

RELATIONAL EVANGELISM

Welcome to the CMF Training page on Relational Evangelism or as it is often called, Lifestyle Evangelism. Unlike "Cold Turkey" evangelism where you approach people you do not know, Relational Evangelism is evangelism you do amongst family members or close friends, people who know you and see your life on a regular basis.

This type of Relational (Lifestyle) Evangelism is the most effective method of Winning Souls. A believer involving him/herself in the life of an unbeliever in the context of a friendship makes the greatest difference and has the greatest impact when it comes to sharing personal faith in Christ.

Historical data shows that over 75% (three-fourths) of all conversions occur in the context of a family or personal friendship suggesting lifestyle evangelism is the most effective method of evangelism for inviting people into a personal relationship with Christ:

Conversions responses:	
A friend or relative	78%
Pastor	6%
Sunday school	5%
Church service or program	3%
Walk-in off the street	3%
Special need	2%
Personal visitation	2%
Evangelistic crusade or TV show	1/2%
[Source: Church Growth, Inc.]	

Personal relationships create a nurturing climate for the invitation to Christ to be extended. In this case, an unbeliever feels a sense of belonging before the experience of believing. We feel that an unbeliever is most likely to give a believer the opportunity to share his or her faith when the believer's life has first proven her/his subsequent words to be truthful and life changing. In this way, people feel Inherent Worth before they open themselves up to the Inspired Word.

This relational evangelism affords the unbeliever the opportunity to see that faith in Christ affects every part of a person—head and heart, both inside and out. We concede, as mentioned above, that it is not the only method, but we believe it is one of the best. Certainly different methods work for different people, but we believe lifestyle evangelism is most productive and profitable, and produces not just converts, but disciples, which is what Christ calls us to do (Matthew 28:19).

This Postmodernism culture around us today defies commitment to ideas because it accepts no ultimate truth. Generally speaking, the only commitment that postmodernism does allow is to a "tribal group", or community, because it is within that tribal group that truth is experienced. In other words, through relationships and community, truth is experienced. Truth is validated in relationship, but initially cannot stand on its own two legs. When it comes to the Truth of Scriptures, people today want to see it lived out and validated in the life of another before they accept it as "valid truth."

That being said, let's jump in....



BIBLICAL MOTIVATION Why do we need to do Relational (or Lifestyle) Evangelism?

1. Christ has sent us into the world to win souls.

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Romans 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,

2. We live in the world as "seasoning" or "salt" to bring the "flavor" of the Gospel where we go. We are able to flavor those we know best.

Matthew 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

Col. 4:6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

3. Our relationships should go beyond just relationships for the sake of the Gospel; our relationships must value people.

1 Thes. 2:8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

4. Within our close friendships, we should always be ready to share our faith.

2 Tim. 4:2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,



CAUTION – Before jumping into the topic of "relational evangelism," it's helpful to look at how many people view evangelism in contrast to how Christ seemed to view this topic of evangelism. I think there are four key areas where Christians are slightly askew of Christ's methodology.

1. The Evangelistic Message is "Gospel" vs. Message is Knowledge of God

The traditional approach of many Christians is to place their "evangelistic" emphasis purely on whether or not they share the Gospel with their friends. While this is certainly important, Christ seemed to place greater emphasis upon ensuring people had a full understanding about the nature of God (John 17:3). You see this in His conversations with people wherein He works to help people first have a fuller understanding about the nature of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. With a full understanding of God's nature, the Gospel then makes significantly more sense.

2. Evangelism is an activity vs. Evangelism is a lifestyle

For many believers, evangelism is something they must be deliberate at. They must plan to do it or even schedule it on their calendar. While this is not altogether bad (doing evangelism is never "bad"), it does not represent the ideal. Jesus Christ seemed to travel around the countryside speaking very conversationally about His faith and relationship with His Father. For us, we too should speak of our relationship with Christ very conversationally, as an ongoing witness to His role in and affect on our lives. In this way, we present a living testimony to our ongoing walk with Christ.

3. People are projects vs. People are the focus (Matt 18:12-14)

Sometimes in the busyness of our daily lives that, for many people, are very project oriented, we can slip into making people evangelism "projects." What does this mean? It translates into having friendships with people for sake of sharing the Gospel with them rather than having a relationship with them just because people are valuable to God and are worthy of relationship. This is a subtle yet common dynamic. We have to be steadfast in valuing people simply because they belong to God. God is responsible for convicting their hearts towards Salvation; we must be their friends first and foremost regardless of their conversion (1 Thes 2:8).

