

Tell it Often – Tell it Well

By Mark McCloskey

Chapter 20

A Strategy for Every-Member Mobilization¹

Every-member mobilization means that every member of Christ's body must be motivated and equipped to "go" with the gospel, taking the good news to all who will listen. As John Stott put it, "Evangelism is a responsibility laid by Christ upon His whole church and every member of it. So the people of God must be both mobilized and trained." The Lausanne Covenant states: "In every nation and culture there should be an effective training program for pastors and laymen." C. Peter Wagner affirms, "All Christians at all times should be prepared for that moment when God brings them into contact with a person prepared by the Holy Spirit for accepting Christ." Every-member mobilization is crucial if the church is to fulfill its mandate to take the gospel to all nations (Matthew 28: 18-20).

The Priority of Every-Member Mobilization

Every-member mobilization is crucial to the very life and witness of the local church. As George Peters observed, "Evangelism will be perennial and effective to the degree that it will succeed to mobilize, train, and actively involve the total 'priesthood' of God, the total 'body' of Christ. This is an axiom of the Scriptures that can be neglected only at the peril of the church."

The growth of any movement, secular or spiritual, is based on its ability to mobilize its membership in effective, continuous, expansion-related activity. The church is no exception to this rule in its calling to the work of evangelism.

In my thirteen years of doing evangelism, however, I have come to a painful truth: After all is said and done, there is usually more said than done. Evangelism is much discussed, encouraged and "taught," but seldom demonstrated. Evangelism is nothing if it is not done. For to fall short of doing evangelism is to remain neutral in the spiritual battle. The proof of our spiritual convictions is in the doing. So, how can we bridge the gap between intention and action, discussion and demonstration?

I have observed that the doing of evangelism will flourish only when certain factors are present in the corporate life of a church or any community of believers, as well as in the lives of its individual members. Only then will the motivational and structural barriers to every-member evangelism be surmounted.

Overcoming Motivational Barriers

Ah, the feet. Home of ingrown toenails, corns, calluses, strange odors and fallen arches. There is nothing glamorous here. These things were not glamorous to the average Middle Easterner in biblical

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times, either. As the victims of dusty roads, sandals and a lot of walking, feet were surely the dirtiest and most undesirable part of the body.

In this context Isaiah surprisingly declared, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news" (Isaiah 52:7). Now, why did Isaiah single out the feet for praise? Why not sing the praise of the messenger himself, or his tongue or radiant face?

Perhaps the feet – mundane, hardworking, and absolutely necessary – are the most fitting symbols of those qualities God sees as praiseworthy in the evangelist. God knows that the spreading of the good news is hard work. It will bring the evangelist in contact with the filth and grime of the world. It is very rarely a glamorous, limelight activity. But, I might add, this is good news for most of us who consider ourselves average people. If you do not mind hard work, and a little dirt under your spiritual toenails, you are certainly qualified to be a messenger of the good news.

I think Isaiah praised the feet because they stood in the "doing gap." The feet must take the good news to the mountaintop where it can then be proclaimed. Our feet must move us to those who need to hear before the tongue can speak and the good news is shared, heard and believed.

The praises of the feet turn our attention to the necessity of putting shoe leather to our heartfelt theological convictions. In this sense, our feet are a measurement of the depth and intensity of our convictions. The question we need to ask ourselves every day is not whether we grasp the crucial nature of the gospel, but whether it has grasped us – by the feet.

As I write this, my thoughts turn to a young Christian college woman whose feet regularly carried her more than a mile through snow, sometimes up to her knees, to a state university student center. Why? So she could share Christ with students who needed to hear. I think of the feet of the great missionary Hudson Taylor, as they marched up the plank to board the ship *Dumfries* in Liverpool, England, for a five and one-half month voyage. It was his theological convictions which led his feet to China. He said, "I would never have thought of going out to China had I not believed that the Chinese were lost and needed Christ." Or consider the feet of martyred Jim Elliot, compelled to go to the Auca Indians out of the conviction that simple obedience to his Master must direct his steps.

These are the "beautiful feet" of which Isaiah speaks, the feet God loves to see in action. There is a direct link between our convictions and our feet. Therefore, the church or Christian community must do everything in its power to develop and strengthen biblical convictions of the nature and necessity of evangelism.

Structures for Involvement

How are the seeds of conviction planted? How are they watered and cultivated? And most important, how do they translate into action?

