

A person wearing a white long-sleeved shirt is holding a vintage, sepia-toned map. The map is partially visible, showing geographical features and text. The background is dark and out of focus.

Engaging Evangelism



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



Engaging Evangelism

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Leader's Guide

How to use "Engaging Evangelism" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Resources/Christianity Today, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

With BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS, you don't have to build a program from scratch or take another night to be out. BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS works when you want, where you want, the way you want. It's completely flexible and easy to use.

You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings with board members or with other committees or groups of leaders. BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS at the beginning of a board meeting or committee meeting:

1. Select a learning tool. In this theme of "Engaging Evangelism," you'll find multiple types of handouts from which to choose:

- ◆ Bible study
- ◆ case study
- ◆ activities
- ◆ interview
- ◆ devotionals
- ◆ resources
- ◆ assessment tools
- ◆ how-to articles
- ◆ sample retreat

2. Select a handout. Suppose, for example, you want your board or team to evaluate evangelistic potential in your congregation. You could select one of three assessments in this theme: "4 Myths about Evangelism" (p. 6), "3 Questions for Evangelism" (p. 7), and "Marks of an Evangelistic Church" (p. 8). From these options, select the one that best fits what you want to accomplish.

3. Photocopy the handout. Let's say you selected "Marks of an Evangelistic Church." Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do not need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).

4. Prepare for the discussion. We recommend you read the Scripture passages and identify key discussion questions. How will you apply the principles to specific decisions your church is making?

5. Lead the discussion. Most handouts can be read within 5 minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions. Be ready to move the discussion to specific issues your church is facing.

Most BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS handouts can be discussed in 15 or 20 minutes (except the Bible study, which may take longer). Your board, committee, or team will still have plenty of time to discuss its agenda.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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Evangelism Is God's Job First

Then he includes us in the work.

Luke 15:1–7; 1 Timothy 2:1–4; John 6:44

Before you think about bringing someone to Christ, God is already witnessing to that person. Let's see how that works..

1. God is the prime seeker. A few years ago my wife asked, “Honey, have you seen Erik?” I said, “No. Isn't he with you?” She checked the bedroom and the basement, but our 3-year-old boy was gone. We ran through the neighborhood, crying “Erik! Erik!” but got no response. So as my wife called 911, I jumped in the car to scour the neighborhood. When I returned empty-handed, I saw a police car pulling away from our house. My wife was smiling. “He's found!” she said.

Our little boy, dressed in dark blue denim, had curled into a corner of the dark blue couch in our family room and was sleeping soundly while we searched for him. In those brief minutes, I began to grasp what God does 24 hours a day seeking lost people. God is a seeking God. I'm glad I once got to see 5,000 people come to Christ, but as a friend said, “All mass evangelism is one-on-one evangelism in a crowd.” The angels in heaven rejoice every time God finds one, because he's the evangelist.

♦ *What does Luke 15:1–7 tell us about God?*

2. God includes us in the work. Billy Graham can't convince someone who is spiritually blind to see. Neither can we. But we can pray. We're in a new church, and our pastor began a weekly prayer meeting. You know what? Aunt Martha's knee problems only get a smidgen of the time because we're too busy praying for lost persons. We're climbing on the backs of Jonathan Edwards and Whitefield and Wesley and the Scots who began the first great concert of prayer.

We can also tune in to God's timing. It is no mistake that you run into the people you do. That's because we operate according to divine appointment. The goal of every mature believer is to get to the place where we hear God ring the bell. When we ask him, “Lord, let me share you with somebody,” he hears us. I was staying in a hotel one Saturday when I realized I had left some notes in my car that I needed to prepare a message. The valet who got my car wanted to talk about God. I couldn't tell him I was too busy writing an evangelism message to talk to him. So we talked. And we ended up praying that Melvin, who had been raised in a Christian home but had drifted away from God, could get off work so he could go hear Billy Graham that night.

♦ *How does 1 Timothy 2:1–4 connect with evangelism?*

3. God is responsible for the results. In describing how he came to Christ, C. S. Lewis says, “God closed in on me.” Another time he says, “I was dragged through the doorway.” Lewis knew when the final step toward conversion was taken but not how the step was taken. He wrote, “My brother and I set out for the zoo. When we set out, I did not believe Jesus was the Son of God. When we arrived, I did.” Belief is a God thing. Evangelism works because God is the first seeker and he includes us in prayer and appointments. When he asks us to evangelize, he joins us. And then he says, “Watch.”

♦ *Read John 6:44. What must happen for someone to come to Christ?*

—LON ALLISON

Discuss

1. How do we know when to speak and when to wait for God's lead in speaking to an unsaved person?
2. Describe a time when God made a divine appointment for you. How did you respond? What was the result?
3. How can we encourage people in our church to work with God in evangelism?

Evangelizing People Today

How to share your faith when people don't know even the basics of Christianity.

1 Peter 3:15

Brian McLaren pastors at Cedar Ridge Community Church in Spencerville, Maryland, and is author of More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix (Zondervan, 2002).

BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: When did evangelism become important to you?

