



“*E-Team E-Zine*”

*Encouragement and Equipping for
Evangelism That Extends the Kingdom*

“*Evangelism Outside the Box*”

New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News

A Great Book by Rick Richardson, Intervarsity Press

October 21, 2002

It seems to be a universal axiom of ministry...find something that works, and formulate it into a nice, ordered, comfortable box. Then, market it for use in every conceivable ministry setting and train lots of people so they can use it “out of the box,” too. Finally, long after the approach has stopped working, continue promoting it as *the* box everyone should use ministry.

It’s a common story, and a frustrating one for leaders who long to be effective in telling the old, old story in up-to-date ways. Rick Richardson has experienced that frustration first hand when it comes to the ministry of evangelism, especially in the context of a culture that has made a dramatic shift into postmodernism. When he retells how he saw great fruitfulness using historical evidence and a linear, reasoned approach to sharing the gospel in a modern context, I saw the “box” that has worked well for the past several decades. When he told the story of trying to use that “box” with a man who wouldn’t even acknowledge that anything in Rick’s box was even worthy of consideration, I shared his sense of desperation. I found myself asking along with him, “what am I going to do now...if the rules have all changed and we have no more common ground to share Christ with people, how are we going to reach them?”

My box doesn’t work anymore.”

Using those personal stories, Richardson powerfully frames the need for evangelism to get outside our old, well-used boxes and think about communicating Christ in new ways. He does a great job of analyzing how postmodernism is forcing us to rethink ministry philosophy and practice. He reaches back into Christian history to the ministry of John Wesley, and gleans from Wesley’s ministry the principles that he believes will reach postmoderns. He summarizes the principles in this way on page 61:

- **Build *friendships* and pray.**
- **Hold *soul-awakening* events.**
- **Draw pre-Christians into seeking *community*.**
- **Challenge pre-Christians to *conversion*.**
- **Help new Christians into *transformation*.**

Richardson spends the rest of his book expanding on these key principles. He speaks from his normal ministry environment—college campus ministry as part of Intervarsity Fellowship—but his ideas can be adapted well in many ministry settings. He ends each chapter with good discussion questions, especially integrating each concept into a Scriptural framework.

Perhaps the most interesting, useful and concise part of the book is Richardson’s “new box” way of communicating the Gospel, keeping the heart of the Good News but helping people connect on a relational, personal level instead of a rational, historical one. The “Circle of Belonging” idea helps us approach people from common ground we’ve not tread on a great deal in our gospel sharing, especially when part of a relational, incarnational process.

I also appreciated Richardson’s “G*I*G” (Groups Investigating God) ideas, especially pointing people to “see” Jesus through the stories of Scripture. His “take-it-slow-how-do-you-see-things-let’s-learn-together” way of letting Scripture speak for itself is a good blend of being informal and yet very intentional.

So...our ministry environment has changed, and it requires that we change how we do our ministry. Richardson’s book gives some outstanding ways to look at and do ministry. In time it will become another “box” that will no longer work effectively, but for now, this is one “box” we’d do well to open up and use what inside.

Oh...make sure to keep the lid open on this “box” and all your ministry “boxes.” That way the Holy Spirit can drop new things in anytime and anywhere He wants...and that’s what makes ministry most effective in the long run.

Next edition: “Another Great Coaching Strategy”



As always, please feel free to pass along editions of these “E-Team E-zines” to others. If you’d like to have people added to this mailing list, contact me. If you have insights, feedback or questions, I’m glad to hear them. God’s best to you!