

# RELATIONAL EVANGELISM as a CULTURE

Evangelism for everyone by everyone

by James Hall & Joel Oliver

Alton Garrison states: "We must be willing to share Jesus in the context of relationship, (which is) a new paradigm for many. Ninety-five percent of churches have never understood how to do this, although statistics indicate that 99 percent of all who know Jesus (come to faith in Him) because someone personally reached out to them...Developing **relationships with the lost before** sharing the good news with them is a big shift. The most needed and effective means of going into all the world is relational evangelism." (**A Spirit-Empowered Church**, p.197-8 – emphasis mine)

"RELATIONAL EVANGELISM" is a relatively new mindset, among other more familiar types of evangelism, such as: "GOSPEL PROCLAMATION" THROUGH CHURCH SERVICES & CRUSADES and "GOSPEL CONFRONTATION" ON DOOR STEPS & STREET CORNERS. Few people are good at or involved in these latter two methods of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus. **EVERYONE**, however, **CAN DO** "RELATIONAL EVANGELISM" – which in essence is

BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS with non-followers to bring to them an eternal relationship with Jesus.

This last approach takes the longest amount of time but is the MOST EFFECTIVE, the simplest and generally the most enjoyable in the process – for both witness and recipient. Our goal is to help your church move past occasional evangelism *events* to a **relational evangelism culture** lived out year round between Sundays by church members.

By understanding the process, witnesses can find fulfillment simply by continuing to do the right things to help move a non-believer toward faith in Christ. Notice Jesus' comment in John 4:36-38 (NLT): "What joy awaits both the planter" (who doesn't see the harvest take place) "and the harvester alike. You know the saying, 'one plants and another harvests'. I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest." This reveals divinely arranged teamwork in harvest labor – often over periods of years - by fellow workers who often don't know each other. So we shouldn't get discouraged when persons to whom we are witnessing delay their faith commitment. God is waiting also – and all the while persistently drawing these persons for whom He died toward Himself – to give them eternal life!

It is important to note that confrontation evangelism with strangers often seems more successful with quick decisions that are made after one conversation. While these commitments may result in a lasting relationship with Jesus, very often they do not last - as described by Jesus in Matthew 13:20-21 (NLT). The shallow soil illustration depicts persons who "hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word."

**COACHING & RELATIONAL EVANGELISM:** Relational evangelism reaches the lost with a simple and gradual process that allows *every* believer to connect with non-followers in ways that are Spirit-led, loving, and conversational. This process is enhanced by the use of informal coaching questions that are open ended and useful toward helping non-believing friends gradually **discover for themselves** their need for Jesus. In the early stages of this approach, the witness

generally is speaking 20% of the time and listening for the remaining 80%. The interaction is simple, non-confronting, and made effective by the Holy Spirit. Also, it avoids the often awkward approach of announcing to an unbeliever their need for Jesus without their admitting that they need Him. Common stages of relational evangelism are as follows.

1. **COMMISSION:** Agree to be **sent** into your world by Jesus and with Jesus. Ask Him for a specific Prayer Assignment to pray for a lost person with whom you have repeated contact in your everyday life. See people through Jesus' eyes and feel for them with His heart – as sheep separated from their Shepherd – unable to handle life on their own and on their way to eternity without Him (Matt. 9:35-38). By daily praying Ephesians 1:16-19 for a person without a Shepherd, the Holy Spirit will begin to give them a desire to find out Who is their Shepherd and what God's purpose is for their life. Your Prayer Assignment person will usually be someone who is a WORK ASSOCIATE, NEIGHBOR, FRIEND, RECREATION ACQUAINTANCE, or NON-FOLLOWING FAMILY member. You don't have to go find them – they are **already** in the routine pathway of your life. Does anyone come to mind with compassion in your spirit for them? (name) \_\_\_\_\_

2. **CONNECT:** Look for Spirit-provided opportunities to authentically connect with the person God has given to you as a prayer assignment (See Col. 4:2-6). Love them with Christ's love, and begin to cultivate a relationship that builds trust. Go at a slow pace by asking open-ended coaching questions about their life and listen deeply (cf. 80% of time listening) to their story - looking for what is important *to them*. As you proceed without pressure, ask powerful Holy Spirit-led questions that reflect on what *they have said* and that help open their awareness OF LIFE ISSUES FOR WHICH THEY DON'T HAVE ANSWERS. Your **goal** is to see them eventually acknowledge that they **need God's help** with their life.

