

"CAN I GET A WITNESS?"

(Acts 8:35)

(Chuck Swindoll)

I've seen a lot of evangelism methods used in my fifty-plus years of ministry. Some are better than others. I don't think there's any single method of sharing the gospel that works for all people at all times, but there are at least three models that everyone should avoid.

THE BOUNTY HUNTER

The bounty hunter wakes up in the morning all excited about explaining the basics of Christianity to anybody and everybody, regardless of the circumstances or people's interest level. Everybody he meets, he tells: the guy at the gas station, the woman in the grocery store, the delivery man at the office, the friend of a friend, the person in the next booth at the restaurant, or sitting next to him on the plane. Ready or not, here he comes!

On the upside, the bounty hunter definitely gets results. By sheer force of numbers, a percentage do hear the gospel and respond. On the downside, how many are pushed away and become more resistant to the gospel as a result? That doesn't matter to the bounty hunter. He feels the end justifies the means and feels relieved of any guilt. In fact, many bounty hunters dismiss any concern for being offensive. They rationalize that "the message of Christ is offensive to an evil world," without stopping to think that they might be the offending element, not the gospel.

My friend Bob told me that the first person he ever saw witnessing was a girl he knew in high school. She wore out-of-date clothes—dark, long dresses, thick hose, and a little hat—and carried a 4-ton Bible. She used to hide behind the lockers and, whenever someone would walk by, she'd jump out, shove a tract into their hands, and say, "Don't blame Jesus if you go to hell!

Bob said, "I thought. *Fine, I won't blame Him!*"

Bounty hunters care more about decisions and numbers than changed lives and relationships.

THE EGGHEAD

Eggheads like what I call "the Ivy League approach." An egghead is the opposite of the bounty hunter in most ways.



Rather than appear too eager or overly zealous, the intellectual witness says "Let's get together and discuss the world's religions." The egghead is an expert in apologetics but never gets to the bottom line: a decision to trust Christ.

The Ivy League approach has a few advantages. This method recognizes the broad spectrum of human opinions, seeks to understand other points of view, and cares to communicate the point through dialogue. It's educational. It's even stimulating to discover how one religion differs from another and how they're similar. Eggheads find more information to fill their already-crowded heads.

The disadvantage: It's reason-centered and rarely works. People don't generally come to know Christ because they lost a debate. The problem of sin isn't an intellectual problem; it's the result of rebellion against God. A decision for Christ is a crisis of the will. That's not to say apologetics doesn't have its place in evangelism. The effective use of reason helps demonstrate that Christianity is a reasonable faith.

That helps keep the entrance uncluttered. Then, once a person's heart becomes receptive to the gospel, apologetics can help clear away intellectual obstructions from the path to Christ.

THE SECRET AGENT

Truth be told, most of us are secret-agent Christians. These believers rationalize their lack of initiative by declaring themselves "silent witnesses for God." They hope their lifestyle will do all the talking. They're waiting for somebody to walk up to them and say, "Friend, I've been watching your life. And I'm interested in knowing how to receive Christ as my personal Savior. Do I receive Him by faith?" When that happens, the secret agent will tell the individual all about Christ and how to know Him personally. Problem is, that never happens.

I've heard people say, "Wait—which is more important to God, your life or your message?" That's like asking a pilot, "Which wing is more important, the left or the right?" A plane must have both, or it will never get off the ground.

The advantage of being a secret agent is that you never offend. This method also keeps you accountable to maintain a life of authenticity, integrity, kindness, and generosity. But this approach comes at the cost of a terrible disadvantage. It's a self-centered means of easing your conscience while shirking a solemn responsibility given by Christ.

Clearly, the best approach brings together the most effective elements of all three. Be transparent about your relationship with Jesus Christ and talk openly about your spiritual growth. Study other religions and engage people in thoughtful, respectful, and calm conversations, taking care to listen and to offer rational responses to questions. By all means, let your life do the talking—but not all the talking! At some point, once you have gained trust and have earned a fair hearing, get to the issue at hand: the need to repent of sin and to accept Christ's gift of eternal life.