

Red-zone evangelism scores strategic touchdowns for God's Kingdom

By Patti Townley-Covert

RANCHO CUCAMONGA — Turkey and pumpkin pie. Relatives and laughter. Television and football—lots of football. Whether at Thanksgiving or on an ordinary weekend, when a favorite team moves the ball into the red zone, fans across the country leap to their feet to cheer them on. That's because once a team gets inside their opponents' 20-yard line, there's the greatest possibility of carrying the ball the rest of the way.

Kent Tucker, the president and founder of "How to Share Your Faith," sees many similarities between football and evangelism. Recently, on his way to speak at a Filipino church in New Jersey, he found himself in a spiritual red zone when he sat beside a doctor and a scientist on the airplane. After initial introductions, the two friends asked Tucker his occupation and Christianity came up.

Seeing a providential opening, Tucker described how he began moving the evangelistic ball down the field. "If you died," he asked, "would you go to heaven?" The middle-aged men thought so and explained how they had lived good lives performing good works.

After more conversation and fielding a few questions, Tucker said he took out a pen and paper and drew a simple diagram—two cliffs, with the deep gorge of death between them; man stood

on one side, God on the other.

Ever since he was an athlete at the University of California, Los Angeles and became involved with Campus Crusade, Tucker said he's shared his faith with others.

"My major at UCLA was mathematics, but by the time I graduated the most exciting thing in my life was talking about Jesus Christ and seeing lives change," he said. "I sensed God's calling to do that full time."

Tucker said he went on to Dallas Theological Seminary for a Masters of Theology, then to Fuller Theological Seminary for a Doctorate in Ministry. Eventually he became a senior pastor, but when an associate pastor position at Hillside Community Church in Rancho Cucamonga gave him the opportunity to coach believers on how to share their faith, he decided to go for it.

During that time, Tucker said, he discovered that most methods don't result in spiritual conversions.

"We had been giving too much information," he said.

Finding effective tools

Too many tools didn't build the necessary competence and confidence of one strategic approach.

As Hillside's pastor of evangelism, Tucker said he started conducting evangelism training seminars and campaigns throughout the country. The imagery of "red-zone evangelism became a frame of reference or metaphor for



PHOTO BY PATTI TOWNLEY-COVERT

Participants prepare to role play, a key feature of "How to Share Your Faith" trainings.

explaining who we're targeting. We're training believers to lead seekers who are in the red zone of their spiritual journey across the line of faith."

According to Tucker, the Bridge diagram, originally developed by the Navigators, was so easy to draw, even on a napkin, that he requested and received permission to adapt this tool for his purposes.

"It's easy and non-threatening to ask the seeker where he sees himself on the diagram and if he'd like to cross over the bridge into a relationship with God," the evangelist said.

However, before getting to that point, seekers often have to travel a long spiritual journey, Tucker said. Objections, fears, hurts, bad experiences or anger need to be dealt with. When someone finally comes to a place where he senses that something is missing in his life, and wonders if Christ can help, he has entered the "red

zone" of his spiritual journey.

Crossing the goal line

During his flight with the doctor and scientist, Tucker said he knew it wasn't enough to just lead them down the playing field. So the evangelist nuanced them into the end zone.

Eventually the doctor said, "I just learned my mother is dying of cancer, and I don't know what to say to her."

Tucker described the steps to faith and suggested that the doctor couldn't impart what he didn't possess.

"You want to accept Christ yourself so you can turn around and have God helping you lead your mom to Christ," he explained to his fellow passenger.

The doctor agreed.

Then, according to Tucker, the scientist spoke up saying his best friend had recently died. The scientist explained how he

liked to put things into empirical evidence and analyze it but wondered how to do that with life after death. So Tucker explained God's promise of eternal life and forgiveness.

"I've been praying every day for the past six weeks saying 'God, I need you, Thank you for today, thank you for my friends, and I pray that you'd help me,'" the scientist responded. "Is that okay?"

Tucker used that opening to explain how the scientist could achieve greater intimacy with God by asking Christ into his life.

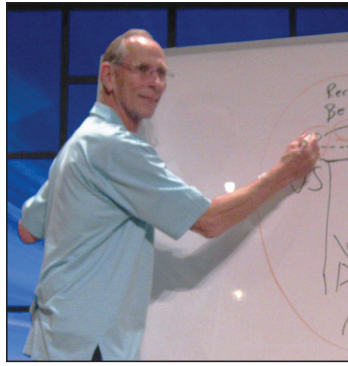


PHOTO BY PATTI TOWNLEY-COVERT

Dr. Kent Tucker diagrams the Bridge to Life at a recent "How to Share Your Faith" training held by Water of Life in Rancho Cucamonga.

Both men acknowledged their need for Jesus as Savior and Lord. To explain the significance of the prayer they prayed, Tucker said he reviewed the memorable ESPN acronym—an essential part of his evangelistic plan: "E stands for eternal life, s for sins forgiven, p for personal relationship and n for never leave."

Full-time focus

For the past two years Tucker has devoted himself full-time to "How to Share Your Faith," training believers through video curriculum, personal evangelism

conferences and workshops. His coaching is so effective, it is now being used by churches in 47 states and 13 foreign countries.

The red-zone strategy is available in Spanish and will soon be released in Tagalog. The need for a video series in that language was apparent when Tucker finally reached the Filipino church in New Jersey. While there, he heard one story after another about how his red-zone strategy has led to many spiritual conversions.

For more information see www.howtoshareyourfaith.com.