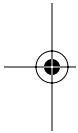


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WHAT'S OUR BOX?

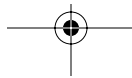


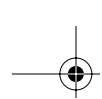
WE WANT TO SEE PEOPLE COME TO KNOW JESUS. WE WANT TO SEE PEOPLE IN heaven with God forever. We want to see people become devoted followers of Jesus Christ. That's what you and I long for. That's why you're reading this book. You and I won't be satisfied until God's hand is stretched out and we're seeing more fruitfulness.

This chapter is about identifying and taking down barriers—old ways of viewing and doing evangelism. If we don't first understand what's holding us back, we won't be ready to embrace important new ideas.

Often when we start to make witness a passion and a priority, we run into a major barrier: our “boxes,” mental models of ministry and evangelism that keep us from pouring our passion into new ways of witness. If we are growing in our passion for witness but pouring our efforts and energy into the same structures and strategies we've always had, we will see little increase in fruitfulness. After a time we will get discouraged and our passion will disappear.

How do we get in touch with our boxes, the mental models and unspo-





ken rules that keep us from bearing more and better fruit?

The Shattering of a Box

Here's how I was pushed out of my box. One year I took eleven students from the University of Wisconsin-Madison InterVarsity ministry to leadership and planning camp. I was their staff pastor. We were fired up, we were excited, we had a lot of vision. Our ministry had grown from sixty-five to seventy-five that year. We had eleven high-quality student leaders planning and praying and dreaming about what God wanted us to do. We felt pretty good about ourselves and our ministry.

We started to meet, and we were getting some good vision, beginning to think about drawing in new students. We made some plans and began to assign jobs. We had two small group coordinators. We designated two large group coordinators, an administrator, a prayer person, an evangelism person, a publicity person. We had people assigned according to gifts, and we were ready to roll!

Then we made a fatal mistake. At least it was fatal to our self-satisfaction. We asked a friend from the Navigators ministry to come in and consult with us. He came into that group of eleven leaders, and he asked a bunch of good leadership questions. "What's your vision? What's your strategy? What's your plan? What are your roles?"

About ten minutes into the discussion, he stopped. He got really quiet. He said, "Now let me get this straight. You've got a ministry with seventy-five students involved?"

"Yeah, we've been growing!"

"You've got eleven really good student leaders here?" he asked.

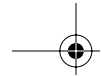
"Yeah, aren't they great?"

"And you're using those eleven good student leaders to run a ministry of seventy-five. Is that what I'm hearing? Now I heard you're going to collect a few pre-Christians. I heard that. But mostly, these eleven people are running this ministry of seventy-five, meeting the needs of the people you already have, plus the needs of some Christian freshmen that you will collect? I'm just trying to make sure I'm hearing you right."

"Yeah, I guess so." We were becoming a little less enthusiastic in our responses.

Then he pounced! "Man, two or three of you could run this ministry, no sweat. Take eight of you and go do something for God, for goodness sake!"





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We protested: "What do you mean, 'go do something for God'? We're reaching out to new students, we've got large groups going, we've got a bunch of small groups going, we're working at integrating our faith and our practice, and we're doing something for God! What do you mean, 'go do something for God'?"

He continued pressing. "You know, all that stuff is great; that's in the Bible, OK. But if you guys aren't extending the kingdom and reaching those outside God's family and bringing in more people to become followers of Jesus, then you might as well fold your tent and go home!"

Whoa! I was ticked! Eleven of us walked out of there ticked. We spent the night ticked. The next morning we were still ticked.

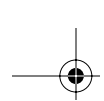
That afternoon we started to get convicted. That evening we found ourselves confessing, repenting and letting God lead us out of our boxes. We chose three of our ministry leaders and said, "OK, you three are going to do something for God. You're going to run our ministry of seventy-five." The remaining eight of us then agreed, "We are *really* going to go take a risk together for God. We're going to reach that dorm complex that we've never touched, where all the party freshmen live. We don't relate to them that well, but we're going to learn, and we're going to go reach them for Jesus."