Brian McLaren: I grew up in a Christian family and became committed to the Lord in the early 1970s, largely through the Jesus Movement. Although I didn't have the words for it then, I probably had a spiritual gift for evangelism because I started a Bible study right after I became a Christian. The thought of inviting Christians to the group never crossed my mind. I invited my non-Christian friends. One was Jewish; another, agnostic; another, just confused.

How can we speak evangelistically to people today?

Much evangelism in the United States was developed in a context in which just about everybody knew the basic information of Christianity and was favorably disposed to it. Evangelism got people to act on what they already knew and, in a sense, already passively believed. You could call people to commitment relatively quickly. You could also use pretty forceful persuasive techniques.

Today's postmoderns do not know the basics of Christianity. If anything, they have a negative idea of what Christianity is. So it makes no sense to them if you come on too strong and quickly ask for a commitment. We should count conversations rather than conversions, not because I don't believe in conversions, but because I don't think we'll get many conversions if we keep emphasizing them.

So what does evangelism to postmoderns look like?

When most people think of evangelism, the word arguments comes up—arguments for the existence of God, arguments for the uniqueness of Christ, arguments for the inspiration of the Bible. For postmodern people, anything presented as an argument is less persuasive because arguments suggest a message of conquest rather than a message of peace. Postmoderns are so assaulted by advertisements and political messages that for a message to be important and true, it must generally come in a form other than argument.

Also, we have become good at boiling the gospel down into little four-step outlines. Modern people love diagrams; it's all about engineering. But postmodern people feel that truth comes as a mystery, a story, and a work of art; truth is more like poetry than engineering. This forces us to ask if we have a clear understanding of what the gospel really is. In many ways, the modern evangelical gospel is a message about how to not go to hell. When you step back and ask if that's really the gospel from Jesus' perspective, it's pretty hard to answer yes. When Jesus talks about the gospel, he talks more about the kingdom of God.

How do you help people share their faith?

We don't talk about having a missions department in our church. Instead, we tell people that when we become a follower of Christ, we're signing up for his mission. That involves doing good, caring for the poor, and giving out cups of cold water in Christ's name, then telling others the story of the gospel and what God has done in our life. We talk about being and making disciples in authentic community for the good of the world. We talk about that because, according to Jesus, one of the things disciples do is help others become disciples. This helps us get away from the event-oriented, decision-oriented evangelism that a lot of us grew up with.



Brian McLaren

"We should count conversations rather than conversions"



Evangelizing People Today *continued*

My book includes the story of a young woman whom I met while she was trying to load her harp into a truck. After I offered to help, we got into a conversation that led to exchanging E-mail addresses. That led to more than a two-year e-mail friendship, through which she came to faith in Christ. Disciple-making began when I offered a simple act of kindness.

We emphasize that to be a good member of our church, we must get to know our neighbors. We say, “Throw parties. Have people over. Be nice to the children in your neighborhood. Be good people. Be good neighbors. That makes it easier to talk to people about your faith.” You know that verse in 1 Peter 3 about always being ready to give an answer? Well, that implies that people are asking questions. To me, part of the issue is how we can help Christians live such good lives that people want to ask questions.

What questions do postmodern people ask?

Many would ask, “Is Christianity good and can it make me into a better person, or will it make me a jerk?” They ask that because when they think of Christians, they tend to think of people who are narrow-minded, judgmental, arrogant, and angry. And they think, *“I really want God, and I’d rather be a Christian than a Buddhist or a Muslim, but Christians look like jerks. I don’t want to become like that.”*

They might also ask, “How can I be a Christian without becoming hateful toward people of other religions?” If we answer that question by giving reasons why other religions are wrong, we just prove that we’re not the kind of person they want to become.

A lady who became a Christian through our church called me one day and told me she needed to talk. When I asked what was wrong, she said, “I’m afraid I believe something different from the other Sunday school teachers. They all believe that if you’re not a Christian, you’ll go to hell. I don’t believe that.”

Instead of arguing with her, I asked what she believed. She said her two best friends weren’t Christians; one was Jewish and one a lapsed Mormon. “There’s nothing I would rather see than that both of them would discover what I found in Christ,” she said. “But if I tell them they’re going to hell, they’ll never listen to me.” What’s so interesting is that she didn’t say, “I don’t care what they believe.” It’s a different spin. We have to listen. If we come with answers without understanding what’s behind a question, we can make things worse.

You know what’s so interesting? She started a Bible study with these two women, and they read the Bible together. I don’t think these women have converted, but I’m sure the outcome will be better by keeping the relationship going than by forcing a decision too soon.

How can churches be more welcoming to non-Christians?

To become this kind of church, we have to accept people who don’t dress right, don’t talk right, don’t smell right, and don’t think right. If we’re not willing to let people belong before they believe, they will never believe in our church. If a group says, “We will accept you only if you agree with us,” it sounds like any other worldly group. What people are looking for is a group that accepts them regardless of whether they conform. That becomes one of the validations of the gospel.

Discuss

1. Describe a time you befriended a neighbor. How did the relationship begin? How did you develop it? Did the subject of faith ever come up? How did you respond?
2. Have people ever come to our church and not fit in? Why do you think that happened? What could we have done, if anything, to make them feel more welcome?
3. Based on this interview, what changes would you recommend in our evangelism efforts?