I believe the answer is twofold. First, as we discussed in an earlier chapter, we must allow the teaching of God's Word to sink into our hearts. This is foundational to the church's work of evangelism. Second we must put ourselves in situations where we can act on our convictions.

We must expose ourselves to both biblical content and real life context, to knowledge and experience, to training and practice. Too often, there is an overemphasis on content and knowledge at the expense of practical experience. We will do well to pay heed to the words of nineteenth-century English

philosopher Herbert Spencer who said, "The great aim of our education is not knowledge but action." So don't fall into the trap of thinking that if your conviction level is lagging, you must first work on building your convictions before you go out and do evangelism. No, the best way to build convictions about evangelism is to go out and do it as you are processing the biblical information which fuels your convictions.

It is a psychological truth that we are more likely to act our way into thinking, than to think our way into acting. In Ethics, Aristotle addressed the issue of how one gains a particular virtue. He maintained that virtues are habits of the will, built up act by act, not intrinsic capacities dependent on personality type. How does one become a builder? he asks. "By building," is the simple answer. A man becomes brave by being brave, and self-disciplined by being self-disciplined.

The application to the realm of evangelism is obvious. We become experienced and therefore effective, "natural," sensitive and bold communicators of the gospel by doing evangelism.

Reality Exposure

If I had to choose between a lecture or discussion on evangelism and an actual evangelistic experience, I would choose the experience. It's been said that "one specific is worth a hundred generalities." I also believe that one personal experience is worth a hundred lectures on evangelism. Why? Because of the principle of reality exposure.

Applied to evangelism, this principle states: "If you want to develop a burden for the lost, go out and talk to the lost and find out how lost they really are. If you desire to have the crucial nature of evangelism branded on your heart, go out and do it, and you will become convinced of just how crucial it is. If you want to develop the conviction that Jesus does indeed change lives, take His life-changing message to others and see if this isn't true."

If you want to experience the power of the Spirit, the boldness that comes only from God, then you must move out in obedience. His provision of power and confidence is granted in the context of your obedience, as you go. As one author puts it, "The Spirit is not a guide and a helper for those on a straight way perfectly able to manage on their own. He comes to assist men caught up in the thick of battle, and tried beyond their strength." The fruit is at the end of the limb. The kind of convictions that translate into action aren't lectured or discussed into our heads. They are hammered into our hearts on the forge of personal, front line experience. This is the principle of reality exposure.

Strategies for Personal Action

These truths lead me to recommend a strategy for every- member mobilization that is structure-, training- and accountability-oriented.

Frankly, my recommendations will cut across the grain of most recent thinking on how to get yourself and others doing evangelism. Most of the contemporary writing on this topic has revolved around the evangelistic philosophy of the relational-incarnational school, which we discussed in Chapter 14. It is an established fact that some of the most fruitful evangelism is that done with friends and acquaintances, and I have no argument here. But, in addition, many in this school suggest that the work of evangelism will simply "happen" as the spontaneous, way-of-life overflow of a spiritually healthy, vital body of believers who are in tune with their spiritual giftedness.

The elements of tools, and training and accountability are seen as at best useless, and at worst an unnecessary intrusion into the free-flowing evangelistic life of the church; a programmatic substitute for spiritual vitality.

We wholeheartedly affirm that all effective evangelism must have Christ at the core of the life of both individual evangelist and Christian community, and that the presence and fellowship of the church is foundational to the success of any group's evangelistic effort. Yet it must not be erroneously concluded that structural elements are incompatible with this truth and are, therefore, unnecessary or obtrusive. As we have noted before, it is a both/and, not an either/or, proposition. Of course, not all of those who affirm the superiority of relational evangelism ignore the benefit of structural elements. Joe Aldrich helpfully suggests many types of what he calls "harvest vehicles," i.e., evangelistic dinners, seminars, home Bible studies and many others.

But a popular concept rooted in the relational approach has become almost axiomatic: Only a certain minority of believers can and should be mobilized to participate in strategic/initiative evangelism. This minority is usually placed at around 10 percent of the local body of Christ, i.e., those with the gift of evangelism. C. Peter Wagner has suggested this figure, not so much to set a limit on what sort of evangelistic training should be offered, but rather to encourage the church that there are more potential evangelists out there who should be trained than are presently stepping forward. He notes that of the 10 percent whom he believes have the gift of evangelism, only one half of one percent are actively using it. He wisely argues that the first step in mobilizing the church in evangelism is to call those with the gift of evangelism to accountability and action.

