

## **EVANGELISM AND THE CHRONOLOGICALLY GIFTED**

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Some Christians think that when they reach retirement age, they no longer have any responsibilities in God's kingdom. They are especially unlikely to be involved in evangelism because most of the people they know are about their age. They assume that these people decided long ago what to believe about Christ and the church. These Christians who have retired from labor in the Lord's harvest field have concluded that their friends would not be receptive to evangelism. There is, however, some reason to doubt the validity of that assumption.

Research that I did for my doctoral dissertation on "Persuasion in Religious Conversion" found that the more change people had experienced recently in their life situation the more likely they were to be receptive to evangelism. With the help of many other preachers, we interviewed a large number of people who had recently become Christians and were still responsible members of the church. We also interviewed others who had recently become Christians, but who had already left the church. Finally we interview people who had been in an evangelistic Bible study, but who had decided not to become Christians. I was looking for significant differences between those who showed that they were receptive to evangelism (the faithful converts) and those who were not (the drop-outs and non-converts).

In the interviews, we showed people a list developed by a cardiologist, Dr. Thomas H. Holmes and his colleagues. It was a stress scale listing various changes in life situation with a numerical value assigned to each. Holmes' theory was that patients who accumulated 300 or more stress points in a year would be more likely to suffer a heart attack. My interests, of course, were just in studying the influence of life changes on receptivity to evangelism. This stress scale is reproduced below.

<b><u>Changes in Life Situation</u></b>	<b><u>Stress Points</u></b>
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Death of a close family member	63
Marriage	50
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Gain of a new family member	39
Change in financial status	38
Change in work responsibility	29
Son or daughter growing up and leaving home	26
Wife beginning or stopping work	26
Beginning or end of school	26
Change in residence	20

Many of these changes take place in adolescence and early adulthood. That is a time in life when most of the people who ever become Christians make that decision. But look at those life changes again. Many of them happen later in life. What this means is that some of the people our age would likely be receptive to evangelism if we would just share the gospel message with them.

I am not suggesting that every Christian should be involved in what some have called the role of the “soul winner,” i.e., the Christian who does the teaching and persuasion that brings others to the point of conversion. I do believe, however, that every Christian should be involved in what some have called the role of the “witness.” If you knew enough to become a Christian, you already know enough to tell someone else why you did what you did. That may not be enough to bring others to the point of conversion, but it may take them one step in that direction. After making the initial contact with a non-Christian and having a conversation about Christ, you may need to get them to study with someone else who can take them up the next step. But the whole church should be involved. That includes those of us who are older.

One older Christian who was confined to bed graded World Bible School lessons and corresponded with students. Could you do that? I have heard that world-wide more people have been lead to Christ through World Bible School in recent years than through all other methods of evangelism combined. Another older member baked bread that she gave to newcomers in the community along with an invitation to attend church services. A Mormon researcher told me that they are making one convert for every 3,000 doors that their young “elders” knock on, but they are making one convert for ever two people they have into their homes for a meal. Could you do that? It does not always have to be a full meal. Just use your gift of hospitality to host a Bible study in your home. Someone else can lead the study, but you can use your home for evangelism. Use your imagination. There are many other ways in which you can be involved in leading others to Christ.

Don't give up just because you are now among the chronologically gifted.