

Three Story Evangelism™

Written by Bill Muir

Introduction

Three Story Evangelism is a new, yet very old approach to evangelism. It is designed to reflect evangelism laid out in Scripture and the needs of people in a post-modern world.

Three Story Evangelism is all about connecting stories: me and my story Him and His story, them and their story. The more these stories and lives connect, the more powerful the gospel becomes.

Three Story Evangelism is teaching people that the first step in evangelism is toward Christ and not a lost world. It's learning as much about Jesus and experiencing His story as we can.

It is also designed to help people who want to reach a lost world that listening has become more powerful than telling. The simple truth is if we want people to listen to us, we have to listen to them first. People listen to people who listen. They also listen only to people that they perceive are real and authentic.

The third aspect of Three Story Evangelism is connecting an unbeliever's life and story to Jesus and His story. There is more to Him and His story than just His death. And there is more to people's story than their sin. When we connect their perceived needs to Jesus' story, He becomes relevant to them.

Simply put, I move into a deepening relationship with Jesus and listen to my friend's story. When I discover where their story and His story connect, I bring it to their attention. It boils down to six components:

- 1) To fall more in love with Jesus
- 2) To allow His life to transform us from the inside out
- 3) To learn to listen to people by asking questions
- 4) To become more authentic and real
- 5) To allow people to process all the stories
- 6) To connect the gospel to someone's needs and desires

“We cannot be effective if we continue to cling to the old ways, the old strategies, the old assumptions. We do not live in that era and we cannot be effective if we behave in a manner relevant only to the past.”

- George Barna

A Short Parable

A person once went to a wise storyteller in his town to discover the best way to tell his friends about Jesus.

“I want to know how to tell Jesus’ story to others,” said the young man.

The wise storyteller’s response surprised the young man, “You first must spend time with Jesus and learn from Him. Have you done that?”

“No, I’ve been too busy trying to get His story out.”

“Then go spend time with Him and come back later, and then we’ll talk about the three steps of storytelling.”

Several days later the young man came back to the storyteller and asked what the first step was.

“You’ve done it,” said the wise storyteller. “Knowing and obeying Him is the first step to telling His story. The more of Him and His story you know, the more His light, love, hope, joy and peace will be reflected in you.”

The young man said, “Now tell me how I tell my friends His story.”

Then the storyteller went on and said, “The second step in telling His story is listening to their story. When you’ve listened to them long enough, they’ll ask you about your story. As you listen to their story and tell yours, I want you to be real and honest with them about it.”

“What if...” and before the young man was finished, the storyteller told him, “No, what if. Just honesty and realness. By the way, as you spend time with them listening to their story, I want you to continue spending time with Jesus and His story.”

“When do I tell them His story? What is the third step?”

“The third step happens when you see the connection between their story and needs and His story and provisions. Telling His story isn’t just about His death. That’s why I told you to continue discovering more and more about Him and His story. The power of Jesus’ story is that it connects with different people in different ways. Be kind and compassionate as you introduce His story to them. If they’re ready to become a part of Him and His story, pray with them and then continue teaching them His story. Some call that discipleship. If they’re not ready, keep praying for them and listening to their story until there’s another moment where you can show them how His story connects to theirs.”

“A good storyteller knows a good story.”

A Brief Look at Post-Modernism

Notes:

A Brief Biblical Look at Three Story Evangelism

Here are several passages of Scripture that I think reflect this approach in evangelism.

1. For Believers

- 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 a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”
- Romans 15:13 – “May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”
- Ephesians 4:29, 32 – Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen. Be kind and compassionate to one another.”
- Ephesians 5:1-2 – “Be imitators of God therefore as dearly loved children and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”
- Colossians 3:17 – “And whatever you do whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of Jesus Christ.”

