

EVANGELISM IS A PROCESS

Most of us think of evangelism as the moment when people share their faith in God and invite another person to receive Christ as Savior. This **is** evangelism. But evangelism encompasses much more than just the decision to invite God into one's life.

A study of how people come to know God indicates there are first multiple exposures to the gospel before a person accepts Christ. Win Arn has noted that people who accept Christ and stay in the church hear the gospel an average of 5.7 times before they record a decision to serve God.

Because we are anxious to see people converted, we are inclined to take shortcuts or apply pressure. This is not the way Jesus worked. And we are finding that it is not a successful method presently.

Research also points out that generally one person alone is not involved as a human agent in the redemption process. God often uses several people, usually over a period of time. After numerous people, several influences, and an half-dozen hearings of the gospel, a person chooses to become a Christian.

We have discovered, for example, the seed of the gospel may be sown when children attend Vacation Bible School or Sunday school. Family members continue to pray, cultivate, and remind these people that God really cares. Regrettably, as teens or college students these now young adults take forays into sin. In their 20s or 30s they may come back to church because relatives are still praying and encouraging them to deal with spiritual issues. Furthermore, the guilt of their sins visits their consciences. Some of life's plans and dreams may have become frustrated. Out of all these series of contacts and circumstances, God works to bring them to Himself. More than likely, the people who are evangelized will begin to explore their relationships with God in much the same way individuals make decisions in other areas of life.

For example, if a young adult decides to buy a car, he or she will ask some friends which models they like, which are durable, which give good gas mileage, and so on. He or she will then visit some car dealerships whose reputations have already been investigated, will test-drive several cars, and then make a decision based on research.

People who are exploring relationships with God will often visit God's "local dealerships," that is, several nearby churches. When spiritual prodigals find some people with whom they are

comfortable, they then begin the actual decision-making process. They accept their need for God. They search for and pray to the God of their newfound friends at church.

We do well to continue cultivating friendships, planting additional seeds, and then looking for opportunities to harvest. Some churches follow these processes very well. Others get hasty and press for premature decisions. Yet others are so fearful of harvesting prematurely, they never invite people into a relationship with God. Evangelism must be done with sensitivity and intentionality. But it must be done! The church has no greater purpose than the making of disciples. Wise are God's people who know *evangelism is a process*.

---Lyle Pointer