Jesus Christ, but it doesn't neglect the Father or the Holy Spirit. Evangelism

is effective only because of the Holy Spirit's work. The Spirit of God is out there, setting people up for our ministry, our witness. We are always at least the second witness to speak to a person. The Holy Spirit has gone ahead of us.

Evangelism includes incorporation into the body of Christ, the church. We not only *invite* people to come to Christ or to attend worship or some other setting where they can encounter Christ. We also *involve* people in the life of the church where they can find a place to be nourished in the faith, to serve, to grow, to be loved, to discover their gifts for ministry and become witnesses themselves. Another way of saying this is that evangelism produces discipleship. We don't just call people to choose Christ, but to go on choosing Christ, to live as his people every day.

Of course, evangelism does challenge us to make a decision. We have to decide whether or not to bow to Jesus as Lord. That decision may be made slowly or suddenly. It may be spoken softly or be very outspoken. What matters is if we are in that relationship of trust and commitment and obedience to Jesus now.

If the church is the evangelist, then community is vital. Community is part of our witness. Jesus said that people would know we are his disciples when we love one another and that the world would know the Father sent him when we are united. The witness of the body of Christ, the church, is powerful.

The purpose of the church is to make disciples for Jesus. Part of how we do that is our witness, telling others about Jesus. Getting involved. Inviting and involving people in the forgiveness and life and fellowship Jesus has for them. There's no one way to do that. There is just the way that comes out of our willingness and God's grace and gifts at work through us.