

The Cycle of Evangelism

Creating a culture of Evangelism in the Church

INTRODUCTION: THE PARABLE OF THE FARMER

And it came to pass that a certain farmer decided to grow wheat. He spent weeks researching the best methods of planting. He cultivated the soil carefully, fertilizing and setting up his sprinkler system. He drove his battered truck to town and bought a tractor and a harvester. Then he impatiently waited for the first emerald sprouts to peek out of the dark earth.

But day after day as he bounded out of bed and peered across the misty fields, he was disappointed. His precious wheat simply wasn't growing. He checked the sprinklers, researched the soil, and prayed earnestly. Finally he bit his lip, went to his wheat farmer neighbors and asked the obvious question, "Why do you think my wheat isn't growing?"

His farmer friends' trucks charged into his driveway in clouds of dust. Together in silence the farmers marched out to view his dark fields, in strange contrast to the brilliant green all around. They scratched their heads and asked, "What kind did you plant?"

*Our farmer friend was speechless. He kicked a clod of dirt around, shuffled his boots and mumbled awkwardly. "I prayed for wheat. I worked hard. I really wanted it to grow. But I guess **I never actually planted seeds.**"*

"It Just Doesn't Work!"

No one needs to tell you that the parable of the farmer isn't a true story. No farmer would expect a harvest when he hadn't planted anything. Unfortunately, the same is not true of churches. Professional public evangelists can all testify to having preached at churches where the members have sowed few or no seeds in the community, but were frustrated and bitterly disappointed when the meetings did not bring the harvest of which they had dreamed and prayed. Time after time we have heard the disillusioned words, "Evangelism just doesn't work anymore."

As II Corinthians 9:6 reminds us, "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." Galatians 6:7 adds, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." This is our promise to claim: If we sow wisely and bountifully, God *will* give us a rich harvest.

The Evangelism Cycle is a biblically-based program following Christ's methods and example. Just as a farmer prepares the soil and cares for the plants for a good harvest, spiritual principles that follow this harvest strategy are used in sharing God's Word in the Evangelism Cycle.

CHRIST'S METHOD OF EVANGELISM

As we follow Christ's methods—and *only* as we follow His methods—we are assured of success.

“Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Let's break down this method into its components:

1. Mingled with men.
2. Desired their good.
3. Showed His sympathy.
4. Ministered to their needs.
5. Won their confidence, and THEN
6. Bade them to follow Him.

Many times we make a mistake by rushing in to share the Word before we make friends and win people's confidence.

Example of Jesus

The following Scriptures show how Jesus first prepared people, and after followed by preaching and preserving.

A - Prepare (Matt. 3:1-3)

Before Jesus started His public ministry, John the Baptist was sent as a leader to *prepare the way*. John's work of preparation focused on the coming of Jesus and on helping people to gain personal salvation, a personal knowledge of God.

Jesus called others to join John in the work of preparation.

- 12 disciples: Matt. 10
- 70 others

Jesus Himself joined the work of preparation before He launched His public ministry.

B - Preach

Jesus began His public ministry after the preparation was done. He preached and taught in the cities where preparation had been done. Matt. 11:1

Jesus publicly recognized John's work of preparation in His preaching to the multitude. Matt. 11:7-15

Jesus preached a strong message to those who had been prepared by John's ministry. He called people to make decisions. Matt. 11:20-24

Those who did the work of preparation also joined Jesus in His public ministry, continuing to work with those who listened to Jesus. Matt. 12:1, 13:36, 14:15

C - Preserve

Jesus taught the importance of follow-up, nurturing the spiritual experience of new believers.

The house (heart) must be filled with Christ, not simply emptied of wrong. Matt 12:43-45

The seed must be protected. Matt 13:3, 4, 6.

Jesus also recognized the importance of physical & spiritual rest after ministry. Matt 11:28-30

- The early Christian church
- Acts 2, Acts 22: 14-16
- The entire book of Acts

THE EVANGELISM CYCLE

The Evangelism Cycle is "the harvest cycle." This is not an event, or a process, but a 12-month cycle of evangelistic events, repeating each year.

1. Personal preparation
2. Preparing the soil
3. Sowing the seed
4. Cultivating
5. Harvesting
6. Preserving
7. Repeating the cycle

Phase #1 Personal Preparation

As we begin the evangelism cycle, a time of preparation is greatly needed for each individual, and collectively as a church as well. As you can see by the following quotations, that revival of true godliness is an urgent need and should be our first work.

