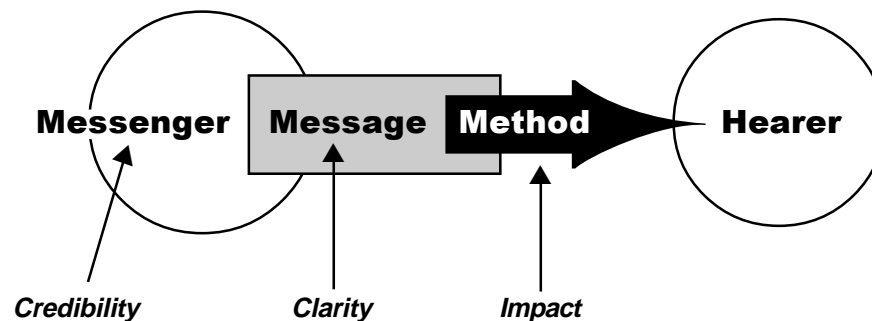


## A Crash Course in Evangelism

# 4

## Honing the Method I

In our study of evangelism so far, we have focused on the first two parts of the communication process – the Messenger and the Message. In this lesson, we begin looking at the third component – the Method.



From this diagram, you will see that...

- The primary issue with the **Messenger** is *credibility*.
- The primary issue with the **Message** is *clarity*.
- The primary issue with the **Method** is *impact*.

When evangelism has credibility, clarity and impact, the result is souls coming to know Christ. This was the experience in the first century Church, and it is God’s plan for our generation too. Just look at how the New Testament describes the impact of the early Church:

- **Acts 2:37,41,47** – “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’...Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day...And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”
- **Acts 5:14** (KJV) – “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.”

- **Acts 9:31** – “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria...grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”
- **Acts 11:21** – “The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”
- **Acts 13:49** – “The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.”
- **Acts 17:4** – “Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.”
- **Acts 17:12** – “Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.”

Would you like to see the same kind of impact in your world? Would you like to see “a great number of people” turn to the Lord? The book of **Acts** is not just a distant historical record. It is our heritage. As **Romans 11:16** explains:

“If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.”

The believers of **Acts** are not distantly removed from us. We are part of the same dough. We are branches of the same tree. We can and should expect to have an impact upon our generation equal to the impact they made on their generation.

How did they have this kind of effect? Quite simple.

- As **Messengers** they were *credible*.
- Their **Message** had *clarity*.
- Their **Methods** had *impact*.

Seeing the Harvest  
 Making the Messenger  
 Clarifying the Message

▶ **Honing the Method I** ◀

Honing the Method II

Honing the Method III

Witnessing in Power

Entering the Battle I

Entering the Battle II

Keeping Appointments

Making Disciples

Reaching Your Community

## Three Easy Mistakes

Many Christians today have a sincere desire to have an impact upon their communities. They want to see their neighbors and friends come to Christ. But unless the Messenger-Message-Method framework of communication is clearly understood, three mistakes can be easily made:

### **Mistake #1 – Emphasizing Methods Only**

We live in a high-tech world that has become very sophisticated in its methods of communication. For this reason, today’s Church is continually seeking to improve its “methodology” (set of methods) in order to evangelize more effectively. As we have already seen, however, the shortfall is often in the *credibility* of the Messenger and the *clarity* of the Message. Without credibility and clarity, there can be no impact, and the study of any evangelistic methodology is then in vain.

Why do we wait until the fourth lesson in this module before we begin looking at our methodology? Why do we spend three whole lessons on our perspective (111-01), ourselves (111-02) and our message (111-03)? Because these are the foundations of methodology. Without the “making” of the Messenger and the “clarifying” of the Message, there can be no “honing” of the Method. And just as the Message flows from the Messenger, so the Method flows from the Message.

### ***Mistake #2 – Confusing the Method with the Message***

As we saw in the last lesson, Christians can sometimes get the Method confused with the Message. In other words, for lack of clarity in the Message, the evangelistic Method used becomes the *de facto*\* Message. Take the example we used in the last lesson – a music concert aimed at bringing in unchurched youth. The concert may be an outrageous success. The young people (both church and unchurched) may have really enjoyed themselves. But the important question we must always ask is: *What is the Message we are seeking to get across?* Without a clear Message, the Method itself will take the place of the Message. In the absence of a clear Message, a Christian concert may communicate the following:

- **Hey, it’s cool to be a Christian!** – This may or may not be true, but is that the Message we are seeking to communicate?
- **Hey, this is what you can expect church (and being a Christian) to be like!** – There’s nothing wrong with youth music in church, but is church just a weekly concert? Do the people attending this evangelistic concert have any idea of what it means to be a Christian after they “sign on the dotted line”? Do they realize that living the Christian life is more than just being entertained – that it is about commitment to Christ? Always remember that if you preach a Half-Message, you get a Half-Result. If you preach a Non-Message, you get a Non-Result!

