

The Way of the Insider

Advancing the gospel where we live, work, or play.

The doomsday countdown had begun.

Living in captivity, without official representation, Israel faced extermination. Genocide on a massive scale was about to occur (Esther 7:4). The situation was hopeless except for one person on the inside of the king's palace. Her name was Esther and she was an insider, someone providentially appointed "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). Esther's influence with the king proved to be the turning point that saved Israel from annihilation. Insiders are God's players to advance His Kingdom.

All of us are insiders to work, family, or social settings. An insider shares a common space, purpose, or interest with those they know. We're insiders to somewhere and to someone. Each of us lives, works, or plays in places uniquely given by God to advance the gospel. If each insider is next to someone, then with enough insiders, we will be next to everyone!

Many churches begin their discipleship ministries by organizing believers into small groups. Jesus had a different starting point. He initiated the discipling process as an itinerant evangelist. Mark jumpstarts his Gospel by describing how Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, "The time is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14,15).

We tend to separate evangelism from discipleship. Jesus did it differently. We would be hard-pressed to identify when the disciples came to saving faith. It appears that Jesus invited people to the discipleship process while they were still "in process." When we follow the Master's model, evangelism becomes an integral part of the discipleship process, a process that begins as an insider.

Insiders are a New Testament strategy.

Like a virus, the gospel infects people through the ministry of insiders. The New Testament pattern is simple. Convert and mobilize enough insiders and you will evangelize the world!

1. Jesus set the example as an insider. Through his incarnation, He lived, worked, and played among people. The Messages translates John 1:14 in this way:

*The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.*

- What does the example of Jesus teach us about the insider ministry?

You're surrounded! You've spent years relating to your family, your community and your situation. Some of your relationships are good, some are bad, but they all have the potential for new meaning now that you're a citizen of the Kingdom of God. – Jim Petersen

[The conversion of the Roman Empire] was accomplished by informal missionaries . . . people chattering [the gospel] to friends and chance acquaintances, in homes and wine shops, on walks and around market stalls. – Michael Green

The new Christian is told he has “nothing in common” with his unsaved associates. Quite frankly, I have a lot in common with them: a mortgage, car payments, kids who misbehave, a lawn to mow, a car to wash, a less-than-perfect marriage, a few too many pounds around my waist, and an interest in sports, hobbies, and other activities they enjoy. – Joe Aldrich

It comes more natural to shout the gospel at people from a distance than to involve ourselves deeply in their lives . . . their problems, and to feel with them in their pains. – John Stott

- How did “moving into the neighborhood” enhance Jesus’ ministry?
 - Reflect on the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry. What were some ways that Jesus moved into the neighborhood of people’s lives?
2. Read Mark 5:18-20. On what mission does Jesus send the formerly demon-possessed man?
 - What can this instruction tell us about the ministry of an insider?
 3. Matthew, the tax collector, is another insider who followed Jesus. Read Matthew 9:9-12. What does this insider immediately do after declaring his allegiance to Christ?
 - Describe the group of people that Matthew was an “insider” to.
 - How did Matthew’s insider relationships open up avenues of ministry for Jesus?
 4. The woman at the well was an insider to an entire village. Read John 4:39-42. What impact did this insider, a common woman wanting water, have upon her village?
 5. Paul’s ministry strategy depended on insiders.

The Apostle Paul was called to go the Gentiles, those Greeks, Romans, and Asians who did not share the Jewish culture or heritage (Romans 1:5; Acts 9:15). But when we look at the biblical record, an interesting observation emerges.

On his missionary journeys, Paul always started with the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:5,14; 14:1). How then did he evangelize the Gentiles? Other than the incidents at Lystra (Acts 14:8-20) and Athens (Acts 17:16-34), there are no other recorded instances of Paul going to the Gentiles before going to the Jews.

