

## **Traditional vs. Digital Gospel Communication**

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As time has aged, our technology and means of communicating have advanced. In the Christian sphere, many debates from different convictions and perspectives arise with our new digital age. Many of us would choose to go back in time to when smart phones ceased to exist, all while still actively using our smart phones and socially media regularly. Believers are faced with the question, “how can I use social media or technology for the glory of God?”

Phones are addicting, and there is no question about that. Many of us carry different perspectives and convictions pertaining digital and social media use. With most of the world on social media though, the opportunity is presented to reach people in places we may not be able to currently go to. Many Christians face a pivotal learning point in their walk with Jesus, and that is learning how to share the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, in which we have been told and bear a responsibility to tell others. Organizations such as Cru, FCA, or others are actively teaching believers how to share their faith. While most of it is through a traditional method like initiative and relational evangelism, the open door to digital strategies is being explored and used to help people be equipped to share the Gospel vocally through social media and other platforms. Both methods have pros and cons, so what is the difference in what is happening in both?

To start with the traditional method, we must define what is meant by that. The traditional method consists of an initiative, in-person effort to sharing the Gospel. This may look like doing initiative evangelism, approaching strangers with full intention to strike up a Gospel conversation. People who do this often bring materials with them that explain the Gospel. There is also relational evangelism, where we as believers look to show the Gospel so we can talk about the Gospel. This is a method used with family, close friends, and people in more closed countries. Relational evangelism seeks to have a genuine friendship, building trust with the non-

believer, having our lives be open examples of what we believe, while looking for opportunities to share a clear Gospel presentation with them. A third method people may use is street preaching. Street preachers mostly do one of two things; announce the Gospel in a public space through raising their voices to catch everyone's attention. Or, these people will grab a bullhorn or a mic, go to a public area, and just begin preaching. There are, just like anything else, both advantages and disadvantages to traditional evangelism methods. The first advantage is that people waste no time. The attention of the hearer is caught, and there can be a clear pathway to the Gospel. There is also the aspect that once in a conversation, most people will not (or cannot) abruptly leave. Once a conversation can be started, there is not turning back. Traditional Gospel communication is direct. People who are being evangelized to, also hopefully get to see an example of Christ right in front of them. Those people get to encounter someone who acts and lives like Christ. Though not perfectly, everything is on display. From the good, the bad, and the repentance, everything is seen. As relationships are built, people also get to make new friends or deepen current friendships.

Traditional Gospel communication has its disadvantages though. First, we live in a post-Christian world and country. Many people flat out reject any conversation with strangers. Also, due to technology people can easily signal their unwillingness to talk through having headphones on or in their ears. Of course, that is the least of the worst that can happen. Many people also look to argue or to make a scene. It may not happen often, but the convictions of the Gospel, or past Christians misrepresenting Jesus to them could cause anger or hurt related to the subject. People who have experienced some form of hurt can be hostile. Lastly, a disadvantage is that it traditional Gospel communication has to be executed with caution and certain procedures to keep

a mission organization safe or still in the country. There can be restrictions in place that can make Gospel communication slightly complicated.

With the new digital age in full steam, there is access to Gospel communication methods that people have never seen before. People can be trained in a whole new way, using social media to communicate the Gospel, to reach people, to attract people to spiritual or even just deeper conversations too. Due to these advancements and the culture of our world being right on top of it, Christians can use social media to reach people outside their country and culture, at any point too. Digital strategies unlock a whole new level of evangelism and engagement. People and organizations can share the Gospel at a higher rate than we were before with strictly traditional methods. While purchasing tracts or organizing mission trips may be expensive, creating response questions online, or posting content to reach people has found to be cheap. These are simple things that just require training on how to do it, and people go from there.

There is one massive downside, though. Just because people can be reached across the world anytime, or multiple people can be reached at once, most times it ends there. This can create a lack of development in personal relationships, follow-ups, and discipleship relationships. Seeing people place their faith in Christ is amazing. But we do not work to increase numbers, we work to increase disciples. The making disciples part can be wildly missed in digital strategies. The natural boundaries as well can create a lack of sense of community, especially if it is responses coming from hours away. Those doing the outreach are naturally limited in helping create community for this person(s) and plugging them into good, healthy churches.

Both the traditional and digital methods have great upsides to them, while presenting plenty of challenges. Traditional seems to be more effective when the standard in Matthew

28:18-20 is clearly to make disciples. In-person evangelism can create for clear communication and relationships, as well as solid expectations. Both are great, and contribute to advancing the Kingdom of God, which should not be halted just because it may be more challenging long-term. Both require for the communicators to be strategic, loving, and Christ-like.

## References

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