- Colossians 4:4-6 – “Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”
- 1 Thessalonians 2:8, 10 – “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well. You are witnesses and so is God of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.”
- 1 Thessalonians 1:5 – “Because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power. With the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction you know how we lived among you for his sake.”
- 1 Thessalonians 4:11 – “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you so that your daily life will win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependant on anybody.”
- James 1:9 – “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger.”
- Matthew 6:33 – “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you.”
- Matthew 5:13-15 – “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”
- 1 Corinthians 10:31 – “So whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
- John 15:5 – “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in them, they will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.”
- Matthew 4:19 – “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “And I will make you fishers of men.”
- 1 Corinthians 13:13 – “And now these three things remain, faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love.”
- Matthew 11:29-30 – “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
- Luke 10:27 – “Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself.”
- John 15:15 – “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in them they will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.”
- Ephesians 5:15-16 – “Therefore be careful how you walk; not as the unwise, but as the wise, making the most of your time because the days are evil.”
- 1 Peter 4:10-11 – “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. Faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”

“It might be that some of our old Biblical basis for evangelism has been taken out of context in order to motivate people to share their faith.”

2. For Missionaries, Evangelists, Preachers and Apostles.

- Philemon 5-6 – “Because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy.”
- Matthew 28:18 – “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . .”
- Acts 1:8 – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and to the ends of the earth.
- 1 Corinthians 9:23 – “And I do all things for the sake of the gospel that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”
- 1 Corinthians 9:22 – “. . . I become all things to all men that I may by all means save some.”
- Romans 1:15 – “Thus, for my part I am eager to preach the gospel to you, also who are in Rome.”
- Romans 1:16 – “For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”
- Romans 10:15 – “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things.”
- Romans 10:17 – “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”
- Romans 10:14 – “And how shall they believe in Him in whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher?”
- 2 Corinthians 5:11 – “Therefore know the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:20 – “Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God was entreating through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”
- Ephesians 4:11 – “And he gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers.”
- 2 Timothy 4:5 – “But you, be sober in all things. Endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

How Three Story Evangelism Differs From Most Evangelism Today

- 1) It’s stories, not steps
Three Story Evangelism is about bringing three stories together in a natural way. It is not taking people through a sequence of pre-determined steps but parts of a story.

- 2) It's listening, not telling
Three Story Evangelism starts out with the believer listening to the non-believer, not preaching to them. It's built on the assumption that people listen to people who listen.
- 3) It's honesty, not perfection
Three Story Evangelism asks the believer to be honest with their life, not perfect. When we pretend to be perfect, the only person we fool is ourselves.
- 4) It's questions, not answers
Three Story Evangelism is more about asking questions than giving answers. Most Christians are giving answers to questions that non-Christians are not asking.
- 5) It's contributing, not controlling
Three Story Evangelism is not about controlling conversations, but allowing conversations to be free to go where they are going and to bring Jesus into those topics or discussions.
- 6) It's hope, not judgment
Three Story Evangelism is primarily about me sharing my hope rather than me judging others' lifestyle, words or choices.
- 7) It's them, not you
Three Story Evangelism is really about allowing people to be themselves and listening to their story. It's about me getting to know them, not them getting to know me.
- 8) It's Holy Spirit, not program
Three Story Evangelism is being led by God's Spirit in our conversations and relationships. It's not working through some tips and techniques to manipulate the gospel into a conversation at the earliest time, but it is about being led by God's Spirit to bring those parts of Jesus' story that He wants at that given moment.
- 9) It's non-linear, not linear
Three Story Evangelism allows people to discover that part of Jesus' story that is most relevant to them at that moment. Jesus' story doesn't come to everybody in the same order or with the same words.
- 10) It's process, not product
Three Story Evangelism is allowing life to influence the process. Most of Three Story Evangelism is not designed to be a product but a natural process of a relationship.
- 11) It's life, not words
Three Story Evangelism is about God's life and my life and their life, and the realities of those lives in our conversations.

