



50
GREAT
SOUL-WINNING
MOTIVATIONAL
SERMONS

FIFTY GREAT
SOUL-WINNING
MOTIVATIONAL SERMONS

Compiled by Jack R. Smith

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Compiling these sermons has brought an awareness of many other great writers of soul-winning motivational sermons who would have been willing to contribute sermons. Perhaps a second book, entitled *Fifty More Great Soul-Winning Motivational Sermons*, will be possible in the near future.

FOREWORD

The pulpit is central in creating a climate for evangelism in the church. The pastor's personal, intentional witness to the lost and his preaching to inspire the laity in witnessing are the keys to reaching the lost.

Every Christian has been given the assignment by our Lord to witness. Each church has an army for God led by its pastor and is capable of penetrating its community with the gospel. It is our prayer that the fire of God will fall on our churches to inspire every member to share Christ with the lost.

Fifty Great Soul-Winning Motivational Sermons will be an inspiration to the witnessing life of the reader. Pastors will find it an excellent resource for their preaching and equipping ministries.

Jack Smith is to be highly commended for his hard work and diligent efforts in compiling these sermons. May God bountifully use this book as an inspiration to reach multitudes for His glory.

Darrell Robinson
Home Mission Board, SBC
Atlanta, Georgia
1994

INTRODUCTION

One of my greatest challenges as a pastor was to motivate and encourage church members to share the gospel. My greatest joy was equipping and seeing church members lead lost people to know and follow Him. I was always in need of a fresh word from God to call them to commitment.

Some pastors are hesitant to use sermon material written by someone else. No pastor should apologize for doing so. The purpose of this book is to provide preachable sermons. All 50 writers hope that you will find their materials useful in the pulpit to the glory of God. I was tempted to ask that this book be titled Pastor, Please Preach These Sermons!

Church members desperately need to hear God's call to share the good news. I am convinced that there are multiplied thousands of Christians who would be active in making disciples if they heard clearly from their pastors about God's expectations of them in this regard.

As the compiler of this book, my own life has been greatly enriched by reading and arranging the sermons. In fact, I found that I could work with the sermons only a few hours at a time before feeling the need to leave my desk and go search for someone with whom to share the good news of Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that the same and more will happen to you.

Jack Smith
Home Mission Board, SBC
Atlanta, Georgia
1994

REVIVAL

Ron Barker

Acts 1–8

Recently I had breakfast with a well-known Southern Baptist evangelist. We talked about evangelism in the United States. The evangelist said, “We cannot reap a heart that has not been seeded.”

Yesterday I spent time with one of the Billy Graham Crusade team members, Tom Phillips. Tom said that the Billy Graham evangelistic organization would probably never conduct another evangelistic crusade in the South. I asked why. Phillips said it was because the generation of people in the South who don’t go to church are an “unseeded generation.”

Simply, the people who attend church are people who have been attending church for a long time. And to be honest, very few people attend church or simply come to a church because there is a church in a location, unless they are aggressively sought out and asked to come be part of a congregation. In fact, most of the time these people are not contacted at church; they are contacted somewhere else first and befriended. A relationship must be built before that person will even come to church. We have a whole generation of people whom the seed of the gospel message has not reached.

I have a burden on my heart. I believe that God ordained the church to reach people. I believe that the Lord ordained the church, the local body of believers, to reach lost people. It is very important that we understand how to do that and what it’s going to take to get it done and be challenged to do it.

Why do some churches grow and others don’t?

February 14, 1945, was the date of a massive bombing raid in Germany over an area called Dresden. It was launched by the Allied Forces. That particular area of Germany was still giving the Allied Forces problems, even though they had wiped out almost everything else. My daddy was part of that bombing raid. He was a tail gunner on a bomber plane Americans called the B-17. When Dad and his crew flew over Dresden, they dropped bombs. As they made the turn to come back, the anti-aircraft fire almost knocked them out of the air. It began pounding them to the point that, if they hadn’t done some things differently, they would have crashed. They got the plane under control, but they had to drop out of formation.

The navigator said, "Look, I can get us back. We have destroyed a lot of things here in Germany, and we can get back without getting shot at."

So they fanned the engines down and got low to the ground and started flying back over areas that were uncontested by now.

Daddy said, "Somewhere over the Belgium-Dutch border, the antiaircraft fire opened up again, and this time there was no hope. We all had to bail out."

So they ended up in enemy territory and made it back because of some British soldiers. Nevertheless, they were shot down.

Last spring my Daddy called me on the phone.

He said, "What have you been doing?"

I said, "I've been working, Daddy. I have been traveling, and I've been busy."

He said, "Well, just keep preaching." Then he said, "I had a reunion last week."

"Daddy, what kind of reunion was it?"

"My old bombing crew got together . . . what's left of them."

"What do guys 75 years old talk about?"

He said, "Well, 47 years ago we got shot down; that's what we talked about."

I said, "What did you discuss?"

He said, "Well, the pilot, the navigator, and I are the only ones left. The pilot and I wanted to know why the navigator didn't get us back without getting shot down."

They asked him that and he said, "For 47 years I haven't told anybody, but I plotted the wrong course."

I started thinking about that. Dad flew on this plane, one of the finest planes America ever made in terms of endurance. The planes had the finest machinery available. It was Dad's thirtieth mission when they flew over Dresden. Dad and his crew had been shot down previously and escaped. We are talking about sincere, professional people—men committed to survival. We are talking about people who were in sight of victory, people who knew they were going to win that war, people who had given their lives for it. But, when the wrong course was set—although unintentional—the result was that the plane was shot out of the air.

Let me tell you where Southern Baptists are. We have set a wrong course for accomplishing what God wants us to do. We have good intentions. We have the best machinery. We have more training and better methods to do Sunday School and witnessing and music than ever before in church history. But we are reaching fewer

people per capita than we have ever reached. It's amazing. Sincerity doesn't mean you will get the job done if you are on the wrong course. Let me help you take a look.

I. Understanding our purpose (Acts 1)

The early church got the job done. Let's look at the course of action—the principle used in the book of Acts. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the Gospel writers—end up at the same place: the Great Commission. Now, in Acts 1:8, we see that same Great Commission reiterated one more time. The disciples are asking questions of the Lord. He is getting ready to go back to the Father, and they say to Him, "We want to ask you something."

He says, in effect, "I don't think you understand what I am talking about."

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NIV).

He told them what would happen. Again, the Great Commission. He then goes back to be with the Father.

One more time, the Spirit of God inspires Luke to write down the Great Commission in one of the most important books in the New Testament, the book of Acts. The first principle in your and my doing what the Lord has told us to do as a church has to do with understanding our purpose—why we do what we do as a church. As I observe churches, I find different things determine purposes of churches. Some are not right, because the only thing that should determine what a church does and has as its priority is what the Lord told us to do when He left. We should be about the business of seeking out people who are lost, sharing the gospel with them, seeding every generation with the gospel, and doing every possible thing so the gospel can be harvested in the hearts of people. The New Testament church understood what its purpose was.

In churches today, other things drive people instead of God's purposes. Sometimes it is tradition. Tradition limits many churches. Nothing is wrong with tradition, unless it has outlived its usefulness. I am amazed that so many churches do things simply because that is what they have done before. What does that have to do with what God says? It doesn't have anything to do with what He says; it's just the way we do it. That will get us shot down week in and week out. If the only thing we can say about why we do something is that we have done it that way before, and if it is not doing what

God put us here for, we shouldn't do it anymore.

Some churches are driven by programs, but the only thing that is supposed to drive a church is reaching people. Personalities drive people to do things based on preference rather than purpose. Buildings sometimes determine what we do in a church. Programs or buildings shouldn't dictate what we put our time and energy into. If we are going to have a business meeting to determine if we are going to reach people for Christ, there's a problem.

II. Understanding our power source (Acts 2)

The disciples and followers of Jesus went to the upper room, and the Holy Spirit came. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and then 120 people gave witness. They bore testimony to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. People must be willing to receive Jesus Christ, to receive the gift that He provided 2,000 years ago when He died on a cross. That gift provides forgiveness of sin; it provides eternal life when you receive it; and it gives hope right now.

When Christ's followers were filled with the Holy Spirit, they didn't stay huddled. They didn't stay in the upper room. I remember when I played football. I was the center. I had to break the huddle. One particular time, I broke the huddle, and no one joined me on the line. We were penalized for taking too much time, and when I ran back to the huddle, I asked them, "What's going on? Are you going to play or what?" That's how I feel sometimes in a church. That's how many of you feel. Sometimes we feel like saying, "Are you guys going to break the huddle or not?"

Well, that's what those 120 people did. They broke the huddle and gave testimony of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. And the result was that more than 3,000 people were converted.

III. Understanding our message (Acts 3-4)

Purpose and power. The Holy Spirit empowered these people. They had one message, and it was clear: Jesus Christ, who was crucified on the cross and raised from the dead, was God's Messiah. Therefore, you must "repent . . . and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19, KJV).

IV. Understanding accountability (Acts 5)

Hypocrisy. What does it take for a real revival to take place in a church? A change of heart for a few people who are frauds about their faith. They want to appear to be faithful without actually

being people of God. That happens in every church. The key is accountability. And that takes cleansing on the inside.

V. Understanding how to organize (Acts 6)

You must organize to grow. You must plan to grow. The sixth chapter of Acts is a description of the deacon ministry. The disciples could no longer care for the congregation because it had gotten too big. Additional people had to assume leadership responsibilities if the church was going to grow. The size of the church makes no difference; any time a church moves from where it is toward where it wants to be, one of the basic principles involved is more people assuming leadership responsibilities. If that doesn't happen, you can't care for the people added to the body.

Let me give you an example. One Monday morning, a widow called First Baptist Jerusalem, and James answered the phone. James was the senior pastor at Jerusalem.

James answered and said, "Yes, ma'am, can I help you?"

She said, "Well, my chariot won't start."

James said, "No problem. I've got some jumper cables I just bought at Walmart. I'll be right over, and we'll try them out."

So James jumped into his chariot and went over and cranked up that widow's chariot—no problem. Well, while he was gone, it seemed every widow in the church called. None of the widows could start their chariots. All the apostles were out starting chariots. This happened Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday mornings.

Saturday afternoon, when the guys got back together, they said, "We've got to do something about this. We can't keep this up."

So Peter said, "Why don't we go to Sears and get a deal on batteries?"

So they went to Sears, loaded up on batteries, and took them to all the widows. Sunday morning, all the widows cranked their chariots up and came to church—no problem. During the special music, James started looking for his sermon notes and couldn't find them. He realized he didn't have a sermon because he had been starting chariots all week. He poked Peter, and said, "Peter, do you have a sermon?" Even Peter did not have a sermon. James asked all the ministers, and no one had a sermon. So James told the congregation he didn't have a sermon because he had been out fixing chariots all week.

Week in and week out, church members across the country expect their pastors to come see them. It's impossible for the staff to

visit everyone. That's why the ministry of deacons was instituted. There is not one word in the Bible that says deacons should take care of money in the church. Wise people gifted in the area of finances should handle that. Deacons, pastors, or congregations don't own the church. The church is owned by the Lord.

The disciples added leadership, so the church became more flexible and grew.

VI. Understanding sacrifice (Acts 7)

Stephen, the first deacon, died for preaching the gospel.

VII. Understanding the seed-sowing/harvesting lifestyle (Acts 8)

Saul persecuted Christians. The persecution was so bad that some people were run out of town, but the apostles did not leave. They stayed there in town. In verse Acts 8:4, the people who left town went everywhere preaching. Preaching means to "gossip the gospel."

When we talk to people outside the walls of the church, we must make certain our lives and lifestyles are clean. When we move into the community, we are supposed to be salt and light.

We are basically a selfish generation who cares about no one but ourselves. For the first time in 2,000 years, we have a generation that does not have a religious background. We have a generation that is not hearing the gospel outside the church building. We can't think that just because we have a service, people will come. We must function outside the four walls of the church.

Conclusion

There are two types of churches. One is the church whose pastor is a hired gun—the one who is supposed to do all the work. In this church, nothing is asked of the people except to attend and give.

The other type is one whose pastor is an equipper of the saints. We all have spiritual gifts, and not everyone will serve God the same way. The equipping pastor helps the people be what they are supposed to be, because each person matters to God. This type pastor is a soul-winner.

An adult knows more lost people when he or she becomes saved than at any other time. The equipping pastor will prepare the saved to lead others to Christ. Then all the saved will go out and share Christ, instead of just the pastor going out and witnessing.

We must visit people who want to be visited.

When we come to church on Sunday morning, we must celebrate what the body of Christ has been doing during the week to bring people to Christ.

This is the New Testament church. In the New Testament, the preacher was a participant and an equipper.

If your church doesn't call its members to service, the members won't stay.

Let me share a story with you. As a child, my family would go down on Sunday afternoons to Hawkins County, where Grandma and Grandpa lived. I remember that the men would stay in the front room and talk, and the women would stay in the kitchen and talk.

One Sunday in August, when I was a little boy, I was with the men in the front room. Grandpa's old fan was in the room. This old fan was oscillating, and it had a bent blade. When it went back and forth, it made a horrible racket. I had my wool pants on, and I was burning up. I was running back and forth in front of the fan, trying to get air up my leg. I wasn't getting cool, because the more I ran, the more sweat I worked up.

Daddy said Grandpa couldn't stand it anymore, and he called the men outside. Grandpa said, "Let's leave Ron and the fan in here." Daddy said when the men came back inside, I was lying in front of the fan, and the fan wasn't moving back and forth anymore. He said that next to me was a Pepsi-Cola bottle, a Moon Pie, a pipe wrench, and a pair of wire pliers.

God's people can either go on sweating and complaining, or they can become proactive and do something about the situation.

Invitation

At crossroads in our churches, we must reassess who we are and why we are in church if we are going to make the difference that salt is supposed to make. God sees our churches moving back and forth like that old oscillating fan. We can't quite make up our minds if we are going to do what God wants us to do. We can't decide if we are going to put our lives on the line for God. God looks at our churches and, like He said in Revelation, He asks us to be either hot or cold. We must stop moving back and forth. We must do what God tells us.

ANDREW'S WITNESSING STRATEGY

John Bisagno

John 1:40

One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus (John 1:40-42, KJV).

Andrew, next to our Lord Himself, is the Bible's master soul-winner. His name appears only three times in Scripture, but always, he is bringing someone to Jesus. First, there is Simon Peter, the big fisherman; then, the little boy with the loaves and fishes; and finally, the Greeks who would "see Jesus."

His technique is a model for us all. Our text outlines three phases in being God's instrument in changing normal men into the Master's men and sinners into saints.

I. The first step in bringing people to Christ is finding your brother.

That is not witnessing, and it is certainly not soul-winning. Surprise, surprise . . . it's Monday night visitation. Finding your brother should generally be done in two ways: 1) **way-of-life evangelism**, in which we are constantly aware of the special possibilities all around us, and 2) **organized, planned, disciplined visitation**, as with a weekly church visitation program.

Are you sensitive to those around you? I have found that the easiest way to get into a discussion about the things of God is to listen. In almost any conversation, people will say something that you can pick up on and turn into spiritual talk. They will ask a leading question. They may bring up a topic with a spiritual implication. But if you will listen with your heart, you will find the Holy Spirit opening doors big enough to drive trucks through.

They may say, "Things are sure bad in Washington." You say, "Yes, but I know who can make it better."

They say, "My father has cancer." You say, "I'll pray for him."

God did not call us to live in monasteries. We are the world's light and salt. The salt is not intended to remain in the shaker. Touch people, plan to visit, and prepare to listen. Be on constant

alert for the opportunity to introduce Jesus into every casual conversation. People are everywhere! Look for them, listen to them, and talk to them about what's really important. Andrew first found his brother. Contact with the prospect, whether planned or seemingly coincidental, may be God's date with destiny for some lost soul.

II. The second step in bringing people to Christ is the witness.

Listen to John's account: "And [he] saith unto him, We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41, KJV). Finding your brother is visitation. Telling your brother whom you have found is witnessing. Jesus did not say you should be His arguers, His debaters, His apologists, His defenders. He said, "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8, RSV). Witnesses simply tell what they know and have seen by personal experience.

The Bible presents world evangelism as a courtroom scene. Jesus is on trial in every person's life. He is the true Light who lights every person who comes into the world. Each person is aware of spiritual reality. The problem is, people don't know what the light is. God has illuminated each heart, but He uses witnesses to tell people that the Light of the world is Jesus. That's what witnesses do. They tell what they know by firsthand experience.

World evangelism is like a courtroom trial. Satan is the prosecuting attorney condemning Jesus, accusing Jesus, whispering to the heart of each person, "No. You don't want Jesus. Reject Him today, forever."

The Holy Spirit is the defense attorney commending Jesus, loving Him, urging people to accept Him into their hearts. The Holy Spirit is the master attorney, trying billions of cases all at once. He knows where every case is at each moment. The time comes when He uses a witness for the defense. He needs your strong and clear-cut testimony for Christ, and He needs it now. So, He prompts the heart of a non-Christian to say something in casual conversation to which you can respond. Go ahead, do it. Speak the word. Drop in the witness. Give your experience. Tell the truth. Go ahead, do it, and do it now. If you do so faithfully, your testimony may be the turning point that wins the case for the Holy Spirit and brings in a verdict for Jesus—*not guilty*. Your silence, however, may lose the case. Your reluctance may destroy everything. You may not be around to see the verdict come in, but you will have done your part. *You are not responsible for the results; you are responsible for the witness.*

III. The third step in bringing people to Christ is the closure; the step of soul-winning.

First, Andrew visited—he found his brother. Second, he witnessed—he told his brother whom he had found. Third, he practiced soul-winning: "And he brought him to Jesus" (John 1:42, KJV).

What is the natural consequence of telling your brother whom you have found? It is that you tell your brother how he can find Him. The gospel is shared, the tract presented, the plan of salvation given, the closure offered, and the person repents of his or her sins and asks Jesus to come into his or her heart.

Notice the order. It is crucial:

1. Visitation
2. Witnessing
3. Soul-winning

Most of us go from visitation to soul-winning, but with only limited success. You will be many times more successful if you introduce your personal testimony into the equation. People may argue theology, refute your topic, debate Scripture, or ridicule your beliefs. But virtually no one—I repeat *no one*—will argue about your personal experience. It softens the soul; it moves the heart and disarms the obstinate. Share your faith, and leave the results to God.

This order, followed in the power of the Spirit, should not only take the pressure off you as you witness, but it also should greatly increase the results the Holy Spirit gives. Remember, you are not on trial. You do not fail or win depending on the verdict. You only fail if you do not give the witness—if you don't try at all.

The Campus Crusade folks were right when they coined the phrase, "A successful witnessing experience is presenting the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God." And let me add, a successful witnessing experience is the sharing of your own faith, as well.

(See Appendix A for Bisagno's illustration, "The Saga of D. L. Moody.")

WHY WE CANNOT REMAIN SILENT

Bill Bright

Mark 16:15

John 14:6,21

And then he told them, “You are to go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere” (Mark 16:15, TLB).

Jesus told him, “I am the Way—yes, and the Truth and the Life. No one can get to the Father except by means of me . . . The one who obeys me is the one who loves me; and because he loves me, my Father will love him; and I will too, and I will reveal myself to him” (John 14:6,21, TLB).

Introduction

Have you ever felt hesitant to share the gospel because you thought the other person simply would not be interested?

Have you ever sensed the Lord leading you to witness to someone, but you heard a small voice telling you, “You’ll only start an argument”?

Or have you been slow to share your faith because you didn’t feel you had the gift of evangelism, and witnessing is better left to those with “the gift?”

These are emotions that every Christian has felt at one time or another. I certainly have struggled with them. However, during 50 years of sharing Christ and training others to do the same, I have been unable to find any biblical rationale to justify those reasons for not witnessing. In fact, from my personal experiences and studies of God’s Word, five key concepts have been made clear to me concerning witnessing—concepts that impact the lives of every Christian.

I. Christ has given a clear command to every Christian.

Jesus Christ’s last command to the Christian community was, “You are to go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere” (Mark 16:15, TLB). This command, which the church calls the Great Commission, was not intended only for the 11 remaining disciples, or just for the apostles, or only for those now who have the gift of evangelism.

This command is the duty and privilege of every man and woman who confesses Christ as Lord. We cannot pick and choose which commands of our Lord we will follow.

II. Men and women are lost without Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6, KJV). God's Word also reminds us, "There is salvation in no one else! Under all heaven there is no other name for men to call upon to save them" (Acts 4:12, TLB).

When I spoke to several hundred students at an evangelistic event in Minnesota, several of them gathered afterward to ask questions. As I counseled them, I noticed an angry young student from India impatiently pacing back and forth.

When I finally was able to interact with him, he practically exploded at me. "I resent you Christians!" he spat out. "You are arrogant, narrow, and bigoted. I am a Hindu—I believe that Christianity is one way to God, but you Christians are not willing to believe that my religion is another way to God."

"I am sorry if I have offended you," I apologized. "But I must remind you that 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me' was a claim that Jesus Christ made about Himself. What do you think of Jesus?"

He thought for a moment before he responded. "I would have to say He is the greatest man who ever lived."

I learned from this young man that he was working toward a double doctorate in physics and chemistry. As we talked, I explained more about the claims Jesus made about Himself—how He died for our sin and was raised from the dead and how His life demonstrated that He was indeed the Son of God. The young man's anger subsided.

"Now tell me," I said, "do you believe that 'the greatest man who ever lived' would lie about Himself? Or do you believe He was a deluded lunatic who just *thought* He was the only way to God?"

The young scholar realized the logic of John 14:6. His countenance changed, as if sunlight had broken through fierce storm clouds in his heart.

"Would you like to receive Christ as your Savior and Lord?" I asked.

"Yes, I would," he replied. "I understand it now."

What a thrill it was to see this brilliant young scholar receive Jesus Christ into his life as Savior and Lord!

Men and women are truly lost without Jesus Christ. According to God's Word, He is the only way to bridge the gap between humankind and God. Without Him, people cannot know God and have assurance of eternal life.

III. Rather than being "not interested," the people of the world are looking for God. When properly approached in the power of the Holy Spirit, the majority are truly hungry for the gospel.

(See Appendix A for additional illustrations of this point: "1960 Tokyo Crusade," "In the 'House of Beautiful Women,'" and "Witnessing to a U.S. Senator.")

Indeed, vast fields of human souls are ripening all around us and are ready now for reaping. We must assume that the family member, neighbor, coworker, or person we've just met will be interested in the good news we have to tell. Always presuppose a positive response. The person may have just gone through a set of circumstances that has prepared his or her heart to receive Jesus Christ. God may have been leading the person to an awareness of his or her need for truth. Perhaps the person has felt especially alone or in need of love.

IV. We Christians have in our possession the greatest gift available to mankind—the greatest news ever announced.

Christ is risen! We serve a living Savior, who not only lives within us in all His resurrection power, but also has assured us of eternal life. He died on the cross in our place, for our sin, then rose from the dead. We have direct fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. And this fellowship, this peace, this gift of eternal life is available to all who receive Him.

Why are we so hesitant to share this good news? Why is it that we so readily discuss our political views or athletic preferences, our gas mileage or utility bills, our children's growing pains or our office gossip, but clam up when it comes to discussing the greatest news ever announced?

If our faith in Christ really means as much to us as it should, then it only follows that our faith should be the number one message on our lips. People *want* to hear good news. And when you present it in the power of the Holy Spirit and with love, you will usually see a positive response.

Several years ago, a group of young Christians were singing Christmas carols in Hollywood and Beverly Hills. They had called

to make appointments to sing at several TV and movie stars' homes, and then, after singing, they left a copy of the Van Dusen letter, a letter I had written about Jesus and how one can know Him personally.

One actor—well-known for his lead roles in two long-lasting family TV series—was particularly gracious to the carolers, and the next day he called the group leader.

"I've read this letter a dozen times," his voice boomed over the phone. "I've never read anything so wonderful. Could I meet Mr. Bright?"

The group leader gave my office the message, and I called the gentleman.

"Mr. Bright—"

"Please, call me Bill," I interrupted. "I've watched your shows enough to feel like I know you already."

"Bill, I know you must be very busy," he apologized. I could sense a feeling of awkward determination in his voice. "I really must see you. I don't want to impose on you, but would you please take a few minutes and see me?"

We arranged for him to meet me at my home. After getting out of his expensive antique car, he bounded up the steps to greet me with a firm handshake and his familiar smile.

"I've been reading your letter and it's been very meaningful to me," he began, after we had chatted for a few minutes over iced tea. "I've been a member of the vestry of my church for years, but I've never read anything like your letter. I don't know Christ personally, and I want you to help me."

We talked briefly about the content of the letter, but he didn't need convincing. He was ready. We got on our knees by the sofa in the living room, and he prayed the most beautiful, heartwarming prayer for salvation I have ever heard. Then, as we stood, he gave me a bear hug that almost cracked my ribs. He went away as delighted as a child at Christmas because of the assurance of his salvation.

V. The love of Jesus Christ for us, and our love for Him, compels us to share Him with others.

Jesus said, "The one who obeys me is the one who loves me" (John 14:21, TLB). In other words, Jesus measures our love for Him by the extent and genuineness of our obedience to Him. And as we obey, He promises He will reveal Himself to us: "And he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will

disclose Myself to him" (John 14:21, NASB).

What are we to obey? When it comes to witnessing, we have the specific commandment from Jesus Christ: "You are to go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere" (Mark 16:15, TLB). Helping to fulfill Christ's Great Commission is both a duty and a privilege. We share because we love Christ. We share because He loves us. We share because we want to honor and obey Him. We share because He gives us a special love for others.

As a corollary to that specific commandment, we are also called to be obedient to God's daily guidance as He brings us into contact with people from all walks of life. We've all experienced that special feeling—that whisper deep inside telling us, "Tell this person about Jesus Christ." But, for one reason or another—fear, rushed schedule, not knowing what to say—we are tempted to neglect the whisper and proceed with "more important things." (See Appendix A for an illustration of this point: "What Is Important?")

Jesus promised, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19, NASB). It is our responsibility to follow Jesus. It is His responsibility to make us fishers of men. We have a ringing command from our Lord to share the gospel, and men and women are lost without Him. Indeed, they are hungry for the good news, and we Christians have in our possession the greatest news ever announced. Our love for the Lord—and His love for us—compels us to obey Him as He leads us into the sharing opportunities of each day.

As you walk in prayerful fellowship with the Lord, always, whenever you're alone with someone, consider it a divine appointment. Always be ready to share your faith. It could well be that God has led that person to you because you know the good news and that person needs to hear it.

Summary

- People all around you are indeed hungry for the good news that Christ died for their sins. Without Jesus, they have no hope of knowing God or of having eternal life.
- God opens up unique witnessing opportunities to you, sometimes in the most unlikely of circumstances. He doesn't expect eloquence, but He does expect obedience.
- You have in your possession the greatest news ever announced. Why be so hesitant to share it with others?
- Christ has commanded us: "You are to go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere" (Mark

16:15, TLB). If we love Him, we will obey Him: “The one who obeys me is the one who loves me” (John 14:21, TLB).

- Whenever you're alone with someone for a few minutes or more, consider it a divine appointment.
- Acts 1:8 (NASB) records the promise of power to be His witness: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses.”
- If we are not fishing for men, we are not following Jesus (Matt. 4:19).

(See Appendix B for suggestions: “For Reflection and Action.”)

THE KEY TO EFFECTIVENESS: IDENTITY

Ken Carter

Acts 11:19-26

Introduction

The church is facing tough times. Until now it has stayed in and near the Jerusalem area. The church members have been instructed in the teachings of Jesus and supported by a fellowship that is expecting the immediate return of the Lord. Now they have been driven out of their comfort zone by persecution. They have gone to cities where they are not particularly welcome. But, in spite of the hostile environment, they are not defeated or discouraged. They boldly and victoriously share Christ in a very effective way.

This was the experience of the early church. What was the key to the church's members' effectiveness in sharing Christ? Some of the things we have, they didn't have. We have community acceptance, beautiful buildings, a finished Bible, a wonderful collection of music, and an organization for resourcing churches that is second to none. We have in common with them the Great Commission, the Holy Spirit, a personal testimony, and the responsibility to share the gospel with every person. With a desire to be as effective as the early Christians were, we should look at the cause of their effectiveness.

The key to their effectiveness seems to be summed up in Acts 11:26 (KJV): “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” The word Christians is found only three times in the New Testament. First, it is found in this text, then in Acts 26:28, and then in 1 Peter 4:16. In each case, it is the pagan world using the word Christian to identify the believer in Christ.

This meant that the pagan world saw Christ reflected in the lives of the believers. They saw His love, character, purpose, purity, and lifestyle in the believers.

If the pagan world today can see us in the same way, then they will listen to what we say about Christ. If we do not reflect that image, then we must not expect them to listen. *The key to our effectiveness is our identity.*

Everyone has an identity. Identity is what others think when they see you or hear your name spoken. When I was in grade school, there was a boy who wanted to be a leader. When he was around, we gave him our undivided attention. He may have thought he was popular, but we knew him to be the school bully.

Some identities are nice, but meaningless. When I was a young pastor, I went to a barbershop to get my hair cut. When I would walk in, one of the barbers would see me and say in a loud voice, "Hello, preacher." I knew that I was being identified. He was really saying, "In case you don't know it, the preacher just walked in. Don't do or say anything that might embarrass you." If all the world knew that I pastored a church and that was all, that alone would not identify me enough with Christ to make my witness effective. There must be a reflection of Christ in my likeness or no one will listen to what I have to say.

What caused these early Christians to have such a powerful reflection of Christ and therefore such an effective witness?

I. Early believers were identified as Christians because of their conversion.

Christ had dramatically changed their lives, and they reflected that change in every situation. They did what Jesus would have done in a tough time—they shared the good news.

One of the tragedies of today is that some people want to trust Jesus without their lives being changed. The Bible teaches that old things are passed away and all things are made new when we come to Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). It also teaches that when we trust Jesus, we become new creatures in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). One must turn loose of the old life through repentance and in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit put on a new life that is totally different.

Every day we live, we must ask ourselves, "How has my new life in Christ made me different from those who do not claim to know Christ?" Jesus asked the disciples what they did more than others. He was talking about love. How do you love? Do you love only those who love you? Do others have to act a certain way, believe a certain way, dress a certain way, or respond a certain way before you can love them? If so, then you are more like the world than you are like Jesus, who never let anything limit His love. While we were still sinners, even before we could be lovable, He loved us enough that He died for us.

The early believers acted like Christ and were identified as Christians. Therefore, their witness had power and was effective.

II. Early believers were identified as Christians because of their commitment.

Commitment to God is not measured by what you do for God,

but by what you allow God Himself (who abides in you because of conversion) to do through you.

This is why Paul said that Christ in you is the hope of glory. Paul said that he lived, yet it was not he who lived, but Christ who lived in him. Paul worked, yet it was not he who worked, but Christ who worked through him. He even declared that for him to live was Christ. He was so united with Christ that Christ simply worked in everything Paul did. Christ continued His work of redemption through Paul's life. This same thing was happening in the lives of these early believers in Antioch.

We have accepted some very subtle substitutions for real commitment, which have hindered the work of Christ from being done in our lives and have kept us from being as effective as we could have been with our witness.

1. We have substituted community righteousness for God's righteousness.

We have convinced ourselves that if we can be accepted by the community as good people, we will have an effective witness. So we work hard at being good neighbors, good friends, good citizens, or good parents until we are recognized as being good. Then we wonder why no one responds to our testimony and witness of Jesus. The reason is that we do not need God's power in our lives to be good by human standards. To display God's righteousness, we must have the power and presence of God clearly at work in our lives. This is why Jesus told His disciples that their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees and the Sadducees or they would never enter the kingdom of God. These two groups were the most respected men of their day in the communities where they lived. There must be something in our lives that reveals the nature of Jesus and cannot be accomplished by human effort if we are to have an effective witness.

2. We have substituted church work for the work of the church.

We have allowed ourselves to believe that a commitment to the activities of the church is equal to a commitment to Christ. We should not look for excuses not to assemble ourselves together (a sign of a deep spiritual problem); neither should we think church activities alone are fulfilling Christ's purpose for our lives. We almost measure the level of a Christian's growth by his or her loyalty to church activities.

The work of the church is to share the gospel with the lost world. What we do when we assemble equips us to do the work of the church. We serve Christ in our workday world, or we do not serve Him at all.

These early Christians were sharing Christ as persecution drove them into all the world.

3. Finally, we substitute not being bad for being good.

My wife and I have three children. When our daughter was 12 and the boys were 9 and 10, we decided that we could leave them at home for about an hour. When we would leave, my wife would say, "You kids be good." When we returned, if they had not broken anything or turned the house upside down, she would say, "You kids have really been good." They had not done anything good, they just hadn't been bad.

Many church members are like that. They think that if they are doing nothing bad, they must be good. They are just doing nothing. You cannot be good by just not being bad. To be good, you must be involved actively in the positive goodness of God, which is always redemptive.

III. How does this work out in our daily lives?

No matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, we must make a daily commitment to let Christ's identity reflect through us. We must say, "Lord, today, create an opportunity, make me aware of it. I am ready (no matter what the cost) to let the world see the difference Jesus Christ has made in my life."

Perhaps Stephen made that decision and the Lord answered, "Thank you, Stephen, I needed a volunteer today to show a person named Saul how a Christian can die with love and forgiveness." No one ever died more like Jesus than Stephen did. And Saul, who watched Stephen die and gave approval to his death, was later saved (see Acts 7:54—8:1).

Will you make that kind of decision? Will you say, "Lord, create an opportunity, make me aware of it, and I am ready at any cost to let the world see how You live in my life"? When you can make that kind of decision, you are in the position that the lost world will see you as a Christian, and your witness will be effective.

THE CALL FROM WITHOUT

Jimmy Draper

Acts 16:6-10

The cries of a lost world resound with a deafening, thunderous roar. Never has there been so much devastation in the hearts of individuals as there is today. Never have so many enjoyed so much of the things of this world; yet, the despair and hopelessness in the human heart is greater than ever before. The lostness of mankind clamors for our attention today.

I. We must hear the call (vv. 6-9)

Those with vision will hear. The call comes, but it is only heard by those with listening ears and willing hearts.

1. The preparation for the call (vv. 6-8)

Paul was moving in the will of God. He was committed to doing God's will. In Acts 13:46, he announced that he had turned to preach to the Gentiles. He never wavered in that assignment. His confidence in that task is seen in Acts 28:28 (KJV), "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."

Paul knew God's will for his life, and, without vacillation, he moved ever forward in that will. He was doing what God had instructed him to do.

The Holy Spirit had forbidden him to go to Asia and to Bithynia. It is important for us to allow God to close doors, as well as open doors. It is vital to note that need is not the only criterion to determine a place of ministry.

Asia and Bithynia were areas of great need. Too many times we initiate programs and ministries based upon need only, rather than following the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

One person's vision may not be another person's vision. God has a vision for you, but you must be faithful. It is unlikely that God will give you a new vision if you are not aggressively following His will now. Obedience is the preparation required to hear the call, to see the vision.

Remember when God spoke to young Samuel (1 Sam. 3)? His response to that call was, "Speak; for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:10, KJV). The use of the word servant reflected obedi-

ence. It was as if he said, "Yes, Lord. Now what's the command?" That type of obedience is essential if we are to hear God's call.

Further, Paul was in prayer when the vision came. He was seeking direction and making himself available to God. He was willing to obey without knowing the course or the cost of that obedience.

The one who hears the call, who sees the vision, must first hear God's call and make himself available. It is the committed and faithful follower whom God gives a vision. Paul was obedient and prayerful, thus prepared to hear God's call.

2. The presentation of the call (v. 9)

The Macedonian simply cried, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9, KJV). The Macedonian man did not know what his country needed; he just knew help was required. He had a great need. Something was missing. There was a great void in his life. That void is present in every person's life.

Within the heart of each individual in the world is a longing that only Christ can satisfy. "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14, KJV).

"I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35, KJV).

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . . ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29, KJV).

Oh, hear the cry of the lost today! The cry of the man in Macedonia was the cry of Europe for Christ. Today, lost humankind calls for help from every continent and nation.

It is reported that when the French Revolution began, a person observed, "This is a riot!" Another answered, "No, this is a revolution!" The world today is crying for help out of the hopelessness of world revolution.

A population revolution is taking place. Over 5 billion people are in the world today, and this number will explode to 8 billion by the turn of the century. Twenty-seven percent of the United States population lives in the suburbs, yet only 15 percent of evangelism takes place in the suburbs. More than 160 cities in the world today have a population in excess of 1 million. By the

turn of the century, 85 percent of Americans will live in cities. Rural areas are facing declining population; farms are disappearing; and even the cities are in transition.

There is revolution among the peoples of the world that is issuing forth in violence and hostility. While the walls of communism have crumbled, other walls are being erected; violence is now the pattern for international relationships. This violent revolution is shaking every continent and nation.

There is a family revolution. We are seeing the disintegration of the American family. One out of two marriages ends in divorce, and the rate is predicted to rise far beyond that figure. More than 50 percent of American adults are single. Almost 70 percent of American women work. More than 50 percent of our children will live with only one parent at some time during their growing-up years. Loneliness is an American trademark now. Twenty million adults now live alone!

My phone rang one morning at two o'clock. A local police officer said they had arrested a woman, who insisted on speaking to me. She had attended our church but was not a member. She had gone to a bar and been picked up by a man. They both got drunk, and he left her stranded and abused in a parking lot. She cried out of her loneliness about being abandoned by her husband and being driven by the emptiness of her heart. Her cry was, "Come over and help me!"

There is a religious revolution taking place. Dead and dying churches are becoming the norm. Ritual and programs have become ends in themselves. The greatest mission field in America today may well be within the church! "Business as usual" won't cut it. Evangelism is not debatable.

We are in an economic revolution. Worldwide recession and inflation are running wild. The instability and turmoil of the economy of this world is frightening. Our own nation is plunging deeper and deeper into economic bankruptcy and collapse.

There is an emotional revolution in the world today. Stress and trauma, depression and discouragement, and disappointment and despair are very much a part of the lives of people today. Only Jesus can fill the longing of this world.

Oh, hear the call of this lost world! Leadership is the key. There is a worldwide lack of people, truly called of God, who are willing to suffer scorn, poverty, and the shame of the cross for the sake of Christ and the lost people of the world.

Oh, hear the call of this lost world! Neil Simon, who wrote

“The Odd Couple” and “Barefoot in the Park,” was asked on the Dick Cavett show whether making a lot of money concerned him. The studio went silent when Simon said, “No . . . What does concern me is the fear of dying.”

“Come over and help us,” the world cries today. We must hear the call.

II. We must heed the call (v. 10)

Paul was not praying about whether to go, but where to go! “Immediately we endeavored to go” (Acts 16:10, KJV).

Once we hear God’s call, we must heed it! The call was to preach the good news to the lost. “Preach the gospel” is one word in the Greek language of the New Testament—*evangelion*. It literally means to evangelize. Paul clearly understood that the call was to evangelize the lost.

The gospel is revealed to us in the Bible. The Bible speaks not only of the content of what is preached, but also of the act, process, and execution of the proclamation. Content and process of preaching are one. We must not separate them. The preaching of this gospel is charged with power (Rom. 1:16)!

What is the gospel? God has acted for the salvation of the world in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ became sin for us, dying in our place, paying the penalty for our sins on the cross. He rose bodily and victoriously from the grave, ascended to heaven, and will one day return for His own to establish His kingdom eternally on this earth. Each individual must turn from his or her sins and, by faith, trust Him as Lord and Savior. That is the gospel.

We must heed the call to preach the gospel. The great missionary Robert Speer once said, “You say you have faith? Well, then, either give it out or give it up.” Faith is personal, but it is never private.

The great English preacher Charles Spurgeon was once asked, “Do you believe the heathen who have never heard the gospel are really lost?” Spurgeon replied, “Do you believe the ones who have heard the gospel and never shared it are really saved?”

Heed the call! Paul went to Macedonia, and people were converted everywhere—Lydia and her household, a demon-possessed girl, the jailer and his household—all in the sixteenth chapter of Acts!

God’s blessings always attend our obedience. To heed the call is simply a matter of obedience in following Him into a lost

world to preach the gospel.

Will we heed the call? We have the message, will we declare it? Will we faithfully obey God so He can give us the vision and the call? We must hear the call. We must heed the call.

REAL REVIVAL AND THE EVANGELISTIC HARVEST

Lewis Drummond

Acts 1–2

Introduction

In Acts 1 and 2 we see the launching of the worldwide thrust of God we call the Christian movement. Therein we discover Christianity at its best. To those principles we must return if we would see the world evangelized. In these chapters, one can glean the essential principles of a genuine spiritual movement. Moreover, in the early chapters of Acts we are introduced to what the Spirit of God would continually perpetuate among His people. The great God of grace transformed that first-century world through the infant church on the basis of their experience recorded in Acts 2, and He would do the same for us and our world today. He would again launch an awakening afresh and anew to the glory of Jesus Christ. And that is real revival. So what we have in an awakening is simply God's Spirit striving to bring us back to this biblical, New Testament norm, with its evangelistic fervor. Dispel the mystery, dispel the mystic, dispel the nostalgia; the Lord just wants us to be a New Testament people. That births revival, and that in turn spawns great evangelism.

I. Proper priorities for world evangelization

Before any great enterprise begins, the priorities of the endeavor must be set forth. Acts 1:6-8 presents in very clear fashion what comprises the primary priority in the entire work of Christ. The setting is the Mount of Olives. Our Lord Jesus is about to ascend back to the Father. He is giving His final instructions. These are apparently His very last words; therefore, they are of vital importance. This pivotal passage is in response to the disciples' question, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6, NIV)?

Jesus responded, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8, NIV). In these verses, our Lord gave us our basic marching orders.

Christ's mandate for evangelization does not mean there are no other ministries in which the people of God are to engage. We must feed the hungry, clothe those in need, build roofs over the unfortunate lives of homeless people, and meet every human need that we encounter, within our ability to do so. Christian love demands that. However, one priority supersedes all because it meets the deepest need of the human experience: namely, leading lost people to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone can satisfy all needs of the human heart and life and thus move people into the abundance He came to give.

Happy is the church that understands that primary priority in ministry and will give itself unreservedly to reaching the lost for Jesus Christ. Further, happy is the individual Christian who understands that priority in his or her life.

Let me share with you the life of a man who exemplified that principle and commitment in the most effective manner of anyone I have ever known. (See Appendix A for Drummond's story "Brother O'Neal.")

II. Proper programming for world evangelism

We read in Acts 1:15-22 that Simon Peter stood up and urged the infant church to replace the vacancy left by Judas when he betrayed the Lord and hanged himself. It seems the early believers sensed they needed 12 apostles to correspond to the 12 tribes of Israel; so they set about in meeting the need in their church administrative life. Although this action was just in embryo form, it exemplifies the principle that, after we have our priorities properly in place, we must program our ministries administratively in a fashion that will make service for Christ effective. That principle is developed through the rest of the Acts of the Apostles. For example, in Acts 6 we see the instituting of a special group of men to carry on a special task. We commonly think of them as the deacons. The full-bloomed New Testament model is finally realized in Ephesians 4:12 (NASB), where Paul speaks of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers "for the equipping of the saints for the work of the service." Simply put, a church must be organized and programmed properly if it is to carry out its priorities with any success. Programs are important. However, the church must do God's work God's way and that way is found in the pages of the Bible. That principle stands as vital and essential. In the Old Testament, a singular case in point brings out this principle vividly. (See Appendix A for Drum-

mond's illustration "David Restores the Ark.")

That principle is true not only individually, but also collectively for the entire church. Therefore, God's people must immerse themselves in the Word, understand the Bible, and serve the Lord Jesus Christ on that basis. The Holy Spirit knows best how to structure the church program and what the church is to communicate to this lost world. The message to communicate is the gospel, the truths of the Scriptures concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Those truths are "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16, KJV). Therefore, the Bible must be central in all of our evangelization and in all of our ministry for Christ. Let us program properly. If we and our church have not been doing so, we must be revived and awakened to those realities.

III. Proper power for world evangelization

With the priorities set and the programming in place, the early Jerusalem church found itself ready to experience God's wonderful work of empowerment. Acts 2:1-4 (NIV) states: "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." How essential is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon God's people! Nothing of significance takes place without His anointing.

The day of Pentecost became the monumental moment in time when God once and for all sent His Spirit to the church, to all the people of God. Therefore, in the strict theological sense, Pentecost cannot be repeated. It was the full giving of the Holy Spirit to the church, just as the Lord Jesus Christ once and for all died and rose again for our salvation. Neither the cross, nor the resurrection, nor Pentecost needs repeating. All are a part of God's final act to effect redemption. But we live in the light and power of the cross and resurrection each day, and we must learn to live in the light of the power of the Holy Spirit moment by moment.

Of course, every Christian possesses the Holy Spirit. The Bible makes that very clear. Paul said, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he

does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Romans 8:9-11, NIV). However, a key term is found in the Scriptures that tells us how we are to relate to the Holy Spirit after He takes up His residence within us. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples not only received the Holy Spirit, they received His *fullness*. That forms the relationship we need, as Paul emphatically stated in Ephesians 5:18 (NIV): “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” God intends His people to be *filled* with the Spirit. Without the fullness of the Holy Spirit, little real evangelization will take place. Remember, our Lord Jesus Christ said, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NIV).

Power comes by being filled with the Holy Spirit. Three words are central to the concept of being filled with the Spirit. The first word is hunger. We must have a *hunger* for all the fullness of God. The second word is *confession*. We must have all our sins confessed up-to-date (1 John 1:9). God wants to fill us with the *Holy Spirit*. He will not fill a filthy vessel. What most of us need is a genuine heart-searching time. God will not touch us profoundly until we are searched out by the Holy Spirit and thus prepared for His fullness. The third word is *SURRENDER*. We must be surrendered to the will of Christ. God gives the Holy Spirit “to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32, NIV). (See Appendix A for Drummond’s illustration “Saul and the Amalekites.”)

Then, after we have paid the price of hunger, confession, and surrender, we are ready to reach out and receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ gave us a wonderful promise in Luke 11:13 (RSV). Our Lord said, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Fullness is found in faith. We ask in faith, trusting Him to do with us emotionally as He sees fit. It is hunger, confession, surrender, and then reaching out in faith that brings the fullness of the Spirit.

Moreover, this is not a once-and-for-all experience, as is the giving of the Holy Spirit at conversion when He comes and takes up His residence within. This disciplined seeking is to be a daily experience. Paul literally said to the Ephesian believers in Eph-

esians 5:18 (NIV), “Be [*continually*] filled with the Spirit.” We are to walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit day by day; therefore, the daily disciplines are vital and essential if we are to walk in all the fullness of God. Make sure of this: If we fail to walk in all the fullness of God, we will never be effective witnesses. Remember what our Lord Jesus Christ said in the very context of the Great Commission given in Acts: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8, NASB). How necessary that we have a proper daily endowment of power if we are to evangelize and share Christ effectively. That, too, is an essential element of real revival. Only then are we ready to share the good news.

IV. A proper proclamation for world evangelization

Much that goes under the name of evangelism today makes one wonder if it can be justified biblically. Just urging someone to get saved, or to come to church, or to “accept Christ” is really not sufficient. We must present the full proclamation of the gospel.

