

Loosen Up and Reach Out

Paul was willing to be stretched ... so that he might win some for Christ.

Recently I was asked to speak at a conference and address the topic of “being relevant” to the needs of this generation. The more I thought about it, the more distracted I became. Relevant has become a buzzword, and buzzwords can be a nuisance because they draw our attention from the crux of an issue to the “buzz” surrounding it.

Being able to relate to people calls for more than having trendy clothes, hair and language. Whereas change, even on the surface, sometimes might be helpful, to be effective in our witness we must go deeper.

The apostle Paul’s words about this are classic. “To the weak I became weak, to win the weak,” he writes. “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I might share its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:22-23, NIV).

Keep this passage in mind while we take a look at what I call flashpoints—or what Webster calls points “at which someone bursts suddenly into action.” The following igniters will spark you “into action”—they’ll connect you with people outside your own social, cultural, ethnic, generational or religious sphere.

Pray for a desire. In reading through Paul’s letters it appears quite clear he was interested in reaching anyone and everyone with the gospel. Whether or not the people he reached were like him made no difference to him. Without a desire

propelling us to reach others, we may as well stop now. I have found that the Holy Spirit will cultivate a desire in us if we ask Him.

Refuse to fear. Do not be intimidated by the buzz of buzzwords—such as postmodern; Gen-X, -Y, -Z or -G (for Geriatric); Muslim, Jew, drug addict, culture; and so on. Remember, all of us have similar basic needs because we all were made the same—in the image of God.

Never forget the gospel is the power of God to all people (see Rom. 1:16) and that the power of the Holy Spirit can supercede our polished apologetics if necessary. Always refuse to allow fear to restrain you from reaching out to people you know nothing about.

Value what God values. This one's simple. It's all about people. More than ideals, philosophy or style, God values people. He wants none to perish. After all, God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son for the world (see John 3:16).

Loosen up. Ever heard, "Blessed are the flexible, for they won't get bent out of shape"? Paul was willing to stretch and be stretched—for the weak, for his fellow Jews, for religious people who strictly obeyed Moses' law—so that he might win some for Christ. He left us a good example.

Tommy Barnett, the great soul-winner who pastors Phoenix (Arizona) First Assembly of God, always says: "It's the message that's sacred, not the method." If we value what God values, then we should be willing to give of ourselves and to stretch and be stretched. I had to learn this truth after

growing up in a New Jersey neighborhood where everyone was Jewish, Catholic or religiously weird. When I moved to the Bible Belt, I had to learn to connect with people who grew up in church.

Stretching includes rethinking our way of communicating. I absolutely believe it is possible to be uncompromising yet relevant.

Get around people on their turf. Jesus said for us to “‘go into all the world'” (see Mark 16:15). To do this, we have to connect with people where they live—in their environment—and break out of the Christian bubble. Serving people and helping to meet evident needs they have can often build a bridge between you and them and will help you relate to someone who seems different from you.

Yes, some folks have gone to extremes in their stated attempt to “win some” to Christ—to the point of losing credibility as His witness. But my question is, Are you winning some? Any? Are you getting close to winning some?

If not, you should take some time to rethink the Great Commission.

Surely Jesus would never have given us that commandment if He knew we could not fulfill it.

So, come on, let's go tell someone—anyone—about Jesus.