However, the thinking that these figures should limit the numbers of those involved in strategic/initiative evangelism is the prevailing attitude in the church today. Joe Aldrich articulates this position as he states, "I doubt that 10 percent of the body of Christ will ever be effective in this type of evangelism." He adds that while the initiative approach or, as he calls it, the "confrontational/intrusional" approach, is legitimate, 95 percent "are either incapable of such a ministry or feel they have no ministry in evangelism because the only visible model offends their sensitivities toward people. As a general rule, the confrontational approach should be a methodology reserved for the abnormal rather than the normal witness experience."⁹

In his response to inquiries concerning his paper "Contemporary Practices of Evangelism" submitted to the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism, Dr. George Peters followed similar reasoning. He stated that as a church was mobilized to do evangelism, we could expect only 10 to 15 percent to be involved in what he called "active, confrontational" evangelism. He went on to conclude that 20 to 30 percent of a congregation could be expected to be trained in a friendship or relational approach to evangelism. The rest would be encouraged to pray for the work of evangelism.

I certainly do not mean to disparage such gifted and experienced men committed to the task of world evangelization, but I must ask, "Do they report what is or what should be the state of the church in its evangelistic function?" The heart of the issue is whether a church ought to develop a strategy for training all willing believers that utilizes a structure to help mobilize all believers to take advantage of all possible bridges between them and the nonbelieving world. Is not the goal maximum mobilization to equip and mobilize every possible member for the New Testament calling to "be ready in and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2); "to make the most of every opportunity," even with outsiders (Colossians 4:5); and to take the gospel to all nations? If it is, then we need to put the necessary training and evangelistic opportunities within the reach of every believer.

This desire for maximum mobilization should lead to an appreciation for the structures which provide training, tools, accountability and a comprehensive approach to building bridges of contact between the church and the lost. These structures will also enhance the spiritual vitality of the church as its members put themselves in a position to experience the Spirit's enabling power and boldness. Thus, structures are a two-way street, carrying the life of the church from its vital core to the thirsty world, and replenishing and strengthening this core with the returning flow of spiritual vitality that comes only from a front-line ministry experience. I believe that a structured approach to the church's evangelistic mandate, properly understood and implemented, will serve as a conductor, not an inhibitor, of the communication of the life and presence of Jesus Christ. Without such structures, I believe that the church's ministry to a lost world and even her very spiritual vitality will be severely hampered. The barriers of inexperience, fear and inertia will keep believers from making contact with the lost and thus obeying God's mandate to take the gospel to the world.

Suggestions for Every-Member Mobilization

The goal of every-member mobilization is to involve as many believers as possible in a maximum ministry of effective, ongoing personal evangelism. Here are three suggestions, which, if integrated into the motivational and structural environment of a church or Christian organization, will greatly enhance the flow of our spiritual wealth to a world in need of Christ.

Suggestion 1: Make it easy for any member of your group or congregation to be trained in the use of an evangelistic tool.

I am convinced that many Christians lack the confidence to share their faith regularly simply because they lack an effective method to communicate the gospel adequately. Fear grounded in lack of training and experience can cut the feet out from under even the most well-intentioned believer. A simple evangelistic tool and basic training, however, can replace this fear with confidence, leading to the first steps of active involvement in evangelism. The use of such a tool is often the difference between doing evangelism and just talking about it.

Suggestion 2: Encourage commitment to an accountability structure.

Accountability will help members overcome barriers of fear and personal inconvenience. All of us struggle with breaking through our comfort zone. For most of us, evangelism is not a comfortable activity. Here we often face the "chicken and the egg" dilemma. We reason, "I don't want to do evangelism unless it feels natural." This feeling is quite understandable. But what we really are saying is, "I'll do it when it's in my comfort zone." And how does any activity get to the point where it "feels natural"? You guessed it, by doing it. Only personal experience broadens the boundaries of our comfort zone.

The only way out of this dilemma is to come to grips with the fact that the Christian life is full of "faith barriers" that must be broken. This experience is never easy or painless. But we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:3), and we must acknowledge that the Christian life is strenuous effort, often involving spiritual conflict (1 Corinthians 15:58, Colossians 1:29, Eph. 6:10-20). We must make sure we are mentally prepared, filled with the Spirit and meditating on God's Word as we face these challenges.

