



Confronting Evangelistic Barriers

By Steve Cohen

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Confronting 15 Evangelistic Barriers That Prevent Christians from Witnessing

At age 15, I went with my parents to the driver's license examiner's office, and took a written test to qualify for a learner's permit. The first time I sat behind the wheel of my father's 1955 Oldsmobile 98, my father sitting in the passenger seat, I noticed first how nervous he was – and how nervous I was!

As I slowly pulled out of the lot and onto the street, trying to concentrate on hand signals, braking, and the gas pedal, the cars in front of me and behind me, I was a nervous wreck! My first time behind the wheel of a car was certainly a negative experience!

Today I think little of getting into a car, putting on the seatbelt, starting the engine, and just driving away. My reactions have become automatic. I can even think of other things while I'm driving down the highway, knowing subconsciously what to look for in order to avoid an accident.

Over the years, many people have asked me how to testify about their Lord and Savior to Jewish people. They've had much experience and training in evangelism, but say they feel nervous when speaking with Jewish people. They are not sure of themselves or what they should say.

First, Seek to Understand

If a Christian finds it difficult to witness to a non-Jewish person, I often wonder how difficult it must be for my Christian friends to freely witness or share their faith with Jewish people. Over the years, I believe that talking about Jesus can become just as natural as breathing or driving.

We should cultivate a sensitivity and understanding of our audience, confidence in the Lord, and a reliance upon the Holy Spirit to give us direction, wisdom and discernment. As we tell of our faith, we are not salespeople hawking God or Christianity. Some principles of communication apply, but the results are up to the Holy Spirit, not us.

Consider these "communication" principles:

- Know your own faith
- Know the attitudes of the people you speak to
- Demonstrate who God is and speak the Gospel
- Demonstrate the individual's need for God
- Invite the person to respond in faith to the finished work of Christ

A salesperson takes time to learn his product and how to present it. It may take years or just a few minutes to build a relationship which facilitates open communication or it could be just a short time.... There is no set formula. So, when presenting the Gospel, the first order is patience. God has His own timing for an individual's salvation. We cannot hurry God along nor can we create anyone's willingness to listen.



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Prayer is the primary key to evangelism – speaking your faith and waiting on God’s timing. We don’t wait in silence, but we expectantly wait for the opportunities to speak up about what God has done in our lives.

A number of years ago, I attended an evangelism convocation. One speaker, Rev. Terry Cripe, was then serving St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, Harborton, N.J. His brief presentation was entitled: Fifteen reasons why evangelism won’t work. I have kept his outline in my office file and have referred to it often.

1. Evangelism will not work because stopping evangelism is the top priority of Satan.

Many times I’ve set up appointments or visits with people, and minor emergencies have arisen. They include illnesses, automobiles that won’t start, crossed lines of communications, and many small irritations that try to deter and dissuade me from actually carrying out the testimony I want to bring. Others have told me they experience these same roadblocks.

Paul says in Ephesians 6:10:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

When we seek to move forward for the Gospel and become effective in bringing a testimony, Satan’s opposition will surely mount and increase. In fact, I’ve noticed that the degree of opposition seems to increase with the effectiveness of the testimony and the clarity of communication in sharing the Gospel.

So, why would Satan interfere if we’re not being effective? If we do nothing, he doesn’t need to do anything. But of course he will discourage us when we’re prepared to move ahead. We may lose a skirmish here or there. But be encouraged to go ahead, for we have victory over Satan in Jesus our Savior.

2. Evangelism won’t work within a congregation, because the pastor fails to see himself as coach and members of the congregation as the star players.

Too often, a congregation’s leader is saddled with every responsibility — teaching, preaching, counseling, administration, visiting and evangelism. There aren’t enough hours in the week to do all that’s necessary for an effective evangelism program. Each member of the congregation must play an integral part within the framework of the congregation, so that they might work as a team, under the pastor’s supervision, molded to effectively bring the Gospel to their community.

3. Evangelism won’t work because we tend to spiritualize things in our lives, rather than to work them out in a practical way.



I have found that in many Bible study groups that gather within a congregational setting, the tendency is to “talk spiritual talk,” but not to walk the spiritual life. We can talk about service, love and worship, but too often we don’t do them.

Jesus didn’t spend three years training His disciples so they could sit around and think spiritual thoughts or construct fine theological arguments. Jesus prepared his followers for active ministry. They didn’t wait for people to come to their 11:00 a.m. worship service. Jesus gave them practical instruction on how to go out into the world and to bring the Good News to every living creature. That still applies. We need to go to the people and bring them the Lord.