*“With-ness
leads to
witness.”*

*“Loving Him
moves us
from the
'ought to'
to the
'want to.'”*

Chapter One – Living Your Story

Notes:

We could begin with any of the stories, but let's begin with ours. The first step in evangelism is not into the world, but to Him. Jesus' first commandment was to come, not go. The great commission came out of three years of living with Jesus.

In Three Story Evangelism we stress the need for each of us to live in an abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. He is where we find truth, love, grace, mercy, peace, joy and hope; the very things that non-Christians are looking for. We bring to Him our brokenness and allow Him to transform us from the inside out. We bring to Him a life without dance and we learn to dance with Him. And, we bring a life without meaning to Him and discover a passion and a desire that comes from knowing Him.

When Jesus called his disciples in Matthew 4, he called them to him that they might be with him. He invited them into intimacy. The more our story overlaps Jesus' story, the more powerful, interesting, believable and relevant we become to a lost world. George Barna says, "Non-believers often respond to people gifted or not, who are accessible to God, used by God and blessed by God through the working of his Holy Spirit. The most powerful attraction to a non-believer is seeing the life of someone transformed by the reality of the gospel.

*“People
listen to
people who
listen.”*

- Jim Hancock

*“People listen
to people who
are real,
authentic and
transparent.”*

We must learn again some of the great spiritual disciplines of the Christian life. I have discovered the more I love Jesus the more I want to talk about him. The more I know Jesus the more I want others to know him too.

Chapter Two – Discovering Their Story

I have discovered over the last couple of years, that people want badly to be heard. Because we live in a busy and noisy world, people live in a world of isolation and secrets. They want someone to come into their life and to listen to their story in a safe and non-judgmental way. People are looking for friends, not evangelists. Friends who have enough time and patience to listen to someone's story besides their own. Friends who won't change their mind based on their stories or confessions.

The first step is getting to know their story. *Why should we take time to get to know their story before we tell them His story?* It's because:

- 1) Jesus listened to peoples' story.
- 2) Their story shapes and influences how they interpret us.
- 3) Their story will determine how we introduce His story.
- 4) Their story told can open them up to hear another story.
Some people wants so badly to tell their story, they can't hear anything else and some peoples' stories are so painful, they need to tell their story to find healing.
- 5) The way to someone's heart is through their story.
- 6) The way to become a part of their story is to listen to it.

Getting to know their story is learning to carry on conversations with people that allow the two of you to interact and for you to hear their story. The art of being a good conversationalist is being a good listener and asking good questions.

There's an art to being a good listener:

- 1) It's being good at asking questions.
- 2) It's listening to what people are saying and feeding it back to them.
- 3) It's taking their words and their emotions and telling them what we've heard by blending the words and the emotions together.
- 4) It's learning to listen with our eyes, our ears and our hearts.
- 5) It's focusing on them and not us.

Why are questions so good?

- 1) It makes people think.
- 2) It tells them you're interested.
- 3) It tells them you're listening.
- 4) It allows them to investigate.
- 5) It allows them to go places within themselves, which they might not otherwise go.
- 6) It allows them to think out loud.

“Ways to let people know you know them:

- *Know their names*
- *Know their birth dates*
- *Notice when they're absent*
- *Find common interests,*
- *Give individual attention*
- *Meet their friends*
- *Applaud their wins*
- *Encourage them in their defeats*
- *Believe in them at their worst*

- 7) It allows them to get feedback from someone who's heard their thoughts and fears.

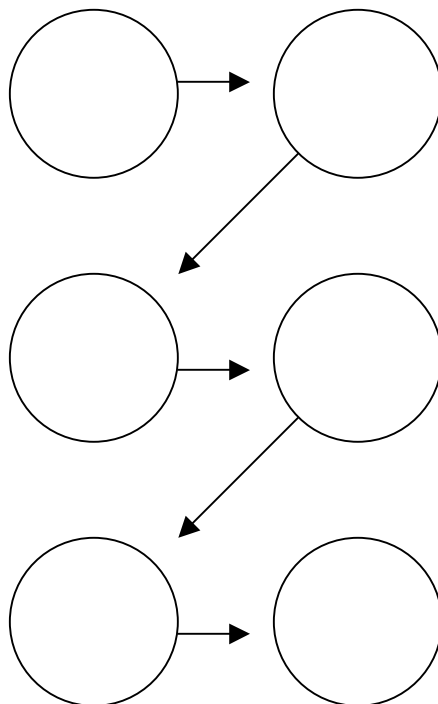
The second aspect of connecting my story to theirs is *being genuine and real*. It's having . . .

