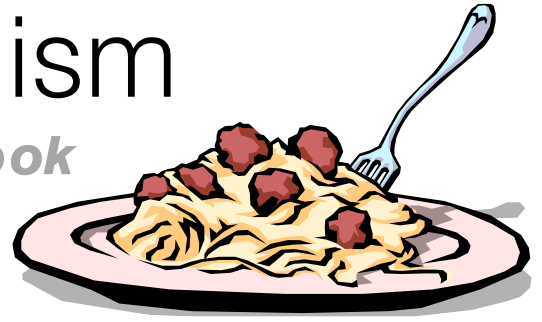


Hospitality Evangelism

A Practical Step-By-Step Handbook

By Kel and Barbara Richards



Hospitality Evangelists

“They exist in churches all over Australia. Most of them are in pews, not pulpits... They’re just ordinary, everyday Aussie Christians.

What makes them special is that they are seeing their friends, their neighbours, their relatives become Christians. They have found a way to witness to their faith, and to the truth of the gospel, that doesn’t frighten the life out of themselves or the people they are witnessing to.

They have found a way to penetrate the Australian culture with the gospel. A way that works! They have mastered the simple secret of **hospitality evangelism**. These people have mobilised Aussie warmth and friendliness in the service of the gospel” (p 9-10)

Case Study 1

Steve services your car. He’s a good bloke. He’s a bit rough, and swears a bit but you get on well, and seem to spend half an hour chatting before you pick up your car. He’s married with a couple of kids just like you, and likes to fish—just like you.

Case Study 2

Kevin is a salesman you talk to on the phone for work a couple of times a month. He always asks about your weekend, and how the family is. He’s single, and has transferred here from interstate. He enjoys a game of golf—just like you.



Who’s the most hospitable person you’ve met? What made them hospitable?

Being hospitable doesn’t mean you need to be a great cook! It’s about making people feel comfortable. Conversation over food or coffee is a great way to get to know people.

And it’s as we get to know people, that we’re better able to share OUR best friend, Jesus, with them. At its simplest, evangelism is *introducing people to Jesus*. If you’ve ever introduced two people to each other, then you’re qualified to be an evangelist!

STAGE ONE: BUILDING A BRIDGE

“It is when we open our home to someone, and when we share our food with someone, that we build strong bridges of friendship with that person” (p24)

The Old Testament regards hospitality as simply normal and proper behaviour. (See Abraham in Gen 18, or Isaiah’s description of it as one of the marks of true godliness in Is 58:7).

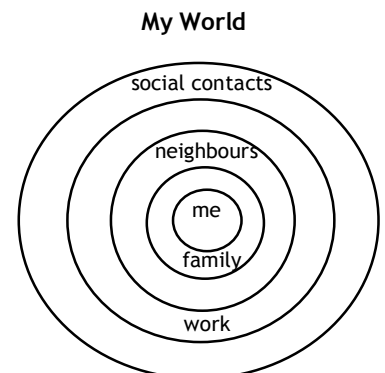
The NT shows the same pattern of ready hospitality. See the behaviour of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:33-35), Zacchaeus (Lk 19:5-6), Lydia (Acts 16:15, 40), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:29-34). Paul even commands us to feed our enemies (Romans 12:20-21).

Step One: Targeting

Can you list as many as a dozen people you are acquainted with who (fairly clearly) don’t know Jesus? Make sure to include people from each area of your world—from those you know best, to those you know least.

Start with Mick, your local butcher, or Steve who services your car. Then there’s Mary, who you catch the bus with each morning. The chatty hairdresser, and that nice young couple with the baby across the road. Don’t forget the people you do business with. Perhaps you work with them everyday, or just see them once a month.

They are acquaintances—people with whom you have a friendly, casual relationship, and people who don’t appear to know Jesus.





Action: Write your list of names below:

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 10. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 11. _____ |
| 6. _____ | 12. _____ |

Step Two: Bridge Building

Not all of these acquaintances are *friends*—people with whom we have built a relationship of trust. How do we turn our non-Christian acquaintances into good friends? How do we build strong, sturdy bridges of friendship? The answer is *hospitality*.

