

## ***How To Disciple an Immature Evangelist (APEST Series)***

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Have you ever noticed that some people seem to be wired up to *make connections and meet new people*? They're always growing their relational networks and can't help but rally people to causes they believe in. They are naturally relational, often extroverted and happy a lot of the time. They typically enjoy spending their time with people who are far from faith or marginalized in some way.

These are people the Bible calls **evangelists**, and they're great! But they can also be "all over the place" in terms of what they think God is calling them to, especially if they're *immature* in their gifting. It's important for us as leaders to be able to recognize the immature evangelists among us, and disciple them to maturity so they can fulfill their ministry in the Body of Christ. But discipling an evangelist is a lot different than discipling someone gifted in another way, so let's talk about the unique challenges and opportunities of discipling immature evangelists.

### ***Five gifts for the church***

The way I'm using the word "evangelist" comes from the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:11-13, where he is laying out five different gifts that God gives his church. These gifts are actually *people* that God has gifted and then given to the church to build it up and bring it to maturity and unity. (This is sometimes called **APEST** – Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, Teachers. Search "Alan Hirsch APEST" for more.)

Paul's assumption is that the church needs to grow into the fullness of her identity in Christ, and that these five gifts are crucial to that happening. In other words, we *need* evangelists in our churches if we're going to grow into maturity. The problem is that mature evangelists don't grow on trees. Evangelists normally come to our churches immature, in need of encouragement and shaping. How can we do this faithfully and effectively?

### ***You might be an evangelist if...***

Before we talk about *immature* evangelists, let's talk about evangelists in general. How are they Christ's gift to the church? The word "evangelist" comes from the Greek *euangelion*, which refers to an announcement of good news, specifically the good news that a new king has been crowned. The early church appropriated this political term because it encapsulated the heart of their life and message: "Jesus is Lord!"

Evangelists, then, are **those who proclaim good news**. They are the people who can't help but talk about whatever is getting their attention at the moment. If they find a great new restaurant, they tell everyone about it. They love telling people about whatever they are fascinated with and interested in. And here's something to note: not all evangelists are "Billy Grahams." Most, in fact, are not preachers at all.

### **Here are some signs of evangelists in general:**

- They are connectors; they enjoy introducing people to each other, especially for strategic partnerships.
- They often have large networks of relationships, both personally and professionally.
- They are naturally relational, often extroverted and happy a lot of the time.
- They typically enjoy spending their time with people who are far from faith or marginalized in some way.
- They remind the church that there are still non-Christians out there and urge us to do something about it!
- They are often natural salespeople with very keen “people skills.”
- They can’t help but rally people to causes they believe in.

But evangelists need to grow from immaturity to maturity, just like all of us. Their greatest strength is also their greatest weakness.

### ***Here are some signs of an immature evangelist:***

- In their excitement to make connections and meet new people, they can neglect depth in their relationships and end up with a thousand shallow friendships.
- They allow their concern to “reach the lost” to push them into bitterness toward “church people.”
- They devalue discipleship and transformation in favor of the excitement of getting new people involved.
- They flit from relationship to relationship, spending time with whoever seems most exciting, instead of staying with a person of peace.
- They can be a mile wide and an inch deep spiritually because they have trouble engaging in spiritual disciplines that require endurance and patience.
- It’s easy for them to “neglect meeting together” because what we do “in church” never quite feels as exciting or important as hanging out with their non-Christian friends.

Does any of this remind you of anyone? Maybe you’ve got an immature evangelist in your church. Maybe you notice these characteristics in yourself? I’m convinced that every church needs an evangelist on board (especially if it’s a church plant!) because a lot of what needs to happen is just “getting the word out” that something’s happening!

As a prophet myself, I find getting the word out about our church difficult and embarrassing. So it’s tempting for me to *use* immature evangelists to do the work I find difficult. It’s also tempting for me to *reject* immature evangelists when they complain that we’re not “getting outside the church walls” enough. But instead of using them or rejecting them, we learn to disciple them. This is our call.

### ***How do we disciple the immature evangelists in our churches?***

In some ways, what evangelists need to grow in discipleship is the same thing that everyone needs: **an abundance of both grace and truth**. We calibrate grace in discipleship by offering connection and compassion in an authentic relationship. We calibrate truth in discipleship by holding *reality* in front of

others non-anxiously. This calibration looks different for an evangelist than it does for a shepherd or apostle. The grace and truth they need takes on a certain shape.

### ***Here are a few notes on bringing grace to an evangelist:***

- **Listen to their insights** about how your church “comes across” to non-Christians.
- **Legitimize their ministry** outside the walls of the church and empower them to connect with non-Christians.
- **Ask them to tell stories** of evangelism encounters during church gatherings.
- **Take their distaste for “church stuff” in stride.** It’s not personal, and they’ll need a safe place to vent when they’re frustrated. You want to be that place.
- **Draw out their unconscious competence,** connect them with people, and invite them to help train others in evangelism.
- **Make sure they know they are valued apart from their gifting**—that they don’t *need* to bring new people to church to be valued in the community.
- **Offering truth to an immature evangelist**

### ***Here are a few notes on bringing truth to an immature evangelist:***

- **Evangelists need to embrace spiritual depth,** but it’s very difficult for them to invest the time and energy necessary to cultivate it. Help them understand that it will make them a far more effective evangelist if they become mature.
- **Encourage them to bring others with them** when they’re out “doing their thing,” so they can train others in what feels natural to them.
- Evangelists tend to win people to Jesus but then “drop” them after they’re “in.” **Insist that they invest in discipling the people they bring to Jesus.**
- Evangelists tend to be “all over the place” in terms of what they think God is calling them to. **Hold them accountable to *follow through*** on the last thing they think God said.
- A mature evangelist is a wonderful gift for a church to have. But they don’t just fall into your lap magically. Churches often have to disciple their team into maturity before they can lean on their team to disciple others into maturity.