The eight of us didn't do any administration for the ministry of the seventy-five for the entire year. We became an outreach team to reach people in a dorm complex. On the first three days of school we helped first-year students move in, did surveys to explore spiritual interest and asked if people were interested in Bible study. We got forty interested first-year students. We started eight groups, mostly with pre-Christian students. We looked at the life of Jesus for six weeks. Then we trained our leaders to lead people to Christ. The leaders went to their groups, shared the gospel and asked people to commit themselves to Christ. A few responded.

Then we took the whole bunch of Bible study attenders on a retreat. Every winter we'd had a retreat with twenty people in our group attending—a really fuzzy, warm, wonderful retreat. This year we had seventy-five, forty of them pre-Christian, and they showed it! Many were smoking, swearing, playing cards, hanging out and being themselves—and being accepted.

Now the nuns who administered the retreat center weren't quite so happy with us. They kept looking everywhere to find out who was in charge. And every time I saw them coming I would duck behind somebody.





At one point I think I grabbed a cigarette to blend in. They weren't going to find out who was in charge if I could help it!

The final session was powerful, as the Holy Spirit worked to invite a lot of these students into the kingdom. At least thirty of the students responded.

Let me tell you, the ministry of seventy-five was run just fine, and we added about thirty-five or forty to become a ministry of about 120 in that year. Nearly thirty of the new members were also new Christians! I was so glad my Navigator friend had ticked us off and didn't just let us do business as usual and stay in the box.

One reason for our new levels of fruitfulness was the dedication of more than half of our people and material resources to reaching those outside God's family. As many of us have discovered, it takes a disproportionate commitment for evangelism to reach the level of intensity of other values and priorities. What will it take for you and your church?

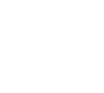
Again and again I've seen students, ministry staff and church people get passionate for witness, wanting to share God's heart, wanting to reach those outside God's family; then they'll share their plans, and it looks to me like the same plan I've seen about 100,000 other times. We're too often trapped in boxes that keep us from seeing God and what he wants to do today.

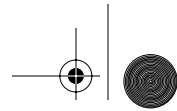
What are the boxes for your church or ministry? What are the boxes that keep you from being fruitful and effective in witness?

I want to share thoughts about the boxes I've seen in ministries and churches over the years. As I expose these boxes, think about what your boxes might be and how you can begin to let God open you up to new ways of reaching out to the people around you.

But watch out. Identifying the mental pictures of the way we view and do evangelism is hard work. It will call us to make challenging changes. As a result, we will face intense spiritual warfare aimed at keeping us in the same boxes, keeping us largely ineffective and fruitless.

Like Paul, we need to fight this battle with weapons that have divine power to demolish strongholds. We are to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we are to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. Our battle is for truth and for more fruitful mental models of ministry and evangelism. Our spiritual warfare is against arguments and ways of viewing and doing evangelism that are actually pretensions that keep us from obedience to Christ.





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These old beliefs and practices represent the ways we violate God's heart and God's command to reach the lost (Mt 15:3). They are unintended barriers we put in front of people that keep them from coming home to God.

Did you ever realize there is a great spiritual battle around the way you and your ministry view and do evangelism? So much is at stake!

Our Theology Box

First, we have mental models and theological notions about evangelism that keep us (and God) in a box.

We often say that God is responsible for conversion. We are responsible only to be faithful. So faithfulness, not fruitfulness, should be our focus.

The truth in that idea is that only God can bring the rebirth of a soul. But God uses us as collaborators. God is the ultimate source of the "catch," but if we are using the wrong bait or fishing in a stagnant lake or using poor fishing methods, we won't catch anything.