The essential gospel can be discovered in Acts 2:22 and following. Peter first of all relates that “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God” (Acts 2:22, NIV). Jesus, the Son of God, the second person of the divine Trinity, God in every sense of the word, became incarnated as a man. That is an incredible reality. To think that the great God of the universe could actually become a man and live among us! But Jesus was a man . . . as well as God. He became the infinite, ultimate, sovereign Lord clothed in human flesh. And He did many mighty miracles and signs and wonders among the people. No one ever lived or taught or impacted people as did Jesus of Nazareth. But then He was delivered up to death. Acts 2:23 (NIV) tells us, “This man was handed over . . . by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you . . . put him to death by nailing him to the cross.” When Jesus died on Calvary’s cross, He suffered for the sins of the world. This we know so well. But what a marvelous truth and reality it is. It must be communicated in all its fullness to people who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. The next verse (v. 24, NIV) goes on to tell us the glorious outcome of it all: “But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” Our Lord is alive. Death does not have the last word. Our living Lord is the conqueror of death, and now we can have eternal life

through Him.

When the first hearers of Peter's sermon were faced with these truths, Acts 2:37 (NIV) declares, "They were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" The apostolic reply is found in verse 38 (NIV), "Repent and be baptized, every one of you . . . for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Repentance is central in coming to Christ. It is not just accepting Christ; it is repenting of all our sins before God and making Jesus our Lord. Nor is it just believing in one's mind that all the truths relative to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are true; rather, it centers in putting one's entire faith and trust in Him. We rely on Him and His work in death and resurrection. We do not trust our goodness or works. That is the real meaning of "believe" in the New Testament. People must repent and believe.

But what will bring all these reviving principles to reality and foster world evangelization?

V. A proper place of prayer for world evangelization

What brings all these principles together? How can we as individuals, and collectively as a church, get our priorities in place and our programming on a proper basis, receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and proclaim the gospel in all its fullness? It can only be brought about in our lives through personal, passionate, and prevailing prayer. Prayer is the lost art of the church today. Few Christians know what it is to be a true interceder. (See Appendix A for Drummond's illustration "The Prayer Principle.")

Conclusion

When all these principles come together, as they obviously did in the New Testament church, then we can begin to experience New Testament results in our witness. With proper prioritizing, programming, power, proclamation, and prayer, we can see multitudes come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The responsibility is ours. May we give ourselves as did the first century Christians and join their ranks as those who have "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6, RSV). God waits to revive us to that end.

HOW TO REACH YOUR COMMUNITY FOR CHRIST

Wendell Estep

2 Kings 6:1-7

I had read these verses on many occasions, and it remained without meaning to me. Other passages had gripped my heart and changed my life, but not this one. Then the Holy Spirit began to reveal to me that the prophets were builders. They wanted to build an educational facility. If we are to build our churches and reach people for Christ, we must possess the same characteristics found in these prophets.

What are the characteristics necessary to reach our communities for Christ? Our text answers the question.

I. There must be a vision of growth

The Bible states, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18, KJV). Vision is important because it precedes action. We do not *do* until we first see.

You have probably heard of the two shoe salesmen who were sent to another country to sell shoes. After two weeks, one salesman wired his company, "I'm coming home. No one here wears shoes." His vision determined his response. The other salesman saw things differently. He wired his company asking for more shoes, because, he said, "No one here has any."

Usually, it is not *what* you see that determines your actions, but *how* you see. Your vision will determine your commitment to reaching your community. If you see the people you have been called to minister to as hardened and uninterested, you will give up on trying to reach them. On the other hand, if you see them as needing Jesus Christ, you will be committed to their salvation. However you see, your vision will determine your commitment to reaching your community. From the prophets, we learn the kind of vision required.

1. It must be an urgent vision

Second Kings 6:1 (NASB) states, "Behold now, the place before you where we are living is too limited for us." The word now denotes urgency. When we hear that two-thirds of our Southern Baptist churches are plateaued or declining, we should be shaken to a sense of urgency. When we are told that America

has become the fourth most pagan nation in the world,¹ we must respond with urgency. When we hear the news reports of violence, rape, and immorality, we must be stirred to an urgent response. Our nation's lostness demands urgency!

2. It should be an unlimited vision

The prophets noted, "The place before you where we are living is too *limited* for us" (2 Kings 6:1, NASB). What are the culprits that limit our vision? Status quo. How often are our plans rejected with the words, "We've never done it that way before"? These are obsolete traditions.

I heard Zig Ziglar tell the following story about a man who noted that his wife always cut the shank off the ham before she cooked it. When he inquired why, she replied, "My mother always did it that way." When he asked his mother-in-law why she did it, she said, "My mother always did it that way." Curiosity got the best of him, so he called his wife's grandmother and inquired of her. She said, "My roaster is too small!" We maintain many traditions in the church that long ago outlived their usefulness.

Fear is another obstacle to our vision. We are fearful of failure or ridicule. Satan uses these fears and more to limit our vision for God's work.

We need an unlimited vision. A vision that focuses on God, not us—that focuses on the possibilities, not the problems.

II. There must be a *plan* that will turn our vision into reality

A vision without a plan will forever remain an unfulfilled dream. The prophets stated their plan in chapter 6, verse 2 (NASB): "Please let us go to the Jordan, and each of us take from there a beam, and let us make a place there for ourselves where we may live." They planned for total participation: "Let us go . . . each of us." A small segment of the church cannot make the necessary impact on a community. The whole church must become involved.

Then, the prophets planned for the necessary materials: "take . . . a beam." We must be willing to commit our resources to reaching people for Christ.

III. A vision, a plan, and a contagious spirit are all required

Verse 3 (NASB) says, "Then one said [to Elisha], 'Please be willing to go with your servants.' And he answered, 'I shall go.'" I believe Elisha was caught up in their contagious spirit and eagerly agreed to become part of their vision. When a church—the body as

a whole and each member—has a burning desire to win people to Christ, people want to be a part of it.

IV. There is another essential ingredient for a builder: work!

"So he went with them; and when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees" (2 Kings 6:4, NASB). We build by working. We can have a vision, a plan, and a contagious spirit, but someone has to cut down the trees. We cannot reach our communities for Christ unless we are willing to work.

V. One final ingredient: commitment

Commitment is essential because there will be obstacles to overcome. A prophet was cutting down a tree when he lost his axe head. An obstacle entered his vision. Every vision from God is encumbered with obstacles from Satan. Paul dreamed of going to Ephesus to preach the gospel, but he faced many difficulties. Your vision to count for Christ will not come without cost.

When we are committed to reaching our communities for Christ, God will perform miracles to make it happen. We see this miraculous intervention of God in 2 Kings 6:6-7 (NASB): "Then the man of God said, 'Where did it fall?' And when he showed him the place, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float. And he said, 'Take it up for yourself.' So he put out his hand and took it." A builder faces obstacles, but they are overcome by faith in the One who is greater than every encumbrance.

The prophets were builders. If you are going to build the kingdom of God in your community, you must possess the characteristics that possessed them.

¹ Bill Tanner, Executive Director, Oklahoma Baptist Convention.

IF YOU'RE NOT FISHING, YOU'RE NOT FOLLOWING

Terry Fields

Mark 1:16-20

I want to start this morning by asking you two embarrassing questions. Now I promise you, they're going to make you feel uncomfortable.

Question number one: When was the last time you brought someone to Jesus?

Question number two: When was the last time you tried?

You see, the truth is that most of us—some say as many as 95 percent of those who claim to be Christians—have never led a soul to the Savior.

Folks, I believe the greatest thing you can do for the world is not to be a good citizen, not to be a good church member, not to be a nice neighbor; the greatest thing you can possibly do for anyone is to bring that person to Jesus.

Jesus is saying in Mark 1:17, "I want to give you a promise. If you will follow Me, I will make you fishers of men." Do you know what that verse says to me? It says that the reason people do not bring others to Christ is not that they don't know *how*; it's that they don't know Him like they should.

You see, Jesus says all you have to do is this: "Follow Me." This passage says to know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to want to share Him, and to share Him means that you want others to come to know Him like you know Him. Now for most of us the, problem is that we make *excuses* instead of making *disciples*: "Well, preacher, that's just not my thing." "I'm just not outgoing." "I just don't know that much about the Bible." Isn't it a tragedy that so many of God's people have nothing to offer God but excuses?

Ladies and gentlemen, I want this verse to penetrate your hearts like an arrow. I want it to lodge down deep in your heart, and I don't want you to ever forget it. "Follow Me," Jesus said, "and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17, NIV). Notice with me several distinctive points in this penetrating passage.

I. Its command is pointed: "Come, follow Me"

Jesus said, "Come, follow Me." That statement is not a sugges-

tion. It is not just good advice. It is not just an opinion. Jesus is saying, “I command you to come and follow Me.” The word “follow” is powerful. It literally means to get under authority—to emulate an example.

You see, to follow literally means that you look with high regard and high esteem to the one you follow and you obey that one. It was R.A. Torrey who questioned the right of a person to call himself or herself a follower of Jesus Christ if he or she is not a soul-winner. There is no such thing as following Christ unless you make the purpose of His life, the purpose of your life. That’s why I call this sermon: “If You’re Not Fishing, You’re Not Following,” because Jesus said, “If you will follow Me, then you will obey Me, then you will submit to My authority, and I *will* make you fish for men.”

It’s time we get something straight. Soul-winning is not up for debate; it is a command. It is a pointed command. You see, some of you automatically tune a preacher out when he talks about soul-winning. You say to yourself, “Preacher, I’ve heard these sermons before, and I’ve heard other preachers try to lay a guilt trip on me, and it’s not going to work this time either. That’s just not my *gift*.” Friend, there’s only one problem with that: soul-winning is not a *gift*; it is a *command*.

You see, beloved, that’s what we must be honest enough to admit to ourselves. If we’re disobeying this command, let’s at least admit it. If we’re saying no to Jesus, let’s admit that we’re saying no. Let’s not try to play patty cake with it and say to others, “Well, Jesus really doesn’t expect everybody to be a soul-winner.”

Many people interpret Mark 1:17 differently. Some say, “Well, we’re all supposed to be fishers of men, but we can fish in different ways. After all, some of us are not gifted in witnessing, so I’ll just fish for men by thinking good thoughts about people—you know, just hoping that they get saved.” Or some say, “I can be a fisher of men by just praying for lost people.” Or some people say, “If I can’t actually get out there and fish, then I’ll just give my money. I’ll give to an organization that’s fishing.”

Folks, have you ever really stopped to think how ridiculous that is? You fish by fishing, and there is no substitute for it.

In fact, this concept of fishing for men is the heartbeat of God Himself. It is the essence of the Christian faith. Did you know Christianity is not a religion? It really bothers me to hear people talking about “the Christian religion.” Fishing for men is that

which separates authentic Christianity from superficial religion.

Religion is man’s desire to get to God. Christianity is God’s desire to get to man. Christianity is God becoming flesh and dwelling among His creation. The Bible says Jesus became incarnate. That word *carne* is a Latin word meaning flesh. The incarnation means the Son of God actually took on human form because God cared so much about His creation that He pursued us diligently. Never are you more stubbornly refusing to live out Christianity than when you claim, “We’re not supposed to go.”

The true heart of God was shown from the beginning in the Garden of Eden, when Adam sinned and God realized that Adam couldn’t get to Him, so He would have to get to Adam. God didn’t hide from Adam; Adam hid from God. But God tracked him down. God has pursued man from the beginning, and man has been running from the beginning.

I’m not a brilliant fisherman, but I know this about fish: *You have to go where fish are*. The only fish that comes to you is the kind Mrs. Paul™ puts in little frozen wrappers. Jesus said, “I’ll make you fishers of men.” He meant that He would make us active witnesses. He doesn’t expect us to sit back and wait for people to come to us; He wants us to go to them.

Beloved, the heart of the Christian faith is God pursuing a lost and dying world.

This passage’s command is pointed, but I want you to notice something else.

II. Its call is personal: “Follow Me”

“Follow me, . . . I will make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17 NIV, italics added). Look at the personal pronouns. Jesus doesn’t say follow the Baptist denomination. He doesn’t say follow the Baptist Sunday School quarterly. He doesn’t even say follow the Baptist preacher. He says, “You follow Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.” Do you see how personal that is?

Jesus was saying, “I’m not just setting up an organization here; I’m setting up relationships. And I want you, through the relationships of your life, to fish for people and let them see that they can have a relationship with Me, as well.” Mark it down and don’t ever forget it: *fellowship* always comes before *fishing*, and *worship* always comes before *witnessing*.

You know what I’ve discovered with my walk with the Lord? The more time I spend with Jesus, the better I know Jesus. And the better I know Jesus, the more excited I get about Jesus. And

the more excited I get about Jesus, the more I want other people to know Him.

You know why most of us never witness? You know why most of us never talk about Jesus in the workplace? You know why most of us have never gone across the street to witness to even a neighbor? It's because we're not excited about Jesus anymore. He has become routine. He has become "old hat." He has become usual rather than *unusual*, *ordinary* rather than *extraordinary*. When you get excited about Jesus, you have to backslide to keep from telling people about Him. (See Appendix A for Fields' illustration "Coming Home to the Family.")

If you consider the sum total of all the relationships that are available to people within this church, it's mind-boggling. Church growth experts call that your evangelism potential. They say that in any given church, each individual—each of you—generally has relationships with 5-8 groups of people. One group could be those living in your neighborhood; it could be those on your job; it could be those in the civic club you're a part of; those who coach softball or baseball with you. Out of these 5-8 groups, you may know as many as 40 or 50 people who do not know Christ. If you multiply that number by a church's members, or multiply that number by just the active members, every church has the potential to touch thousands.

Something else is true about this verse.

III. Its company is powerful: "I will make you become . . ."

Jesus said, "If you'll just follow Me, I'll turn you into fishers of men." I want you to notice something. This verse is *pointed* in its *command*: He said, "Go." This verse is *personal* in its *call*: He said, "I'll make *you* fishers." But, third, it's *powerful* in its *company*: Jesus said, "I'm going to do it with you. You follow Me first, and then I will convert you, change you, transform you into fishers of men." We must realize that although we do the fishing, Jesus does the converting. Don't ever get that confused.

Someone has said that a soul-winner's prayer is simply this: "Lord, help me be a *nobody* who will tell *everybody* about *Somebody* who can save *anybody*." That ought to be your prayer. You see, we don't fish alone; we fish with Jesus.

So often we get out on an island just by ourselves. We think we're the only ones out there working.

Before the Great Commission, there is a statement you could call "The Great Claim." You see, we often quote Matthew 28:19,

but leave out Matthew 28:18. In most translations, verse 19 begins with "Therefore" or "Go therefore." But verse 18 tells us what the "therefore" is there for. Verse 18 (NIV) says, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" Then verse 19 (NIV) continues, "Therefore go and make disciples." What was He saying? "Before you go out, you had better realize that I am the One with the authority. I am the One with the power."

You may think: Wait a minute; time out. Doesn't the Bible say that Satan has power also? No, Satan doesn't have power; he only has weapons. Jesus possesses all the power.

There is no business like soul business; and if you're not fishing, you're not following.

(See Appendix A for Fields' illustrations "A Boy with Four Birds," "A Girl with Leukemia," and "The Loss of Lee.")

BLOOD ON OUR HANDS

Roy Fish

“Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; . . . When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die,’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. But if you on your part warn a wicked man . . . you have delivered your life” (Ezek. 33:7-9, NASB).

The very title of this message contains a terribly frightening prospect for a minister of the gospel: *“Blood on Our Hands.”* It contains the kind of inference from which, if we followed our instinct, we would tuck our tails and run: *“Blood on Our Hands.”* Serious thought of the possibility of such a reality is almost enough to overwhelm even the strongest of us: *“Blood on Our Hands.”*

Out of the imagery of the Old Testament comes the idea for the message. All major cities in the Old Testament world had a watchman stationed atop a tall tower on the wall, where a maximum range of visibility would be his. If an enemy army approached the city, the watchman’s duty was to warn the city of an impending attack. If the watchman failed in his duty of warning, and the city was overrun and its citizenry massacred, the watchman would be held responsible. The blood of those who had perished would be on his hands. With this symbolism in mind, God said to the prophet Ezekiel: *“Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; . . . When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die,’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. But if you on your part warn a wicked man . . . you have delivered your life” (Ezek. 33:7-9, NASB).*

I. The relevance of blood on our hands

Because of the location of the text and the seriousness of its inference, the tendency today is to lay the issue of blood on our hands on a man-made shelf of Old Testament irrelevancy. With the attitude of *“what happened before Christ came does not pertain to us,”* much of contemporary Christianity would reject this principle

as outmoded—a thing of the past. This may be a legitimate claim except for the fact that the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, contends that the principle of bloodguilt for negligence is still binding in this Christian age. When he left the city of Ephesus, he boldly stated, “I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27, KJV). The Apostle might have left the city of Ephesus with blood on his hands. But rather, “I am not guilty of blood in Ephesus,” he cries. “My hands are clean.” According to the New Testament, a failure to discharge a God-given responsibility to speak out means the blood of eternal souls is on our hands. The bloodguilt principle found in the Old Testament is repeated in the New Testament. Its recurrence enforces its ratification in your life and mine.

II. The reality of blood on our hands

Relevance suggests reality, and there is no more frightening reality in the life of any Christian than the reality of being held responsible for the souls of others. That we, by our negligence, can be guilty of a kind of spiritual homicide—that our hands can be stained with blood because of indifference toward those who are lost—what an awesome truth! The reality of blood on our hands rebukes anything short of total commitment to the task of sharing the exciting news of Jesus. The reality of bloodguilt is a reproof to anything short of a life controlled by the Holy Spirit, being in the right place at the right time, playing a part in God’s redemptive activity. The reality of bloodguilt is a censure on careless living, sin-obstructed testimonies, and Spirit-grieving habits. It is a constant rebuttal to the kind of cowering fear that causes Christians to shut up when they ought to speak up.

But the heart of this message has to do with how the blood may be removed.

III. The removal of blood on our hands

Blood on our hands is a frightening reality. But the blood can be removed. Every preacher of the gospel should seriously consider how. **First, blood can be removed by the cultivation of converts into witnesses.** A slighting of any part of the plan of our Lord can involve us in the bloodguilt of others. There is a part of His plan that generally has suffered sad neglect. This neglected part of His plan is the cultivation of converts into personal witnesses for Christ.

In the fourth chapter of Ephesians, the apostle Paul states clearly

that the primary task of the pastor is to mature Christians for the work of the ministry, for the building up of Christ’s body. Pastors are to train their people in the work of soul-winning. Jesus said we are not only to make disciples, but we are also to train those who become disciples to make disciples (Matt. 28:20). Most of us have regarded the training aspect of the Matthew commission as optional. But the question pastors face is not only, “How many people have I won?” It is also, “How many people have I trained to win others?” It is an indictment against our negligence of the commission of our Lord that only a small percentage of pastors are employing any effective method of training personal witnesses. Thank God if you are actively engaged in winning the lost. But I remind you that if we do not train converts to reach the lost, we are responsible for those who may have been reached through our multiplied ministry.

Second, blood can be removed by consistent concern for lost people. I choose the word “consistent” for a particular reason. Most of us are noticeably *inconsistent* in our concern. Sometimes we are on fire; other times, we are smoking embers. But one mistake in the area of concern is that many times we let *our* level of concern determine whether or not we will witness. If we feel concerned, we share with others. If we don’t feel a concern, we fail to share. But our efforts in reaching the lost must not be regulated by our feeling of concern. Rather, our efforts are to be regulated by our Lord’s feeling of concern for the lost. He is always concerned about them. It is the burden of *His* heart that should drive us to reach lost people. Not our compassion for sinners but His compassion for sinners must be our motivating factor in witnessing for Him. For this reason, not a love for souls but a love for Christ is the basic condition of effective personal evangelism. If we love Him, His interest will be our consuming interest, and His basic interest toward those who are lost is a redemptive interest.

Third, blood can be removed by a constant commitment to our task. Have you ever considered what failure in consistent witnessing can mean? One missed opportunity can mean one more Christless life and one more Christless grave, which could have been otherwise. On the other hand, consistency in remaining available as a witness delivers us from bloodguilt.

I am far from being what I ought to be as a witness for our Lord. Late one evening, I was exhausted from a teaching session of three hours. I had told the Lord earlier in the day that I was available to Him if He wanted to use me to touch someone’s life. It was after

midnight when, on an elevator, I ran into Tony. My desire was to get to my room as quickly as possible and get to bed. But the Lord reminded me of my commitment to Him to be available. On the elevator, I sensed the Lord saying to me, “My child, did you really mean it when you told me you were at my disposal? Are you available to me for this situation?”

I responded, “Lord, I am tired. It’s almost one o’clock in the morning, and I want to go to bed. And to be honest, Lord, I couldn’t care less. But, grudgingly, I make myself available to you.”

Tony was reading a newspaper. Before I stepped off the elevator, I took a Billy Graham tract out of my pocket and said to Tony as I stepped off the elevator, “Excuse me, sir, but here is some good news you won’t read in today’s newspaper.”

I shoved the pamphlet into his hand. He took it, turned it over, and saw the name Billy Graham. I didn’t know, but the Holy Spirit knew that Tony Maringo, born in Turkey, fluent in eleven languages, worker in the United Nations with Dag Hammarskjöld, had once attended a Billy Graham crusade. At that crusade, God had spoken to his heart about becoming a Christian. He left that crusade service lost, but hungry to know more. When he saw Mr. Graham’s name on that pamphlet, the hunger in his heart was revived, and in the early morning, on the fourth floor of that hotel, Tony invited Christ into his heart. I received a phone call from a pastor on Long Island shortly after that, telling me that Tony had come forward in a revival service in his church, confessing Christ as his Savior.

Being consistent in our availability and witness! This is the way to keep blood off of our hands.

HOW TO THINK LIKE A SOUL-WINNER

Charles G. Fuller

Acts 10:1-48

Introduction

A familiar proverb reminds us, “As [a person] thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7, KJV). That insight is designed to keep us alert to the ulterior motives of those who hide their thoughts behind a deceptive generosity. The principle of the proverb, however, has multiple applications. It is simply a fact: What we are is the result of *how* we think.

In few realms of the Christian life is how we *think* more related to what we *are* than in personal soul-winning. What most impedes our witness is not our undeveloped skills or the absence of training; it is that we do not *think* like soul-winners. Some Christians do not think of themselves as soul-winner types, apparently oblivious to the fact that God’s plan is for every believer to be a personal witness. Worse still, some of us understand the soul-winner’s role, but we are silenced or verbally debilitated by a mentality preoccupied with prejudices, peer pressure, and pride.

For instance, it is unlikely we will lead many people to Christ whom we are convinced will not respond to the gospel. Neither is it probable that we will win those we fear or find socially repulsive. Few of us could ever admit to the prideful mentality that labels someone as inferior, but soul-winners are not to be found among those with such a mind-set. And, simplistic though it may sound, we will hardly even *attempt* to win to Jesus those we personally dislike.

As much as anything, Simon Peter had to contend with his own thinking before he could lead Cornelius and his household to Christ. Cornelius was not the problem; it was not *his* resistance that impeded Peter’s witness. It was Peter’s perspective that had to be transformed, and when it was, he was God’s instrument to lead a household to Christ.

The account in Acts 10 begins with an introduction of Cornelius, a Roman centurion in command of a contingent of troops helping to occupy the land of Israel. Roman though he was, Cornelius had become convinced that the God of the Hebrew people was, indeed, the true and living God. He was even benevolent to the residents of Caesarea, who viewed Romans as their enemies.

Furthermore, in his personal hunger for God, Cornelius sought to pray regularly. God honored the man's sincerity, instructing him in a vision to send for a man named Simon Peter who was in Joppa. Peter had the answers for what Cornelius longed to know.

Luke continues the account, shifting the scene to Simon Peter, who was visiting in the home of Simon the tanner in Joppa. Not knowing three men were en route from Caesarea to escort him to Cornelius, Peter was waiting for lunch on his host's rooftop. With food on his mind, Peter fell asleep and had a dream, which repeated itself three times. He envisioned a large sheet, suspended from heaven, let down in front of him. On the sheet were all sorts of animals, birds, and reptiles. A voice called upon Peter to kill, dress, and eat one of the creatures. He protested, saying he had never broken the Jewish dietary laws. Upon each of Peter's protests, the voice countered, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:15, KJV).

As Peter pondered the meaning of his vision, the three men arrived from Caesarea. The Holy Spirit instructed him to go with the men—no questions asked. Taking some friends along, Peter made the divinely arranged journey the next day. Upon his arrival at Cornelius' house, Peter was met by the centurion, who knelt before him, as if to worship him. Peter insisted he stand, declaring himself to be only another man. Walking into Cornelius' home, Peter found himself surrounded by Gentiles, an uncomfortable setting for one so steeped in Jewish background. It was then that Peter acknowledged his original mind-set and the change of mind that he had experienced.

"And he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean'" (Acts 10:28, NASB).

Finding a receptive assembly, who hung on his every word, Peter preached to Cornelius and to those Cornelius had invited to his home. In the midst of Peter's witness, the Holy Spirit manifested His convicting presence and a house full of Gentiles was saved! Astonished though Peter and his Jewish Christian companions were, there was no mistaking that these Gentiles were saved in the same way they had been.

Aside from an exciting biblical account of salvation's miracle, this incident in Peter's life underscores several truths essential to the thinking of all soul-winners.

I. No one is beyond the reach of salvation

Peter had a difficult time becoming convinced that Gentiles could be saved the same way Jewish people were. The experience at Cornelius' house probably should have settled the matter once and for all, but Peter proved to be hard to convince. At least for the moment, the fisherman-evangelist got the point: "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35, KJV).

Like Simon Peter, we must learn to think like soul-winners if we are to be used to reach the hard-to-reach.

Years ago, I was asked to be present at the execution of a man who had murdered his wife and two of their three little girls. He did not deny committing the crime, but, having been in a drunken stupor, he hardly remembered it. Before I met him, during the long process of trials and appeals, he was led to Christ in jail. During the five months I visited with Grover, I became convinced his conversion was genuine. However, on the eve of his execution, knowing I was to be with him in his last moments of life, I had to wrestle with my own confidence of salvation's power. It was in that honest heart-search that I found a conviction that remains in me: *No one* is beyond the reach of God's amazing grace!

The next morning, just before I took that walk with Grover Lucas to the electric chair, I heard him ask what I had anticipated: "Preacher, will I be with Jesus in a few minutes?"

I never meant it more than when I replied, "Grover, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from *all* sin!"

II. None hunger for God like those who do it in secret

Who would have thought a Roman centurion would yearn to know the God about whom he learned from the people he ruled? And who would think that some people we assume are so disinterested in the gospel are among those who most yearn for the Lord?

A few years ago, I had the joy of baptizing a man and woman whose conversions remain radiant to this day. Before they were saved, both had heavy drinking problems. In fact, when they drank, they became loud, boisterous, and intimidating to their neighbors. So intimidating were they that few Christians ventured a witness in their direction. Finally, by way of broadcast ministries and faithful, befriending Christian witnesses, the couple came to Christ. Some months after their baptism, during a personal conversation, the wife told me, "Even when I was so repulsive and difficult

to deal with, I wanted so much the Christ other people had.”

III. Nobody comes to Christ except by the work of the Holy Spirit

If any thought should be foremost in the soul-winner’s mind, it is the one from God’s Word: “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3, NIV).

To be sure, we are to be faithful witnesses, but we cannot do the work of conviction and conversion; that is the Spirit’s work!

In the case of Cornelius and Simon Peter, the Holy Spirit was at work in them both. The Spirit prepared the heart of one for the witness that He prepared in the heart of the other.

For a soul-winner to think clearly and effectively, he or she must remember to take the role of careful, loving, biblical *input*, while the *outcome* is in the hands of the Spirit!

IV. Not one of us has a monopoly on a relationship to Jesus

It is true. We are saved by way of a personal relationship to Christ. Our salvation is an individual matter, but we must never forget that we are also saved so that others may have opportunity to be saved. To be smug or silent about our knowledge of the Lord is to be both disobedient and unbelievably selfish.

Peter and his fellow Jewish Christians had to acknowledge they had no right to monopolize the gospel. They were not owners of the gospel; they were debtors to those who had never heard it.

As Paul said of himself, “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise” (Rom. 1:14, KJV).

It has been said that when Jonas Salk presented the world with the vaccine that would conquer the dreaded disease of polio, a colleague of his asked, “Why did you not keep it to yourself awhile? You could have been a richer man perhaps.”

Salk’s reported response was classic. In fact, his reply is the articulation of a soul-winner’s mentality. He said, “Oh, no, I could not keep it to myself. For he who has what the world needs is debtor to the world!”

That’s how to think like a soul-winner.

MY APPROACH TO PERSONAL SOUL-WINNING

Freddie Gage

John 3:16,36

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. . . . He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”
(John 3:16,36, KJV).

I. The content of our message

The content of our message must be comprehensive. It must include the entire gospel message. The gospel, recorded simply in the apostles’ sermons in the book of Acts, consists of the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and blessed return of our Lord. It should never simply be “thrown out” to the people. The claims of Christ must always be presented in such a way as to make a demand upon the hearers. Their needs must first be presented, for no demand is made without recognition of personal need. Show people they are sinners.

II. Condition of the lost

Turn to Romans 3:10 and read it to the person slowly. Let’s assume it is “Mr. Smith.” It is even better to point to the verse and encourage him to read it aloud. “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10, KJV).

Then turn to Romans 3:23 (KJV) and read: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

“Now, Mr. Smith, the Bible says that none are righteous. That means that I’m not righteous, doesn’t it?”

Always get yourself lost first. In witnessing, we never approach the lost with a “BIG ME—little you” attitude. We must maintain a “little us—GREAT SAVIOR” attitude. Never make a person feel inferior to you.

“Now, if there is none righteous, then your neighbor, your wife, and you are not righteous. Isn’t that right?”

With this approach to the questions of righteousness, you are not pointing him out. You are including him with the rest of humankind.

“Mr. Smith, the second verse said, ‘For all have sinned.’ That means you and I both have sinned, right?”

Occasionally, someone will not immediately admit that he or she is a sinner. You may, in such a case, respond by saying, “If Jesus were to walk up and stand before us right now, do you mean you could look Him in the eye and say, ‘Jesus, you didn’t need to die for me, for I am as good as you are?’” (Wait for response.)

“No, you couldn’t, Mr. Smith, and this is exactly what it means when the Bible says, ‘All have . . . come short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23, KJV). So then, according to the Bible, you and I both have sinned, haven’t we?”

III. Consequences of being lost

The next thing Mr. Smith must come to understand is the consequences of being lost. The price of sin is high, and it must be paid.

“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Ps. 9:17, KJV).

Turn to Romans 5:12 (KJV) and read it to him, or allow him to read it aloud: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

Then comment, “Mr. Smith, in this verse we see the price of sin. Death. The one man by whom sin entered the world was Adam. I’m sure you know the story of Adam.”

Then turn and read Romans 6:23 (KJV): “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

“Mr. Smith, you recall, I’m sure, how God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden. There He told them they could eat of every tree but one. They disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden tree. When they did, they died. ‘The wages of sin is death.’ Now, they didn’t die physically on the spot, did they? (Wait for response.) But they died spiritually. Spiritually separated from God, they went and hid themselves. What this verse indicates to us is that, because of our sinful nature, we are separated spiritually from God; we are spiritually dead. Do you understand?” (Wait for response.)

“Mr. Smith, if a man lives a life separated from God, doesn’t it stand to reason he will die a death separated from God? (Wait for response.) And, if he dies a death separated from God, doesn’t it follow he will spend eternity separated from God? (Wait for response.) And an eternity separated from God is spent where? (Wait for response). In hell!”

Now that the need is established, the attitude of the conversation changes.

“Now, Mr. Smith, I want to share with you the greatest news you’ve ever heard.”

IV. Christ’s compassion for the lost

It is at this point we share the “good news.” Share it with great joy and excitement, for it is the “power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16, KJV).

“But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, KJV).

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10, KJV).

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, KJV)!

“Mr. Smith, God knows you and I are sinners. And to die a sinner, separated from God, is to spend eternity in hell. Mr. Smith, God loves you more than you’ll ever know, more than you love anyone, more than anyone ever loved you. God loves you. God wants you to spend eternity fellowshiping with Him in heaven!”

“God, because of His great love for you, devised a plan, whereby He could save you. The plan had to include justice for your sin, as well as His love for you. The plan had to include payment for your sin to settle your account, and forgiveness and cleansing for you so that you can enter heaven.

“God Himself came to planet Earth as a man, becoming all we are while never ceasing to be all He is. His name: Jesus Christ! Born of a virgin in Bethlehem, living a life as a man without sin, and performing great and mighty miracles, He was God’s Son.

“Mr. Smith, suppose for a moment that Jesus had sinned only one time. What would He have been? (Wait for response.) That’s right, He would have been a sinner.

“*But, He never sinned!* And in dying, His enemy said, ‘I find no fault in this man’ (Luke 12:4, KJV). So Jesus did not *have* to go to hell.

“But at the age of 33, He hung on a bloody cross and cried, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me’ (Matt. 27:46, KJV)? He was separated from God the Father. That’s what happened to Adam and Eve in the garden, wasn’t it? (Wait for response.)

“Jesus Christ paid the price for their sin and ours when He became ‘sin for us, who knew no sin’ (2 Cor. 5:21, KJV). Can you see that Jesus was paying a debt He did not owe? (Wait for

response.)

“Now, Mr. Smith, you owe a debt you have not paid. Don’t you see, you and Jesus need to get together.”

Yes, Calvary is the cure for the lost, and the cross must be the centrality of our message. It is here we can settle the sin question.

V. Conclusion—an invitation: The key to soul-winning

A lawyer is lost without a verdict; so, too, is a soul-winner. Often a soul-winner does not receive a verdict because he stops short and never gives an invitation. No wonder we see such few results. God has promised fruit, and it is our privilege to reap, as well as sow. The climax of our witness is to lead the sinner to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20, KJV).

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9-10, KJV).

“Mr. Smith, as you can see, our job is to accept God’s plan by receiving God’s Son as the risen Lord, who not only died for our sins, paying sin’s full price, but who lives today and desires to live His life in us as Lord.

“Let’s say you had a loan at the bank, and the payment was due, and the banker called you, saying, ‘Mr. Smith, someone just walked in and paid off your debt. Would you come down and sign the final papers?’ You would have a choice. You could go down and sign the papers and accept the payment made by the individual, or you could tell the banker, ‘Just tell whoever it is to pay his own debts, and I’ll pay mine.’ Can you see that to refuse payment would mean you’re paying a debt that already has been paid? (Wait for response.)

“Jesus Christ suffered the penalty (payment) for your sin and mine when He died on the cross. Would the wise decision be to accept His payment—His death on the cross for your sin—or to suffer for your own sins in eternal hell, separated from a loving God?” (Wait for response.)

VI. Close—a decision

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of

salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2, KJV).

Many people have aims in life, but they never pull the trigger. “Close” is a salesman’s term meaning to bring a person to a decision. In a church service, we would call it the invitation. In soul-winning, we often call it “drawing the net.”

“Mr. Smith, would you mind if I take a moment to pray that you would receive Christ as Savior and Lord of your life?”

Don’t pray a lengthy or a “ministerial” prayer. Pray simply something like this:

“Dear Lord, I am so thankful that Mr. Smith has listened to your plan. I pray you’ll help him realize that Jesus loves him and died for him and waits in love to forgive and save him. I pray you’ll help him to receive Jesus.”

Don’t say “Amen”; just stop praying and say to Mr. Smith, “While our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed, I want you to know God loves you and Jesus died for you, just like He died for me. I’m going to ask you to do what I once did, to simply ask Jesus, in your own words, to come into your heart, forgive you of your sins, and save you.”

Wait for a response. If he does begin to pray, as he draws toward the end of his prayer, softly interrupt and say, “Mr. Smith, repeat after me, ‘Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner (pause for response). Save my soul (pause). I now receive Jesus Christ (pause) as my Savior and Lord (pause).’”

If, when you ask him to pray in his own words, he does not begin to pray, then softly lead him in the above prayer at that time.

At the conclusion of the prayer, ask him, “Now, Mr. Smith, according to the Word of God, if you were to die today, where would you go?”

Don’t ask him how he feels! You are not saved by how you feel. You are saved by whom you trust. If a person hears the plan of God, believes the plan of God, trusts the Savior as his substitute, and receives Him, he or she is saved. The Bible says so.

Read again Romans 10:9, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (KJV). *This is the assurance of salvation!*

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17, KJV).

HOW TO OVERCOME YOUR FEAR OF WITNESSING TO OTHERS

Thad Hamilton

*“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”
(2 Tim. 1:7, KJV).*

Introduction

Ever since I received Jesus Christ as a teenager, I have wanted others to know about Him. When I became a Christian, I came to understand that my job was to win others to Him. But I have been a Christian for 16 years, and I have a confession to make to you. I have a fear of witnessing.

Some of you would say, “Thad Hamilton, how can you have a fear of witnessing? You are always talking and enthusiastic and excited.”

Well, I have to admit to you that whenever the opportunity comes up in the course of daily life to share Jesus with someone, or whenever visitation time at our church is approaching, I become afraid of what may happen. I really do. And as I have talked with many other Christians over the years, I have found that they, too, have a fear of witnessing. How about you? Do you have a fear of witnessing to others about Christ?

After much study, observation, and prayer, I am convinced that of all the enemies of soul-winning efforts, fear is the most deadly. Fear keeps us from doing anything at all about sharing Jesus Christ with those who need Him. I am sharing this message with you in the hope that what God has shown me about overcoming my fear of witnessing will be helpful to you.

How do we overcome our fear of witnessing to others? I think there is a two-fold plan, a two-fold remedy.

I. Why we are afraid to witness to others

We should to analyze two things: our adversary and our attitude.

1. Our adversary

When a person is afraid to witness to others, what is the real problem? As we look in the Scripture—“for God hath not given us the *spirit* of fear” (2 Tim. 1:7, KJV)—we see that the problem is not

the spirit of *fear*; but the *person*, who causes us to be afraid.

As we read Scripture, it's very apparent that Satan, the devil, is the one who gives us the fear. The devil makes us afraid. But let me ask you a question. Has the devil ever given you anything good? Can you think of one good thing that the devil has ever given you? Listen carefully. Jesus says, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10, KJV). The devil has never given you anything good. He's a taker.

Let me ask you another question. Has the devil ever told you the truth? Jesus said to some of the Jewish leaders, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44, KJV). So, if the devil wants you to be afraid, he is telling you a lie.

So, when we analyze our adversary, we come up with this: Our enemy, the devil, has told us to be afraid of witnessing to others, but he is a liar who wants to take us out of God's plan for our lives.

2. Our attitude

In analyzing our attitude, I want to ask three questions.

(1) What is fear? Fear is an attitude of the mind.

(2) What is an attitude? An attitude is a way of looking at things. So, fear is a certain way of looking at people, situations, and ourselves.

(3) What is this kind of fear? What is the fear of witnessing? The New Testament uses two primary Greek words that are translated "fear."

The most frequently used Greek word is *phobos*—the word that we translate phobia, such as claustrophobia. This word in itself has neither a good nor bad connotation. It can be either, depending on what it refers to.

Then there's the other word for fear in the New Testament, *dilia*. This word is only used once in the New Testament, in 2 Timothy 1:7. In other literature, it's always used in a bad sense. The word can be translated cowardice. This is the kind of fear that makes a person a coward in witnessing to others. And fear paralyzes us so that we do no witnessing at all. Perhaps the title of this message should be "How to Quit Being a Coward in Witnessing to others."

We've seen what fear is. It's an attitude of the mind. It's a way of looking at things. We've seen what this kind of fear is. It means to be a coward. But now, what is the actual reason for the fear? Why do we have fear?

First of all, some of us have fear because of personality. You may have a more introverted personality. You will not come forward to meet people; instead you let people come to you. My wife, Camille, has this kind of personality. She has said, "It's hard for me to approach people and witness because they may not be interested in what I have to say. It's easier for me to let them approach me. Then I know they are interested enough to start the conversation."

Sometimes fear comes from our past. You may have the kind of past where you've been rejected by friends or family. I often feel fear in witnessing for this very reason. I'm afraid the other person may not like me, may not receive me, or may just outright reject what I'm saying about Jesus Christ. I'm afraid of being rejected personally.

The third reason we fear witnessing is pain. In the Bible, there are many occasions when the disciples were afraid to witness because of the threat of bodily harm or death. Sometimes, even in our day, we may be scared that the person we are going to witness to is rough and mean and may do us some bodily harm. A man I know ran off two people who wanted to witness to him and threatened to shoot them if they ever returned.

Now we've analyzed our adversary and our attitude. We know where the problem is.

II. What God will do to enable us to witness to others

Let me share with you the second part of overcoming your fear of witnessing to others.

Second Timothy 1:7 tells us, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." As I've tried to study this and pray through this and understand how this works in my life, I have come up with three areas of acceptance.

1. Accept His authority over us

The Bible says that when I accepted Jesus Christ, God gave me His Holy Spirit. God, without a body, comes into my body and lives there. Why? The Bible says that God has given us His Holy Spirit to be the God of every area of our lives. And so, the first step is to accept God's authority over us, and to do this each time we

sense fear in witnessing to others: “Lord, take control. Have control of me, what I say, what I do, what I think.”

2. Accept His appointment for us

You may not have known that you were important enough for God to make appointments for you. But God has one main appointment for every Christian: to be a witness of the good news of His Son to the lost around us. The Bible says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19, KJV). That is our goal in life. That is our reason for being.

Have you ever accepted His appointment for you to witness? You see, if you accept His general appointment for you, then He will set up the other appointments for you. While sitting in the gym where I work out, I was praying, “Lord, I really want to witness for You. Bring someone into my life.” Into the room where I was came one of the biggest, meanest-looking, strongest guys I have ever seen in my life. It turned out that he needed a Christian witness. God had set up an appointment for me.

First, we must accept His authority over us. Second, we must accept His appointment for us.

3. Accept His ability through us

It's not us copying God. It's God working, coming to people through us. It's not us witnessing because He wants us to; it's God doing it through us. You see, here's the principle: God's Spirit—when He has authority over us and when we have accepted His appointment for us—will operate His ability through us. The Bible says, “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24, KJV).

When it comes to witnessing to others, 2 Timothy 1:7 says that God will work through us in three ways: power, love, and a sound mind. The word for *power* is that familiar Greek word, which we translate “dynamo” and “dynamite” and “dynamic.” The power of the Holy Spirit is not promised only to preachers, or especially to Christian workers, or to some superstar who stands before thousands. The power of the Holy Spirit is promised to all of us. And especially as we tell others about Christ. “But ye [plural] shall receive power [that's a fact], after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you [and He has when you've received Christ]: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8, KJV). The Holy Spirit will give us the power. He will work the power through us,

making us a dynamo and making the truth that we share like dynamite with dynamic results in the other person's life.

Now, the Spirit will also work through us with *love*. The Greek word for love here is the familiar word *agape*. Agape is the kind of love that simply means to have an unconditional love expressing itself in genuine concern for the good of the other person. The Bible says that Jesus saw the multitudes and He was moved with compassion out of His love. Jesus cares and has a genuine concern for our good. And, as we allow Him to, the Holy Spirit will work through us in others with that genuine love, which will push our fear aside. How can we be afraid of people rejecting us when we know how much they need what we are sharing?

The key is to be loving people. We don't witness because we have to. We witness because of His authority over us, His appointment for us, and His ability and love through us. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18, KJV).

But the Holy Spirit works through us, not only with power and with love, but also with *sound mind*. Now, the word here is kind of unusual. In fact, as I was studying it, I had a hard time understanding what it meant. This Greek word for sound mind is used only here in the New Testament. It's translated variously as “discipline,” “self-control,” “caution,” and “discretion.” In trying to understand how the Holy Spirit would give us a sound mind in witnessing, I've come to the interpretation that He will give us good sense and the good actions that are a result of good sense. You see, if we are thinking right, we'll do right. The Holy Spirit will work in our minds, giving us good sense, and the good sense will control our actions. Now, how does this relate to witnessing?

First, the Holy Spirit will give us good sense about preparation to witness. We won't be able to witness long without knowing that we must get prepared. We must pray, read our Bibles, and understand and memorize the verses in the Bible that are a part of witnessing to others. The Holy Spirit will also give us good sense about our personal lives which relate to our witness. Many times our lives close our lips, but the Holy Spirit will give us good sense about preparation in personal life, good sense about cultivating the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

He'll also give us good sense about presentation while witnessing. He'll give us good sense about what to say and when to say it—when to say nothing and be quiet and let the Spirit move and when to say the right thing to the right person at the right time.

And finally, the Holy Spirit will give us good sense about praise

in witnessing. God gets all the glory. And so, the Holy Spirit will not only work in us by power and love, but He'll also give us a sound mind—good sense and good actions in preparation to witness, personal life, presentation, and praise.

So, the fear of witnessing to others can be overcome when we analyze why we are afraid to witness and then accept what God will do to enable us to witness to others. God, with the power and love and sound mind, will make us effective witnesses.

My prayer is that God will help you to personally search your mind, your heart, and your life in this most critical matter.

HERE'S HOPE. SHARE JESUS NOW.

Richard Harris

Ephesians 2:8-12

Introduction

Hope is something all of us need. Hope is something that money can't buy, but you can't live without. Hope is the stuff that dreams are made of. It's that quality of thought that makes the future look brighter and life worth living. With a heart full of hope, you can endure any hardship. You can sustain any love. You can outlast all the ups and downs of life, and hope is the only remedy for hopelessness. Real hope. Where do you find it? How do you get it? Ephesians 2:12 (NIV) says, "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, . . . without hope and without God in the world."

I want to share with you about *Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now*. To understand *Here's Hope*, we must look at it in the past, present, and future perspectives. To fully appreciate and capture the opportunity of the hour before us, we must first go back and understand what life is like without hope.

I. No hope defines our past

Paul, in Ephesians 2, paints a dark and dismal picture. Listen to what he says about you and about me. He says in verse 1 (NIV) that you were without life—"You were dead in your transgressions and sins." You weren't just sick; you were sinful. He says in verse 2 (KJV), you "walked according to the course of this world." You didn't just need resuscitation, you needed resurrection. You were without strength.

How often have you heard somebody say, "Well, preacher, I just couldn't help it." Sometimes I think they could help it, but often they can't, because they are blinded by the power of the god of this age (see 2 Cor. 4:4). In Ephesians 2:12 (KJV), Paul said that we were without promise, "strangers from the covenants of promise." It is said that 30,000 promises are contained in God's Word, but not one is there for the man or the woman who will not turn in faith to Jesus Christ. Did I say there's not one? There is one promise, "He that believeth not is condemned already" (John 3:18, KJV). In verse 12 (KJV), he says our past is described without hope, having no hope. Then he says not only without life, without strength, without Christ, without promise, without hope, but also "without God in

the world.”