- Fewer and fewer secrets
- It's about pretending and acting less
- It's about letting people in on our emotions
- It's about us being on a journey, not have arrived at a destination
- It's about our needs and failures
- It's about our broken dreams

I have found that when I have listened to somebody, they eventually want to know my story. I think they want to know my story because having heard their story has brought intimacy. They now want to know who I am.

I tell my story because:

- 1) It can lead them to telling more of their story.
- 2) It deepens a friendship.
- 3) Over time, it allows me to share a part of Jesus' story.
- 4) It reveals my honesty, genuineness and humanity, which continues the conversation.
- 5) As I take risks in telling my story, it allows them to take deeper risks in telling their story.
- 6) Because people are skeptical, they want to see my life up close and personal.
- 7) I can talk about Jesus.



“People don’t care how much we know until they know how much we care.”

“The new apologetics is not about truth, it’s about relationships”
- Josh McDowell

One human dilemma is that we all want to be loved, but in order to be loved, we got to be known, and the risk in being known is being rejected. When we come into relationships and reveal to people that they won't be rejected, it opens them up to being loved by us.

Connecting my story to them happens as I get to know their story. The kind of relationships that allow people to be themselves are:

- Trusting
- Safe
- Open
- Unconditional Positive Regard
- Listening with Empathy
- Full of Grace and Mercy
- Encouraging

It is important in our relationships with people that they do not perceive themselves as the object of some kind of evangelistic goal, "I/it" but see themselves in a relationship that is built on the merits of the relationship itself "I/thou."

Chapter Three – Connecting Their Story to His

My little girl, Allie was a part of leading somebody to Christ when she was only four years old. It started with her singing, "Jesus Loves Me" on the back porch of a friend's house.

The biggest mistake most people make in evangelism is they assume the reason they came to Jesus is the same reason that the person they're talking to may want to come to Jesus. For the last couple of years, I have asked people *why they have come to know Jesus* and have been surprised by how many reasons there are:

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| • Hell | • Rejection |
| • Heaven | • Purpose |
| • Shame | • Peace |
| • Guilt | • Reconciliation |
| • Community | • Acceptance |
| • Family | • Meaning |
| • Eternal Life | • Forgiveness |
| • Abundant Life | • Starting Over |
| • Significance | • Love |
| • Truth | • Father |
| • Testimony of life | • Identity |

"The top three reasons people don't respond to the gospel are:

1) It's not Relevant.

2) The words that were used.

3) The gospel didn't do what was expected."

"How do you communicate with people who listen with their eyes and think with their hearts?"

The gospel becomes relevant when we connect somebody's need or want to Jesus' life and story. Let me show you out of the gospel of John how Jesus' story can connect with people.

- Needing love John 15:13; John 3:16
- Dealing with shame John 8:1-11
- Desiring heaven John 14:2
- If they're troubled John 14:1, 27
- Struggling with sin John 1:29
- Abundant life John 10:10
- Eternal Life John 6:68

Once we have begun to *connect people's story to Jesus*. There are several things to keep in mind:

- 1) You don't have to do it all at once.
- 2) You don't have to do it the same way.
- 3) You don't have to always use the same verses.
- 4) You don't have to have all the answers.