It is not that evangelism is 100 percent God's activity and 0 percent ours. It's not even a fifty-fifty deal. Evangelism is 100 percent both: 100 percent God and 100 percent us. That is the mystery of the incarnation, how God came to us in Jesus. Jesus was 100 percent God and 100 percent human. That is the way God works through his church. He fills 100 percent human beings with his 100 percent divine Holy Spirit. That is the way God's work and witness in the world goes forward.

The people who put all their eggs in the basket of prayer and spiritual warfare and sit around until God shows up in some future event are living out a superspiritual or anti-incarnational approach to evangelism. They think it's all God and we're just along to worship and pray.

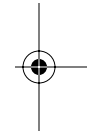
The people who ignore prayer and believe that the right methods will automatically produce the right results can be worldly and are also anti-incarnational in approach and theology.

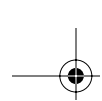
Unbalanced Calvinism—the idea that it all depends on God—is deadly to evangelism. So is unbalanced Arminianism—the idea that it all depends on us.

It's both. It's incarnational, the right human means indwelt by the Spirit of God. Prayer *and* action. Faithfulness *and* fruitfulness. Faithfulness without fruitfulness is an oxymoron in a biblical, incarnational life.

Let's let God lead us out of the box in our theology, our view of God!

Pray your heart out. Do so individually. Do so corporately. Ask God to





show you the spiritual barriers to evangelism on your campus, in your community and in your hearts. Satan trembles when we pray! Listen to God about who you're to reach, who you're to pray for and even heal.

But don't just pray. Act. Act now! Learn from the best, most fruitful evangelism ministries you can find. Adapt their strategies. Don't merely adopt their methods. That is a sure-fire way to diminish, not increase, your fruitfulness. Don't try to be a carbon copy of some other successful ministry. But give your best thought and energy and resources and time to developing ministry and training people to reach those outside God's family in your sphere of influence.

It's 100 percent God.

It's 100 percent you and your people.

It's the incarnation, God's filling and blessing the right human means. It is human beings seeing what God is doing and jumping in with both feet and with committed hearts and with busy hands and mouths.

May God lead us out of our theological boxes.

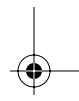


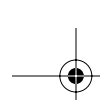
Our Sacred Practices Box

Every ministry and stream of tradition in the church has a great strength that can ultimately become its constricting box.

For my own ministry, InterVarsity, it is the analytical, thoughtful, critical, autonomous spirit that God has used mightily in our books and publications and in our engagement with university students and faculty. Unfortunately, we have often analyzed until we are paralyzed! Our meetings sometimes seem cold and unwelcoming. We are more likely to have dark reflective lighting for our group spaces. Some of us may not blink an eye when we host hour-long biblical expositions at our meetings, camps and conferences. Some of us would lay down our lives to have students sing complicated ancient hymns. In these ways we can be more and more out of touch with students today. These things are changing about us. And there are those among us who are too willing to throw out the traditions that have given us life. But we have to face in a clear-eyed way how pre-Christians feel when they visit us.

I am watching a couple of national campus ministries explode with evangelistic fruitfulness. My own ministry is seeing some progress, but we long for so much more. I believe one reason we are seeing so much less than we long for is our sacred practices box. How do we maintain and pass





What's Our Box?

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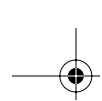
on our great strength of growing the mind of Christ in people, but reinvent practices that build better bridges to people today? We need to have light-filled, energetic spaces. We need to embrace experiences and reflect on them a little less quickly and skeptically, though in the end not less deeply. We can actually trust the Holy Spirit to guide us through those experiences. We need to address issues not just of thinking but also of feeling and imagining and committing in ways that people today can engage with and be intrigued by. Transforming today's experience-oriented people into critical, analytical people is not always the same thing as helping them to become more like Jesus!