The relevance of religious history to today's problems has been debated. Religion is not one of evolution, as some would have us believe. As I understand it, religious history in evolutionary terms starts with many gods and, through the process of elimination, finds the true God. Our modern history is just the opposite—*devolution*. Devolution starts with the one true God, and now we are bowing down before every idol and god that can be mentioned or named. We live in a day where people are without hope, and that's the reason they are drifting off into so many varied sins and moral aberrations.

Without Christ, humankind is without hope. Do you remember what it was like before you were saved? This is where every lost person is today. Theologians are trying to help us understand this. They tell us that when Adam and Eve sinned, they died; and that was the “fall of man.” But what does the fall of man mean? The humanist may say that when Adam and Eve died, they added something to their personality, they actually became more complete. The existentialist takes issue and says no, man didn't move upward. Man fell over the brink, but he caught on the edge, and, with enough self-effort, he will be able to bring himself back into right standing with God.

The philanthropist says, “Oh, yes, he went over the edge when he fell spiritually, but as he went down, down, down, he caught on a twig on the side of the cliff, and there he hangs.” The philanthropist says man can be saved if a concerned human will come along and help another needy human, so that he or she can be lifted back into right standing before God.

The religionist comes along, and says, “Oh, no, he didn't just fall over the edge and catch on a twig, he fell all the way down, but he landed on a ledge, and that ledge is the church. If the church will do its job, the church will put man back in right standing with God.”

As I read my Bible, I don't understand that man added something to his personality when he died spiritually. He didn't fall upward and improve himself, nor did he fall and catch on the brink of the ledge. He didn't catch on a twig on the side of the cliff when he fell; he didn't hit on a ledge so the church can help him up. The Bible says he fell all the way! People are dead in their trespasses and sin, without hope in the world. Now to understand what it means when a person is spiritually dead, go to a funeral home. Be sure to go where no one knows you. Wait until all the

visitors have left the viewing of the corpse. Go into the funeral parlor with a big sandwich or a big glass of ice water.

Go up to the corpse and say, “Sir (if it's a male), now you've been here for two or three days, and I know you just must be famished. I know you are thirsty. I brought you a sandwich. Have a bite.”

Will he eat? The Lord help you if he does take a bite. Offer him a drink of ice water. Will he take a drink? Surely he is thirsty, he has been there for two or three days. He will not take a drink.

Then raise up the lid of the casket and take a big hat pin, stick him right in the big toe and say, “Sir, did you feel any pain? I know that must hurt, as I stuck you with a hat pin.”

Now, you say, “You're being facetious; you're just being ridiculous, preacher. You know a corpse is not thirsty, is not hungry, and does not feel any pain.”

That is my exact point. He is dead. He is dead physically.

It is the same way with people spiritually. They are without hope in the world! They are dead in their trespasses and sins! This is the spiritual condition of everyone without Christ. Now the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is the difference between a living person and a corpse. And the only difference between one corpse and another corpse is the degree of decay. And be it a Ted Bundy, with all the atrocious acts he committed; or Ceausescu over in Romania, with all the death and suffering he caused; or the moralist who sits in your church pew on Sunday morning—the *only difference between one lost person and another lost person is the degree of decay!* They are all lost—without Christ, without hope.

II. A living hope describes our present

No hope defines our past, but a living hope describes our present. And our present hope is based on two things. In Ephesians 2:8 and 9, we have the reception of grace. We must receive what God has given us. In verse 13 (KJV), Paul says, “But now in Christ Jesus . . .” From no hope to faith in Christ Jesus, from dead in trespasses and sin to alive in Jesus Christ. In verses 1 and 5, Paul says that you were quickened. In verse 13, he says Christ has made us nigh. And in verse 6, Paul adds that Christ has raised us together and we are seated together with Him. (See Appendix A for an illustration of this point, “Saved from Quicksand.”)

Are you aware that, during 1992, according to the Uniform Church Letter of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC; now called the Annual Church Profile), 72 percent of our churches baptized 10 people or fewer? Ten or fewer. Tell me evangelism is a priority in

the SBC. With such results, tell me it is a priority in our state conventions, associations, and churches. Many of us are part of the hesitant church that has totally defected from the sense of individual responsibility.

What am I saying to you? I am saying that we have a hurting land, and, in the hurting land, we have church leaders who are not doing their jobs. We are not responding to the grace bestowed upon us. We must use our spiritual eyes and see our nation as the Lord sees it.

The Son of God wants us to go out into the streets, the highways, and the hedges and mix with the crowd of the irreligious people—people who don't necessarily fit in our churches, don't exactly look at home sitting in our pews. But they are people Jesus loves. He died for them on the cross just as much as He died for you and me.

You know Israel was chosen by God to be a light unto the Gentiles. But what happened to Israel? They became like the Gentiles, and their light burned dimly. We in the church today have become, as one great preacher said, "So much like the world and the world so much like us that we can hardly tell the difference." When we are most like the world, we are the least effective for Jesus. And when we are most like Jesus, we will be most effective in the world!

III. *Here's Hope* directs our future

There's one last thing I want to mention to you. *No hope defines our past. A living hope defines our present.* But I want to say to you that *Here's Hope* directs our future. Verse 11 (KJV) says, "Wherefore remember . . ." All backsliding comes out of God's people failing to remember—forgetting what it was like to be lost. We must go back and remember. Remember we were without hope. Remember Jesus did give us hope. The 1995 *Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now.* evangelism emphasis may or may not result in spiritual awakening, spiritual revival. But I think many people will be saved. I believe the time has come for us to put our actions where our mouths have been all along.

After 12 years in denominational work, I have come to this conclusion: Southern Baptists have evangelism as a priority in theory only, not in practice. When 72 percent of our churches baptize 10 people or fewer, it says something about our priority. Jesus said, "The fields . . . are white already to harvest" (John 4:35, KJV), and He told us to pray for laborers to go (Luke 10:2). If all the ministers listed in the *Southern Baptist Convention Annual* (i.e., preachers,

associates, ministers of music, ministers of youth, ministers of education, evangelists) were each to win just five people to the Lord annually, we would have 412,000 baptisms a year. We have only had annual baptisms go that high five or six times in Southern Baptist history.

Do you know where the dry bones must come back alive? In the pulpits of this land. We must start practicing what we are preaching. Have you ever noticed that lost people are much more interested in hearing the gospel than most of us are in telling the gospel? Preachers, lead the way!

In the book *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World*, David Barrett and James Reapsome indicate that throughout history, at least 788 plans have emerged to evangelize the world. These plans have sprung from every continent and every major tradition of Christianity. More than half of history's plans have emerged since 1948. By 1990, one new plan appeared each week. About 254 global plans are active today and making progress, and half have targeted dates for A.D. 2000. Of the 66 generations, up to where we are now from the early church, 59 of these 66 generations got very little serious attention from the church. It is a story, say the authors, of failure, neglect, and disobedience. Church historians will describe twenty centuries of the church as obeying the Great Commission but perhaps the most accurate description would be *disobeying* the great commission.¹

Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now. will just be a slick slogan until God's people rise up and say to a hurting land, "There is hope in Jesus Christ, and I'm a living example of this dynamic hope! Look to Jesus and receive the life and hope He offers!"

¹ David B. Barrett and James W. Reapsome, *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World: The Rise of a Global Evangelization Movement* (New Hope, Alabama: Woman's Missionary Union, 1988), 8, 10.

A LOST CHILD

Ken Hemphill

Luke 15:3-32

One Sunday evening after church, I stopped by a pizza parlor on my way home. While waiting for my pizza, I stepped next door to the grocery store to pick up a couple of Cokes and some milk for Monday breakfast. As I placed the milk carton in my basket, my eye was drawn to the pictures of two children on the side of the carton. I paid for my few items and walked back into the pizza parlor. My steaming hot pizzas had been packaged to go. To my surprise, the coverings for the pizzas were adorned with the pictures of yet two more children. I began to read. "Susie, eleven years old, blonde hair, last seen March 3." They were lost children.

Involuntarily and compulsively, I reached down and hugged my youngest daughter, Katie, to my side. The horror of a *lost child* flooded through my mind. What must these parents feel? Shock, panic, fear, gut-wrenching pain. My mind began to ponder the numerous horrendous circumstances that one could imagine for a lost little girl.

Have you ever lost one of your children, even for a split second? You are shopping in a crowded mall. Your little boy slips his hand out of yours and runs to the toy store window. The crowd suddenly swells, and in that moment you lose sight of your son. He's gone. Lost! Do you remember that empty, sick feeling in the pit of your stomach? Adrenaline began to flow; you scurried into action, frantically searching to find your lost child. Can you remember the relief, the sheer joy, when you found him? Your plans to scold him for leaving your side were washed away with the joyous tears that unashamedly flowed.

If we feel so intensely when one of our children is lost only for a moment, how must our Heavenly Father feel when He sees one of His children facing the prospect of being lost for eternity. There is a parable in Luke's Gospel that gives us a picture of the Father's passion for the restoration of His lost son. We often refer to it as the parable of the prodigal son. It is, in fact, the third of three parables given by our Lord Jesus to quiet the grumbling of the religious leaders of His day. Let's look at these three parables in Luke 15.

I. The context

Let me first set the stage for the telling of these parables. Notice in verse 1 that we have a typical scene in the life of Jesus. The tax-gatherers and the sinners had drawn near to listen to the teaching of Jesus. In Jesus they had found a man who stood powerfully and consistently against sin, but who loved and embraced the sinner. He did not treat them as outcasts, but as lost children of the Father.

Jesus' ability to reach out to sinful humanity is a moving and compelling picture. But it was not pleasing to everyone. In fact, Jesus' ministry to sinners seemed to be a thorn in the side of the religious establishment of Jesus' day. The Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble that Jesus would receive and socialize with sinners.

Notice in Luke 15 that there are three parables—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. All three deal with lost items. Each has a common theme—the sheer unbridled joy when the lost item is found. But each parable has a slightly different and unique emphasis.

II. The lost sheep (vv. 3-7)

We have memorialized the parable of the lost sheep in the song “The Ninety and Nine.” I have always thought that the missing sheep in this story was the proverbial black sheep of the flock. That evening, as the shepherd took stock of his sheep, calling each by name as it entered the sheepfold, he probably was not overly surprised to find that one was missing. More than likely, it had been missing before. Perhaps frequently.

The shepherd's day had already been a long one, beginning before sunrise. He was tired and hungry, ready to retire for the night. The thought of going back out into the dark and dangerous wilderness was not a joyous one. It would have been easy to convince oneself that the trip would be a waste of time. By this time, the helpless lost sheep had probably perished at the hands of a hungry lion. That small sheep could have been the appetizer, making the shepherd a leading candidate for the main course.

To search for the lost sheep was troublesome, dangerous, and possibly even futile. Yet the shepherd didn't hesitate. He left the 99 and began his search for the single missing sheep. The unique emphasis of this parable is that no cost is too great. The shepherd did not consider the trouble, the personal sacrifice, or the risk. He searched until he found his missing sheep, and then he tenderly carried it back. (See Appendix A for the illustration, “The Rescue of Jessica.”)

III. The lost coin (vv. 8-10)

Our second parable involves a woman who has lost a coin. The coin represents a tenth of all she has. Thus, it has great value. In light of its value, she begins a thorough search, sweeping out the entire house. The unique emphasis of this parable is the thoroughness of the search based on the value of the missing object.

Have you ever lost something that you highly valued? I have participated in many searches in our house that resulted in the moving of furniture, the emptying of drawers, the checking of pockets, and, finally, the thrashing through trash cans.

“Maybe I threw the treasured item out with the trash.” You've been there. If the item has sufficient value, one is reluctant to ever call off the search until every conceivable corner has been searched. (See Appendix A for the illustration, “Kristina and the Precious Ring.”)

IV. The lost son (vv. 11-32)

The last of our three parables is obviously the central parable. You know the story well. A man had two sons. The younger son decides that life at home is too confining. He takes his portion of the inheritance and strikes out on his own. The son was foolish, impetuous, and, yes, sinful. The “far country” represents his attempt to escape every vestige of his father's influence.

Yet in the far country, he discovered a bondage far worse and confining than the walls of his home. He lost his treasure. He sank so low in his sin that he found himself slopping hogs. Once he hit bottom, he determined to look up. The aroma of the hog lot of sin can bring us to our senses. He made up his mind to swallow his pride and return to his father.

As the scene shifts, we find his father peering at the distant horizon, desperately scanning the landscape for any sign of his missing son. He had never ceased to wait; he had never quit his anxious vigil, for he had never ceased to love his son. Seeing his son at a far distance, the father began to run toward him with outstretched arms. He embraced his son and began to shower him with kisses. He ordered the slaves to bring his son the best robe, a ring for his hand, and sandals for his feet. The party—the celebration for the return of this lost son—was about to commence.

Heartwarming story, isn't it? An incredible picture of a father's compassion and willingness to forgive. But we're not actually to the focal point of the story. I told you we should take the three parables together. Have you noticed the progression? In the first story, the

ratio was one in 100; in the second, it was one in 10; while in the final story, it was one in two. All things being equal, the more scarce something is, the greater its value. But here the impact is compounded because each item is actually more precious than the former one. The coin has greater value than the sheep, but we would all agree that a son is of infinitely greater value than a sheep or a coin.

When we compare the stories of the missing items, we notice that something is missing in this final story. *Where is the rescuer? No one searched for the lost boy!* If a shepherd would risk his life for a sheep, and a woman would diligently search for a lost coin, surely someone should have looked for the missing boy. If the father in this story represents the Heavenly Father, He can not physically seek His lost children. But there is someone in the story who could have gone. There is someone who should have gone.

It was the older brother. Now, before you get angry with the older brother, you should notice that he's not a bad sort of guy. He had stayed home, faithfully managed the farm, and scrupulously obeyed his father. Notice that he can boast that he had served his father and had never neglected a command (v. 29). Perhaps had he been alive today, he would have served as a deacon, taught Sunday School, and tithed with absolute regularity. But he sinned, because he failed to seek his missing brother.

Look for a moment at the tragic results of failing to look for our missing brothers and sisters.

1. The elder brother missed the party (vv. 25-28)

The joyous celebration in the father's house and the pouting older brother create quite a contrast. He feels no joy at the return of his younger brother. In fact, he refuses to call him his brother, choosing instead to refer to him as his father's son. Many of God's "frozen-chosen" have lost the joy of their Christian experience because they have neglected the plight of the missing children.

2. The elder brother failed to receive his father's fullness (vv. 29-31)

The elder brother whines about his father's generosity toward the younger brother, complaining that his dad had not given him even one little calf. The father answered, "My child, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours" (Luke 15:31, NASB). What have you failed to receive at your Father's magnanimous hand because you have neglected the plight of your brother?

3. He failed to truly understand his father

He had lived at home all these years, but he had no comprehension of his father's love for his missing child. He had no awareness of his father's abundance. The father had plenty for all the prodigals and elder brothers who would respond to his love. Many Christians miss out on the celebration and their Father's abundance because they have failed to understand their Father's desire that not one should perish. He cared so much that He sent His only begotten Son to die on a cruel stick of torture that we should not perish but have everlasting life. (See Appendix A for closing illustration, "Rescuing Animals.")

WHY WE'RE IN BUSINESS

James B. Henry

John 4:27-39

Essence of Text:

Jesus' dramatic encounter with the woman at the well underscores His primary concern for the lostness of humanity.

Proposition:

To receive insights into the actions and attitudes of Jesus that are basics for our missions activity.

Objective:

One cannot probe into the life of our Lord Jesus Christ without seeing quickly the matters He considered significant. That which was His business should be our business. This message is to be a reminder to the church of its principal reason for existence.

Introduction

In Washington, D.C., a business closed down. A sign hung on the front door for passersby to read: "Going Out of Business. Didn't Know What Our Business Was."

What is true in the business world is too often true in the spiritual world. There is a constant diluting of purpose in all worthwhile endeavors. Only a steady reminder and continual refocusing can help us stay on God's track.

A newspaper article reported that a mainline Protestant denomination was making a study to redefine the church's mission. Saying it was entering its third century as a denomination adrift without a vision or sense of identity, 112 seminary professors recommended the study. The professors were saying the denomination had lost the sense of what it was all about.

"The question before us is of the loss of a common sense of mission, which is indeed the mission of God," said one of the professors recommending the study. "When that mission is lost, the people perish for want of a vision."

What has happened to that denomination can happen to Baptists or any other group that wanders from its prime reason for existence. Jesus, as recorded in John 4:27-39, in dealing with this "woman of the streets," led her to a new life, a new identity, a new

joy. She met someone who turned her into a new creation. Because Jesus fulfilled His mission, her life was changed eternally. In this encounter, there are some great lessons about Jesus' dealing with people. There are at least four absolutely essential things we can learn from this encounter to remind our churches "why we're in the missionary business."

I. Jesus saw people as more important than anything else

Verses 31-33 depict the intensity of Jesus' concern. He had to have been physically hungry. He had been traveling, and the energy demands of His ministry had drained Him. Yet, He forgot His needs, because the woman had a far greater need. The disciples were amazed when Jesus said: "I have food to eat that you know nothing about" (John 4:32, NIV).

In our vernacular, Jesus said, "I have some soul food." Jesus' reply was not so much to rebuke as to enlighten. He knew that we can be so absorbed in our pursuits that we ignore the larger picture. (See Appendix A for an illustration of this point, "Eskimo Priorities.")

Throughout the life of Jesus, we see the tremendous love He had for people: a widow whose son was dead, a soldier with a dying daughter, a thief on a cross, a blind man in Jericho, ten lepers, a seeking Pharisee, children on the shores of Galilee. You cannot study the life of Jesus without seeing Him involved with an intensity beyond anything we usually practice.

You may say, "I can't be like that!"

Why not? Didn't Jesus tell us that we would do greater things than He did because He was going to the Father (John 14:12)? Jesus is in the people business. Missions is people. The church's mission is people.

II. Jesus' supreme desire was obedience to God's will

The motive that prompted Jesus' ministry is seen in His statement in John 4:34 (NIV): "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

When this word will is pursued through the Gospel of John (6:38-39; 17:4; 19:28,30), we understand His prime mission was to die for the sins of lost humanity. That death was in the very heart of God's eternal will (1 Pet. 1:17-20). God's will was always Jesus' will.

A friend, retired from military service, said that he studied the word command in the New Testament and found an amazing

thing. A command means that a commander-in-chief gives an order.

"When I was in the military," he said, "I knew that the general was the commander, and that he gave the commands. As a colonel, I carried them out and passed them on. If God, the commander-in-chief, gives a command, all we can do is carry out the orders!"

Why don't we carry out the command to reach our world? I believe there is probably a combination of reasons.

1. Perhaps it is because some of our church members have never been saved. Having no life with Christ, they have nothing to tell.

2. Another reason is that we often have accepted the good instead of the best. Most of our churches offer a variety of excellent programs and ministries. We can be consumed with so many good activities that we overlook the priority.

3. Sometimes traditions root out our mission. There is a tendency to think that the Holy Spirit is bound to the way we did something five or 50 years ago. Our traditions can shackle rather than free us. Openness to the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit can bring a revitalized direction, plan, and sense of purpose to accomplish our Lord's mandate.

4. There are times when we are too comfortable. We're not willing to pay the price. We'll do some things if the price tag isn't too high. The sacrifice to be missionary at heart and in practice often causes churches and individuals to exchange the valley for the mountain.

5. Maybe it's because of a misguided understanding of missions. If I say "missions," some people immediately think, "Africa, Bangladesh, Brazil." But missions is where we are. It begins at home, in the office, and in the community, and it expands until it encompasses the world. The correct Christian is the believer who has a worldview. That is the view from the top! God's will is for the world to come to Him. We are partners in that plan. That's why we're in business—to fulfill God's eternal plan to witness to all humanity.

III. Jesus surveyed the world with harvest eyes

A look at verse 35 gives us a sense of the discernment Jesus had

for the opportunity at hand. I think this is the scenario.

The disciples came trudging to Jesus and said, "Lord Jesus, it's tough over in Samaria. We've worked hard and with little results. This is a hard situation, if not impossible. It will be at least four months before we see any harvest."

While the disciples were complaining to Jesus, the woman at the well is on her way to Jesus with a large contingent of her village following her. Jesus saw what was happening. He said in essence, "Listen, fellows. You say there are four more months until harvest. Turn around and look! The harvest is coming in right now!" Jesus surveyed the world with an eye to immediate harvest.

Many in the world are ready to be harvested. It only takes laborers. The up-and-out are ready to be saved. They have tasted all of life, and they're still empty. The down-and-out are ready, too. One defeat after another has left them in despair, and they're looking for answers.

The skeptics are ready. Their cynicism has left their souls bone dry, and they are thirsty. Those who have never been told the good news are ready and often receive the gospel more readily than the calloused. The world is ready. Humankind's governments, systems, programs, and philosophies have been tried and found wanting.

The successful are ready. Newsweek magazine ran a feature article on the rapid changes taking place in Japan. Successful Japanese businessmen, when interviewed, showed an uncertainty about their reason for living.

Youth and children are ready. Someone has said, "The young people are dancing now, but someday they will have to face the music."

With a needy and open world like ours; with a surge in new converts, churches, preaching points, and enthusiasm in Third World countries; with urban complexities driving American citizens to look for fresh answers; with humanism and dead religion leaving Western Europe hungry for vital faith—the fields are white unto harvest.

IV. Jesus taught the great principle of sowers and reapers sharing the same joy and reward

The amazing truth of equal reward for reapers and sowers eluded my grasp for many years. Early in my ministry, I witnessed to a man for nearly three years without seeing him come to Christ. I had been on my new church field only a brief period of time when I heard that the pastor who followed me had won him to Christ

and baptized him and that he had become active in the church.

My first reaction was not so much joy as jealousy. After all, I had sown for three years, and then someone else reaped the harvest. Years later, when this principle Jesus laid down in verses 36-38 became a reality to me, I learned to rejoice in the role of sower, as I do in the role of reaper!

This principle doesn't apply in most other fields. A farmer expects to reap what he sows; an insurance salesman expects remuneration from the policy holders he has developed. A car dealer works hard to make a sale to a reluctant buyer and looks forward to his commission. But in the business of missions and evangelism, the sower may sow, and someone else will reap, but they both share the same joy.

Annie Armstrong understood this principle. Lottie Moon understood it. Adoniram Judson understood it. William Carey understood it. Bill Wallace understood it. Gripping this truth brings the sense of releasing a spiritual time bomb that can explode anytime or anywhere. As someone has said, "There is no limit to what can be done if it doesn't matter who gets the credit!"

Conclusion

David Bryant, in his book *In the Gap* says that every Christian experiences a three-part conversion: a conversion out of the world to Christ; a conversion out of self into the body of Christ; and both tied into a conversion with Christ and others back into the world.

If we can move more quickly into that third stage, we will see an acceleration of worldwide Christianity beyond anything in Christian history.

Why are we in business? Every Christian, every church, every denomination, must constantly ask and answer that question. We are in the position of Bobby Merrick in the novel *Magnificent Obsession*, who is talking with Nancy Ashford about taking her dead husband's medical practice as his own. In a way, she was asking that he live out her former husband's useful life. As he mulls over the decision, he realizes that such a commitment would be for life and that there would be no discharge from that branch of service.

It's the same for Christians. Once we have signed on with Jesus, there's no discharge from the war for the souls of the nations. That's why we're in business!

THE SIN OF SILENCE

Rudy Hernandez

2 Kings 7:9

Introduction

- 1. Samaria under siege by Ben Hadad, King of Syria**
- 2. The siege is prefaced by two miracles and followed by two others:**
 - (1) God made visible the invisible (6:17)
 - (2) God made invisible the visible (6:18)
 - (3) God made audible the inaudible (7:6)
 - (4) God made possible the impossible (7:16)
- 3. Four lepers outside the gate were used by God to break the famine**
- 4. Key verse:** “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent . . . let us go and tell” (2 Kings 7:9, NASB).

I. Searching men (7:3-4)

- 1. They were hungry for food.** The world's hunger may be caused by hurricanes, drought, war, “an act of God.”
- 2. They were hungry for health.** Leprosy was not tolerated. Lepers were outcasts of society, left to die outside the gate. Today, we face a high infant mortality rate and lack of prenatal care for expectant mothers. Senior adults lack proper medical attention due to the high cost of health care. Nearly everyone is on some type of diet, exercise program, or recovery plan. Many are left to die as the lepers were.
- 3. They were hungry for trust in others.** They could not trust their own . . . maybe there is help elsewhere.
- 4. They were hungry for life.** It was worth their risk.

Summary: The lepers wanted food, health, trust, and life; and people today have need of the same.

II. Successful people

1. They were motivated by a personal need.
2. They were driven by common sense.
3. They were directed by divine intervention.

Summary: They took the risk and it paid off. People today must take the risk, the plunge into the unknown.

III. Satisfied people

1. They yielded to faith and feasted on the findings.
2. They yielded to greed and hoarded the bounty.
3. They yielded to conviction and acknowledged their sin.

Summary: People today must yield to faith, avoid greed, be convicted of the error of their ways, and experience victory in Christ.

IV. Sharing people

1. They were apprised of their victory.
2. They were awakened to their sin.
3. They were challenged by their responsibility.

Summary: They knew they had succeeded, that they had sinned, and that they must share; and they did. So people today must remember that with every blessing there is a responsibility.

V. Conclusion

1. **The need is all around.** People are starving for food, health, life, and faith.
2. **The responsibility to share the gospel is greater now than**

it was then, and people must be brought into a right relationship with Jesus Christ.

3. Whoever discovers the cure for cancer is under obligation to the whole world to share the news. Whoever discovers salvation from the slavery of sin is under obligation to the whole world to share the news that Jesus saves.

4. We have a *crisis*; we must attend to it. We have a *crowd*; we must minister to it. We have a *cross*; we must communicate it. We have a *crown*; we must share it.

5. We must inform our world that:

- (1) The Word of God is the greatest unifying statement
- (2) The Son of God is the greatest unifying person
- (3) The people of God are the greatest unifying force

6. People suffer because they are:

- (1) Uninformed
- (2) Unconvinced
- (3) Unimpressed
- (4) Uncommitted

7. We must

- (1) Get up (get awake)
- (2) Listen up (get attentive)
- (3) Sign up (get committed)
- (4) Gear up (get ready)
- (5) Brush up (get trained)
- (6) Team up (get organized)
- (7) Speed up (get going)

8. The application is:

- (1) There is *good news*: Jesus saves. "This day is a day of good news" (2 Kings 7:9, NASB).
- (2) There is *bad news*: Greedy Christians sin when they keep it to themselves. "We are not doing right. . . . we are keeping silent" (v. 9, NASB).
- (3) There is *danger*: We dare not commit the sin of silence. "If we wait . . . punishment will overtake us" (v. 9, NASB).
- (4) There is *hope*: We must decide to share our bounty. "Now therefore come, let us go and tell" (v. 9, NASB).

(5) There is *revival*: We must tell it and pray the unsaved sinner believes it. “And it came about just as the man of God had spoken” (2 Kings 7:18, NASB).

9. God uses all of us, if we are willing. The time is now. *Let us go tell!*

GOD’S CURE FOR BARREN CHURCHES

Junior Hill

Psalm 126:6

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:6, KJV).

In 1993, in the Southern Baptist Convention, 6,191 churches did not baptize one single convert to faith in Christ. My first impression upon reading that startling statistic was to assume that these were tiny rural churches located in very remote areas, with virtually no evangelistic opportunities.

However, according to C.B. Hogue, executive director of the California Southern Baptist Convention, that was not the case. Many of them were fairly large congregations, situated in densely populated urban areas. And yet, all of them together spent an entire year of preaching, teaching, singing, and working, and still could not lead one solitary person to receive Christ as Savior and follow Him in baptism.

What an astounding and appalling truth that is!

While I have no accurate figures concerning other denominations, it is probably safe to assume that countless thousands of other churches outside the Southern Baptist Convention are just as barren. Spiritual poverty knows no religious boundaries. It afflicts the liberal, as well as the conservative, the moderate, and the fundamentalist.

Now lest you misunderstand what I am trying to say, let me be quick to point out that I am not suggesting that the church of our Lord has taken to its deathbed, frantically gasping for its last breath. To the contrary. The church of Jesus Christ is alive—and in many places, vibrant and well. All over this land, hundreds and hundreds of Spirit-filled congregations are winning literally thousands of people to faith in Jesus Christ every year.

But for anyone to suggest that all is well in our midst would be both ludicrous and naïve. The truth of the matter is, many of our churches are desperately sick. They have a religious illness, a Laodicean fever that has reduced them to spiritual barrenness, having a form of godliness and yet denying the power thereof.

But thankfully, this paralyzing affliction need not be terminal, for

God has given in His Word an unmistakably clear remedy for barren churches. In Psalm 126:6 (KJV), the Bible says, “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

In that short, simple, and remarkably clear Scripture, God has given an unfaltering formula for victory over spiritual barrenness. And the wonderful part is, it works for everybody. It doesn't matter who you are, where you are, or what you are. If you will put to practice that simple principle given in this verse, it will produce a complete and thorough healing for spiritual barrenness. And so, let's take a brief glimpse at God's cure for barren churches.

I. Notice the broken sower

Look very carefully at what the first part of that verse (v. 6, KJV) says: “He that goeth forth and weepeth, . . .” Most Bible scholars believe that this particular Psalm was written by Ezra shortly after the Jewish remnant returned from Babylonian captivity. The picture presented is that of a man walking out across barren fields, and, as he looks upon the dry and scorched earth before him, he no doubt remembers how it once bloomed and blossomed with harvest.

But not any longer. Those fields now lie parched and lifeless, rudely stripped of their sweet harvest by long years of neglect. As that poor man stands gazing out across that fruitless soil, his heart is so overwhelmed with grief that he begins to weep over the barrenness before him. As you read that verse, you can almost hear him groaning, “Oh, barren fields! Oh, barren fields! Oh, barren fields!”

And, so, in the reckoning of heaven, the very first step in God's plan for healing barren churches is to be *broken in spirit*. Before any church can ever expect to have the blessings of God upon its ministry, it must be humbled and broken, for “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Ps. 34:18, KJV).

If you will carefully examine the Bible, you will notice that God has inseparably linked up brokenness with blessings. Wherever there is brokenness, there will be blessings; and wherever there is a blessing, there has been brokenness. You simply cannot separate the two.

For instance . . .

It was because of the brokenness of Moses that God drew back His hand of anger and spared the rebellious house of Israel.

It was because of the brokenness of Hannah that God opened

her barren womb and gave us Samuel.

It was because of the brokenness of Esther that God interceded and delivered His people from the wicked hand of Haman.

It was because of the brokenness of the prodigal son that the father opened his arms, kissed his son's cheeks, and restored his son to his place of honor.

It was because of the brokenness of Paul that God flung wide the doors to the nations and let one solitary man shake the entire unconverted world.

It was because of the brokenness of that early church that God empowered that little band of unlikely saints to march triumphantly across the earth, battering down the very gates of hell as they went.

Now, that divine principle never changes. Wherever you look in the Word of God, it will always be the same. *Brokenness always precedes blessings.*

Where there is no humbling, there will be no hallelujahs. Where there is no repenting, there will be no rejoicing. Where there is no crying, there will be no crowning. I recently had that truth called to my attention in a rather unusual manner.

I was conducting a revival meeting in Florida; and one night after the service, the pastor and I went over to a woman's home to have some refreshments. As we sat down around the table, I soon recognized something unusual about this woman. She was physically blind. As we sat there talking, she turned those dark expressionless eyes toward where I was sitting, and she said, “Brother Hill, do you know why I'm blind?”

“No, ma'am, I don't,” I replied.

“Preacher,” she continued, “a number of years ago the tear ducts in my eyes dried up, and no matter how broken my heart was or how crushed my spirit might have been, I simply could not cry. As a result of those dry eyes, I eventually lost my sight. Brother Hill, I'm blind because I cannot shed tears.”

As I sat there listening to that sad woman tell of the tragedy of eyes that could not see, I thought in my heart, “Oh, Lord, what a remarkable comparison that is to many of our churches today—blind congregations who are spiritually barren because they have lost their ability to weep over those who are dying around them.”

Oh, what a proud and haughty people we are!

We're proud of our buildings. We're proud of our budgets. We're proud of our degrees. We're proud of our programs. We're proud of our robed choirs. We're proud of all that we're doing through the

cleverness of human wisdom and the ingenuity of carnal abilities. And, out of the midst of that repulsive pride, there has evolved a sickening brand of self-satisfied, dry-eyed church member who wouldn't shed a tear over some poor lost sinner if his or her very life depended upon it.

Is it any wonder, then, that we have barren churches? Is it any wonder that we have the smell of death hovering over our meeting places? Is it any wonder that the sweet refreshing breath of God's Spirit has been replaced by a stifling cloud of indifference and apathy?

Oh, that God would break our hearts and humble our spirits. And until we allow Him to do that, our spiritual barrenness will never be healed. (See Appendix A for illustrations of this point, "Preach with a Broken Heart" and "Weeping over the Wrong Things.")

II. I call to your attention the blessed seed

Look again at what the next part of that verse (v. 6, KJV) says: "bearing precious seed." See that man as he walks out across that barren ground, and hear him as he cries, "Oh, barren fields. Oh, barren fields. Oh, barren fields." But as we walk along behind him, listening to him cry, we see something very interesting happening. All the time he is weeping, he is faithfully scattering seed. "Oh, barren fields, here is your seed. Oh, barren fields, here is your seed. Oh, barren fields, here is your seed."

What, then, according to the Word of God, is that seed? What does it represent in this particular passage? In the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gave us the parable of the sower, called by others the parable of the soils. Immediately upon Jesus' concluding that story, His disciples came to him and said, "What might this parable be?" (Luke 8:9, KJV). And Jesus said unto them, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:10-11, KJV). Again, in 1 Peter 1:23 (KJV), the writer said, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

So, then, we can deduce from these two passages of Scripture that the seed is the blessed Word of God, the Bible. And when we put that together with what the psalmist said in Psalm 126:6, here's what God is saying to the barren church of today: "My answer to

your spiritual poverty is this: *weeping and sowing—weeping and sowing.*" Dear friend, that's God's only solution to the problem—*weeping and sowing.*

In light of that remarkably clear illustration, you would think that every preacher and church in the world would readily embrace that simple principle, wouldn't you? But strange as it may seem, many don't. If you look at the religious world today, you see that there are at least three different responses being made to this simple remedy for spiritual barrenness.

1. Some churches merely ignore it

Because they cannot accept the Bible as the infallible and inerrant record of God, some churches just cast it aside as irrelevant and unimportant, little realizing that all they're doing is adding barrenness to barrenness. You see, it doesn't matter what kind of buildings a person may build. It doesn't matter what kind of programs a person may institute. It doesn't matter how much money he or she may raise for worthy and legitimate causes. It doesn't matter how charismatic, suave, and polished leadership abilities may be. It doesn't matter how high a person may rise in the ladder of religious success. If a person is building a church upon the exclusion and neglect of the preaching of the Word of God, then that person is building a barren church.

And yet there are many who do. There are hundreds of churches in this land who haven't heard an old-fashioned, Holy Ghost-inspired sermon in years. Their religious diets consist of nothing better than political propaganda, social activism, and the improvement of human charms and cultural graces. With that kind of ministry, is it any wonder that we have barren churches? Is it any wonder that the power of God is strangely absent from many of our congregations?

2. Other churches merely imitate God's cure

You see, some folks have far too much religion to completely deny the Word of God. Because they have an outward form of godliness, they cannot bring themselves to totally reject the Bible as God's authority. And yet they cannot bear to accept the simplicity of it. And so, they very cleverly alter, rework, and redesign the message until it is, as they say, "unoffensive to the modern mind."

Brother, the world is not impressed with our efforts to mimic their lifestyles. That little band of tattered and persecuted saints in the book of Acts did not turn the world upside down by becoming

miniature pagans. They revolutionized their day for one reason—they had upon their heads the authentication of heaven. The power of God was upon them. And do you know why it was? Because here was a congregation of believers who comprised that.

3. Some churches obediently implement God's remedy

The early church just had no more sense than to believe God. They took Him at His word. With simple faith, they accepted the fact that God knew more about spiritual matters than they did, and they merely put to practice what God had said in Psalm 126:6. And as a result of their faithful weeping and sowing, God opened the windows of heaven and literally altered the whole course of human history. And He's still doing it today. (See Appendix A for an illustration of this point, "The Power of Heaven on Our Hands.")

III. Notice the blissful soul-winner

Look again at what verse 6 (KJV) says: ". . . shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." The interesting thing is, that's the same fellow we saw only a moment ago, broken and weeping. And not only that, he's walking in that same field that just awhile ago appeared so parched and barren.

But, oh, how different it is now! No longer is he bowed over, burdened and broken. No longer does he weep over those dusty, dry fields. No longer must he spend long, tiring hours faithfully scattering his seed.

It's harvest time now. And across those fields we see him coming—leaping and rejoicing—laden down with sheaves, which God has given him in response to his faithful labor. Oh, what a beautiful verse that is! In the first part of it, God shows us "*weeping and sowing*," and then in the last part there is "*rejoicing and reaping*." And then, as if the Holy Spirit wanted to impress upon us the beauty of it all, He built an indestructible bridge hinging those two couplets together, and the word He used to do it is one of the most beautiful in all the Bible—*doubtless*. *Doubtless!*

Just think of it! While the world must take its stand upon the fleeting and shifting sands of doubt, the children of God can anchor their souls in the everlasting and eternal *doubtlessness* of God. Without doubt, it works.

Now there are probably some of you hearing these words right now who are saying to yourselves, "Well, that may work for some people, but it won't work for me. You just don't know what a difficult and hard place of service I have."

Dear Christian, you don't have to go empty-handed. You don't have to stand before Him without one single soul. The God of heaven has given you this unfailing formula for victory over barrenness, and, praise His holy name, it works for everyone—"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. 126:6, KJV).

LOVE IN ACTION

Bill Hogue

Matthew 9:35-38

Introduction

The word compassion is used in Matthew 9:35 (KJV) to describe the deep feelings of concern Jesus had for the multitudes He saw when traveling from village to village in His homeland. He not only had deep feelings, but He also acted on His love and made it a reality. In the preceding chapter, Matthew 8, you will note the many places Jesus traveled and worked His ministry and healing, doing those things only the Son of God could do. So, a better meaning of the word compassion for us to use would be *love in action*.

Everything Jesus did was from a love relationship. Putting love in action is the missionary ingredient the world does not understand, and it is misused by individuals and churches. It is time to recapture the meaning and reality of putting love in action.

I. Jesus is our example

We teach and preach that we should live like Jesus. He is our example in everything we do and everything we say. He motivated the early church to practice this kind of love. He said of Himself, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, KJV). If He thought of Himself as one who reaches out to those outside the eternal kingdom, we are to follow that example, also.

1. His example is expressed in His teachings

Read the parables He shared. Each consistently expresses compassion. For instance, He spoke of a shepherd who went searching for a lost lamb held at the mercy of the cold or the prey of wild animals. He spoke of a woman who lost a valuable coin and searched her house until she retrieved it and of a forgiving father waiting for that wayward lost son.

2. His example is seen by His actions

Jesus sought a fallen woman to forgive her. He looked for a publican to make him a preacher. He could not eat on occasion because of deep concern. Nor could he sleep because of it.

Observe Jesus' actions in these verses in Matthew 9. He "saw"

the crowds. That sight touched Him mightily. The disciples had trouble seeing people as Jesus saw them. People were not plastic to Him. The little children, blind men, lepers, the woman of Canaan, even prostitutes, were people whom He loved for the sake of new life. Look at the people in the shadow of your church, and see them as Jesus sees them.

The size of the crowd is overwhelming. The multitudes in your community demand the opportunity to hear the good news of Jesus. And there are burgeoning multitudes of unchurched in our land, communities that need to hear. What a challenge for bringing love and hope to empty hearts and lives!

These people are sheep without a shepherd—distressed, miserable, dejected, and with no hope for the future. They are “scattered abroad” (Matt. 9:36, KJV), separated from hope and life—no place to go, except to Jesus.

Love in action drove Jesus to the cross and would not let Him die until a repenting thief on a nearby cross was forgiven and promised eternal life. Jesus loved so much!

II. The sinner’s destiny is our motivation

The Scripture tells us that a person without Jesus Christ will spend eternity separated from Him. How tragic when that person could escape it.

1. The tragedy of it

Jesus saw such multitudes in distress. Would you reach out a hand to a drowning child? Or help a little girl fallen in a well? Or reach out to hostages held by a hostile country? Or pull a person to safety from a burning vehicle?

General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, once said he would like to send all his officer candidates to hell for 24 hours as part of their training. Only then would they see the need for the lost to be saved and be able to accept the sacrifice necessary to seriously reach out to those outside God’s saving grace.

No doubt we take too lightly the sinner’s destiny. We think of the world so far away that we do not attempt to help . . . but they are right here.

2. It makes sense

It makes sense to share the gospel when you see the changes in character, personality, and lifestyle in those who come to know Christ in salvation. This is the only way to change our communi-

ties, states, and nation—even the whole world.

III. The action is costly

Indeed, putting love in action cost Jesus His life. Yet through it He purchased forgiveness for our sins. What love! To care like Jesus cared will cost self-love—self-giving love.

1. It costs attitudes

When Jesus saw the countless people, He did not think of their personalities or comment on their worthiness. His actions involved attitudinal thinking. When He saw them, He did not reject them; He forgave them in love.

2. It costs prejudices

It certainly costs personal forgiveness against those who have wronged you. Prejudice becomes an action that does harm in whatever form against others. Prejudice is more than racial; it is an action toward those who are not like us.

3. It costs time

This means time for others, and time with God praying for others. It also means time to share with others the hope of new life in Christ.

4. It costs family

Can you share your daughter or son to give their lives to work wholly for Christ? In all circumstances, to live or die for the gospel?

5. It costs you your real self

This means exactly what it says. This has the same meaning as the words Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler. It will cost all of you.

Conclusion

Love in action is more than words. It is literally positive action on the part of the believer. It is that holy, loving, tearful “must” that burned in the hearts of others along the way. It is that supernatural endowment from God, that thrusts us to put love in action that others may live!

FISHING IN DEEPER WATERS

Ron W. Johnson

Luke 5:1-11

Several years ago, I saw a Norman Rockwell painting that both amused me and spoke to me. It was about fishing.

Picture the scene that Rockwell painted: Your eye falls a little below the surface of the water, so that you can easily see both the fisherman and the fish.

The fisherman is a young boy. He is clad in cutoff blue jeans and a straw hat, and he sits barefoot on the end of a dock. His tin can of worms is beside him. His cane pole is held out straight ahead of him, and a look of anticipation is on his freckled face.

But you and I enjoy a perspective, as we view the painting, that the young boy does not have. Below the water's surface, we can see the fish. They are gazing at the worm on the hook, and a quizzical look seems to be on the faces of the fish.

And we laugh. The young lad on the end of the dock has no idea why we would be laughing. Yet the reason is clear to us.

This young fisherman, who probably planned for his fishing trip all day, lowered his hook, line, and sinker into the water. But he happened to drop his baited hook through the neck of an old milk bottle that happened to be standing on the bottom of the pond, just below the end of his cane pole. There the bait sat, in the bottom of the milk bottle, where no fish could possibly get to it.

And so, the fish stared at the bait in the bottle. Soon, we could imagine, the young lad's optimism would turn to disappointment as he waited for a tug on his line. "Just my luck," he might think, "There are no fish in this lake."

If we are honest about the world in which we live, we will admit that sometimes we practice our faith as if there were no more fish to catch.

It's "business as usual" in our churches, like the refrain in the Genesis creation account: "And there was evening, and there was morning" (Gen. 1:5,8,13,19,23,31, NIV). Except, for many churches, the refrain is, "And there was Sunday morning and Sunday night." And the world does not notice.

Many church members are not only fishing in too small a lake, but their hooks are also nestled comfortably in the bottom of a bottle. The sad reality is that they think they are fishing.

Here in Luke's Gospel is a challenge for Christians to practice a more inclusive and risky evangelism. Here is where we find out what church growth is really about: To reach people in a larger context; to stop fishing only for people who are like us, who live in the shallow water near the shore; to launch out where it is deep, and sometimes dark and unknown. To dare to preach Jesus in a world where Christians often assume people do not want to hear about a Savior.

We can become awfully comfortable near the shore, in the shallow water. Our church programs can become so monolithic and ordinary that even the faithful become jaded and unable to change.

The world is looking for life in our churches, not deadness and routine. Someone has called Sunday morning in most churches "programmed dullness." Do we think we can reach a lost world with programmed dullness?

We are often content to retreat to our religious comfort zones, to change our manner of speech from the familiar language of modern life during the week to religious jargon on Sunday, and to practice a kind of piety that many of us cannot even apply on Monday.

If we are to be faithful to the Great Commission of our Lord, we do not have the luxury of a privatized religious solitude within our churches. We simply must move outside our holy huddles.

Jesus, in the early days of His ministry, did not have the luxury of solitude. Everywhere He went, the crowds pressed against Him. Even on this occasion in Luke 5, the crowds pressed upon Him with such force that He was backed up against the water.

He climbed into one of the boats and pushed a little way from the shore. And He taught the people from the boat. Luke does not tell us what Jesus taught. Luke's focus seems to be not on what He taught, but on the fact that the crowds pressed Him because they wanted "to hear the word of God" (Luke 5:1, KJV).

Many people today have indicated that the society around us is beyond hope—wicked and evil. It is wicked and evil, but not beyond hope. God still wants to reach the masses of lost people. The headlines confirm the world's sin sickness—its need of a Savior.

Whether it be in Somalia, Bosnia, or in east Los Angeles, you and I become sick at heart to hear of the starvation, ethnic riots, and racial hatred present in our world.

When one in four young African-American males will not live past his teenage years, and when little seems to be done for the poor and needy in this nation—except at election time—there is

certainly a sickness in the land. And as Jesus became the Great Physician to the sick, we too should be willing to carry our faith into the marketplace, where the sick are. Otherwise, our faith means very little.

If it can be said that people are physically hungry today, surely our souls ought to tell us that they are also hungry for the Word of God. Luke tells us that the people were eager to hear the message of God.

But don't make a mistake. The lost are not hungry for our church programs; they are hungry for the peace that only God can give them. They are not hungry for our denominational politics. They are hungry for justice to roll down like the waters and to take the oppression of racism, poverty, ignorance, drugs, and abuse from their lives.

People are *not* hungry for a shallow evangelism that is content only to get a decision and a baptism. Rather, they want an evangelism that really will be good news, that will help them live full and meaningful lives in an increasingly difficult world today.

People are hungry for the *good news* of the gospel. And they are hungry to see you and me, who claim to know the good news, living out what we know and bringing that good news to them in the form of a gospel witness—food, clothing, justice, healing, and genuine care for all people.

George Gallup has said that people are not turned off to God. In fact, nearly 80 percent of Americans believe in God. Seventy-six percent of the unchurched pray, and 68 percent of the unchurched believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But many *do* reject the kind of religion we portray in our churches. Six in 10 people say that the church has lost the spiritual part of religion.

George Barna has said that the pressure is on the church to go beyond the skin-deep commitment of most Christians and to rededicate ourselves to proclaiming the gospel in new ways that are relevant to people's lives.

Why is it that the church seems to be unable to make much of an impact in the lives of the lost and hurting in our world today?

