

Elements of Evangelistic Dynamic

“If it is true that more and more people lack any religious foundation and that the dominant cultural narratives are making the Christian faith more offensive, then we must find new and compelling ways to share the gospel in this generation. In fact, we must discover a late modern version of the evangelistic dynamic of the early church, which grew through conversion in a similarly hostile and uncomprehending culture.” - Tim Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*

Attention

- How do we get people to pay attention to the gospel when they find it irrelevant?
- In the early church, evangelism was done by ordinary Christians sharing with their *oikos*—their network of relatives and close associates.
- In a similar way, we as Christians need to be intentionally missional in our daily lives and relationships.
- Cross Pressures
 - The stories that are told that play imaginatively on our suppressed desire for eternity
 - The tragedies of life that force us to face death and meaninglessness.
- “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” - 1 Pet. 3:15

Attraction

- We need to question people’s answers before we can answer people’s questions.
- No one can live without meaning, satisfaction, freedom, identity, forgiveness, resolution of moral questions, and hope for the future.
- The culture’s ways to provide these things ultimately will not work.
- Christianity offers:
 - A meaning in life that suffering can’t take away, but can even deepen
 - A satisfaction that isn’t based on circumstances
 - A freedom that doesn’t reduce community and relationships to thin transactions
 - An identity that isn’t fragile or based on our performance or the exclusion of others
 - A way to both deal with guilt and forgive others without residual bitterness or shame
 - A basis for seeking justice that does not turn us into oppressors ourselves
 - A way to face not only the future, but death itself with poise and peace
 - An explanation for the senses of transcendent beauty and love we often experience

- “So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.’” - Acts 17:22-23

Demonstration

- There is still a need to answer people’s questions.
- People have questions around God (“How can a good God allow suffering” or “How can God send people to hell?”) and around the Bible (its historical reliability or compatibility with science).
- People also have questions about the church’s history (issues of injustice and oppression).
 - We must be honest and own the areas where the church has failed.
 - We must help others to see that often the framework for their moral values has been founded on Christian ethics.

Conviction

- Gospel presentations always make two points:
 - The bad news: You are trying to save yourself, but you can’t.
 - The good news: You can be saved through Christ alone, not your efforts.
- Gospel presentations used to be built on the assumption that the meaning of life is to be good.
- In our current culture, the basic narrative is “the meaning of life is to be free.” Therefore, the bad and good news might look like this:
 - The bad news:
 - You want to be free, but you aren’t. You must live for something, and whatever it is will enslave you and lead you to exploit others.
 - The existential justification/identity you seek is impossibly fragile and will lead you to exclude others.
 - The deep satisfaction you seek is elusive and can’t be found in this world.
 - The explanation for all of this is that you were created by the true God. Your failure to live for him is a violation of both obligation and love.
 - The good news:
 - On the cross, Jesus reversed the power dynamics of the world, giving up power in service rather than exploiting, and took the penalty for our unjust rejection of God and treatment of others.
 - This provides an identity unlike any other, one that provides unconditional love and isn’t based on the ups and downs of our performance.
 - This identity creates a new freedom from being controlled by anything in this world and provides hope for deep satisfaction in the future.