LOOK FOR "FOOT PRINTS" from previous seed plantings and influences by others that God has sent into their lives. As your friendship progresses, offer your assistance for situations where they could use a helping hand. You can also suggest they ask God for His help for needs or challenges they are facing. (God certainly welcomes their prayers for needs prior to their making a whole life faith commitment to Jesus. Seeing God answer *their* prayers for specific needs can begin to build their faith that He will help them in every aspect of their life. There is no biblical prohibition that denies a non-follower from praying for a need – just as Jesus welcomed requests for healing from persons who had not yet become His disciple.)

|  |
|--|
| <u>Friend's Prayer Needs</u><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br> |
|--|

Assure your friend that you also will continue to pray for the needs they have mentioned. Be sensitive to the Spirit prompting you to offer to pray with them right after they tell you about the need – or when it comes up in a subsequent conversation. Feel free to pray with eyes open, if that would seem more comfortable to them – especially if you are in a public place. Later inquire about the situation, assuring them that you are still praying. Encourage them to make a habit of praying for their needs – and mention that you are continuing to do so, as well. (1 Timothy 2:1).

Gradually pursue a trust relationship with your non-following friend that will usually take time to develop. Ask the Spirit to guide you in friendly interaction - including practical kindness and warmth as the Spirit leads. Persist patiently and peacefully, trusting the Spirit to convince them that your caring is genuine. Also look for common ground, conversational topics of shared interest and activities through which you can cultivate friendship. Go to a ball game together or go fishing or get coffee or lunch or see a movie. Let your friendship grow through open and honest communication, without trying to appear different from what you really are. (See more on this in I Cor. 9:19-23)

Serious life issues will come up naturally in conversation. Find out what their questions are, and "let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them." (Ephesians 4:29 NLT). In a low key manner, **tell about Jesus' help in your own life with similar issues**, and recommend His help for the specific problem situations in their life.

Be aware that kind deeds "plow the ground" of an unbeliever's heart, helping to turn it into "good soil" that has been worked to be receptive for planting. Look for ways to show God's love, as well as opportunities to explain it. This kind of interaction sends a repeated message that God wants to be involved in the details of their everyday life in a personal relationship. Simple acts of caring are usually appreciated by non-Christians – regardless of how much or how little God-awareness they are experiencing at the time. Everyone needs outside help. Through friendship, you will allow unbelievers to experience Jesus in you and through you - the fruit of the Spirit. This can result in an increasing attraction in their hearts toward having the benefits of their own relationship with Jesus. (See also I Peter 3:13-17.)

3. **CONVERSE**: Having gained an audience of one through friendship, the process of purposely sharing the Gospel through interactive communication (i.e. conversation) can be launched. There are **facts** that lost people must have to enable them to entrust their life to Jesus Christ. The most effective means of informing someone is through friendly conversation - which is by definition a two-way delivery system. I believe this is why **person-to-person communication**, the primary means of communicating the gospel in New Testament times, is still the **best method of informing** lost persons of their one hope. And it is the only method that every believer can employ to deliver the good news to those they meet—as led and empowered by the Holy Spirit! In recent decades, the dramatic spread of the Gospel in Latin America and China has been driven by conversation – in spite of persecution and low level of communication technology in these parts of the world. It is a sad irony that the accommodating setting for person-to-person witness in the western world has been met with more reliance on one-way delivery of Gospel-information to crowds through amplified sound and media. May we devote ourselves to an all-out effort in relational and conversational delivery of the Good News, believing that this means will be **most effective** in the long run. And - of course - continue the other means as well.

So let us take whatever personal time and energy that is needed to help **our** non-following friends become aware of the real person of Jesus Christ in history. Let us do our best to help them understand the impact God wants the Risen Christ to have in their everyday life, in addition to their eternal life. THIS UNDERSTANDING CAN BE ADVANCED WITH OUR PERSONAL WORLD CONTACTS BY SHARING PERSONAL LIFE REPORTS OF **JESUS' ACTIVITY IN OUR EVERYDAY LIFE - AS THE LORD PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY AND PROMPTING**. (I Peter 3:13-17) This is different from "sharing our testimony" in the form often recommended of a general statement of "I used to be in bad shape but Jesus came into my life and changed me". This kind of statement has value, but often is short on specifics about how Jesus has brought change that could illustrate the impact a future follower can expect after entrusting *their* life to Him.