- **Revival**

"A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work." *Review and Herald*, March 22, 1887

"When churches are revived, it is because some individual seeks earnestly for the blessing of God. He hungers and thirsts after God, and asks in faith and receives accordingly. He goes to work in earnest, feeling his great dependence upon the Lord, and souls are aroused to seek for a like blessing, and a season of refreshing falls on the hearts of men.... It is for the want of this kind of labor that souls for whom Christ died are perishing." *Christian Service*, p. 121

- **Prayer**

"Men are needed who pray to God for wisdom, and who, under the guidance of God, can put new life into the old methods of labor and can invent new plans and new methods of awakening the interest of church

members and reaching the men and women of the world.” *Evangelism*, p. 105

- **Planning**

“For which of you intending to build a tower sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost...?” Luke 14:28-35

- **Training programs**

“In every church the members should be so trained that they will devote time to the winning of souls to Christ. How can it be said of the church, ‘ye are the light of the world,’ unless the members of the church are actually imparting light? Let those who have charge of the flock of Christ awake to their duty and set many souls to work.” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 116

- **Developing a church mission centered around the Gospel Commission.**

“The Church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory.” *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9

Harvest Indicator - Phase #1 Personal Preparation

Can we know what the outcome of our evangelistic efforts will be? The following information can be analyzed and used as indicators of the harvest. Has the preparation been adequate for a good harvest?

- **Spirituality/Practical Christian Experience:** Living spiritual experience of individuals within the church family; unity of church family.
- **Focus:** Mission of the church family focused on reaching others with the gospel.
- **Planning:** A clear and organized plan to execute a repeating cycle of evangelism.
- **Training:** Number of members and leaders within the church family who are trained to lovingly minister to others.

Phase #2 Preparing the Soil

If we want success in reaching the people, we must follow Christ’s method in preparation. With a loving and caring attitude we can spend time with them, meeting their needs and winning their confidence. How can Christ’s methods be put into practice? Below are some suggestions that have been very successful in many churches and communities.

- Friendship evangelism
- Community service programs
- Advertisement for Bible studies (internet, mailing, door hangers, newspapers, etc.)
- Door-to-door surveys

- Prayer ministry
- Building database of names (based on all of the above)

Harvest Indicator – Phase #2 Preparing the Soil

How effective has the seed-sowing been? Consider:

- The number of positive relationships between the church and the community.
- The number of positive relationships between members and non-members.
- NAMES IN THE DATABASE OF INTERESTS – THOSE WITH PERSONAL CONTACT WITH MEMBERS.

Phase #3 Planting the Seed

Jesus uses an agricultural parable of the sower in Luke 8:4-15 to teach us about sharing God's Word. The seed represents the Word of God; the sower/farmer is the soul winner, the Christian who shares his faith with others. How shall we as Christians share God's Word? The ways listed below have been used with great success.

- Sharing personal testimonies
- Drop-off Bible studies
- Video Bible studies
- Personal Bible studies
- Small group Bible studies
- Literature/books
- Christian radio & TV programs

Harvest Indicator - Phase #3 Planting the Seed

We are told in God's Word that if we sow sparingly we will reap sparingly. 2 Corinthians 9:6

Have you sown enough seeds? Has God's Word been shared with many in your community?

Analyze the indicators below; they will give you information on how productive your harvest may be.

- The amount of direct spiritual outreach by the church toward the community.
- The number of members directly sharing the gospel with others (through literature, Bible studies, small groups, seminars, etc....)
- The number of in-home/personal Bible studies being given.
- The number of positive relationships between the church and the community.
- The number of positive relationships between members and non-members.

Phase #4 Cultivating for Harvest

Once the seed has been planted in the garden, what does it need to grow and mature for harvest?

The seeds need the following: water, fertilizer, weeding, protection, training, pruning, and transplanting/thinning for growth.

As the seeds of God's Word are shared with people, their spiritual needs are very similar to the garden. It is vital that we help people to grow, develop and experience a deep love, trust, and commitment to Jesus. Follow the guidelines below to cultivate for a good harvest.

- Continue Bible studies
- Transition to your home and/or neutral place
- Conduct short "bridge" events at church (social events, seminars, concerts, small group Bible studies, etc.)
- Plant "seeds" for upcoming evangelistic meetings – start talking about it!
- Advertise, remind, use all modes of communication (personal, mail, phone). Ideally, each contact will receive 6 invitations during the 2-3 week period before evangelistic meetings begin.

Harvest Indicator - Phase #4 Cultivating for Harvest

Has cultivating taken place effectively? How can you know? The five indicators below can be used to reveal if adequate cultivating has been done.

- Number of consistent in-home/personal Bible studies being given.
- Number of people attending "bridge" events/seminars.
- Number of decisions and/or changes being made by those who are studying.
- Number of positive relationships between the church and the community.
- Number of positive relationships between members and non-members.