4 Myths about Evangelism

And the truth about how churches can effectively witness.

Romans 10:14–15

At Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, 80 percent of attenders were previously unchurched. To reach out, Mecklenburg leaders say, you must first shatter these myths:

Myth 1: Generation X has radically different needs from those of Boomers. We have found that once 20-somethings get married and have a child, they begin to look and act very much like Boomers. Those who wanted music cafés and coffee bars become more interested in the nursery. This shouldn't shock us. After all, the Woodstock generation that grew up gave us the Reagan era. The postmodern mind is real and here to stay. But there is a difference between the philosophical moorings and the sociological pilgrimage of GenXers. We must understand the philosophical change but hold loosely to what it takes to reach folks stylistically at various stages of life. Practically, a lot of what we learned in the 1980s and 1990s about what appeals to the unchurched still works.

◆ *Your reaction to this assumption?*

- Yes, it's a myth; here's why _____ It's still true; here's why _____

Myth 2: The key is to be seeker-targeted. People assume that if you fashion a church that is seeker-targeted, seekers will come. They think that if you offer topical messages, casual dress, drama, drums, and Starbucks coffee, the church will grow. The reality is that seeker services are nothing more than a tool in the hands of those who do the inviting. Being seeker-targeted is not about style—or Starbucks. It's about building relationships and earning the right to talk about spiritual things. It's about creating entry points to support the evangelistic efforts of believers to fulfill the Great Commission through the local church.

◆ *Your reaction to this assumption?*

- Yes, it's a myth; here's why _____ It's still true; here's why _____

Myth 3: Everyone needs small groups. If you study Scripture, you discover that community is taught, but there's not one program or method for achieving it. Yes, there were house churches in the New Testament, but cell groups had more to do with the nature of the growth and culture of the early church than with methodology. Small groups are great, but they're not for everyone. What's important is the assimilation, community, and pastoral care of people. Instead of small groups, what may be needed is one-on-one mentoring or community spirit built around ministry activities.

◆ *Your reaction to this assumption?*

- Yes, it's a myth; here's why _____ It's still true; here's why _____

Myth 4: People today don't want to say, sign, or give anything. Today's seekers want to experience the sacred. What they're looking for, though, is more experiential than cerebral. Instead of thinking their way into feeling, they often feel their way into thinking. As a result, worship services must offer more moments that engage the soul and expose it to the holy. Instead of services with the theme "Reasons to Believe the Bible," we must shift to "This Is the Bible."

◆ *Your reaction to this assumption?*

- Yes, it's a myth; here's why _____ It's still true; here's why _____

—JAMES EMERY WHITE

Discuss

1. Which of these 4 myths should we spend the most time rethinking? Why?
2. What are we doing to reach out? How successful have these methods been? What might help our efforts?
3. In traditional groups, how can we create community for people?

3 Questions for Evangelists

Defining your role in the work of evangelism.

Acts 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 3:1–23

Planting and harvesting are two different seasons. Confuse the two in evangelism and you may waste precious seed. Some questions to ask before witnessing to others:

1. Am I proceeding with both zeal and wisdom? While in college, a friend and I decided to make an evangelistic foray onto the local university campus. We wandered around until we saw a student who seemed like a good prospect. We gave little prayer to this effort and had no plan for follow-up, let alone building relationships beforehand. We were going to turn that campus upside-down for Christ! We had zeal, but no experience, no wisdom, no preparation, and—consequently—no harvest.
 - ◆ *When have you tried to witness with more zeal than wisdom? What happened?*

2. Am I trusting God’s timing? A young woman and her children began attending our church. Occasionally she and her husband would invite me for supper, and we began to develop a friendship. As I shared the gospel with her, she told me, “We prayed something like that once. We were trying to rent a house, and they told us to pray this prayer. We just thought it was something we had to do to be able to rent.” Because of her confusion and her husband’s lack of interest, I didn’t push the gospel but discussed spiritual things as the opportunities arose. Eventually the husband was saved, and the entire family became active in the church.

On the other hand, I once befriended a young unbeliever. I helped him remodel a storefront for his business, and I worked with him at the fire department. I also went coon hunting with him late at night. One evening as we listened to his hounds bay, I decided it was time to probe. “Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?” I asked. He gave an open, honest response, so I probed deeper. “If you were to die tonight, do you know for sure that you would go to heaven?” Before morning, I had a new brother in Christ. Sometimes we need to push back the dirt on what we have planted to see if the crop is ready for harvest. If so, it’s time to dig. If not, we back off and trust God for the right time.

 - ◆ *How do you know the time is right to speak to an unchurched person about Christ? What have you noticed?*

3. Am I being myself? When my friend was a teen, his father told the boys in their small church that he would like some of them to try their hand at preaching. My friend memorized one of Billy Graham’s sermons word for word and preached it like his own. Everything went great until he came to the part: “Thousands are coming down to the front . . .” The story draws laughs, but it makes a point. Trying to fit someone else’s mold will never work. It is better to discover your own style of evangelism.
 - ◆ *What kind of witnessing feels most natural to you? Is it best to stick with that approach or challenge yourself to try something different?*

—RICK WEINERT

Discuss

1. According to 1 Corinthians 3:6–8, Apollos and Paul had different tasks. What were they? How did others view this division of responsibility?
2. What role do you usually play in evangelism? Do you accept this role? Do others?
3. How do we encourage people who labor differently in the vineyard of lost souls? How can we support various efforts for evangelism?