### **Translate the Gospel into Everyday Life**

When friends talk, they usually include some anecdotes about what has been happening in their life. For the follower of Jesus, there is always something happening that is related to Jesus. Look for Spirit-provided opportunities to bring **Jesus'**

**activity in your life** into normal conversation with unbelievers. The following topics for sharing illustrate the **three kinds of faith** non-followers will need to exercise to begin and continue life with Jesus. So as you give personal testimony of your faith in action in everyday life, you are illustrating or unpacking for their understanding the faith walk Jesus wants to have with them. So look for opportunities to share brief stories of the following:

1. Situations where you asked Jesus to **forgive** you. (i.e. showing benefit of Jesus as your SACRIFICE)
2. Ways Jesus has helped you as a **friend** . (i.e. showing benefit of Jesus as your SAVIOR)
3. How Jesus gave you guidance to **follow**. (I.e. showing benefit of Jesus as your LORD)

These are ways to continue to assist non-following friends with making an informed and whole hearted decision to follow Jesus (i.e. "truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest" Matt. 13:23 NLT). In parable language, this would be taking the time to work the soil to make it "good soil" – so it will receive the seed at a depth that allows it to grow "deep roots" of understanding that produce a multiplied harvest. (Matt. 13:23 NLT - see also I Peter 3:13-17)

This process overcomes the obstacles of the three resistant soils Jesus describes as hard ground (message not understood), shallow ground (impulsive response that doesn't last when difficulties arise), and crowded ground (distractions of worries and wealth). With the seed of God's Word we plant in good soil, He mysteriously does His part, as "night and day...the seed sprouts and grows, but the farmer does not understand how it happens. The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. As soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the **harvest time has come!**"(Mark 4:27-29) Hallelujah!!

**In this way, we participate in God's great harvest process - introducing our friends to Jesus in *our* life before asking them to invite Him into *their* life. We help them begin to understand in advance how to have a daily relationship with Jesus. This will better prepare them to not just focus on "eternal life assurance" through repentance and faith in Christ, but be prepared to continue daily in a healthy growing 24-7 relationship depending continuously on their new Leader and Friend (Lord and Savior).**

This informative conversational phase of the witness journey should continue until the non-following friend admits to a hunger and need to have "the hope that is in you" – and desires to know what to do to receive the Christ Who is blessing *us* - into *their* life. In anticipation of this door opening to their heart, the witness should prepare in advance to respond effectively to their friend's request to know how they can receive Jesus into their life. When THEY are the one desiring to commit to Jesus, then your "conversing" to influence them turns into coaching them in how to achieve their new goal of commitment to Christ. Anticipating this opportunity to help a person come to faith in Christ should lead us to **prepare** for it – as indicated below.

### **Prepare in Advance to Coach your Friend**

Let's begin preparation by making sure we are "always ready to explain it, if someone asks about your Christian hope. But do this in a gentle and respectful way" (I Peter 3:15-16). Be sure you can explain clearly the content of the Good News – the Good Message – the Good Information. It is that essential "news" that allows a person of any age or status

on earth to "turn and become as a child" to enter Christ's kingdom and become an eternal child of God! As familiar as this message is to most "pew missionaries" who have heard it proclaimed many times over by pastors and evangelists, most foot soldiers in God's army sadly lack confidence and readiness to explain the message they bear in a clear and simple way that includes essential content. The telling of the message needs to be faithful in both **clarity** and **completeness**. (e.g. most Gospel presentations in the U.S. have historically omitted the necessity of embracing the Lordship (authority) of Jesus as essential to receiving eternal life.) The sharing manner should be with humility and confidence, but does not have to be persuasive in tone, since it is the Spirit's responsibility to "convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment." (John 16:8)

Please study thoroughly the following simple explanation of the Greatest News Ever so you can faithfully fulfill your part in helping your seeker friend to "truly hear and understand" (Matt. 13:23) the message of salvation and begin to follow. Remember, Jesus says if the hearer does not **understand** the message, Satan will come and steal it away and the potentially productive ground will remain barren!