4. Success defined as Sharing the Gospel vs. Success is a Greater Understanding/Knowledge (Isaiah 55:10-11)

It is man's nature to define his activities as "good" or "bad", "successful" or "unsuccessful." The same is true of evangelism. Often, we will view ourselves as being "successful" in evangelism only if the end result of our encounter is the sharing of the Gospel. If this be the case, then Jesus Christ frequently failed in evangelism! We know this is not true. Rather, "success" (if you are compelled to evaluate it) is defined by whether or not someone has a better understanding of who God is and what His desires are for mankind (namely that he desires relationship with them).



REMEMBER – This is a great point in our discussion to remember that our "salty" words (helping people know God better) are never wasted. God's Holy Spirit can use our words to often produce growth in others that we do not see.

[Isaiah 55:10-11](#)

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹so is my word that

goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.



GETTING LAUNCHED

Let's begin our discussion of the task at hand: bringing God's love to our close friends and family such that God can use our words and actions towards salvation. There are 4 basic points to get us started.

As we move through this topic, I will quote heavily from the book Generating Hope – A Strategy For Reaching the Postmodern Generation, by Jimmy Long. This definitive work gives us a fairly clear insight into our target audience: the people that live around us in this Postmodern generation.

1. POINT 1 – Overcome or Circumvent the Christian Stereotype

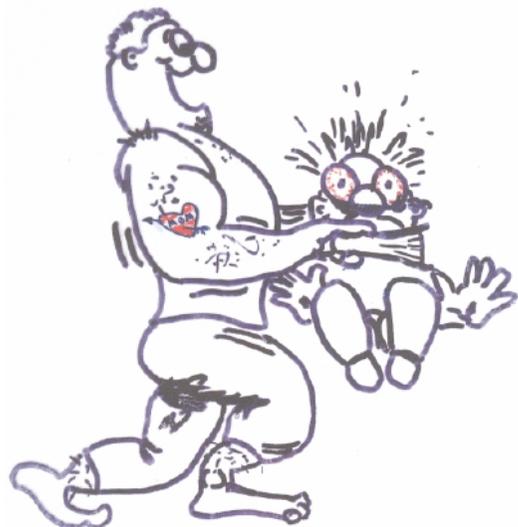
We have to understand the "playing field." Amongst American, many people have already been saturated with Christian messages and various religious salvation appeals. Sadly, the witness of many Christians is very poor, that has certainly been my experience, especially within the Military context. Many (possibly most) Christians do not practice what they preach.

This has resulted in Christians being stereotyped. Whether we like it or not, if you identify yourself as a Christian, then you will most likely be stereotyped as well.



Christians often come across as close minded and speaking in absolutes, wanting to "cram" their beliefs down the throats of others. Our challenge is that God's Truth is absolute, but that does not mean our friends and family members will accept it as truth.

Over three-quarters of all teens reject any notion of absolute moral truth, favoring a relative view of right and wrong. Therefore we need to lead people to discover the truth for themselves instead of telling them what to believe. [Postmodern people] do not like being told anything. However, they are willing to discuss things. They are suspicious of people who arrogantly claim to know the truth. [Long]





Turn on your TV and turn to any of the religious programming. Despite the good intentions, much of the religious programming comes across to unbelievers as hokie or simply fraudulent and exploitive.

[Postmodern people] are leery of spiritual facades that rely on image. They are sensitive to pretense, having grown up on TV commercials. What they are looking for has to be real and authentic. [Long]

The combined weight of the mass marketing movement and onslaught of televangelists continues to present anything but a real and authentic image. People today view religion with great sarcasm and skepticism.

Related to what has already been said, many Christians appear to be standing upon a moral "soap box" stating theirs is the only way to heaven. Again, our challenge is that there is ONLY ONE WAY to heaven, but in this world of multiculturalism and pluralism, many people will outright reject the idea there is a singular path to God.

Instead of human reason that leads to truth, postmodernism posits (or proposes) multiple truths that lead only to preferences. [Long]

The statement "There is no absolute truth" becomes an absolute truth. [Long]

People are tired of the façade and are tired of having Christianity crammed down their throats. In order to overcome this stereotype, the Apostle Paul gives us clear guidance:

[1 Thes. 2:8](#) We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

Or how about the words of the Apostle John, [1 John 3:18](#) Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Our challenge then becomes to live our faith. We "preach a sermon" everyday in how we live and treat others. People don't want religion; they want real people that relate over real issues. They want to be understood, and have in common shared experiences. people would rather SEE a sermon than HEAR one any day.