I'm not just thinking of my own ministry. Every group begun before the late 1960s is probably wired up to reach the more thoughtful, individualistic, scientific kind of person who trusts in logic and evidence and cares about truth. Most people today are more experience-oriented, hungry for community and concerned about personal but not absolute truth. Many today don't even believe absolute truth exists; most are sure that even if absolute truth exists, no one group or person has it. Our boxes can keep us from reaching those often spiritually seeking people. Every ministry born in the 1960s or before probably needs significant and sometimes painful soul-searching and change, especially in the area of its sacred practices, in order to thrive and be fruitful today. We struggle to commit to these changes, fearing that if we give up certain sacred practices and strategies, we will lose our purpose, orthodoxy and identity and cease to please God.

But there is a way out of our dilemma: distinguishing between our core values and our sacred practices. We need to embrace and hold on to core values. We want people to know the Scriptures, to think with the mind of Christ, to love God with heart, mind, soul and strength, to love their neighbors as themselves. But churches' and ministries' ways of fulfilling their core values may have worked in the past but may be holding them back from reaching people in the present.

For liturgical churches the sacred practice can be the liturgy and the sacraments. The altar becomes the be-all and the end-all. Services have to look the same every week. If we can't get to the core value of symbol and ceremony and then reinvent ways for pre-Christians to enter in, we will never reach them. The liturgy will be an unintelligible mystery. That's not all bad. Mystery is very attractive to people today. But there must be events and entry points that *are* intelligible and meet felt needs. Liturgical





churches seem to be very weak at creating and hosting spiritual interest-generating events and at speaking relevantly to pre-Christian people. Of course there are many times to let fly with the liturgy and to celebrate it in all its tradition and pomp and mystery. But we cannot let the liturgy become a barrier to the pre-Christian coming in, as Israel's temple practices could be for non-Jews.

For some churches the hour-long expository sermon is the sacred practice that cannot be touched. Unfortunately, pre-Christian people today will listen to maybe one speaker in a million for that long and return again. Aren't there ways to teach the Bible that are more interactive, that foster dialogue and experiential learning, that help people enter into the Scriptures imaginatively? Can't we at least take a Sunday a month and devote it to experimenting with communicating the Scriptures in a way pre-Christian people today can respond to?

For some charismatic churches, intense, heartfelt, very intimate worship is the sacred and untouchable practice. Worship can be great evangelism. But it probably will not be attractive to pre-Christians if everybody looks like they are immersed in a very private experience, and if people are expressing their exuberance in strange ways.

Our sacred practice likely expresses our greatest strength, the greatest gift we have to give. So we don't just drop it. Instead we identify the core value and adjust the practice to fulfill the core value but not alienate the pre-Christian.

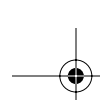
Of course in some of our gatherings we will continue to focus on mature Christians, and here we can be free to carry out the sacred practice in those old and powerful ways. What's more, as long as we are communicating and caring well, ancient practices and the experience of the transcendent and mysterious are immensely attractive to people today.

What are your sacred practices? Can you identify them? What keeps pre-Christian people repulsed or indifferent when they visit your gatherings?

What are the core values that lie behind your sacred practices? How can you express those values and instill them without becoming irrelevant and incomprehensible to pre-Christians today?

This may be our greatest spiritual battle. Many of us feel like we are in a fight to the death to maintain sacred practices that are gradually losing their power and relevance in our world. Our tendency is to battle harder, to hold





on tighter, to exhort and plead, to weep and cry out. There is certainly a need for prophets who call us back to the ancient ways. But there is also great need for evangelists who will translate core values into new practices that will resonate with and reach pre-Christian people. Often, sad to say, the prophets and evangelists spend a lot of time beating each other up!

Our Structure and Strategy Box

Much teaching on evangelism tells us that relationships matter but our structures and strategies don't. If we just love people, any structure or strategy will do. This just isn't true.

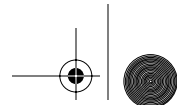
If evangelism is a once-a-year structure or strategy for our ministry, our people will consider it a once-a-year priority and not an ongoing lifestyle.

If Christian members are overwhelmed with activities with other Christians, and we have helped create that structure and pattern, with our words we are saying one thing—that lost people matter to God—and with our structures and priorities we are saying another thing—that lost people are not a priority.

