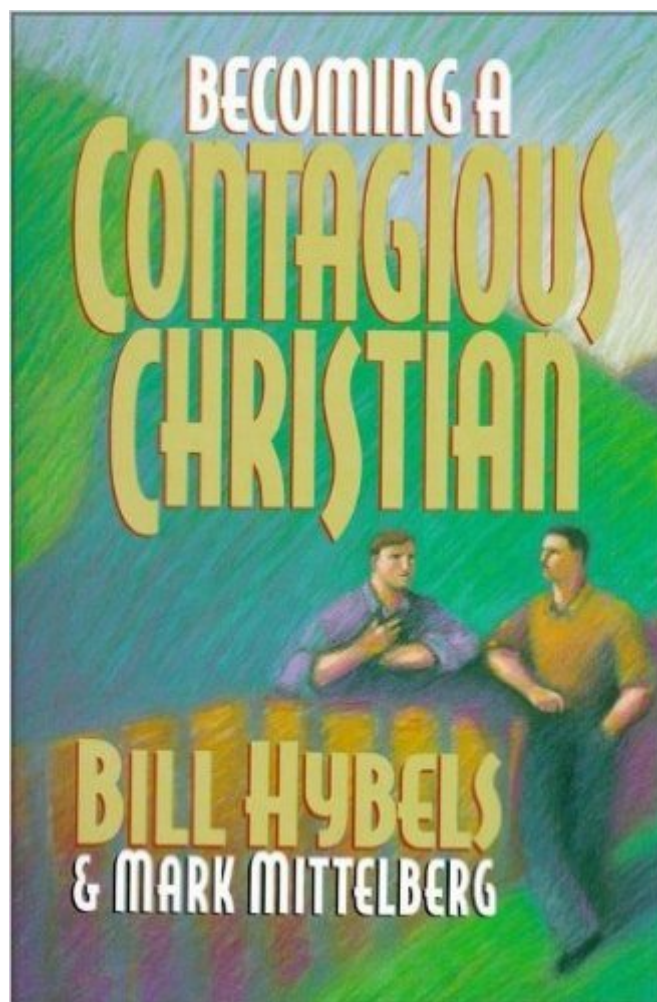


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Becoming A Contagious Christian



Synopsis

What is it about verbalizing our faith that leaves our knees knocking and our tongues tied? We know it's the most significant thing we can do and that sharing it is the most important gift we could ever give to a friend. Yet evangelism remains one of the most frustrating parts of the Christian life. Until now. Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg believe that it doesn't have to be that way; effectively communicating our faith in Jesus Christ should be the most natural thing in the world. What we need, however, is encouragement and direction. In *Becoming a Contagious Christian* Hybels and Mittelberg offer a practical plan of action for touching the lives of friends, family members, and others, illustrated with powerful, real-life stories. Their emphasis is clear: be yourself in Christ, find a style that works for you. Hybels and Mittelberg use simple, straightforward language and diverse biblical characters such as Paul, Dorcas, and the Samaritan woman to encourage us with the good news that God knew what he was doing when he made each of us. As a result, all of us can impact our world for Christ. It is an approach the authors have seen work again and again at Willow Creek Community Church. They articulate the important principles that have helped the believers at Willow Creek become a church of "contagious Christians," a church known around the world for its outstanding and effective outreach to the unchurched. *Becoming a Contagious Christian* may well be one of the most important contributions to relational evangelism in decades. It presents a blueprint for starting a spiritual epidemic of hope and enthusiasm for spreading the Gospel of Christ.

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Customer Reviews

This book really contributed to the seeker friendly evangelism and worship craze that is still prevalent in many megachurches in America. Thousands of church leaders have attended leadership conferences at Willow Creek designed to equip churches to reach out to secular people relevantly. While there are several problems I have with the Hybels approach in this book, in the end, I think more good than bad has come from the methodology and mentality proposed here, and hence, I'm giving the book a cautious 4 star rating. Someone looking for an academic theology of evangelism will probably not be satisfied with this book. The book is heavily weighted toward practical application and personal empowerment, and this is quite deliberate. The Hybels model stresses individual evangelism both in daily living, and even within the institutional church. The Hybels model, as I've seen it practiced, can turn the entire church top to bottom into an evangelistic enterprise, with lay leaders and volunteers in the church doing most of the heavy lifting. This model naturally tends to work best within the context of churches that shun an extensive ecclesiastical hierarchy, and instead have a pastoral staff that believes in and even welcomes change, adaptability, and flexibility. This intense emphasis on preaching and ministry that are ultimately evangelistic in nature has resulted in astounding church growth in more than a few churches, and in this respect, the Hybels model is to be applauded. But it also comes with dangers as I will discuss below. This book is loaded with practical application that Christians can almost immediately put into practice. In addition, the book offers helpful tips on sharing your faith in succinct and compelling ways, and really hammers home the theme of 'authenticity' and evangelism as a process, rather than the gospel raid approach that presses immediately for a decision and commitment to Christ without doing much of what is needed to truly resemble authentic and caring evangelism. These contributions are welcome and are things that evangelicals of all theological stripes should pay attention to and generally adopt. Hybels calls for flexibility in evangelism that is person and even situation specific, and while this might rub some people the wrong way, I do think a good case can be made that effective evangelism cannot be reduced to a standardized approach that refuses to interact with the uniqueness of each person we encounter. Now for the bad stuff. Tops on this list is Hybels egregious paraphrasing of Scripture throughout much of the book. Hybels is blatantly guilty in here of recasting and rewording the Bible to make it fit the points he wants to make. I have long said that the tendency of evangelical preachers to minimize the importance of the actual words in Scripture through reworded paraphrases that may or may not be Biblically faithful is a direct assault on the notion that the Bible was divinely inspired not just in the ideas presented, but in the words used to express those ideas. It is impossible for me to understand how Hybels could so thoroughly engage in this practice if he affirms verbal plenary level inspiration. Either he doesn't affirm this,