As you connect more and more of someone's story to Jesus' story, keep in mind that you will want to eventually cover these high points:

- 1) Jesus showed up
- 2) Jesus died
- 3) Jesus rose
- 4) Jesus sent his Holy Spirit
- 5) Jesus is coming back

It's important to keep in mind that I think people today need more time to process the gospel. Being skeptical, they will want to watch you and question His story. I believe that requires us to build "*holding tanks*" for people while they are processing the gospel. Those "*holding tanks*" can be sports, events, camping, small groups, etc.

As you begin to bring His story and their story together, it's important that you use *gentle tugs*. *Gentle tugs* are often simply good questions:

- 1) Can you see how this makes sense to me?
- 2) Does this make sense to you?
- 3) Is there anything that prevents you from trusting Jesus?
- 4) Tell me what you think of this story I've been telling you.
- 5) Can you see how this story can make a difference in yours?

We might be doing evangelism all wrong.

We may be doing it all wrong. Starting at the wrong point, minimizing our walk with Jesus, preaching the gospel too quick, using the wrong words, stressing the wrong point, trying to do it all at once and separating our lives from our words.

“Maybe the reason that most Christians only talk about Jesus’ death is because that’s the only part of His story they know.”

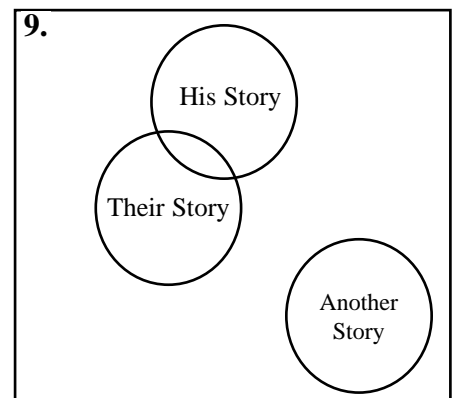
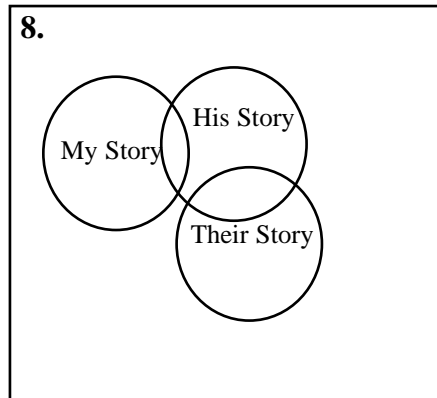
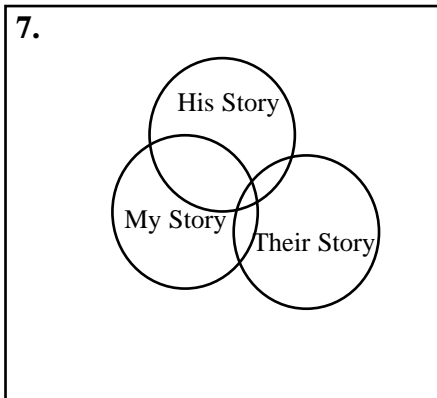
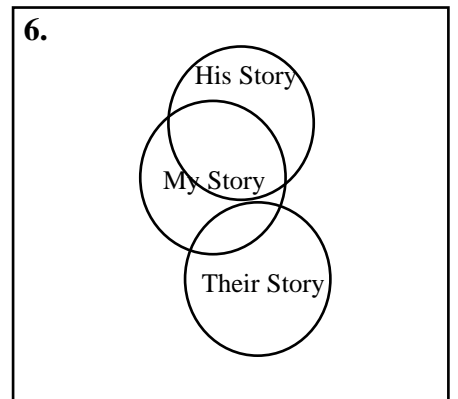
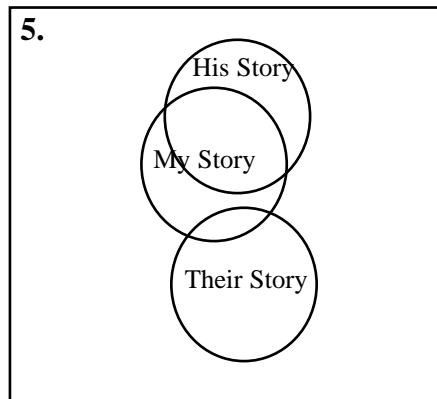
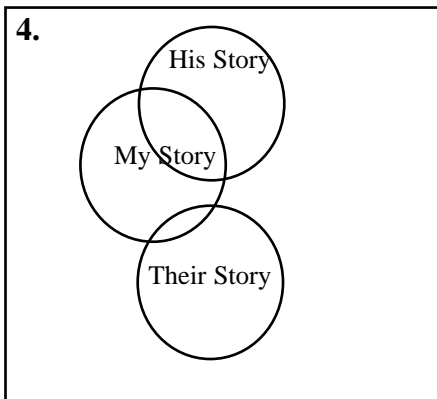