Marks of an Evangelistic Church

6 ways to stoke the evangelistic fervor of your people.

Colossians 4:3–6

How do we measure up to these marks of a church that's fired up for evangelism?

- 1. The salvation of lost people is the church's top priority.** Evangelism, or sharing the gospel for the purpose of conversion, must be a clearly stated objective. The allocation of time, energy, and resources must match the goal. About what percentage of our church's programs, people, and budget is devoted to evangelism?

Less than 10 percent 10 percent 15 percent 30 percent
- 2. Leaders lead.** Many church leaders don't feel they're good evangelists. But the issue is not how many people leaders bring to Christ each week as much as how up-front leaders are about their efforts. Leaders must regularly call believers in the congregation to share their faith. And they must assess whether church ministries are outwardly focused and how they can be made more evangelistic. How outwardly focused are our leaders?

Evangelism promoters Interested Too busy for it
- 3. Evangelists are identified and unleashed.** A small percentage of people in every congregation feel burdened for those without faith. These people can lessen fear for others and show them that evangelism is not just a leader's job. How well does our church identify and encourage lay evangelists?

We do this We need help with this
- 4. Every believer is coached in sharing his or her faith.** Most believers won't articulate their faith unless they're taught. Witnesses need a witnessing plan—whether it's homegrown or prepackaged, a personal testimony or a carefully crafted apologetic. If we offer evangelism training, what percentage of our congregation has been through the program?

50 percent or more 25-50 percent 10-25 percent Less than 10 percent
- 5. The church gets frequent reminders of the importance of sharing their faith.** Baptism or faith professions keep a congregation excited. They're visible reminders of how God uses ordinary people to bring others to faith, and they encourage others to bring friends to church where they can hear the gospel. How often does our church celebrate the fruits of evangelism with personal testimonials?

Every week About once a month Twice a year Once a year

—ERIC REED

Discuss

1. Name some evangelism approaches our congregation has tried. What's been most effective and why?
2. What are some new ways we can celebrate the fruits of evangelism?
3. Name some people in our church who are evangelists. How can we support them?

Trouble in the Parking Lot

How could we witness to troubled teens?

Luke 19:1–9

The Case Four teens in black trench coats hunkered down in the church parking lot. Their multicolored hair was spiked, their faces painted, and their bodies pierced with metal. When I invited them to the youth service in our sanctuary, they swore at me.

I was youth pastor at Crossroads Foursquare Church in Snohomish, Washington. We were drawing families from our suburban neighborhood to our new church building. About 75 kids gathered in our sanctuary every Wednesday night for Bible study.

One of the dangerous-looking kids we saw in the parking lot later told me they were there to cast a spell. They had heard that our church was attracting lots of teens for Bible study, and they wanted to stop it. The next week they brought reinforcements. When we didn't turn them away, our parking lot became their hangout. Within six months, more than 100 Goths and other fringe teens were there every Wednesday night. Early on, I approached three girls with bright orange hair and pierced lips and asked, "Why don't you join us inside?"

"Why should we?" one replied. "We'll feel worse than we already do!"

What Would You Do?

- ◆ If at-risk teens won't come inside the church, should we move our youth meeting outside?
- ◆ If kids are creating problems in the parking lot—how can we stop that behavior without appearing uncaring?
- ◆ How can we befriend these kids without offending church kids and their parents?

What Happened We began ministering to two youth groups. Kids inside the church met for worship and prayer while kids outside converged for five-minute "God-talks." We provided food and soft drinks, then hung out with the kids, answering questions and getting to know them. Our approach to the behavior of the parking lot group was open. As long as the Goths didn't endanger themselves or us, they were welcome. That meant we tolerated some things that regular church kids would never get away with. That made some church people uncomfortable. Soon we began hearing, "If you don't stop working with these Goths, we'll leave the church."

After much prayer and many discussions, we moved the parking-lot ministry. Still, the Goth ministry had a positive impact. Today our church is drawing hurting, broken people, largely from the Asian community. We're ministering cross-culturally, using many of the lessons we learned with the Goths.

—BLAYNE GREINER with GAIL WELBORN

Discuss

1. What would you do if your kids brought some Goths home with them?
2. How might people in the church respond if we brought people like that into the church?
3. In Luke 19, Jesus reaches out to Zacchaeus. What did people say about that? What was Jesus' response?

Becoming a Slave to Save

We can't hoard the blessings; we owe it to others to share them.

2 Corinthians 4:1–6

Read

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Comprehend

Do I feel the sense of indebtedness to Christ that Paul felt about every unsaved soul I meet? Is it a point of honor with me that I do not hoard blessings for myself? The point of spiritual honor is the realization that I am a debtor to everyone on the face of the earth because of the redemption of Jesus Christ.

