
EVANGELISTS

The Good News Bringers

STEWART

Stewart certainly didn't come from the South, though he grew up in *Southern* California. He had no accent and no wild clothes. Always conciliatory and perpetually smiling, Stewart was happy in anyone's company. He had a way of sidling up next to people, usually beginning conversations with a question. People found themselves wanting to talk with Stewart.

Think Beach-Volleyball, and you can picture him in your mind. He wasn't tall, but he was athletic in every sense of the word. Stewart could run a mile, do 100 pushups (or pull-ups) without breaking a sweat. That outer stamina matched his inner endurance. Stewart was, what I'd call, a long-distance Evangelist. Unfazed by the seeming distance between people and their salvation, Stewart moved forward with them relentlessly.

The social signals people sent him, of boredom or disinterest, seemed lost on Stewart. Either he didn't notice that people were brushing him off, or he was able to draw on deep reserves of spiritual staying power! I always pictured him as a marine slowly crawling forward in the face of enemy fire; regardless of how severely wounded, he just kept pressing ahead.

Not that there was anything the least militant about his demeanor. Quite the contrary. For such a hard body, Stewart had one of the kindest, softest personalities I have ever known. He simply didn't give up on people. Nothing made him happier than leading someone to the Lord.

KAYLA

A century ago and with a far different accent, Kayla might easily have passed as a southern belle, but I'm sure her ancestors came from Scandinavia. I can't recall a time when she

wasn't smiling. Her blonde hair and blue eyes made a definite statement wherever she went, and her energetic joy was like an electric current sparking everything around her.

Effervescent. No other word quite captures Kayla. Far sweeter, of course, than an Alka-Seltzer tablet, if Kayla dropped into a conversation or a gathering of people, she bubbled so expansively that she soon infected everyone nearby. She was almost naive to evil, not because she was a sheltered air-head, but because her love for people was like a delete key that rapidly eliminated others' mistakes and wrongs from her computer screen.

Kayla could talk... and talk. The pitch and volume of her voice opened ears. Not too loud, but strong enough to carry, her conversations with anyone about anything automatically drew others in. She fascinated attention. People looked up when she entered or passed through a room. Oh yes, she was pretty, and attracted her share of looks. But the utter lack of guile or subterfuge in her being quickly deflected everyone's interest in her into a feeling of total acceptance by her.

Kayla was utterly blind—not physically, but interpersonally. Never mind that you are the most crotchety old man, or a teen-age terror, or a fussy, teething baby. Kayla made you smile. A man or woman? Black, brown or white? Rich, richer or dirt-poor? No matter to Kayla. To her everyone was a stray who needed adoption into Jesus' family.

DEFINITION

In some ways, Stewart and Kayla fit with aspects of our stereotype about Evangelists. I have purposefully removed them from the revival meeting or up-front on the church stage because Evangelists rarely have such a ready-made platform for their ministry. We associate Evangelists with staged events and other sorts of arranged meetings. Such venues do often feature Evangelists, but we'll miss much about this marvelous Gift-Mix if we don't examine it in the normal particulars of life.

Not many of you will be platformed in meetings or on TV. But many of you are Evangelists! So, let's try to define this Gift-Mix in light of its original meaning, long before it became such a popular (or even religious) image.

The term evangelist was not originally a Christian term. The early church just borrowed it. [It always makes me think of the dear people who never celebrate Christmas because the tree is a pagan symbol; well the whole language of the New Testament is basically pagan language that we pirated to explain things in a way that made sense to normal people.]

Evangelist is a compound word (*Ev* [Good] + *Angelos* [Messenger]) In classical Greek, Evangelist simply meant *a messenger with good news*—especially news of a (military) victory. Before the days of CNN, battles were won/lost long before the folks back home learned the outcome. When a runner returned to one of the Greek city-states with news of victory, he was called an Evangelist. On the other hand, if he brought word of a defeat, he was no Evangelist.

During New Testament times, the Roman world was accustomed to hearing about numerous religions and philosophies—from regional mystery cults and Greco/Roman deities to Stoics and Epicureans. Followers of different gods and philosophies sought to spread their faith to others by proclaiming the benefits and promises of their ideology. Those who actively announced such “good news” were known as Evangelists.