If a church or ministry can be considered successful whether or not it is experiencing growth through new conversions and commitments to Christ, then new conversions and commitments will not really become a priority. How many times do we say, "We don't just want to take people from other ministries and shift the sheep around. We want to reach the unchurched"? Then we blithely go ahead and shift the sheep around. If our ministry grows, most people will tell us we have been successful, whether or not we have grown merely by shifting sheep.

I love what Campus Crusade, a ministry reaching college students, did in 1991-1992. They were not reaching those outside the Christian family very effectively, even though they were still counting lots of decisions for Christ, lots of staff and lots of Christians involved. Steve Sellers, campus ministry director, believed that Crusade's modernist, individualist, competitive approach was bearing less and less fruit. So the ministry decided to restate its mission: to turn lost students into Christ-centered laborers. That restatement got the focus in the right place. And then Crusade changed what it counted. Basically, the only figure that was valued as absolutely crucial, that was counted and reported constantly, had to do with the growth that came from new conversions and commitments to Christ. How many people are substantially involved in the ministry who weren't Christian when they started at the





campus? That's what Crusade counted. How many people became committed to Christ through their ministry, entered into Christian community and were growing? The staff person I recently talked with wasn't sure how many decisions for Christ the organization had counted that year, but he could tell me the figures for growth in the number of new Christians now involved in Christian community going back seven years.

To meet the primary goal of this kind of effective evangelism and growth, many Campus Crusade groups have adapted their large group meetings to make them high-energy, laughter-loving, welcoming events that are fabulous for freshmen. And then they have focused most of their energy on getting these students into small groups, where they come to know Christ and come home to God.

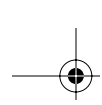
They changed their mission. They changed what they counted. They changed their structures. They are seeing God work in miraculous and explosive ways. They model a change process many of us need. They let God lead them out of their structure and strategy box.

One key issue in how we formulate our structure and our strategy is where we start our planning and dreaming. Do we start with who we are and figure out what we can do to reach people? If so, we often end up asking the pre-Christian to adapt her needs to our structures. Or do we look at who the pre-Christian is and what it will take to reach her? If we start with this question, we are pushed to adapt our strategy to her needs and let go of structures and strategies that exclude her. In chapters three and four you will get a lot of help in understanding how to think like the person you are trying to reach and to adapt your structure and strategy accordingly.

So let's ask ourselves: What structure and strategy are we using to reach pre-Christian people? How often do we reach out with our group meetings? How many of our leaders are focused on witness? How much of our resources do we spend on witness? Are we really reaching the lost, or are we competing for the found?

Be ruthlessly honest here. What are you really spending and doing in order to reach the lost? Where are your people, time and money resources allocated? Could you focus 40 percent of your leaders and resources and church or group gatherings on witness? Evangelism is not the only thing or even necessarily the most important thing. But it takes a disproportionate investment of time, resources and energy to bring the value of evangelism to equal footing with other values.





What's Our Box?

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Just begin to dream about the radical difference those choices might make. Just begin to imagine the radical joy God will have, and will share with you, if you will seek him and those outside his family.

Our Self-Perception Box

Here are comments I've heard over the years from many people:

- Evangelism is for extroverts. It also helps if you're at least a little obnoxious. I am not an extrovert. And I'm just not comfortable being obnoxious.
- I will live my life, and when people ask me questions, only then will I share my faith.
- It is manipulative and underhanded of me to build a relationship only to share the gospel.
- I am not gifted in evangelism. I have other gifts, but not much role in witness.
- Evangelism is for superstars like Billy Graham, whom I could never be like.
- Evangelism is for obnoxious people like Brother So-and-So on the corner, whom I would never want to be like.

Earlier evangelism models emphasized reasoned preaching and explanation, best done by the professional. In our world today (and maybe even in the past too!), the story of a fellow friend is far more persuasive.