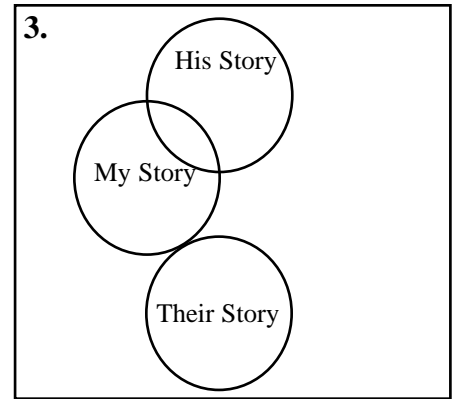
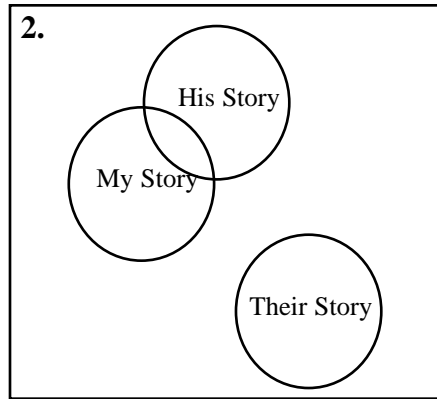
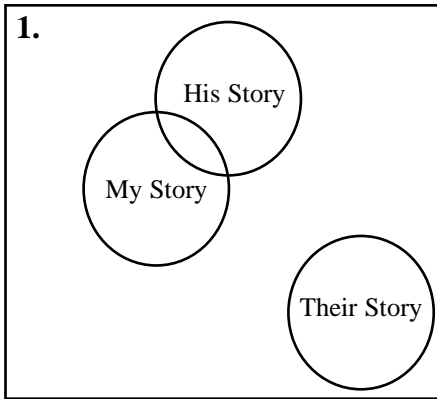
- 1) We may be starting at the wrong point.
A common mistake that believers make when they're sharing the gospel is that they tend to start with their own needs than starting with the needs of the person they're talking to.
- 2) We may be minimizing our walk with Jesus.
I think the evangelical community has slipped into the trap of thinking the only thing that matters is getting the words right, not my life right.
- 3) We may be going too fast.
I also think the Christian community waits too long to begin sharing the gospel and then when they do share it, they share it too fast.
- 4) We may be using the wrong words.
Words don't have meaning, people do. Because it's people who are listening who give meaning to our words. When we communicate the gospel, we need to communicate in words that people understand.
- 5) We may be stressing the wrong points.
The order and the points of the gospel we communicate should be seen as relevant to the person we're talking to. Sometimes we project what's relevant to us on to other people. Keep in mind our needs may not be their needs.
- 6) We may be minimizing their history.
History is the strongest filter that people interpret, conversations, words and actions through. The better we know their history, the better we'll know how they will interpret us.
- 7) We may be minimizing people's needs.
Too often we project our needs on people and answer those needs rather than knowing what their needs are and speaking to them.
- 8) We may be minimizing discipleship.

