

# Eleven Commandments for Ordinary, Everyday Evangelists

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WHEN THINKING OF EVANGELIZING or being an evangelist, one usually begins by asking the question, what is evangelism? That question then sparks a whole host of other questions. What do I talk about? What do I have to do? To answer those questions, I go to people whose knowledge and values I have a high regard for and that I respect. Here are some of their answers regarding what evangelism is:

Evangelism is one hungry beggar telling another where to find bread. (D.T. Niles)

Evangelism is empowerment by the Holy Spirit to get the story of God's action out through word and deed so people will be turned around to Jesus Christ; into Jesus' body the church; and toward their neighbor in need. (Gabriel Fackre)

Evangelism is bringing good news in word and deed of Jesus Christ and the coming of God's reign so individuals may become disciples, the church built up, and society becomes accountable to God's will. (Steve Gifford)

Evangelism is the task of each generation—to incarnate the gospel in their own time. (M. Arias)

Evangelism means participating in God's sufferings in the world. (Dietrich Bonhoefer)

Evangelism must be our joyful proclamation of what God has done for us or else it turns into a churchly workaholic search for scalps to count on our evangelical belt. (Harvie Conn)

Evangelism is gospel "show and tell." (Harvie Conn)

Evangelism is communication of the good news of what God has done, is doing, and will be doing in the world. . . . Evangelism should be seen as an act of love. (Robert Hall)

Evangelism is not only verbal proclamation but visual proclamation as well: the whole disclosure of God in the world. That's a function of the church—to continue the incarnational principle Christ started. (Jerry Cook)

Evangelism means an invitation to participate in the blessings of the kingdom, to celebrate the hopes of the kingdom, and to engage in the tasks of the kingdom. (M. Arias)

Evangelism as here understood [in *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism*] is an activity of transformed consciousness that results in an altered perception of world, neighbor and self, and an authorization to live differently in that world. The news that God has triumphed means that a transformed life, i.e. one changed by the hearing of that news, works to bring more and more of life, personal and public, under the rule of this world-transforming, slave-liberating, covenant-making, promise-keeping, justice-commanding God. (Walter Brueggemann)

Evangelism is the presentation of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in such ways that persons may be led to believe in him as Savior and follow him as Lord within the fellowship of the church. (Episcopal General Committee)

Now that we have answers that define evangelism, let us move on to ways that we can respond to the mandate of Jesus to “go and make disciples” and turn that mandate into a reality. It is not at all difficult; just follow the eleven commandments, and you will become an effective evangelist, furthering the realm of God:

1. Decide that you will begin to speak of and share your faith with others. Deciding is a giant step!
2. Fear Not! Don't be afraid that you will be like those rude, intrusive “evangelists” you have seen or heard. Don't be afraid that you will be thought weird or crazy. Don't be afraid that you must become someone else. Don't be afraid that you will be embarrassed. You must only be yourself—gentle and quiet, or excited and passionate, or hesitant and searching.
3. Be a disciple. Learn about your faith. Read and study the Bible. If there is no Bible-study group at your church or none that works for your life schedule, start one that does. (Don't wait for someone else to do it!) Ask questions, wonder, reflect, and pray. Think about your relationship with God and with Jesus. Keep a Bible with you for study and reflection or even to share a passage with someone else (you needn't be showy about it—there are nice pocket-sized ones, even some for PDAs). Then pray some more.
4. Practice speaking of and sharing your faith with children and grandchildren, family, church friends, neighbors. It is okay to start with a little—for example, when speaking about getting through a hard time in your life, just include something like “God led me through” or “Jesus was right there with me.”
5. Identify to yourself and pray for (by name when possible) those in your life who do not seem to know God's love for them—these can be individuals you know who seem to have no faith, or have no church-home, or who have expressed loneliness or need and can be groups like the “kids in the neighborhood” or the fami-

ly next-door. Make a short list, and pray everyday for them.

6. Trust God's Spirit in you. You are not alone! You don't have to be perfect or “finished” before you can share God's good news. Say what you know or have experienced. God can and will work through “even” you.
7. Be part of a supportive, local-church community and encourage its intentional, planned, evangelical mission. Discourage calling evangelism what is really just survivalism for an institution. Evangelism is a community vocation as well as individual. Invite others to be part of your community of Jesus followers.
8. Don't be tempted to trade your mission and justice activity for intentional evangelism. They are all part of a whole Christian life. Bring your evangelism into your social concern and your social concern into your ministry as an evangelist.
9. Remember what evangelism is and isn't about. It is not about you, so don't worry about failing or being embarrassed. It is not about getting new members for your church. It is God's work that we get to join. It is about the good news of God's love that you know through your relationship with Jesus and helping others to receive and experience that love.
10. Listen to the needs, concerns, fears, doubts, and questions of others. Evangelism is not “preaching at” others; it is not lecturing, judging, shaming, probing inappropriately, pushing, or overwhelming. Evangelism happens best in relationship, whether short-(your dentist, person on a bus) or long-term. As you engage with others, admit what you don't know or aren't sure of and invite further exploration together.
11. Just do it! Don't just attend workshops, read about, or talk about evangelism at church. Don't wait for someone else to do something. Just try it. And try it again. Don't worry. Let God work in you.

*Tell the story of Jesus and his love!*

## A Few Resources for Ordinary, Everyday Evangelists

1. The Bible.
2. A few texts:
  - John 4 (entirety or verses 28–30, 39–42)
  - 2 Corinthians 4:7, 13–15
  - Acts 8:26–35
  - Matthew 8:35–38
  - Matthew 28:16–20
  - Jeremiah 1:6–9
  - 2 Timothy 5: 1–5
3. Brueggemann, Walter. *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storeyed Universe*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1993.
4. The church library for Bible dictionaries, Bible commentaries, or books on the history and teaching of Christianity.
5. The William M. Easum and Thomas G. Bandy Web site <[www.easumbandy.com](http://www.easumbandy.com)> or their book *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* (Nashville,

Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1997) and Bandy's *Moving Off the Map: A Field Guide to Changing the Congregation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1998). [Author's note: I disagree with Easum and Bandy about some key things, such as implicit devaluing of justice ministries, so I encourage reading their work with a critical eye, but their overall emphasis on reclaiming passion for the gospel is very helpful, and there is much thought provoking and valuable in their work.]

6. *e. Word* (a packet of evangelism resources available from UCC Resources at 800.325.7061 and through the Web site <[www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)>).
7. Evangelism Connections annual workshops, promoted through the United Church of Christ and Net Results.
8. "Net Results," the publication or available on the Web site at <[www.netresults.org](http://www.netresults.org)>.
9. The UCC Web site <[www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)> Evangelism pages.

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