A good example of such a proclamation comes from the Imperial Cult—the belief that Emperors of Rome, and other rulers like Herod,¹ were gods. A common theme of these Imperial evangels was a new world-order that would fix all problems. Listen to the language of a proclamation made in 9 BC by Paulus Fabius Maximus about the birthday of Augustus:

Providence which has ordered the whole of our life... has ordained ...a savior for us...to make war cease, to create order everywhere...The birthday of the god [Augustus] was the beginning for the world of glad tidings [evangel]...

The Jews were looking for Messiah, the Savior, who would defeat the kingdoms of the earth and usher in a new era of shalom (well-being, peace, prosperity). Because they had misinterpreted the evangel to be (only) about physical, political realities, many missed the promises and glad tidings.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EVANGELISTS

The intent of this book is NOT to provide a Christianized personality profile or, even worse, predictions about your life or your ministry. I’m not interested in pigeonholing people. But a great deal of our makeup as individuals comes from what God intended us to be. We are what we are according to His intentional design and His unending grace.²

Just as Stewart and Kayla look and act far differently from one another, so, too, will your

¹ Acts 12:22

² 1 Corinthians 15:12

personality and the specifics of your life be different from others whose Gift-Mix is an Evangelist. Just as one color differs from another, so one *GIFT-MIX* differs from another. For every attribute I'll mention about *EVANGELISTS*, there are scores of nuances, subtleties and exceptions. How many custom shades of green are available in a paint store?

But you will also share some aspects of being with other Evangelists—that might not be as pronounced among other Gift-Mixes. The point is that *EVANGELISTS* tend to function with a slightly different orientation than *EXHORTERS* or *GIVERS* or *PROPHETS*, etc.

As I mentioned earlier in the book, my basic approach is to begin with the root word (evangel) the Bible uses as the *GIFT-MIX* name. By definition, *EVANGELISTS* ought to share many qualities inherent in their name-sake. What is true of the term evangel, should provide clues about the very make-up of *EVANGELISTS*. Make sense? Additionally, Bible verses utilizing the root word of the *GIFT-MIX* frequently reveal traits of that *GIFT-MIX*.

Using definitions and verses, I arrive at something of a systematic theology of the different Gift-Mixes—*EVANGELISTS*, Showers of Mercy, *TEACHERS*, etc.

***EVANGELISTS* are not condemning.** If Evangelists announce the outcome of an already-fought battle, and declare an event that has already taken place as reason for rejoicing, then it makes no sense to think of an Evangelist as a blame-bringer. Citizens of the city-state who listened to the Evangelist's report had no hand, whatsoever, in the now-finished battle. They did not and could not affect its outcome. Blame would never have entered the announcement.

We have not evangelized our neighbor or the world if we have merely told them the things they are not supposed to do. Contrary to our ingrained image of a fire-breathing, finger-wagging, condemnation-bringing preacher, an Evangelist wants to get on with good news. People's need for forgiveness and for a better future is self-apparent to the Evangelist.

True, they spot "wrong" things in people's lives, but not for the purpose of bringing condemnation. Evangelists are like a handyman friend of mine, Jerry, who makes personal calls to homeowners whose contractor-warranties are about to end. Contractors' liability for faulty workmanship concludes after a few years, and Jerry, who used to work for a nationwide builder, knows that. So, he asks the homeowners how their house is holding up. After alerting them to legal provisions for repairs, he points out stress fractures and other problems his trained eye picks out.

He's not blaming the owners for shoddy living! He's offering to fix the very problems he highlights. But Jerry's repair skills work even on issues that the owners may have caused themselves. The point is the possible repair, not the probable cause. Evangelists don't condemn buildings; they repair them!

I personally believe that the church gets crippled because of its preoccupation with trying to be moral policeman of society, trying to make people feel bad about what they have done, instead of telling them whatever they're done in the past doesn't matter with the offer of a new future.

EVANGELISTS are indiscriminate. Perhaps a better way to say this is that Evangelists have no prejudice. They announce the good news to everyone—not just to a select few. Though he made his announcement to the few shepherds, he made it clear that the message was for “all people.” Obviously, not everyone heeds the invitation to salvation, but God—the love-filled Evangelist—extends it to all.³ He wants everyone to be saved.⁴ In fact, Jesus describes God's indiscriminate blessings as one of the key marks of His perfection:⁵

“He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Rarely do Evangelists consider which person or people to speak with. They generally speak to anyone and everyone—one exactly the same terms. They do not treat people differently; like Kayla, they are blind to distinctions that set one people apart from others. Remember, they know that Jesus is the one answer to every person's life, and since Evangelists view all of life from that equalizer, existing differences between people mean almost nothing to them.