As we shall see later in the module, methods such as youth concerts and street dramas can be very effective ways of communicating the Gospel – but *only* if they are Message-centric. Always remember: The Message is *what* you are seeking to communicate. The Method is *how* you are seeking to communicate it. Don’t ever get the “what” and the “how” mixed up.

### ***Mistake #3 – Getting stuck in a One-Method Rut***

This is the opposite end of the spectrum. The Message may be clear, but the Method used is neither attractive nor relevant to this generation. Let’s take a look at one method used in the Bible – the Soapbox Method.

#### **Read Acts 17:16-21**

Here we find Paul reasoning in the synagogue (with the Jews) and in the marketplace (with the Greeks). The Marketplace Method that Paul used is very similar to the Soapbox Method used today. You find a place where there is a crowd, you

\* *De facto* means “acting or existing in fact but without legal sanction.” In the usage of this lesson, a *de facto* Message means “the perceived Message, in the absence of a clearly communicated Message.”

make yourself visible, and then you begin declaring the message of the Gospel, hoping to attract a crowd.

But just because this method was used in first century Athens does not mean that it is the God-ordained method to be used in every city and town. For one thing, Athens was predisposed to this kind of rhetorical preaching. **Acts 17:21** tells us:

“All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.”

And the marketplace was not just simply the first century equivalent of our supermarket. It was also the first century equivalent of our television. It was the place where the citizens of Athens heard the latest international news, listened to local gossip, and discussed both politics and religion.

Now the Soapbox Method does work today under certain conditions:

- **If the place is well known for soapbox rhetoric** – There are places, such as Hyde Park in London, which are famous for soapbox preaching. If you go to these places on a weekend, you will find many people standing on a soapbox preaching about politics, religion or social issues. In these places, the Soapbox Method can be very effective.
- **If the Soapbox Method is combined with other methods, such as the Drama Method or the Choir Method** – We will be looking at a variety of these methods later in the module.

But is the Soapbox Method the *only* viable method? Certainly not. With anointed creativity, many methods can be used to enable effective communication of the Gospel.

## Understanding the Method

Simply put, the Method is the *way* the Gospel is communicated. The Method you use in evangelism comes down to two simple elements:

- **How you *attract and hold* the attention of the Hearer** – this is vitally important, since we live in a world of many messages, all vying for people’s attention. Unless we capture the attention of the Hearer, there can be no communication of the Message.
- **How you *express* the Message** - your choice of words or, in the case of drama and similar methodologies, your choice of action and illustration. As we shall soon see, there is an almost infinite variety of means by which you can express the Message.

Now as we progress through this module, you will find that we will deal with two main kinds of evangelism:

- **Personal evangelism** – one-on-one evangelism
- **Public evangelism** – one-to-many or many-to-many evangelism

These two kinds of evangelism use a different set of methods, and we will be exploring both kinds in the lessons to come. But first up, our focus will be primarily on personal evangelism and the methods you can use in one-on-one witness.

## **The Master Communicator**

As we begin to examine the “how” of evangelism, we have no better role model than God himself. God is a communicating God. Communication is a part of his divine nature. From the very first chapter of **Genesis**, we see that God’s method of creation was through the spoken word.

J. B. Phillips, in his eloquently-worded *The New Testament in Modern English*, renders **John 1:1** as:

“At the beginning God *expressed* himself...”

So let’s take a quick look at how God has expressed himself – how he has communicated his message – and see if we can pick up some tips from the Master Communicator.

One thing we must understand first up is that God doesn’t just want to speak words; he wants to be *understood*. And so, in order to make his meaning clearly understood, he communicates *proactively*. He purposely enters the hearer’s frame of reference.