“Effective leaders know that you first have to touch people’s hearts before you ask them for a hand [or a commitment to Christ]. That is the Law of Connection. All great communicators recognize this truth and act on it almost instinctively. You can’t move people to action unless you first move them with emotion. The heart comes before the head.” The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, John Maxwell.

There’s an old saying: To lead yourself, use your head; to lead others, use your heart. The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, John Maxwell.

As leaders share their hurts, trust is developed. {postmodern people} need people with whom they can identify, since they have been deeply wounded. [Long]

2. POINT 2 – Make “God’s love” the centerpiece of what you desire to share and how you live. Without an understanding of God’s love, the Gospel makes no sense.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Our world today is truly hurting. The family structure is broken down, many kids are "latch key" kids, people no longer respect authority—people are awash without an anchor. People are crying out to be valued and cared for. People want to belong to something bigger than themselves and to be loved unconditionally by someone. This is ingrained in their DNA.

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

When people feel loved and accepted, they will become open to another person's values and beliefs. When we love people unconditionally, for many people, this will be their first inkling of God's unconditional love for them.

Matthew 9:36-37 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

"Every message that people receive is filtered through the messenger who delivers it. If you consider the messenger to be credible, then you believe the message has value... You cannot separate the leader from the cause he promotes. It cannot be done, no matter how hard you try. It's not an either/or proposition. The two always go together." The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, John Maxwell.

Christ needs people who will lead others to Himself through the vehicle of unconditional love.

This idea about needing to communicate love and acceptance of the other person just as they are cannot be overstated. People do NOT know what it means to receive love unconditionally.

As one author portrays this generation, "They are torn by dreams for the future and are ridiculed by failures of the past. They are torn by the longing to get life right and the nagging suspicion that they are fatally flawed, and they are torn absolutely apart by the craving to be loved and the terrified fear of being known." [Long]

“God’s love” will be manifested in how you treat others, to include the person you’re hoping to share your faith with. It will also be manifested in your witness of how you treat your spouse, your children, your co-workers, your neighbors, etc.

This is so critical to comprehend. Furthermore, postmodern folks lives in a constant state of shame. Only the love of God, unencumbered by “religiosity,” can overcome this “state of shame.”

State of Shame

[Postmodern people] feel bad not so much about what they have or have not done but about who they are.

Shame says, There is something wrong with me. Shame has less to do with actions and status and more to do with a loss of identity and being. [Long]

3. POINT 3 - Become a good question asker. We need to seize the initiative and get people reacting to us, and thus get them to the end of their logic. At that point, they are ready for the Gospel.

"[Postmodern people] are the first generation raised without the assumption that Christ is the starting place for religious expectations." [Long]

Over the course of conversation and relating to them, my initial goal is to draw them out to find out what exactly they think about God, what their assumptions upon which they base their belief system. To draw them out, I need to become a good question asker. Get them talking so they can be heard.

I like to draw the analogy to a job interview. The person conducting the job interview is in full control of the interview because he or she is asking the questions. The person soliciting for the job may speak 90% of the time, but the employer is in control of the dialogue. In similar manner, we need to get our friends and family talking about what they believe and why.

4. POINT 4 – After drawing them out over time, I need to lay the groundwork for the Gospel. Some call this pre-evangelism.

What is meant by "pre-evangelism"? It means to lay the groundwork in preparation for the Gospel. The Gospel message is predicated upon the fact that God exists and that he desires relationship with man. Without these to foundational premises in place, the Gospel can seem irrelevant to many people who think in a secular way.

In other words, to proceed with the Gospel, establishing [Hebrews 11:6](#) is imperative. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