I believe that Luke gives us a clue regarding the problem. Luke said that after Jesus taught the people, he told Simon: "Put out into the deep" (Luke 5:4, RSV). That is where I am convinced the church must go. The deep waters of our secular society are where the fish are.

Don't you feel sorry for Peter? He says, in effect, "Master, we

have been working. We have toiled all night and we have taken nothing” (see Luke 5:5). Perhaps they had fished all their favorite spots. Yet they had taken nothing.

Nevertheless, Peter obeyed Jesus. He listened to the Lord say, “Let’s fish in another spot, Peter. Let’s go where you think there are no fish to be found.” Peter, no doubt, had many questions in his mind. Surely, he thought Jesus should know that the best time to fish with a net is at night, not in the morning. Still Peter obeyed the Lord.

And they caught a great shoal of fish. And their nets began to break. They had to call for help. Even then, the boats were too small. They began to sink. They had not expected so great a catch.

Peter was convicted. He was overwhelmed. He had a limited vision of what the Lord wanted to do. Do we? Do we ever dare to color outside the lines and dream what God would dream about the churches where we are members?

I am rather amused sometimes to read many of the popular church growth books on the market. Scores of books are being written to help churches entice people to come. All people want their churches to grow. But what do we mean by growth? More people like us? We already have nearly 6 million Southern Baptists on our church rolls that even the FBI couldn’t find. Or do we want to see the lost people in the deep waters come to Christ?

I wonder what would happen if God really did a work among us? If there were a real spiritual awakening in our land? Would our churches be ready for hundreds, thousands to suddenly appear at the doorsteps of our churches, hungry for the Word of God?

I am persuaded that one reason many churches do not reach the sea of lost people surrounding them is that their evangelistic expectations are too small. They have no vision of what God can do in multiplying their witness. And many are very skeptical about evangelism and evangelists.

You and I can never get around the fact that Jesus’ last will and testament was that we be His witnesses.

Peter, James, and John left behind their boats. They did not simply remain in their unbelief. Rather, they put their faith into action. Maybe even with a smile and a pun Jesus encouraged Peter. He told Peter that from now on he would be a catcher of people.

Peter and the others followed Him. When you and I see people the way Christ sees people, it leads us to conviction for the evangelistic apathy that is in our lives.

Don’t you think it’s time for our churches to wade out into the

deep waters of our world’s lostness and leave the comfort of the shallows? If we really believe that “People Need the Lord,” then our fishing habits will change. We will become deep-water fishers.

Our world has changed so much. These are not the 1950s. No longer do people see the church as the center of the community’s social life. No longer can we assume that people will come to church out of a sense of obligation.

Those are shallow waters. We have about fished dry the lakes and shallows where folks like us reside. Secular America has found its home away from the religious shallows. Home resides in ever-increasing numbers in the dark deep.

It’s time to actively cast our nets into the deep waters of secular society. It’s time we learned a new way to fish. (See Appendix A for an illustration of this point, “A Day of Good News.”)

Do we really believe that God wants to pour out His Spirit upon the lost in our world? Do we really believe that this church can become a church filled with people who actively scatter the seeds of the gospel every day?

The late D.T. Niles once said, “Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.” If we really want to grow our churches, we must be in the business of telling all beggars, rich and poor alike, about the Bread of life—even though some will doubt our motives.

People are drowning in the darkness of deep waters. They are looking to us for hope that what we say about our faith is indeed real.

Let’s stop wading in the shallows. Push out from the shore. Set your evangelistic sail. The harvest is waiting for those who dare to fish in deep waters.

HOW TO GET A PIECE OF THE POWER

Chuck Kelley

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Introduction

Bodybuilding is a sport growing in popularity in recent years. Some would question even calling it a sport. All the participants do for their competition is walk on a stage and look strong. They don't pick up anything; they don't carry anything; they don't jump high or run fast. They simply stand in front of the judges and flex their muscles. The appearance of strength, not the use of strength, is the point.

If God were interested in sports, I am sure He would not be interested in bodybuilding. The use of power, not the appearance of power, has always been His major concern. God is not interested in making you look strong. Believers interested in experiencing God's power daily should understand that God only releases His supernatural power to those who are involved in accomplishing His divine purposes. Since the heartbeat of God for the church has been and always will be for us to tell the world about Jesus, we know that His power follows our involvement in telling others about Jesus. To the extent that you and I are involved in the task of evangelism, we will experience the release of supernatural power in our lives and souls.

The problem is that most of us think evangelism is one of the most important jobs of the church . . . for someone else to do. We are happy when someone is born again, but we are convinced that others can do a better job of witnessing than we can. Our reasons are many: "I don't know enough about the Bible," or, "I don't know what to say," or, "My friends may think I am a religious fanatic." We always have a reason that somebody else could do a better job at witnessing than we can. In reality, each of us has been given the divine assignment of going and telling other people about Jesus. (See Appendix A for Kelley's illustration "Budget Evangelism.")

I. Learning from Paul

That going and telling is my subject. I want to talk to you about personal witnessing. You can get a piece of God's power by getting involved in telling others about Jesus. I want us to look at the example of the apostle Paul. *Ohhhh, don't do that!*

This guy is Paul, the apostle. That is like being Billy Graham. He wrote more than half the books in the New Testament. He honeycombed the Roman Empire with churches. How can any of us today expect to be witnesses like Paul, the apostle? I realize that Paul was cut from a different cloth than you and I. I know that he was one of the greatest men of God ever to walk the face of the earth. I also know that none of us will ever be another apostle Paul. But maybe there is something we can learn from him. We acknowledge that Paul is a spiritual giant, and the best we can do is gather around and try to pick up a hint or two from him about how to share the faith.

We find an excellent description of Paul as a personal witness in 1 Corinthians 2:1-3 (NASB): “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.”

Did you notice what the Bible said about Paul as a witness? Paul—the apostle, the guy who honeycombed the Roman Empire with churches, the guy so bold he would witness to Caesar about Jesus—said that he went out to witness feeling weak and fearful! That does not sound like Paul, the apostle. That sounds like many of us. (See Appendix A for Kelley’s illustration “Cowards for Christ.”)

II. Feeling inadequate

We think of spiritual giants as people who witness without fear. Actually they are most often little more than obedient cowards. Being afraid doesn’t mean that you don’t love Jesus enough. You are not somehow inadequate because you feel a little intimidated when you go out to tell somebody about Jesus. As a matter of fact, it is normal to feel that way. The apostle Paul told the folks at First Baptist, Corinth, that when he did door-to-door evangelism in Corinth, his hands trembled when he knocked. It is OK for you to be nervous. Some people think that you have to have memorized the whole Bible or that you must know a slick presentation or know lots of theology to witness. All that is really required is a desire to tell people what Jesus has done for you.

My wife and I went to one of those fancy New Orleans restaurants for an anniversary celebration. I walked in, went to the head waiter, and requested a table for two reserved in the name of Kelley. He looked at me and asked how someone with the name Kelley got

a large Jewish nose like mine.

I looked back at him and said, “I guess it is because I have a Jewish Savior named Jesus, and He loved me so much that He gave me His nose.”

The waiter laughed and said, “That’s pretty good.” And I replied, “So is Jesus.”

I had a tract with me, and I pulled it out and gave it to him. He took us to our table and walked off looking at the tract. I did not quote a single verse of the Bible, nor did I get into a deep theological discussion. I never had a training course on how to use your nose for evangelism. All I did was open my mouth and say a good word about Jesus. That’s what witnessing is. Any Christian can say a good word about Jesus. You can do that on the job; you can do that when you are having coffee after a movie; you can do it anytime and anywhere an opportunity presents itself. And that is the point of Paul’s experience.

III. Our weakness is overcome

But look at what else Paul said: “And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:3-4, NASB).

What Paul discovered is that his apprehension, his sense of intimidation, and his sense of fear went away *when he began to share*. Some of us are waiting for our apprehension to go away before we start. If all Christians were like that, no one would ever be a witness. Paul discovered that his experience of God’s power came when he started witnessing, not before he opened his mouth.

The Bible teaches us that a witnessing muscle is in your soul. Each of us has a witnessing muscle that will allow us to tell other people about Jesus. The Holy Spirit of God energizes that muscle, but you will never discover your supernatural strength, your witnessing muscle, until you use it. Some of us have been so shackled by our fear and sense of inadequacy, our worries about what will happen, that we never use the witnessing muscle. As a result, we never discover the power God has already given us.

Please keep in mind that whenever you use muscles for the first time, you may feel a little awkward or uncomfortable. (See Appendix A for two illustrations of this point, “Using Your Strength” and “The Witnessing Muscle.”)

IV. Why God lets us be afraid

I have asked myself the question, "If God wants me to witness and God gives me the power to enable me to witness, why in the world does He even let me be afraid?" Why doesn't He just let me be a commando for Jesus? Why doesn't He make me so bold that I jump out of bed every morning and pray, "Oh, God, give me an atheist today. Give me someone I can really sink my teeth into?"

Notice what Paul said: "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom . . . [so] that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4-5, NASB).

We think God is looking for the sharpest or the best-trained person, the one who has the greatest attitude. We assume that God is looking for the most awesome, powerful witness he can get.

Notice, however, the way the Bible describes Christians. Look at 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NASB): "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God."

The point in witnessing is not how I am doing, but how God is doing. Far from hindering me, my sense of inadequacy as a witness is, in fact, one of my greatest qualifications. For when I share out of my fear, when I share out of weakness, when I share out of my ignorance, when I share out of all the liabilities I carry, and someone's life is touched, the person knows it is not from me. He or she knows the power of God is stirring the heart.

V. The power of the nonprofessional

That is why church members have a power in their witness that a pastor will never have. When I start sharing with someone, 80-90 percent of the time the first thing they say is, "You must be a preacher." Sometimes I want to say, "No, I am just a satisfied customer."

If I were to go with you to your place of business, your school, or a gathering of your friends and you were to introduce me as evangelist Chuck Kelley, this is what would happen.

Number One: Your coworkers would start looking at their shoes.

Number Two: They would stand there for about 30-60 seconds and then say, "Oh, I have to leave."

They would make an excuse to get away, because they would be very uncomfortable in my presence. What people want is not the testimony of the professional. They want the testimony of the satisfied.

Here's the problem. Many people prefer to pay a professional to get the job done. We often think, "Let's get somebody good and turn him or her loose. Get a hit man for Jesus and watch him go."

However, God's Plan A is to involve real people who have been helped by Jesus in telling the people they know about Him.

Do you know what makes a movie a hit at the box office? Hollywood has discovered the one common denominator of every movie that has been a major moneymaker. It is not the stars who act in it. Some of the most popular, biggest stars in the movie industry have been in bombs. It is not the screenplay or who writes it. Great screenplays have been shown to empty seats. Not even stunning special effects or an extravagant promotion and advertising campaign can guarantee a hit. Studio executives have spent literally millions of dollars on movies that no one bothered to see. Do you know what the common denominator is? Word of mouth. A movie makes it big when those who see it leave the theater and tell their friends to go and see it.

When a movie starts that reaction in California, the Northwest, Kansas, Texas, New York, Michigan, Florida, and Louisiana, suddenly everybody in America is talking about it. The movie enters our national conversation, because friends tell friends.

(See Appendix B for Kelley's invitation, "Friends Telling Friends.")

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

Ernest J. Kelley

John 3:3,7

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . Ye must be born again (John 3:3,7, KJV).

An inmate on the fifth floor (death row) of the state prison said to me, "I'd give anything in the world to be born again, to start over, to not look at 'old smokey' [electric chair] every day." What a glorious opportunity to share the good news with that man! He could be born again, have the certainty of eternal life, and remove forever his fear of the future.

The one message our world needs is, "You must be born again." A recent national news magazine printed, "Our nation is in a mess!" Think about it for a moment: the blessings of affluence and prosperity compared with the loss of hope; the miraculous discoveries in medicine overshadowed by merciless abortions of the unborn; in the midst of abundance, rank poverty and homelessness glare; sparkling new high-rises in the cities lurk with fearful danger in the streets. This is our nation. A nation of churches, yet the unsaved within our population increase by more than a million a year.

The future of our nation and civilization as we know it may depend on compassionate, effective winning of souls by believers. George W. Truett proclaimed, "The bringing of a soul to Jesus is the highest achievement possible to a human life."¹ Truett not only preached soul-winning, but practiced personal evangelism. Arthur Archibald reminds us of the personal commitment of Charles H. Spurgeon. "For forty years in London, he averaged one convert a day, men won outside his pulpit."²

With more than 181 million unsaved within our nation's population,³ we must see the masses as Jesus saw them—lost, wandering sheep without a shepherd. We, like Jesus, must address mankind's most important need: lostness. When famine grips a people, we give food; when disease disables a people, we give medicine; when a person is lost, we must give the invitation to be born again.

All too many believers are emasculated by an idealistic Pollyannaism that says, "I'm sitting in a house by the side of the road, being a friend to man." This attitude will not bring an effective witness to our world. Winning the lost to Jesus Christ requires us to be

totally committed to the same premise that Jesus expressed to Nicodemus: “You must be born again” (John 3:7, NIV). We must not be apologetic, compromising, or defensive. We must passionately present Jesus—the need of every lost person.

I. Does everyone need to be born again?

Yes! “You must be born again.”

Man’s very nature tells him he must be born again. The living history of the human race reveals that mankind is born in the flesh, has fallen into sin, and trespasses against a holy and righteous God. There is nothing in a spiritually dead and sinful life that can generate or create spiritual life. The Bible proclaims, “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:15, KJV).

The “old,” or physical, nature cannot serve God. How clear the Bible is in 1 Corinthians 2:14 (KJV), “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: . . . neither can he know them.” To be a winner of lost souls, you must be totally convinced of the lostness of the lost. No rationalizing here, no equivocating here, no compromising here: The unregenerate are lost, now and for eternity. The Bible declares that mankind is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1, KJV). There is eternal punishment awaiting the unbeliever. To deny this is to expose to contempt the revealed truth of God’s Word and to deny the deity of Christ Himself. The Bible declares, “There is no soundness in it [old nature]; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores” (Isa. 1:6, KJV).

There was an occasion when a church member who objected to his pastor’s strong emphasis on “soul-winning” came to the pastor with a question. “Pastor,” he asked, “surely we are not responsible to witness to *everyone*.” The pastor responded, “You are probably right. Let’s eliminate some from our list. Let’s begin with your brother and your son.” The church member dropped his head and said, “I see, pastor. You are right. Everyone needs to be born again.”

II. Jesus said everyone must be born again

This declaration is for all—every race, every socio-economic level—everyone. Regardless of how one feels, lives, believes, or worships, Jesus said everyone must be born again.

Some today would excuse Nicodemus. He was an outstanding citizen, a very religious and moral man, a tither, and a teacher of God’s Word. Any church would be blessed to have him as a member, perhaps even seek him out. But wait, Nicodemus had to be born again.

In contrast, it was obvious that Jesus needed to witness to Mary Magdalene, who possessed seven devils. Also, the whole community knew the woman at the well needed to hear the message of repentance. This woman, guilty of adultery, surely needed a witness. But Nicodemus? Yes, even Nicodemus had to be born again. Jesus said *everyone* needs to be born again.

III. You are a witness that the lost must be born again

This is not a question, “Are you?” but a declaration, “You are a witness.” The real question is, “What kind of witness are you?”

God gives gifts to believers and gifted leaders to His church. The gifts of the Holy Spirit vary. They are for spiritual enablement for specific service. Nowhere in the Bible does the Holy Spirit give the gift of witness. Rather, Jesus announced, “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8, NIV). No decision to be made, no card to sign, no action to be completed . . . “You are my witnesses.”

The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, has much to say about soul-winning, or witnessing.

The psalmist cried, “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalms 126:6, KJV).

The writer of Proverbs states: “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30, KJV).

Ezekiel, the prophet, was admonished by the Lord, “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me” (Ezek. 3:17, KJV).

In His early ministry, Jesus called two fishermen, Simon and Andrew, “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17, KJV).

On the night following the resurrection, Jesus said to the disciples in the upper room, “Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21, KJV).

And what was the nature of the ministry of Jesus? “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10, KJV).

The marks of an obedient soul-winner are obvious.

1. The soul-winner has the manifestation of spiritual wisdom

He or she is a wise Christian, making the best use of time, talent, energy, influence, and opportunity. But most of all the soul-winner

is wisely following the call of Jesus.

2. The soul-winner has the imprint of a divine sense of values

Paul's prayer for the Philippians was that they would "approve things that are excellent" (Phil. 1:10, KJV); his admonition to the Colossians was to "set your affection on things above" (Col 3:2, KJV); and his advice to the Corinthians was to look not at the things which are seen (temporal) but at the things which are not seen (eternal) (2 Cor. 4:18).

3. The soul-winner wisely prioritizes life on the best, not just the good; on the eternal, not just the temporal

God has no provision for telling others about Him other than Christian witnesses.

4. The soul-winner has the knowledge of the worth of a soul

The soul-winner in some small way understands the worth of a soul to God. Jesus came to earth because He valued a soul enough to come. He took the form of a servant, was made in the likeness of man, was obedient unto death, grappled with sin, met and overcame Satan, and set the prisoners of sin free by the sacrifice of His own life. He did all of this for lost souls.

5. The soul-winner is identified by a compassion for the lost

I once heard the story of a theater manager instructing a new usher, pointing out the exits in the event of an emergency. The usher replied, "Don't worry about me. I'll get out." He missed it all. He was to be the guide for many to find safety. Is this illustration too close to home? Is our primary interest to get to heaven safely, rather than be a guide for many?

Let us revisit that old church in Edinburgh, where John Knox shouted, "Give me Scotland or I die."⁴ What is the level of compassion we have for our community? Paul reminded the church at Ephesus, "By the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31, KJV). Compassion!

6. The soul-winner is identified by persistence

One marked as a witness for Jesus endures, perseveres, and continually presses the claims of the gospel to those who need to be

born again. How indicting that sometimes those who witness for dubious and spurious varieties of cults put the followers of Christ to shame with their strenuous persistence.

IV. There is an appeal to being a soul-winner

Soul-winning receives scant recognition and little applause, but it accomplishes great things for God. There are some who think soul-winning is beneath their stations or positions in life. They would rather preach to large crowds or teach large Bible classes. While Jesus preached on occasion to thousands, he sought opportunities to deal with individuals.

When I was in seminary, a professor made an assignment to critique 25 interviews of Jesus. I said to a classmate, "There are not that many interviews in all four Gospels." Was I surprised! There are many more. I had failed to notice the many times Jesus dealt personally with individuals.

1. The appeal comes from God Himself

In the priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17, God reveals His strategy for sharing the good news of the gospel with everyone. We—you and I—are commissioned to go and tell a lost world of the possibility of a new birth.

2. The appeal comes from within the believer's heart

As Andrew sought out Simon, we long to see our loved ones born again. As we grow in grace, the desire for bringing others to Christ grows into a burning compassion.

3. The appeal comes from the unsaved

When we view the crime, cruelty, and inhumanity all around us and realize all of this finds its taproot in sin, we want the lost to be born again. The lost are not only expressing their lostness in lawless ways but are in imminent peril of a Christless eternity. In their sinful deeds, they cry out for someone to help them to begin again, to be born again.

4. The appeal is from heaven

The Bible mentions only one thing that causes the joy bells to ring in heaven, and that is when someone is born again (Luke 15:5-7). Soul-winning is vital to a growing, Christ-exalting believer.

The question of the hour is, will you accept the challenge to win

souls? The distinguished preacher, educator, and seminary president, L. R. Scarborough, said, "A soul longing to see the lost saved and to have a share in their salvation is . . . essential in successful soul-winning."⁵ Pray God to give you a "soul-longing."

¹ George W. Truett, *A Quest for Souls*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1917), 57.

² Arthur C. Archibald, *New Testament Evangelism* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1946), 34.

³ Phillip B. Jones, *Home Missions Resource Document* (Research Division, Home Mission Board, Atlanta, 1994), 1.

⁴ Archibald, 34.

⁵ L.R. Scarborough, *A Search for Souls*, (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1925), 14.

BRINGING OUR FRIENDS TO CHRIST

Richard G. Lee

Mark 8:22-24

Do you have a friend who is without Jesus? He or she may be a relative, a coworker, or a lifelong friend who has never met Jesus as personal Savior. If he or she is going to be won to Christ, it will most likely be through your efforts. It will probably take a friend like you to reach this person for Christ.

Chances are that it was a friend who helped introduce you to Christ. The vast majority of those who come to Christ do so through the influence of a friend. The Bible tells us how we can bring our friends to Christ in Mark 8:22-24 (NIV): "They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?' He looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around.' Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly."

Notice the lessons our Lord is teaching us here:

I. His friends brought the blind man to Jesus

The blind man was incapable of finding Jesus alone. He needed the help of his friends. They brought him to Jesus as an expression of their own faith and out of concern for their friend's condition. While this is a true story of a man healed of a physical illness, it illustrates a spiritual truth. True friendship means doing something about the needs of others.

The blind man's friends could have been concerned, without acting on his behalf. They could have prayed about his condition or had compassion for him without taking action. But they did something about his condition. They brought him to Jesus!

True friendship will motivate us to want to bring our friends to Christ. In Matthew 11:19, the Pharisees said of Jesus that he was the friend of sinners and they were right. Our Lord Himself stated: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners [to repentance]" (Mark 2:17, NIV). Jesus' public ministry was one of calling sinners to Himself.

Jesus proved His friendship when He gave His life for us that we

might be saved. He said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, NIV). Our Lord proved His love for us when He took our sins upon Himself and shed His blood for those sins, that we might be saved.

What other friend has done that for you? Jesus is the greatest friend you will ever have. He proved it on the cross, and He will prove it again when you give your life to Him.

II. His friends believed God for his healing

Mark 8:22, (NIV) says the man's friends "begged Jesus to touch him."

Never underestimate the power of our prayers. The blind man's friends begged Jesus to heal him, and the Lord responded to their request. They interceded on behalf of their friend and Jesus healed him. You probably have friends who are in need of a touch from Jesus right now. Don't fail to hold them up in prayer. They need your prayers.

They also need your witness. Sometimes we fail to tell our friends about Jesus because we think they will be offended or "turned off" to the gospel. The truth is, they are already turned off or they would be "turned on" to God! You are not going to offend them by telling them you care about their spiritual well-being. Most people appreciate your caring about them.

Some of the most belligerent people I have ever known eventually came to faith in Christ because Christians consistently prayed for them and faithfully witnessed to them. I cannot even count the times in my own ministry that I have seen hardened sinners repent, believe the gospel, and accept the grace of God into their lives.

In Baton Rouge, La., there is a prison called Angola Prison. Each year Gideons take Bibles to the prisoners and tell them about Jesus.

One day a Gideon named Luther took a Bible into the cell of a notorious criminal named Charlie Frazier. Frazier had been in solitary confinement for 12 years. When Luther came into the cell with the Bible, he handed it to Charlie and said, "I came so that you would know that somebody cares about you. In Jesus, I love you."

Cursing angrily, Charlie Frazier said, "That's easy for you to say. Get out of my cell." Luther turned to leave, and as he did, he put the Bible down on the prisoner's bed and said, "I'm leaving the Bible for you to read, and I'll always pray for you."

Luther was faithful to pray for Charlie Frazier, and one day the prison chaplain called him and told him that, because of his prayers, Charlie Frazier had given his life to Christ.

Several years after he was saved, Charlie Frazier died, and the Louisiana Attorney General was quoted in the New Orleans paper as saying, "We don't know how or what changed the life of Charlie Frazier. He was once a wicked criminal who killed two of our guards while trying to escape from Angola Prison. But in the last few years of his life, he was a different man. We don't know what came over him, but, whatever it was, it changed his life."

There may be people like Charlie Frazier in your life. They desperately need a touch from God. But they are acting like they want nothing to do with God. Don't give up on them! Keep praying for them and witnessing to them. Don't quit! God will honor your faith and bless your efforts.

III. His friends cared for his needs

Mark 8:23 (NIV) says, "He [Jesus] took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?'" Jesus took the blind man away from the crowds and dealt with him personally. He spoke to him one-on-one. Often, we must do the same. We must invite people out of the noise of the world into church, so that they might reflect more seriously on their spiritual conditions.

Why do we reach out to bring sinners into the house of God? Because they are welcome here! The church is not a museum in which to display the holiness of the saints; it is a spiritual hospital to minister to sinners.

Our text tells us that Jesus spat on the man's eyes. In those days, people recognized the healing power of saliva. Even today, when a person hurts a finger, he or she will often stick it into his or her mouth. Our Lord was demonstrating compassion toward the blind man's needs.

Jesus cared about the blind man, even though He had never seen him before. He also met him at the point of his need. Our Lord came to the man's rescue because his friends had brought him to the Savior. Jesus will do the same today when we bring men and women to Him. Here Jesus taught us three important lessons:

1. We must care for others even when they believe wrongly

We must be careful not to be self-righteous, not to be "better than thou," for we're not. If Jesus can love one who believed wrongly, so can we.

2. We must begin where our friends are in leading them to understand Christ

It is evident that people who have never heard of salvation are not going to understand you when you first tell them about it. Jesus knew this man believed in the power of healing. And although Christ was the healer, He gently used the act of putting saliva on his eyes to open him to eternal truth.

3. We must always lead them all the way to the cross

Although they may believe wrongly, we must find out what they believe and why. Then we must faithfully and continually show them the way to the cross, never watering down the truth, and never standing less than firm in what the truth really is.

IV. His friends never gave up on him

In verses 23-25, “Jesus asked, ‘Do you see anything?’ He looked up and said, ‘I see people; they look like trees walking around.’ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.”

We should never give up on our friends, because Jesus loves them. He is not willing to give up on them. Why should we? Jesus touched the blind man’s eyes and he began to see, but he needed a second touch to come to full sight.

Sometimes it is necessary for us to pray for our friends one more time. Sometimes it is necessary to witness to our friends one more time. Each time we lovingly tell them the truth, we are demonstrating the love of Christ for them. We cannot give up on them, because Jesus loves them. He died for their sins. He rose from the dead, and one day He is coming again, because He loves us.

Picture your friends in your mind. Picture them cut off from Jesus, without help or hope. Now, picture yourself telling them that Jesus loves them, that He is willing to forgive them, and that He will give them eternal salvation. That is what you and I must be willing to do. You may be the only friend some people have who can introduce them to Jesus Christ. You may be the only saved person these people know. Don’t turn your back on their souls. Turn to these people right now and let them know that Jesus loves them, that Jesus died for them, and that they can have eternal life. Do you get the picture? I hope so. That’s what friends are for!

BEING LIKE JESUS

Larry L. Lewis

Matthew 9:32-38

Introduction

I once heard a preacher say that the late R.G. Lee was asked, “What do Southern Baptists need more than anything else?” His instant reply was, “More than anything else, Southern Baptists need to be like Jesus.”

I think most of us would agree. To be like Jesus, we must understand how He felt and acted and what He said and did. Matthew 9:32-38 (KJV) gives us a portrait of Jesus.

I. What Jesus saw: “When he saw the multitudes, . . .” (v. 36)

Everywhere Jesus went, great multitudes followed Him. He saw them not as a hindrance, but as an opportunity for witness and ministry.

1. He saw their needs

America is filled with people in need—the homeless, jobless, and hopeless.

2. He saw their lost condition

He saw them as “sheep having no shepherd” (v. 36). He knew they were without God and without hope in this world or eternity.

3. He saw their potential

He saw every one of them as a precious soul with unlimited potential.

According to the Home Mission Board Research Division, there are 180 million lost people in America today, and that number is growing by almost 2 million each year!

II. What Jesus felt: “He was moved with compassion” (v. 36)

“Moved with compassion” means He literally became sick inside. Jesus was heartsick, burdened, and brokenhearted over His lost city and nation. Oh, how desperately we need brokenhearted people who will weep over their lost neighbors, friends, and families. How desperately we need people who will weep over their cities and communities.

III. What Jesus said:

“Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37-38, KJV)

Notice that Jesus said three things:

1. “The harvest . . . is plenteous” (v. 37)

Many tend to believe the problem is in the harvest. They believe that people are gospel-hardened, indifferent, and unreceptive. Just the opposite is true. People are hungry for the gospel and will respond favorably, if it is presented to them in the power of God’s Spirit.

2. “The laborers are few” (v. 37)

The problem is not in the harvest, but with the laborers. Southern Baptists have many churches and many members, but they have few laborers who will go out into the harvest, sharing their faith boldly and bringing people to a saving knowledge of Christ.

3. “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers” (v. 38)

Jesus did not say this to complain about the lack of workers or to berate the people because they were not working faithfully. He commanded that we pray for them just as fervently as we pray for church members and for the lost. We must pray for soul-winners and faithful witnesses who will take sickle in hand and go out into the harvest to reap.

IV. What Jesus did: “These twelve Jesus sent forth” (Matt. 10:5, KJV)

Jesus answered their prayers. However, the ones He commanded to pray for laborers became workers themselves. These are the ones Jesus sent forth, house to house, home to home, sharing the Good News and winning souls.

Conclusion

As we pray for laborers, let us respond as Isaiah did: “Here am I; send me” (Isa. 6:8, KJV).

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Homer G. Lindsay Jr.

Matthew 9-10

“And as Jesus passed forth from thence [he was going back to Capernaum from Gadara], he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom” (Matt. 9:9, KJV).

Matthew was a tax collector for Rome. These tax collectors worked on commission. Most of them were dishonest. Most of them charged more than they were supposed to and became very wealthy by doing so. They were hated and despised by the people. Certainly, if anybody would know about this experience, Matthew would. It happened to him personally.

The possibilities that Jesus sees in a person are amazing. Here Jesus looked at this sinner, this tax collector, this hated and despised man that the Jews would have nothing to do with; and Jesus saw great possibility in him.

Jesus said to Matthew, “Follow me. And he arose, and followed him” (Matt. 9:9, KJV).

The willingness to follow Jesus is the difference in people. Jesus saw Matthew and said to him, “Matthew, follow me.” And Matthew arose and followed the Lord. Matthew turned his back on his lucrative trade. He turned his back on his friends. He turned his back on his old way of life and followed the Lord. He left them to follow Jesus.

Look back at Matthew 4:17 (KJV): “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The Scripture says John the Baptist came preaching repentance. Jesus came preaching repentance. The word “repent” means to change your mind. That’s what this service is all about. Its purpose is to get folks to repent or to change their minds about Jesus and about their need for Jesus.

Look at Matthew 4:18 (KJV): “And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.”

Verse 19 (KJV): “And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Verse 20 (KJV): “And they straightway left their nets, and fol-

lowed him.”

So, here Jesus has former fishermen who are following Him. Now in chapter 9, He comes by a tax collector—a hated, despised tax collector—and says to him, “Follow me.” He immediately rises and follows the Lord.

Now verse 10 (KJV): “And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house [he was in the home of Matthew], behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.”

These were the friends of Matthew. Matthew had met the Lord and now he wanted his friends to meet the Lord. So he gave a dinner. This is a natural response after you come to the Lord: You have a desire for your friends and loved ones to know Jesus as you have come to know Him.

Verse 11 (KJV): “And when the Pharisees [the religious leaders] saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?”

Verse 12 (KJV): “But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”

Verse 13 (KJV): “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Jesus has come to minister to those who are sick. We live in a sin-sick age, a sin-sick society that desperately needs the touch of the Great Physician’s hand. We greatly need the touch of the Master’s hand upon our lives.

Now, verse 35 (KJV): “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.”

There were 204 of these villages in Palestine, and Jesus visited them. Jesus went where the people were. He didn’t build a building and wait for the people to come to Him. Rather, He took His message to the people. He went where the people were, and He presented the gospel to them.

Verse 36 (KJV): “But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them.”

This suggests strong emotion. He felt deep feelings, deep sympathy, deep love, deep affection for the people as He saw them: “When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matt. 9:36, KJV).

The image here is very striking. He saw the people as harried

and helpless as sheep wandering about with no spiritual guidance. You and I, as individuals and as a church, will never do anything for God until, first of all, we are moved with compassion. As we have beheld our city, our Jerusalem, our Jacksonville, we know we must have a compassion for it. God has placed us here to minister to this city.

I was reading Friday’s paper about the great concern for the gangs in Jacksonville—more than 400 gang members known by name. There are more than 35 gangs in Jacksonville. I have felt great distress as I read about all the many crimes that have been committed in our city—murders, holdups, burglaries, and many other types of crime.

As I have told you in recent messages, I have been greatly concerned for the children of Jacksonville. These children quickly become teens and youth. They are our future. Our future looks bleak if we don’t do something about our youth. But I don’t believe we will do anything until we first have compassion. You would be absolutely appalled at how many people don’t care—how many people are totally indifferent to the needs of our city. As long as it doesn’t affect them, their loved ones, and their families, they don’t care. But there is no place to hide where sin cannot go. There is not a place you can go where you are not affected. (See Appendix A for an illustration of this point, “A Vision for the City.”)

Jesus loves all people. He loves the down-and-out and He loves the up-and-out. Listening to me this morning may be someone who barely has enough money to buy a hamburger for lunch. Somebody else may be tuned in who lives in a mansion. Without Jesus Christ, both are going to hell. Both of them desperately need to experience the miracle of the new birth. It doesn’t matter who they are, where they are, what their background is—they need Jesus. But you and I will never rally to the command, never be responsive, never do anything, until we first have compassion.

Jesus goes on in verse 37 (KJV): “Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few.”

I lived in South Florida for 16 years. South of Miami is Homestead and the Florida City area, where they bring in four crop harvests a year. The soil down there is terrible. They ship tomatoes to New York and get a nice price for them. But they are not fit to eat. They are just like colored water, tasteless. They ship lettuce and get a big price for it. One year, I remember they had a bountiful harvest, and they couldn’t get laborers. I read in the Miami Herald that the crops were just rotting in the fields. So, I drove down there just

to see for myself. Sure enough, there was a stench. The crops were just wasted because they didn't have the laborers to harvest them. I thought how sad that was—so many needy people, so many people who could have used those foodstuffs, and the farmers just plowed them under because they didn't have laborers.

If that's sad, what about the spiritual picture the Lord has painted here. The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few. The harvest here is souls of boys and girls, souls of teenagers, souls of more than 400 gang members in Jacksonville, souls of young people, souls of young couples who do not know Jesus Christ as Savior. They are ready to be harvested, but there are so few laborers.

God will ask, "How many people did you tell about My Son, Jesus?"

"I intended to, but I just never got around to it."

"How many people are here in Heaven because you witnessed to and shared Jesus with them and they invited Him into their hearts and were born again?"

"Not any, I guess."

It's interesting what Jesus says to do. He says the laborers are few. But notice what He tells us to do. Had I been deciding right about here, I would have said, "Dr. Vines, I'm going to appoint a committee to look into this thing." That's what government does. They will spend a million dollars of your tax money just like that, looking into it.

That's not what Jesus said. Jesus didn't say turn it over to somebody else. Jesus didn't say appoint a committee, look into it, and get a bunch of experts to study it. Jesus said, "Pray." (See Appendix A for an illustration of this point, "The Need for Power.")

Now, when our people get to praying, and, through the blood of Jesus Christ, they lift up their hands and put their hands in the hand of the One who saved them; they begin to pray about Jacksonville. They begin to pray about the thousands of lost people. They begin to pray about the harvest that is ripe and ready for the harvesting, but the laborers are so few.

Then God begins to work. Over here a guy begins to get concerned. Over here another one and another one and another one get concerned. This man, this woman, this young person, that young person become concerned. It's coming from the heart, from God. It's not somebody else from the outside handing us something, not somebody giving us a report card. It's God at work.

In our men's department this summer, we have not had fewer than 300 men out visiting on Tuesday nights, right in the heart of

summer when people are on vacation. Phenomenal! How do you get such commitment? It must come from God.

We are getting ready for our summer camps. If these young people are to be equipped and prepared to go back into the schools as God's missionaries, God's evangelists, somebody must back them in prayer. It's not just going to happen; God's people must pray. It's not something you pray for once and forget it. You must continue to pray. When the compassion gets weak in our hearts, when the concern gets weak in our hearts, then we must pray.

Thousands of people in Jacksonville could say: "Nobody cares for my soul. Nobody cares whether I live or die. People are just interested in themselves. They are wrapped up in themselves. What's in it for me? They don't care about others."

The Lord lays upon us a burden that we must pray. We should be praying about the problems of the gangs in Jacksonville. We should be praying about the problems of our schools in Jacksonville. We should be praying about all the other problems we have in America. We should be praying about the degradation and filthiness of the television industry, the unfit programs that are flooding into the homes of America. I'm convinced that Jesus is the only One who can change the situation. He has the power. We must do the praying. (See Appendix B for an "Invitation to Prayer.")

HAPPENINGS ON THE JOURNEY

Emmanuel McCall

Acts 15:36—16:40

Introduction

Learning to live life one day at a time, rather than from special event to special event, represents growth in one's pilgrimage. The special event mind-set begins in our childhood. We live from birthday to Easter; from the end of the school year to July 4, to Labor Day (when school begins); from Thanksgiving to Christmas; from preteen to 13, then to 16 (driving age); from graduation to college, to becoming 21, to marriage—from event to event. The problem with that style is that we miss a lot of living between events. It is the in-between times that determine the substance of life. The special events are ethereal, fantasy, and show. This truth can be fleshed out by looking at the daily events in Paul's life mentioned in Acts 15:36-41 and Acts 16.

I. Paul and Barnabas separated (Acts 15:36-41)

Here were two men who had become efficient in their work for Christ. Each complemented the other. Their first missionary trip had been both eventful and successful. When the suggestion was made that they retrace their steps to see how their efforts continued, their friendship ended.

Neither had a way of knowing that a visit from Peter would set up lifelong dynamics. It was during Peter's visit to Antioch that a harmonious relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians blossomed as a result of the efforts of Paul and Barnabas. A surprise visit from some Judaizing Christians from Jerusalem caused Peter to act hypocritically (see Gal. 2). Barnabas followed Peter's lead, probably not out of conviction, but from convention. He may have felt the need to follow Peter due to Peter's rank. Paul confronted both men. Barnabas began seething with resentment that exploded when the decision was made for the second missionary trip. While the unpredictable behavior of John Mark became the excuse, the dynamics for separation were already in place.

II. Conflicts—new opportunities for expanded service

Barnabas took John Mark and confined his ministry to the island of Cyprus. There began a nurturing process of Mark that produced

the quality genius of the writer of the first-written Gospel. Mark became such a powerful force that even Paul later requested his assistance (see 2 Tim 4:11).

Paul selected other companions. Silas was the first. He had made a tremendous impression on Paul at the Jerusalem Conference with his attempt to heal the fragile relationship with the Gentile Christians.

A second companion was young Timothy, a convert from the first missionary trip. He was to become Paul's closest companion and son in the ministry. During the first visit, Timothy followed Paul and Barnabas, learning all he could. He became leader of the church at Lystra. Paul's investment in Timothy paid off in big dividends. He was Paul's administrative assistant, handling the important details.

III. Nighttime visitations

It was a nighttime vision of a man standing in front of the backdrop of Macedonia, whose appeal to Paul—"Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9, KJV)—changed the direction of Paul's travel and, perhaps, his ministry.

IV. An original Annie Armstrong

At Philippi, a chance prayer meeting introduced Paul to one who would become the Annie Armstrong of her day. Philippi was a Roman center of culture. It was intolerant of other cultures, especially Jewish culture. The believers in God could not have a synagogue, so they worshiped by a river. Among those Jewish worshipers were Gentile "God-fearers." A woman of prominence named Lydia was among them. To describe her merely as a seller of purple cloth fails to give the whole picture. Purple dye was extracted from the murex seashell. Because it was hard to obtain, it was expensive. Only wealthy people could wear, or trade in, purple cloth. Lydia was wealthy, but when she heard and received the gospel, she brought her whole self into the faith. Nothing was omitted. She invited the missionaries to stay in her home. She had both space and servants to care for their needs. Her home was large enough for the church to meet there. She also opened her pantry for those in need and her pocketbook for the Lord's work. Paul later commended the church at Philippi for the generous support of him, led by this woman. Women at Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth caught the spirit of mission support from Lydia of Philippi.

V. Painful witnessing

At Philippi, a young woman with psychic powers attached herself to Paul's company. Generals and even emperors sought her fortune-telling services. Battle strategies were based on her predictions. Her clientele made wealthy the syndicate that owned her. Following Paul, she observed his divine powers. Her report was accurate, but her witness gave confusing signals to those needing the gospel. Don't expect unholy people to give holy messages with holy results. Paul recognized and exorcised the demonic spirit. The loss of gain caused the syndicate to seek Paul's indictment, even on false charges (paraphrased): "These men are Jews (prejudice). They are throwing the city into an uproar (law and order). They are introducing foreign customs (illegal proselytizing)."

Paul and Silas were jailed without benefit of trial, but their responses were unusual compared with others in similar circumstances. They rejoiced in being counted worthy to suffer for Christ. They sang and prayed with thanksgiving.

Although earthquakes were common, God sent a special one to free Paul and Silas. The building was destroyed from around them without harm to them. Instead of running, they remained calm. The jailer was about to commit suicide rather than face Roman justice. Paul and Silas led him to two kinds of salvation: first, from suicide; second, from sin. The jailer heard the girl say they were saviors. His question to them was, "What must I do to be saved?" These men turned his temporal question regarding Roman justice into one of eternal significance. They proclaimed Christ to the jailer and his household.

VI. Free reign in Philippi

The demonstration of the power of God left the city magistrates impotent to disturb Christians again. Their abuse of Roman citizens (Paul and Silas) brought fear of removal from office and municipal financial punishment. The church moved freely and respectfully in Philippi. The work of God's kingdom flourished.

Life is not lived only by special events, but also by the day-to-day routine of living.

Raymond Francis (Chunky) Harvey, Tuskegee, Ala., selected this poem for his memorial service.

Lord, is this the right road home?
The clouds are dark and still,

The stony path so sharp and hard,
Each step brings some fresh hill.
I thought the way would brighter grow
And that the sun with warmth would glow
And joyous songs from free hearts flow,
Tell me, Lord, is this the right road home?

Yes, child, this is the right road home!
The clouds were dark for me,
The stony path so sharp and hard,
Not sight, but faith, could see
That at the end the sun shines bright,
Forever, where there is no night,
And glad hearts rest from earth's fierce fight,
Yes, child, this is the right road home!

Author Unknown

BRING THEM IN

James Merritt

John 1:35-51

Introduction

It has been said that the greatest thing of all things is for one human being to bring another human being to Jesus Christ.

If that is true, and I believe it is, then it may be that the greatest disciple of the twelve was the disciple named Andrew. Andrew is mentioned only three times in John's Gospel. Each time he is bringing somebody to Jesus. First, he brought his brother to Jesus (John 1). Later on he brings a little boy with a few loaves and a few fish to Jesus (John 6:8-9). Later he brings some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus (John 12). After Andrew met the Lord Jesus Christ, the first thing he wanted to do was introduce Him to someone else.

Many Christians remind me of a little baby bear whose mother was trying to teach him to walk. He asked, "Well, which paw do I put forth first—my right front paw, my left front paw, my right hind paw, or my left hind paw?" She said, "Ah, shut up and walk!"

Nike™ has a commercial that I think says it all: "Just do it." That is a great slogan, not just for shoes, but also for saints. How we need God's army of soldiers to get out of the barracks and onto the battlefield to bring men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ. We see in this passage everything that is necessary for a Christian to do just that. We will also see that every Christian has what is necessary in his or her hands, head, and heart to bring people to Jesus.

I. Commitment to Jesus

"Again the next day after, John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus" (John 1:35-37, KJV). Now those last three words are the key to everything else. Soul-winning, first of all, is primarily a matter of following the Lord Jesus Christ. From the very beginning, we find that soul-winners were made when Jesus simply said, "Follow me," and they followed.

Soul-winning is primarily a matter of obedience. To follow someone simply means to obey his or her commands and to emulate his or her example. When you follow someone, you go where the leader tells you to go, you do what he or she tells you to do,

and you say what the leader tells you to say. Jesus said, “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17, KJV). That means if you are not fishing, you are not following.

Now I am not trying to minimize soul-winning training. It is important to be trained, and all should be trained. But these men had not been trained. They had never heard of CWT or Evangelism Explosion. They just had a heart full of Jesus. When you follow Jesus, He will lead you to lost people, so that you can, in turn, lead them to Him.

II. Communion with Jesus

“Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour” (John 1:38-39, KJV). After the disciples had made a commitment to follow Jesus, notice that they then took some time to fellowship with Jesus. Fellowship always comes before fishing. Worship always comes before witnessing.

We are told that they stayed with Jesus that day, beginning “about the tenth hour.” That was probably 4 p.m. In other words, they spent all evening and all that night talking with Jesus. The next morning, after having spent all that time with Jesus, they were so full of the Lord Jesus Christ that they had to go tell somebody about Him. The more time you spend with Jesus, the better you know Jesus, and the better you know Jesus, the more excited you will be about Him, and the more excited you are about Jesus, the more you want to tell others about Him.

My dear friend, if you are not excited about soul-winning, quite frankly, it is because you are not excited about the Savior. I believe it is an impossibility to have a quality quiet time, day by day spending time with Jesus—blessing Jesus, praising Jesus, loving Jesus, listening to Jesus, learning about Jesus, getting filled with Jesus—and not be about the business of bringing people to Jesus.

III. Confession of Jesus

“One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:40-41, KJV). Now that they

had spent time with Jesus, these disciples were so full of Jesus that they had to go tell somebody about Him.

I read about a layman in Boston who went boldly into a hotel, walked up to a woman and said, “Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ?”

Later on she told her husband about it. Her husband said, “Why didn’t you tell him to mind his own business?”

She said, “My dear, if you had seen the expression on his face, and heard the earnestness with which he spoke, you would have thought it was his business.”

I want you to notice how these disciples confessed the Lord Jesus.

1. They were seeking

Ours is not a come-see religion. Ours is a go-tell salvation. God is a seeker. Jesus is a seeker. Jesus said in Luke 19:10 (KJV), I have “come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

I want to remind those of you who are saved that you were not saved looking for God. You were saved because God was looking for you. I hear people talk about finding God. Friend, if you have found God, it is because God first found you.

If you had a son who was lost—he had gotten out in the woods and could not find his way home—what would you as a parent do? Would you just sit in the house, read a magazine, drink a Coke, have the television blaring, and say to yourself, “He knows where his home is. He knows where the house is. He has a nice bedroom. He has a TV, stereo, and Nintendo in it; if he wants to come home badly enough, he will find it”?

Absolutely not. If you love that son, you will call out the dogs—you will call the police, you will comb every inch of the woods trying to find that boy. I want to tell you, that should be the attitude of every Christian on earth, seeking the lost.

Notice who these disciples sought. Andrew sought his family, and Philip sought his friend. They both started in their own backyards. One started at home and one started with his next-door neighbor, but they both started with people they knew and loved. Did you know that the best place to start winning souls is right where you live? So many people think you must go overseas to be a missionary, when you have never even been a missionary at home.

2. They were speaking

Now they did not leave Jesus and just try to set a good example. They did not have the attitude, “Well, I will just try to live a good

Christian life. I will just try to set a good example, be as much like Jesus as I can, and hope that people will be drawn to Jesus by the way I live.” They did not witness just by their lives, though I am sure they did; they also witnessed with their lips.