Now this concept of the hearer’s “frame of reference” is extremely important, both to communication generally and to evangelism specifically. A person’s frame-of-reference means:

- That persons’s personal history
- That persons’s ethnic/cultural history
- That persons’s cultural and religious concepts
- That persons’s language and vocabulary

These four things flavor how a person views the world and act as a filter through which that person hears your message. Charles Kraft explains it this way:

“The term *frame of reference* refers to the culture, language, life situation, social class, or similar all-embracing setting or context within which one operates...Such a setting provides the perspectives in terms of which one interprets all of life. [Hearers] automatically interpret communication from the perspective of their own context.”<sup>1</sup>

Take as an example the most simple evangelistic concept that you can communicate: “God loves you.” You may think that little more needs to be said. After all, how much clearer can one sentence get?

In a remote village in Thailand, however, those three words, translated into their own language, mean nothing. These people have no word for “love” except sexual union. And who is God, anyway? Is he the idol I worship, or the spirits that haunt the jungle? For them, communication must go beyond trotting out a trite phrase.

The meaning of the words “God loves you” must be *explained* and *demonstrated* in order for understanding to take place.

This is, of course, an extreme example. But the lesson we learn from this can be condensed into an important principle of evangelism:

**Evangelistic Principle #6** – Always seek to understand the Hearer’s frame of reference, and enter that frame of reference when you communicate the Message.

After all, that’s exactly what God does, time and again, when he communicates to mankind. He never expects us to enter his frame of reference, since this is totally beyond our experience. Instead, he bridges the cultural gap and enters our frame of reference – he uses *our* personal history, *our* ethnic/cultural history, *our* cultural and religious concepts, and, most importantly, *our* language and vocabulary to communicate his message to us. As Charles Kraft explains:

“God wants to be understood. Like all would-be communicators, he wants to be interpreted in such a way that his intent is understood correctly and responded to appropriately by his [hearers]. So he comes all the way...into our language, culture and human form. He enters the world of time and space, of relativity, of sin...[and] employs the principles and rules of his creation to put across his messages to his creatures.”<sup>2</sup>

Just a look at the language of the New Testament shows the extent to which God prioritizes the hearer’s frame of reference. Despite what many Christians think, the New Testament was never written in a religious or sacred language. It was written in Greek, since Greek was the *lingua franca* (the international language) of that day. But there were *two* kinds of Greek used in the first century:

- **Classical Greek** – This was the cultured “high language” of Greece itself. All the Greek classical literature was written in this carefully-phrased, eloquently-turned language. This was a language of beauty without par.
- **Koine Greek** – This was unpolished “street Greek,” the language of the ordinary, working-class person of the first century Roman world. It was vulgar and uncouth at times, but it was a language of communication without par.

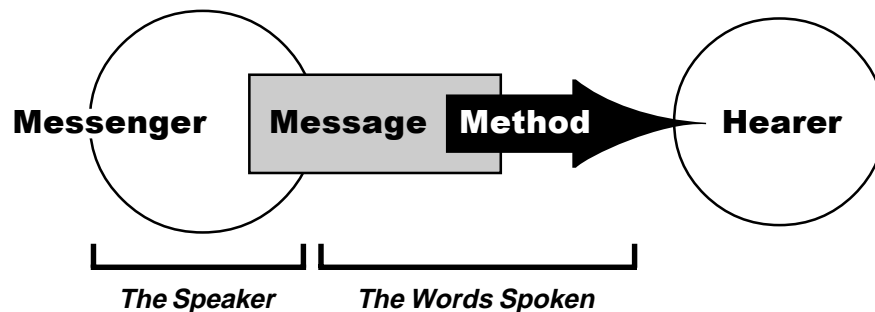
Take one guess which version of Greek the New Testament is written in. You guessed it – Koine Greek. And why did God use Koine? Why not classical Greek, which was far more impressive and far more beautiful. God used Koine because he was not out to *impress* but to *communicate*. He used the common language of the people, not the intellectual language of the books.\*

\* This is why the Online Bible College course material is written, as much as possible, in “street English” (with some adjustments for grammatical accuracy). We would do you a great disservice to teach you to speak “churchese” or “theologianese,” for the only use in speaking such a “high language” would be to speak with other theologians or seminarians. We want you to understand the Christian life on a street level and also to be able to communicate the Message on a street level.

From this point, we will begin to explore how this works in personal evangelism – the act of witness one-on-one.

