

Reaping the Harvest

Most people learn about the love of Jesus from a friend. Here's how you can become an effective evangelist.

One of the greatest questions facing every member of the body of Christ today is this: "Can we really reach the world we live in with the message of Jesus Christ?" If your answer is yes, then the follow-up question is equally important: "How can we do it?" The best place to research these questions is the archives of the early church, which we call the book of Acts. Look at the following passage of Scripture:

"And he [Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:8-10, NKJV).

Whenever I read this passage, my mind shifts into overdrive, trying to process the idea that in a two-year period all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord. Wouldn't it be great if each of us could reach our entire towns or cities in just 24 months?

How did the disciples do this? Judging by all the communication tools we have at our disposal today, the early church was severely handicapped. After all, they had no television, radio, satellites, podcasts, Internet streaming, cell phones, printing press or even sound systems, yet still they accomplished the feat of blanketing an entire section of the known world with the gospel. It may sound almost unbelievable, but it is true!

Well then, what means did they have to minister "back in the

day”?

- Large mass meetings—for example, Jesus teaching the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5:1-2)
- Services in synagogues (see Acts 19:8)
- House-to-house visits (see Acts 20:20)
- One-on-one conversations (see Acts 8:4)

How much clearer can the disciples’ example be? The easiest and most effective means heaven has to reach the people in your world is the person who is reading this right now—*you!*

Surveys have shown that most people find faith in Jesus Christ through a friend, relative or acquaintance. Without a doubt, we must use every other means available to us to get the message out, including crusades, TV, witnessing programs, outreaches and so on. Yet it is time we “ramp up” our own individual witness in order to make a communitywide, regional and maybe even worldwide impact.

If you have read this far then I believe you have an interest in making a difference in your world. But before I go any further in teaching you how you can do that, you must make a decision about how you want to live your life.

You can choose for your life to be bland, boring and totally focused on the temporal stuff—situations, obligations, issues, personal needs and so on—even though you are a Christian; or you can choose to live your life as a mission, based on the mandate to bring the gospel to the whole world and make disciples.

If you choose the latter, then there are a few things you must commit to do:

Be available. You must allow the Word to become flesh through you. There is nothing spooky, mystical or weird about doing

this. You simply live life with your walk and your talk headed in the same direction.

Be normal. It's more attractive to an unbeliever for someone to become a Christian and remain "normal" than for him or her to morph into something pseudospiritual, religiously goofy and strangely disconnected from the reality of everyday life.

Be personal. An individual will more readily respond to your witness if he believes you are genuinely interested in him as a person and not simply as an evangelistic target.

Be ready and patient. There are times when we have not spent hours in prayer and study in direct preparation for a particular encounter, but God sends a person across our path, anyway. That is why we must "stay ready" to speak or act at a moment's notice when the opportunity presents itself.

Yet we must also be patient in working with the person, taking the time to lead him to a full encounter and ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ, even if he does not respond instantaneously.

Be kind. In addition, if we want our lives to be a witness for Christ, then we must be nice, kind, generous and servant-hearted people. Others want to be around a person like that. I know I do. A smile (there are too many frowns in most churches!), an outstretched hand and a breath mint go a long way in connecting with people for the sake of the gospel.

Incidentally, witnessing at work requires that you have a good work ethic and are a hardworking, faithful employee first and that you share a verbal testimony only secondarily, at an appropriate time. Your job performance and attitude may even create a platform for your testimony.

Be yourself. When you do begin to witness, be genuine, be real and be yourself. Pretenders, fakes and phonies will not experience much success.