Evangelism is for all of us. I know introverts who have led more people to Christ than I have as an extrovert. Each of us has a style, giftedness and passion that can help the church in witness. As we become teams together, each of us can help all of us reach people today.

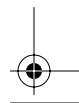
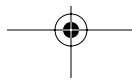
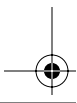
Think about it. You know people who can only be reached by a person just like you!

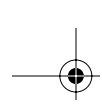
When you hear the word *evangelism*, don't think Billy Graham or Brother So-and-So. Think *you!* You will get more help in doing so in the chapter on evangelism in and through teams (chapter five).

So let me deal with more of the objections I listed above—objections that you yourself may have voiced or felt.

It is not manipulative to build a friendship with the goal of sharing Christ. It is loving, as long as we stay committed to our friends whether they respond to our appeal or not.

It is right to live our lives in ways that engender interest and questions from others. But we are not to wait passively until people ask questions. We





can engage them actively, asking questions ourselves and sharing our lives and our stories of God at work. One of my friends calls this practice “living out loud.” After all, how will people hear unless someone is sent who has the guts to share (Rom 10:14-15)?

A Story and a Challenge

I was traveling around to different campuses speaking at InterVarsity group meetings, and for a while those efforts were quite fruitful, but then I began to see a decrease in people responding. Finally I led two evangelistic meetings at which not a single person committed his or her life to Christ.

I was kind of scratching my head, thinking, *This fits with what I think, because evangelism is a process today, and people don't respond to thoughtful appeals to the mind and will.* I was falling into the box of thinking God could never work like he used to! And I was convincing myself to be happy with not seeing anybody come to know Jesus.

Then somebody confronted me: “You know, Rick, I don't think you have any faith for people to come to trust Christ at these things. Don't even go if you haven't prayed in faith that someone will come to know Jesus!”

I was convicted. I started praying every day, “God, I want to see people come to know Jesus. I want to see people come home to you!”

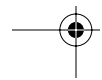
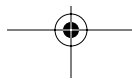
At my next campus event I did a mediocre job of giving an evangelistic message. It wasn't awful, but it certainly wasn't great. I got done and thought, *Oh well, that was OK.* And I gave an invitation: Anybody want to come to know Jesus?

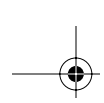
Ten people said, “Yeah!” And we followed those ten people up, and it was all genuine. We often have not because we ask not.

Here's the bottom line: Ask God to help you personally lead someone to Christ this next year. I think God would be delighted if you wouldn't rest or stop praying until God let you lead somebody to Christ.

People have all kinds of reasons that undermine their faith for God to use them in this way: “I don't have that gift.” “I stumble over my words.” I had great reasons for why nobody came to Christ after my campus talks.

God has to give you the faith to pray for new conversions and commitments. I can't give it to you. You can't just work it up. But nothing would affect you or your ministry more than letting God lead you out of the box personally first. Let God fill you and use you to lead a friend to Christ, and you'll never want to go back into the box again!





Discussion Questions

1. How much time, energy and resources have you and your ministry focused on evangelism? How could you change that percentage? Could you give 40 percent to reaching those outside God's family? What might that look like? There is no magic number, but thinking in such terms could help you bring the same level of creativity and dedication to evangelism that your other priorities enjoy.

2. What boxes do you think you might have? What theological boxes? What sacred practices boxes? What structure and strategy boxes? What personal perception boxes?

3. What box do you think it is most critical for you to work on next? What steps do you need to take? Go back to that section in this chapter and work through the questions it poses. For instance, if you want to work on the sacred practices box, identify your sacred practice, then identify the core value behind the sacred practice, and then imagine a practice that can affirm your core value but not alienate pre-Christian people.

4. Could you begin to pray daily, and ask God for faith, that you would be used by God to lead someone to Christ over the next year? One woman challenged me recently: "Why don't we pray for God to let us lead *ten* people to Christ?"! I told her to go for it! What is God giving you the faith to ask for?