Paul realized that he owed everything to Jesus Christ. That's why he spent himself to the last ebb. When the Holy Spirit indwells us, we cannot talk in cold logic, but in passionate inspiration. And the inspiration behind all Paul's utterances is that he viewed Christ as his Creditor. The great characteristic of Paul's life was that he realized he was not his own; he had been bought with a price, and he never forgot it. His whole life was based on that. Paul sold himself to Christ. As he writes, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:2)

We are apt to think that a person called to church leadership is different from others. According to Jesus Christ, this person is a spiritual leader, never a superior, and, indeed, even a bondservant. As Paul says, no matter how people treat me, they will never treat me with the hatred and spite with which I treated Jesus Christ. When the realization comes home that Jesus Christ has served me to the end of my meanness, my selfishness, and my sin, then nothing I receive from others can exhaust my determination to serve them for his sake. I do not come among people as their superior; I come among them as the love-slave of Jesus Christ, realizing that if I am worth anything at all, it is through redemption. That is the meaning of being made broken bread and poured-out wine.

Paul goes on to say, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). Paul attracted people to Jesus, never to himself. He became a sacramental personality; that is, wherever he went, Jesus Christ helped himself to Paul's life (see 2 Cor. 2:14). Many of us are subtly serving our own ends so Christ cannot help himself to our lives. If we are abandoned to Jesus, we no longer have ends of our own to serve.

Thank God that when he saves us, he gives us a way of expressing our gratitude to him. He gives us a great, noble sense of spiritual honor, the realization that we are debtors to everyone because of our redemption in Jesus Christ. We are thus passionately concerned for that brother, that friend, those unsaved nations; in relation to them we are the bondslaves of Jesus.

—OSWALD CHAMBERS. *Adapted from So Send I You (Discovery House, 1993). Used with permission.*

Discuss

1. Describe a time you felt indebted to someone who was lost because of the indebtedness you felt toward Jesus Christ for saving you. How did that affect the way you reached out to that person?
2. What are some ways we can come among lost people as their bondservants? As their superiors?
3. How much can we do for others without feeling used or devalued? Don't we invite abuse by being slaves to people? How does that fit with Paul's admonition to be bondslaves for Christ?

Running a Marathon for Souls

What it takes to train and win.

1 Corinthians 9:24–27

Read

“I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:26–27).

Comprehend

What enabled Paul to make an impact on his time, a time every bit in opposition to the gospel as today? You can say he had the wind of God at his back and was controlled by the Holy Spirit. Yes, Paul had a commission from God, given to him after he was knocked down on the highway to Damascus. Still, there was something in Paul’s spirit that brought to the ministry what it takes to make a difference in the world. You can see flashes of that spirit in 1 Corinthians 9. The image in that passage refers to the Greek games. Athletes in those games went through strict training for at least nine months. And they competed in the nude—which was something the Jews of the Diaspora couldn’t tolerate. But Paul, determined to reach the Greek world for Christ, was not so put off. He admired the games and the athletes. What he admired most was their dedication. They gave up everything to compete for the prize—a twisted laurel leaf on their brow.

That’s the spirit Paul brings to ministry. He’s not like some fat businessman puffing around the high school track trying to lose a little weight. No, he’s like a runner in a marathon—his face flushed, his body straining, as he races to cross the finish line for the prize.

Paul had to preach the gospel. It was a commission. God summoned Paul to reach the Greek world, and under that commission Paul was obligated to follow through. There was no reward for preaching the gospel. That’s what Paul was called to do. Likewise, if you have a calling from God, part of that calling is to make Christ known to those who do not know him. It is a commission.

It is also an obligation, because bound up in the gospel is the demand to proclaim it. Think of a scientist at a great university who has discovered a cure for AIDS. Imagine what would happen if she refused to share that cure with others. That would be a sin against science and humanity. Likewise, to know your sins have been forgiven—that all charges against you have been dropped because of the Cross and that you are joined to the timeless life of God—and not share it with others is a sin against God and people.

Let’s face it. The strength of any cause depends on the people committed to it. Fanatics make a difference, and Paul was a fanatic for the gospel. The problem with fanatics is that they often turn people off. Thus Paul says he was willing to not only give up his rights but also to become a slave to anyone’s way of thinking in order that some might be saved. Paul didn’t change the message. Whether he was in Jerusalem, Antioch, or Philippi, he preached Jesus Christ. But Paul also knew people are shaped by culture, education, families, and religion. So he adapted to a person’s way of thinking so he or she would listen to the gospel. He would do anything short of sin to win a person to Christ.

—HADDON ROBINSON

Discuss

1. How have you responded to your commission to bring the gospel to lost people? What makes responding to this commission difficult? What makes it easy?
2. Considering Paul’s image of a marathon runner, what kind of training may be necessary to prepare us for evangelism? How could our church help with this training?
3. Do you know any fanatics for the gospel? How effective are they in winning people to Christ?

Report from a Church Visitor

4 ways to make our church more visitor friendly.