## The “How” of Evangelism

Let’s take a look at a modified version communication diagram we’ve been using to date:



### *You as the speaker*

The starting point of all witness is you, the speaker – the one who is sharing the Gospel. When you are speaking (sharing your faith) there are two possible points of focus:

- **A Self Focus** – Either through nervousness or pride, you may be self-conscious, focused on yourself, what you are saying, and how you are saying it.
- **A Hearer Focus** – Your focus is on the person to whom you are witnessing. If you are hearer-focused, you are seeking to be sensitive to the needs and concerns of the person to whom you are speaking, so that you can translate the Gospel into words that are intelligible and challenging.

True witness is hearer-focused, not self-focused. It’s natural, of course, to be nervous, particularly when you first begin to reach out and share your faith. But what is the answer to self-consciousness? Two things:

- **God-consciousness** – Be aware of the presence of the Lord and his anointing available for witness.
- **Hearer-consciousness** – Be aware of the value of the person you are speaking to. Ask the Lord to make you attuned to his or her needs, concerns and frame of reference.

The more you share your faith, the less self-conscious your delivery will be. There really is no short-cut to this. There is only one way to learn to be hearer-focused – and that is to step out and begin sharing the Gospel with others!

This brings to light the seventh principle of evangelism:

**Evangelistic Principle #7** – Don’t focus on yourself and your method of delivery. Focus on the hearer!

## ***The words you speak***

Remember: The Gospel is not simply about “speaking” to people; it is about “communicating” to people. There is a big difference. “Speaking” involves just words – they may or may not be the right words for helping the hearer to understand the message of the Gospel. “Communicating,” however, means that the hearer actually understands what you are seeking to get across.

There are four things that will hinder communication, if we allow them:

### **Jargon**

Don’t use words that the hearer doesn’t understand. This includes “showing off” with technical or academic language, but more often than not it is simply being aware that the average unbeliever has no idea of the meaning of Christian religious jargon. To him, “Biblese” is like a foreign language. Words like “repentance,” “sanctification,” “redemption” and “justification” go over most people’s heads. Not only are they not understood; they also tag the speaker as “religious,” someone who is culturally removed from the hearer.

As we have seen, the Message always remains the same. It is *always* about repentance and reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. But the way we express that Message in words will vary from situation to situation, depending on the hearer. For instance, God demands repentance from every person (**Acts 17:30**) – that is part of the Message. Yet “repent” can often mean something totally different to an unbeliever than it does to you.

Think about it for a moment. How does Hollywood portray the person who uses the word “repent”? Usually a wacko, right? For the average unchurched person, the word “repent” may conjure up the picture of a wild-eyed religious fanatic on a street corner, holding a placard: “Repent! The world ends tomorrow!”

So how do we get around this problem? Is it possible to communicate the *meaning* of repentance without actually using the word itself? Of course it is. Here are a couple of examples:

- You are witnessing to a businessman, and you say: “God demands that you align your thinking with his, not the other way around. That means a change of priorities. It means giving your life to God, on his terms, not your own...”
- You are witnessing to a young person, and you say: “You can’t play games with God. He sees right through you. You gotta change track completely, give your life to God. It’s all the way with God or no way at all...”

Did we use the word “repent” at any time when speaking to these two people? No. Did we communicate the meaning of repentance to them? Absolutely. Even without using the word “repentance,” the Message has remained unchanged.

Does this, then, mean that you should never use the word “repent”? Of course not. You can use any biblical word as long as *you are certain the person understands what that word means*. But to be on the safe side, if you use biblical terminology *always* explain it in ordinary “street language.” Thus you may say:



- ☛ “You can’t just inch your way into relationship with God. The Bible says: ‘In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands *all* people *everywhere* to repent.’ That includes me and it includes you. Do you know what repentance means? It means doing a 180° turn. It means making a deliberate choice to turn away from everything that displeases God and to turn to Jesus...”

When we speak with unbelievers about Christ, we must clear our thinking of religious jargon and speak to them on *their* level with *their* language.

### **Clichés**

We need to be equally careful about clichés. Unlike jargon (which the unbeliever doesn’t understand or may misunderstand), clichés are pat expressions that are understood, but are over-used and dry of meaning. Clichés like “You must be born again” or “You are a sinner” may be biblical, but if made as stand-alone statements, they tend to harm communication, not help it.

