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foreword

When Christians learn that only 10 percent of believers have the spiritual gift of evangelism, many breathe a huge sigh of relief. They are “off the hook,” to use a fishing metaphor. I don’t think so! We are all in the fishing business (see Mark 1:17). Like the Twelve we are called to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). All of the spiritual gifts—from administration to compassion, from giving to teaching—can be used in the service of that Great Commission.

Beyond our Spirit-given qualities, we each hold another unique gift—our life experience. Far more effective than rote-memorized Bible verses and scripted responses to seekers’ questions is our individual story about our life of faith and experience with God. Such a story is a testimony that cannot be refuted.

Moreover, long before any of us discovered our spiritual gifts or experienced much of life at all, we received another gift from God: our personality. Those who study personality types believe that these personality preferences are hard-wired at birth, and the psalmist wrote that it was God who knit us together in our mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13). It is our God-given personality that largely determines how we communicate with and relate to one another in community. The good news is that people of all personality types can be effective evangelists, each in his or her own distinctive style. This is the heart of Jeffrey Johnson’s *Got Style? Personality-based Evangelism*.

God weaves together the Spirit’s gifts, our life experiences, and our innate personality to prepare us uniquely and individually to share the Good News with our neighbors and with the next generation of disciples. Our “style” of communicating will be different

from believer to believer but, according to Johnson, all can be powerfully and profoundly transforming in the lives of our family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Whether we operate primarily in a words-based style of the assertive, analytic, or storytelling personality or through the works-based style of the relational, invitational, or incarnational personality, we are uniquely qualified and equipped by God to communicate the gospel in relationship with our world.

Our Trinitarian theology teaches us that the very nature of God is the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When Jesus envisioned the church he linked relationship to evangelism (John 17:21). It was relationships that defined the early church in Acts. It was difficulty with relationships that caused problems for Paul's churches. No wonder, then, that our natural style of communicating, of forming relationships, prepares us for a faith-sharing encounter with someone who does not yet have a relationship with God.

Yes, there are those with an extraordinary gift for communicating the gospel across cultures, languages, interests, and personalities. But we who are average fisherfolk may have confidence in the gifts we possess—that the Lord will provide opportunities for us to share our own stories in our own ways. And where the connection seems broken or garbled, we may trust the Holy Spirit to do the work of translation—just as effectively as the people experienced at Pentecost. “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Isaiah 52:7) is not just encouragement for professional clergy, vocational evangelists, and missionaries, but for all us who communicate “what comes naturally” and discover that we've Got Style.

—David C. Laubach, MDiv, DMin
Associate Executive Director
Strategic Missional Relations
National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA

preface

Jeff Johnson's book, *Got Style? Personality-based Evangelism*, is a perfect fit for my West Coast culture, which a Lutheran scholar termed "The None Zone." It is a culture where polite society prefers none of the traditional religious options. It is a zone where Jesus might be good news, but the church of Jesus connotes bad news for so many. In this practical and conversational resource, Johnson blends the high touch for this high-tech culture by letting our personal witness emerge from our own individually unique wiring. It is an approach that is exactly right for this postmodern generation and a None Zone context.

Johnson's blend of strong biblical studies with contemporary illustrations, together with an amazing array of practical tools and recommended resource, combine to make *Got Style?* the book on evangelism that I will recommend in my church and for my school.

—Ray Bakke

Chancellor and professor

Bakke Graduate University

Former pastor and professor of evangelism and mission

Northern and Eastern Baptist Theological Seminaries

Senior Associate for Large Cities

The Lausanne Committee for

World Evangelization (1980–2000)

introduction for leaders

This book contains precepts and principles that I have learned and lived during nearly twenty years of local-church ministry as both a solo and a senior pastor. However, if you had gone looking for these concepts back in my earliest years in ministry, you might have had a hard time finding them in any coherent form. I was never able to formalize them as I share them with you now, not until 2001 when I became director of evangelism for the American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) under the auspices of our Board of National Ministries, the arm of ABCUSA that works in the United States and Puerto Rico. I was afforded the precious gift of time to systemize my concepts and to read a great deal more on the subject of personality-based evangelism in particular and on ministry in general. I believe that what I share in this book has application across the spectrum of folks in your church as well as across the spectrum of ministry in your congregation.