Hebrews 13:1

Today I visited your church. I looked up the address, called the church office for service times, and got myself and my kids ready to go. We're new in town, and this is the fourth church we've visited. We step inside, hopeful that perhaps here we'll find people who will help teach the Word to our children. Perhaps here we'll grow spiritually. Or maybe here we'll receive the same welcome we got at the other churches.

Evidently everyone has taken the same greeter class. Someone offers a limp hand saying, "I'm so glad you came," without smiling, and quickly moves on. After wandering around trying to find a door to the sanctuary that doesn't open into the choir loft, we're late. The sanctuary is nearly full, but there's one empty row—at the very front. We walk past hundreds of eyes. As we settle the kids, a lady whispers to someone behind her, "I don't know where John and Steve are going to sit now." I cringe and turn, searching for another pew to move to, but the place is packed, and the music is starting.

After our experience, I've come up with four things churches can do to help visitors feel at home.

- 1. Develop a greeting ministry with the visitor in mind.** I attended a church years ago that had such a program. This was not simply shaking hands and handing out programs. Members were expected to seek out and speak to specific visitors for at least three consecutive weeks. When I began attending, someone came alongside me, escorted me to my children's Sunday school classrooms, and answered my questions about various studies. We felt welcome and connected from the start.
- 2. Choose hospitality over visitation.** After our first visit to one church, we received four phone calls, two e-mails, and three letters. Then the pastor invited himself to our house to "get to know us a little better and answer any questions we have about the church." We weren't even unpacked yet. I wanted to welcome him into my home, but I wasn't ready. I'll invite the pastor when the family is settled and the curtains are up. By contrast, after the morning worship service at another church, the pastor and his wife invited us to their house for dinner. We ate hot dogs and potato chips and were completely at ease. In this open atmosphere, we found it easy to ask questions about the church. It made a world of difference.
- 3. See Sunday school as an initial contact point.** A visitor's first impression of a new church is often what he gets dropping a child off at Sunday school. Adult Sunday school teachers also serve as important first contacts. When we attended Sunday school as a couple in one church for a few weeks, only one couple bothered to learn our names.
- 4. Become visitors for a day.** People who have belonged to the same church for many years may not remember what it's like to be a visitor. A simple exercise can resensitize them: Visit a church where no one knows you. Go outside your community and outside your denomination. Go without knowing what to wear or what ministries are available. Pay attention to how you're received. Ask how you'd feel if you longed for a church home. Would this church welcome you enough to make you come back?

Welcome does not happen automatically. It involves intentionally setting aside natural habits to show genuine caring. It involves treating your visitors the same way that Christ would: with warm hands and open hearts.

—JENNIFER SMITH-MORRIS

Discuss

1. How welcome do visitors feel at our church?
2. What is the role of people in the pews to greet newcomers? The role of greeters and ushers? How can we train people to better connect with visitors?
3. What other ways can we draw in visitors?

How to Share Your Faith

You don't need special gifts, but you do need to care.

John 9

I don't have the gift of evangelism. I haven't come up with a unifying theory that amalgamates 52 different techniques of evangelism into one unstoppable, unbeatable method for converting people. I don't even like the word evangelism because I have seen plenty of bad evangelism.

But I have many non-Christian friends. Every day I interact with dozens of people who do not have a relationship with Jesus. They seem happy, but I know there is little joy without God. This bothers me. And so I evangelize. Evangelism isn't a gift thing; it's a gospel thing. God has called us to the work of evangelism because he cares about people. We should be grasped by the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. People are suffering; their lives are not okay without Jesus. God left us on this earth for a reason. God wants none to perish.

I want to give you some principles for evangelism. This is not a technique that will make sharing Jesus easier. Evangelism is a long-haul work whereby you enter into someone's world and lay your life down for that person. Here are the principles:

- 1. Go.** For the most part, people are not going to come to us. We can have the most effective seeker-sensitive, gospel-enriched, inoffensive Christian activities, yet apart from deep relationships in which we go across boundaries, most people will not go to God. The gospel message has an inherent call: go.
- 2. Stay.** Going is hard. Staying is harder. We have a few friendships with nonbelievers and go to some of the places they go, but as soon as things get a little uncomfortable, we leave. The type of love Jesus calls us to necessitates that we stay in relationship even when discomfort sets in. Once we get over the need to be comfortable, we can start being people who stay. We see people through the good and the bad. We learn to enjoy them and care for them. It is these long-haul relationships that afford the most room for the gospel to articulate all of its grace and truth.
- 3. Bless.** We can't bless people in mysterious, weird, religious ways that we alone understand. People need and want to see tangible things. Like the Good Samaritan, we have the means to bless people in practical, obvious ways. As people hear the good news from our lips, they should see the good news in our lives.
- 4. Tell.** If you have lived faithfully with your friends, there will be room to tell your stories. They know by how you live that you are a Christian. Once you have these types of relationships, you can speak about Jesus to non-Christians in the same way that you speak to Christians. You don't have to look for opportunities or manipulate conversations; simply let people know what God has done and is doing in your life. Use language that they can understand. If you are concerned that people might feel uncomfortable, most likely they won't be; it is those who are not concerned about people's comfort who make them uncomfortable.