4. Evangelism will not work because we are afraid of commitment.

I can’t wholeheartedly agree with this statement without qualifying it, for it seems as though people in North America are over-committed! We commit to social clubs, sporting events, hobbies and many other projects.

But these commitments crowd our lives so that we make no room to commit to the work of evangelism. So, I agree with Pastor Cripe – we are afraid of commitment to a planned, purposeful and effective course of evangelism. Evangelism just doesn’t have enough of a priority within our lives today.

In fact, congregational members seem to opt out further by saying, “Why do you think we give offerings or support missions?” “Isn’t that the work of the visiting committee or the evangelism committee?” “Isn’t that the work of the pastor? He’s the one responsible for doing those kinds of spiritual things.” Maybe they support evangelistic agencies or associations, or radio or television ministries.

We can give financial and prayer support to many worthwhile causes. But there is no more worthwhile cause than personal commitment and involvement as a believer in the life of a person who is not yet a believer. What greater commitment could we have than to commit to the value of an eternal soul?

5. Evangelism won’t work because there is insufficient follow-up.

Perhaps you have many acquaintances, points of contact or friendships. But the conversation doesn’t turn to spiritual things. We easily talk about sports, politics or world events and we leave it there.

Christians must take the initiative with the Holy Spirit as our guide. We can follow through, return a visit, send some literature, lend a Bible, or just stay in touch with an individual to let him or her know that we will be available for spiritual questions.

Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5: “But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” Timothy was called to make



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evangelism his work. He traveled and did a great deal. But Paul exhorted him over and over again to be diligent, and watchful in all things.

As believers, we too are called to be diligent and mindful of the people the Lord has brought into our lives. People don't just cross our paths by chance. The Lord has a plan for each person, and we should seize the opportunity God has given us to tell them about Jesus.

6. Evangelism won't work because we don't expect results.

It's become a vicious, self-fulfilling circle. We say to ourselves, "People won't believe, so I'm not going to tell them." And when we don't tell them, therefore, people don't believe.

When it comes to a person's salvation, we are not responsible for the results – the Holy Spirit is. That doesn't mean we sit back and do nothing. As Christians, Scripture exhorts us to go, to preach the word and to share the Gospel of the resurrection of Jesus in a bold, yet sensitive, way.

Isaiah 55:10-11 promises:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

When we speak God's Word, it will not return empty, but God will accomplish His purposes through it. Let's reconsider our own attitude in not expecting results. God tells us that His Word will have results.

7. Evangelism won't work because there is a lack of vision, and the objectives in evangelism are unclear.

Do you know where your congregation stands in evangelism? What are your congregation's plans for the coming year? The next two years? The next five years?

Do you plan to reach every member of your community within a certain radius of the church? Will it be done house by house, door by door? Do you have a plan to meet with people within your own personal sphere of influence, starting at home, with your immediate family? What about your coworkers, acquaintances, friends, the people with whom you have classes? What about the strangers you meet?

You wouldn't leave on a trip without a map, and so you won't be successful in evangelism without a direction, purpose, vision or goal. One could almost say that the people perish where there is no vision in the parish for evangelism.

8. Evangelism will not work when we do not prepare ourselves to endure the long haul.



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Many people think of evangelism as a 100-yard dash. We go to seminars or convocations, gear up, expend our energy for a short time, and then say, “That’s it!” But evangelism is more like a marathon. We need to pace and build ourselves to commit to the long run, not just commit to a short burst of energy.

9. Evangelism becomes a program, rather than a way of life.

All too often, we easily commit ourselves to bringing in special speakers, and holding special events, rallies and festivals. We’ll even do community outreach. But, beyond that, we live a fairly non-evangelistic lifestyle.

Being a Christian in this world, by definition, means that we should not conform to the ways of this world. We’re called to be in this world, but not of it. An evangelistic lifestyle seeks opportunities to speak whenever we meet someone, and to share testimony of our Lord and Savior. Perhaps we can simply leave a tract or share scripture, but in some positive, affirmative way we need to make a statement and communicate with others the Good News we know.

10. Evangelism won’t work because we are uncomfortable or unwilling to lead other people to the Lord in their work or in school.

So often, we think of evangelism as church work or work for church leaders, rather than of individuals speaking to other individuals. The more you tell others about Jesus, the easier it becomes. You learn what to expect and how to respond.

