

THINKING ABOUT EVANGELISM

By Bob Young

For many Christians, evangelism is not a regular part of their lives because the essential elements of evangelism are not present. This is not a thoroughly studied treatise, but it seems to me that several things are essential. In order to share the gospel with another person, I need to see if these things are part of the relationship.

This is a work in progress—here is my tentative list.

Evangelism is unlikely to happen without....

→Proximity. To be close enough often enough to have a voice and influence. Lots of ways to define this, lots of ways to do this, but it is hard to share the gospel with those you do not have contact with.

→Presence. This is related to proximity, but one can be near and not be present. Evangelism works best when I am present in the life of another.

→Christian practice (exemplified). This is simply the example of Christian living. This is letting your light shine, something that is important but something that seldom has much impact unless coupled with other elements. We can be good people because we are followers of Jesus, and unless others know the reason for our practice, we are hardly distinguishable for a whole host of other folks. See next point.

→Christian practice (explained). Christian action must be explained. I do this because I am a Christian. Action without explanation looks little different than the humanitarianism all around us.

→Passion (for sharing the gospel). Evangelism is certainly more likely to occur when Christians have a passion for talking about the difference Jesus has made in their life. When I have genuinely good news, I want everyone else to know.

→Personal (Christ-sharing relationships). The gospel is best shared in the context of relationships.

→Proclamation. Telling about the Christ-event, sharing the message, is absolutely essential. Some have left the impression that presence alone is sufficient. Just be a good Christian around your neighbor long enough and they will give in and accept the gospel. I have bad news about the good news—not going to happen without some kind of proclamation!

→Persuasion (some folks will need to be encouraged to make Jesus Lord). Presence + proclamation may be sufficient at times, but some folks will need encouragement.

→Prayer. Goes without saying, right?

Individuals, ministries, churches, mission works without a commitment to developing these will fail to recognize and seize many opportunities for evangelism. In fact, it is possible to have half or more of these and have almost no impact at all evangelistically.

Something to pray about!