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Introduction

If sharing one's faith can be a challenge, leading others in evangelism is a greater challenge. How do you set direction that aligns with God's will and work? How do you adapt to a complex and often changing cultural context? How do you equip and engage a growing movement of naturally fearful, hesitant, and often busy believers in fruitful witness?

The Leading Edge: A Biblical Framework for Evangelism Leaders is a book for leaders—for anyone responsible for helping others share their faith more frequently and more effectively, whether a small group, a local church, or a Christian ministry. It “flies at a higher level” than most books on evangelism, taking in the big picture view, rather than close up individual encounters. This book is designed to help you think more clearly about evangelism, because how you think will shape how you lead. But to think well about evangelism you must first recognize the divine design behind it.

Since evangelism is of the utmost importance to God, it should be an equally high priority to us who are ministry leaders, whatever our scope or level of responsibility.

True evangelism flows from the love of God. It was because of his love that the Father sent his beloved Son into this broken world to rescue fallen humanity (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9–10). Jesus Christ displayed the greatest act of love when he laid down his life, dying upon a cross for the sins of the world (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16). Because of this love, Jesus has sent his disciples into the world as gospel-bearers and ambassadors for the King. God's love compels evangelism.

It is also God's plan that shapes evangelism. Our all-knowing, all-wise Creator God didn't leave this assignment for us to figure out on our own. Like a master designer, he has provided the framework for the church to build upon—doctrines to instruct, commands to obey, principles to guide, and examples to follow.

When we recognize God as the ultimate source of evangelism, we see that leading a church or movement in evangelism involves more than adopting a certain set of tools or applying a few effective methods. We need leaders who understand the biblical foundations and spiritual dynamics of evangelism, who can formulate strategy, evaluate effectiveness, troubleshoot issues, and innovate new solutions.

Framing Our Thinking

The Leading Edge: A Biblical Framework for Evangelism Leaders will help you think well about evangelism—that is, to think biblically, comprehensively, principally, and practically.

Think biblically. To think well about evangelism, we must begin with the Bible. Our ministry philosophy needs to move from the biblical to the practical—from what is true to what works—and not the reverse. Theology and biblical principles provide the foundation upon which a sound ministry philosophy must be built.¹ *The Leading Edge: A Biblical Framework for Evangelism Leaders* can help you build the bridge between biblical principles and practical applications.

Think comprehensively. "All" and "every" are common in the language of the Bible, emphasizing the comprehensive scope of our evangelistic mission. Often what is written, taught, or discussed about evangelism misses this mark. It isn't that what is said is wrong; it is often simply too narrow. Biblical bases can be shallow, proof-texting one's position or practices. The case for one's preferred style or favorite resource is made at the expense of other

¹ Sections from "The Evangelism Model: The Biblical Framework" follow at the conclusion of each chapter. For an inductive study utilizing the Evangelism Model's 5-M framework, see *Getting Biblical About Evangelism*, CruPress, 2004.)

legitimate approaches. One aspect of the mission may be over-emphasized, leaving other important dimensions neglected. As a result, our fruitfulness suffers. Comprehensive thinking protects us from becoming too narrow or limited in our strategy and leads to a multi-faceted approach for reaching a campus, community, or country with the gospel.

Think principally. Because we lead in diverse cultural or global settings, our thinking must also be principle-based. Specific methods and approaches are generally limited in application, effective in certain contexts but not in others. But biblical principles are applicable anytime and anywhere. It has been said, “Methods are many, principles are few. Methods may change, principles never do.” While the principles themselves remain constant, their application can be contextualized, adapting to the ministry setting or need.

Finally, **think practically.** Our thinking must translate into practice. Wisdom involves the ability to discern the best means to accomplish the best ends. In leading evangelism, we seek to gain and apply both elements of wisdom. We seek goals that reflect the best ends and strategies which provide the means to accomplish them. Ultimately only God is all-wise, knowing both the best means and the best ends. Therefore, we are always seeking to align our plans and strategies with the work that God is already doing in the world around us. In evangelism, we become co-workers with him (1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:1).

The 5-M Evangelism Model

Think of evangelism as the interaction of five elements:

1. **God: The Master**

Evangelism always begins with God. It is first and foremost the work of God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2. **The Audience: The Masses**

God is at all times and in all places seeking the lost—that is, the people of this world, who are alienated from his life and suffering the consequences of their sin. They provide the defining context for evangelism, their lives and culture shaping its form.

3. **Believers: The Messengers**

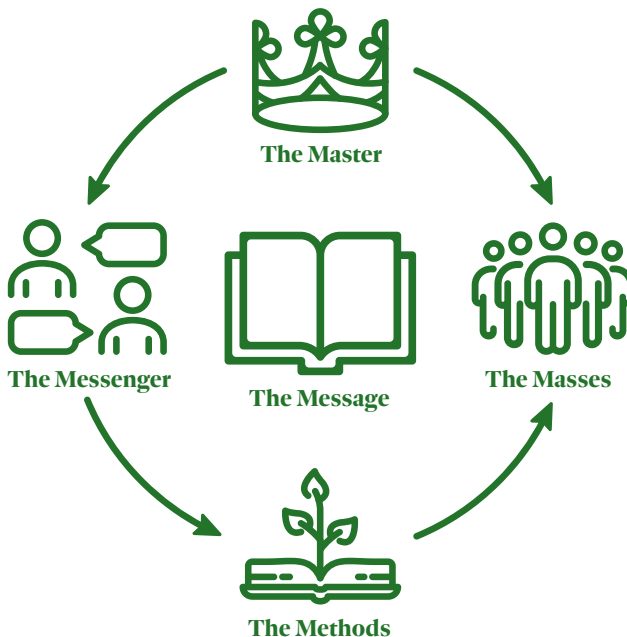
God has chosen to send believers as his messengers to the world—ambassadors authorized by his command, empowered by his Spirit, and constrained by his love. They are the primary initiators in evangelism.

4. **The Gospel: The Message**

God has entrusted the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ—to his messengers to deliver to the intended audience. It is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).

5. **The Communication: The Methods**

There is always an approach employed to communicate the gospel. The methods are contextualized, varying according to audience and the situation.



These five elements (5-M's) provide the framework for the evangelism model that follows. As the frame is the skeleton of a house around which the rest of the structure is built, these elements provide a frame for evangelism around which biblical foundations can be explored and gospel movements can be built.

The Changing Face of Evangelism

Evangelism leaders deal with the tension of staying faithful biblically and being relevant culturally. Our framework helps us navigate this tension. It helps us differentiate between what never changes, what is always changing, and what must change. The difference between these is a key in leading evangelism effectively—any time and any place, in any culture and with any generation.

Consider the elements of the 5-M Evangelism Model.

What never changes? Certainly, God doesn't change, nor does the gospel.

But what does change? The culture and felt needs of the masses change from person to person, from time to time, and from place to place.

Then what must change? While holding fast to the unchanging work and word of God, the messengers and their methods need to change, adapting to the culture and differences in their audience. If they do not they become irrelevant and ineffective. This process is known as contextualization.

Leading evangelism effectively involves understanding these five elements and the biblical principles that undergird their interaction. Effective leaders align to the unchanging elements and adapt the rest as needed.

Let's dive in and explore each element more thoroughly.