which is a big problem, or he does and he doesn't take it seriously, which is also a big problem. Either way, the reader should be extremely discerning when Hybels makes his arguments from Scripture by rewording what the Bible says so radically, and also speculating on what the Bible does not say and then uses these speculations as an integral part of his argument. Bad theology, bad hermeneutics, bad teaching. The other major problem is the fact that Hybels, more than once, seems to imply that evangelism is at root, an activity powered more by human effort than the power of the Holy Spirit. Any book on evangelism that talks in great length about human action while giving the power of the Holy Spirit a passing nod is one that employs a theology that severely flirts with work-based religion. This is particularly dubious in Hybels' case since in his gospel summary section, he states (very correctly) that religion is about what people do to try to gain God's favor, while Christianity is about what God has already done that we could not do. In my view, what Hybels gets right here, he gets wrong throughout most of the rest of the book. So it is a mixed bag, but as I stated at the beginning, because the book deals heavily with application, and since many of his application points are valid and very good, the book is more good than bad. However, I would strongly urge the reader to employ a heavy dose of discernment when reading this.

In their book *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg state their goal as providing "practical steps toward becoming an effective carrier of God's life changing message". I believe that the book is a success as it is an action plan for impacting the spiritual lives of your family, family members, friends, co-workers and basically everyone you might meet. I particularly felt a confidence from the authors concerning the ability of average lay people to share their faith in meaningful ways. The authors use an interesting formula to emphasize what we must do and how to go about it: $HP + CP + CC = MI$. Their basic premise is that the combination of High Potency in the form of a contagious Christian, Close Proximity brought about by being intimate with those around us, and Clear Communication of the Gospel message are the formula for Maximum Impact and leading a seeker to have faith in Jesus Christ. In order to emphasize the need for evangelistic activity, the authors begin by discussing what it means to be "salt" and "light". This requires a close examination of our own commitment toward being compassion to all of God's children. According to the authors, love must motivate us to share our faith and compassion creates compassion. The authors also challenge the reader to have an authentic witness which is representative of one's own life and to be sacrificial in our approach toward others. I was particularly impressed by the authors' discussion concerning sharing biblical truths in everyday situations. Central to the authors' message is the need to be clear in communicating the Gospel as grounded in God, Christ, Us, and our

individual need for salvation. No one approach can work in all situations and I felt that Hybels and Mittelberg did a good job of outlining several different approaches that can be used. I did find the book somewhat over optimistic on dealing with rejection or difficult situations, leaving the reader with very little guidance on how to approach those circumstances. However, the authors acknowledge that any one person may only play a small part in the evangelistic activity in another's life. I found helpful the various stories which Hybels and Mittelberg use to illustrate different points of their evangelistic plan. I particularly enjoyed the story concerning Bill's friend Tom that was woven throughout the entire book. The authors also effectively used Scriptural references to bring home various points. The reader is encouraged to discover their own natural style of communicating their faith, using their own experiences as a basis for sharing. Hybels and Mittelberg have documented excellent ways to direct conversations to spiritual matters, overcoming the most difficult part of starting an evangelistic conversation. Hybels and Mittelberg have suggested that evangelism is an achievable goal for all Christians. Their challenge is to share the Gospel in and through our everyday lives. As the authors state, "There's no adventure like it, and no other activity that even comes close to offering the same level of reward".

After I read the first three chapters of this incredible book, I rang the Christian book store where I bought it here in England, and told them I would buy the other six copies they had in stock! I gave these to my wife, to a couple church leaders, and a couple of the "less motivated" church members. They also captured the easily picked up insights about relationship building as a worthy way to assist the Holy Spirit in opening hearts, ears and minds to the saving love of Jesus Christ. The methods are not difficult to understand or to apply. The principles in this book are what the churches in England, Wales, Scotland, and all of Ireland need to put into practice. Your life, whether you are a Christian (yet) or not, will be positively affected by this book. I cannot praise it highly enough!

Ignore the nay-sayers, this is a wonderful book. It's not perfect, and you might not agree with everything in there, but I'm 100% sure you'll find something of some help in this book. It's short, cheap and easy to read. Want some tips on sharing the gospel? Find that the "direct approach" doesn't seem to work for you? Try this book on for size.

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