Phase #5 Harvesting

Harvest time on the farm is the most joyful and rewarding event of the year. Should harvesting souls for Christ's kingdom be any less joyful and rewarding? What will your harvest be like? The following are various

- Strong message, appeals for decision
- Public evangelistic seminar at church
- Video evangelistic seminar at church
- Revival meetings at church
- Bible studies – making appeals for decisions

Harvest Indicator - Phase #5 Harvesting

All crops are not ready for harvest at the same time. In the public evangelistic meeting the fruit that we want to harvest is the ripe fruit at this time. If we have been faithful in caring for the crop through all five phases, the harvest should be plentiful. Analyzed the indicators below to determine what kind of harvest you may have.

- GET a crowd – Number of non-members attending the public seminar.
- KEEP a crowd – Number of members continuing to attend the seminar, developing positive relationships between visitors and members during

the public seminar, helping non-members understand and follow truth as they learn it.

- BAPTIZE a crowd – Clear presentation of Biblical truth with skillful appeals and loving visitation to lead people to decision.

Phase #6 Preserving the Harvest

We must always remember that the seed is in the harvest! Nurturing and discipling the new members is a must to protect them from the darts of Satan. The following three items listed below are needed to give growth and maturity in their walk with God.

- Spiritual: weekly study opportunities, including deeper truth and Christian experience, spiritual mentors
- Sharing: training & opportunities to share with others, beginning the cycle all over (remember the harvested fruit has a seed that needs to be planted)
- Social: friends – at least 5, regular activities together

Harvest Indicator - Phase # 6 Preserving the Harvest

Have you implemented the four items below? If not your chances of preserving and keeping the new members in an active state will be limited.

- Practical Christian experience of new believers.
- Continued opportunities for study of God's Word.
- Opportunities for active service.
- Positive, supportive, nurturing relationships between members and new believers.

WHY ARE THE RESULTS OFTEN SO SMALL IN EVANGELISM?

"Evangelism doesn't work!"

"We've tried evangelism, but people just come in the front door and go out the back door."

"We spent all kinds of money and no one was baptized."

"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." 2 Corinthians 9:6

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Galatians 6:7

"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth

the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. IN THE MORNING SOW THY SEED, AND IN THE EVENING WITHHOLD NOT THINE HAND: FOR THOU KNOWEST NOT WHETHER SHALL PROSPER, EITHER THIS OR THAT, OR WHETHER THEY BOTH SHALL BE ALIKE GOOD.” Ecclesiastes 11:1-6, emphasis supplied.

Read also Matt. 22:1-14

- Giving the gospel invitation
- Meeting excuses
- Finding success

THREE REASONS WHY “EVANGELISM DOESN’T WORK”

Reason #1: We don’t plant enough seeds, so we reap what we sow. We haven’t prepared for a harvest.

Reason #2: We forget that the SEED IS IN THE HARVEST. We “take a break” from evangelism, instead of continuing the cycle, letting the success grow.

Reason #3: We have weak/disjointed links in the Evangelism Cycle.

The Evangelism Cycle is not an event, or even just a process. It is a cycle.

- An event happens once. It has a beginning and an ending.
- A process, while it continues and progresses for a time, also has an end.
- What one characteristic sets a cycle apart from an event or process? *It never ends.* Think of the cycle of planting and harvesting. The seed is *in the harvest*. A wise farmer would never consider the harvest to be the end—he must begin preparation immediately for the next harvest.

Our success will be limited if evangelism is an event or process rather than a cycle, because we have not followed Christ’s method of preparing, preaching and preserving.

How often should the corporate cycle repeat? Every 12 months.

- Think of a garden. There are small harvests along the way, plucking fruits as they ripen, but a season of harvest recurs each year.
- Plan a 12-month cycle, but include a harvest every 6 months.
- Have a major evangelistic seminar once a year.
- Have a mini-evangelistic seminar/revival also within the same year, at the 6-month interval.

It is vital to note that the Evangelism Cycle includes both the corporate cycle and the personal cycle. The corporate cycle of evangelism is an annual evangelism calendar that the church plans together.

However, individual people grow and progress in their experience with God at different paces. This must also be considered. The corporate cycle is a program that is mapped out for an individual, a group or church to execute. But just as different plants ripen for harvest at different rates, people also grow spiritually at different rates.

How does the corporate cycle relate to the personal cycle?

Key #1 – Recognize as you go through the corporate cycle that you will be working with people at many different stages. Give them room to grow.

Someone may come to see their friend or family member get baptized at the close of an evangelistic series, and be ripe for cultivation but not at all ready for harvest.

Key #2 – Keep the cycle repeating at frequent intervals in order to “harvest” people as they reach spiritual maturity.

THE EVANGELISM CYCLE SUMMARY

Christ’s method is as follows:

- Friendship that wins confidence, THEN
- Sharing God’s Word

Jesus gives an example for evangelism:

- Prepare
- Preach
- Preserve

Sharing God’s Word is like planting a garden: it must repeat to be successful!

The Evangelism *Cycle* is the best plan for evangelism:

- It follows God’s instruction for seed-sowing.
- It builds success from year to year.
- As in nature, *the seed is in the harvest.*