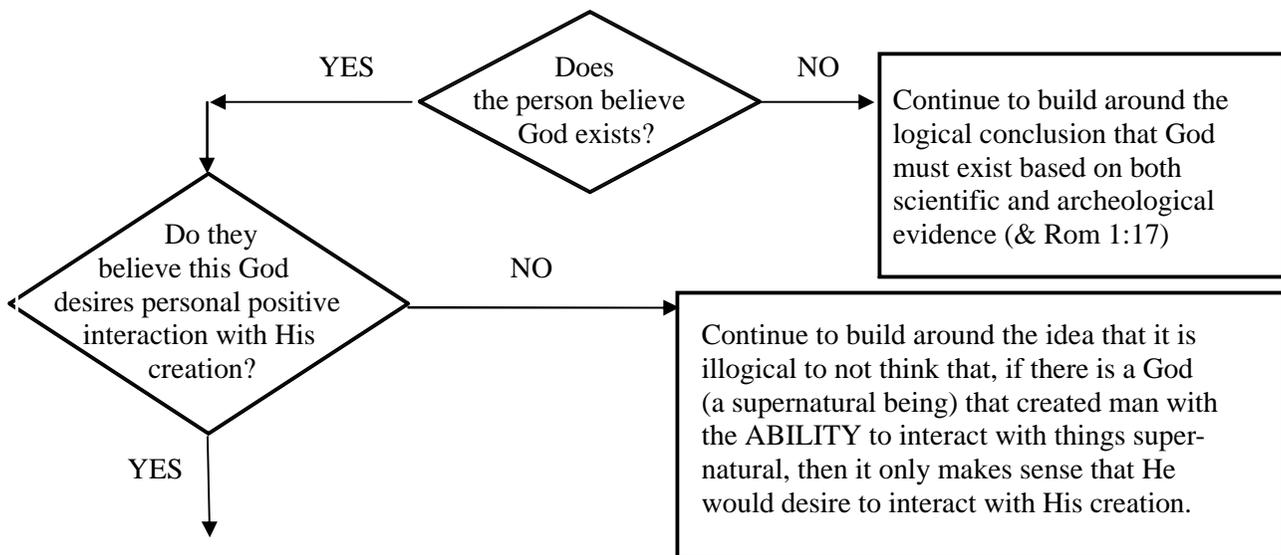
Below is the basic logical flow chart I follow through course of my ongoing discussions. Basically, I have to pass each through each logical "gate" before proceeding further.

Through the course of my prayerful discussion, I want to help the person first understand that God exists, and that in many respects, it is **ILLOGICAL** to think He doesn't exist.

Once they can accept this truth (even if they only tentatively accept it), I can then try to help them see, based upon our design, that we were created to relate with things unseen (that's why humans can speak on telephones and watch TV—we can understand and glean knowledge without having to be physically in the other person's presence).

The fact that our design allows us to relate with things unseen is the key to us relating to an unseen God that desires relationship with us.

Here is my pursuit of Heb 11:6 in flowchart form:



With Heb 11:6 in place, I can proceed towards the Gospel with a foundation now laid (the basics of God's and his nature are now established). Lastly, I normally ask people to entertain the idea that the Bible can speak to the relationship between God and His creation. I simply explain that the 66 books of the Bible are an inspired accounting of this relationship between God and man over the course of about 3,000 years.

I build around the idea that the Bible, at its most rudimentary core, is the accounting of how man interacted with this supernatural God. Most people, I have found, will entertain the reading of the Bible on this basis, based upon our relationship, if nothing more than for the sake of discussion.

From this point, you should now have a positive dialogue ongoing that is open to reading the Bible as part of your dialogue. You may want to encourage them to consider reading a certain book of the Bible and then you talk together about it. I recommend the book of John as it presents the most intimate and warm aspect of Jesus Christ.

If they continue to respond, you may want to ask them if they would be open to seeing a presentation of the Gospel that brings the work of the Cross into greater clarity. If so, show them one of the Gospel presentations we present on our Mastering a Gospel Presentation web page ([click here](#)).



CAUTION – Before continuing further, we must always remember that despite our efforts and desires, God must be doing a work in our friends and families' lives in order for them to be saved. They have to respond to God's drawing of their hearts into a saving relationship.

John 6:44

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.



CONTINUING FURTHER

To continue further let's focus on a couple of additional areas.

1. Learning to be a good question asker (going deeper on this topic).

We've talked about part of the pre-Gospel road to travel. It traverses the enclaves of worldly wisdom and ends with their lack of answers for life and purpose; it ends at the end of their logic. How do you get them to this point? By learning to ask good questions that steer them along their own failed thinking.

Let's look at three vignettes from the Gospel. What do you notice about what Jesus does in these conversation?

Vignette 1: Matthew 21:23-27

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

²⁴Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵John's baptism--where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' ²⁶But if we say, 'From men'--we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." ²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

Vignette 2: Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

¹⁸But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, ²⁰and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

²¹"Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."
²²When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Vignette 3: Matthew 22:41-46

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴²"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?"

"The son of David," they replied.

⁴³He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says,

⁴⁴"The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."

⁴⁵"If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" ⁴⁶No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

What did Jesus do each time? He turned the conversation around and took control of the conversation by being the one asking the questions.

Remember to analogy of the Job Interview:

At a job interview, the people asking the questions in the one in control even if the "interviewee" talks 95% of the time.