Now notice what happens. When there is commitment to Jesus, communion with Jesus, and confession of Jesus, there will also be conversion.

IV. Conversion by Jesus

Notice carefully that it is Jesus who does the converting, not the soul-winner. A new Christian whom I had recently led to Christ was just bubbling over about Jesus and said to someone, “Dr. Merritt saved me.” Now I know what he meant, but I want to set the record straight: I cannot save anybody. Thank God, it is not my job to save anybody. All I’m supposed to do is bring people face-to-face with Jesus, and it is Jesus, through His Holy Spirit, who does the rest.

A chain reaction of conversion was set off that day. Five people got saved, one right after the other. Notice how their conversions were accomplished.

1. A personal presentation

Before people are saved, there must be a personal presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” Jesus said, “Follow Me.” Andrew and Philip both said, “We have found Jesus, come and see.” Everybody was personally presenting the Lord Jesus Christ.

In fact, the thing that excites me is to notice that everybody was involved. Jesus was not winning everybody. Jesus won Philip, but He did not win Nathanael, and He did not win Peter.

If this city, this community, this county, this country, this continent is going to be presented with the gospel of Jesus Christ, it will not be done by a few superstar preachers or by the staff of a certain church. It will either be done by the Andrews, the Philips, the Simons, and the Nathanaels of this world, or it will never be done at all.

2. A positive declaration

Both Andrew and Philip declared, “We have found Jesus; we have found the Messiah.” The first step to being a soul-winner is that you must be sure of your own salvation.

Do you definitely know the Lord Jesus Christ? There must be

that positive declaration of your own knowledge of Jesus if you are going to bring others to a knowledge of Jesus.

3. A persuasive confrontation

Over and over, everyone who was saved in this passage of Scripture was confronted one-on-one with the person of Jesus Christ. There are people today who are criticizing what I call “confrontational evangelism.” Dear friend, if evangelism is going to bring salvation, ultimately there has to be a confrontation.

To confront simply means to bring face-to-face. If you are going to win anybody to Jesus, you ultimately must bring that person face-to-face with the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of the most beautiful words of the Bible are found in John 1:42, where we are told, “He brought him to Jesus.”

When there is a personal presentation, including a positive declaration, resulting from a persuasive confrontation, there will be a wonderful change—a transformation.

4. A powerful transformation

When Peter and Nathanael were confronted with Jesus, there was a tremendous transformation in their lives. Jesus gave Peter a new name: “Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas” (v. 42, KJV). I believe one of the reasons He gave Simon a new name was because Simon was a new creature.

But not only did He give Peter a new name, He gave Nathanael a new nature. Notice the tremendous change that came over Nathanael from verse 46 to verse 49. In verse 46 (KJV), Nathanael says, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” But in verse 49 (KJV), he says, “Thou art the Son of God.” When he met Jesus, he went from being a foe to a friend. He went from being a doubter to a disciple. He went from blindness to sight, from darkness to light, from weakness to might, and from wrong to right.

I am here to tell you that this transformation, which only Jesus can bring, is the only hope for this world. The wonderful thing about salvation is this: It doesn’t deal with the symptom; it always deals with the problem.

HOW BIG IS YOUR VISION?

Luis Palau

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. If you love me, you will obey what I command”
(John 14:12-15, NIV).

Have you ever tasted a nice, cool, refreshing Coke? Congratulations! So have hundreds of millions of other people all around the world. And it's all Robert Woodruff's fault.

Well, not all his fault. But he's largely to blame.

You see, Woodruff, while president of Coca-Cola, had the audacity to state during World War II that “We will see that every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca-Cola for five cents, wherever he is and whatever it costs.”¹

When the war ended, he went on to say that in his lifetime he wanted everyone in the world to have a taste of Coca-Cola. Talk about vision! With careful planning and a lot of persistence, Woodruff and his colleagues reached their generation around the globe for Coke.

How big is your vision? Have you ever thought about what God could do through you to influence your generation?

I'm not kidding. Neither was the Lord Jesus Christ kidding when He called His disciples to gain a vision of impacting the world for His name. He said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:12-15, NIV).

Don't underestimate those words. Read them again. Here, in capsule form, Christ challenges His disciples—and that now includes you and me—to dream great dreams, plan great plans, pray great prayers, and obey His great commands.

I. Dream great dreams

In the disciples' minds, time was fast running out. For more than three years they had hoped Christ would be the one who would redeem Israel and reign as Messiah. But now He was saying that one of them would betray Him and deliver Him up to the Jewish leaders to be crucified.

Imagine what the twelve thought when Christ went on to promise, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing" (John 14:12, NIV).

Around the upper room table sat Peter, who had almost drowned trying to walk on water. And Philip, who waved his arms in exclamation, stating the impossibility of buying enough bread to feed the multitude. And Andrew, who, with a number of the other disciples, could not heal a boy who was demon-possessed.

To each disciple, Christ said, "You can continue the work I have been doing." And His promise is the same to you and me. He calls us to dream great dreams of what we can do to impact the world for His glory. How is this possible? The key is twofold.

First, because Christ was going to the Father, He assured the disciples He would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to indwell all believers (see John 14:16-17). Christ would now continue His work through us!

Second, Christ qualified His promise with a condition. He said, "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing" (v. 12, NIV). The Lord challenges us to have faith—not necessarily more faith, but faith in Him. It is an ongoing faith.

II. Renew your vision

Have you stopped seeing great things happen in your life? Perhaps you have stopped believing that God can work in a mighty way in our generation. But what limits the work of God here on Earth?

Is God somehow incapable of turning the hearts of multiplied thousands to Himself? Of causing the fires of revival to spread throughout this country and beyond? Of course not! Yet God has chosen to limit His works, at least in some measure, to those things we trust Him to do through us.

Why is it that so few Christians ever accomplish great things for Christ? I believe it is because we lose the ability to dream great dreams.

For God to use us again, we need to confess our unbelief and say: "Lord Jesus, renew my vision of Your power. Renew my confi-

dence in Your abilities. Renew my trust in Your resources." Then begin to dream again!

Christ Himself never limited His disciples' vision. Even though He restricted His own public ministry to Palestine, He came and lived and died for all mankind. And after His resurrection, He commissioned His followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19, NIV) and sent them first to Jerusalem, then to all Judea and Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth (see Acts 1:8).

Where have your own dreams stopped? Have they been lost somewhere between your living room and the house next door? If your dreams aren't greater than finishing your education, paying your bills, or raising your children, then your vision isn't divine. Maybe it's time to consider how God could use you to make a difference in the lives of others.

The opportunities are great throughout the globe. But how can we impact our generation for Christ? Is it really possible to preach the gospel to all nations?

I believe it is possible by taking God at His word and making plans to accomplish great things by His power working in us.

III. Plan great plans

Jesus Christ declares, "He [who believes in me] will do even greater things than these [I have done], because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12, NIV).

That is a fantastic, almost incredible, yet true, promise. It came from the lips of the Lord Jesus and has been proved trustworthy many times. Christ promises we can do *greater* works than He did!

Perhaps a look at the ministry of Paul will help us understand what Christ is saying here. Without a doubt, God used Paul tremendously during the crucial, formative years of the New Testament church. Even his opponents admitted Paul had saturated entire provinces with the gospel (see Acts 19:26) and turned the world upside down (see Acts 17:6). Some scholars have even claimed that, from a human point of view, this Pharisee-turned-preacher influenced history *more* than Jesus Christ Himself.

What was Paul's secret? Simple. He dreamed, but he wasn't just a dreamer. He also planned great plans and carried them out in the power of the Holy Spirit. These plans included utilizing ministry teams, traveling extensively, taking advantage of opportunities to witness for Christ, and establishing local churches to nurture new believers.

You see, Paul wasn't content to saturate one small area with the gospel at the expense of the rest of the world. He had a strategy for reaching the entire Roman Empire! He could say, "But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions [Jerusalem to Illyricum], and since I have been longing for many years to see you [in Rome], I plan to do so when I go to Spain" (Rom. 15:23-24, NIV).

Paul goes on in that chapter to explain his itinerary. In his mind, he could visualize every major city where he would stop on his way to Rome. He longed eventually to win the people of that capital city to Christ. But beyond that, his ultimate goal was to reach Spain—the western limit of the empire.

Notice the apostle used strategic thinking to fulfill his ministry. He didn't consider it carnal or beneath his dignity to plan strategically. Instead, he used it as a tool to more effectively reach the masses.

Of course, we must recognize God's role in our planning. Psalm 127:1 (NIV) reminds us, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain"—no matter how nice a job the architect did on the blueprints. Our planning is never intended to replace God's sovereign leading in our lives.

This is an exciting concept to me. On the one hand, God intends for us to use logical, strategic planning in fulfilling the Great Commission. But on the other hand, God can redirect our plans when necessary. One doesn't necessarily cancel out the need for the other.

Do you have dreams and plans of what God might do through your life? Or are you just busy with life's routine, ordinary tasks? Have you become bored . . . or boring?

The Lord Jesus Christ challenges us to abandon our complacency when He says that we can do even greater things than He has done through His Spirit, who dwells in us. He doesn't intend for us to sit idly and dream of what could happen for His glory. He wants us to plan great plans so that dreams can come true!

William Carey upset the status quo of the church in his day when he proposed sending missionaries from Britain to evangelize other parts of the world. Older Christians told him to give up his preposterous ideas. Carey countered their boredom and doubt by writing, "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."² That statement became the creed of the modern missions movement as men and women followed Carey's example and went to the ends of the earth with the saving message of Christ's gospel. Like Carey, God wants us to attempt great things for Him to reach

our generation.

Are you expecting great things from God? Or are you letting the opportunities pass you by? If the Lord wants the gospel preached worldwide—and He does—then we can't remain passive. Whatever our gifts or abilities or resources, we must work together as faithful stewards of what God has given us.

Dream a little. Envision the 4 billion people who have not accepted the gospel in this generation. Many have not even heard it explained to them. What are *you* going to do about it?

Start doing something by making specific plans of action. Determine how God could use you to share Christ at work, at school, in your neighborhood—and beyond.

Are you willing to gain a vision of what God could do through you to win others to Himself? After all, God doesn't have a Plan A, a Plan B, and a Plan C for evangelizing the world. He has only one plan—and that's you and me.

¹ Jim Reapsome, "Final Analysis," *Pulse*, March 6, 1992, 48.

² F. Deaville Walker, *William Carey: Missionary Pioneer and Statesman*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1925), 19.

LOST

Jerry Passmore

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

In preaching across the state of Florida this past three and one half years, I have found that so many of our church members have lost sight of the eternal consequences of a person's being lost without having received Jesus Christ into his or her life. I am not so sure that people of the world really know what it means to be lost. The word lost or a form of it is found 63 times in the Bible. It is fascinating to see some of the things that are lost—time, wealth, sweet words, life, hope, influence, child, rewards, soul. In Mark 8:36, Jesus says, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul" (KJV)? Luke 19:10 (KJV) says that Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost." It is amazing how people in the world do not understand the terminology we are prone to use in the pulpit.

A number of years ago, I was preaching a revival in Northern California. While out visiting one afternoon, I met a man from Boston. Eventually I asked this man if he was a Christian. I immediately realized this was the wrong question, because his definition and mine of the term "Christian" were worlds apart. I rephrased my question by asking him, "Can you share with me the time when you confessed your sins to Jesus and asked Him to come into your life to forgive you of your sins and to save your soul?" His response was altogether different to the second question.

Recently 1,000 people were asked this question, "What does it mean to be a Christian?" Some people gave multiple answers. The response was astounding. Twenty-one percent said "living different from other people." Fourteen percent said "loving and helping each other." Fourteen percent said "believing in God." Eleven percent said "going to church." Ten percent said "being good." Twenty-two percent said they didn't know what being a Christian really is. Nine percent said "accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and having a personal relationship with Him." It is obvious the world doesn't know what it means to be a Christian. It is also obvious the world doesn't know what it means to be lost.

Let me share with you 11 characteristics of a lost person, starting in the book of Matthew and continuing through the New Testament. Matthew 12:30 tells us the lost person is the enemy of God.

Luke 15:11 and following refers to the lost son, simply meaning he is away from the Father. John 3:16 indicates that a lost person is perishing, in the process of being destroyed. John 3:18 states that the lost person is under condemnation, which means he is already judged because of sin in his life. In John 8:44, Jesus tells some people they are children of the devil. Romans 3:9 states that a lost person is under sin, which simply means that he or she is born that way. Second Corinthians 4:3-4 states that a lost person is blind, which means that he or she cannot understand spiritual things. Ephesians 2:1 states that a lost person is dead, which means that the person is spiritually dead. Ephesians 2:12 states that a lost person is without God, without hope, and without Jesus.

There are three things in this passage of Scripture today that I would like you to see about lost people: 1) Lost people are blind; 2) lost people are perishing; and 3) lost people can be saved.

I. Lost people are blind (2 Cor. 4:4)

This simply means that lost people are blind to spiritual things. They cannot mentally see that they are without Christ. Spiritual things are as if they are covered and not seen at all. Although lost people can read the Bible and not understand it because God's Spirit does not live in them, they can understand enough to be saved. John 1:5 (KJV): "And the light shineth in darkness." That light is Jesus. John 1:9 (KJV) says, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." John is saying that, although lost people may not understand spiritual things, they have received enough understanding to recognize that they are sinners and need God in their lives.

I believe our problem today is that we don't believe every person is lost. We draw the conclusion that if a man or woman is a good person, he or she must be a saved person. We draw our conclusions by what we see in this world of sin—drunks, adulterers, drug addicts, homosexuals, abortionists. We forget that those things don't make us sinners. Those things just reveal that we have sin in our lives. That sin was born in us when we were born physically.

The Bible still teaches us that we are sinners by nature, then by choice. When we come to the place of choosing to be a sinner, we are no longer sinners by nature, but by choice. The only thing it takes to be lost is refuse to take Jesus Christ into our lives, to say no to Him. Good people are lost just like bad people. Our outward lives do not make us sinners. The devil has led us to believe that as long as we are good, law-abiding citizens, everything is all right.

Obviously the church believes that also, because we lack the zeal to share Jesus Christ with lost people. But lost people are spiritually blind.

II. Lost people are perishing (2 Cor. 4:3)

The word "perishing" comes from the Greek words *apollumi*. *Apol* means "away from," and *lumi* means "ruin or destruction." When we put these two words together, the word perishing means "taking away and being destroyed." It appears to me that God is saying that individuals are born into this world as sinners, and throughout life they are in the process of being destroyed, without ever being destroyed. When they come to the time of dying physically, that destruction process continues. Yet, even in the afterlife, they are never destroyed.

This is a picture of hell. The Bible teaches us that lost people begin to die the moment they are born, yet that death is never completed. They enter a place called hell and continue the process, but are never destroyed.

Now folks, we don't like to think about this, but this is teaching us about eternal separation from God in a place called hell. I am not so sure that we as Baptists believe this. If we did, we would be constantly speaking to people we encounter about the personal salvation experience we have had in Jesus Christ. When we observe the Word of God, we find that it teaches us more about hell than it does about the second coming of Jesus, or even about heaven. Jesus was probably the greatest hellfire preacher this world has ever known.

Look at Mark 9:42-49. This entire passage is a solemn warning by Jesus of this horrible place called hell. We come to verse 48 (KJV) and Jesus said, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Verse 49 says, "For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt." (See Appendix A for an illustration, "Being Salted with Fire.")

III. The Lost can be saved (2 Cor. 4:5-6)

Now the third thing I want you to see: Not only are the lost blind and not only are the lost perishing, but also, the *lost can be saved*.

These verses are telling us that the light of the glorious gospel of the Christ who lives in us can shine forth so that people might see the person of Jesus Christ in our lives. We can reveal His presence in our lives by the way we live. Second Corinthians 4:5 tells us that

we can preach, not ourselves, but Jesus Christ our Lord, and, in so doing, we can convince the lost that they too can invite Jesus Christ into their lives.

Verse 6 (KJV) says, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” It appears to me from this passage of Scripture that the responsibility of sharing Jesus Christ belongs to those who know Him as their personal Savior. It is directed to everybody that has been saved. The devil has convinced us that we can’t do that, but the Bible teaches us that we can. As brilliant as the apostle Paul was, we find that he constantly shares the simplicity of the gospel by talking about what took place in his own life, when Jesus Christ saved him on the road to Damascus.

I believe that’s the need of our lives today—just to share with other people what Jesus Christ has done for us. It’s amazing how our lives impress other people. People know we are different. People know we are not folks of the world. People know there is something or someone who makes a difference in our lives. We can reveal to them that the One who makes the difference is the person of Jesus Christ. (See Appendix A for three illustrations of this point: “A Lost Man in Cape Coral,” “A Senior at Montana State,” and “A Fellow Baptist Pastor.”)

Folks, I want to tell you today that people lost without Jesus Christ are going to hell. And because God has allowed His Light to shine through us, we have a responsibility to share who that Light is. May God help us today to be faithful in sharing the gospel with those who are lost.

A CRY FROM HELL ON EASTER SUNDAY

Ron Phillips

Luke 16:19-31

Introduction

The man had been sentenced to death for a capital crime. His family had exhausted every means to save him. Finally an appeal was made to the governor, who said to an officer of the court, “I will pardon him if he is repentant.”

The officers journeyed to the prison to ask the inmate one question sent by the governor: “What would you do if you could walk away from this prison?”

The prisoner was not aware of the governor’s test. He replied, “I would hunt down those who sent me to this place and kill them one by one.”

History records that the officers walked away from the prison with the pardon in their pocket.

This scene is unbelievably sad. Far more so, however, are those who refuse the risen Christ. Jesus has come to offer every human being pardon for sin, enduring peace, His daily presence, and strength and hope for tomorrow.

Yet, astonishingly, each week, many refuse the clear call of Jesus Christ. On this Easter Sunday, God has given me a strange text for such an occasion. Go with me to the dark caverns of the infernal, eternal hell. Here Jesus reports the dialogue between men who are in heaven and hell. In the course of that conversation, look at the appeal of verses 30-31. This man in hell appeals to Abraham to send someone back from the dead. The sad comment is that most will not even believe the word of one back from the dead.

The issue is the same today as it has always been: This Easter, the issue that confronts every one of us is faith. Can you believe the Easter miracle? Can you believe the good news that Jesus died for your sins and failures; that He rose again on the third day; and that He will come live in you if you will receive Him? This Scripture disturbs us and causes us to face ultimate questions of life and death, heaven and hell.

I. The question of death

This scene confronts us with the grim reality of death.

1. Death is universal

There is no family, no race, no nation exempt from death. It is the great common denominator of all humanity. Death visits the palace and the ghetto. Death comes to rich and poor, famous and obscure, old and young, men and women.

It is the teaching of Scripture that death is the result of sin. Death came as a curse upon humanity when Adam sinned. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12, NASB).

2. Death is inevitable

Death came to the rich and to the poor in the passage in Luke. One day you shall die.

3. Death is a door, not a wall

In Scripture, death is not the end of life; death is a journey to another place. Death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the spirit of man from his body. Death means you no longer live on earth. You are alive somewhere else. That brings me to the next question.

II. The question of destiny

Our passage indicates several startling truths.

1. There is life after death

2. This life is lived in a conscious existence in a body capable of experiencing pain or comfort

3. This life is lived in one of two places: heaven or hell

4. This assignment to heaven or hell is fixed and final in eternity

5. To go to hell is to experience awful torments

Dr. Maurice Rawlings, noted cardiologist, was saved when he heard the pleadings of a man under his treatment who was near death. The man caught a vision of hell and screamed to be saved.

My dad was summoned to the home of a man late one night. Arriving at the man's house, he found him sweating profusely, pouring his liquor down the sink drain. He had dreamed he was in

hell. Dad led him to faith in Christ. Just a few months later, the man was diagnosed with cancer and died shortly thereafter.

Some take comfort in the near-death stories of unsaved people who speak of seeing a lighted being and a gateway. That being could be the angel of light, Satan, leading them in one last final hoax of hope before the bottom falls out and they fall into that bottomless pit!

You have a destiny beyond time in eternity. That brings us to the final question.

III. The question of decision

Everything in this passage shouts that the decision to follow Christ must be made now, in this life. The rich man cannot change his decision in hell. He desires to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his family members. His missionary zeal and soul-winning fervor are nurtured by his awful agony.

Why was this man in hell? He was not in hell because he was rich. He was not in hell because he did not give to the poor. He was in hell because he refused Christ.

1. He refused the scriptural warning (v. 31)

Moses and the prophets had warned. Often the wealthy and affluent do not want to hear about sin. They are embarrassed by unsophisticated preaching. They want to be in a church where they are not disturbed. This man was a person whose religion was for convenience, not conviction.

2. He refused the soul-winner at his door (v. 28)

The poor man at his gate knew God. Had this man stopped once and reached out to Lazarus, he would have heard about Jesus, the coming Messiah. Lazarus was a witness. Note also that being saved is no guarantee of a comfortable life.

3. He refused the supernatural

Most of the wealthy were Sadducees. They did not believe in the resurrection of life after death. This life was all. Like the popular beer commercial, they thought they only went around once in life, so they grabbed all the gusto they could. Dear friend, there is a supernatural realm beyond this life. You must be saved, born again, to enter that new life.

HOW TO MEDIATE FOR A FRIEND

John Powers

1 Timothy 2:1-8

During the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, we saw hundreds of athletes awarded for their excellence. One of the most memorable scenes, however, was of an athlete who finished not first, but last.

Derek Redmond, a sprinter from Britain, was running in the men's 400 meter semifinals when his hamstring popped, and he fell to the ground in pain. He didn't stay on the ground, however, but got up and began hopping toward the finish line.

Before long a man came out to join him, offering consolation and support. The man was Jim Redmond, Derek's father, who had sacrificed much to get his son to the games. Together, father and son walked across the finish line five minutes later, with 60,000 people giving them a standing ovation. That is not the first time this scene has happened.

Long ago, a person entered a race. He was a medal contender who aspired to greatest heights. But when the starter's gun was fired and he began to run, something tragic happened. He was spiritually injured and fell on the track. No one was able to help him, for they were not qualified or were so focused on their own race that they did not see him lie before them, grimacing in pain. Then the Lord rushed onto the track to offer a way to finish the race.

If you will look closely, you will see yourself. It is you and I who lay on the track, for whom the Lord charged in to help us finish the race.

The Bible teaches that all people have fallen, and they cannot get up. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, KJV). In fact, the nature of sin is such that it only worsens, because all people carry the stain of sin from Adam and are depraved. Sin separates people from God. That is why Jesus Christ came. As Paul writes, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5-6, KJV).

That is the message of the good news. One mediator between God and you and me; one, not two; one Person who loved us enough to surrender His life as a substitute for ours. Just like Jesus practiced the ministry of reconciliation, we have been given the privilege to do the same. How can we accomplish that wonderful

4. The Savior (vv. 29,31)

You see, the issue was not wealth and poverty, religion or works; it was faith. In verses 29 and 31 find the call to hear. Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Conclusion

Jesus has come back from the dead. His resurrection is established by the facts of history. Men will not hear and believe. You say, "If I saw a miracle, I would believe." "If someone came back from the dead, I would believe."

Easter is the story of One back from the dead. Jesus said, "Hear the Scripture. Believe the Scripture."

Say today, "I will believe the report of Scripture." I want Jesus in my life, heaven for my home, and peace in my heart, now.

Felice Holman tells the story of the Bezprizorni in her book *The Wild Children*. Tens of thousands of Russian children were left orphans as their parents were taken away by the Communist secret police. These "wild children" lived on the streets, stealing to get by. One boy, named Alex, fled to his school teacher, Ektarina, who hid him as long as she dared. She escaped to Finland but never forgot the boy. She later, against terrible odds, arranged his escape across the sea to safety.

As Alex scrambled out of the boat, he could scarcely believe his eyes. There stood Ektarina, his old school teacher, waiting with open arms. The book records of Alex, "that his life began again."¹ That's what happens when you believe. Life begins again for now and eternity.

¹ Felice Holman, *The Wild Children*. (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 142.

and supernatural work today?

I cannot think of a more loving, caring expression of concern for a friend than to intercede on his or her behalf, especially if that friend has not established a personal relationship with Christ. Praying for people who do not know Christ is the chief and main task of effectively reaching them for Christ. How do we mediate? How do we pray for our lost friends? How do we intercede for people we care about?

I. Praying for people is the right thing to do

Moses prayed for God not to consume the unbelieving, complaining people in fiery judgment. He said, "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy" (Num. 14:19, KJV).

Samuel told his friends, "As for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king" (1 Sam. 12:23-25, KJV).

Remember the prophet Jeremiah? His claim to fame in Scriptures is his brokenness over the sin and separation of Israel. He is called the weeping prophet.

Daniel asked the Lord to forgive the people, restore them, their city, and their worship (see Dan. 9:17-19).

Stephen, the first man to lay down his life for Christ in death, asked the Lord to receive him as he was being stoned. He said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60, KJV). The implication of that prayer is: "Lord, do not let this mistake keep them from coming to you."

Paul was so burdened for people that he said, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, . . . my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 9:3; 10:1, KJV).

Here is how we can apply this message today. Right now take a note form and draw a line across the page. Write the name of the person you want most to come to faith in Christ. If you want the Lord to invade the lives of your friends; if you want those people to come to know Him—to be freed from the penalty of their sin, understand forgiveness in Christ, and experience grace and mercy that was freely given at the cross of Christ—write at least one name on that line.

II. Here's how to mediate for your friend

God's Word is clear. Let us see how we can stand in the gap for the soul of someone we know until he or she comes to faith in Christ.

1. Claim them for Christ (1 Tim. 2:3-4)

Peter says, "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9, KJV). The good news is that the Lord is more interested in you and your friend than anyone. He has vested interest in every person. People matter to God. Therefore, it is inappropriate to pray, "Lord, if it is your will that (name of friend) be saved, then save him." I believe that we assume the positive posture of faith, hope in the power of the Holy Spirit, and claim our friends for Christ. Can you visualize those people making professions of faith in Christ? Can you see them being baptized? Claim them for Christ.

2. Expect spiritual warfare (2 Cor. 10:4-5)

When we pray for our friends, we are entering the supernatural arena of spiritual warfare. Put on the armor of God! Plan to go into battle for souls.

3. Pray for spiritual enlightenment (2 Cor. 4:4)

Remember that the reason your friends cannot understand why you act the way you act and do what you do—why you are a different person—is that they are being blinded. The devil is actively blinding people, including your friends, about the claims of Christ. He will do anything to keep them from coming to faith in Christ, including darkening your eyes to the eternal plight of lost souls.

4. Pray for freedom from captivity (2 Tim. 2:25-26)

Did you hear about the woman who was celebrating her one hundred second birthday? She was asked, "What do you enjoy the most about your advanced age?" She replied, "The lack of peer pressure."

Sin holds your friends captive. They could not get loose if they wanted to. They have no power to stop the attack, influence, and control of the devil. They are prisoners. Like Katie Beers, who for 16 days in January 1993 was trapped by an insane man in a makeshift basement prison, your friends cannot escape without your intervention. It angers me when I think of this insane man; but it also angers me when I think of the thousands of people who

remain in spiritual prison, and I sit here free!

Jesus Christ came to set captives free. We need spiritual Rambos who are willing to go into the supernatural war zone to help set people free. Would you be willing to go into the prayer closet for your friends?

5. Pray for a repentant spirit

When you pray, ask the Lord to give your friends a spirit of repentance. It is the kindness of the Lord that leads people to repentance. Repentance and faith are gifts of grace from God. We do not conjure them up. When we pray for friends, we are inviting the Lord to provide conviction. The role of the Holy Spirit, according to Jesus, is to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and future judgment. Ask the Spirit of God to move in the lives of your friends.

6. Pray believing (Matt. 21:22)

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matt. 21:22, KJV).

“Well, I will pray, but I think he is a hopeless case.” That is not praying in faith. Faith moves where the eyes have yet to see and does what the mind cannot understand and the heart cannot feel. Do you believe your friends will come to Christ?

7. Pray for help in the harvest

Pray to the Lord of the harvest that He would send laborers into His harvest (Luke 10:2).

8. Pray for the spiritual growth of your friends

Do you see your friends serving the Lord one day? What expectancy! What purpose-driven passion for people! What faith! To pray for someone who is lost today that the Lord would save and use him or her is bold, confident, and victorious praying.

When I was a child, other children would often say, “I double-dog dare you” to do or say this or that. I never backed away from a double-dog dare from anyone. I want to make that kind of challenge to you today: to become so burdened for your friends that your prayer life changes for their good and God’s glory. Come, and offer your life a living sacrifice of intercession and mediation for your lost friends.

John Hyde became so burdened about souls that he began to approach God’s throne for two souls a day. After 12 months, John

Hyde had seen some 800 souls come to faith in Christ. But it did not satisfy him, for he soon began to ask God for four souls each day. He was named “Praying Hyde” because he assumed such a burden for the lost.

Would you ask God for a special burden for your friends, and set a goal to really intercede for them?

ATTRIBUTES OF A SOUL-WINNER

Howard Ramsey

John 4:27, 31-38

Introduction

The account in John 4:7-26 of Jesus and the woman at the well demonstrates how Jesus overcame the barriers we face in witnessing. He overcame the fear of rejection and racial, religious, and social barriers. In verses 27 and 31-38, we discover four attributes of Jesus that must become attributes in our lives if we are to fulfill His commission: compassion for people, commitment to the Father's will, consciousness of the urgency of the hour, and comprehension of the laws of the harvest.

I. Compassion for people

“Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, ‘What do you want?’ or ‘Why are you talking with her?’” (John 4:27, NIV).

Jesus loved people, and that is why He reached out to the Samaritan woman. Jews did not associate with Samaritans. But Jesus never met a person He didn't love and reach out to, because Jesus had compassion. The word “compassion” is a much stronger word than the word “concern” and has often been defined as “love accompanied by action.” The word is used seven times in the Gospels: five times in regard to Jesus' ministry, one time in the parable of the prodigal son, and another time in the parable of the good Samaritan.

Illustration: Mark 1:40-41 (NIV) tells us that a leper “begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’”

Luke 15:20 tells us the action of the father when he saw the prodigal returning home. We read that before the prodigal admitted he had sinned, while he was still a long way off, the father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.

To illustrate the difference between concern and compassion, let me open a page in the diary of Howard Ramsey. In 1987, while I was on a fishing trip with my 12-year-old and 10-year-old grandsons, the metal canoe that I was in capsized, and I was thrown into

water about 20 feet deep. When I leaped for the canoe, it rolled and struck me in the head. As I tried to swim out of the lake, my legs seemed to be paralyzed, and it became evident I was drowning. Neither of the boys knew how to swim. When the two boys saw what was happening to me, the younger boy began to cry and call out for help. There was no one within miles of the lake.

The 12-year-old boy pulled off his shoes and dived into the water and by the grace of God was able to swim to the canoe, get hold of my arm, and pull me safely to the shore.

When a reporter questioned the 12-year-old, she asked, "Were you afraid?"

He answered, "Yes."

"Did you know you could swim?"

He answered, "No."

"Did you think you could save your Granddad?"

Grandson, "I didn't know."

"Then, why did you endanger your life?"

He answered, "He's my Granddad, and I love him."

The younger grandson was concerned and cried and called for help. The older grandson showed compassion and dived into the water.

II. Commitment to the Father's will

In John 4: 31 (NIV), the disciples said to Jesus, "Eat something."

In verse 32, Jesus said, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

In verse 33, the disciples asked, "Could someone have brought him food?"

Jesus answered in verse 34, "My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

Jesus was on a mission for the Father. What is the Father's mission? In 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV), we find the Lord's mission is this: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." God has been on a mission from the very beginning. This is why He sought out Adam in the garden. It is why He established the sacrificial system. It is why He sent Jesus and said, "You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21, NASB). Jesus validated God's mission by saying that He had come to seek and save the lost (see Luke 19:10).

We, too, have been given a mission. God's commission to us is

found in Matthew 28:19 (NASB): "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." We are told in Mark 16:15 (NASB), "Go into all the world and preach the gospel." Again, in Luke 24:47-48 (NIV), we are instructed, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." Once again in John 20:21 (NIV), Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." We, too, must make a commitment to be on a mission for the Father.

III. Consciousness of the urgency of the hour

"Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35, NIV). The harvest was ready in Samaria after the woman told the people of the town about meeting Jesus. Verse 30 (NIV) says, "They came out of the town and made their way toward him."

The harvest is also ready in our nation and in our world. It is a terrible thing to lose a harvest.

As a young Christian, because of the fear of rejection or breaking a friendship, I failed to witness to a young man who worked for me and was a prospect member of my Sunday School class. I was with him all day Saturday and had every opportunity to witness to him. Early Sunday morning, he drowned in a boating accident. How many times have I wished that I had understood Paul's cry, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16, NIV)! If we are to understand the urgency of the hour, we must become conscious that every person we meet is only one heartbeat away from death, and we may be the last Christian to talk with him or her.

IV. Comprehension of the laws of the harvest

"One sows and another reaps" (John 4:37, NIV). The law of the harvest is sowing and reaping. No harvest will come until seeds are sown. We must all become involved in sowing the seeds. The Holy Spirit then will allow us to be used as reapers.

I have learned that if I am faithful in sowing, I also have the opportunity to reap. In July 1993, I attempted to share the gospel at least once a day, and no one prayed to receive Christ. Then came August. In August, in one day, three people I witnessed to personally received Jesus Christ as their Savior and their Lord. Before the month ended, nine people had accepted Jesus Christ. In every case, someone had already attempted to witness to these people. Verse 36 (NIV) proved again to be true: "Even now the reaper draws his

wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.”

Conclusion

What is the secret of possessing these Christlike attributes? There is no secret. These attributes accompany our availability and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Join with me, let us say to our Lord, “We are available,” and present our bodies in living sacrifice unto Him, in order that He may fill us with His Holy Spirit. The fields are white unto harvest, and “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Matt. 9:37, NIV).

WITNESSING WITHOUT FEAR

Alvin Reid

1 Peter 3:13-18

How do you respond to difficulty? Most people see suffering as something to avoid rather than as the great teacher that it is. For example, in his book *Creative Suffering*, Swiss physician Paul Tournier discovered that difficulty often played a key role in the development of great leaders in history. Whether religious leaders—such as Moses, Joseph, or Daniel—or political leaders—such as Alexander the Great or Napoleon—the experience of great deprivation was the rule rather than the exception in most great leaders’ lives.

What does this have to do with witnessing? Over the past several years, I have been privileged to lead scores of witness-training seminars. In questioning participants, most of whom truly wanted to share their faith, I have found that the number one reason most Christians don’t witness is fear—particularly fear of rejection or fear of not knowing what to say. What a powerful boost to our spiritual lives this fear can be, if we *admit our fears and overcome them!*

First Peter 3:13-18, especially verses 15-16, was written to encourage believers facing severe persecution, to show them how to overcome their fears. *By confronting your fears with confidence in God’s Word, you can defeat them and become an effective, confident witness.* I challenge you to spend the next 60 days talking to people about the Lord with this passage as your foundation. How do we move beyond our fears to freedom in sharing Jesus? Fear is defeated:

I. Through a personal experience with Jesus (1 Pet. 3:15, KJV)

1. A settled experience—“Sanctify the Lord God”

The verb emphasizes the importance of establishing in a clear manner the fact that Jesus Christ is your personal Lord. Gratitude for what God has done in saving us is a powerful motivator.

Oh, that we would be grateful like the dirt farmer who shouted too much in church. A committee (it was obviously a Baptist church) went to see the man about the shouting. He was in the

field, plowing with his mules. “I know I shout too much,” the man said. “But when I think about how much God loves me, and about what He did for me, and that He has a home in heaven for me—**HOLD MY MULE WHILE I SHOUT!**” He could not contain the joy of knowing Jesus.

2. A continuous experience—“Ready always to give an answer”

Conversion is only the beginning of a dynamic, life-changing relationship with God. I fear that today Christians do desire to serve the Lord, but many have lost their first love for Jesus! *There is no substitute for a daily, growing walk with God.*

3. An obvious experience—“An answer to every man that asketh”

Notice here the emphasis is on the lost person asking you about your life. Evangelism in the nineties will focus increasingly on seizing opportunities to share Jesus in the normal activities in the marketplace. These opportunities will come from the obvious change in our lives that comes from knowing Jesus.

I love studying the great awakenings in history. One of the key emphases of the leaders of these great revivals—whether a German Pietist like A.H. Francke, a Congregationalist like Jonathan Edwards, or an Anglican like Devereux Jarratt—was the importance of an obvious conversion experience followed by a godly life. Such an emphasis no doubt played a part in the tremendous evangelistic harvests reaped by these revivals. When we know Jesus has changed our lives, we can know He will guide our witness.

II. Through a powerful explanation of Jesus (1 Pet. 3:15, KJV)

1. A word—“The reason”

This term literally means word. That is, the message of the cross is the greatest news we could ever tell anyone—not our church, or our pastor, or our ministries, as important as they are, but the gospel! As a young pastor, I taught several laypeople how to witness with a marked New Testament. What a joy to see parents lead their own children to Jesus one by one because they had been trained! The reason many people have not been saved is that no one has clearly told them how. Take advantage of the tools we have to learn how to share the gospel message.

2. A witness—“Hope that is in you”

Share your own experience. People can debate theology, attack stereotypes, and refute arguments, but they cannot take away what has happened to you! Read about the blind man in John 9 or Peter and John in Acts 4.

During my first quarter of teaching at Houston Baptist University, I was stopped after class by a student named Teresa. We had been studying Abraham, and she made this comment: “I believe in God, but I don’t *know* Him like Abraham did.” Sensing her frustration, I shared that Abraham had a personal relationship with God and not merely an intellectual knowledge. I then shared the gospel from Romans, and she opened her heart and was converted! It was the testimony of a saint (in this case, an ancient one—Abraham), along with the gospel, that Teresa needed and wanted!

III. Through a pure example of Jesus (1 Pet. 3:15-16, NIV)

1. Humility—“With gentleness and respect”

We should treat others as Jesus did—like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36). My experience has shown that *there are more people who are open to a compassionate gospel presentation than there are believers willing to share.* Our genuine concern for lost people and their relationships with the Lord should be obvious, because people can tell if we are sincere in our witness.

2. Integrity—“Your good behavior”

If it could be said of us—in the workplace, the neighborhood, and the school—that nothing can be said against us except that we believe and serve God (See Dan. 6:5), what an impact we would make in this world!

Only God knows the impact you and I can make if we will emulate the life of Jesus before others. Little Chad, a student in grammar school, was shy and timid. One day he told his mom he wanted to make a valentine for all his classmates. His mom’s heart sank. She knew Chad was not treated well by the other children and feared he would be crushed if he received no valentines. But Chad persisted, making 35 valentines by hand. His mom said she would make his favorite cookies when he came home, anticipating his rejection. Chad went to school excited. That afternoon Chad came home. His mom expected him to burst into tears, so she said, “Mommy has some warm cookies for you.” But he hardly heard her. He looked up and said, “Not a one, not a one.” His mom’s

heart sank. Then he smiled and said, “I didn’t forget a single one!” His only interest was in giving, not receiving. Such a warm, giving attitude can touch the heart of the coldest person.

We live in a society that in some ways is growing more hostile toward Christianity. The way to overcome our fear of witnessing is to experience God’s presence consistently, share the powerful gospel regularly, and live a pure life like Jesus. I challenge you to follow this pattern for 60 days and see the change in your life.

FALSE GODS GIVE NO ANSWERS

Dwight “Ike” Reighard

1 Kings 18:20-29

Introduction

On April 14, 1912, the Titanic was crossing the Atlantic Ocean on her maiden voyage, on a journey to America. At approximately 11:40 p.m., the Titanic struck an iceberg that created a 300 foot gash. A ship that took years to build took only two hours and 40 minutes to sink. History tells us that the “unsinkable” did sink. History tells us that out of 2,227 passengers, only 705 were rescued. History tells us the laughter and jokes of passengers became the screams of the dying and the prayers of survivors. History even tells us the Titanic’s band changed music, and began playing a hymn. History tell us that by 2:20 a.m., April 15, the Titanic was gone. The unsinkable had done the unthinkable—it disappeared 13,120 feet beneath the black waters.

What caused this incredible disaster? History tells us the truth—the “safest” ship was not safe after all. The “unsinkable” did the unbelievable. The bottom line was *negligence*, expressed in at least three forms:

1. Pride

It ignored all the warnings about ice and increased its speed in hopes of an early arrival in New York Harbor.

2. Irresponsibility

The Californian, the only vessel in the area (10 miles away) made no attempt to rescue the Titanic’s passengers because the radio operator had gone off duty. No one on the Californian ever heard the call for help.

3. Inattention

The message to be aware was ignored, and the desperate SOS was sent too late.

What truths can America learn from this tragedy? In many ways our nation, our ship of state, is like the Titanic. And we Christians are like Elijah when he represented God in confronting King Ahab and the nation of Israel on Mount Carmel.

We are on a collision course as a nation, and icebergs of destruc-

tion are all around. We Christians had better get our message across before America sinks beneath the dark waters of her sin, before America succumbs to being politically correct rather than scripturally sound. Icebergs of iniquity are all about us, and America is about to sink!

I. Our worsening circumstances require that we must determine our choice: Are we with God or against God?

1. The problem was obvious

For 585 years, the nation of Israel had vacillated in its desire for God. Divided minds. Divided emotions. Divided loyalties.

2. The prescription was optional

In 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah challenged: If you are going to follow God, then follow Him; if you are going to follow Baal, then follow him; but quit mixing the two! God wanted to stop the syncretizing of His beliefs with the pagan beliefs of other gods.

Joshua stood before the nation of Israel and challenged them: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15, KJV).

So, now, on Mount Carmel, Elijah stands and commands: Wholly follow God or totally follow Baal. *Just make a choice; quit being lukewarm!* Our choices today will equal our lifestyles tomorrow.

II. Our choices will reveal the difficulty of life’s challenges

1. Doing the right thing is often the hardest thing to do

We have a natural tendency to go with the world.

2. Doing the right thing is often the most unpopular thing to do—a minority position

If we don’t stand for something, we will fall for everything! What may be politically correct can often be totally ungodly. We can spend our lives being politically correct or being prophets of Christ. We can be chameleons of the times or committed to the unchanging truth of God’s Word. We can be tied to the heights by Scripture or towed under by society. Society will waltz us straight to hell, and many Christians are dancing right along. There should be a difference in us! Remember: You will never go wrong by doing the right thing!

3. America’s false gods:

- (1) God of Sex
- (2) God of Materialism
- (3) God of Recreation
- (4) God of Music

4. False gods will give you no answers

- (1) In the 1920s, it was education.
- (2) In the 1930s, it was economics.
- (3) In the 1940s, it was world politics.
- (4) In the 1950s, it was science.
- (5) In the 1960s, it was sociology.
- (6) In the 1970s, it was unrestraint, doing your own thing.
- (7) In the 1980s, it was greed—money and career.
- (8) In the 1990s, it is false gods.

A theological Disneyland—from New Age to Branch Davidians. The stranger your extremes, the more likely you will attract society. If our land is going to be healed, we must learn that false gods give no answers.

III. Our greatest challenge will result in dealing with the consequences

1. We must repent

2. We must restore

3. We must recommit today

4. We must share the true gospel

Only Jesus Christ is truly recommendable. False gods never give an answer, but the true and living God will never lie.

I AM NOT ASHAMED

Herman Rios

Romans 1:14-17

Sometimes you read a portion of Scripture and nothing happens. And then, there are times when you read it, and it literally jumps off the page and grabs you. And sometimes you begin to argue with it. One day, I began to read this passage, and it jumped out at me, and I began to argue with the apostle Paul. I began to ask him, “What in the world are you talking about?”

In Romans 1:14 (KJV), it says, “I am debtor” and I said, “Paul, what are you talking about?”

When Paul says, “I am debtor,” he is referring to several things. First of all, he says he is a debtor because of the kindness he received from the early church when he was converted to the gospel. His name was Saul of Tarsus. You can read about it in the book of Acts, chapter 9. He says he was Saul of Tarsus, and he thought he was doing God a favor by persecuting the church. But God knocked him off his high horse, blinded him three days to get him saved, to get him in the kingdom. But when the church heard that he had been saved, they were suspicious. I don’t blame them; I would have been suspicious, too. On one occasion, Paul was preaching and working, and a young man came and told Paul to get out of town—some people were coming to kill him. And the believers put Paul in a basket and threw him over a wall so that he could escape with his life. So, he says, “I owe a great debt because of the kindness I have received.” When he was in jail in the winter, believers would bring him coats to keep him warm and parchment and pens so that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he could write the words that you and I enjoy. He is saying, “I am debtor,” because of the kindness that he had received from fellow Christians.

He says, “I am debtor,” not only because of the kindness, but also because he has an obligation to every man, every woman, every boy, and every girl with whom he comes into contact . . . to share Jesus with them, to plant the seed of the gospel. He owes it to God, he owes it to the church, and he owes it to himself, as God gives him opportunities, to tell people about Jesus. And, my dear brother and sister, if you have asked God to forgive you, and if Jesus is in your heart tonight, you, like Paul, have the same obliga-

tion. You are obligated to this church, you are obligated to yourself, and you are obligated to the Father, when God puts people in your path, to plant the seed of the gospel.

We have no choice, we cannot escape from it. It is our responsibility; every one of us has that responsibility.

Between now and next Sunday, people will come in and out of your life like comets; some you will never see again. But one day, my dear brother and sister, you and I will stand before a holy God. We will give an account of each of those persons as to why we didn't plant the seed of the gospel. That's what Paul is talking about. He said we have that obligation. We owe it to those lost neighbors; we owe it to those lost friends; we owe it to the guy at the gas station—we owe it to them, if nothing else, to plant the seed of the gospel.

But he goes on to say that not only is he a debtor, but also “as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also” (v. 15, KJV). I like that. Paul says, “I am ready.” If you had sneaked up on Paul at 2:00 in the morning when he was asleep and said, “Paul, wake up,” he would sit up on the side of his bed and start sharing the Roman road. That's how ready he was. When he came to town, he found a corner, or a synagogue, or the marketplace—he found someplace where he could tell somebody about Jesus. When they came after him, he preached Jesus. When they put him in jail, he preached Jesus. When they stoned him and dragged him outside the city and left him for dead (I really believe he died; I believe God brought him back to life), he stood up and kept on preaching. You could not keep him down. He was ready.

Let me ask you tonight, my dear brother and sister, are you ready? There is only one thing you must do to be ready. People say, “Well, you have to go to seminary.” No. “You have to be certified in Continuing Witness Training.” No. “Well, you have to be certified in Evangelism Explosion.” No. “You have to be certified in the One-Day Soul-Winning Workshop.” No. Those things are good, and if you have the chance to go through some of those, do it; they will help you. But you don't have to go through all that. All you must do to be ready is know one thing—know without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is your Lord and Savior. If you know that, you are ready.

