

The Holy Spirit and Evangelism: Revealing the Presence of the Kingdom Like Jesus Did

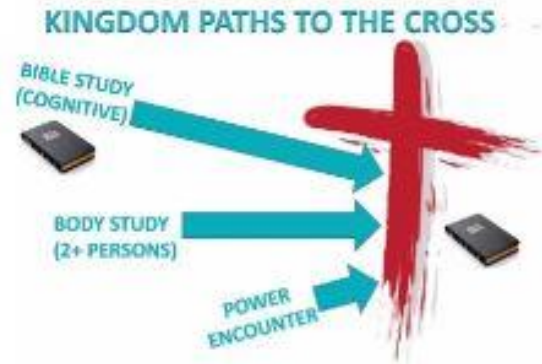
By Bob Young

Reporting on a study that compared evangelistic methods, the time required to evangelize, and evangelistic success, Dr. Ralph Neighbour suggests an interesting connection between evangelism and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. His premise is illustrated in the figure, “Kingdom Paths to the Cross.” The research studied three different approaches to evangelism, comparing the time required to bring a lost person to faith and obedience.

The most time-intensive method was faith developed through individual Bible study. This is a common method in most faith communities, probably THE most common method.

Seekers developed faith and commitment more quickly if they participated in a small group Bible study where they heard believers share faith and the Word of God. They saw the impact of faith in the lives of others.

If an unbeliever personally encountered the power of God in a meaningful way – a changed life, problems solved, prayers answered, help and healing – the faith decision to obey and follow was almost immediate.



Think with me. Jesus came preaching, teaching, and healing. Jesus preached the Good News of the arrival of the Kingdom. How did he reveal the presence of the Kingdom during his ministry? Jesus obviously used words – “the kingdom of heaven is like.” Jesus taught groups of people – his disciples, the multitudes, in the synagogues, along the road, in the fields, by the sea. But what most often catches the attention of those reading the Gospel for the first time is that Jesus revealed the presence of the Kingdom and brought people to faith through personal encounters. He healed the sick, he met people where they were, he met specific needs in their lives. He sent out his disciples to heal the sick, declaring that the kingdom had come.

In my international mission work, I have the opportunity to see churches that are succeeding in bold and unpredictable ways. I also interact with churches that are struggling to reach the multitudes for Christ. Some grow amazingly; some barely, others not at all. Some of the churches are not growing because **they are not evangelizing**. In other cases, the churches struggle because of **how they evangelize**.

On a recent trip to the Dominican Republic, I witnessed 24 baptisms as people came to faith and obedience. I visited seven churches that have been established in the last five years. Today there are hundreds of Christians where there were only a handful a few years ago. How is such growth possible? People come to Jesus when they come face to face with his power to make their lives entirely different! The presence of the Holy Spirit and his filling are easily seen as new Christians constantly talk about Jesus and give themselves to the Word of God and to prayer, seeking changed lives in Christ.

The kingdom may be explained in words – both to individuals and in groups. But the greatest evidence of the presence of the Kingdom is the demonstration of the King’s presence and power. As churches come into the post-pandemic period, we have an opportunity to reinvent how we impact our world. We have an opportunity to move away from programmed evangelism efforts to spontaneously talking about Jesus everywhere we go, empowered by the Spirit. We have an opportunity to take the gospel outside our buildings. We have an opportunity to demonstrate gospel power, to help people personally encounter Jesus, to help people see the difference that Jesus makes in the world. Let us never forget that bringing people face to face with the power of the gospel—baptism, a new birth, a changed life—is a powerful, personal witness that God is at work and the King reigns supreme in his kingdom.

Take-Aways! We can and should renew efforts to teach the Bible, training workers, seeking opportunities, arranging Bible studies. While this approach is the slowest and most time-consuming, some research has also shown it to be the most lasting.

We also have an opportunity to rethink small groups and “body life evangelism” where unbelievers encounter faith and declare that “God is among you!” Where are our small groups where we talk about Jesus, study in the group, share prayer in deep, meaningful relationships, and find encouragement toward changed lives?

Finally, we have an opportunity to understand in fresh ways the ways we can help unbelievers toward powerful encounters with the power of the gospel. What causes a church to double or triple in ten years or less? That kind of kingdom growth happens when every believer is equipped to penetrate their own little segment of society, to bring and demonstrate God’s power in their circles of influence. Certainly, that will not happen without a fresh awareness of the presence and filling of God’s Holy Spirit.