

CONVERSATIONS not Conversions

by Ed Waken

My doorbell rang. As I rose from my home office to answer it, I wondered to myself, “Who is bothering me?” It was Reese. Reese had trimmed some trees for me earlier in the month. Standing there in a very sweaty ball cap, dirty clothes and a sunken face, he wanted to know if I had more work that he might be able to do.

At that moment, I really didn’t care how he was doing. I was busy doing something else and I really didn’t need any trees trimmed. Reese was bothering me. But a voice in my heart told me to encourage him. My lips parted. Air from my lungs raced across my vocal chords. I managed to ask, “Hey Reese, how are you doing?”

That simple question, prompted by God, began a conversation about Reese’s drug addiction and desperate state of life. As we moved to my back yard and enjoyed some sandwiches and iced tea, Reese shared his life story with me. I shared the story of Life with him. Later, Reese invited the Life-Giver to be His Lord and Savior. He has since been sober for over two months and has already seen a house church with some friends who are new to Jesus and who are desperate for Jesus get started. Whatever I was working on in my office that day doesn’t seem that important now!



Reese

This is a grand story of success in evangelism, but not because Reese became a follower of Christ. It is successful because I was obedient to have a conversation with him instead of blowing him off for my “stuff.” How many times have I blown off conversations with people because I was so tuned into my world, my agenda and priorities? My experience with Reese reflects the Biblical principles of evangelism that are given to every believer.

Many believers have the notion that evangelism is hard, scary and reserved for those who are gifted. The results of this kind of thinking cause us to shy away from spiritual interaction with lost people. After all, we really don’t know what to say, how to say it and many of us don’t know our Bibles well enough to answer the hard questions people ask. This kind of thinking is not at all what the Bible teaches us.



Many people measure success in evangelism with results. That is, did the person I’m sharing with make a decision for Jesus? If he did, I was successful. If she didn’t, I must have missed something and need to do better next time. This is not what the Bible teaches us.

The Biblical principle regarding success in evangelism is always to be obedient to share the truth. In short, we should be measuring *conversations* about Jesus, not *conversions*. We can choose to have conversations about the spiritual with people, but we cannot make people respond to the truth we share with them. That is God’s realm.

So what is success in evangelism?

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>>Success in evangelism must be measured by conversations. Here are *four truths that will serve to strengthen our passion to share our faith*. At the moment of salvation, these truths are equally true for every believer.

1 **The Authority of God** (Matthew 28:16-20). Every believer has Jesus residing in them and therefore has His authority according to the Great Commission. Jesus said, "All authority is given me...", and I am sending you to share the truth about me with others, make disciples, baptize them and teach them. He ended with "... behold, I am with you always..." Every believer has the authority to share the good news of Christ.

2 **The Power of God** (Acts 1:8). Acts 1:8 specifically teaches us that the power of the Holy Spirit is given to every believer for the precise purpose of sharing Christ with the world. This powerful witness is not reserved or limited to a few, but is given to all (see Acts 2:38-39).

3 **The Mind of God** (1 Corinthians 2:16). Paul truly builds confidence in our ability in evangelism when he writes of the believer's reliance upon the Spirit as the real confidence builder regarding evangelism. The principle is that the Spirit of God knows everything. We have the Spirit of God living in us. The Spirit of God freely gives us thoughts that we are to voice. Therefore, Paul concludes that we have the mind of Christ! The context is all about evangelism (see 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

4 **The Words of God** (Matthew 10:16-20, Mark 13:9-11, Luke 21:12-15). These are parallel passages that give us some tremendous promises regarding evangelism. Jesus instructs us to *not worry* about what we are to share or how we are to share it. In Mark 13, Jesus tells us *not to worry beforehand* about what to say or how to say it. In Luke 21 He instructs us to *make up our minds not to worry*. In the Matthew and Mark passages, we learn that the Spirit will give us the words and method, but in the Luke passage the Word teaches us that Jesus Himself will give us the words and methods to use.

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Evangelists... for the Church or the Lost?

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,
Ephesians 4:11

At the mention of the word, Evangelist, our minds immediately picture large crowds in packed stadiums where people are streaming forward to receive Jesus Christ. People like Billy Graham, Luis Palau and Greg Laurie come to mind as some of today's best evangelists in our land. With these ideas flowing through our minds, we would naturally think that the Evangelist is given by God to reach the lost, right? Wrong!

If we continue on to Ephesians 4:12 we find these words, "...and some as evangelists...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ..." *The Evangelist is given to the church, not the lost!* The Evangelist is given to the church to equip believers to carry out the work of evangelism.

