

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
April 12, 2015
“Relationship Evangelism”

Relationship Evangelism

- What relationships do you have with the people around you, outside of your family, every day?
- How can you use those relationships to find ways to minister to and evangelize those people?

Relational or Relationship Evangelism is simply allowing your spiritual life following Christ to be on display when interacting with those God has placed around you at work, in your neighborhood or at hobbies or events you attend. This is not the “cold call” confrontation of knocking on a stranger’s door, nor is it the impersonal technique of leaving gospel tracts at restaurants and gas stations. Both of these CAN be effective evangelistic methods because all people react differently to evangelism: some don’t like a personal conversation with a stranger, but would be compelled by a well-written gospel tract and some couldn’t be bothered to read a tract, but would love to have someone to explain the good news to them. It’s important to know that while these are important, they are not our only, nor even our most effective, methods of spreading God’s word.

ANOTHER way to reach the lost that anyone can do, is to use Relational Evangelism. Every day, apart from your family, there are people you see every day or regularly every so often. They can be co-workers, vendors, workers at retail or food shops we frequent. You might not think so, but these are some of the people we have the best chance of influencing for Christ. The reason is that we invest so much time and conversation with them throughout our weeks, months and lives that we develop relationships with them. They may or may not come over to our house or go fishing or shopping with us, but we still have strong influence, for good or bad, with them. Hopefully, we use it for good and to bring those around us to Christ. Let’s take a look at how we can do just that.

1. Pray for specific people to be saved. (Matthew 7:8, Romans 10:1)

It’s as simple as that. Pick one or two people that you’re close to at work or elsewhere and begin to pray for God to give you opportunities to evangelize to them. Keep in mind that, as with other prayers, God isn’t a vending machine and won’t necessarily drop a situation in your lap exactly how you imagine it. Instead of worrying, relax and embrace God’s will. Pray and stay aware so you don’t miss any opportunities to spend some extra time in conversation with them and even then, don’t feel like you have to preach a sermon to them. Instead...

2. Minister to those people. (1 Peter 2:12, Matthew 5:16)

Give help and aid to everyone around you as often and as best you can. Be a shoulder to cry on, fix a flat tire, give someone a ride home, loan gas money to someone who needs it, and don’t ever mention it again unless they do first. Be a source of good will and assistance as often as you can afford to and watch as opportunities to spread the Gospel increase. Everyone around us has needs; some we can meet and some we can’t. However, we know that God is source of every good and perfect gift and has the power to meet every need, if it is His will to do so. When we do good deeds, not expecting repayment but simply for the honor of God and for the benefit of those around us, we are doing the work God has saved us for so that He can receive glory from all those who witness it. Having a reputation for helping others is one of the greatest inroads into the

trust of our friends and acquaintances. If you prove that you care for them, they will genuinely care about you and what you have to say. Without this crucial step of showing love through service, any message of God's love you have will sound hollow and will not be taken seriously!

3. Listen to their story; see where they are. (James 1:19)

When people see that they can trust you because you genuinely care about them and others around you, they will be comfortable in sharing their lives with you. You don't have to be their counselor or therapist or even their pastor. Just be their friend. Listen and don't rush to speak, but wait for the opportunity God gives you to speak the Gospel into their lives using whatever means He gives you. If they have a problem they confide in you, tell them you are praying for them (and actually do it!) When God provides the right time, ask them about their beliefs about God in a way that considers their lives. Have they run away from God? Ask them if they ever consider coming back. If they've been hurt by churches before, remind them that the sin of man can divide us, but God always wants us to be unified in His will and love, and that His love never changes. Often God will show us circumstances in our own lives that we have gone through that we can relate to our friends and will help demonstrate our understanding and sympathy with their situation. Once again, be patient. Sometimes people may shrug off your attempts to evangelize them. Trust the Lord's will and timing and keep praying for opportunities. It may not be God's will that YOU lead them personally to Christ, but you have planted the seed and if nothing else, you have provided a good example of a follower of Christ.

