

What is it?

By 'walk-up evangelism', we mean what it says – walking up to someone and sharing the gospel. Other descriptions have been used in recent times, contact evangelism, stranger evangelism and so forth. There are many possible contexts including parks, streets, shopping centres, beaches and door-to door.

Why do it?

1. It provides good opportunities for gospeling. If we go to the right places, there are always people willing to talk and listen. On some occasions contacts are willing to be followed up with Bible study and coming to church.
2. It is the easiest way to get going in evangelism.
3. It is one of the best ways to train others in evangelism. It is ideal 'on-the-job', watching an experienced personal evangelist, having a go and getting feedback. We grow in confidence in the gospel and in our personal skills. We develop lots of skills – starting conversations, building rapport, presenting the gospel, answering questions. We learn more in 30 minutes of doing evangelism than in a week of classes.
4. Those who are doing walk-up evangelism are usually talking to friends about the gospel. By approaching strangers, presenting the gospel and seeking to persuade, our commitment to Christ and the gospel is heightened. We are 'radicalised' as Christ's disciples, out in the market place, representing Him, 'going public' if you like. It is often a defining moment for both young and old Christians. We are acknowledging Him before men (Matt 10:32-33), confessing Him with our mouth (Rom 10:9-10). As a result we are more likely to speak up with friends, family and acquaintances. Many of the skills learnt in the more 'formal' evangelism equip us for the more 'relational' evangelism.
5. To regain the initiative from the cults who have majored on this approach and grown as a result.
6. For those training for full-time ministry is an invaluable training ground. We learn about all kinds of people, how to approach them, their attitudes to Christianity and skills in communicating the gospel.

Why we don't do it

1. There are all sorts of reasons offered for not evangelising this way: it is not the best strategy, there is little follow-up, if done badly it can be offensive, people think we are from the cults, we should only evangelise friends, it just doesn't work.
2. The basic reason is fear. Fear of the unknown, embarrassment, not knowing what to say. For people at the shy end of the spectrum it can be excruciating.

Where to do it

- i) Where are people sitting around, reasonably relaxed, and not too crowded to be

inhibited in talking?

- ii) We can target particular areas to make it more strategic, near our church or reaching a specific ethnic group.

How to do it

In one sense our own personalities will shape how we approach people.

But if we are training others in evangelism, we need a simple, fairly structured approach which others can imitate to get started.

Opening Gambit

Identify who you are openly and gain permission to engage in conversation:

"We are Christians from (church, ministry), finding out what people know about Christianity and discussing it"

"We are from (church, ministry). Could we get your opinion on three questions about God and talk about it with you?"

Build Rapport

Spend a few moments swapping names, finding out about their religious background and looking for common ground. Anything that builds a bridge of relationship and trust is important. It may be you grew up in the same area, went to the same school, know someone in common, saw the same movie, read the same book, share a pet hate. Anything that breaks the ice and says you are a real person with a genuine interest in them.

Ask Questions

- i) What is your view of God
- ii) Who in your opinion is Jesus
- iii) What is a real Christian
- iv) What is the future of the world
- v) What happens when we die

Present a Gospel Outline

"Let me give you a summary of Christianity which answers these questions"

Present the gospel early in the conversation. It is the preaching of the Cross that persuades, not our arguments. Having clearly set out the gospel, we can answer their questions by further explaining the gospel. A visual presentation often works best.

Handle Responses

There can be a whole range of responses at this point from faith to hostility. To some, the gospel is the aroma of life, to others the stench of death. There are some broad principles in handling responses.

- i) Keep leading the conversation to the central issues of the gospel, who Jesus is

and our salvation won on the Cross.

- ii) Work out the question behind the question. Philosophical objections often but not always mask a more fundamental moral problem, an unwillingness to repent of sin. Emotional reactions might derive from deep hurt in life, including bad experiences with religion.
- iii) You can sometimes get to the real problem by asking: "if I could answer that question, would you become a Christian?"

Purchase Proposition

We are not sales people but ambassadors for the Lord Jesus Christ. However this aspect of marketing is helpful. The good sales person will make a clear proposition at the end of the conversation, inviting the 'prospect' to make a definite response. In our evangelism, we often stop short of making a specific proposition or invitation, usually because of some lurking fear. The fundamental proposition is: would you become a Christian? But there are other steps we can lay before people, appropriate to their stage: let's meet again, do a Bible study, read this book, listen to a tape, come to church.

Follow Up

Those who accept some invitation need to be diligently followed-up. If they wish to withdraw at some point, respect their freedom in the matter. We must never harass people.

Some practical tips

- i. The initial approach must be positive, confident and honest. It is best to approach people who don't appear to be busy. Avoid anything that creates a negative impression. For example, don't sneak up on people from behind, don't surround them with one of you on either side and don't work your way along a line of people who are watching you approach others.
- ii. Show integrity at all times. Never manipulate or pressure people, always stick to the time they have agreed to give you. If you can't answer their question, just say so.
- iii. In training others, you might set a limited goal for some sessions of evangelism. On one occasion you might work at how to discover people's attitude to Christianity. On another occasion you might work at the purchase proposition. You don't have to master all the methodology in one step. You can also share different parts of the conversation.

Resources

Personal Evangelism, Matthias Media