Paul was an “outsider” to the Gentiles but his ministry in the Synagogues brought him into contact with God-fearing Greeks and Romans who were insiders to wider Gentile networks (Acts 13:42,42; 14:1; 17:4). It was among these new converts that Paul established spiritual beachheads, new groups of believers who could reach out to their family and friends.

Paul counted on the continued growth of these spiritual offspring to impact their surrounding areas. Because of these insiders, Paul could refer to an entire area as being evangelized (Acts 13:49,50; Romans 15:19). Insiders were essential to the growth of the early church.

The structure of the early church naturally built on the ministry of insiders. These early groups of believers met in homes (Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15). Households were both physical settings and groups of people that included an extended family and household slaves (Acts 16:31-34). Since it was illegal for the early church to own property, the physical home and social networks were ideal meeting and growth places for the gospel.

- Why do you think these interconnected social networks were ideal settings for evangelism?
- 1 Thessalonians 1:7,8 describes an insider ministry moving from a Roman city to an entire province. What does this example tell us about the power of insiders? (look up the locations on a map to see the impact of this group of believers)

6. Summarize. What did you learn about the impact of an insider ministry?

How do you feel about being an insider to your networks of friends, family, and co-workers?

- I'm a little apprehensive.
- I'm excited about God's potential to impact people.
- I've never thought much about being an insider until now.
- I'm excited but I don't know how to proceed.
- I'm motivated and have some basic training to get started.

Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Silas, and others who took Christianity to the Roman Empire traveled along social networks that gave them entry to, and credibility within, the Hellenized Jewish Communities.

– Rodney Stark

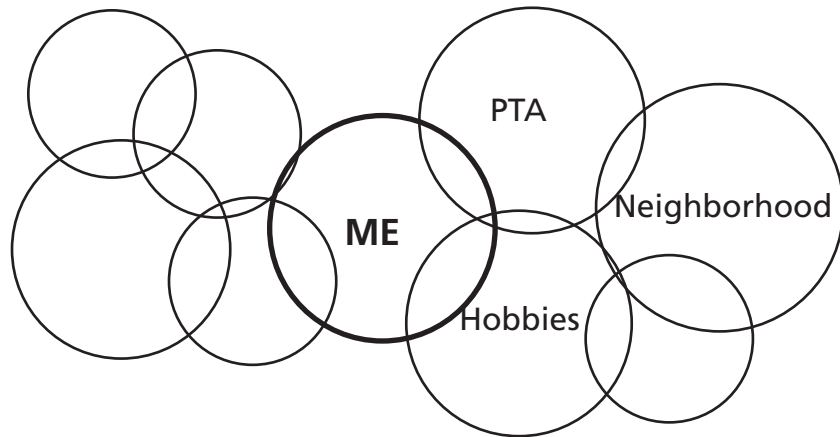
Evangelism isn't just something you “do--out there” -- and then get back to normal living. Evangelism involves taking people seriously, getting across to their island of concerns and needs, and then sharing Christ as Lord in the context of our natural living situations.

– Becky Pippert

I simply argue that the Cross should be raised at the center of the marketplace as well as the steeple of the church. Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves, at a crossroads so cosmopolitan that they had to write His title in Hebrew and Latin and Greek, at the place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. That is where he died and that is what he died for . . . and that is where churchmen ought to be and what churchmen ought to be about.

– George MacLeod

7. Visualize yourself as an insider. What are the everyday venues of your life, the places where you live, work, or play? Within these places are people to befriend for Jesus' sake. Using the following illustration, brainstorm and list other social circles of people with whom you're a natural insider.