4. Have a plan to say it: simple is effective (2 Tim 4:2)

Having a plan doesn't necessarily mean memorizing the Roman's Road, or the ABC's of Evangelism, or buying an Evangecube in preparation of relating the Gospel to your friend. (All of these can be VERY helpful tools in evangelism, but they are simply that: Tools!) Having a plan of relating to your friend means that you take the time to tailor your presentation of the Gospel to their needs. Notice we say the "presentation" of the Gospel. We don't change, misrepresent or water-down the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Here we are talking about using what we know about the person and their life to teach them about Christ's love, His sacrifice on their behalf and their need for Him as their Savior and Lord. If we think that simply preaching "at" them or reciting a bunch of scripture "at" them is the same as being a minister of the Gospel of Christ, then we are sadly mistaken. Time and again, Jesus speaks to individuals "where they are." The Woman at the Well, Zacchaeus, Nicodemus... Jesus often asked direct and probing questions. He also told powerful and thought provoking stories to communicate his message. He even sometimes taught with word pictures, "I am the door, bread, water". But he did not feel it necessary to share the same stories or ask the same questions in every instance. He was knowledgeable in the Word of God, and in discerning the work of God in the lives of specific people. His sensitivity to the condition of each individual with whom he spoke allowed him to apply the Word of God to each one personally. His word reached their hearts with the truth of God. Some people need to hear about God's grace and forgiveness. Some might need to hear a stronger word of rebuke about their attitudes or sins along with the message of salvation. Trust in God and always, always speak the Truth in Love, and the Holy Spirit will give you what you need to say at the appropriate time. (Luke 12:12)

5. Be transparent! (1 Cor 10:13)

First, be up front with them about the way of being a Disciple of Christ. It is not easy and no one can live it without failure. Paul admitted that he "died" daily, and that he did things he wasn't supposed to and failed to do all that he should. Although our friends may be attracted to the way we live our lives differently than the world through the grace of God, we should never try to portray ourselves as having it all together, living without a struggle or being perfect. Putting on that kind of a façade is FALSE and it is PAGAN. The World

wants us to live our lives as if we don't have a problem while hiding the fact that we're dying slowly, on the inside. So in the presence of Christian brothers and sisters, AND in the presence of the lost we hope to win, don't ever pretend to be something you aren't. So if you're a young believer, don't act like you're Billy Graham or Charles Spurgeon. And if you're a mature believer, don't try to act like you're perfect or holier than thou because you fear what others might think if they knew you still struggle. Following Jesus is a continuous learning and growing experience that doesn't end on this side of eternity. (1 Cor 10:13)

Second, don't ever try to "trick" someone into hearing the Gospel. One of the things that annoys me most is when people try to sell me a time share. They tell me "oh we just want a moment of your time and you can get this money or this prize"... and then they proceed to try to throw everything but the kitchen sink at me to get me to come to the "hard sell." These tricks are for shysters, in my opinion, and the people who use deception are generally not very nice at all. Most recently I had a fellow tell me he hoped it rained every day I was there on vacation because I didn't give him my time!

Be straight-forward with your friends. Don't invite them to a "concert" when it's a revival singing at your church. Don't invite them to a "dinner party" at your house if it's going to be a Bible study. Don't try to trick them into believing in Christ with a bunch of "gotcha" questions about evolution vs. creation or end times beliefs or anything else controversial. Don't try to brow beat them or wear them down with arguments or scare them with Hell-fire and brimstone!

We want to win souls, not arguments. The call of the Holy Spirit does not require our gimmicks or techniques. It only requires us to relay the Word of God to those who will Hear it. Once that is done, once we have spoken the truth in love, the Holy Spirit will produce faith in those He wills as they respond to His call. (Romans 10:17)

Take Home

1. When people see and experience our genuine love, they will hear the message. If people don't see our love, they won't take us seriously
2. Write down the names of two people that God is leading you to pray for and share the gospel with.
3. "The best argument for Christianity is Christians; their joy, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians -- when they are somber and joyless, when they are self-righteous and smug in complacent consecrations, when they are narrow and repressive, then Christianity dies a thousand deaths." – Sheldon Vanauken