- A. You choose to **spend time** with them in whatever situation you normally meet them.
- B. You **share yourself** with them. Tell them about your family, job, interests, what you're cooking for dinner tonight—whatever is natural and appropriate.
- C. You **listen**. People like to be listened to!
- D. You **invite them** to your home for a meal, or to have coffee, or to play golf, or to a movie, or whatever. Hospitality can be **lots of things!**



Action: Go back to your list of 12 names, and see if you can pick out three people with whom you might be able to build bridges of friendship

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 3. _____ |
| 2. _____ | |

Step Three: Pray! Pray! Pray!

Pray daily for the people you are building bridges with.

Prayer triplets are a good way to keep this sort of prayer alive.

- ⇐ They help to keep you praying regularly.
- ⇐ They help keep your prayer specific
- ⇐ They help multiply the prayer.
- ⇐ They keep your prayer outward-looking and connected with action
- ⇐ They help to encourage you



To Think About:

Jesus calls us to be **fishermen**, not **hunters**. Hunters are aggressive and want to get out there and bang away at targets. Fishermen have to be patient. They set out to attract their prey. Good fishermen know their prey—they not what sort of bait works best.

What does this approach mean for our conversations?

How important is listening?

What indirect messages might be behind these answers to the question, "How are you?"

1. "After last week, things could only get better!"
2. "I went to a funeral last week, now I'm snowed under!"
3. "I live alone, but I've got so many hobbies that I never seem to notice."



Hospitality Tips

1. Keep it simple

It's not a culinary contest. In fact if the meal is too fancy or your house too spotless, people will be put off thinking they could ever invite you to their place. Remember relationship building is the key. The food isn't the main focus.

The fact is, extensive preparation will make you less likely to make hospitality a habit. And it's an expectation that makes it harder to be spontaneous or flexible.

Keep it simple and you'll more likely sustain a hospitality ministry both from a time and cost point of view. Just have two or three easy to prepare dishes as your stock standard.

2. Work out your best time

It can be hard to get organised with hospitality. Often we have good intentions to 'have that person around' but they don't translate to reality. Poor planning is often the issue. Think through how you can develop a special 'hospitality slot' in your weekly schedule.

Like most things, unless it becomes a habit, hospitality will slip away. It's about investing. And investing here might mean a cost elsewhere. It might mean reviewing how you're spending your other time in order to make space for hospitality.

3. Getting to know you

Remember the goal is to get to know the person better. Try to think through the practical side of things and remove distractions to good conversation. As they say on 'The Castle', "at meal time the telly is definitely turned... down". Make that off! Get to know your guest. Ask questions that get them telling their story. What do they think about God? Have they had much to do with Christians? What/who has been significant in their life? People are usually very happy over a meal to answer questions that might seem threatening in other contexts.



God Talk

We can turn our normal, every-day conversation into Christian conversation using “God talk”. This doesn’t mean telling people they should be “washed in the blood of the Lamb” or quoting the Bible in every conversation. It’s NOT Bible bashing.

God talk means that we stop hiding the fact that we are Christians. We stop censoring our own conversations. We include the things we do as Christians in our conversation in a natural, normal, comfortable way—without making a big deal about it.

By being just a little bit sensitive, we can talk to our non-Christian friends in much the same way we already talk to our Christian friends.

Offering to pray for your non-Christian friend who has shared a problem is an unexpected and frequently appreciated gesture.

Perhaps there is a Christian book you’ve just read, or sermon you’ve just heard that has taught you something you can share. This shows your friend how Christianity makes a real difference in your life.

God talk has four characteristics;

1. **How we talk**—loving, honest, gentle, thankful.
2. Be sensitive about using **jargon**. Words like sin, holiness, righteousness, grace, born again needs to be thought about. What words could you use instead?
3. **Concepts** of love, honesty, compassion, truth, morality etc are often used by people without any connection to the God from whom they all flow. Be gently moving people to keep thinking about the concepts to move them towards a Biblical world view.
4. **God in action**. Talk about God’s work in his world—sending rain, healing, answering prayer. We can talk about his anger at sin, as well as the peace and security he gives us.