### **What is Required to Follow Jesus**

The heart of the Christian life is a personal relationship with God that is like a perfect earthly father-child relationship. The Lord's Prayer begins with "Our Father" (Matthew 6:9). John 1:12 states that we can become "children of God." Romans 8:15–17 shows that God intends that relationship to be warm and loving ("*Abba*" or "*Daddy*"), with two-way communication. Every real relationship has two-way "traffic"—interaction of deeds, words, and feelings that travel back and forth between those in the relationship. God "first loved us," and invites us to "love Him back". This relationship is summarized in John 3:16; 1:12; 15:14 – and expresses three kinds of trust or faith required to begin and continue to follow Jesus – as summarized below.

• **ASK FORGIVENESS FROM JESUS WHO SUFFERED FOR ME** - God provides *forgiveness* through Jesus – if we ask Him - for our disobedience and disrespect of Him as holy and ruling God who created us to live by His purpose for our life. God sent His Son Jesus to earth to become a man and suffer the punishment that God's justice demands for our self-will and rebellion against God. This allows God to forgive us for breaking His rules, if we ask forgiveness and trust in Jesus' taking on Himself our punishment for every bad thing we have done and will do. Through faith in Jesus, we are now free from the sentence of eternal punishment for our sins. Also, sin's control over our earthly behavior is broken. (This is the summary of trusting Jesus as the **sacrifice** for our sins. See John 3:16.)

• **BELIEVE IN JESUS AS MY FRIEND** – With the sin barrier removed, God provides a sacred *friendship* that begins on earth and lasts forever. For everyone who invites Him, Jesus comes to live inside of them, to forever be with them. He pays attention to everything about that person and desires ongoing conversation with them. He also gives practical help as needed, in response to requests and often just based on the good He wants for us. Accepting Jesus' friendship means we rely on Him because He is always with us, and only with His help can we do what He wants us to do. We continually focus on Him, we listen to Him, we express our love and requests to Him, and trust Him to help us. (This is Jesus as our **Savior**. See John 1:12, 3:16.)

• **COOPERATE WITH JESUS AS MY LEADER** - God provides the leadership of His Word, the example of Jesus, and the ever present help of His Holy Spirit – to empower us to *follow* or cooperate with Him each day. He has a purpose for our whole life, and has divided it into plans for each moment of each day. He will personally guide us if we pay attention to Him and obey what we understand Him telling us to do. (This is Jesus as our **Lord**. See John 15:14.)

These essential components of our relationship with God—**forgiveness, friendship, and following**—are the foundations of the ABCs of relationship your friend needs to know to be a child of God. A quick review:

We respond to God's offer by trusting Him in the following ways:

1. **Ask** Him to forgive you to escape the punishment of hell.
2. **Believe** in Him as your eternal Friend to be with you and provide whatever you need.
3. **Cooperate** with (follow) Him as your Leader and Partner in all of life.

All this can happen only as we pay attention to and put our trust in Him who is always with us (John 15:4,5,14). Jesus said the "first and greatest commandment" is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Then He adds: "A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt. 22:37-39 NLT)

The result of this loving relationship with God in heaven is a new lifestyle that God intends us to live out here on earth. Jesus describes it as: "Love your neighbor as yourself," (Matt. 22:39) and it flows from our connection with "Our Father who is in heaven." His provision to us in our relationship with Him is our Father Who "first loved us" and continues to love us. And as Jesus said to His disciples in preparation for their ministry tour to towns in Israel: "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8; also see Luke 10:27,33; 11:4).

It can accurately be stated that the Christian lifestyle – so rich with receiving the love of our Father in heaven, is characterized by a focus on GIVING to others around us – our "neighbors". This is in contrast to our natural inclination toward "getting" and hoarding, although we are certainly "getting" from God far more than we could dream of or ask for. So we need to stay continually aware that our getting is not only to bless us, but to provide for us the means to give to and bless others!! So the output of loving our neighbors on earth as ourselves is provided for by our receiving from God His blessings toward us!! So we love our Father in heaven because He first loved us – AND we love our neighbors as ourselves because He continues to provide to us that which He wants us to have AND to give to others! "Freely we have received, freely give"! We can unpack this as follows:

1. Having received grace (forgiveness) from God, we give grace to (forgive) others, i.e., we love them without requiring them to deserve our love, or we love them in spite of their offenses against us. (Matt. 6:12-15; 18:22-35)
2. Having received friendship from God, we offer (give) friendship to others.
3. Having received leadership from God, we give leadership (by example and influence) to others - i.e. others can follow us and find Jesus. We deliver these gifts to others through the natural ways that people interact with each other, with words and actions accompanied by emotions (Luke 10:34–37; Galatians 5:22-23).