That's why Evangelists are so good at connecting with people *on their level* and *in their language*. They tend to be oblivious to all the reasons why they have no business trying to talk with individuals or groups. An older, blue-collar Evangelist from Minnesota wouldn't hesitate for a moment to start conversation with a young, female émigré from Mali who is nursing her infant on a plane. A few rows further up on that same plane, another Evangelist—this one middle-age, matronly and African-American—would find a way to conversationally intercept a teenager wearing earphones to his iPod. And in 1st Class, the portly and balding frequent-flyer pharmaceutical salesman (Evangelist) sitting next to a

³ See Matthew 22:9; 1 Timothy 4:10

⁴ 1 Timothy 2:4

⁵ Matthew 5:43-48

very *bored-but-you-don't-dare-talk-to-me* socialite would miss all the put-off hints from her. His relentless string of questions would eventually penetrate her defenses.

EVANGELISTS tend to have many acquaintances. I'll put it plainly: if you do not consider yourself a "people-person," you're not an Evangelist. I think of Evangelists as bus drivers for airport rental car companies. Their route is fairly short—not at all like that of trans-continental bus drivers who ferry people from Atlanta to Portland. Evangelists have a simple route, back and forth from Arrivals to the rental lot. Spiritually speaking, of course, that straightforward route intends to drop people at the foot of the Cross.

Once people are well on their way, enjoying their journey with God, Evangelists tend to lose interest. They have other passengers waiting. Like the initial stage of a rocket, an Evangelist wants to get people beyond earth's atmosphere, into the spiritual dimension with Christ. Evangelists are patient, too. They are like good fishermen who don't mind fishing all day, if they have to, to make a catch. Since the people in their lives are at various stages of progress toward the Cross, Evangelists stay connected to many, many people.

Evangelists have more short-term friendships than long-term, exclusive relationships. Does that make sense? Anything that smacks of exclusivity or an insider's club violates an Evangelist's being. They want everyone to be friends with everyone in the world. Deep, time-consuming friendships drive Evangelists crazy, and at a party, they would gravitate more toward a new acquaintance than an old friend.

They are like Philip ("the Evangelist"), one of the newly selected leaders of the burgeoning early church in Jerusalem.⁶ Though he was a Jew, he preached "the good news about the kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ," in lots of places to lots of different people: to Samaritans, to an occultist magician and to a high-level government official—who happened to be an African eunuch. At the end of the brief snapshot the Bible gives us about Philip's normal life,

*The Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.*⁷

EVANGELISTS are optimistic and kind. In direct contrast to the angry caricature most people have of Evangelists crying out, "Turn or Burn," we see a different picture in the

⁶ Acts 6:1-7

⁷ Acts 8:40

Bible. Scripture tells us that God is rich in “kindness and tolerance and patience,” and it is “the kindness of God that leads” people to repentance.⁸ Evangelists bring word of a better future. Certainly, their main message is about God’s offer to save people from the clutches of sin, but in a broader sense, salvation is rescue/deliverance from anything that endangers people’s God-intended future.

Evangelists simply believe God wants to do people good—all the days of their lives. That’s why they’re optimistic. They simply do not concede that the existing situation is the end of the story. And, as mentioned earlier, neither do they spend much time trying to affix blame. Think of it this way: Evangelists are like messengers who bring word of presidential pardon to a prison; with the pardon in hand, they have no need to rehearse the crimes that led to someone’s imprisonment. That’s old news—and not that interesting to Evangelists.

God’s kindness, one of the chief characteristics of true Evangelists, is not fully understood by English-speakers. We tend to define kindness exclusively in terms of sympathy, compassion and other feelings. But God’s kindness is more like our word benevolence. It is a feeling; but it translates into helpfulness. God is moved to do things for us. So, too, are Evangelists. They really enjoy doing things for other people as a simple expression of how God treats them.

How tragic that this extraordinary Gift-Mix has been mixed up in so many people’s thinking with an angry, judgmental and aloof (not-so-friendly-seeming) man, shaking his fist at, and enumerating the evils of, a crowd of people.

⁸ Romans 2:4