With the anointing of the Holy Spirit, your expressions can be fresh and new, with a feeling of immediate impact, reaching out to the person *as an individual* – touching him where he is.

### **Anachronisms**

An anachronism is something that doesn’t relate to modern times. When you speak to an unbeliever, you don’t need to transport him back to Biblical times in order to communicate with him. As beautiful as the parables that Jesus spoke are, they were stories that were relevant to the people of his day. When he spoke them in the first century, he spoke to them in the “here and now,” and so also must we. God can give you modern-day parables, stories that explain to an unbeliever what it means to get to know God.

### **Patronizations**

When you speak with anyone – Christian or non-Christian – avoid taking a superior position – a “holier-than-thou” or “I-was-once-like-you” attitude. This is patronizing and an automatic communication switch-off.

The key to effective communication is naturalness. Jargon, clichés, anachronisms and patronizations all kill naturalness. As Christians talking to unbelievers, we must be seen as authentic, not artificial.

How can we be natural? Think for a moment. How would you talk with your parents? Or with your children? What kind of language do you use with your natural brother or sister? What style of communication do you use with your best friend? This is the kind of language most effective in communication – not stilted or rehearsed, but authentic, imaginative and familiar.

This brings us to the eighth principle of evangelism:

**Evangelistic Principle #8** – You must translate the Message into language that is authentic, imaginative and familiar.

## Being a Witness

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In the next few lessons of this module, we will further explore the Method – the *how* of evangelism. But while we will share many hints on effective communication of the Gospel, we must never think that evangelism is complicated. Evangelism is simply about you being a witness – nothing more, nothing less.

In **Acts 1:8**, Jesus declared to his disciples:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and *you will be my witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

**Read Acts 3:15**

**Read Acts 5:32**

Jesus has called us to be witnesses – “eye-witnesses” of God’s salvation. Evangelism is just about two things:

- ☞ Being an eye-witness to the salvation of God
- ☞ Reporting that eye-witness account to others

Thus like John, in **1 John 1:1-2**, we are able to say:

“That which...we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – *this* we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have *seen* it and *testify* to it, and *we proclaim to you* the eternal life...”

And like Peter, in **Acts 4:20**, we can say:

“For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

The word “witness” in the original Greek is *martus*, from which we get the word “martyr” – to lay down your life for the Gospel. It can also mean “a record” (as used in **2 Corinthians 3:2-3**). *Martus*, then, means to be a witness, not just with words, but with the *whole* life.

This brings us to the last principle of evangelism for this lesson:

**Evangelistic Principle #9** – You can only share with another what you have received yourself. You are a witness to what you have seen, heard and experienced.

## Summary

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As we close this lesson, let’s list the evangelistic principles we have studied so far.

**Evangelistic Principle #1** – The first priority in evangelism is *perspective* – seeing the harvest as God sees it.

**Evangelistic Principle #2** – The second priority in evangelism is *preparation* – allowing God to equip you, his messenger, as a fully-trained worker in the harvest field.

**Evangelistic Principle #3** – The third priority in evangelism is *clarity* in the Message.

**Evangelistic Principle #4** – The Message has priority over the Method, not the other way around.

**Evangelistic Principle #5** – At the core of the Message lies a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Evangelistic Principle #6** – Always seek to understand the Hearer’s frame of reference, and enter that frame of reference when you communicate the Message.

**Evangelistic Principle #7** – Don’t focus on yourself and your method of delivery. Focus on the hearer!

**Evangelistic Principle #8** – You must translate the Message into language that is authentic, imaginative and familiar.

**Evangelistic Principle #9** – You can only share with another what you have received yourself. You are a witness to what you have seen, heard and experienced.

In the next lesson, we will continue our investigation of the Method – the *how* of evangelism.

## Exercise #4

- **Pray** – Ask the Lord to help you understand the perspective of an unbeliever.
- **See** – With the help of the Holy Spirit, look at your world today through an unbeliever’s eyes. How would an unchurched person think about Christians, about church and about the Gospel?
- **Act** – When you speak with an unbeliever, enter his or her frame-of-reference. Use language and illustrations from that person’s “real world.”

<sup>1</sup> Charles Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness: Revised Edition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), p.15.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness: Revised Edition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), p.13.

<sup>3</sup> J Oswald Sanders, *Effective Evangelism: The Divine Art of Soul-Winning* (Kent, UK: STL Books, 1982), p.24.

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