To help your members broaden their comfort zone, suggest that each one place himself in a position of mutual accountability with another member to embark on a faith venture that takes each of them outside the safe borders of his comfort zone.

This accountability structure can take many forms. Some lay people have found accountability study-prayer groups to be an encouragement to their ministry of evangelism. These groups meet weekly to study the Scriptures and to pray specifically for friends, family members and acquaintances and for the lost in general. This group holds each member accountable to make the most of opportunities throughout the week to share the gospel with those in their natural sphere of influence. These people are prayed for by name and the group prays for "divine opportunities" to share the gospel with them. Each week a report is given on how God answered these prayers. Some take this accountability structure one step further and set aside a time every week (or however often they have determined) to go out in pairs to engage in an actual evangelistic conversation.

Why a specific time? Isn't this a bit rigid or artificial? Why not just leave it to a way-of-life approach?

First, this commitment to accountability in no way negates one's commitment to way-of-life evangelism. In fact, a specific, regular time of evangelism will greatly enhance our way-of-life ministry. The more evangelism you do, the more natural it will feel. The more natural you feel, the more confident you will become, and the more confident you become, the more convinced you will be that the doing of evangelism is crucial to the unfolding of God's love plan for a lost world. The end result is that evangelism will become a conviction and a way of life and the more evangelism you will want to do.

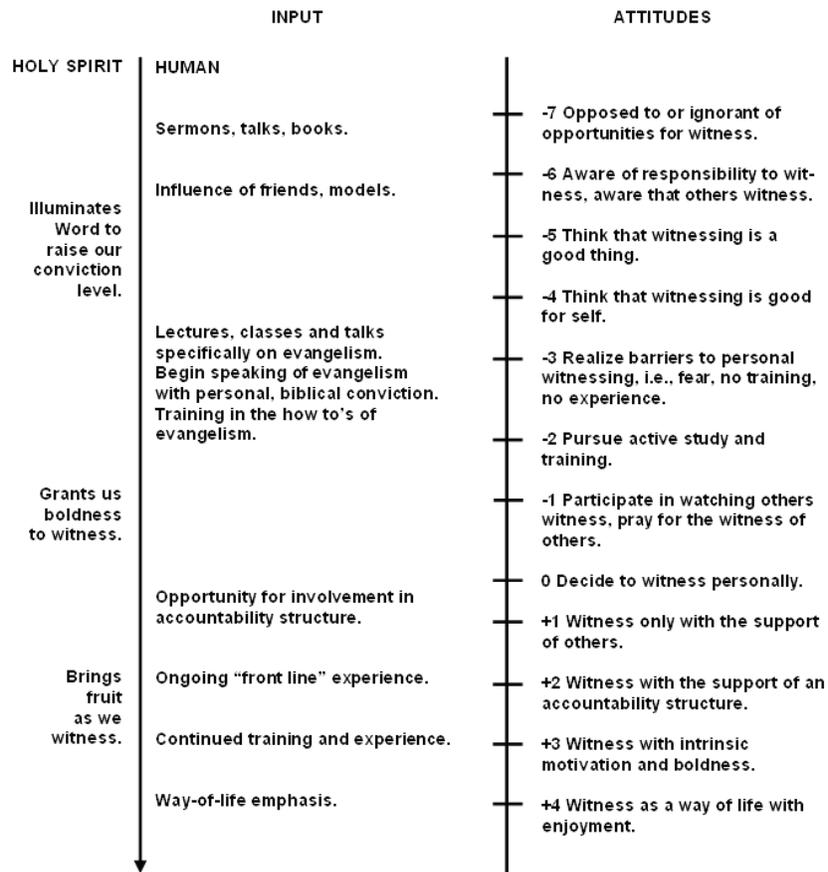
Second, and closely related, the accountability approach takes seriously the fact that just as prayer, worship, meditation and Bible study are spiritual disciplines, so is evangelism. Are prayer, worship, meditation and Bible study to be way-of-life experiences for the believer? Of course. But does this fact hinder us from setting aside specific times during our week to concentrate solely on one or more of these activities? Of course not. We meet at a specific time and place every week for worship and prayer.

Our commitment to spiritual disciplines is the very means by which we ensure that they become all the more rich and meaningful as a way-of-life experience. Evangelism is no exception.