Let me say from the outset, I am not the originator of many of the concepts of personality-based evangelism. I am really not sure who is. As I've been reminded by Scripture (Ecclesiastes 1:9) and by my colleague David Laubach, nothing is entirely new. Everything is recycled by rewording. This book is an offering of new perspectives and a linking of old ideas in new ways to meet the new challenges that face us.

Hippocrates, originator of the great oath taken by physicians, introduced basic personality concepts some three hundred years before Christ, but those concepts were not intended to be linked with evangelism. Some two hundred years after Christ, another doctor, Galen, created a detailed list of strengths and weaknesses based on

Hippocrates' concepts. Like Hippocrates, Galen did not observe these traits in terms of religion. Therefore, what I do here is more the work of a refiner. These general ideas have been "out there" in some form for centuries and more.

One of our American Baptist regional executive ministers told me he had taught some of this in the 1970s and early 80s in one of our ABC-related schools (when I was still a kid). Jard DeVille, who early on contributed to the area of evangelism based on personality, began in 1980 to advocate for an understanding of the link between personality and evangelism, using an elementary form with just four styles. Further, Duncan McIntosh said, "Evangelism has been used to describe quite a range of activities and styles of communicating the Good News."¹ More recently, these concepts became familiar to many when several groups, including the Evangelical Covenant denomination led by Lon Allison and the Willowcreek Church and Association led by Mark Mittelberg, formulated their ideas and put them into print. Others continue to probe and shape these ideas, and I will add my insights and experiences here.

This book is an attempt to bring together and refine the various evangelistic programs, methods, and curriculums into an understandable and applicable format, by categorizing them in order to complement specific personality styles. In the end, however, we all are seeking a renewed vision of God's heart, for while we are always trying to find better methods to share our faith, God is looking for better people.²

The premier book on the subject in recent history is *Tell It with Style: Evangelism for Every Personality Type* by Helen Boursier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995). She based her work on the four basic personality styles included here and provided insights into the personalities from the perspectives of both the giver and receiver of communication. Though Helen's book is out of print, it is well worth reading. What follows is, in part, a tribute to

her work, but I will provide a newer look at the subject and offer greater diversity and definition.

We live in a time where changes occur exponentially every year in every area of lives. For example,

1. Every two or three years, the knowledge base doubles.
2. Every day, seven thousand scientific and technical articles are published.
3. Satellites orbiting the globe send enough data to fill nineteen million volumes in the Library of Congress—every two weeks.
4. Today's high school graduates have been exposed to more information than their grandparents were in their entire lifetimes.
5. There will be as much change in the next three decades as there was in the last three centuries.³

The ways in which we engage with the world as messengers of the Good News must take into account our rapidly changing world, and it is clear that in our times, evangelism cannot occur in a vacuum or as something external to ourselves. The assessment of personality-based styles among a congregation's membership is actually just one component of aligning or realigning the congregation toward mission and outreach through styles-based evangelism, although it is the crucial and critical component. As tempting as it might be to jump right into the styles, we must keep in mind that styles are a part of a broader framework, the component steps of which are summarized below. Evangelism should occur naturally and normally as a part of health and spiritual vitality, individually and congregationally.

Seven Steps of Personality-Based Styles Outreach and Implementation

1. Discernment and Discovery among leadership
2. Vision casting
3. Prayer and hospitality training among congregation

4. Personality styles—evaluation, education, and explanation
5. Personality styles—styles specific training
6. Personality styles—styles organic training
7. Follow-up and discipleship

This book focuses primarily on step four with some input for training in step five. For a fuller explanation of these steps, see Appendix 1.

Personality-based evangelism affirms the diversity of God’s creativity as seen in the Body of Christ. There is a place for everyone at the evangelistic table, where people can share their faith in ways that complement and do not compete with their inherent, divine wiring. Personality-based evangelism also acknowledges the diversity of the population outside the church and so presents the gospel in style-specific ways—literally speaking, the languages of their personalities. This book is an effort to address both of these realities.

NOTES

1. Duncan McIntosh, *The Everyday Evangelist*, Laura Alden, ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1984), 8.
2. William Carr Peel and Walter Larimore, MD, *Going Public with Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 196.
3. *Leadership and Technology*, National School Boards Association’s Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education, <http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/chnsoc.html>.