One of the things I do is old-fashioned, but it works—I carry tracts. I carry tracts with me; I leave them in places. Early this morning, I stopped somewhere to get some coffee. It must have been 4:30 or 5:00 a.m. I was the only guy in the place. I got some coffee; I left the woman a tip; I left her a tract; and I left. I hope she

read it. There it was; that's all I had time to do. She went to do something else; I left her a tract.

My wife said, “Honey, you are always out on the road, you are always winning people, but I am here with five kids, and I am involved at the church, but how am I going to win people?”

I said, “I've got a plan. You don't even have to leave the house to win people to Jesus.”

“How am I going to do it?”

I said, “I've got a tract that I put out all over the country. The tract has our phone number on it.”

Since we've been at this church, two people have called my house in the middle of the night when I wasn't home, gotten her out of bed, and asked her how they could be saved.

And now she does counseling at the altar at our church on Sundays, because God is blessing our church and people are responding. So my pastor directs traffic at the altar—he only directs traffic. People come and he asks, “Why do you come?” If they say they need to get saved, he will call a counselor, and there they are—all the counselors are lined up. They have a smile from ear to ear, because they are ready to sit down with the Word of God and lead somebody to Jesus. There is nothing greater—next to getting saved—than being instrumental in helping someone come to Jesus. Oh, it is one of the greatest things in the world. Paul says, “I am ready, I am ready.” (See Appendix A for Rios' story about “Witnessing with Tracts.”)

And if you don't have the courage to pass out tracts, buy a box of blank envelopes, put your church's address on them, a person's address, and a stamp. Put a tract inside the envelope and send it to the person.

Folks, we have no excuse for not reaching people. There are 9 million lost people in the state of Florida right now.¹ If you and I don't have a burden for them, if you and I don't have a passion for them, if you and I don't have a concern for them, tell me who is going to. No one else is. (See Appendix A for Rios' story, “A Minority Report.”)

In verse 16, Paul is saying he's not disappointed in Jesus. Now, if somebody accuses you of being disappointed in Christ, they have a fight on their hands, don't they? But, you see, every time we have an opportunity to tell somebody about Jesus and we don't do it, without saying a word we say to that person, “I am disappointed in Jesus.” (See Appendix A for Rios' stories “Go to Hell” and “Give Her a Witness.”)

Let me tell you something, when God lays upon your heart to tell somebody about Jesus, you had better tell somebody about Jesus. You had better do everything you can to plant the seed of the gospel, because if you don't, you will be miserable, and the devil will use it against you.

Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:16, KJV).

We owe it to people to tell them about Jesus. Since we've been here tonight, God has flashed across your mind the faces of people you know that are lost. Some of you are shaking your heads because you know what I'm talking about. You see their faces in your minds. Could it be that that's God's way of allowing the Holy Spirit to tell you what you and I will do between now and Wednesday to get those folks here—to get the Word to them? I really believe that if we don't reach some of these folks between now and Wednesday, they will never be reached. I believe this is their time, and they will only be reached if you and I go in the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the results to God. Let us pray. (See Appendix B for Rios' "Invitation.")

¹ Florida Baptist Convention, Evangelism Division, "The Number One Problem," (Jacksonville: Florida Baptist Convention, 1992).

CONFIDENCE FOR SOUL-WINNING

Darrell W. Robinson

John 20:19-23

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20:19, RSV).

Introduction

What happened to the disciples? They had heard Jesus say, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23, RSV). Now they were hiding in fear behind locked doors.

Fear erects a barrier that dominates the mind, depresses motives, and discourages the mission of Jesus' followers. Fear turns attention inward toward self. Fear defeats soul-winning.

Can we get rid of the fear that hinders evangelism? Yes, indeed! The presence of Jesus removes fear for those who trust and obey Him. Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst and said, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19, RSV). Then, "he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20, RSV).

Knowing Jesus' love and loving Jesus overcomes fear. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18, RSV).

I. The person of Jesus gives confidence for soul-winning

1. Peace comes from the abiding presence of Jesus (John 20:21)

- (1) Jesus said, "Peace be unto you" in verse 19. He said it to resolve their fear of His sudden appearance and their anxiety for personal safety.
- (2) Later He gave assurance, as His followers were sent out on mission to be His witnesses. Jesus affirmed His presence with the disciples in Matthew 28:20 (KJV), "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Summary: Jesus promised to give His peace as we obey Him in soul-winning.

2. Peace comes from the authoritative presence of the person of Jesus (John 20:21, RSV).

- (1) He was sent by God, the Father, as the eternal Son to redeem the lost world: "As my Father has sent me, . . ."
- (2) He has sent His followers as an extension of His mission to redeem the lost world: ". . . even so I send you."

Summary: The followers of Jesus are sent under divine authority to reach lost people with the gospel of Christ.

II. The plan of Jesus gives confidence for soul-winning

Jesus' plan is recorded in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). This same commission is found in different forms in the four Gospels and in Acts. Repetition is the key to establishing direction and building enthusiasm for soul-winning.

It is Jesus' plan: ". . . so I send you" (John 20:21, RSV).

1. To involve every Christian

Total participation of the membership is required to reach every person with the gospel.

- (1) Christians do not witness because they are not sent for by lost people.
 - The lost are in spiritual darkness and do not see their need (see 2 Cor. 4:3-4).
 - The lost are in spiritual deadness and have no power to change, apart from the work of God and the work of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:1).
- (2) Christians do go to witness because they are sent by the Lord (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:8).

2. To include every person

Total penetration of every geographic area with the gospel, not overlooking any person, is Jesus' plan.

III. The power of Jesus gives confidence for soul-winning (John 20:22-23)

God uses three things to reach people for Himself.

1. The work of the Spirit (John 20:22)

"He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" The Holy Spirit came and filled the church at Pentecost later. God breathed into the body of the first Adam the breath of life

and he became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). God breathed His Spirit into the body of Christ, the last Adam. The church became the dynamic body of Christ. The Holy Spirit empowers the believer for effective witness (Acts 1:8).

2. The word of salvation (John 20:23)

No person has the power to forgive any other man's sins. The power to remit or retain sins is in the word of salvation. God forgives as people respond in repentance and faith. This verse is parallel to Jesus' word to Peter about the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19). The word of forgiveness is entrusted to believers.

- (1) The believer witnesses to convey forgiveness to repentant hearts. Their sins are remitted.
- (2) The believer warns sinners that they are forfeiting the forgiveness of God. Their sins are retained.

3. The witness of the saved

It is the privilege and responsibility of every believer to bear the good news of God's forgiveness through Christ to every lost person.

IV. Conclusion

Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, KJV). If our hearts beat as beats the heart of Jesus, we will seek and reach the lost with the gospel of salvation.

INTRODUCING OTHERS TO JESUS

Leonard Sanderson

John 1:35-46

How would you like to be remembered by family members, fellow students, colleagues, associates, bosses, fellow church members, neighbors, friends, enemies? There are many possible and worthy answers.

I remember Will as an introducer of others to Jesus. Will was a farmer, a very successful farmer. He owned hundreds of acres of fertile farm land, many well-bred cattle, and some farm-related businesses. He was a philanthropist who gave liberally to causes he believed in. I remember him primarily, however, as one who loved to introduce others to his Lord. He introduced Jesus to employees, hitchhikers, neighbors, prison inmates, people he met everywhere—on the streets, at auctions, in stores, in shops, and in offices. Will was not a perfect man, but he was, like Barnabas, “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord” (Acts 11:24, NIV).

John the Baptist is remembered for introducing others to Jesus. If any person ever knew why he was born, it must have been this son of Zechariah and Elizabeth: He was born to introduce others to Jesus. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, he did just that several times. In our text passage, the people John introduced to Jesus immediately began to introduce Him to still others. John the Baptist introduced Jesus to Andrew, who immediately introduced Him to his brother, Peter. Likely John, the apostle, was the other disciple who followed Jesus, and he likely found his brother, James, and brought him to Jesus, because from then on it was “James and John.” Then, when Philip met Jesus, he immediately introduced Him to Nathanael.

I. Excitement is the mood

Roland Q. Leavell used to say that evangelism has become effective when the evangelized have become evangelists.¹ How do you explain this inherent quality, this intrinsic attribute among early Christians? They seemed so excited they couldn’t help but tell it. We have an Anglicized word that is almost electric in quality. It is the word eureka, brought over from Greek into English almost in its original form. It means, “I have found it.” This was the word

used by the Greek mathematician Archimedes when he made a significant discovery. This is the Greek word used by Andrew when he rushed to find his brother and exclaimed, "We have found the Messiah!" It is the Greek word used by Philip when he found Nathanael and exclaimed, "We have found Him!" If you are excited about something, you will tell others about it, unless some restraining condition prevents it.

I heard George A. Buttrick, the great New York Presbyterian pastor, lecture for a week at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The one thing he said that has never ceased to impact my life was his emphasis on the attitude of the early Christians expressed in the words, "A marvelous discovery has been made. Eureka, I have found it!"

Chubby was a former bartender who became a respected labor leader, politician, then a state senator. He found Jesus in a tent revival conducted by First Baptist Church. He talked about his thrilling new experience to everybody who would listen, and likely to some who wouldn't. He led many people to the Lord. He never stopped entirely, but a fellow church member observed that he was not as excited as he used to be and asked why.

The answer he got was, "Well, maybe after Chubby got to be a Sunday School teacher, deacon, and chairman of important committees in the church, he learned that those kinds of 'important' people don't do so much soul-winning." Do you suppose that some of us so-called mature Christians have drifted into being more effective restrainers than proclaimers? Incidentally, the next step is to become complainers. But I have observed that when people cease being happy proclaimers, they become, in a sense, unhappy disclaimers. Watch it!

How can one avoid becoming a complainer, a disclaimer, and a restrainer? Ask God to help you recall how happy you were when you first became a Christian. If you were a child, recall your simple faith in God at that time. You don't have to give up your growth. You don't have to forget what you have learned. Just review what you really believe about God. Reflect upon the times you felt closest to Him. Think about answered prayers. Would you exchange your Christian experience for anything else in the world? This kind of recall and reflection is called revival. Read a favorite passage of Scripture. Talk with someone about the Lord.

In leading evangelistic campaigns, I have always insisted that I have the privilege of spending some time every day calling on people to talk with them about the Lord. I do this not only because

they need this, but also because I do. When I was a pastor and got depressed and discouraged, I soon learned that the most effective therapy was to go to my list of prospective Christians, select the most likely prospect I knew, and go see her or him. If I selected wisely and prayed sincerely, about one out of three of them would become believers and church members, and I became a better pastor.

Do you want to improve your spiritual health and, at the same time, do something wonderful for your fellow worker, fellow student, friend, relative, fraternity brother, neighbor, doctor, or client? Pray about it and plan the best way to talk with this person about the Lord. You say, "That is not my gift. I'm not good at that." Surprise! That has very little to do with it.

You say, "I do not have that kind of training." As I reflected on this message, it occurred to me that I did just as well witnessing before I ever had a course of training or ever heard of the gift of evangelism. I'm not putting the gift or training down. At the risk of sounding arrogant or ostentatious, I thank God that He has given me a gift in personal witnessing. I wouldn't trade my years of teaching and being taught in evangelism for any other training experience in the world. I'm saying that the most important prerequisite is not know-how, but want-to. You already have that quality.

Now, I'm not trying to put a guilt trip on you. My purpose is to encourage you to do what you want to do. It will make you feel good to exercise your courage to do what you really desire. Don't try to talk to someone like your pastor does. Talk like you talk.

Who told you how to tell that guy or gal you loved him or her? Who taught you how to brag on your favorite food? Did it make you nervous to tell someone about your favorite friend? Those guys who put fear in you about talking to others about the Lord probably don't do it themselves, or they turn people off by their obtrusive manipulation. Leave off the mask of piousness and the veneer of paternalism. The language of Jesus and the New Testament is the language of the marketplace, the fields, and the seaside. The disciples' manner was excited *naturalness*. If you are sincere, you don't have to *sound* sincere. If you are spiritual, you don't have to *sound* spiritual.

II. Simplicity is the manner

Now let's say you have rediscovered the good news of Jesus. If being a daughter or son of God is important at all, it is the most important thing in the world. You are excited about it. You want to

share it with others. How do you proceed?

- **Be able to answer the question, “How does one become a Christian?”**
- **Get people to ask the question.**
- **Be able to recognize the question when it is asked.**
- **Follow the leading of the Spirit of God.**

1. Be able to answer the question, “How does one become a Christian?”

Just keep in mind these simple truths:

(1) God desires that all people be His people. The most familiar passage in the Bible, John 3:16, says it: God so loved the world that He gave Jesus. Paul wrote that God desires everybody to be saved (see 1 Tim. 2:3-4).

(2) Everybody needs to become a Christian. The Bible teaches that we are all like straying sheep (see Isa. 53:6), that all have sinned (see Rom. 3:23), and that the price for sin is death (see Rom. 6:23).

(3) God provided for our need. He gave His Son (see John 3:16) to die for our sins and raised Him from the dead (see 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

(4) This gift is eternal life through Jesus (see Rom. 6:23). The Bible makes it clear that this love gift is ours for the asking (John 1:12; Rom. 10:13).

Dozens of passages in the Bible tell us these truths. The ones I mentioned are just examples. Get familiar with where to find these or similar Scriptures. It is usually better to read to the lost person directly from the Bible, if possible. Familiarize yourself enough with these passages to give the sense of what they say in case it is not possible for you to read from the Bible.

Another option, if you cannot read from the Bible, is to tell your own experience of salvation. I usually find myself giving my experience and telling or showing the listener what the Bible says. Most instructions for giving your personal testimony include the following four points:

- Give a *brief* word about your life before becoming a Christian. If you were a child, there is not much to tell. If you were older, there is not much you *should* tell.
- Tell who or what helped you to know you needed Christ. It is especially helpful to tell *who* the Holy Spirit used to help draw you to Christ.
- Briefly give your actual experience. Tell about your sense of

need, your inability to save yourself, and how you took Jesus at His word and fully trusted Him to save you.

- Tell what being a Christian means to you on a daily basis now. This is a very vital part of your testimony.

If you don't have time for one of these suggested approaches, set a time with your friend to talk more about Jesus. Go to lunch together, have a cup of coffee together, like you would about anything else you want to discuss with someone.

Let me make one more suggestion: Your pastor can tell you about a training event where you can study in more detail the things I have talked about. All of us need a refresher course now and then, like once or twice a year. But remember, the word is *simplicity*. Be able to answer in simple language, “How does one become a Christian?”

2. Get people to ask the question:

There are several suggestions about how this can be done at the workplace, home place, school place, or any place.

(1) Attitude. Develop a loving, caring, helping attitude. It must be genuine and sincere.

(2) Behavior. Live like a Christian. Don't simply “act” like a Christian. Be like Christ. Remember you are the incarnation of Christ. Let Christ be Christ in you. Don't try to fake it. Admit you are not perfect.

(3) Pray often. Ask God to open doors.

(4) Make natural, relaxed, conversation about the church and the Lord. The questions will come—maybe in fun or jokes, maybe in very sincere questions.

3. Be able to recognize the question when it is asked

Be a good listener. People will ask about the church, the preacher, doctrines, beliefs, or practices. It may be criticism or endorsement. If you don't know the answer, admit you don't. Sometimes silence may be the best answer. You are the seller, not the defender.

4. Follow the leading of the Spirit of God

Do what you are trying to lead your friend to do. Perhaps the greatest need among those of us who have trusted the Lord for salvation is that we begin to trust the Lord.

(See Appendix B for Sanderson's "An Invitation to Commitment.")

¹ Taken from a classroom lecture, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1946.

A DIRECT WORD FROM GOD ABOUT WITNESS

G.W. Schweer

Acts 18:9-11

Introduction

Has God ever spoken to you? I do not mean in an audible voice. I mean through circumstances, through someone else, through a book, or through the Scriptures. Perhaps it was so real that it was like an audible voice.

Late one night many years ago, a prominent metropolitan pastor, who was also a physician, was driving home in his horse-drawn carriage. He came across a badly beaten woman lying in the gutter.

He helped her into his carriage and took her to several hospitals, all of which refused her, for she was a woman of the streets. The next evening the pastor met with his deacons. He told the deacons that the Lord spoke to him last night and said that they should build a Baptist hospital where anyone needing help would be admitted, regardless of his or her situation. A large Baptist hospital stands in that city today as a result of that encounter.

This is the sort of thing I mean about God speaking to us. I believe that Christians can have similar experiences.

Something like that happened to Paul. In his day of signs and initiatory events, it may well have been even more direct and literal. But whatever the nature of the experience, it was an unforgettable event.

Paul had a vision that preceded a great spiritual harvest in Corinth. It came to him in a moment of great trial and uncertainty, for him a much-needed word. It is a much-needed word for us, as well.

I. A word of strong exhortation

"Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace" (Acts 18:9, KJV). It was almost a rebuke. Quite literally the Lord said, "Do not be afraid," or, "Stop being afraid. Keep on speaking, and do not be silent."

We like to think of Paul as bold and fearless. Some may be a bit surprised to see that he was only human. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he readily confessed that he had been with them "in much fear and trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3, RSV). There was ample rea-

son for his apprehension.

Paul had begun speaking in the synagogue. He had not preached long before severe Jewish opposition arose. Paul then turned to the Gentiles and moved next door to the home of Titius Justus. At that time, the ruler of the synagogue, along with his household, believed, and many other Corinthians embraced the faith and were baptized.

While Paul doubtless rejoiced over the new converts, he could sense what was to come. The same opposition had caused him to be shown out or thrown out of the last several places he had been. Paul and Silas had been beaten, jailed, and asked to leave by the authorities at Philippi. At Thessalonica, the brethren had sent Paul and Silas away by night for their own safety. The same thing happened at Berea. At Athens, Paul left with the mockery of the intellectuals ringing in his ears, and now, at Corinth, similar opposition was building. Paul knew full well how life-threatening this opposition could be.

Paul's fear was deeper than for his own safety, however. His work was not finished. The church was not yet ready to stand on its own. Perhaps he even wondered if he had misinterpreted the Macedonian call.

Then, right in the midst of his fear and discouragement, God spoke in a night vision. "Stop being afraid. Keep on speaking and do not be silent" (see Acts 18:9).

I believe that is what God is trying to say to many of us today. So many are fearful, and many more are silent. The proof is written in our meager baptismal records and Sunday School enrollments.

Someone has said that the church is like an army afraid to fight. It has been cowed into silence by the hostility of the secular world. We sing, "Like a mighty army moves the church of God." Yet about the only similarity between an army and the church today is that they both eat a lot.

Often the problem is that many are not sure who they are. They seem to be one person at church and an entirely different person at the workplace. Some Christians can work at the same job for years without anyone's suspecting that they are believers. The sooner one clearly identifies himself or herself as a Christian, the easier witnessing and holy living will be. We must be glad to identify ourselves. We must stop being afraid. We must speak and not be silent.

II. A word of assurance

"For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee:

for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:10, KJV). Tremendous assurance came to Paul in the simple words, "I am with thee." For Paul, those words carried enormous meaning. After all, that was what God had said to Moses. Moses had been reluctant to do God's bidding, but God reassured him with signs and with this same promise (Ex. 3:12; 4:12,15).

That had been God's word to Gideon. Gideon was aware of his own inadequacies. In reply to God's call, he said, "Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judg. 6:15, KJV). But the Lord said, "I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man" (v. 16, KJV).

Jeremiah responded to God's call by saying that he was only a boy and did not know how to speak. But God said, "Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee" (Jer. 1:8, KJV).

Thus, the God of Moses, of Gideon, and of Jeremiah would be with Paul. Those were mighty words and a vital part of the vision.

The same God has promised to be with us. Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20, KJV). We are not alone. What an encouragement to the believer who is bearing witness in a hostile world. He is indeed with us, affirming His words in ways both seen and unseen.

There was a further word of assurance to Paul: "No man shall set on thee to hurt thee" (Acts 18:10, KJV). Paul's catalog of suffering in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 indicates clearly that this was not always the case. Yet, that was God's special provision for Corinth, and it enabled Paul to remain there for 18 months.

There is no specific promise that the faithful witness will not come to harm today. Yet, in our culture, harm is the exception rather than the rule. Ordinarily, the greatest danger is that of minimal persecution in the form of ridicule, ostracism, threats, or harsh words. Even that type harassment carries the promise of special reward (see Matt. 5:11-12).

III. A word of encouragement

God said, "I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:10, KJV). What a remarkable promise that was, and what tremendous encouragement that must have been. It is even more remarkable when the nature of that city becomes clear.

Corinth was an eminent commercial metropolitan crossroads. It was situated on a narrow isthmus of land between what we today call northern and southern Greece.

All north-south traffic was compelled to pass through that isth-

mus. Much east-west traffic did, as well. The southern tip of Achaia was known as the Cape of Malea. At that point, a particular convergence of waters made for an extremely dangerous sea. There was a saying among sailors, "Let him that would sail around Malea make his will first." For that reason, a substantial business had developed of taking ships out of the water and dragging them across the isthmus on logs.

Thus, Corinth was in every sense a crossroads. Many passing through had found reasons to stay. The city had become a multifaceted mosaic of people from everywhere. They had brought their particular vices and wedded them to the established evils of Corinth.

Corinth was also a center of worship of the goddess Aphrodite. Her temple atop the Acrocorinth, just behind the city, had at times housed 1,000 prostitutes, who were essential participants in the worship of a fertility goddess.

As a result, the name of the city had been verbalized and used in a pejorative sense. Thus to "Corinthianize" something was to utterly corrupt or pervert it. The very name came to be synonymous with sensuality of the most debased sort.

It was of that municipality that God said, "I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:10, NIV). And God did. According to Luke, "Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8, KJV). At the end of the book of Romans, Paul mentions Erastus, the city treasurer, and Gaius. Sosthenes (see Acts 18:17) and Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17), all were apparently prominent persons worthy of mention. All had become Christians. Tradition has it that Corinth was one of Paul's largest churches.

The point is this: If God had many people in that city, a city whose very name symbolized perversion and corruption, then surely God has many people in my city and in your city. Some of them work where you do, go to your school, and live in your community. What remains is for us to declare a moratorium on our silence. We must keep on speaking and draw on the strength of God's presence in our lives. Our witness must be forthright and clear. For only then can God use us to win the people whom He has in our cities.

Many years ago, when John Wesley was establishing his triangular itinerary, he arrived at Newcastle to consider it as a northern terminus. As he approached the city, he remarked on its beauty, but, when he arrived, he was shocked at the filth that poured even from the mouths of little children. He began to ask, "Where is the most

wicked place in this city? Where are men most vile of all?" Everyone answered, "Sandgate Street is the place."

At seven o'clock, Wesley and his companion stood in the midst of Sandgate Street and sang Psalm 100. When they had finished, a crowd had gathered. Wesley introduced himself and announced that he would be preaching at the same spot at five o'clock that evening. His comment in his journal was, "Surely this place is ripe for him who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."¹

That is what made Wesley great. He was never cowed into silence by the monstrous evil of his day. He kept on speaking, trusted in God's presence, and believed God would act. Such is the challenge we must answer today. We can do it in God's strength.

¹ Wesley, John. *The Journal of John Wesley*. Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.

LET'S GO FISHING

Clarence Shell

Mark 1:14-20

Introduction

What do you think when someone says, "Let's go fishing?" You may think, "When are we going to go? Where are we going to go? How are we going to fish? What are we going to fish with?"

Some years ago, I was in a revival meeting on the beautiful Bull Shoals Lake in northern Arkansas. One day, the pastor, Bob Eubanks, said, "I want to take you out and show you how to catch the bass in this lake." I knew that day that I probably would catch the biggest bass of my life. Brother Bob had been a commercial fishing guide on that lake. I was sure that he knew where every big bass in the lake was.

We spent a wonderful morning fishing, and I really felt great because I caught twice as many as my guide caught. He caught one and I caught two. There is a great joy in sharing with friends when you are fishing.

But the joy of all joys is not being out on the water. The joy of all joys is to share Christ with a lost man, woman, boy, or girl and see him or her come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. We are going to consider the great truths of fishing for men.

I. What is fishing for men?

In the Old Testament, Proverbs 11:30 (KJV), the Bible says, "He that winneth souls is wise." In the New Testament, this activity is called witnessing, sharing, testifying, preaching. Here, in Mark 1, Jesus calls it fishing. The Lord was a master at using natural things that people understood to teach great spiritual truths. The principles of fishing for fish in the water are basically the same as the principles of fishing for people.

1. We must have good equipment

The equipment for catching fish must be safe and useful. Five times in our Scripture passage, the equipment is mentioned. The boat and net were very valuable to these fishermen. As children of God, we are the only equipment that God has to bring people to Jesus. Jesus, the Master Fisherman, makes us very much aware that

we are His witnesses.

2. We must use the right bait

In New Testament days, fishermen used nets. These men were commercial fishermen. It is illegal to use nets in our day, unless a person has a license to fish commercially. The people who fish in our day will much more likely use bait on a single line. The important thing is to use bait the fish will bite. If we are going to lead people to salvation and prepare them for heaven, we must present to them the right bait.

I know that many people say, "Why do you Baptists get so excited? All of us are going to the same place. We're just going on different roads."

You and I must say, "No, there is only one road to heaven. There is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6, KJV). We must never get caught up in universalism. We must consistently and continually be very narrow-minded on how people come to know the glorious experience of salvation.

3. We must have time and patience

Every person who fishes knows that if he or she keeps on keeping on, he or she will catch some fish. This principle is better understood if the analogy is changed from fishing to gardening. If I want to enjoy delicious tomatoes that not only look like tomatoes but also taste like tomatoes, I know I must follow a process in my garden. I must break the ground, plant the seed or plants, water, and then cultivate. If I do all of these, with God's miracle of growth, this summer I will enjoy the harvest time when the tomatoes are ripe and delicious. Sometimes when we go witnessing, we break the ground. Other times, we plant the seed. Then, we must water and cultivate. The glorious time is the harvest time when a boy or girl, man or woman surrenders to Christ.

4. We must be where they are

The weather may be right. The water may be right. We may have all the good equipment, the right bait, time, and patience, but we never catch a fish until we go to the water. This is critically important to understand in our churches. My 40 years of ministry experience has shown that only 3 percent of all lost people come to church on their own. Ninety-seven percent are out there, lost, helpless, hopeless, powerless, condemned, and alienated from God. We

must go where they are and share the good news.

II. Who will God use as fishers of people?

Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will teach you how to catch people."

1. The called person

I'm not speaking about the person called into full-time ministry. I speak here of the person who is called from sin to salvation to service. God has called every born-again believer to be a fisher of others. In Acts 8:4 (KJV); the Bible says, "They that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." This sounds like the apostles and prophets and missionaries. But Acts 8:1 (KJV) says that they were all scattered "except the apostles." There were men and women and young people just like we have in our churches today. Everywhere they went, they were lifestyle evangelists.

2. The cleansed person

John said in 1 John 1:9 (KJV), "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Isaiah 6:1-9 (KJV) is a beautiful expression of this experience:

- (1) Isaiah looked up, and he saw God. The seraphim cried out, "Holy, holy, holy."
- (2) Isaiah looked in, and he saw himself. Conviction came, confession was made, and cleansing was experienced.
- (3) He looked out and saw others. A call was heard, "Who will go?" A commitment was made, "Here am I; send me." A commission was given, "Go and tell."

3. The courageous person

Satan has discovered that fear is a choice weapon to use on God's children. In 2 Timothy 1:7 (KJV), Paul told Timothy, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." The Bible teaches that perfect love casts out fear (see 1 John 4:18).

4. The concerned person

Jesus looked upon the multitudes with compassion. The word compassion comes from two words and means "suffer with." The Lord saw people as sheep without a shepherd, and His compassionate love went out to them. God will use His children when they

have a broken, bleeding, burdened heart for lost souls.

When I walked on the parking lot one Sunday morning to begin a revival meeting, a young man walked up to me and said, "You had better preach today like you've never preached before."

I asked, "What do you mean?"

He said, "My 72-year-old father is going to be here today, and I've never seen him in God's house."

God blessed us with a great service, and 15 people responded to the gospel, but Charles Browning, the young man's father, did not respond. That night, Mr. Browning was back again. Eight people responded, but Mr. Browning did not respond. Monday night, Mr. Browning was in the service again. That night, his son, who really was his stepson, was at the altar on his face before God praying for his father. When the service was over, I saw that the carpet was wet with tears of a young man praying for a lost father.

I met this young man after the service and he made this statement, "I am so burdened, because I am afraid I'm not burdened enough."

I said to him, "I believe God is going to honor your concern."

The next day, the pastor and I went to visit Mr. Browning. He made a commitment of his life to Christ. That night, when he came in the building, I knew he meant business. He had a brown paper sack in his hands. In that sack was a change of clothes. He not only professed his faith in Christ, he was also obedient in baptism. Charles Browning came to know Christ because his stepson was so burdened—because he was afraid he was not burdened enough.

Who will God use as a fisher of lost people? You, who are called and cleansed and courageous and concerned for them.

THE OBVIOUS PRIORITY OF EVANGELISM

Bailey E. Smith

"For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost" (Matt. 18:11, KJV).

There is only one reason Jesus died, and that's because there is a literal hell. I made that statement in the message I preached in Dallas during the 1985 Southern Baptist Convention at the National Conference of Evangelists, meeting that day at First Baptist Church. A pastor of one of our larger churches came up to me and said, "You just changed my life. I'm going back and making evangelism the emphasis in our church so the death of Christ will not be wasted. I've never really thought of that before."

It's true. Jesus died only because there is a hell to escape and a heaven to gain. A church emphasizing something more than evangelism is frustrating the purpose of the death of Christ.

Maybe you object by saying, "Yes, but Christ also fed the hungry, clothed the naked, taught principles of human relationships, and so forth." That's true, friend, but those are all things He did as a living man and teacher. Had God wanted his people to be involved primarily in communicating the principles and ethics of the teachings of Christ, He would have allowed Jesus to teach until He was 85 and brought Him to heaven on a soft white cloud. The agony of the cross could have been avoided if God meant for us to emphasize something besides redemption. Christ was the Lamb slain in our stead, and without His death, all people would have to go to hell.

There is no argument at this point. Jesus died to be our substitute on the cross. Had He not done so, we would have no sin offering and would have to die in hell for ourselves. Man could not have been redeemed, bought, and paid for by the life of Christ; it took the death on Calvary. The Calvary part is not just theological verbiage, for Jesus could not have been our Savior just by dying; it had to be a bloody death. "Without shedding of blood is no remission [of sin]" (Heb. 9:22, KJV).

If we preach Jesus as example, Buddhism can produce Gautama as their example. If we preach Jesus as teacher, Islam can produce Muhammad, who taught truths similar to the truths Jesus taught. If we preach patriotism, Shintoism can put us to shame. But there is no one who can be Savior and Redeemer other than He who graced Golgotha's crest.

Too few pulpits today preach this basic truth of the gospel. Preachers have wanted to be known as clever manipulators of homiletical skills or as polished orators, verbally scanning the contemporary scene. They quote every noted author, but quote very little the only One who can permanently bring peace. A great preacher of old finally woke up to this poor stewardship of preaching time and said something I wish every preacher in the world had engraved on his pulpit, “Yesterday, I preached my much learning, and all the scholars came up and praised me. Today, I preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and all the sinners came up and thanked me.”

Too many preachers are not content to preach that. They are not messengers of God’s eternal truth, but spokesmen for philosophical speculations and worldviews. No wonder half-empty churches, with even emptier people, are dying. No wonder church members remain lost, never having a genuine salvation experience. They have lost the power that comes from proper priorities.

I. The real thing of evangelism

Evangelism is at the heart of all we do. It must be. Jesus said Himself, “Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Luke 15:7, KJV). Evangelism makes heaven happy because it is the only hope—absolutely the only hope for sinful man.

This is why Paul was willing to be stoned at Lystra. This is why Stephen was willing to be martyred. This is why John the baptist would not compromise his message, even though it meant losing his head. People can be changed by the power of Jesus Christ now and receive eternal life. It not only gets them out of hell, but also it gets the hell out of them. This is the basic motivating power of the gospel.

We must stay to the truth: Hell is hot; heaven is sweet; judgment is certain; and salvation is only in Christ Jesus. Only then can we lead the world from darkness to light, death to life, and despair to joy. That’s the real thing of evangelism.

In Matthew 7, Jesus said some very remarkable things. In verses 13-14 (KJV), he said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

In these verses, Jesus said two profound things. First, not everyone is going to heaven. Second, more will go to hell than to heaven.

Now remember that these are not the words of a wired-haired itinerant preacher ranting under his portable tent. These are the words of Jesus of Nazareth. More people will be lost than saved.

Jesus knew that apart from Him there was no hope for mankind. He knew that, even though He had the answer, most people would not receive it. He believed so strongly in the awfulness of hell for those who reject Him that He said it would be better for a man to cut off all of his limbs and pluck out his eyes than die and go to hell.

You see, it’s the teaching of Jesus and His death that should motivate all of us to be soul-winners. Jesus is not the best way to get to heaven; He’s the only way. Every church, then, should not only be an evangelistic church, it should also train every willing member to be a personal evangelist. We must all be about the real thing of evangelism—winning every lost person to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. People will still be saved if they are told. People are not more difficult to reach today than they were 50 years ago, but too often Christians are lazier than they were 50 years ago.

Evangelism is what’s real about the church. Let’s get rid of the ecclesiastical trappings and sanctuary synthetics and discover afresh the power of the priority of what’s really real—evangelism.

It was love for people that led Christ to Calvary, and it must be our love for Him and the ones for whom He died that gets us concerned about those around us. Without question, people by the scores will remain lost unless we go with single-mindedness to tell them of Christ. (See Appendix A for Smith’s story “From Generation to Generation.”)

People are out there who will be saved. They are everywhere, and unless we go, many of them will never be saved. And who can tell the generations of saints that will come from just one visit? One person being won to Christ can lead to thousands of other converts and untold numbers of others being called into the gospel ministry.

Evangelism is not just kind deeds or social concern. A Christian will do kind deeds and express concern, but he will, most of all, be about bringing people to Christ.

Let’s get up and get with it. Let’s knock on doors for the One who is the door to life abundant and life everlasting. No one is going to tell them unless we do.

II. Realistic view of the task before us

Our world is largely lost. It is not begging for the Savior. It is so engrossed in the evils of the hour that it doesn’t even have enough

spiritual perception to see that it's lost. Only one-third of this world is Christian, and, if world evangelization continues as it is now, by the year 2000, only 1 percent of this world will know Christ. Every day we awaken, there is a smaller percentage of Christians than when we retired the night before. What we are doing is not enough. It's inadequate. It's not getting the job done.

So, the task before us demands an all-out effort in at least two areas: the reaching of the lost and the motivation of Christians to be consistent soul-winners. Let's look at those in reverse order. The latter will, of course, aid the former.

The motivation of Christians is the answer, but it's not an easy task. It is estimated, for instance, that only five out of 100 Christians ever win just one person to Christ in a lifetime. What a terrible and heartbreaking tragedy. Where does the problem lie? Apparently in the Christian's relationship to Christ.

If you are a professed follower of Christ and yet are not out in the field laboring to gather the harvest before the storm comes, the words of the late Charles M. Alexander, the great song leader, are for you: "Anybody who is not doing personal work has sin in his life. I don't care who you are—preacher, teacher, mother, father—if you are not reaching definite people to a definite Savior at a definite time, or trying hard to do so, you have sin in your life."

If this is true—and it is, for disobedience to the Great Commission is sin—what a weight of guilt is resting on a multitude of Christians in the church today.

It is sadly true that most Christians never win another soul to Christ. They are apparently not too impressed with the idea that the gospel is good news, for, surely, if they believed that, they couldn't keep from telling it. No Christian, irrespective of his or her other gifts, is excused from being a verbal witness for Christ.

Let me repeat a too-often-forgotten truth: Witnessing is every Christian's responsibility. Escape cannot be found in some other achievement in Christian service. Oh, dear Christian, get hot on the trail for the souls of people.

Because of the increasing masses of the lost, we must put forth maximum effort to reach everyone possible. Every 24 hours, about 146,000 people die, and most of them are without Christ. The job we have to do is not just with the existing masses who are dying lost; every 24 hours, about 345,000 babies are born. Will we win these? Our denomination wins about 400,000 people to Christ a year, which is less than the number of people born January 1 and 2 each year. At this rate, it would take the Southern Baptist Conven-

tion 4,000 years to win the world to Christ, if no more people were born during these four millennia.

With these figures only casually considered, how could anyone say of another, "He's just too evangelistic"? How can anyone be too concerned for souls to be saved? It's impossible! All of us must pray in earnest that God will stir our hearts as never before to reach all of those around us for the Savior. We must be about what church is all about.

Sometimes it's easy to get the idea that churches are making As in everything that doesn't matter. We have excelled in all that is unimportant, but in the one thing Christ has told us to do—to win, teach, and baptize—we have flunked out. (See Appendix A for Smith's illustration "Blood on Our Hands.")

SEVEN REASONS CHRISTIANS SHARE THE GOSPEL

Jack R. Smith

2 Corinthians 5:1-20

“And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation”
(2 Cor. 5:19, NIV).

I. Introduction: Reasons Christians are not sharing the gospel

No one ever drifts into soul-winning. Even though soul-winning holds the greatest joy known among Christians, it requires intentionality from start to finish. Some things may make soul-winning difficult.

1. There is opposition by the forces of the devil, because in soul-winning, you are, in effect, invading the enemy camp to free hostages.

2. There is fear of failure, partly because of a misunderstanding of the mandate. Many would-be soul-winners mistakenly think they must do the Holy Spirit's work of convicting and converting. The work of the witness is to deliver the good news clearly, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The only time the witness fails is when he or she refuses to be Christ's witness.

3. There is fear of rejection by the lost person. Many Christians have the incorrect notion that they personally are being rejected if the person is not ready to trust Christ.

4. There is even occasional opposition from non-witnessing fellow believers. Christians who do not witness sometimes become critical of those who share the gospel. Potential witnesses should be made aware of this pitfall. It often originates from rebellion against the Holy Spirit by those He is convicting who are not sharing the gospel.

5. Low self-esteem causes Christians who sincerely want to witness to feel like failures, because they think they can't do it as well as others. People who have high self-esteem have little advantage. God-esteem, not self-esteem, is the answer to having confidence in witnessing situations.

6. Many Christians do not witness simply because **they do not know what to say**. These people, who are often burdened with guilt, should enroll in a good witness-training course.

7. Church members who have **never been exposed to a happy, witnessing believer**—who have no mentor, no role model—have a hard time imagining themselves in that role. Many great witnesses declare that such a person—whether it was their pastor, Sunday School teacher, or another person—exerted a powerful influence on them for God.

In summary, those whom God uses as soul-winners have learned how to share the gospel, and they know why they must tell the good news. Therefore, they go beyond fears and opposition to deliver the priceless life-changing message of Christ.

II. Reasons for sharing the gospel

Having strong reasons is important. People will accomplish things they never thought they could if they have strong enough reasons. Are you one of those who shares the gospel? If you are not, have you ever wondered about those who lead others to Christ? What makes these people tick? Why do they witness? Why should anyone be Christ's witness? If you had strong enough reasons, would you be more willing to share Christ?

In 2 Corinthians 5, at least seven compelling reasons are given for telling the good news.

1. Christians share the gospel because of its worth (vv. 1-8). "If our earthly house [body] . . . were dissolved, we have a building . . . not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1, KJV). This verse may be more familiar than others, because it is often read at the funerals of believers—and that is precisely the point. Many reasons could be listed for the gospel's worth, but the worth of the gospel is epitomized at the burial scene of the body of a saint of God. The priceless value of the pearl of great price soars to new heights in the understanding of the saved loved ones of the deceased—and 10,000 times more for the one who has gone to be with the Lord.

Verse 1 speaks of the new body Christians receive when they die. What will your unsaved friend receive at death? Think about the worth of the gospel! Every Christian should share the gospel

because of the awful, hopeless future of the lost. You and I can't save them, but we can surely tell them how we came to have eternal life. Every Christian should share the gospel because of the joy that results when someone comes to Christ.

Verse 2 (KJV) talks realistically about life on this earth: "In this [body] we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven [our new body]." Christians and lost people alike groan in these physical bodies, and every time a person groans, he or she is really saying, "I wish I could have a body that does not hurt or tire or become weak, cold, hungry, or sick." The Christian has a new body to look forward to that will never grow old. What do our lost friends have to look forward to?

2. Christians share the gospel because of a desire to please Christ. "So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it" (v. 9, NIV). Years ago, I asked Homer Lindsey Jr. how he was able to motivate so many of his church members to be soul-winners. His reply surprised me: "At our church, we teach people to love Jesus, and if they love Jesus, they will want to please Him. Nothing pleases Him more than when we lead someone to Him." Is your goal in life to please Jesus, or is it someone else?

3. Christians share the gospel because of respect for the judgment seat of Christ. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (v. 10, NIV).

4. Christians share the gospel because we know what it is to fear the Lord. "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men" (v. 11, NIV). Here, Paul is explaining to some who were critical of him and other soul-winners why he is a soul-winner. He is explaining why they are going around trying to persuade others to follow Christ. He adds: "What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you" (vv. 11-12, NIV).

5. Christians share the gospel because of the compelling love of Christ. “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced . . .” (v. 14, NIV). This is incarnational Christianity at its best. Christ, who is alive in the believer, speaks with a powerful voice, compelling the believer who listens to Him to share with others his or her most valuable possession, the gift of God, which is eternal life.

6. Christians share the gospel because of a different worldview. “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view” (v. 16, NIV). The next three verses capsule that view. It is based on (1) how we regard Christ, (2) how we regard one who is in Christ, and (3) how God makes the difference.

7. Christians should share the gospel because of Christ’s command. “God . . . gave us the ministry of reconciliation: . . . And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (vv. 18-19, NIV). Reconciliation means helping people become rightly related to God through Christ. Read further how this is intended to work: “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (v. 20, NIV).

III. Conclusion

Through the centuries, the gospel has been passed on “from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17, KJV) until it has reached today’s generations of believers, including you. Thank God for His witnesses. Think of where you might be today if someone hadn’t gone beyond feelings and fears of rejection and inadequacy to share God’s message.

Now that you have before you at least seven scriptural reasons for sharing the gospel, would you be willing to be Christ’s witness? Do you know someone who needs to know Christ? What would it be worth to you to see that person become a new creation in Christ? Would you be willing to register for a witness-training course? Would you be willing to list names of family, neighbors, and coworkers or classmates who need Christ? Would you be willing to pray each day for those people? Would you send them or hand them a booklet explaining how to know Christ?

Invitation

Those who have already been sharing the gospel, come join me at the front of the church. Those who want to join these people as part of the church’s witnessing team, come to the front and stand with them. Let’s pray for and support those who make commitments to be trained and to witness.

THE SEEKING SAVIOR

James H. Smith

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus and His disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. Jesus knew that He would face a mock trial, then fulfill His mission on earth. Passing through Jericho, He saw Zaccheus in a tree and invited him to come down. Jesus invited Himself to the home of the despised tax collector.

Before reaching his home, Zaccheus made a public declaration of a radical change that had taken place in his life. The crowd voiced its skepticism. Jesus came to his rescue and defense, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10, KJV).

Let us consider three basic words in this short, significant verse. They are lost, seek, and save.

I. Lost

The word lost is filled with fear, anxiety, frustration, and futility—the thought of a child lost in the woods or a traveler lost in the night. I have heard the voices of pilots come on aviation radios saying, “I’m lost; I’ve become disoriented. Will someone please help me?” The sound of fear and anxiety was in their voices.

In Luke 15, Jesus told a three-part parable: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. The word lost was prominent in all three accounts.

1. The lost sheep was helpless

He could not save himself. A lost sinner cannot save himself; he or she is helpless.

Illustration: When I was 12 years old, a friend and I saw an old western movie. The hero fell into a quicksand pit. Just as it looked as if he were gone, someone came to the rescue by throwing him a rope. My friend and I decided to try it. We found some quicksand and I insisted on being first. It was fun to feel the cool wet sand coming up my legs. When I was in waist deep, I realized that I was helpless and could not get out. It was a relief when my friend rescued me with a horse that pulled against the rope and saved me. As a teenager, I came to realize that I could not save myself from the sins that were attaching themselves to my life. It was then that I

asked Jesus into my life.

2. The lost coin was worthless

Value is computed by possession. A million dollars of gold in the hull of a sunken ship is worthless. It must be in possession. Human beings were created to be possessed of God. Until that takes place, they are worthless to the purpose of God.

3. The lost son was hopeless

The younger son spent his substance in riotous living. The Greek word translated as substance means being, or life. He spent more than money or possessions. He spent himself in undisciplined, unrestrained living.

Illustration: In 1968, Janis Joplin, a rock music star, took her life with an overdose of drugs. A news magazine carrying the story said that she lived and performed without restraint. She was without discipline in her eating, drinking, use of drugs, and illicit sex. The story went on to say the thing she feared most was growing old. It was so hopeless. Unrestrained living is hopeless. It only leads to despair.

There is no light at the end of the tunnel of the lost. We must be awakened to the lostness of the lost. They are helplessly, worthlessly, hopelessly lost. This should be a driving force in our witnessing to lost people.

II. Seek

Occasionally I am asked, "Don't you think that most people are really seeking God?" The answer is no. People have never really sought God. He is the One who seeks. In the Garden of Eden, God went seeking Adam and Eve. All the way through the Old Testament, God was seeking people who would love and obey Him.

In the fullness of time, God came in Christ, seeking that which was lost. The Holy Spirit was sent in the process of seeking the lost. The church, the bride of Christ, is God's instrument in the world today for seeking the lost. God has sought and continues to seek the lost. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come" (Rev. 22:17, KJV).

It is the responsibility of every believer to seek the lost. God sent someone to seek each one of us. Someone prayed for us. Then someone shared the good news with us.

III. Save

Salvation is an all-inclusive word. It embraces the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Justification: We have been saved from the penalty of our sins by the death of Jesus on the cross. This looks to the past (see Eph. 2:8-9).

Sanctification: We are being saved from the power of our sinful self by the Spirit of Jesus in us. This deals with the present (see 1 Cor. 1:18).

Glorification: We shall be saved from the presence of sin with the return of Jesus. This is hope for the future (see Rom. 5:10).

God has provided for all of our needs through Jesus Christ.

Illustration: In the spring of 1970, I heard the testimony of O.J. Peterson, a member of Arthur Blessitt's team. They were dragging a 10-foot cross from Sunset Strip, Calif., to Washington, D.C. O.J. said, "I was raised in Phoenix, Ariz., just four blocks from a Southern Baptist church. My parents were not church people and had their problems with alcohol and its effects. No one from that church or any other church ever knocked at our door. We were never invited to Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, or revival meetings.

"As an unrestrained, curious kid, I experimented with alcohol, then drugs. In my teens, I became hooked on drugs. I heard that you could get them easier in California than anywhere, so I made my way there. It was there that I met Arthur Blessitt. He told me about Jesus, who saved me. I'm saved. I've been saved from sin. I've been saved from hell. I've been saved from alcohol. I've been saved from drugs. I've been saved from a wasted life. I've been saved." (O.J. has been a Southern Baptist pastor for almost 20 years.)

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, KJV).

WITNESSING TO PEOPLE OF OTHER RELIGIONS

Maurice Smith

John 4:4-29

Matthew 15:21-28

“I have become all things to all men that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it” (1 Cor. 9:22-23, NASB).