Conclusion:

How Three Story Develops

[see diagram next page]

Three Story Evangelism™



Think of the three stories—Their story, My Story and His Story--as three different circles. At the beginning of a relationship, the circles probably don't touch. As the relationship grows, those circles get closer together and begin to overlap.

Your circle and their circle will probably overlap first. As you begin to introduce Jesus' story, His circle will begin to overlap theirs. The more these circles overlap, the more the lost person will understand the power and the relevance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Evangelism is one person telling another person about Jesus. That was true 2,000 years ago and will be true until Jesus comes back. The bottom line is: The Holy Spirit convicts a lost person, the Holy Scriptures reveal the truth, and Jesus Christ's death and resurrection brings salvation.

Through the story—their story, my story, and His story—we can take lost kids to the foot of the cross, and allow them to decide if Jesus' story will become a part of their life story.

The increasing power of the gospel takes place as I intersect those three circles. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2, "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. Surely you remember brothers our toil and hardship. We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed."

As His story overlaps my story and produces holiness, conviction, love, joy and peace, I bring that transforming story to a kid. Through my relationship with them of love, acceptance, sacrifice, compassion, mercy, grace, etc., I begin to build a bridge that allows me to bring His story to them.

As these three stories come together I believe the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ comes into being.

When Rembrandt completed his great portrait of the crucifixion, he called some of his friends over to see his latest masterpiece. They looked at all the detail in the faces and the different reactions of people to the cross. When they looked over into the corner of the painting, there was a man who looked like Rembrandt. One of his friends said, "You know, that fellow looking up at the cross looks just like you." Rembrandt very somberly said to his friend, "It is me. I was there. That cross was for me."

Why Three Story Evangelism?

There are several reasons I think Three Story Evangelism is right for us.

1) It's Biblical

Three Story Evangelism finds its roots in 1 Peter 3:15. The first step in Biblical evangelism is to obedience in Jesus. Ninety-nine percent of Scripture's commandments to believers are about their lifestyle.

- Scripture requires us to have a living and obedient relationship to Him.
- Scripture wants us to be salt and light
- Scripture doesn't want our behavior to disqualify us
- Scripture assumes that good works will coincide with good words.
- Scripture wants our life of hope to draw people to Him

2) It's Appropriate

As I listen to people, they seem more and more interested in stories than facts. People have become skeptical of truth and because of that are skeptical of people who say they know the truth. Three Story Evangelism comes to those kinds of people in a quieter, authentic and personal way. Recently, on a major magazine cover was the headline, "Skepticism is a Virtue." As a culture, we have been spun by the politicians, manipulated by the media and lied to by our friends. People have lost faith in reason, technology and truth.

3) It's Balanced

Three Story Evangelism doesn't separate discipleship and evangelism; it sees them as two sides of the same coin. Three Story Evangelism begins with my discipleship and ends with their discipleship. It's doesn't end with a "raised hand," but a life long deepening walk with Jesus.

4) It's Honest

Three Story Evangelism requires me to be real, authentic, open and honest with the person whom I am attempting to introduce to Jesus. It doesn't require me to be what I'm not, but what I am. It's not about being perfect, but being real.

5) It's Friendly

Three Story Evangelism is about friendship. It's listening, loving, serving, caring, laughing, and visiting. It includes all the things that make great friends: time, laughter, memories, meaningful conversations and a safe place to express our secrets and fears.

6) It's Natural

Three Story Evangelism doesn't force a conversation into a particular direction, but waits for the conversation to naturally go there. This evangelism allows us to talk about Jesus, not all at one time and in a particular order, but simply talking about Him over time. It comes out of the context of our story and not our agenda.

7) It's Incarnational

St. Francis of Assisi says, "Preach Christ always, when necessary use words." Too much of the gospel these days is about words not life.

8) It's Spiritual

This evangelism is built on the premise that the Holy Spirit should lead us in our conversation, not our guilt or program.

9) It's Believable

This evangelism is best for reaching the skeptic because it comes from a believer whose life is real, authentic, transparent and hopeful.