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Discuss

1. What non-Christian is God calling you to spend more time with? What prevents you from doing that?
2. Is a relationship with a non-Christian difficult for you to maintain right now? What do you need from God to continue that relationship?
3. List some ways you can bless a non-Christian in your life. What resources do you have that can be used to serve him or her?

Introducing the Gospel

How to help people who are searching for the spiritual.

Mark 6:30–44

One of our church members is a highly sought piano teacher. After inviting his students and parents to church with little success, he decided to take church to them. He proposed a parenting seminar offered by church leaders at the clubhouse of a residential subdivision. It would be held on Friday night and include dessert and coffee. What's more, he'd invite various families to sponsor and pay for tables. "We'll get 12 tables, with 10 people at a table. That way we'll pay for the clubhouse and have enough left over for a first-class event," he said.

So many people packed the clubhouse that we had to turn some away. In the weeks that followed, families came to our church who never would have attended apart from the seminar. Here are ways to introduce the gospel to unchurched people in your community.

- 1. Create pre-evangelism events.** At our Friday night clubhouse event, we offered a simple presentation on parenting based on basic biblical insights, putting in a low-key plug about what would happen if people had Christ in their marriage and home. We offered some tapes and invitations from our church, mingled for a while, then went home. We're now working with clusters of families around Charlotte to offer parenting seminars as pre-evangelism events. You might try something similar—or find your own format for getting out into the community to meet a need and show people what you offer.
- 2. Use the Internet for training and outreach.** One of the best uses of the Internet is training our members to share their faith. We've converted much of our evangelism coaching from church-campus classes to a 16-week Internet-based effort called "The Impact Zone." The pitch is easy: "Give us your e-mail address. Then, for the next 16 weeks, you'll receive a weekly, one-page coaching e-mail." That keeps evangelism before folks on a weekly basis; it's bite-sized and easily digested, and convenient to their schedule. And it works. We are also using the Internet for outreach. Our Web site is designed to help seekers feel comfortable about Mecklenburg so that they will come and check out the church.
- 3. Let them ask questions.** People today have a greater desire to talk about what they are learning. We've learned to let them. Our first Dialogue Night was an experiment: a mid-week service following our time of worship, during which people in the audience were invited to ask questions on Christian faith and spiritual growth. We got questions on every issue imaginable. Today Dialogue Nights rank among our most highly attended services. We are incorporating times of dialogue in our weekend services. And small groups for seekers are built on an open-question format. Leaders are trained to address the questions posed on the first night so that the sessions have biblical structure yet high personalization.
- 4. Offer gateway experiences to new believers.** Like any church, we've struggled with how to disciple new believers. The biggest breakthrough we've experienced has been the use of large, gateway events to provide a basic introduction to what we want new believers to know. Foundations address the basic needs in a new believer's life, such as: how to be sure you're a Christian, the importance of baptism, how to read the Bible and have devotions, how to worship, and how to talk to others about faith.

—JAMES EMERY WHITE

Discuss

1. In what way was Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:30–44) an event to introduce the gospel?
2. What kinds of events today address people's needs? Could our church offer something similar?
3. Name some ways our church can incorporate times of dialogue in large- and small-group gatherings. How can we train leaders to answer questions that come up?

Our Church’s Readiness to Evangelize

A tool to determine where we are and how to move forward.

2 Corinthians 5:15

Step 1: To determine how ready you are to share your faith, check the following boxes, circling + as strong or – as weak.

- Motivated (I have a heartfelt desire to share the good news of Christ): + or –
- Available (I have social contact with non-Christians): + or –
- Equipped (I can effectively explain the message): + or –

Step 2: Take those answers and find your “diagnosis” on the following chart. The chart demonstrates how our strengths and weaknesses influence each other. There is some overlap in each category. For example, motivation might change, depending on how well you’re equipped to share faith in a certain situation. Each category represents a continuum rather than something you have or don’t have. Motivation, for example, goes up and down, depending on whom you’re talking to.

Taken from *Speaking of Jesus* by J. Mack Stiles. ©1995 by J. Mack Stiles and InterVarsity Christian

Motivated	Available	Equipped	Evangelism diagnosis
–	–	–	<i>Sequestered.</i> Not interested in evangelism; has adopted rather than personal faith; needs to make personal faith commitment before evangelizing others.
–	+	–	<i>Apathetic.</i> Sees religion as a personal thing; doesn’t see importance of evangelism; needs to know Christ’s love for others and become willing to share.
–	–	+	<i>Academic.</i> Sees evangelism as intellectual exercise; knows the gospel and culture but no non-Christians; needs to pray for love and take concrete steps to reach the lost.
+	–	–	<i>Frustrated.</i> Confused about what to say and to whom but has a heart to share Christ; needs to find a role model to learn biblical approach to evangelism.
–	+	+	<i>Daunted.</i> Frightened or tired of evangelism; knows the secular world and gospel but lacks motivation; needs to dare to share.
+	–	+	<i>Isolated.</i> Wants to share but is too busy with church stuff; doesn’t know non-Christians socially; needs to take steps to make friends with a non-Christian.
+	+	–	<i>Reckless.</i> Sees evangelism as exciting opportunity; has potential but may fall for manipulative ideas; needs to develop a sound biblical approach to evangelism.
+	+	+	<i>Engaged.</i> Willing and ready to share faith; is motivated by love and is available to non-Christians; needs to keep following Christ.

