

A Better Reason to Share Your Faith

 desiringgod.org/articles/guilt-evangelism

Steven Lee

March 6, 2018

Maybe evangelism intimidates us not because it *is* intimidating, but because we've made it intimidating.

My neighbor and I used to drive together to a nearby coffee shop every other week. Some weeks we just talked — about life, news, whatever was on our minds. Other weeks we'd look at the next passage in the Gospel of Mark. So much of it was foreign to him. It was his first time reading the Bible and, well, the Bible isn't always easy to understand.

I listened as he asked really good questions — questions I don't even think to ask (or remember asking). I'd listen to my neighbor share about his job, his family, his upbringing, and his longing for true meaning. We talked about being dads to our kids, we talked about the pressure of being the main breadwinners in our family, and we talked about tricky relationships at work. And while we sipped and talked, God was working. This was a friend and neighbor, with lots of questions about God, the Bible, and Christianity, who trusted me enough to ask those questions. This was evangelism.

Sitting Ducks

Unfortunately, many Christians tend to think of evangelism as *gavage*. Let me explain. *Foie gras* is a French delicacy made of fatty duck or goose liver. The traditional process to make *foie gras* is called "gavage." A long metal tube is forcibly inserted into a duck's mouth to feed it an unnatural amount of grain up to three times a day. This process causes the liver to expand to 600% of its natural size and takes up a large part of the bird's body cavity. This process creates large, fatty, and buttery liver prized for its taste and texture.

“We often live as if the laborers are plentiful, but the harvest is few.”

Many Christians share the gospel like grain through a long metal tube. We're just pouring the gospel down the throat of some unsuspecting stranger, hoping they don't choke on it on the way down. Author and pastor John S. Leonard writes, “As Christians, we know we should share our faith with others. However, we don't do it until we feel horribly guilty — then we force ourselves upon some poor, unsuspecting soul” (*Get Real*, 5). Do we only do it to alleviate our guilt with no consideration of how our message was received?

Deliberate Evangelism

The other danger — on the other end of the spectrum — is that we're so fearful of coming across forceful that we never get around to sharing anything about our faith. We hover along the surface but never get to the heart of the matter. We labor to build friendships but never share the hope that lies within us. We are content to be nice, friendly people but never tell others that we are sinners saved by grace.

Evangelism is a spiritual discipline. We need to be intentional and deliberate in building relationships with, and testifying to, those who don't know Jesus. We need to prioritize evangelism and practice it. Just like Bible memorization, fasting, or prayer, it won't happen unless we're convinced it is important for our spiritual growth and intimacy with Jesus. Few important things happen naturally. The things that are most important require our attention, intentionality, and practice.

Sometimes we forget that Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" ([Luke 10:2](#)). We often live as if the laborers are plentiful, but the harvest is few. The harvest is ripe and ready. Certainly not without building relationships, not without listening ears, not without faithful prayer, not without hospitable homes, and not without speaking, but the harvest is plentiful.

Buried Talents

Evangelism, like other spiritual disciplines, is a means of God's grace to us. God has given evangelists to the church in order to equip believers for the work of ministry ([Ephesians 4:11–12](#)). But if we took a survey of a typical gathering of Christians, it's likely that less than one-tenth of one percent would say they have the gift of evangelism. It is inconceivable that God has so ill-equipped his church with evangelists for the spread of the gospel both locally and globally.

“Evangelism won't happen unless we're convinced it is important for our spiritual growth and intimacy with Jesus.”

Far more of us can become capable and effective evangelists than we realize. Own it up front: you're not destined to be the next Billy Graham — but you can be used by God to share the good news with a handful of people.

Deliberate practice will develop into a gift. Ask any talented musician how long it took before they became good at whatever they do. They each put in *thousands* of hours of practice with their instrument. Even young prodigies still practice hours each day to hone and develop their skills. But we assume evangelism should come naturally and immediately. After one bad experience, we give up altogether — burying the talents God has given us in the ground.

“Do you ever wonder if you have a talent that you’re not using?” John Leonard asks. “Maybe you have a gift for music or can paint or write, but because you never work at developing that talent the potential of these gifts go undiscovered and unused. This is equally true when it comes to sharing our faith. Most Christians don’t know if they’re evangelists because they haven’t done it enough or worked at developing that gift to see if they have any potential” (110).

Pursue Your Joy

My personal evangelism, though, isn’t mainly a result of hardwiring it into my life as a begrudged discipline, or even deliberate practice, but because few experiences are so exhilarating, enjoyable, and wonderful. The God of the universe has called every disciple of Jesus to make disciples (Matthew 28:18–20). We get to be the means by which God renews the world, one soul at a time. Furthermore, not only has God called us to this privilege; he himself equips us for it and promises to save some through our efforts.

After a few months of studying Mark, and then Genesis, with my neighbor, I could begin to see the fingerprints of God on his life. He was processing what he was reading in the Bible. I could see the Scriptures coming alive in his heart and mind. I had the privilege of walking with him, answering his questions the best I could, listening to his doubts, and praying for him.

| “We get to be the means by which God renews the world, one soul at a time.”

And then the phone call came. He said we had to meet. When I saw him, the first words out of his mouth were, “I’m off the fence! I didn’t even know I was on the fence, but I’m off the fence. I believe in Jesus!”

He went on to share with me the joy that had filled his heart, how the Scriptures were making more and more sense, how things had finally clicked for him. How he suddenly had unusual peace. How he had surrendered himself to God, repented of his sinful patterns of living, and was “all in” following Jesus. My heart soared with gladness. We hugged — a couple grown men in a coffee shop. *God saves!* My neighbor had become a friend, but now he was a brother — forever. All because of some conversations over coffee.

What Might God Do Through You?

So yes, in Jesus’s name and with his help, pursue evangelism and missional living with intentionality. Make it a discipline. But God will increase *your* joy as you pursue the lost. The apostle Paul says to those converted under his ministry, “What is our hope or *joy* or crown of

boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?" (1 Thessalonians 2:19). Few things are more satisfying in life than being used by God to bring someone new to saving faith.

So, get off the fence, ask your neighbor to coffee, listen carefully as they share about themselves, and look for opportunities to tell them about the hope you have in Jesus.