In other words, the Evangelist's job is to teach believers how God has equipped them to be successful evangelizers for His kingdom. He is to encourage and guide the church in the ministry of sharing the truths of Christ with the world.

The Evangelist is most effective when helping the church to multiply communicators of the gospel, not multiplying listeners to hear their messages. He or she should be mobilizing all Christians to do uncommon things in expanding the Kingdom of God.

Evangelism crusades are wonderful tools that have been used by God for generations to see people ushered in to the Kingdom. I applaud their role. However, I also believe that if we are going to see a tsunami of souls coming to Christ, multiplying listeners will ever be enough. We must have more communicators of the Gospel. We must have more evangelizers. The Evangelist's role is to teach and release the church for this purpose.

As we rethink the role of the evangelist, as we empower all believers to engage in conversations, we will finally be able to see just how white the fields are. §

by Ed Waken

conversations not conversions

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The Godhead takes an active role in teaching us that we have no reason to worry; they will instruct us and give us the confidence, words and methods at just the right time. Jesus promises that if you simply speak what is given to you to say, that none of your adversaries will be able to contradict or refute you.

Conversations, not conversions are what we should be looking at as we think about success in evangelism. Imagine if every believer understood and acted upon the Biblical truth that they have the authority, power, mind and words of God every time they choose to share their faith? Imagine a field that has been sown extravagantly with seeds of the kingdom. What kind of harvest would take root?

Begin many conversations with people not yet connected to Jesus. Be assured that at the moment of sharing, you are successful because Jesus is giving you His words and His methods while doing His work in the heart of the hearer. That is success—100% of the time! All we have to do is open our mouths and speak what is given us in that moment. Simple conversations will produce eternal results. §

I want to share Jesus with others because of what Jesus has done for me.

I remember my conversion in November of 2001 and how Jesus really began to change me over the next months.

I knew I should share this with others. Laying on my bed one night, I asked Jesus to give me the boldness to share the story of what He had done for me. At our school I had a bad reputation. It was a Christian School and I wasn't a believer until a few weeks prior. After asking God the night before, I remember that He put it on my heart right there in the bathroom to open my mouth. I just said, "Fellas, this is what Jesus has done for me," and I told my story. Doing this struck a cord deep within me.

In another month or so, I was given the chance to share my testimony with my school—about 175 people. I didn't think I did that very well, yet a few students responded by rededicating their life to Jesus, and a spirit of repentance really came over the school. That really freed me to share my story with anyone, anywhere.

As I moved on to college, there was an older freshman who carried a prison record and a lot of baggage. He wanted to hang out with me, and at first I pushed him away. Then God changed my heart. I realized that this person is either going to heaven or hell and God put him in my life.

We covered lots of ground in our relationship. I'll never forget when he knelt down, right there in my dorm room, and asked Jesus to come into his heart. The next week, his grades went up, his language changed, and he grew in being a servant. The excitement of changed lives continues to propel me to share Jesus.

by Brent Saba- student at Grace College

Marine...Maintenance Man... Evangelist?

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privacy) approached him and wanted to pray to receive Christ right there. So they prayed together. Then he asked Paul to share these things with his dad. Paul didn't figure he would see the dad for a while, but agreed to talk with him as he had opportunity.

After this amazing day, Paul wandered into the now empty first classroom and wrote on the whiteboard: "Born again today, in the Lamb's Book of Life." Then he wrote the names of the two boys from the class and Allen's name. Paul thanked God again. As he walked out of the classroom Allen's dad was standing right in front of him!

Shocked, Paul explained what had happened with Allen that day. At the start, his dad was antagonistic, yet when Paul asked him, "Do you know for sure that you would go to heaven if you were to die," Allen's dad's heart softened and he showed interest. Within moments, he also prayed to receive Christ!

The next morning, while Paul was in the shop to get the day going, a fifth grade student knocked on the door. "Mr. Wise, can you come up to our class right now. A few more kids want to pray to accept Jesus," the student said. Paul excitedly walked to the first classroom. He was stunned as he entered and saw 16 kids at the front of the classroom waiting to pray. He prayed with them. Soon he was beckoned over to the second classroom. Waiting in the front of that class were 15 more fifth graders.

The ripple effect of this apparent movement of God is still spreading. At least 50 of the fifth graders made a commitment to Jesus. People started calling it the "Fifth Grade Revival." Students in other grades and parents have come to Christ as well. 17 junior high students made a commitment at a chapel service when Paul spoke. Reports of students leading other students to accept Jesus are still coming in.

We know that this story hasn't ended. Paul said, "As best as I can count there are at least 120 people connected to the school—that is students or their parents—who have come to Christ in the three weeks since Biker Sunday. Because this thing is going so fast, there maybe as many as 175, but I really don't know." §

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