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Discuss

1. Have you ever led a person to Christ? If so, describe some of the steps in that process.
2. Name some ways you could get more involved with non-Christians. What prevents you from doing that now? What would help?
3. What needs to happen in our church to turn people from Isolateds or Daunted or other types into Engaged Evangelists?

Further Exploration

9 helpful resources on outreach and evangelism.

LEADERSHIP JOURNAL Reaching and Connecting (*Spring 1999*) and **Embracing Evangelism** (*Summer 2001*) The leading publication for church leaders devotes these issues to how we can communicate the gospel to people around us. Read these issues online for free: www.leadershipjournal.net, click on “Archives,” scroll down and click on the issue.

Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism by *Mark Mittelberg*. This book anchors evangelism in the local church. It reviews Mittelberg’s thinking in *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Zondervan, 1996) and expands it into a church plan (*Zondervan, 2000; ISBN 0310221498*).

Evangelism Outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News by *Rich Richardson*. This book grapples vigorously with postmodern issues (including a courageous chapter that challenges us to re-think how we define the gospel), and offers a way of diagramming the gospel that goes beyond the popular “bridge” illustrations. The pages are packed with practical ideas. (*InterVarsity, 2000; ISBN 0830822763*)

Growing Your Church Through Evangelism and Outreach edited by *Marshall Shelley*. “How to Reach the Happy Pagan,” “Opening the Closed American Mind,” and more from leading evangelists on getting the good news about Christ out of the pews and into the world. (*Moorings, 1996; ISBN 0345395980*)

How to Reach Secular People by *George G. Hunter III*. In this thorough profile of contemporary secular people, Hunter says such people are often deeply spiritual yet struggle with doubt. To reach them, Hunter challenges us to imagine an approach to evangelism where belonging precedes believing (*Abingdon, 1992; ISBN 0687179300*).

Leadership Handbook of Outreach and Care edited by *James D. Berkley*. More than 200 articles by church leaders on how to inspire and equip churches for evangelizing people in all walks of life. (*Baker, 1994; ISBN 0801090423*)

Lost in America: How You and Your Church Can Impact the World Next Door by *Tom Clegg and Warren Bird*. The authors show how to do postmodern evangelism by asking the right questions and offering helpful answers. The text is colored with references to popular movies (*Group, 2001; ISBN 076442257x*).

Share Jesus without Fear by *William Fay with Linda Evans Shepherd*. This book is an antidote to argumentative and antagonistic approaches to evangelism. The foundation is solidly biblical and the method refreshingly relational, offering clear evidence that one-on-one evangelism is doable. (*Broadman & Holman, 1999; ISBN 0805418393*)

The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples by *Win Arn and Charles Arn*. This classic book on evangelism is clear and concise. It’s based on the “web of relationships” concept, which is how most evangelism actually happens (*1982, 2nd ed., Baker, 1998; ISBN 0801090512*).

Sample Retreat Schedule

How to use “Engaging Evangelism” at a weekend retreat.

BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS expands easily into a retreat format. Here is a sample retreat schedule you may follow for the “Engaging Evangelism” theme. The purpose of this retreat is to study how to evangelize, both individually and as a church.

Friday Evening

◆ 8–8:45 P.M. **Opening Session:** Hand out copies of “Evangelizing People Today,” the interview with Brian McLaren on pages 4-5, and allow time for each person to read it. Then form groups of three or four. Have each group discuss the questions at the bottom of the page. Reconvene for the last 20 minutes and have the groups share their comments and consider what that may mean for the church.

◆ 9–9:45 P.M. **Bible Study:** End the night with “Evangelism Is God’s Job First,” the Bible study on page 3. You can either photocopy it and pass out the study or use the handout as your notes.

Saturday Morning

◆ 9–9:45 A.M. **Devotional:** Set the tone for the day by handing out (or presenting) the devotional “Becoming a Slave to Save” (p. 10). Discuss the questions at the bottom of the page and consider how our group feels about this issue. Do we feel so indebted to Christ that we are compelled to share him with non-Christians?

◆ 10–11 A.M. **Activity:** Work through the steps of “Our Church’s Readiness to Evangelize” on page 15 to help our group determine where they are in evangelism and where they might go..

◆ 11:15 A.M.–NOON. **Assessment:** Hand out “4 Myths about Evangelism” the assessment on page 6, to each participant. After each person has read and completed the assessment, consider how our church might adjust its approach.

◆ NOON—**Lunch.**

Saturday Afternoon

◆ 1–2 P.M. **Final Group Session:** Close the retreat with the how-to article “How to Share Your Faith” on page 13. Have each person spend some time alone to quietly read and respond to the questions on the handout. Have the group come together to share what God has taught us about blessing people who do not know Christ with the good news of the gospel. Pray together, asking God for guidance and wisdom as we take these new steps together.

You can create similar retreat plans for any of the other BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS themes. Simply determine what you want to accomplish and select the handouts that support your objectives.