People expect religion to help them deal with reality, with the issues of life and death. We Christians believe that our religion—our faith in Jesus Christ and our new life in Him—enables us to live life with confidence and to face death with courage. Further, we want all people, including those who embrace other religions, to know the grace and wholeness that God provides through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we want to know and love people of other religions, so we can minister and witness appropriately to them.

Your effective witness to people of other religions involves your crossing barriers to share the gospel with them. Those barriers may be geography, culture, language, social circumstances, or religion. How do you overcome such barriers? You eliminate the barrier of geography by moving; you penetrate the barriers of culture, language, and social status by learning to function in new ways.

But how can you subdue the barrier of religion? Often, people can be separated from you because your and their religious backgrounds differ significantly. That calls for interfaith witnessing, sharing your faith with people who have another faith, with people who have religious backgrounds different from yours.

How do you get the good news of Jesus Christ from *you* to *them*? What is *your part in proclaiming the gospel* to people in such situations? Let me suggest that you begin with a serious and specific effort to understand them.

In a recent major book on evangelism, two mission strategists emphasized this principle: “The single most important element in planning strategies for evangelism is an understanding of the people to be evangelized.” This describes the attitude Paul had when he reported in our text that he was becoming everything to people of every sort, to bear his part in proclaiming the gospel.

Understanding people characterized the way Jesus related to people. When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:4-26) and to the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28), He did not treat them as Jews. He understood their non-Jewish religious backgrounds, and He spoke to them in terms familiar to them. Jesus demonstrated that effective witnessing begins with an understanding of a person's religious perspective.

The witnessing patterns that Paul followed in the book of Acts also demonstrate how he understood the religious backgrounds of the people among whom he worked. Remember Paul's pattern among the Jews. He addressed them as "Men of Israel" (Acts 13:16, KJV). He "reasoned in the synagogue" on the Sabbath (Acts 18:4, KJV). He spoke of Jesus as the Savior promised to Israel (see Acts 13:23,32-33). He spoke to Jews in concepts familiar to Jews.

Paul wisely followed such an approach with Jews, but he deliberately changed his technique with Gentiles. Remember the Greek pagans Paul met at Lystra (see Acts 14:8-18). Paul knew that those Greeks believed in the myths that the gods came to earth as men. And to those idol worshippers Paul made no reference to the Old Testament, but he spoke about God's revelation in nature and in history. Paul did not change the gospel, but he communicated it in the setting of his audience's particular religious background. And in every case he was wise enough to know something about that background.

Let me delineate two principles of interfaith witness as you consider *your part in proclaiming the gospel*.

I. Understand the basic assumptions of people who have another religion

You may be quite comfortable in your religious setting, in your Christian experience and perspective. However, when you venture to share your faith with someone who does not have your Christian background, or perhaps any Christian background, you must not assume that the person comprehends religious issues as you do. Try to recognize and acknowledge the religious mind-set, the bundle of religious ideas, which that person holds.

Every religion begins with its own set of basic assumptions, a collection of ideas and propositions that people who embrace that religion take for granted. What basic assumptions do we Christians hold? What are the foundational concepts that we start with—the propositions that come before our doctrines and practices? We rarely think about these, because we assume them, we take them

for granted. Review some of them: God is person; God is knowable; God makes Himself known. God is Creator; He has made human beings in His image. The basic human problem is sin; human beings have chosen to oppose God—opposing His character and rejecting His will. The Bible is an accurate and trustworthy record of God's revelation in history, and that revelation climaxes in the person and work of Jesus Christ. God offers forgiveness and restoration to sinful human beings through the sinless life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

Those foundational ideas, so basic in your Christian perspective, may not even be present in the thinking of someone from another religion. So you must pay attention to the religious framework in which the person functions.

How do you do that? Consider these guidelines whenever you discuss your faith with people who have another faith.

1. Give careful thought to the way you phrase questions

Ask questions that are not offensive or condescending. Rather than stating, "Don't you believe in God?" inquire, "What is your understanding of God?" Instead of saying, "Do you believe in Jesus?" ask, "What is the role of Jesus Christ in your religious background?" or "What is your personal relationship to Jesus Christ?" Instead of asking questions like, "Do you believe in sin [or other subjects, such as justification or regeneration]?" phrase questions in ways that are more likely to reflect the interests of people unfamiliar with "Christian" terms. They respond better to statements like, "How do you think God deals with people today?" and "How can people know God?"

2. Inquire about people's understanding of the Bible

Recognize that they may not be acquainted with the Bible or may consider it irrelevant. They may have a high regard for the Bible as sacred literature, but not respect it as authoritative. Instead of asking, "Do you believe the Bible?" ask, "What is the role of the Bible for you?" Assume that people from non-Christian backgrounds may not be familiar with Bible books, characters, and episodes. References to David, Paul, Luke, Galatians, and Ephesians may perplex people from non-Christian religions. Invite people to read the Bible; give them one when you can. Explain practical things such as how to find the books, chapters, and verses. Suggest specific places to read, and encourage people to comment on what they read.

Consider a second principle of interfaith witness as you anticipate *your part in proclaiming the gospel*.

II. Understand the special concerns of people who have another religion

A second principle of interfaith witness is recognizing that religions differ from each other in where they start and where they end. The beginning points for a religion make up its basic assumptions. The ending points of a religious system make up the hopes and expectations of people who embrace that system. Let people tell you what they expect their religions to do for them. You can ask them, “What are the special concerns you have that lead you to embrace your religion?”

Consider these guidelines for discussing your faith with people who have another faith.

1. Talk about significant issues without using “Baptist language” or a specialized Christian vocabulary that may not make sense to people in other religions

Plan your conversation along lines that fit the mind-set in which people of other religions are accustomed to thinking. You want to talk seriously about sin, salvation, Jesus Christ, and the Christian life—issues in which people from other religions may have very little interest. Therefore, get to those issues by tapping into the interests they do have. Probe questions like these:

- (1) “How do you describe the basic human problem?” or “What is the main religious concern you have about your life?” Quite often people who embrace a non-Christian religion will not refer to sin, but to fear, suffering, lack of being in harmony with the universe, uncertainty about the future, or their efforts to live the best they can. More than likely, they are hurting in some way; they have some particular spiritual issue that is important to them. So, your question about their concern reflects your sincere, non-judgmental interest in them. You open up the opportunity to discuss the biblical understanding of the basic human problem—sin, which is humanity’s estrangement from the holy, transcendent God. In such a setting, you have the occasion to talk about God’s grace provided through Jesus Christ. God comes near humanity and offers everyone the way to be restored to fellowship with Him. You can joyfully tell about that.

- (2) “Tell me more about your perception of Jesus Christ.” Often people from non-Christian religions say that they have a high regard for Jesus, but that does not mean that they understand and accept Him as their Savior. Often people consider the way of Jesus as one way among many valid religious paths. In such a discussion, you have a prime opportunity to say, “Let me tell you what Jesus Christ means to me.”

2. Insist on defining terms, yours and theirs

Realize that many words you use are new and strange or have different meanings to people from other religions. Terms such as love, spirit, peace, meditation, and wholeness call for clarification. Many people “believe” in God, Jesus Christ, transformation, life after death, and even heaven and hell; but what they mean by those concepts may differ radically from biblical ideas. As you meet people from other religious backgrounds, be sure that you understand what they are saying, and be careful to help them understand what you mean.

Do you dare to believe that you have a part in explaining the gospel to people from non-Christian religions? Will you venture to understand their basic assumptions and their special concerns? Will you try to “become all things” to people of other religions, so that you may win some? Decide today to begin the journey, making these words your own: “All this I do for the sake of the gospel, to bear my part in proclaiming it” (see 1 Cor. 9:23).

MASTERING THE MASTER'S METHOD OF SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Jack Stanton

John 4:4-20

In Revelation 1:5 (KJV), Jesus is called “the faithful witness.” In 1 Peter 2:21, we are told that Christ is our example. In John 17:18-20, Jesus prays for all believers and reminds us that He is sending us as the Father sent Him. In Luke 19:10 (KJV), we are told He came “to seek and to save that which was lost.” So we who are followers of Christ are to seek people, that through Christ they might be saved.

Let us look at Christ's witness to the woman at the well and seek to follow His example.

I. He sought her, “And he must needs go through Samaria” (v. 4, KJV)

Most Jews went around Samaria. Why this double emphasis on going through Samaria?

- 1. A lost person was there, and every lost person has the right to hear about Jesus.**
- 2. Jesus is teaching us that there should be no prejudice in the Christian's heart.**
- 3. Jesus is revealing that He can make the most unlikely person an effective witness.**

II. He spoke to her interests and her needs

- 1. He requested something from her—water (v. 7)**
- 2. He offered something to her—God's gift of living water (v. 10)**
This gift is bountiful, free, and honorable.

III. He stirred her conscience

Jesus said, “Go, call thy husband, and come hither” (v. 16, KJV). Notice her three-fold reply:

1. She denied her guilt (v. 17)

2. She attempted to ridicule Jesus (v. 19)

3. She wanted to argue (v. 20)

IV. He showed her the way of life by revealing Himself

“The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he” (vv. 25-26, KJV).

FOLLOWING WITH A WHOLE HEART!

H. Bailey Stone Jr.

Joshua 14:8-15

Someone said, “A pessimist is one who sees difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist is one who sees opportunity in every difficulty.” It is refreshing to find those who clearly discern hope in seemingly hopeless circumstances.

An example of this is fleshed out in Joshua 14. The focus of this passage is on a man named Caleb. In fact, there is a qualifying word that leaps off the pages three times in verses 8, 9, and 14 (NIV). The word is “wholeheartedly.” This term is used to describe Caleb. He is a man who wholeheartedly followed the Lord, his God. He was an optimist in pessimistic circumstances. He was surrendered, committed, and completely yielded to the purpose of God. There are several things that marked his wholehearted devotion.

I. He was confident, though his task was difficult

Caleb was a man on mission. The assignment was difficult—in fact, dangerous. In Numbers 13, he was chosen as one of the 12 spies responsible to search out the land of promise. If apprehended, the spies, no doubt, would have been killed.

He was a man with a vision. He saw what other people see. The land was fertile; it was highly productive. It was described as a land flowing with milk and honey. It was also a fortified land. It presented a formidable task for the people of God. The cities were walled and the inhabitants, well-armed. Giants among the people caused the spies to see themselves as mere grasshoppers by comparison.

When decision time arrived and the reports were given, the people said, “No, it is an impossible task. We will not go into the land.”

A majority report from 10 of the spies startled them. These 10, who merely saw what other men see, warned the people that the dangers were too great—the difficulty would not allow them to enter the land.

Caleb, along with Joshua, spoke against the majority report. “Not only can we take the land, but we must!” they said. “God has given it to us.” These men saw what other people do not often see. They saw the land in the light of God’s sovereignty, His great power, His purpose, and His plan. People listened to the frightened 10 and

refused to accept the challenge.

What do you see as you view your area of ministry? What do you see when you look at your community, your city, your school, or your university campus? Do you see people who desperately need a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Sure, people are difficult to reach today. Ours is a day of mega-traumas and population shifts. We are no longer homogeneous. We are multicolored and multicultural. The world has come to our cities, towns, and villages. It may be difficult to share the gospel with them, but share it we must!

In the first century, once-frightened followers of Jesus, now indwelt by the Holy Spirit, came down from the upper room and took to the streets with the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Have we reversed the scene, retreating into our magnificent structures in hopes that the people will come to us? Whatever mental image of ministry you embrace—traditional, nontraditional, or somewhere in between—Scripture has not changed its emphasis.

A paraphrase of Matthew 28:19 is: Going (as you go in life's traffic patterns), make disciples of every nation (all races, cultures). The imperative verb in the passage is not *going*, but rather *making disciples*. Most of us are on the go every day, but are we making disciples? Have we forgotten that people all around us are lost without Jesus? Universalism must not be allowed to creep into our practice, much less our theology! John 14:6 (NIV) reads, "I [uniquely] am [and absolutely no one else is] the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Yes, ours is a difficult day, but we must see our day in the light of the sovereignty of our Lord and His purpose. Jesus is the only means of salvation for all mankind. Our purpose is to meet the challenge and make Him known.

II. He was consistent, though his task was discouraging

Can you imagine the discouragement Joshua and Caleb must have felt when they were forced to live with the wrong decision made by the people of Israel? They would wander in the wilderness some 40 years, until an entire generation died. To my knowledge, they were not critical of their brothers during these years, nor were they subversive; however, it is obvious that they never lost sight of the sovereignty of God, His purpose, or His plan! They knew that one day they would return. They were determined to serve the Lord consistently even in the face of discouragement.

I recall a young man in El Paso who came up to me after I had

spoken and said, "I work in a discouraging place. I am probably the only Christian in my workplace, and I am thinking about getting another job."

I said, "Before you leave your job, let me ask you a question. Has God entrusted you to be the one ray of light and hope that these people ever have of knowing Jesus personally? Look at Philippians 2:14-15 (NIV): 'Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.'"

I told my young friend that a star is consistent. A navigator can take his sextant, fix it on a star, and chart his course to his destination. However discouraging our circumstances, we Christians must be so consistent that people can get a fix on us and chart their course to Jesus. The Lord has not promised us an easy way without discouragement at times. He did say, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20, NIV). He is with us; His Holy Spirit empowers us as we hold forth the Word of life. We must be consistent in lifestyle and witness, realizing that when we share Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, leaving the results to Him, we cannot fail.

In the book of Joshua, we learn that Caleb was passed over for leadership. The mantle fell on Joshua. What was Caleb's reaction? He did not complain, become downcast, or create problems for Joshua. He made Joshua shine! Caleb was not concerned about position. The important thing to him was the purpose of God. To me, the purpose of God is clearly defined for all of us in Acts 1:8 (NIV): "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Each of us has a vital role to play in sharing the good news of Christ. Consistent sharing, even in the face of discouragement, will bear fruit that abounds to Christ's glory.

III. He was courageous, though his task was demanding

In Joshua 14:10-11 (NIV), Caleb says, "So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then." Perhaps we will not be able to say that, from the physical perspective, in our old age, but we should be able to say it from the spiritual perspective at any age! We never reach a plateau from which there is no need to grow. We never reach a place where we

leave the sharing to someone else. We should never stop growing, ministering, and sharing the good news of Jesus.

In verse 6, the men of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal. Caleb reminded Joshua of the promise of Moses that he would have his choice in the land. He made that choice in verse 12 (NIV) when he said, “Now give me this hill country [mountain] that the Lord promised me that day.” That was a day that demanded courage! Caleb’s choice was a courageous one. Hebron was an area Israel had ignored. It was a city of giants and an embarrassment to Israel. Caleb said that if God went with him, he would take the city whether anybody went with him or not! Obviously, others went along, too, accepting the demanding challenge. They restored Hebron to Israel. Hebron (meaning “fellowship”) was brought back into the fellowship of the people of God.

Let me ask a question. Do you have a mountain? Do you have a demanding challenge that requires great courage? Maybe it is the workplace, the office, or the neighborhood in which you live. Perhaps it is a friend or a business associate for whom you are burdened and are in the process of cultivating for Christ. Could it be fellow students on a high school or university campus for whom you must walk the walk which qualifies you to talk the talk? There is a great mountain of lostness that confronts us today. Do we have the courage to take our part of this mountain for Christ?

THE SUM OF ALL FEARS

Jay Strack

Matthew 9:35-38

Tom Clancy has for the past 10 years been one of the best-selling authors in America. His books *Hunt for Red October* and *Patriot Games* have sold millions of copies and have been made into two very popular movies. His latest publication, *The Sum of All Fears*, spent many months at the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list. In this novel, Clancy builds on the assumption that the greatest fear of mankind is the fear of nuclear annihilation. It is an excellent book, but not wholly convincing. While it is true that for many years the fear of nuclear annihilation hung like Damocles' sword over the heads of men and women the world over, I suggest, with all respect to Clancy, that his presentation is built on a faulty premise. The nuclear threat, severe though it has been, is not the greatest of our fears. People all over our world are possessed by the consuming fear that *life will never get any better than it is today*.

I have the opportunity to talk to people all across the country—from Florida to California. I meet folks from every walk of life—from truck drivers to executives. I speak to people ranging in age from searching adolescents to senior adults. But no matter where I go or to whom I speak, I find folks who are disappointed, despairing, and depressed. They have little energy for today and no hope for tomorrow. (See Appendix A for an illustration of this point, “The Rainbows Are Dead.”)

In the passage of Scripture before us, we come upon a scene from the life of Jesus where He met some people who were very much like many modern Americans. The text says it very poignantly: “They fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matt. 9:36, KJV). Yet, our Lord had the answer to their needs. Let’s look at His prescription for people who were consumed by this *sum of all fears*.

I. First, Jesus was consumed by the vision

“When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion” (v. 36, KJV). He saw what the casual observer could not see. Many people have a problem with perspective. They may know the price of everything, but they know the value of nothing. Not our Lord. He truly saw the need in the lives of those around him, but He was able to see deeper.

Most of Jesus' ministry was spent in the countrified hills of Galilee. Why do you suppose that was? Among the reasons one could give, I believe it was in part because there were so many people in Galilee. Certainly Jerusalem was a large city, but Galilee had a larger concentration of population over a wide region. In Jesus' day, there were 204 cities and villages in Galilee, with a population of about 3 million. What an enormous task! Warm sulfur springs in Tiberias attracted many people who were suffering from afflictions. They came from all over Palestine and settled in Galilee, much as people a generation ago went to Phoenix, Ariz.

Yet, our Lord had a vision of provision that drove Him out and kept Him going through all the hardships. I want to suggest to you that this is the same vision that the apostle Paul had when he reported, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19, KJV).

What was it that Jesus saw that consumed Him? It began in ages past.

1. Notice the precision of His vision

Scientists tell us that a falcon can see a dime on the sidewalk from the top of the Empire State Building, and that it can see a mouse running through a field from a mile away. (You know, that would be my luck: I'd be the mouse coming out for a night on the town, dressed to kill, ready for a good time, and suddenly a shadow looms overhead as the falcon says, "Thank You, Lord, for this food that I'm about to partake.") Imagine the vision of our living Lord when He views His creation. And His vision of the creature (you and me) is far greater than that of the impersonal universe. In Deuteronomy 11:12, we are told that the Lord sees the year from the beginning to the end. He cares for the land and sends rain from the heavens. He also sees the problems in this world. But *He sees more than the mess*; He perceives the misery, but He knows the cause, as well as the effect.

2. Think with me also about the panorama of His vision

He has *always* seen. He saw the desperation of the first couple, Adam and Eve, and He promised a Redeemer. He watched the rebellion at Babel, and in mercy He scattered the people. He understood the need for a covenant people, and He called a moon worshipper out of Ur of the Chaldees. He viewed the affliction of His people in Egypt and sent a deliverer. He saw captives weeping in Babylon, and He brought them home. He looked down on a young

man going through broken home after broken home, abused and alone—and He brought him to a place where he was truly home. He saw me, and He sees you.

3. I am also reminded of the product of His vision

When He saw, He sent . . . His Son. To be even more precise: When He saw, He came. He came in the incarnation, that blessed event we celebrate every Christmas. He came as Immanuel, "God with us!" If you send a Christmas card to my house, my daughters will examine it very carefully. They believe you demonstrate your level of concern by the quality of the card. I like the slogan for Hallmark Cards, Inc.: "Care enough to send the very best." That's what God did by sending Christ. He did it for you and for me.

Jesus saw the multitudes. The language in the original tongue of the New Testament is graphic. These people were like a pitiful flock of sheep—devastated, lacerated, flung down, wounded, and half-dead. They had been fleeced to the point of bleeding. They had been pursued night and day by wolves. If I were to paint a picture of this, I would show one lonely lamb, wandering about with a look of abandonment, crying for its mother, but the mother is no longer there. I would depict another, lacerated from the unforgiving thorn bushes it had crawled through to escape from the ravenous predators. Jesus saw the immediate needs people had, but He was able to see also the ultimate needs.

People who wear bifocals can look through the lower part and see what is close, immediate; they can look through the top and see what is distant, far-off. That's the kind of vision Jesus uses in viewing and understanding the needs of His people. Jesus perceived their needs because He saw with the bifocals of faith. I'm grateful Jesus saw that I needed a shepherd when He saw my immediate need. But His seeing did not fall short. He saw also that I was on my way to hell and that I needed redemption and rescue from judgment. I didn't need a shepherd just for the hour, I needed a Savior for eternity. He perceived my *felt needs*, but provided also for my *real needs*. Praise God, He has also given to His people the ability to see with the same kind of vision.

Christian friend, fellow preacher, Sunday School teacher, is this the same kind of vision that consumes us? We'll never win those lost friends, family members, and neighbors until we truly believe that people have deeper problems than those that are on the surface. We must be consumed by the vision of Jesus: We must see as Jesus sees.

II. Second, Jesus cared for the victims

He saw, but He also loved. Understanding is never enough, left to itself. There must also be compassion, and this text tells us precisely that Jesus “was moved with compassion” (Matt. 9:36, KJV). When He saves us, He lifts from us the burden of sin, but He replaces it with a burden for the lost. He understood, as we must, that *people are not impressed with how much we know until they know how much we care.* (See Appendix A for Strack’s expansion of this point, “Sterile Professionalism.”)

I’m a member of what I believe is one of the greatest churches in America, Prestonwood Baptist Church in North Dallas. Because of its location and the size of its budget, some would conclude that this church attracts only upper-middle-class members. I praise God, though, that Jack Graham is the kind of pastor who believes we must minister to everyone. Prestonwood was the first church in Dallas to sponsor a “To Dallas with Love” program. Every Thanksgiving, our church feeds more than 5,000 people. The church has a crisis pregnancy center, a bus ministry to bring kids to church from the projects, a women’s ministry that helps indigent families with school clothes and food. There is no elitism in that kind of church.

We as God’s church must learn that all people want what Jesus wants to give; they just don’t understand the emptiness in their hearts. They’ve tried to fill it in every way except the right way. We hear much talk today about being a twenty-first-century church. The true church of the future is a church that tells people, especially young people, how to turn from their broken dreams and learn to dream again. In our Convention in 1991, fewer than 50 churches baptized at least 50 youth. Fewer than 10 baptized at least 100¹. The church that can reach the youth of America will be the true church of the twenty-first century.

III. Finally, in this passage of God’s Word, Jesus called for the victory

He told His disciples (see Matt. 9:38-10:6), “Pray . . . then go!” John Owen, the famous Puritan, arose at 4:30 every morning. “I need God” was the reason he gave. He sought the face of God in prayer; then he labored in the Lord’s field with intensity. He was assured that God would bless, if he would be faithful. John Wesley, too, arose every morning at about that same time to pour out his heart for the needs of England. Wesley was a dynamo, covering a 250,000 miles on horseback, preaching more than 50,000 sermons in his lifetime, and winning tens of thousands of people to Christ.

Why? Because he believed that God would win if he would be faithful.

The Lord will win! But we must be faithful. People will not be saved unless we have the vision and the compassion of Christ to take the gospel to them. One of the most insidious heresies of all is the heresy of universalism. In Rodin’s famous sculpture, “The Thinker,” a man sits with elbow on knee, chin in hand. What do you suppose he is thinking about? Rodin says he is contemplating the masses on their way to a Christless eternity in hell. Curiously, some theologians in our midst, even some who hold the name evangelical, no longer believe that faith in Christ is the only way to find salvation. They believe that somehow, in the end, God is simply going to open the doors of heaven to everyone, even those who shook their fists in His face and lived lives of unmitigated evil all their days. The Word of God, though, teaches that only those who have found Christ’s forgiveness in this life will enjoy the fruit of forgiveness in the life to come. The Lord will ultimately win, but we must be faithful. (See Appendix A for closing illustration, “Ron and Janet Greenfield.”)

¹ Taken from Dean Finley’s report to the Southern Baptist Convention Task Force on Reaching Youth in America, Dallas, Texas, November 1992.

DECISIONS

John Sullivan

Luke 15:11-32

The longer I minister in the name of Jesus Christ, the more keenly aware I am that people become victors or victims of our own decisions. This is not to imply that decisions of others do not have bearing on our lives. However, a time comes in the human pilgrimage when we must decide some things for ourselves and live by the decisions we make.

In Luke 15, we find the parable of the lost son. He is often referred to as the prodigal son. The story is sometimes called the parable of the prodigal's brother—sometimes, even, the parable of the waiting father. I am convinced the parable hinges on one single phrase: “He came to his senses” (Luke 17, NIV).

I. Four basic scenarios

There are four basic scenarios, or combinations of scenarios, out of which decisions must be made. All of these are in the story of the prodigal son, the younger boy who went into the far country and squandered his wealth in riotous living.

1. Decisions come out of desperation

The young man was desperate. He was at the end of his rope. He went into the field to feed the pigs and was so hungry that he would have eaten what he was feeding them. He was so desperate that he was willing to become a hired servant of his father, rather than be a son. His desperation dictated a willingness to take whatever steps necessary to go to his father's house. Desperation is one scenario for decision making.

2. Decisions are influenced by guilt

Guilt also came into play in this young man's life. There is no question, as you read the text, that this young man had thoughts about his father. He had to have considered the pain he caused his father. The intense pain produced guilt.

Moments of guilt can only be dealt with in the light of God's grace. We make a tragic mistake in our religious pilgrimage if we think we can read enough materials to exorcise guilt from our lives. Nor can we talk to enough counselors to do away with our guilt.

No scenario of life will handle our guilt. Confession to Christ and receiving His forgiveness alone can restore direction in the human experience.

John says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, KJV). Forgiveness is the God side of the transaction. God has the ability to cleanse my sins and to remove them “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12, KJV) and remember them no more.

God does a much better job of forgiveness than we do. Human tendency is to let people receive the forgiveness of God but never allow them to forget their sin. Often we remind people of their guilt. However, when confession has taken place and forgiveness has occurred, cleansing is a reality. A person gets to feel clean again. Maybe for the first time in a long time.

Forgiveness is a fragile thing. We do not often forgive ourselves, even when we have asked for the forgiveness of God. Guilt in our lives can be forgiven. If you are carrying around excess baggage of guilt or expensive garbage of sins, I have good news. You don't have to! Jesus can take care of those things.

Desperation brings about decision. Guilt brings about decision.

3. Compromise brings about decision

Every one of us has had a moment in our lives when we have had to come to grips with a situation as we perceived it. To the best of our ability, we came to a compromise position. “Compromise” is not a bad word. It is not always a negative word. Compromise sometimes is that situation in life that finds us negotiating for survival.

4. On rare occasions we make decisions based on love

We sometimes make decisions out of love—not out of desperation, guilt, or compromise. I must admit to you, I do not see much decision making out of love. Rare are the occasions when there is no hidden agenda or false motivation involved in decisions of this nature. But a love-decision is the type decision our Lord had to make. Jesus did not make decisions out of desperation. He did not make decisions out of guilt. He did not make decisions out of compromise. He made decisions based on uncompromising love. He prayed, “Not my will, but thine” (see Matt. 26:39). It wasn't long until that prayer meant Calvary. It wasn't long until that prayer meant desperation. It wasn't long until that prayer meant the despi-

table condition of hanging alone on a tree between thieves. In His decision of love, He made the commitment of forgiveness to us.

We cannot go through life without making decisions. In a measurable degree we become the victim or the victor of our own decisions.

II. Three principles of decision making

There are three principles of decision making that will become operative in every given situation. No matter what the decision—how large or how small—these will be present.

1. You can have anything in life you want to your fullest potential under God

Your potential is not the same as my potential, because God never “cookie cuts” individuals. God always builds custom-made homes, not tract homes. God always gives us our individuality. In every person, there is the potential that God has had in mind since our birth. You can reach that. You cannot exceed that, but you can reach your fullest potential under God. This is reality.

2. Though you can have anything in life you want to your fullest potential under God, you cannot have everything in life

At some place we come to grips with, “What do I really want out of life?” Do I really want to follow God? Am I willing to listen to the words of our Lord in Matthew 16, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24, KJV)? Can I deny myself? Can I take up a cross? I must decide. Am I willing to take my selfish ambitions and my false motivations and nail them to Calvary there to die? I can't have everything. I must decide the important matters of my life. I must constantly prioritize the agendas of my life.

3. Once I have decided, I will have to pay a price

I can have anything in my life to my fullest potential under God but I cannot have everything. And what I choose, I may have to pay for. Do you mean I pay a price for doing good? Absolutely. You also pay a price for doing bad. It seems to me that logic would dictate this: if I must pay a price, why not pay it on the side of good! Let me illustrate from the Word of God and from personal experience how these principles operate. (See Appendix A for the biblical illustration, “Adam and Eve.”)

Contemporary example: By nature, I love to preach. The pastor of a church where I was preaching during revival was able to get me into the private schools in the area. I would preach at 9:00 a.m. at one school, at 10:00 a.m. in the other, at the church noonday services, and then at night. We saw many teenagers saved in one of those schools. The pastor of the church, while we were waiting for services to begin in one of the schools, told me about a fine, godly young girl. She loved God. She was morally clean. She was confronted by another girl with no moral values at all. In fact, this other girl claimed to have slept with every boy in the senior class. She bragged about her immorality. On one occasion, she tried to intimidate this fine young girl by telling her about her escapades, the fun and thrill of sex outside of marriage.

Finally, the godly young girl said to her, "You don't understand, do you? I can decide to become like you any day of my life. But you can never decide to be like me again. Never!"

What was she verbalizing? I can have anything in life I want, but I cannot have everything. I have decided to pay the price of ridicule or the price of intimidation to do right just because it is right. When this happens, we can stand in the midst of adversity knowing that to remain clean and pure before God is worth it. Let me say it again. When you are doing right just because it is right, if you do it long enough, it will begin to feel right.

Saul of Tarsus had a dramatic experience with Jesus Christ that changed his life and the course of Christianity. He became Paul, the apostle of God. Thirteen books of the New Testament have been canonized under the inspiration of God through the pen of this man. He was led all over Asia Minor populating the world with New Testament churches. Everything that could happen did happen. Every difficulty that could arise did. He was berated. He was ignored. He was considered the offscouring of the earth. God moved him from pillar to post. However, when he prayed, jailhouses fell down around him. When he got on ships, he assured them of safety. When he was in prison dying, he wrote epistles to the clanging of chains.

In the last days of his life, he wrote letters to young Timothy, his son in the ministry. He said something like, "Timothy, I want you to understand I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. Timothy, I made a decision on the Damascus Road to follow God at any cost. It has a cost. I bear the marks of Christ in my body" (see 2 Tim. 4:7).

The marks on Paul's body were not the marks of baptism,

church membership, and stewardship. The marks were stripes left by a whipping at Philippi, where he and Silas sang until the prison fell down, and the Philippian jailer cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:30, KJV)? There might have been a mark on his forehead from Lystra, where he was stoned and left for dead (see Acts 14:14). Perhaps other marks could be identified as part of the price.

No need to spiritualize the marks of Paul. They were real. He was beaten. He was abused. Yet, as he came to the end of life, let's ask, "Paul, tell me, was it worth it all? Would you do it over again? Would you allow the Spirit of God to lead you from place to place? Would you allow the stoning at Lystra? Would you allow the whipping at Philippi? Would you get on that boat again to go to Rome? Would you go to prison? Tradition tells us you died there. Would you do it again?"

My conviction is that Paul would say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12, KJV). I paid the price and it's good!"

Without Jesus, a person is lost—lost to hell in death, lost to the will of God in life. God loves the lost. He sent His Son to save us. His love is real. However, we must decide what to do about it. We are saved by a personal decision to have a personal relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

How about you? What about the price of decision? We can have anything, but not everything. Jesus prayed, "Oh, God, not my will, but Thine be done." What a price.

THE HEART OF A SOUL-WINNER

Jerry Vines

Acts 20:1-27

Since the earliest days of my Christian life, I have had the heartfelt desire to be a soul-winner. Even as a boy, I wanted to experience the joy of leading people to Jesus. I didn't know how to go about it, but the desire was there.

On our baseball team of ten-year-olds was a boy who came from a broken home—a rough boy who needed Jesus. I remember praying he would be saved and trying, in my limited way, to tell him about Jesus. Then, I remember, during my teenage years in my home church, Sunday after Sunday, people would walk down the aisle—what a thrill I would experience!

I recall the first time I ever led someone to Jesus. They were 15- and 13 year-old brothers. Their baptisms started a revival in our church and made me think seriously about winning people to the Lord Jesus.

The greatest soul-winner in history is Jesus Christ Himself. No one could (or can) lead people to salvation like He could. Recall the night Jesus was talking to Nicodemus one-on-one. I believe that was the greatest sermon ever delivered. Before that encounter was over, Nicodemus knew what it was to be born again. Then, there was the day Jesus sat at Jacob's well, and the woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst [again]" (John 4:14, KJV). So, she left her water pots, returned to the city, and exclaimed, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29, KJV). So, the Lord Jesus brought many precious people to salvation.

I guess the next greatest soul-winner has to be the apostle Paul. Think of the people Paul won to Jesus—the journeys Paul made to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ. When you read about the missionary journeys of Paul in the book of Acts, those were not journeys to extend the influence of a denomination or to expand the ministry of a church, but to reach the lost and introduce them to the Lord Jesus Christ. His missionary journeys were soul-winning tours. When you reach Acts 20, you come to the last lap of his third journey. In the process, he shares what made him the soul-winner he was.

In Acts 20, Paul made two important stops. One of those was in the city of Troas. Luke writes, “And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them” (Acts 20:6-7, KJV). You will notice they gathered together on the first day of the week.

Notice verse 7 (KJV), “And [he] continued his speech until midnight.” The apostle Paul preached until midnight, because he was never going to be there again. He was trying to lay on the converts’ hearts more truths about Jesus and how to be soul-winners for Him.

The second place he visited was Miletus: “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church” (v. 17, KJV). He was on his way back to Jerusalem and knew he would not be there again, so he called for the pastors of the Ephesian church to meet him in the little place of Miletus. What follows from that point is one of the most moving, heartwarming speeches ever recorded in literature. Paul opens up his heart in these verses and reveals the heart of a soul-winner. From Paul we learn certain ingredients of being a successful winner of the lost (read Acts 20:18-20, KJV). We discover in these verses the attitude, the approach, and the appeal of a soul-winner.

I. The attitude of a soul-winner

What was the attitude of this missionary giant, Paul? “Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons” (v. 18). The task was not easy in Ephesus, but Paul stuck to the task. He was absolutely dependable, faithful, and trustworthy in his ministry in Ephesus. That is pivotal. The Lord would be pleased if all of us could be characterized by such an *attitude of dependability*.

The Bible says, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2, KJV). The Lord said, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10, KJV). Unfaithfulness is a tragedy in any realm of life—the family, a business, or even a church.

Don’t disappoint Jesus by being unfaithful. When you are unfaithful, you are raising questions concerning your love for the Lord. Keep on keeping on. If you want to be a soul-winner, be faithful. Be dependable, and God will bless you sooner or later. I would encourage you who have committed yourselves to lead a

soul to Christ but haven’t done so yet. Stay with it, for the Bible promises: “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:6, KJV).

Now notice an *attitude of humility*: “Serving the Lord with all humility of mind” (Acts 20:19, KJV). It is essential to have a humble attitude if you are going to lead people to Christ. Humility means you have an awareness of your own unworthiness. The proud person boasts, “I can do all things.” The humble one asserts, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13, KJV). It is easy to develop too great an estimate of one’s own importance. If and when you and I lead people to Jesus, it comes about only because of the miracle-working power of the Lord.

So, the attitude of a soul-winner is *dependability, humility, and sincerity*. Paul said, “Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears” (Acts 20:19, KJV). Paul was one of the erudite thinkers in the annals of humanity. Paul is the greatest theologian of the Christian faith. The Spirit of God used him to pen more than half the books of the New Testament. He was not emotional, wishy-washy, or unstable.

Yet, when it came to leading people to Jesus Christ, Paul testified, “I want you to know I serve the Lord with many tears.” How can we keep dry eyes when we think about the situation of people today? Look around at our world and see the horrible suffering people are experiencing and the deep sin into which they have fallen. If it does not move your heart, you must have ice water in your veins. When you consider what our loving Lord endured at Calvary’s cross—if it doesn’t move your heart—you have a heart of stone.

Sometimes when nothing else works, compassion and sincerity will do the job.

If you have someone on your heart, if you have a burden for them, you will be surprised what God will do when you start praying. Ask God to break your heart for those people. Submit yourself to Him, and you may have the joy of seeing those people saved. Wouldn’t that be wonderful? That’s the attitude of a soul-winner. (See Appendix A for Vines’ story “The Power of Compassion.”)

II. The approach of a soul-winner

How did Paul approach the matter of soul-winning? There is a three-fold approach in verse 20. There is, first of all, the matter of *personal conviction*. He explained, “I kept back nothing that was

profitable unto you, but have showed you” (v. 20, KJV). Here is Paul’s personal conviction—the need of the human heart.

Look at verse 27 (KJV): “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” The verb “shun” means to set your sails to catch the wind that is blowing. Paul is saying, “I didn’t set my sails to catch the popular breeze. I love people enough to tell them the truth.” Do you love people enough to tell them the truth? Jesus had the tenderest heart ever, yet he said more about hell than any other person in the Bible. We do people a disservice when we are not truthful and do not tell them there is a hell to shun and a heaven to gain.

Then there is *public instruction*. He said, “I . . . have showed you, and have taught you publicly” (v. 20, KJV). Paul often conducted large public meetings. It is a stirring time when people gather together and the gospel is publicly preached. That is miraculous. (See Appendix A for Vines’ illustration “Spurgeon and the Young Preacher.”)

Then there is the matter of *private presentation*. Paul says, “I . . . have taught you publicly, and from house to house” (v. 20, KJV). Private presentation is going into homes and presenting the gospel, probably the best place to present the message. You can win people to Jesus almost anywhere, but in a place of business, for instance, it’s a little harder, because people are coming in and out, and people working on the job are not able to give you their full attention. If you witness for the Lord around other people, sometimes people will put up a front. They feel they have to impress others, so they will say certain things or put on a show for other people. But when you are in people’s homes, the facade and pretense are usually gone, and it’s just Jesus, them, and you. You cannot improve on the method in the Bible. It’s not that the Bible’s method has been tried and found wanting; instead, it has been tried and found difficult—therefore discontinued.

III. The appeal of the soul-winner

“. . . Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 21, KJV). *Our appeal is first that people turn from sin.* That is the meaning of “repentance”—an about-face, a change of mind about yourself, your sin, and Jesus. It is an inward experience that leads to an outward change of conduct. Repentance is the sick person’s acknowledgment of illness as he or she comes to the Great Physician saying, “I have sin-sickness, and I need the cure only You can give.” Repen-

tance is the sharp needle that pierces a hole in the heart, letting the thread of the gospel come through. Repentance is the hammer that breaks the hard heart to pieces. Repentance is the plow that makes furrows in the heart, in preparation for the seed of the good news of the gospel. Jesus said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, KJV).

Second, *turn to Jesus*. “Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 21, KJV). When you turn from your sin, then you turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. The very moment you invite Jesus into your heart, you are saved!

MY MISSION IN THE MARKETPLACE

Rick Warren

Romans 10:9-14

When you look at people who have made the most of their lives, you can usually find one common denominator. They have a purpose. They have clearly defined their objective in life. They know why they are here. When you find people who make their lives count, you'll find they have a life mission.

I. The Christian's mission

Paul was a man with a life mission. He understood that the moment you become a Christian, God gives you a new purpose for living. The moment you become a Christian, God gives you a new mission. In Acts 20:24 (TLB), Paul says, "Life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the *work assigned me by the Lord Jesus* [that is his mission, and then he tells us what it is]—the work of *telling others the Good News* about God's mighty kindness and love."

That was his mission, and that is your mission. You ask, "What is my mission in life if I am a Christian? What is my mission in the marketplace?" Notice this verse, Acts 1:8 (RSV). Jesus says, "You will be my salesman." No, that is not what He says. "You will be my attorneys." No, that is not what He says either. He says, "You shall be my [what?] witnesses . . . [where?] to the end of the earth."

Now many people misunderstand this. They think, "Well, I am supposed to be a salesman for Jesus Christ." No, no pressure is involved in this decision. They think, "Well, I am supposed to be an attorney for Jesus Christ; I am supposed to argue people into heaven." No, it doesn't say that. It says you will be a witness. What is a witness? A witness is somebody who just gives personal experience, personal evidence. That's pretty hard to refute.

Let me give you a definition of witnessing. Witnessing is sharing what God has done in my life. Circle that word *my*, because you are the authority on that. You don't have to be a Bible scholar to be a witness for Jesus Christ. You just have to say, "Here is what God has done in my life." And if you can say that, you can be a witness.

Notice another verse. In John, Jesus says, "I sent them into the world just as you sent me into the world" (John 17:18, GNB). Did you know that you are sent? You are sent into the world by Jesus Christ if you are a Christian.

Every Christian is a missionary. You don't become a missionary by crossing the sea; you become a missionary by seeing the cross. God has made you a representative of Jesus Christ in your work. You are. It is not negotiable; it is not optional. If you are a Christian, you are a missionary. Part of the joy of being a Christian is the privilege of helping other people come to know Christ.

Now, why is that so important? There are two reasons:

II. The importance of our message

1. We have a life-saving message

That means there are eternal consequences to what we are sharing. We are talking about heaven or hell here.

Romans 10:13-14 (TLB): "Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?"

Does that make sense? Sure. Who does God expect to tell them? Us—me, you—all of us. That is what this passage means.

Start introducing other people to Jesus Christ. The dearest thing to the heart of God is the death of His Son, Jesus Christ; and the second dearest thing to the heart of God is when we tell others about it. Tell the good news!

And it is good news. Look at this verse: Jesus came ". . . to preach Good News to the poor; . . . to heal the brokenhearted and to announce that captives shall be released and the blind shall see, that the downtrodden shall be freed from their oppressors, and that God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him" (Luke 4:18-19, TLB).

You know what those verses are. That is the first sermon of Jesus Christ. It is the very first sermon, and He lists the benefits. He says I am coming to share, not bad news, but good news. It is good news for hurting people, and He lists several different kinds of hurting people.

Do you know any people who are brokenhearted? Do you know any people who are confused? Is there any possible chance that there is somebody at your workplace who is discouraged? Do you know anybody who is stressed out? Tell them the good news. They need to hear it. We have a life-saving message, and *the world is far more ready to hear it than we are ready to share it*. Why? Because we think that God has called us to be salesmen and attorneys. No, He

has said to each of us, "Just be a witness." Just say, "This is what happened to me." That is all you have to do.

2. People are hungry to hear it

"What pity he [Jesus] felt for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know what to do or where to go for help. . . . The harvest is so great, and the workers are so few" (Matt. 9:36-37, TLB).

Now He says that in New Testament times, three things were true:

- 1) Problems were great;
- 2) People didn't know what to do; and
- 3) People didn't know where to go for help.

Do you know anybody like that? The world is full of people like that! They don't know what to do; they don't know where to go. They are looking for help. And the fact is, Satan has gotten you to believe a lie. He has gotten you to believe a myth. Most Christians believe it; they don't understand it. The myth is: "Most people aren't interested in talking about spiritual things." That is not true. In fact, every single poll by George Gallup and George Barna and the Roper Poll and every survey, census, and statistic says the exact opposite—that interest in spiritual matters is increasing in the '90s, not decreasing. (See Appendix A for statistics and illustrations on this point: "Religious Opinion Polls" and "Popular Magazine Stories.")

The world is far more ready to receive the good news than we are ready to share it. People all around you are looking for relief and answers, and you have the answer. You have it! As Jesus said, the problem isn't the harvest, the problem is limited workers.

III. Being a missionary in the marketplace

So, how can you be a witness at work?

"Whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17, TLB).

You are a representative of Jesus Christ. You are an ambassador in the world. If you are a Christian, you represent Jesus in your work. And God has placed you where you are so that you can represent Him. Work takes on new meaning when you understand that "I am here as a missionary. That is part of the meaning of my work."

One day God is going to ask, "Whom did you tell? If it was such good news—you have eternal salvation—whom did you tell? Did

you ever think about sharing with anybody?”

“Well, they are not interested,” you say.

You are kidding me! People are looking for answers. *They are far more ready to receive the gospel than you are ready to share it.*

Here are three ways you can be a witness at work.

1. By the quality of your work

Shoddy workmanship is a poor testimony. I don't care if you are a taxi driver, a computer repair person, a car designer, or an interior designer, Christians are called to competence. We should set the standard that says: If that is done by a Christian, it is quality work. Your work is a witness, so don't cut corners and don't try to “get by.” Notice this verse: “The quality of each man's work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it” (1 Cor. 3:13, GNB).

It will be revealed one day, so you may as well do a good job now. Even a boring job becomes meaningful when you focus on quality.

2. By your positive attitude

“Do all that has to be done without complaining or arguing . . . and you will shine in the world like bright stars because you are offering it the word of life” (Phil. 2:14-15, TJB).

Paul says one of the ways you stand out in a crowd, in a negative dark world, is by being positive. When you find a positive person in a negative work environment, that makes a difference. Paul is saying, “Don't be a cynic.” Go the second mile when needed. Have a proper respect for authority. Be positive; don't be cynical; don't be negative.

You are the only Bible some people will ever read. It is like that old statement: If they outlawed Christianity in America, and you were arrested, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

3. By telling the good news

“Make the most of your chances to tell others the Good News. Be wise in all your contacts with them” (Col 4:5, TLB).

Paul says make the most of every opportunity.

I know an eye doctor in the San Jose area who put the four spiritual laws on his eye chart! You can witness anywhere, if you will just be open. You don't have to be a salesman; you don't have to be an attorney; you don't have to get into arguments; you don't even have to know a lot about the Bible. You just need to say, “This is what happened to me.” And if you are available, God will wear you

out! (See Appendix A for additional examples of on-the-job witnesses: “A Flight Attendant,” “A Paper Hanger,” “A Sheriff,” and “A Manicurist”).

Look at this verse: “Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you. But do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15-16, GNB).

Circle the word “explain.” The Bible says you should be ready to explain the good news to anybody who asks. Many Christians find it difficult to explain how they trusted Christ. In fact, if you were asked to, could you do it? Could you say, “Here are the steps to become a believer”?

My job as your pastor is to help equip you for your life mission in the marketplace, so I have developed a tool called “How to Establish a Spiritual Base for My Life.” It is a tool you can use when somebody asks you about spiritual matters. It is simple and to the point. You don't have to memorize anything or carry your Bible with you. It is nonthreatening. It just asks simple yes or no questions in nontheological terms. (See Appendix B for a sample of the card and suggestions about using it.)

Now, there is one more verse on the outline (see Appendix C for an outline of Warren's sermon). Look at this verse: 2 Tim. 1:7-8 (TLB): “The Holy Spirit . . . does not want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them. If you will stir up this inner power, you will never be afraid to tell others about our Lord.”

You know how you get rid of the fear of talking to others about Christ? You love them. There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out all fear. When you love somebody, you care enough to tell them the good news.

I want to give you a little homework assignment this week. I want you to go home and make a list of three nonbelievers whom you care about, and I want you to start praying for them every day. Don't do anything about it, don't talk to them, just pray for them every day. Let God act and watch what happens.

