

When you begin to share your faith with others, you will likely see a variety of responses. Hopefully, you will get to see someone genuinely place their faith in Christ. There is nothing like seeing someone's life changed by the Gospel to make you love evangelism. At the same time, the opposite is true. If you've ever had someone respond with extreme negativity, you may have become disheartened and conclude that evangelism is not for you. The reality is it is normal to get varied responses. It happened to Jesus. It happened to Paul. It's going to happen to you too. Realizing that can help you stay in the game where God can use you to make His glory known.

The last couple of verses of Acts 17 do a great job encapsulating the three major responses. A brief study through this text can help us recognize likely outcomes, and be prepared for them. By the way, we are just looking at vv. 32-34 in this lesson, but the chapter is loaded with incredible insight on how to share the Gospel in a pluralistic culture such as ours.

As we jump into the narrative Paul has just finished doing an incredible job laying a foundation for the Gospel. With great grace and tact, he has warned them of the judgement to come – a judgement that will be carried out by a man who has risen from the dead.

Luke records that there are three responses that people show. Take a look:

1. The first response is found in v. 32. "When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered." This is the worst-case scenario everybody fears.

Have you ever had anyone respond negatively to you when discussing spiritual topics?

If so, how did you respond and how did it make you feel? _____

Usually our response to this response falls into one of two categories. One is that we feel like a loser. We think people are making fun of us, or that we are perceived as weak, too stupid to know that science has disproved God, or whatever. Fill in your favorite insecurity. At the other extreme, we might feel guilt since we apparently blew the evangelistic opportunity. Now the unbeliever is condemned to an eternity in Hell because I screwed up sharing the Gospel and forgot that really good illustration. Nonsense and nonsense.

Notice what those two reactions have in common? They're both about us. I, I, me, me. Here's the thing: Evangelism isn't about me, it's about God. It is about declaring "the praises of Him who called us out of darkness and into His wonderful light". I am not the issue. And it's about the lost. It is an invitation to those who are separate from Christ, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, and without God in the world to come inside and find life, forgiveness, and peace with God.

Always remember that Evangelism is not about you. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, lost people will always reject God. They echo Isaiah's detractors who said, "give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!" (Isaiah 30:10-11). We shouldn't be surprised or affronted when lost people reject the Gospel. Instead we should:

Be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. To those who oppose us, we should gently instruct in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses, and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

If someone you are sharing with rejects the Gospel, how should we respond to them?

Just to reiterate, do we have room to feel like a failure personally if the other person chooses not to put their faith in Christ? _____

Remember, it is God who saves. God is the one who longs to show mercy. It is the Father who, "devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him." (2 Samuel 14:14) He is sovereign in extending His grace. You can't thwart Him. Remember, successful witnessing is taking the initiative in the power of the Holy Spirit to share Christ, and leaving the results to God.

2. But, what if their response is not negative, but is curious instead? How might you respond to your friend? _____

Alright, back to Acts 17. Take a look at verse 32 for the second response:

"Others said, "we want to hear you again on this subject." I love this one. These people are intrigued, but unsure. They want to think about what they've heard, and talk more. They have some questions, recognize that you might have some answers, and sincerely want to investigate. That's a dream come true. When this happens, we should praise God and ask Him to move in their hearts to respond in faith. By all means, make it a point to get back with them soon; the next day or at least next week, ready to answer questions.

This is one of the reasons that it is good to have lots of tools in your bag. It may not be needed to reshare the Gospel, so maybe you could share your testimony. Freshen up on apologetics. Be ready to explain one of Jesus' parables that makes the Gospel clear, or speaks to a point of hesitation for the non-believer. It's important to be ready for these kind of "second appointment" opportunities.

3. The final response though is everyone's favorite. It's found in v. 34. "A few men became followers of Paul and believed." Glorious.

What do you do when someone is ready to put their faith in Jesus? _____

What is your next step with them? _____

Whenever this happens we should show appropriate exuberance. Someone has crossed over from death to life! What could be greater?

What do you think is most critical for this new believer? _____

The following are two good places to start:

1. Introduce the new believer to other Christians. Your top priority should be to see them get relationally connected to the body. Go to lunch with them and another Christian friend, or invite them to come to church with you and then catch lunch together afterward. Do something, anything to get them in a relationship with multiple believers.
2. Begin to meet regularly to teach them the basics of the faith. These discipleship lessons is where I'd recommend! You can find them at thebridgecc.org/discipleship-lessons.

The bottom line is that all three responses occur at times and are normal, and it is good to have some idea of what to do when each occurs.

Which of these three responses do you feel least ready to handle? _____

How can you better prepare yourself? _____

Ultimately, remember that successful witnessing is taking the initiative in the power of the Holy Spirit to share Christ, and leaving the results to God. Read 1 Corinthians 3:6.

Memorize: 1 Peter 3:15