God hasn’t allowed us to opt out and leave the responsibility of speaking to those who are “above us” spiritually. All of us who believe in Jesus are called to become co-laborers in speaking of our Lord and Savior. By simply doing the work of evangelism in your daily life, you can overcome that unwillingness to lead others to the Lord.

11. Evangelism will fail because we fail to involve our family and friends in praying for us and for others who are speaking the Gospel.

It is crucial that we involve the community of believers around us in the work of praying. Through prayer and the Holy Spirit, we can know and look for success in our Gospel proclamation.

12. Evangelism will not succeed because the leaders of the congregation are not trained to do the work of evangelism.

In the recent past, Dialogue Evangelism clinics became a part of the seminary training experience within the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Now they are not offered at all. I’ve spoken at many congregations where pastors have told me that they have no evangelism training or experience. So, how can they be expected to train up members of their congregations? It’s like the blind leading the blind.

Jesus did not spend three years with His disciples teaching them theological perspectives, foreign languages, or many other elements we find in seminaries today. But, in a very practical way, Jesus



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equipped His followers to do evangelism. Through His preaching and teaching, He demonstrated His power and showed His followers that they had this same power through His Holy Spirit. We are enabled and equipped to go forward.

Today, both leaders and laypeople can make it a priority to attend evangelism convocations and become equipped to participate, for training is the key to success.

13. Evangelism will not work because we do not have the right attitude towards evangelism.

A book published in the 1980s was entitled, *The Seven Last Words of the Church* – “We never did it that way before!”

When I was a new believer, I attended a Lutheran congregation in Washington State. During a Sunday school class, I asked: “Let’s say you have a friend over for coffee, and you’d like to turn the conversation to Jesus. You’d like to see that person become a believer and you want to initiate a testimony. What do you say? Where do you begin? How do you start a conversation that focuses on spiritual things?”

One lady, a member of that congregation for many years, stood up and said, “Oh, I’m a Lutheran. I don’t do that sort of thing.”

Unfortunately, her attitude about evangelism prevails in far too many congregations across North America. But I’m encouraged as I see minds changing, people’s spirits being challenged and hearts awakening to the Great Commission of going into the world and making disciples. We will always hear voices in congregations saying, “We never did it that way before,” but I urge you instead to follow the voice of Jesus Who commissions us as His followers to “Go and Tell the Good News.”

14. Evangelism won’t work because our own devotional life is either poor or nonexistent.

How can we possibly introduce somebody to Jesus as our Lord and Savior if we really don’t know Him in a real, personal way? How can we know Him if we don’t have daily fellowship with Him in prayer, study of His word, or through regular participation in a congregation?

A minister once told me how many members were faithful attenders at his congregation – at Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. He was trying to say that was OK, because the Jewish people, in the exile, were only summoned to Jerusalem for the three major festivals (Passover, Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur).

The scriptures exhort us to gather regularly with other believers to affirm, uphold and nurture the faith we have.

The last and probably most influential of the 15 reasons why evangelism won’t work:

15. Evangelism won’t succeed simply because we are afraid!



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We are afraid of failure...a lack of knowledge about the Bible...not having graduated from a Bible school or seminary...a lack of experience...not knowing the answers...and, in Jewish evangelism, not knowing Jewish customs or traditions. You might worry that Jewish people know the Bible better than you do, or that they have different festivals, or that you might offend them if you tell them that Jesus is the only way to God. I'm sure many people can add to this list of fears.

Still, remember Paul's words in 2 Timothy 1:5-8:

I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

In Romans 1:16, Paul makes a great statement of faith and boldness: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

My father-in-law is a very special man, a man of great wisdom and practicality. Before I was even a Christian, he helped me to understand how all men are equal before God. Though we have different social positions, stations in life, or economic status, we all stand on the same level in the eyes of God – at the foot of the cross. We stand as sinners in need of salvation.

My father-in-law said, "We are all the same, because we all put our pants on one leg at a time. Nobody is different when it comes to needing salvation. Whether we are Jewish or gentile, all stand in need before God as sinners, and are separated from Him. Even though Jewish people are in a called, covenant relationship to God through Abraham, that relationship does not guarantee salvation. We must be mindful of the need and the importance of telling Jewish people about Jesus."



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For More Information

For more information about this resource, please feel free to contact us at:

The Apple of His Eye Mission Society
PO Box 1649
Brentwood, TN 37024-1649
(888) 512-7753
info@appleofhiseye.org

For additional resources, please visit our website at www.appleofhiseye.org.