The new follower will spend a life time unpacking the components of these upward and outward relationships through **discipling designed for spiritual infancy that grows into adulthood**....through being disciplined, taking responsibility for themselves, and reproducing disciples.

4. **COACH**: Your relationship becomes COACHING when your friend begins to **desire** to know more about Jesus with the potential of trusting and following Him. **They** are now **asking questions about Jesus**. The goal now - in coaching language - is to help your seeker friend "put their new thinking into action". In the context of relational evangelism, this means helping them – **upon their request** – to put their trust in Jesus as a whole life-commitment.

Encourage them to – in their own words – invite Jesus to come live in them, while they begin trusting Him daily in the three ways you have illustrated to them in your "Jesus in me" stories. This is ongoing trust in Jesus for a) forgiveness of sin, for b) friendship and help with daily living, and c) guidance to follow Him with the daily choices they make.

Ask them if they have questions that need clarifying. Affirm them after they have prayed, assuring them that Jesus has indeed heard their prayer with great joy and has come to live inside of them. They may feel His presence at that moment, or feeling His presence may come later. Assure them their confidence in Jesus is **based on His promise** to receive them if they put their trust in Him (Rev. 3:21) – rather than depending on a feeling for assurance that He has received them.

## **COACHING/DISCIPLING THE NEW BELIEVER'S WALK WITH JESUS**

This conversion experience would typically be followed soon after by the celebration of water baptism. Then their should be provided a one-to-one **coaching relationship to assist the new believer in the daily process of following Jesus and loving others**. This coaching/discipling relationship should last for eight months to a **year** – and should continue until the disciplined new follower is **discipling another** new follower.

Coaching a new follower through his/her first year of their new life certainly qualifies to be called "discipling". This is simply an ongoing process of discussing "milk of the Word" passages to learn how to follow Jesus daily – while being accountable for putting new behavior guidelines into practice. This process is commanded by Jesus: "Teach these new disciples to obey (not just to "know") all the commands I have given you" – which includes equipping the new disciple to obey the command to in turn **disciple others!** Jesus encourages our faith for success with His promise of empowerment: "And be sure of this, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:19b-20 NLT).

TO SUM UP: Joel and Jim's goal is to help your church move past evangelism programs to a **RELATIONAL EVANGELISM CULTURE** that is driven by biblical methods and incorporates informal coaching dynamics – and the help of the Holy Spirit in every component of the process. These together can empower church members to make disciples in their everyday world, to continually reach out to win the lost and disciple the found as an expression of a relational evangelism culture and our spiritual DNA - because "that is who we are and that is what we do".

## Jesus on Mission in my world

OVERVIEW OF RELATIONAL EVANGELISM CULTURE

### Commission to reach (name)\_\_\_\_\_

- Pray to see with Jesus' eyes
- Pray to feel with Jesus' heart
- Pray to do with Jesus' help – i.e. filled with His Spirit

### Connect with friendship

- Ask general coaching questions about their lives & listen for needs
- Ask Spirit-led questions based on what they have said to help them see their need for Jesus
- Show kindness & pray with them & for them

### Converse about Jesus in you

- Sow seed with stories about "Jesus my FORGIVER - my FRIEND - my LEADER" (illustrates daily Jesus Journey)
- Water & pray for seed to grow – seed sown by you & others
- Encourage them to start praying for their needs – large or small

### Coach their Jesus Journey (when ready to seriously consider faith in Jesus)

Phase I: Take them to John 3:16; 1:12; 15:14

- Ask Jesus to FORGIVE disobedience. (Sacrifice)
- Believe in Jesus to help as FRIEND. (Savior)
- Cooperate DAILY with Jesus as LEADER. (Lord)

Coach their **prayer** of BEGINNING FAITH in Jesus (when they are ready - Matt 13:23)

Phase II: Coach their **process** of GROWING/MULTIPLYING FAITH (win & disciple others) for 1 year  
Discipling will help deal with worries, trials, greed, persecution (soil conditions)

newchristian.com FB/newchristianlifeministries [jhhalls@aol.com](mailto:jhhalls@aol.com) 417-860-6140