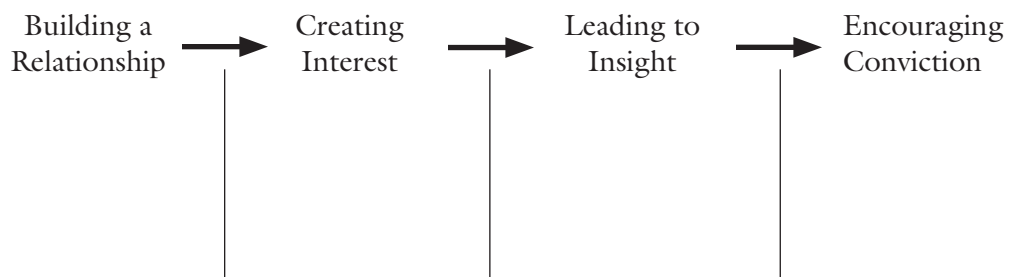
Insiders know that evangelism is a process.

Evangelism is a spiritual process of helping unbelievers respond to the Holy Spirit in a series of mini-decisions that leads him or her to place their saving faith in Christ. Experience and Scriptures demonstrate that four things are needed in this process:

- Relationship - I'm building relational bridges of trust and respect for the good news.
- Interest - My seeking friends are moving from hostility or apathy to a curiosity about the Christian faith.
- Insight - My friends outside of Christ are making personal discoveries about God, Jesus, the Bible, faith, etc.
- Conviction - My seeking friends are taking steps to act in faith upon one's discoveries about God, Jesus, faith, etc.

Scriptures includes snapshots of people at these four stages. In Matthew 11, we observe how Jesus used social occasions to build relationships with lost people. Acts 17 records Paul's conversations with a Greek audience, people with interest but little insight. In John 4, Jesus converses with a woman and leads her to new insight. The Ethiopian official in Acts 8 shows how a person responds to conviction.

9. Review the friends you listed in #7. Where would you place each person in the evangelism process? Write their names under the appropriate headings.



9. Read the following practical steps to build relationships, create interest and insight, and encourage conviction. Check the ones that you could do with your friends listed above.

Building a relationship

- I can pray for my friend.
- I can serve him or her in a practical way.
- I need to introduce myself to him or her.
- We can do something together socially: eat lunch together, go to a movie, invite to my home, attend a sporting event, etc.

Creating interest

- I can identify myself as a Christian.
- I can ask to pray for him or her in time of crisis or need.
- I can ask, “Where are you on your spiritual journey?”
- I can introduce my friend to another Christian friend.
- I can share a faith story (a simple personal illustration of an answer to prayer, insight from the Scriptures, etc.)

Leading to insight

- I can invite a friend to watch *The Passion* movie together.
- I can share my personal faith story.
- I can invite him or her to a Bible reading group.
- I can invite him or her to a Christmas concert.
- I can pass-on a meaningful book related to an issue of concern or a question.

Encouraging application

- We can discuss his or her objections to the faith over lunch or coffee.
- We can discuss the implications of *The Passion* movie together.
- We can discuss a gospel illustration (a helpful tool is *One Verse Evangelism* by Randy Raysbrook).
- We can attend a relevant worship service together.
- We can talk together about what we’re learning from a book we’re reading together.

10. Which of the above practical steps can you take to move a friendship from interest to insight to conviction?

Nowhere in the Bible is the world exhorted to ‘come to church.’ But the Church’s mandate is clear: she must go to the world.

– Richard Halverson, late Chaplain of the U.S. Senate

Our surprise develops into a sense of urgency when we recognize that a primary, maybe the primary, venue for evangelism in Jesus’ life was the meal. – Eugene Peterson

Insiders live on a mission

We can't win them if we don't know how they think, and we can't know how they think if we don't ever enter their world. Loving and liking secular people is absolutely essential to reaching them.

– Bill Hybels

11. Review this study. What principles or discoveries did you make about insiders or the process of evangelism?

12. Dream a little. What could happen in your small group, adult class, or church if everyone saw themselves as insiders? How could your neighborhood, community, or city be impacted?

13. How could you visualize yourself living out this principle as you live the life of an insider where you live, work, or play?

14. Describe one specific action step you could take within the next twenty-four hours, next week, or next month to live as an insider.