As Figure 10 indicates, there is a wide spectrum of attitudes and involvement in personal evangelism. The point I would like to make from this chart is that while many are positive about evangelism (-5 to -2), they have yet to decide to become personally involved in witnessing (point 0), and have not actually begun to witness with any degree of confidence (+1 to +4). As beneficial as talks and training classes are, they will not get us from -2 to +1. Only the support of a personal accountability structure, coupled with training in how to use a tool and an ongoing strategy for making contact with interested non-Christians will translate the would-be evangelist's good intentions into actions. As Jesus sent out the disciples two by two, each person should find someone who will be accountable with him as he practices the discipline of evangelism.

Suggestion 3: Organize a comprehensive strategy to contact the maximum number of the lost with the gospel.

**FIGURE 10
HOW PEOPLE BEGIN TO WITNESS**



This chart is adapted from a chart used by Dr. Herb Klem, professor of Missions at Bethel Theological Seminary and is used with his permission. This chart is adapted originally from a chart devised by Dr. James Engel.

As we learned from our New Testament survey of evangelism, the first-century church used all means available to reach all people for Christ, for they were convinced that the Heavenly Father was intent on a maximum finding of the lost. But their comprehensive, flexible, initiative-taking approach to getting out the good news has come upon hard times in the American church. Training the laity to take the initiative with anyone who will listen is out of style. In its place, an approach which limits our gospel outreach to our personal sphere of relational contacts, using "natural," (usually non-tool oriented way-of-life) means to make contact, is recommended.

This emphasis is one of the sad by-products of falling prey to the assumption that the majority (90 percent plus) of the church can be expected to do only "friendship evangelism" or pray for the success of the outreach of others. As a result, little or no training will be offered beyond the scope of helping the evangelist learn how to be more natural and sensitive or how to start a gospel conversation with their nonbelieving neighbor. While this is, of course, helpful information and should be made available to all in the body of Christ, it certainly does not pave the way for a maximum involvement of God's people in making evangelistic contact with all who need to hear.

Rather, the believer should be offered the opportunity for training and involvement in a wide variety of evangelistic strategies. For the sake of simplicity, I have chosen to describe two categories of such strategies, the "strategic/initiative" approach and the "initiative/way-of-life" approach.

Strategic/Initiative Evangelism

This type of outreach is so named because it combines the elements of strategy and initiative. It is strategic in that it employs a conscious and wise organization and distribution of resources for bringing trained Christians into evangelistic contact with interested non-Christians in the most advantageous way. It is initiative-oriented in that it asks believers to take the first step to initiate the contact and boldly yet sensitively communicate the gospel to all who are interested.

The question is sure to arise, why not just let the Spirit lead? Why impose a strategy on what should be a natural and spontaneous overflow of the church's vital core of spiritual life? While it is true that the Holy Spirit cannot be programmed, He does operate according to order. Strategy is not a foreign concept to His work of bringing the gospel to the world. We see the Spirit leading Paul to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10) where he preached the gospel (always going first to the synagogues), and to strategic cities like Philippi (a seat of Roman government) and Thessalonica (on a strategic trade route conducive to the rapid spread of the gospel) (1 Thessalonians 1:7,8).

Paul understood that strategic/initiative evangelism is an exercise in wise, Spirit-led stewardship of the church's most valuable possession, the gospel. Used correctly, this approach is a channel of blessing to those outside of the kingdom. As such, strategy is always the servant, never the master, of our highest priority – to put trained, concerned Christians in touch with as many people as are drawn to Christ by the Spirit.

There are many varieties of strategic/initiative evangelism, but they all have one common objective, to enable the evangelists to make evangelistic contact with non-believers.

The Evangelist's Waterloo

Making contact is the spiritual Waterloo for many a well-meaning evangelist. After thirteen years of doing evangelism, I still suffer from spiritual lockjaw. It often seems hard to start a gospel – oriented conversation. The incredible spiritual inertia that must be broken through should come as no surprise, for we are in a spiritual battle. The enemy knows our weakness and fear and is a master at exploiting these to render us silent in the face of evangelistic opportunities.

Overcoming Inertia

Strategic/initiative evangelism comes to our rescue by helping us in our struggle to break the ice and make contact with an interested nonbeliever. The following list of methodologies is not exhaustive, but it will give you some ideas of the comprehensive nature of the strategic/initiative approach.