But God does want to work through you. He intended for your life to count, and He has equipped you to do all that He's called you to. That's why the apostle Paul could declare, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

Be prepared for opposition. Remember that Satan is greatly opposed to your being used by the Holy Spirit to spread the life-transforming message of Jesus Christ to others. He will go to great lengths to hinder or stop you, utilizing tactics such as deception ("It's not my gift or call"), inadequacy ("I don't know what to say"), and fear ("I'm afraid of being offensive or concerned about what others might think"). Nevertheless, God has promised that "no weapon formed against you shall prosper" (Is. 54:17) and "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Be baptized in the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit as expressed in Acts 1:8 is to empower us to spread the gospel around the world. In fact, this gift is primarily for the fulfillment of the Great Commission, not simply spiritual manifestations.

Reaping the Harvest

Jesus said: "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35, NIV). Are you able to see the "fields" as ripe and ready for harvest? Difficult—even dark—times, whether on a personal or a national level, are some of the best times to reach out and touch people's lives with the message that really matters. God's people, whom Jesus calls the light of the world, should be most effective in dark times and places.

Can you see the possibility of people being reached by Christ? Can you envision the potential they might have in God's kingdom if they became believers? And can you see yourself as having a very real and practical part in the reaching process?

Are you able to imagine how harvesting might look in your sphere of influence? Can you see everyday encounters, conversations and even the most routine situations developing into divine opportunities to have an eternal impact on someone's life?

If you can, you're ready to begin reaping the harvest.

Jesus likened us to the natural elements of salt and light, and it's true that we are living and modeling the gospel message every day. But sooner or later something has to be said. A good, quiet life is just that—good and quiet—but it might not lead anyone to Christ.

Paul asked the believers in Rome some important questions: "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14, NKJV). In other words, something has to be said.

Otherwise, how will those we speak to know we represent Jesus? They might think we are nice quiet folks who are Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses or something entirely different than what we are—Christians who desire for them to meet and know the same Jesus we do.

Good lives and works (including expressing compassion and engaging in servant-type ministries) only pave the way for what we must do—give a verbal witness about Jesus Christ.

Outreaches that include Adopt-a-Block, Random Acts of Kindness and the like are great ways to build a bridge in a community through practical, helpful means. But after the bridge has been built, be sure to bring the people you are reaching out to across.

Our witness can be confrontational (though not rude and obnoxious), calling for an immediate decision to be made for Christ following a personal conversation or publicly delivered message. Or it can be more of a lifestyle- and relation-based

witness that often spans a period of time and includes a number of encounters and conversations.

When you want to engage in a “witnessing conversation,” here are a few steps to take:

Fish do not generally jump into the boat of their own accord. You will have to not only initiate a conversation but also turn it toward spiritual matters. Everyday events in our world often create an opportunity to share with others. If you pay a little bit of attention and continually look for the Lord to open a door, He usually will.

I often utter a simple prayer as I go about my day: “Lord, do we have any appointments today?” It is exciting to see what opportunities the Lord opens up in response.

If a person raises the subject of a negative situation, such as a war, disaster, politics, the economy and so on in my hearing, sometimes I’ll simply say (in a nonreligious, positive tone), “This is a good time to pray, isn’t it?”

If you say something similar to someone and the person is open to more conversation, take the dialogue even further. Allow your encounter to morph from “the natural” to “the spiritual.”

You may want to use a bit of your own life story or your testimony. This establishes a personal connection. Speak freely about what God has done for you and make the point that He can do the same for the person you are witnessing to.

It is important to remember that a person cannot be saved apart from Jesus Christ. Therefore, you must introduce Him by name and not refer to Him simply as “God.” After all, “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

You must also make the point that Jesus is unlike any other person who has ever lived because He is the Son of God. He

faced every temptation we will ever face and did not give in. This is why He could pay the price for the sins of all men of all ages—including you and me.

Tell the person that if he will not only acknowledge that Jesus did this for him personally but also ask Jesus to forgive him for all his sins, He will. The Bible says that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Encourage him to make the choice to turn away from his old life and allow the Holy Spirit to make him a new creature in Christ.

Never forget that your place in this world is to bring the message that really matters to people during a time when Jesus is so urgently needed. You can do it. Go into your world and begin reaping right now!

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