Therefore, we must learn to be good question askers. In this way, we seize the initiative and go on the offensive. Remember that the best defense is a good offense.

What I do during the conversation I am having is that I am praying for God to always give at least one more question to ask them about their belief system. My goal is to keep asking them questions until they run out of answers, till their logic fails them. Sometimes my silent prayers can become pretty frantic as I am asking God for one more question to ask. But you know what, the Holy Spirit ALWAYS gives me at least one more question to ask.

I have used this technique countless times, and it always works. I never lack for the "next question."

Once we get a person to the end of their logic, they are ready for the Gospel. They will say something like, "I don't know the answer to that; what does your belief system suggest?"

You know what? Based upon your willingness to draw them out and HEAR THEM, they are now ready to hear what you have got to say.

The key to doing this effectively is praying on the hoof You must operate on the presumption that God wants them reached more than you do. Based upon this, believe He will always give you one more question. This can be a lot of fun once you get used to it, and it is very non-threatening to others.

Isaiah 41:13

For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

This is our goal:

"In the moment in which we feel abandoned by both our dreams and the God we thought would save them for us ... in precisely that moment we are ready to receive God's true salvation. It is then we discover that God wants to save us, not our dreams." [Barnes in Long's book]

2. Get serious about praying for their souls.

Ask God, who of your close family and friends is the Holy Spirit really working on.

Then begin fasting and praying for them specifically.

Pray for opportunities to have "hang out" time for "casual conversation." Ask God to give the two of you extended times alone together.

Once God responds, start "praying on the hoof" for questions to draw them out.

But again, the key is to lay a solid foundation of pre-emptive prayer.

3. Get a couple of books on Apologetics from your Christian bookstore or from online. These can help you in your conversations about God.

Here a few suggestions:

- **"Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics"** by R. C. Sproul
- **"Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World"** edited by Phillips/Okholm
- **"Christian Apologetics"** by Norman L. Geisler (a prolific write on Apologetics)

4. This last suggestion concerning going further has to do with risk taking in evangelism and might be controversial for some.

I believe in order to reach our friends and family members, we must be willing to push the limits of our comfort zone to hang out with them wherever **THEY WILL BE COMFORTABLE**.

Beyond what we have discussed thus far, you need to reach out to the lost man or woman and meet him/her where they are, where they feel comfortable. While you pursue holiness and sanctification, you must be willing, as you are able, to become all things to all men for the sake of the Gospel.

Paul gives us a clear mandate:

1 Cor. 9:19-23

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. [20] To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. [21] To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. [22] To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. [23] I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

For example, my wife bridged a gap with a very secular neighbor by periodically by going out every few weeks for margaritas at a local restaurant. This became their special date. Through their dialogue and my wife's acceptance of our neighbor, she was able to lay the groundwork for her to open up to my wife and trust in her for answers when her world began to crumble around her.

Luke 5:29-32

Then Levi [the tax collector outcast] held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. [30] But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

[31] Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. [32] I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Eventually (after about 4-5 months), my wife led her to Christ on a moonlit night on her driveway.

Remember, postmodernism defies commitment to ideas because it accepts no ultimate truth. The only commitment that postmodernism does allow is to a tribal group, or community, because it is within that tribal group that truth is experienced. In other words, Truth for them is accepted within the context of and on the basis of a relationship.

Through relationships and community, truth is experienced. Truth is validated in relationship, but initially cannot stand on its own two legs.

Therefore, I encourage you to be willing to be unconventional in your approach and be willing to push the limits of your convictions for the sake of the Gospel. Keep foremost in you mind that Christ went to the Cross to redeem fallen man unto Himself. If the lost man is not saved, then why bother. We need to be creative.



CAUTION – If you go down this road, make sure you are under strong accountability for your actions. Ensure a few Christian brothers or sisters are holding you accountable for your actions and what you are doing.

Also, do not go places that are obviously dangerous for your soul like strip clubs and such. No man need venture there.

However, that being said, you can probably go with a friend or family member to a bar or party, even if there is alcohol present. If your convictions do not let you have a beer or glass of wine, offer to be the designated driver.

The goal is to accept some risk, as necessary, to reach those who need Salvation. Something to consider...



FURTHER STUDY

For further study, complete this topical Bible study on Christ's interactions with people other than His disciples. As we watch Jesus interact with people, we can learn much on this topic of evangelism.

[Click here for the Bible study.](#)



[Printable version of the Personal Testimony Web Page. \(click here\)](#)

Have a suggestion or question? Let us know at: training@cmfhq.org

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