1. Meetings as a bridge. This strategy, using meetings as common ground, puts Christians in touch with nonbelievers in a context where the gospel can be discussed openly. Such meetings can range from church worship services to evangelistic home studies to prayer breakfasts. Two of my friends have seen incredible results with a Christmas party theme. They invite neighborhood friends to attend "coffees" where the true meaning of Christmas is presented.

Our church recognizes that our Sunday morning worship services provide such a point of contact. As Christians bring friends, family members and neighbors, or as the spiritually curious walk in off the street to attend a service, they are duly noted (through a church friendship register) and are put in touch with trained people from our congregation who arrange a meeting to share Christ with them within the week.

Some of my friends have begun a neighborhood home Bible study. Couples from the block are invited to participate in an open Bible study where all are made to feel comfortable, and no question is too ridiculous to be considered seriously and given a sensitive answer. People in their neighborhood who might never consider attending a church feel welcome. This strategy has provided a rich network of relationships that have proven to be effective in opening opportunities for gospel conversations. These Bible studies can be geared to discuss the claims of Christ, or may revolve around issues of relevance to nonbelievers, issues which find their resolution in Jesus Christ. Topics such as successful marriages, child-rearing, or apologetic issues are just a few of the categories that could work for you.

2. Surveys and evangelistic tools as a bridge. The use of surveys can be a helpful bridge to make contact with nonbelievers. They can be used in a neighborhood door-to-door strategy, or randomly in parks, shopping centers or other appropriate public places. I have found surveys to be helpful not only in breaking the ice with nonbelievers, but also in discerning their spiritual interest level so that I might better communicate the gospel to them.

The evangelist must be very careful to avoid two profound abuses of such a strategy. First, we must not see the survey only as a foot-in-the-door technique, a mere device to ease a potential contact into a gospel conversation. We must be up front about our purpose being both to get the person's opinions on a survey and to share the gospel with him if he is interested. To withhold our true intentions from him is nothing less than manipulation. We have nothing to hide.

Second, we must not see the survey as a mere formality to get us to our "real purpose" of sharing the gospel. Rather, we must use the survey as a tool to gain insight into the spiritual preparedness of the nonbeliever. We must listen to their responses and take note of their level of spiritual preparedness and how it will touch on their response to the gospel. Used correctly, surveys can be a great asset in helping us to make contact and to communicate after contact is made.

In addition to surveys, tools like the Four Spiritual Laws or other theologically sound tracts can help break the ice and get a gospel conversation started.

Not long ago, two of my friends joined in a conversation with two other Christians who were trying to introduce the gospel to another student. These two Christians, steeped in the relational-incarnational approach to evangelism which discouraged the use of tools, were finding it quite difficult to steer the conversation toward the gospel.

To their frustration, the conversation ended without a mention of Christ. They then asked my friends how they directed the conversation toward the gospel. One of them took a Four Spiritual Laws booklet from his pocket and explained, "I just ask them if they've ever heard of the Four Spiritual Laws, explain that it tells how to have a personal relationship with Christ and ask them if they are interested. If they are, we have a great chance to talk. If they aren't, I thank them for their consideration and go about business as usual."

C. Peter Wagner states that "an ingenious device like the Four Spiritual Laws is an invaluable tool, and the more Christians who know how to use such a tool in conjunction with their role of witness, the better." If done in a sensitive, nonthreatening manner, this simple, direct approach enables you to determine who is interested in the gospel and gives you an incredible opportunity to explain the good news clearly and concisely.

Meetings, surveys and tools all serve as effective means to put believers in touch with the nonbelieving world – friends, acquaintances and strangers alike.

This list of bridges is only the beginning. There are many creative ways to talk to nonbelievers in an attractive, nonthreatening and relevant manner. What is important is that nonbelievers are brought into contact with Christians who are ready and willing to share the gospel. Therefore, Christians should have readily accessible bridges to the nonbelieving world so they can share the gospel on a regular basis. Only a comprehensive, flexible, initiative-taking strategy will ensure this.

The Way-of-Life/Initiative Approach

This approach is so named because our daily lives provide the arena of contact. Our friends, neighbors, relatives and potential friends (i.e., acquaintances and sometimes even strangers) are the sphere of evangelistic activity. We approach them in a more spontaneous relational manner because we are normally and naturally in contact with them as a "way of life."