STAGE TWO: INVITE THEM TO HOSPITALITY EVANGELISM EVENTS

While your friends may not feel comfortable about coming to church, coming to an event with a meal and a speaker is probably something they *are* familiar and comfortable with—like a Lions, Apex or Rotary Club dinner, or a business breakfast, or a fund-raising event.



A **hospitality evangelism** event is just like these—a meal and a speaker, but is organised by your church! *Feed ‘em and tell ‘em! It’s safe surroundings in which to hear a dangerous message!*

Hints:

- ⇐ Training, prayer triplets, then planning.
- ⇐ Plan a year’s worth of **regular events** in about September of the year before.
- ⇐ Adopt a **50-50 rule**. Christians can only come if they bring a non-Christian friend.
- ⇐ Use a “**neutral venue**” like an RSL club, Chinese restaurant, surf club, or beer garden.
- ⇐ Organise an **evangelist** to speak, rather than a Christian “celebrity”. The message needs to be *clear*.
- ⇐ **Personal invitation** works better than impersonal advertising
- ⇐ Hold **regular events**, planned out over the year. An American study showed that people who become Christians have heard the gospel an average of 4.7 times. Keep inviting your friend to events.
- ⇐ Run an **evangelistic series** such as Alpha, Introducing God, or Life-works (see over page)
- ⇐ Why not try combining a **dialogue evangelism** event with hospitality. Begin with a ten minute talk, then invite people to write questions on cards over dinner. After dinner, answer the questions. The speaker concludes by calling for a response.
- ⇐ Would **parents of your Scripture class or Kids Club** come to an event?



Action: How might you use God talk in the following case studies?

Case Study 1

You arrive at work on Monday morning, and your work-mate says, “What did you do on the weekend?”

Case Study 2

On Wednesday morning your neighbour asks you whether you saw a TV show last night. Last night you were at Home Group instead.

Case Study 3

Your hairdresser shares that she is scared about the results of some medical tests she has had.



Investigate:
Look at Luke 15:1-31

1. What is the disagreement between Jesus and the Pharisees about (v1-2)?

2. What are the parables in Luke 15 telling us about how God cares for those who are lost? What should our attitude be towards the lost?

Read John 1:35-46

3. Who points people to Jesus in these verses (36, 41, 45-46)?

4. How does Jesus respond in each situation (39, 42, 47-49)?

Read Colossians 4:2-6

4. What does Paul ask the Colossians to pray for?

5. Alongside praying for his ministry, what ministry does he expect the Colossians themselves to be involved in?

6. What does he say about the role of action in this ministry?

7. What does he say about the role of words in this ministry?

8. How might hospitality ministry fit with this picture of ministry towards outsiders?

9. What will it mean for you to make the most of every opportunity with this ministry?

Adapted from:

Kel and Barbara Richards, *Hospitality Evangelism: A Practical Step-by-Step Handbook*. Beacon Communications, Sydney, 1995.

Evangelism Courses & Hospitality

The last few years have seen the introduction of a number of evangelistic courses based around friendship and food.

Alpha

www.alphaaustralia.org.au/

The original course combining food and evangelism. It consists of 15 talks, and was written by Nicky Gumbel from England. It includes a weekend away. Some evangelicals find his teaching on the Holy Spirit not biblical enough.



Introducing God

www.introducinggod.org/

A seven or nine week course, including a weekend away. It follows the Two Ways To Live outline, explaining a Bible passage each week. Written by Sydney Anglican minister Dominic Steele.



Lifeworks

www.afci.com.au/lifeworks/

An Australian ten-week course written by Robert Forsyth and John North. It focuses on pre-evangelism questions for the first six weeks, discussing why someone needs to investigate Christianity, what God is like, who am I, what is wrong with the world, is the Bible reliable, and who is Jesus.

