

Simple Evangelism #1
Invitations
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. After preaching for more than 35 years, I've developed some opinions and attitudes about many of our church or religious practices

1. I'm not talking about things actually taught in scripture
2. I'm talking about things that have to do with our traditions, or customs, our habits, our methods, etc., most of which God has left up to us to figure out, and has not prescribed for us, what or how things must be done
3. My opinions and attitudes have a very wide range
 - a. some of these things I really, really love and think are great
 - b. some I really, really don't like at all, and wish they'd disappear
 - c. others, I'm sort of ambivalent about, I can take them or leave them
 - d. I try not to be too vocal about these things

B. There is one area that I have some pretty strong opinions about – Evangelism

1. I believe the Bible has some strong instruction regarding evangelism
2. The problem is not with evangelism, the problem is with methods, traditions, and customs that often do more to stifle evangelism than promote it

C. Steve May shared a personal story that illustrates some of my frustration with methods of evangelism

As I was sitting down to a meal with my family recently, the phone rang. I answered and a voice I didn't recognize seemed to recognize mine. "Steve! How's it going, bud?"

I said, "Fine," thinking it must be someone I know.

Then he started his spiel, sounding just like an AM radio deejay: "Hey, just wanted to let you know about this fantastic investment opportunity that I think would be just fabulous for you..." and with that, he was off to the races. I don't like to be rude to people, so I decided that when he stopped to take a breath, I would politely let him know I wasn't interested. I had no idea how long he could go without taking a breath. He never asked me if I was even slightly interested in hearing about his fabulous investment opportunity. He just assumed that I was, since I am (in his words) a sharp, intelligent, success-minded individual. Finally, thinking he had me in the grip of his pitch, he asked me a question: "Steve, wouldn't it be nice to be able to provide your family with rock-solid financial security?"

I said, "Yes, as a matter of fact, it would. But right now my food is getting cold and this is not a good time for me to talk." I expected him to apologize for interrupting my meal and ask if he could call back, to which I would say, "No, thank you."

I was not expecting him to say what he said next: "Steve, this deal is too important to put off. When you hear me out, you'll agree that delaying a meal for a few minutes is a small price to pay for financial success."

At this point I became a little annoyed, and said, "Sorry, but I'm hungry now. I'll get rich later." And I hung up.

Now, tell me by a show of hands. How many of you think I missed out on the opportunity of a lifetime by cutting that conversation short? Anyone? O.K. How many of you think I avoided a scam, or at the very least, an extremely questionable investment? Everyone?

We'll never know for sure, will we? We'll never know. His deal may have been legitimate, but his approach was so offensive, I couldn't bring myself to listen to it. And I want you to realize something. I wasn't rejecting the idea of investing money. I rejected him.

When I first began attending courses in how to witness, I was told again and again: Remember, they're not rejecting you, they're rejecting the message. That's not always the case. Sometimes it is not the message that offends a non Christian; it is the messenger. -- Steve May, PreachingToday.com

1. I know this is hard for some of us to take, but a lot of evangelistic efforts end up sounding almost exactly like this con-artist – er – salesman!
2. No wonder few Christians are actively evangelistic (they don't want to sound like that guy), and no wonder few people want to hear such a presentation (it sounds like they're listening to a rip-off artist)

D. One of my personal opinions is that while personal evangelism professionals have helped reach a lot of people, it may be that we've failed to reach far more simply because the method we used made us sound offensive

E. Still, we've been given the task of evangelizing the world, starting with our own community

1. People are still lost, and we've got the solution
2. Jesus was very specific as to our mission in the world, and it is to save the lost
3. So, despite the difficulty and the possibility of offending people around us, we still must learn how to reach out and give people the opportunity to be saved

F. On Sunday nights, for several weeks, I'm going to share a sermon series titled, "Simple Evangelism"

1. We're going to talk about things that are simple and easy, yet potentially very powerful
2. We're going to look at things anybody can do, and that are least likely to offend anybody
3. Hopefully, as a congregation, we can use them to help us grow the kingdom

G. **Caveat:** It might mean that you need to change your mind or attitude about evangelism and how to do it – else I might employ another of my opinions: I like the way I do it better than the way you don't do it!

I. EXTEND AN INVITATION

A. The Bible shows us that a simple invitation is often a powerful tool to reach others

1. Isaiah 1:18 -- 18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. NASU
2. John 1:45-46 -- 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." NASU
3. Matthew 11:28-30 -- 28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." NASU
4. Matthew 25:34 -- 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. NASU

B. Invitations are built on a foundation

1. The foundation that you a part of something worth knowing about
2. The foundation that you are willing to share what you have
3. The foundation that the person you are inviting needs what you have

C. Invitations require some groundwork

1. Invitation work best with people with whom you already have a positive relationship
 - a. many of our evangelistic efforts focus on people we don't know and who don't know us – and they usually produce little fruit
 - b. many of us have avoided family, friends, neighbors and others we know because we don't want to be rejected
 - c. statistics still show that most people are obey the gospel of Jesus due to the influence of a friend or family member than any other person
2. Invitations work best when you work hard to NOT be offensive
 - a. it is true that some people will be offended at the gospel, but that does not give us an excuse to be offensive in our approach or presentation
 - b. do not give the impression that we're the only ones going to heaven!
 - c. do not play the "our church is better or more right than your church" game (besides, you might lose the argument!)
 - d. give people something positive and attractive in yourself and it will make your invitations that much sweeter

3. Invite people to something specific
 - a. invite them to visit as your guest on a specific Sunday
 - b. invite them to a particular Bible study
 - c. invite them to hear a specific sermon (get a sermon schedule)
 - d. invite them to some other specific event, activity, etc.
4. Invite with excitement, a positive attitude, and a firm commitment on your part
 - a. if they don't see that in you, why should they come and be bored too?
 - b. if you're not going to be there, why should they
 - c. your excitement and positive attitude go a long way with people
 - d. be ready to share one positive thing with them that keeps you coming
5. Extend invitation all the time to as many people as possible
 - a. statistics tell us that many people will attend church services, if only someone would ask, but it might take more than one invitation
 - b. the more people you invite, the better the chances that someone will accept
6. Expect people to attend, especially if they told you they would
 - a. look for them at the front door
 - b. sit with them
 - c. be sure they get a bulletin or other information
 - d. explain what's happening (quietly and quickly)
 - e. introduce them to others
 - f. ask them to come back!

II. DON'T MAKE IT HARDER THAN IT HAS TO BE!

- A. Be patient with people; you don't have to see them baptized before they leave services
- B. Never be negative about their religious faith or heritage
- C. Remember, we're actually inviting them to encounter Jesus, not us!

INVITATION

- A. Are you a Christian? If not, there's another invitation especially for you.
- B. If so, you have a special invitation into God's throne room through Jesus himself
- C. Tell us how we can help