This approach, although more casual and less structured, still places the responsibility of initiative on the evangelist. Indeed, many who advocate and practice the way-of-life approach, even to the exclusion of the strategic-initiative approach, are firmly committed to taking the initiative to share Christ with all who will listen.

You As the Bridge

The way-of-life approach is a most effective form of evangelism. It affords a built-in relationship of intimacy and trust and provides a ready bridge for further involvement in the church if the friend or acquaintance should come to Christ. Here are some practical suggestions to aid you in a ministry of way-of-life evangelism.

1. Make sure that you always have a list of friends who do not know Christ. Pray for them daily. Identify with them so that you might present the gospel to them with sensitivity, relevance and power. Pray that God would open their hearts to the gospel and that He will give you boldness as He provides the opportunities for you to communicate Christ.

A practical question often raised in this type of approach is, what do I do if I have no non-Christian friends to share with? Or, what do I do if I have shared with all of my nonbelieving friends and they aren't ready or willing to hear more about the gospel? Let's discuss these questions one at a time.

If you have few close non-Christian friends, join the crowd. As we have discussed, this is a major problem in the body of Christ. If you want to resolve it in your own life, it is really quite simple. Go out and meet nonbelievers on their own terms. There is plenty of common ground between us if we would only look for it.

Your common interests might include a back yard that borders on that of a nonbelieving neighbor. Maybe you both enjoy gardening, root for the same sports team, have children going to the same school or work for the same company. There are plenty of activities and causes that would prove to be a comfortable point of contact for both you and the nonbelieving world. Taking the initiative is the key. Don't count on your neighbor joining the PTA so he can meet Christians. You need to be the one who takes the first step. Here is where participation in an accountability group can benefit you greatly. Seek out a person or group who will hold you accountable to pray for and seek out those in your natural sphere of influence.

What do you do if your nonbelieving friends have heard the gospel and for whatever reason don't desire to continue to talk with you about Christ? First, continue to relate to them as friends. It is important not to allow a crust of evangelical subculture to form over your life so that you quit relating and listening to them. Stay in touch, and keep praying.

A decision though, must be made as to whether a new bridge will be pursued. If you are committed to the New Testament spirit of comprehensiveness, you will find a way to get in touch with others, even strangers, who do not know Christ and who will be willing to listen to the gospel. Just as the first-century church did not limit their witness to Jerusalem, but spread the gospel to the far-off and foreign, so we are compelled to find a way to get the gospel out to listening ears and open hearts – even if they are reachable only by bridges other than natural friendship.

As Figure 11 shows, the strategic/initiative and way-of-life approaches, though different at certain points, are not mutually exclusive. Each approach carries certain strengths and weaknesses that highlight the necessity of combining the two in the church's outreach strategy.

While the strategic/initiative approach ensures a maximum impact in terms of numbers reached and provides for the discipline and accountability crucial for the training of effective evangelists, it must not be allowed to box us into an emphasis that fails to take advantage of our most likely mission field, those closest to us.

Also, while the way-of-life/initiative approach is quite effective in bringing the gospel to a limited sphere of people on a regular basis, it can be a problem for Christians who are not naturally outgoing or who have never received training in the "how to's!!

Although these two approaches are mutually reinforcing, I believe that, sequentially, priority must be given to the strategic/initiative approach. Why? Because the strategic approach is foundational to the implementation of a successful way-of-life emphasis. As already noted, if convictions are forged in the context of personal experience, if training is required to help the would-be evangelist overcome the inertia of fear, lack of confidence and lack of experience, if strategic points of contact help us to break the ice and engage in actual evangelistic encounters, then the strategic/initiative approach is the training ground for the effective pursuit of a way-of-life ministry. Without learning the lessons offered by the strategic/initiative approach, one could find the challenges of relational evangelism overwhelming. While the church indeed owes a great debt to those who have written to equip the church in a relational approach to evangelism, much more needs to be written concerning how to overcome the difficulties in this approach. This fruitful form of evangelism is, I believe, also the most challenging to practice on a regular basis.

**FIGURE 11
STRATEGIES FOR INVOLVEMENT**

Strategic/Initiative	Way-of-Life Evangelism
1. Makes contact through relationships or strategies	1. Makes contact through relationships and daily routine.
2. Confined to limited number of hours per week.	2. Ideally, can take place as often as believer is in touch with nonbelievers.
3. Will happen consistently due to built-in accountability structure.	3. Will happen to degree that believer is intrinsically motivated.
4. Provides for ongoing training in use of tools and communication skills due to presence of trainer or other believer, i.e., two-by-two strategy.	4. By definition, allows for no trainer/trainee experience due to spontaneous nature.
5. Crosses relational boundaries to insure comprehensive scope of witness	5. Limited in scope by relational element or sphere of daily routine.
6. Lower percentage of valid conversions and numbers added to visible expression of Christ's Body.	6. Higher percentage of conversions seen and numbers added to visible expression of Christ's Body.

The difficulties of way-of-life or relational evangelism are vastly underrated. The challenge of overcoming fear and of breaking the ice without a strategic bridge or accountability structure, and thus on the sheer force of our intrinsic motivation, is taken too lightly. The same could be said of the difficulty of cultivating the friendship and trust of our unsaved neighbors. The tricky business of using friendships as a platform for evangelistic encounters without succumbing to the ethical pitfalls of the "hidden agenda" is rarely discussed. While these difficulties should not discourage us from practicing friendship evangelism, they should serve notice to the evangelist that successful way-of-life evangelism is grounded in communication and interpersonal skills which are greatly enhanced through training and actual evangelistic experience. This is why, at least in sequence, the strategic/initiative approach should be given priority.

Comprehensiveness Reconsidered

I hope it is obvious that a great degree of overlap exists between the way-of-life and strategic approaches. Both place the burden of initiative on the evangelist. Also, in a very real sense, our friends, relatives and potential friends are the most strategic people to reach. We must not forget our Jerusalem on the way to the uttermost parts of the world. Both approaches benefit greatly from the use of an evangelistic tool. Both require the qualities of boldness and sensitivity on the part of the evangelist. There need be no final tension between these various methods. The issue is not whether strategic/initiative evangelism is superior to relational evangelism or vice versa. The church obviously needs to practice both. Rather, the issue is whether the church is fulfilling her evangelistic mandate by sharing the gospel in the most effective way possible, with the boldness, urgency and sensitivity that the crucial nature of the gospel demands. Will as many as possible hear as soon as possible, as clearly as possible, with every possible opportunity to go on in the faith? This is the issue.

Ideally, every Christian would have both a circle of friends for whom he prays daily and to whom he seeks an opportunity to present the gospel, and a strategy that offers ongoing training and holds him accountable to share the gospel. Beware of any imbalance that finds you sharing with strangers but not with your friends and those in your natural sphere of influence. Beware also of an approach to evangelism that has you building relationships as a bridge to the few, resulting in a barrier between you and the rest of the nonbelieving world.

We need to be open to being used by the Lord in the lives of anyone and everyone. Any strategy for contact, no matter how effective, can become both a bridge and barrier – a bridge to those of your target group and a barrier to the rest of the world. Only a commitment to comprehensive, flexible outreach can keep this from happening.

Donald McGavran communicates this balance well. "Of all the factors which influence church growth, none is more immediately available to all Christians than to evangelize the natural fringes of the existing church. This is where most growth occurs. These are the nearest of the fields white to harvest. These are the people who already have some knowledge of Christ and the Christian life. Evangelizing each network of social connections out to its fringes is always sound procedure. True, it must always be supplemented by deliberate attempts to go to the Samaritans among whom Jews have no relatives and few friends. The huge numbers of unreached peoples of the world warn us not to limit evangelism to networks of friends."

Summary

Every-member involvement has two ingredients: first, theological convictions leading to action; second, commitment to a structure that provides training and flexible strategies to equip and mobilize as many believers as possible for a fruitful, ongoing ministry of taking the gospel to all who will listen. While allowing for the fact that some will be more comfortable and better suited for certain styles of evangelism than others, I would strongly urge every believer to be trained to take the initiative to share Christ with anyone who is interested and to remember that the strategic/initiative approach is the best place to start. This evangelistic approach should not be limited to a minority of the body of Christ.

If you are already involved in the great adventure of evangelism, keep it up. Your ministry will undoubtedly prove to be a blessing to believers who are encouraged by your commitment, and to nonbelievers who hear the gospel through you. If you are not yet involved in evangelism, don't despair. It is within your reach. Seek out someone to train you. Find a group of people who have biblical convictions in this area and who are active in evangelism regularly. Get involved in their training, structures and strategy. You will be blessed by God as you align your life with His great purpose of bringing Christ to the world.