THE OBEDIENT, BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN

Robert Witty

2 Corinthians 5:10—6:2

Who am I?

Why am I here?

Can a Christian ask any two more important questions?

The first question deals with identity; the second with mission. Notice the inescapable relationship. “Who I am” determines the answer to “Why I am here.” “Why am I here?” influences the answer to “Who am I?” Identity reveals mission; mission reveals identity. The soldier enlists as a protector of his country; protection of his country depends on the soldier. If you identify a Hitler, you also identify a mission of ruthless domination. If you identify an obedient, biblical Christian, you also identify a biblical, soul-winning mission. Identity and mission cleave to each other. To please God and to fulfill our God-given destiny, all Christians must ask and correctly answer the questions of identity and mission.

I. Who am I as a Christian?

Four works of God in the life of a human can be used to identify the true Christian: *saving, sealing, sending, and sustaining*. None of these four works of God is ever absent.

1. God saves (John 1:12-13)

The Christian is a person whom God has saved, and saved, thank God, into the very family of God! Failure is inevitable if we search in other places for benefits comparable to the personal benefits of God’s salvation—peace of mind, being loved, spiritual fellowship, adoption into the family of God. Only the saved know that all their sins are forgiven (see 1 John 1:7). Only the saved become members of the family of God (see Gal. 4:5). Only the saved have the sure hope of eternal life (see John 10:28). Only the saved are members of the body of Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:27).

This great salvation is a gift of God to all who receive the Savior (Rom. 6:23). The grace and love of God demonstrated in the atoning work of Christ provide this gift (Eph. 2:8-9). This great salvation changes the very nature of man—not just his conduct or his human fellowship, but his very nature (John 3:7). The saved person actually becomes a “new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). God’s free and

available salvation becomes the essential foundation that identifies the Christian person's identity and mission (1 Cor. 3:11).

2. God seals (2 Cor. 1:21-22)

The Christian is a person whom God has sealed and sealed, thank God, as God's possession! Failure is inevitable if we search in other places for protective benefits comparable to those received by God's sealing—escape from temptation, protection from evil, comfort in sorrow, and security for eternity.

God's seal evidences God's ownership (2 Tim. 2:19). God's seal provides the protection of God's presence (1 Cor. 3:16). God's seal demonstrates that God will bring to a glorious conclusion what He has graciously begun in salvation (Eph. 1:13-14). Because the Holy Spirit Himself is the seal, the Christian has the promise that God Himself is present on His saved property (Eph. 2:18-22). God's seal also identifies the Christian believer!

3. God sends (John 17:18)

The Christian is a person whom God sends and sends, thank God, to fulfill the divine will! Failure is inevitable if we search in other places for an experience comparable to the Christian experience, in which human purpose has joined with divine purpose. Consider Paul's personal testimony about how Jesus sent him: "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee" (Acts 26:16-17, KJV). God identifies every Christian as a sent witness to Him and His salvation. Jesus sent the 12; Jesus sent the 70. God's *sending* is an essential part of Christian *identity*.

4. God sustains (Phil. 4:11-19)

The Christian is a person whom God sustains and sustains, thank God, by divine provision! Failure is inevitable if we search in other places for the gracious provisions that are an essential part of the Christian's identity. Consider Jesus' promise of inward spiritual refreshment: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (John 4:14, KJV). Or, consider Jesus' promise of inward spiritual life: "He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever" (John 6:58, KJV). Paul's experience of God's sustaining power motivated the testimony: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13, KJV). God's gracious *sustaining*

becomes an essential element of the Christian's *identity*.

This combination of saving, sealing, sending, and sustaining identifies the biblical Christian. No one of them is ever absent. All are present without exception. No matter how the Christian reacts, the fact remains that God gives every believer this unique identity.

II. As a Christian, why am I here?

When you acknowledge the essential elements for identity, you also establish the nature of mission. Mission grows out of identity. Just as nothing less than the unique combination of God's four works can identify the biblical Christian, likewise, nothing less than obedience to God's specific mandate can fulfill the Christian's proper mission. Five clear Bible commands reveal God's mandate. Every Christian must face these specific commands, which are both duty and privilege. Love of Christ will produce obedience to Christ. Obedience to God's mandate requires this unique Christian identity; this unique Christian identity finds fulfillment only by obeying God's mandate.

1. A unique continuance (2 Cor. 5:20)

The obedient, biblical Christian must continue what Jesus Christ began! Luke described his gospel message as ". . . all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1, KJV). What Jesus began by His sacrificial work, the Christian must continue by proclaiming the saving message. Jesus came in the flesh to do God's will (Heb. 10:7); the obedient Christian must continue this objective. Jesus declared that "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, KJV), and revealed the same in His prayer: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18, KJV). Only the biblically identified Christian can continue by evangelizing or by discipling to fulfill the mandate. And anything less than this continuance not only disobeys God but also contradicts the identity God has given the believer. When Jesus ascended into heaven, having finished His work, He left His disciples to continue.

2. A unique, commanded continuance (Mark 16:15)

The obedient, biblical Christian does what Jesus Christ commands. What Jesus said before His ascension proves that personal soul-winning is His command to the Christian. Matthew 28:19-20 (KJV) records Christ's command as the Great Commission: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Mark, Luke, and John agree, and Acts 1:8 (KJV) makes the final command very personal: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” This is no option, but a specific command. No one can read the New Testament and fail to acknowledge that Jesus *commanded* His believers to continue to “go out into the highways and hedges” (Luke 14:23, KJV) and thus continue “to seek and to save that which [is] lost” (Luke 19:10, KJV).

3. A unique, committed continuance (2 Cor. 5:18-19)

The obedient, biblical Christian demonstrates a personal commitment to what Jesus Christ commanded. The apostle Paul declared that God has committed the ministry of the proclamation of the word about Jesus’ redemptive work to be the exclusive mission of the Christian. Commitment means that God will not do through any other servant what He has reserved for the Christian. Angels cannot proclaim what is reserved for the believer. The story of Cornelius demonstrates that only the Christian, the human who has experienced salvation, can proclaim the gospel message. Evangelism is still every Christian’s job. If Christians neglect or refuse, soul-winning will cease. God has no other plan. This startling truth reveals in Christian history that God provides or allows no substitutes. God waits on committed Christians to fulfill their exclusive mission to proclaim the Savior!

4. A unique constraining continuance (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

The obedient, biblical Christian demonstrates the constraining power of the love of Jesus Christ. The love of Christ constrains the Christian to love the lost for whom Jesus died. Measure the power of this love by Paul’s testimony: “I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3, KJV). Paul loved his Jewish brethren with the love of Christ. He was willing to lose his own soul to save others from hell to heaven. Such constraining power reflects and radiates in a human the love that God has put in Christ. This constraining power must lead Christians to fulfill their mission to persuade men to receive the Savior.

5. A unique, cooperative continuance (2 Cor. 6:1)

Obedient, biblical Christians work together with God in the service of Jesus Christ. What a glorious company: fellow Christians, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, working together with one another and with their Heavenly Father. God alerts the believer that “now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2, KJV). This urgency caused Paul to exhort Timothy to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. . . . Do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Tim. 4:2,5, KJV). This divine-human cooperative work cannot delay and still be obedient. Soul-winning is the mission for which Christ died and for which the obedient Christian must live.

III. Present blessing/future glory

For obedient, biblical, soul-winning Christians, God provides double portions of blessing! Think of the blessing Christians may share with the unsaved who receive the Savior: to be forgiven of all sins; to be made a child of God in the love and care of the Heavenly Father, a member of the body of Christ; to be free from the power of Satan, from the fear of hell; to be given the comfort of the Spirit in this life and the hope of heaven in the world to come.

How can the Christian give adequate thanks for the first blessing of being a soul-winner?

The second portion of blessing is even greater than the first. The obedient, biblical Christian will hear the Savior say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:21, KJV). As the apostle Matthew wrote, the souls that are reached for Christ will be the soul-winner’s joy and crown for all eternity.

How indeed can the Christian give adequate thanks for the two blessings of being a soul-winner?

The obedient, twice-blessed Christian can lift the greatest thanks to God by doing what God created him or her to do. As the bird sings, as the fruit grows, as the winds blow and the rain gladdens the flowers, so Christians can give praise to God by being true to their identity as soul-winners and by fulfilling their soul-winning mission.

WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS

C. Thomas Wright

Matthew 28:16-18

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’” (Matt. 28:16-18, NIV).

Introduction

We are constantly barraged with others’ telling us what we need for a healthy, happy, fulfilling life. But what does God say we need? We all need to know Jesus, regardless of our cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. An example is the story of the city rat.

One day, a large city rat was running from a large city cat. The rat jumped behind a dumpster just as the cat was about to catch him. The cat tried but could not reach the rat. Suddenly the rat heard barking and the sound of running feet. The rat calmed down and came out, but the cat grabbed him!

“What happened?” asked the rat. “I heard the dog.”

The cat responded, “In order to survive in the city, you must be bilingual.”

The United States always has been a multicultural nation. Our Statue of Liberty has welcomed Irish, Scottish, and other Europeans, as well as Asians, Hispanics, and Africans, into this land of American Indians. In 1993, more than 600 language groups called the United States home. Southern Baptists are witnessing and ministering in more than 100 of those groups. Ethnicity is in every Baptist association in the United States. So every Southern Baptist must be witnessing across cultures, if we are to survive in the twenty-first century.

Jesus knows that witnessing is difficult for most of us. That is why He gave us clear instructions in Matthew 28:19-20. These verses record Jesus’ last words to the disciples prior to His ascension. He had already died for our sins and victoriously risen from the dead. Here is what He says to us (read the verses):

I. Everyone needs to meet Jesus (Matt. 28:16)

Witnessing across cultures is based on meeting Jesus. The disci-

ples traveled from Jerusalem to a specific mountain in Galilee to meet Jesus. If they had stayed in Jerusalem, they would have missed meeting Jesus! They knew that they had a responsibility to go where Jesus designated before they could meet him. Meeting Jesus requires a conscious, personal decision on our part. Jesus was very sensitive to cultural differences, but He tore down cultural barriers that interfered with relationships.

The best illustration of this is how Jesus witnessed across cultures to the woman at the well in John 4:7-26. He faced barriers of gender, race, and religion. Jesus circumvented bias, prejudice, and false teachings to bring this woman to a relationship with God. Jesus took advantage of opportunities to witness.

Another example is the young man I met who was a leader in his church. He said he liked hanging around Christians and was a good person. But he had no desire to help others meet Jesus. As we talked, he realized he had never met Jesus personally. He was a proselyte to the Christian culture but not a convert to the Christian life. Using the “Eternal Life” booklet as a guide, I helped him confess his sin and ask Jesus into his life. He immediately shared about his conversion and began introducing people to Jesus. Just because you are not witnessing does not mean you are not saved, but many people do relate to Christian culture without having a relationship with Jesus.

Be sure that your witnessing encounters help people meet Jesus, not just the church or the Christian culture. To witness, you must have met Jesus. Witnessing is sharing with someone else what Jesus has done for you. This requires a relationship with Jesus that has changed your life. When that relationship happens, you begin to share with others how they can meet Him, too. You have a responsibility to meet Jesus by confessing that you have disobeyed God. (Sin is best defined as disobeying God. The word from the Greek means “to miss the mark.”) Then ask the Holy Spirit of God to move into your life and transform your will to God’s will. The Holy Spirit will work to transform your thoughts and actions to be consistent with the thoughts and actions of Jesus. The change is so radical that it is called being reborn! The change results in a testimony that will help others meet Jesus. Start praying for opportunities to help people meet Jesus.

II. Everyone needs to worship Jesus (Matt. 28:17)

When people see Jesus, they worship Him. The Greek word for worship is *proskuneo* and means “to bend the knee.” True worship

is our recognizing that we are in the presence of the Creator God who loves us so much that He sent His Son to die for us. If no one else in all of history had ever lived but you or me, Jesus still would have died on the cross. He died for you and me. Selah. Worship is internal. It is an attitude of the heart. Biblical worship includes corporate and private aspects. Worship must lift up Jesus. The apostle John says it clearly in John 3:15-16.

Most of us have seen a bonsai tree. They are mature trees that are 18 inches tall and perhaps 100 years old. They are kept small by trimming the roots. Christian growth has two strong roots: corporate worship and private worship. Private worship is daily and personal. Corporate worship is public and with other believers. Satan keeps us spiritually dwarfed by cutting roots. We know people who are in church every time the door is open, but the lack of daily private worship has made them spiritual bonsai trees. We also know people who only subscribe to private worship—often practiced on a golf course or in a bass boat! They, too, are spiritually dwarfed, without corporate worship.

All of us have been blessed by private worship on the beach or in the mountains. Private worship is between you and your Maker. You can be absolutely honest and open. Corporate worship helps us to understand the Bible, exalt the Savior, and fellowship with other believers. Jesus is worthy of an attitude of worship privately each day and corporately each week.

Our worship should be culturally inclusive. Prejudice is a learned behavior. The love of Jesus can help us unlearn prejudice. Everyone likes to worship in a way that is comfortable. Anyone should be welcome to worship in any church where he or she is comfortable in that group’s cultural style. We should not be forced to worship in a cultural fashion different from our own. Neither should we force anyone else to worship in a culture different from his or her own. Healthy worship results in a love for Jesus that spills over to other people.

III. Everyone needs to witness in Christ’s authority (Matt. 28:18)

Jesus came up and spoke to His disciples. He was about to give the Great Commission to all believers. Notice He starts with the statement that all authority is given to Him. That word “authority” is interesting. It comes from a Greek word that means “freedom of choice, right to act or decide, and ability and power.” It refers to what shows us that Jesus is the only path to God. There are more

than 1,600 different religions in the United States. What right do we have to tell people to believe in Jesus, when all of these other religions are out there? Jesus is the only religious leader to rise from the dead. We have the right to share based on this authority. The world religions will teach us to be good. Jesus taught us to be holy, because being good is not enough to reach heaven. The only way to be holy is to ask the Holy Spirit to come into our hearts. The Holy Spirit will only do that through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is said that Asian-Indian reformer Mohandas K. Gandhi's authority was often questioned. When asked what right he had to try to change India, he responded, "I act on the authority of the needs of my people." Can we do any less?

The authority of God is in Jesus. Jesus is in us. So, where is that power? In us! Do not let any social, cultural, or linguistic barriers hinder you from helping people meet Jesus. The United States is now the third largest unsaved nation on earth. Only China and India have more lost people than we do. All Christians must be involved in sharing Jesus. There are tracts and witness training materials available in many languages from the Home Mission Board and other sources. You do not have to speak the language to share a tract or a Bible. You do need to take advantage of opportunities the Lord gives you to share.

IV. Conclusion

Everyone needs to meet Jesus, to worship Jesus, and to witness in His authority. How will our friends, family, and neighbors meet Jesus if we do not help introduce them to Him? There are too many lost people in the United States now for everyone to meet Jesus through the witness of a professional minister. Every Christian must be involved in the process of meeting people's greatest need. How will you respond to what everyone needs?

V. Invitation

Please bow your heads. Will you begin praying for opportunities to share your faith? Please raise your hand. Will you make yourself available for witness training? Please raise your hand. Is there someone here who realizes you are a proselyte to the Christian culture instead of a convert to Christ? Will you raise your hand? Now, those of you who raised your hands, please come forward.

APPENDIX A

ILLUSTRATIONS, STATISTICS, AND STORIES

The Saga of D.L. Moody

It was a warm sunny Saturday afternoon in April, 1855. In so many ways, this day was like any other day. But somehow in the heart of one Sunday School teacher in London, a restlessness could not be satisfied. Finally, agreeing in his spirit to obey the voice of God and the troubling of the Holy Spirit, Edward Kimball decided to go talk to that student in his class whom God had placed so heavily on his heart.

Kimball knew the student was not a Christian but was becoming increasingly interested, and he felt that the time to talk with him was now. So he lay aside his Saturday afternoon pleasantries, got in his buggy, and went down to the little store where Lyman Moody was learning to be an apprentice shoemaker and repairman. He found a ready heart. Moody took a small break from work; the two went aside; and, in only moments, a man who was destined to become one of England's mightiest preachers became a Christian. Dwight Lyman Moody bowed his head and thanked Edward Kimball for coming and caring as he said yes to Jesus Christ.

Little did the world know that D.L. Moody would one day take two continents, one in each hand, and shake them for God. So powerful was the revival in America—as D.L. Moody swayed crowds and preached in the power of God so that tens and hundreds of thousands were saved—that he needed help. So he sent word back to London and asked his longtime friend E.B. Myer if he would come and help him preach. Soon, the crusades grew to be so mighty that both of them had to preach. They parted ways and began two sets of crusades across America.

In one of those crusades, a young man came forward and had a mighty experience with God. He opened his heart to Jesus Christ. He was J. Wilbert Chapman. When Dr. Chapman was saved, God gave him two interests. One was the souls of people, and the other was the physical needs of people. And so, with the help of Mrs. George Clark, he was instrumental in beginning what was destined to become the most significant and famed inner-city gospel rescue mission in the world, the Pacific Garden Mission.

One evening, a former big-league baseball player, now alcoholic and broke, stumbled into the Pacific Garden Mission, heard the gospel, and was converted. The fire of God stirred in his soul. He went from tabernacle to tabernacle preaching, from building to revival, from tent to stadium—jumping off pianos, turning over benches, throwing his Bible, storming across the pulpit. He took America by storm. He became the most powerful evangelist in the history of the world to that day. He was the baseball player we know as Billy Sunday.

Another young man, a preacher from the South, was so stirred with the message, inspirational life, and preaching of Billy Sunday that he decided he

too must preach. His prayer was that he might be another Billy Sunday. Mordecai Hamm began to thunder up and down the trails of South Georgia and across Mississippi. Within a few months, his preaching would take him to the hills of North Carolina. There, on a quiet evening in a brush arbor meeting, after he had preached a stirring sermon on hell, a 16 year-old mountain boy walked down the aisle at the invitation of Mordecai Hamm and his Lord. “Billy Frank” they called him. Within three years, he would be called to preach and would enroll in Bible college. No one ever dreamed that more than 100 years later, the result of that faithful Sunday School teacher’s witness in London would be the mighty worldwide ministry of the most effective and successful evangelist in the history of the Christian faith, William Franklin (Billy) Graham.

—John Bisagno

1960 Tokyo Crusade

In the early 1960s, I was in charge of the student phase of the Bob Pierce Tokyo Crusade. Approximately 500,000 college students were in the city, and I was scheduled, along with several Campus Crusade leaders, to speak at numerous meetings. I was told that nothing like this had ever taken place in Japan, so I boarded the plane with great excitement at the opportunity to present Jesus Christ to the Japanese student world.

On arrival, however, my enthusiasm turned to discouragement. We were briefed by a missionary who had been working in Japan for 15 years.

“Now the Japanese are different,” he warned. “They don’t receive the Lord like Americans do.”

He went on to explain that a Japanese would normally spend 10, 15, or 20 years “seeking God” before receiving Christ. They would spend all this time in Bible classes, studying diligently, learning all the proper information about Christianity . . . making salvation a lifelong quest, rather than a decisive commitment.

I went back to my room after the briefing, downcast at the prospects of an unsuccessful evangelistic crusade. “Lord,” I prayed, “Do you really want me here? I mean, I have so much to do back in the States, and if people here are not interested, maybe someone else could do what I’m doing.”

As I prayed, I sensed a peace coming over my troubled heart. It was as if God were assuring me that the Japanese were like anyone else—hungry for God.

The next morning, I spoke in my first meeting to approximately 1,000 students. For one hour, I presented the gospel and told stories to illustrate how people’s lives have been changed by the power of the living Christ.

At the end of the hour, I said, “We’re going to take a five-minute break. If you would like to receive Christ as your Savior and Lord, remain in your seat. The rest of you are free to go without any embarrassment. I’ll then explain for another hour how you can be sure Christ is in your life and how you can grow spiritually.”

The meeting was over. But nobody left.

So I spoke for another hour, walking the audience point-by-point through the gospel message. “Now,” I concluded, “we’ve seen what the Bible tells us about why we need to accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord. And you can invite Christ into your life this morning, through a simple prayer. If these words express the desire of your heart, pray with me silently, sincerely: ‘Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.’”

I asked the students to raise their hands if they had prayed that prayer. Almost every hand went up.

I practically ran back to my hotel to see the missionary who had briefed us. “Most of those students accepted the Lord!” I exclaimed.

“Aw, Bill, you’re an American. They don’t want to offend you,” my missionary friend said, as gently as one can possibly be when throwing cold water on you. “You see, these people appreciate General MacArthur’s benevolent treatment of the Japanese after the war. And since you’re an American, they don’t want to offend you, so they’ll do anything you ask them to do.”

Again, my balloon deflated. So the next day, I went through a similar procedure with a new group of students. I spoke for an hour, then gave a clear invitation for those who wanted to receive Christ. “Now, ladies and gentlemen,” I concluded, “I’m told that you’re staying in these meetings just because you want to be gracious to me—you don’t want to offend me because I am an American. But if you’ve received Jesus Christ into your life today and you know without a doubt that He is in your life, I want you to come and tell me.

“Don’t do this if you’re just wanting to be courteous to me. Take my hand and tell me the truth, in your own words. I want to know for sure.”

And the line formed. I shook hundreds of hands that morning, but, more importantly, I had the thrill of looking into the glowing faces of young men and women who had just ended their lifelong search for spiritual truth.

People are indeed hungry for the gospel. Jesus said, “Do you think the work of harvesting will not begin until the summer ends four months from now? Look around you! Vast fields of human souls are ripening all around us, and are ready now for reaping” (John 4:35, TLB).

—Bill Bright

In the “House of Beautiful Women”

Shortly after Vonette and I began working with college students at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), we were scheduled to speak to the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority on campus. Because of active communist recruitment activity on campus, the student newspaper and student government were controlled by the radical left. As I prepared to speak, I prayed hard that God would break through this atmosphere and reach at least one

or two of the young women.

The sorority was called “the house of beautiful women,” and they were. Sixty of them gathered in the living room to hear us speak, and, when I finished my message, I said, “If you would like to know Jesus Christ personally, come and tell me.”

I had prayed for one or two. But at least thirty of these beautiful college women stood in line to tell me they wanted to become Christians.

Since this was my first group meeting in which people wanted to receive Christ, I didn’t know what to do. So I did what any good businessman does when he’s not sure what to do: I called another meeting.

“Vonette and I would like to invite all of you to our home tomorrow night,” I announced. “We’ll talk more about how you can know Christ personally. Would you come?”

Each of the women agreed, and most of them came—some with boyfriends. All but a few prayed with us that evening, yielding their lives to Christ. From this nucleus, the ministry called Campus Crusade for Christ was born, and spread not only across the UCLA campus, but also across the country and around the world.

These sharp young women and their boyfriends were hungry for the good news. They were only waiting for someone to tell them, someone to show them how.

—Bill Bright

Witnessing to a United States Senator

A few years ago, I was concluding a meeting with a group of executives when one came up to me. “Bill,” he said, “next time you’re in Washington, would you please go see my senator? He needs the Lord.”

The question startled me. “Don’t you think that would be presumptuous, going to see a senator without an appointment to talk to him about the Lord?”

“Tell him I sent you,” my executive friend laughed, for he knew that his senator probably didn’t even know him.

Several months later, I was in the Senate office building in Washington, where I met and prayed with a couple of other senators. As I walked down the hall, I saw the name of the senator to whom I had been referred.

By this time, I had learned not to argue with the Lord. The natural man in me would have said, “Who do you think you are, bothering the senator—and he probably won’t even be interested!” But over the years, God had taught me to be prepared for Him to provide unusual witnessing opportunities, sometimes in the most unlikely circumstances. And He doesn’t expect eloquence, just obedience.

So, with a quick prayer for God’s guidance, I entered the senator’s office.

“May I help you?” the receptionist asked.

“Good morning. My name is Bill Bright, and I’d like to talk with the senator,” I said.

“Let me see,” she said as she left her desk and disappeared through a doorway to the back offices.

In less than a minute, she was back. “He’d be glad to see you right now,” she reported.

In most circumstances it’s best to take the time to converse and establish a good rapport with the person with whom you’re sharing Christ. However, since I had arrived without an appointment, I wanted to respect the senator’s time constraints. I got right to the point.

“It’s an honor to meet you, Senator,” I greeted as we shook hands. “I’m Bill Bright.”

“Bill, it’s good to meet you,” the senator smiled. “Have a seat there. How is your stay in Washington?”

“I’m having a good visit. I’m president of Campus Crusade for Christ International, and I’ve been here to meet with several government leaders who have committed themselves to Jesus Christ. Senator, are you a Christian?”

The question “Are you a Christian?” could come across as blunt and insensitive. Yet, I have found that if I bathe an opportunity in prayer, and if I make sure God is on the throne of my life and I’m reaching out in genuine love in the power of the Holy Spirit, the person I’m sharing with invariably responds to this question without taking offense. Such was the case with this busy senator.

“I don’t know. . . . I think so,” he hesitated. His voice was quiet, and he leaned forward, eager to hear more. His contemplative brown eyes looked straight into mine.

“If you were to die tonight, do you know without a doubt that you would go to heaven?” I asked.

His gaze dropped from me to the top of his desk. “No,” he whispered. “I don’t.”

“You’d like to know, wouldn’t you?” I asked.

“You bet I would.”

I went through a brief presentation of the gospel, and the senator responded that he would like to receive Christ.

—Bill Bright

What Is Important?

One fall day, I was in such a hurry to do something “more important” that I almost missed out on a real blessing that God had waiting for me. I was driving to speak to a group of Christian college students at Forest Home, a beautiful conference center in the San Bernardino mountains. The uphill climb proved a little strenuous for my car, however, and the radiator started to boil over. I pulled into the driveway of a nice, rustic-looking house, which turned out to be the home of a man who worked with the forestry service.

“Can I be of help?” he smiled as he came over to my car. With a garden hose he filled the radiator, and we chatted while I let the engine run.

Nervously, I stole several glances at my watch.

While we chatted, my radiator cap had fallen to the ground, and as I stooped to pick it up, my New Testament fell from my pocket. Hurriedly, I put the Testament back in my pocket, replaced the radiator cap, slammed the hood down, and hopped in the car.

“Thank you for the water!” I called out as I sped out of the driveway. “I may still make it on time,” I thought.

But almost immediately, a disquieting feeling overcame me. The Lord was telling me, “I wanted you to talk to him about Me.”

But I was cutting it awfully close getting to my speaking engagement. “It’s too late,” I argued. “I can’t go back now.”

“I want you to go back.”

“But he’ll think I’m crazy! What would I talk about?”

“I want you to talk to him about his soul. Go back.”

“But I’m already late for the meeting . . .”

“Go back.”

So, after arguing with God for two or three miles, I turned the car around and went back. Down the mountain. Into the driveway.

“What can I do for you?” he asked. “Did you forget something?”

I got out of the car, closed the door, and leaned against the body of the car. “Yes, sir,” I answered. “I forgot to talk to you about Jesus.”

His eyes looked straight into mine for a moment. “Come inside.” He spun around to lead me into his house.

He had been active in church all his life, until several years before when an argument with a church member had prompted him to leave the church. Since then, he had had nothing to do with God.

“You know, it’s a very interesting coincidence. There’s a revival campaign going on in my old church. My wife has been going every night, but I haven’t gone.

“But,” he continued, “I’ve been thinking about what I’ve been missing. And I believe God sent you back just to give me the added encouragement I need to get my life straightened out with Him.”

He called his wife in from the kitchen to join us. “Would you pray with us—for me?” he invited. We got on our knees, and I remember the man’s wife shedding tears of joy as her husband asked the Lord to forgive him for his waywardness and to take control of his life from that moment on.

The Lord had prepared him. And on that particular day, it was more important to Him that I be a few minutes late for a meeting and touch a soul who was ready to renew his walk with the Lord.

—Bill Bright

Brother O’Neal

I would like to introduce you to Brother O’Neal, as we affectionately called him. He grew up on a very poor farm in East Texas. Actually, the family was so poverty-stricken that he had to be taken out of school after the

fifth grade and put in the field to help the family survive. That constituted all the formal education he ever received. He labored long and hard in the hot East Texas sun, tilling the fields. After he came of age, he moved to Fort Worth, Texas. There he married, and a small family came along. He worked hard in Fort Worth as he gave himself to his tasks.

One day, he decided he would build a little frame house. After he saved up a few hundred dollars and secured a small loan from a bank, he banged together a small structure with his own hands. He did a creditable job, and somebody wanted to buy the house. He sold it at a modest profit. He then built another and sold it, then another and another until he became a very successful house builder.

His was the typical success story: a poor farm boy goes to the city, works hard, and makes good. But that was far from Brother O’Neal’s greatest genius. I have never personally known anyone as adept at leading others to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through personal witnessing as Brother O’Neal. Nor have I ever known anyone so utterly committed to doing so.

There was no human situation in which this good man would not share his faith. He would witness to waitresses in restaurants and to service station attendants. He and I planted a church in Fort Worth. Night after night we would go out visiting in homes in a small Fort Worth community, and I saw him in a matter of minutes lead an entire family to faith in Christ. The gift this man had in sharing the good news of our Lord was incredible.

On one occasion, one of my seminary classmates came to him and said, “Brother O’Neal, I wish you would sometime have the opportunity to witness to my father; he is not a Christian.” Brother O’Neal was a big man—he weighed some 300 pounds and stood more than six feet tall. He had a booming voice to match his frame, and he blurted out in his typical fashion, “I’ll just go witness to your father right now.” It was not unusual to hear O’Neal react like that, but a logistical problem intruded. The conversation was taking place in Fort Worth, Texas, and the father lived in Sumter, S.C., more than 1,000 miles away. But this layman immediately went home. His lovely, understanding wife packed a few things in a suitcase; he threw the suitcase into the back seat of his car; and off he went to South Carolina to witness to one man.

He came back a few days later, jumped out of the car, and said, “I have just had the time of my life. The first person I ran into in Sumter, S.C., was the sheriff, and I had the joy of leading him to Jesus.”

I do not know how he encountered the sheriff, but he would share his faith with whomever he encountered. And, yes, he found the father and had the joy of leading him to the Lord Jesus Christ. He sought souls, as the old expression has it, continually and constantly and unabatedly. The stories that emerged out of this man’s personal life of witnessing are at times almost unbelievable.

Now Brother O’Neal was not a preacher, never served as a deacon, never taught a Sunday School class, and never held a place of prominence or lead-

ership in the church, although he was very faithful to his church. Yet he won literally hundreds of people to faith in Christ. Moreover, he had no particular method of leading people to Christ. He was not given to Bible memorization, although he was a faithful student of the Bible. He did not have a “pat plan” of witnessing, although that is helpful to some. He would simply share the Lord Jesus Christ in his own inimitable way. It was so utterly refreshing to see him share Christ. He taught many of us young preachers more than we perhaps ever learned through textbooks and classrooms.

O’Neal went everywhere, constantly taxing himself to share the Lord Jesus with others. He burned out his life. He became very ill. He was in the Baptist hospital in Birmingham, Ala., and surgery became mandatory. On the day of the operation, as a nurse came in to prepare him for the operating room, you can imagine what happened. Brother O’Neal did his best to lead that nurse to faith in Christ. He came back from the surgery, and though he lived a short time thereafter, he was never really able to leave the hospital again. One of his last conversations on earth was an attempt to lead someone else to Jesus; then he went to be with God. What a fitting way for this man to end his life, sharing the Lord Jesus! He was “just a simple layman,” but what a power for Christ. He had his priorities right. That is the point: He knew what mattered most and gave himself unreservedly to it.

Granted, we may not all be as gifted in personal evangelism as Brother O’Neal, but we can all be as committed, get our priorities in their proper places, and do what we can to lead others to Jesus. That is vital and essential. We must have proper priorities if we are to see revival come and see what God can do through us. We are to take our part in fulfilling Christ’s commission. If we are not “there” in our spiritual lives, we need a fresh touch of the Holy Spirit to revive us.

—Lewis Drummond

David Restores the Ark

Remember that King David had decided to bring the ark of the covenant into the city of Jerusalem. For some years it rested at a site outside Jerusalem, after it had been captured and released by the Philistines. David set about doing the work in what he thought was a very fine fashion. He had workmen build a cart—the best they could build. The leaders set the ark of the covenant on the cart and began a procession into the city of Jerusalem. There were singers and praisers, and they were having a glorious time. David was even leading the entourage, “dancing before the Lord.” (2 Sam. 6:16, RSV) Everything progressed well until one of the oxen stumbled. At that point, a man, apparently well-meaning, reached out to steady the ark, and God struck him dead. What went wrong? Everything seemed to be in order. They had spared no expense. They had put their minds to the task and were doing the best they could conceive. It was even God’s will to bring the ark of the covenant into the city of Jerusalem. Yet, God struck the man dead and brought the whole affair to an abrupt stop.

One day, some three months later, David was reading God’s Laws. In his Bible he discovered that God had prescribed a way of transporting the ark. It was to be carried on staves on the shoulders of the priests, not on a cart drawn by oxen. Someone has facetiously said that upon reading that passage, David probably scratched his head and said, “I wondered what those metal loops on the bottom of the ark were for.” So David discarded the cart and the oxen. He enlisted the priests and got some staves, and, with the ark now securely fastened onto the staves and the staves on the shoulders of the priests, they began a parade into the city of Jerusalem. The singers were singing, the praisers were praising, and David was dancing. As they entered through the city gate, a genuine revival broke out as the ark of the covenant came home. The conclusion is obvious: We must do God’s work God’s way, and that way is discovered in the pages of the Bible. The church must be organized on scriptural principles. The programming must be done in line with the Word of God. If we expect God’s blessings on our work of bringing others to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no escape from that very basic programming principle.

—Lewis Drummond

Saul and the Amalekites

A classic example of the obedience principle is found in the Old Testament when King Saul came back from the defeat of the Amalekites. God had instructed him to obliterate everything that breathed in the Amalekite community, and God granted him a wonderful victory. Saul slew all the people in that wicked nation. As he returned to Israel, he was met by Samuel. When Saul saw the old prophet, he said, “Blessed be you to the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord” (1 Sam. 15:13, RSV). At that moment a sheep bleated and a cow mooed. The old prophet Samuel’s ears perked up and he said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear,” (1 Sam. 15:14, RSV)?

That put King Saul on the spot. He had not fully obeyed as God had instructed him. He was to slaughter everything that breathed, including the animals. It is safe to suppose that Saul decided he would get “religious” on the old prophet and thereby attempt to put him off. So the king replied, “The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord” (1 Sam. 15:15, RSV).

Samuel got right down to the heart of the real issue, however, when, with his piercing eyes and words that must have cut Saul to the heart, he said, “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to harken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22, RSV). God is not concerned with our religiosity, but our absolute obedience. He will only give the fullness of the Holy Spirit when we are completely surrendered to His will in our lives. He fills us for His glory, not ours or our church.

—Lewis Drummond

The Prayer Principle

There is a beautiful story that illustrates this principle in the Old Testament. When Jacob was on his way back to his father's home with his wives and children and with the flocks he had manipulated out of the hands of his uncle Laban, a servant rode into his camp saying Jacob's brother Esau was coming with 400 armed men. I am sure when Jacob heard that news he almost passed out. He had fled from his brother Esau some years earlier because Esau had threatened to kill him. Now Esau was on his way to meet Jacob with 400 armed men. What would happen?

The name "Jacob" can be translated "supplanter," or "crafty one," or in twentieth-century terminology, "con artist." And he was good at his trade. He had worked his uncle Laban out of his flocks and he was now fleeing with Laban hot on his trail. Still, he was something of God's man, and so he uttered a very quick panic prayer—something like, "O God, I am not worthy of the least of Your mercies. Please help me." He probably thought, "Well, that takes care of the spiritual thing, now I'll put my mind to work in my usual crafty fashion." So he arranged a series of gifts and sent them out before him. Then he divided his family into two groups. His reasoning was if the gifts did not soften his brother's heart, perhaps the first set of family would, and, even if Esau slaughtered them, perhaps he would not obliterate the second group of wives and children. So Jacob had everything in place. But then it haunted him: Would this suffice, would this satisfy an angry brother? At that stage, Jacob did the wisest thing he had done since Bethel, when he first met God on the night he saw the ladder ascending into heaven.

Jacob went to the other side of the river Jabbok, and there he met a man and began to wrestle with him. But it was not a man at all. He was actually wrestling with God. Events went something like this.

He grappled with the "man" and cried, "I will not let you go until you bless me." The man shot back, "Let me go."

"No," cried Jacob, "I will not let you go, now, until you bless me."

"Let me go or I will touch your thigh," said the man, "and you will limp through life." "You may touch me," Jacob declared, "but I will not let you go until you bless me." And the hours of the night passed away in the struggle. Finally, the man asked, "What is your name?" Of course, God knew Jacob's name, but he wanted Jacob to understand it.

"My name is Jacob," said the crafty one, no doubt with the thought, "but I'm at the end of my tether; my craftiness has not been sufficient."

Then the man declared, "No, your name is no longer Jacob, your name is now Israel, one who prevails with God." And the drama ends as the morning rays of the new day break across the horizon. There silhouetted on the sand dune are Esau and his brother Israel in an affectionate, reconciling embrace.

The conclusion: God gives victory to those who prevail with God in fervent, wrestling prayer. If we are to evangelize, we must know what it is to storm heaven's gates, take the kingdom with prayer, and watch God do reviving miracles. Prayer is the answer. Oh, how most of us need reviving on that issue.

—Lewis Drummond

Coming Home to the Family

I travel around the country just enough to know that I don't like it. And every time I pull into our subdivision, every time I pull into my driveway, I'm thinking about just one thing: getting a kiss from my wife and a hug from my boy. Now, I can't ever imagine pulling into my driveway, closing my garage door, and sitting there thinking, "Do I have to? Do I have to get out and go in? She's probably going to want to kiss me, and that baby is going to slobber all over me." No, just the opposite is true. I'm out of that car before it comes to a stop. I'm running in the door. The luggage comes later. I want to be close to the ones I love. I want to be with them. Why? Because I know them and they know me.

My friend, when you get close to Jesus—I mean really intimately close to Jesus—you'll want other people to know Him like you know Him, and nothing else will substitute. You can really know people well if you do one thing: spend some time with them. In fact, if you give me just 30 minutes with a guy, I'll tell you in 30 minutes what makes his clock tick. You know how? I can tell by listening to what he talks about in the conversation. The reason most Christians talk so very little about Jesus is because they know Jesus so very little.

—Terry Fields

A Boy with Four Birds

S.D. Gordon told the story one day about meeting a little boy who was carrying a bird cage with four field sparrows in it. He walked up to the little boy and said, "Son, what have you there?"

The little boy looked up and said, "Oh, I have four of these little birds that I've caught."

Gordon said, "What are you going to do with those birds?"

The little boy said, "Well, I figure I'll play with them a little while. I have a stick that I like to poke them with. And after that, I'll probably feed them to my cat."

S.D. Gordon's eyes fell down and looked at the birds. He said, "Son, how about I buy those birds from you?"

The little boy said, "Oh, mister, you don't want these birds. These are just field sparrows. They're as common as they can be; you can find them anywhere." Gordon reached into his pocket and all he had was four dollars. He said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you two dollars for the birds and two dollars for the cage."

The little boy couldn't believe it. "Four dollars for these birds and the cage?" He said, "You've got a deal."

The little boy took the money and ran off. S.D. Gordon said he took that cage out into a field, and he opened up the door. He had to tap the back of the cage before the birds would fly away. As they flew away, he could almost hear them chirping, "We're free, we're free." Just like a bullet, the thought entered his mind: One day Jesus came to the devil and said, "Hey, devil, what are you going to do with all those people in your cage?" The devil said,

“Well, they’re just a few old sorry sinners. I’m going to play with them a little bit; and I’m going to jab them a little bit; then I’m going to destroy them.” Jesus said, “How much would you take for those people?”

“Oh, listen, Jesus, You wouldn’t want these old sinners: You can find them anywhere. They’re sorry, they’re rebellious, they’re evil. You don’t want to have anything to do with them.” Jesus said, “How about all of My blood? It’s all have.” The devil said, “You’ve got yourself a deal.”

—Terry Fields

A Girl with Leukemia

A little girl was dying of leukemia. The disease was in the later stages, and she was lying in a hospital bed. Her mother came in and found the little girl’s face pale and cool. She had lost a lot of weight. The doctor said she only had a few days to live. It was just a matter of time. The mother started crying over her little girl. The little girl looked up and said, “Mommy, please don’t cry.” The mother said, “Honey, sometimes I have to cry because I’m afraid.” She said, “Mommy, please don’t cry for me.”

Then the little girl said, “Remember last year when we had that picnic together? Do you remember that bee that was flying around you when you were trying to put out the food? Do you remember how he landed on your arm and he stung you and you said ‘ouch’? Then, before you could swat him and kill him, he flew around and landed on me. Do you remember that, Mommy?”

The mother said, “Yes.”

“Do you remember what you told me? You said, ‘Bees only have one stinger and once they sting somebody, they can’t sting anymore.’ Mommy, if the devil stung Jesus, he can’t sting me anymore.”

That’s what we must tell a lost world. That’s the bait we must fish with. We must tell people that there is hope; there is an answer; there is a reason to live.

—Terry Fields

The Loss of Lee

His name was Lee. He loved to play basketball. He played at a Baptist church in Fort Worth, Tex., where a goal had been set up in a corner of the parking lot. Dozens of boys would play out on the lot every day. They would have pickup games well into the night. But nobody ever came out to the boys to invite them to Sunday School. Nobody ever walked out and told the boys that he or she cared about them and that Jesus died for them.

A few years later, Lee moved away from that neighborhood. He got mixed up in the wrong crowd. He started reading all kinds of political theory. In fact, Lee was sucked into a socialistic, communistic way of life, and he actually spent some time in Russia after he was discharged from the Army. He was a deeply troubled young man. A few months after

he returned from the Soviet Union, in the summer of 1963, the newspapers one Friday afternoon carried the headline: “Lee Harvey Oswald Shoots President John F. Kennedy.”

Could history have been altered if someone had walked out to Lee Harvey Oswald when he was playing basketball on a Baptist church parking lot in Fort Worth, Texas, and told him about Jesus? The most tragic presidential event of our lifetime could have been avoided. We’ll never know, because one church wouldn’t “fish for men.”

—Terry Fields

Saved from Quicksand

One of my favorite stories is told by Stephen Olford, who I think is one of the greatest preachers alive today. It is a story of his boyhood days. He was reared in Angola, West Africa, the son of missionary parents. He was often hard-pressed to find something enjoyable to do with his time. Olford developed a love for recreation and hunting, particularly goose hunting. He said one day he left the mission compound and went through the brush out to a marshy area. There he constructed his blind. He waited for the geese to come in. He said it wasn’t long before three or four geese came in. He stood and shot two or three times, and two geese fell to the water. Getting out of his blind, he went cautiously to retrieve his geese.

As he approached the first goose, he was looking for any movement. There was no movement; the goose was dead, and he retrieved it. He proceeded to the second one. As he approached the second goose, he noticed there was a twitch of the wing, a movement of the head. He knew the bird was not completely dead. He could shoot it again but he would destroy the meat. He would try to retrieve the wounded fowl. So, very cautiously, he approached the goose. When he drew near, the goose jumped up, ran out across the top of the water. He would try again. He noticed the wing of the bird was broken, so, when he got within eight or 10 feet again, the bird jumped up and ran out across the top of the water again. He repeated this procedure numerous times. Olford decided he would change his tactic. He thought if he could get within 10 or 12 feet and make a quick lunge forward with the length of his arm and body, he could capture the wounded goose.

He executed his plan. He made the lunge. His fingers went through the feathers and the goose ran ahead. This time something was altogether different. He had stepped into a hole. Immediately he realized it was quicksand, and he started to sink down, down, down. As any dying man would, he began to cry at the top of his voice, “Help! Help! Anybody help me,” not knowing if anybody anywhere could hear him. His voice went ringing back through the brush country, back to the mission compound. There, a mission servant heard him. He found out later that the servant began immediately to run through the brush to Olford’s aid.

This immaculately dressed, refined servant had on a beautiful white jacket. He neared the marshy area. Olford, by this time, had the waters up around his mouth and nostrils, and he thought he was going down for the last time. The servant saw his trouble, sized up the situation, never broke stride, and came out across the marsh. As the servant ran, he stripped his beautiful white jacket off his back.

The servant ran right up to Olford and almost instinctively knew where to stop. He gave a sling of his jacket as Olford was going under. Making a death grab, Olford caught hold of the jacket, and the servant pulled him out to safety. Olford uses the story to introduce the gospel in a nutshell. The Lord Jesus Christ, 2,000 years ago, stepped down off the portals of glory, stripped off the coat of righteousness to identify with sinful humanity, and gave a sling of the coat of righteousness.

—Richard Harris

The Rescue of Jessica

Several years ago, I flew down to Midland, Texas, to speak at an evangelism conference. I had never been to Midland, but was excited to go, because I had closely followed the story of little Jessica. You remember Jessica. She was the little girl who fell into an abandoned well shaft. I was glued to the television news reports as they kept the nation updated on the condition of this little girl. I was moved as I watched an entire community drawn together by the plight of a helpless, frightened child. Finally, the decision was made that the best way to rescue the little girl was to drill an intersecting shaft alongside the abandoned shaft that had become Jessica's prison.

As I watched that newscast, I wondered to myself what would have been Jessica's plight if the operation had been left up to the local church. We might have heard people argue about the relative merits of the various options for rescuing the little girl. Some may have debated the wisdom of sinking an intersecting shaft. "It may not work." "I don't think we should do anything until we have the perfect tool."

Sounds vaguely familiar, doesn't it? "I don't like the canned approach to evangelism. I'm waiting till I find a better tool." While we wait and debate, lost children are dying, separated from their Heavenly Father.

Let me suggest one possible final scene: The decision has been made that the only way to rescue the child is to sink the intersecting shaft, yet they hesitate because the cost is so great. They interview the parents of little Jessica and question whether the rescue should continue. The father then calmly declares that they have been weighing the decision carefully and have decided to call off the rescue because of the cost. The family has been wanting for years to add on a room to their house to make it more comfortable for their growing family. They have also determined to re-carpet the house to make it more comfortable for the rest of the family. They can't afford to both redo the house and rescue Jessica,

and the family has voted to finish the house and abandon the rescue of Jessica.

We would have been incensed, unbelieving. Yet many churches today have abandoned the rescue of lost children and people because it seems too expensive and requires too much exertion. Instead they have decided to make the house more comfortable for the family that remains.

—Ken Hemphill

Kristina and the Precious Ring

A few years ago, Paula and I, with our three girls, returned to England for a visit. My oldest daughter, Kristina, had been born while we were studying in Cambridge. We wanted our girls to see the place that was so special to us and to meet our many English friends.

Kristina had received her mom's permission to wear one of Paula's rings while on vacation. The ring was not an expensive one, but it was precious. I had given the ring to Paula on our first anniversary. It was a small gold ring with a few diamond chips surrounding a tiny emerald. If you want to know how tiny, just remember that I was entering seminary when I purchased it.

On the flight over, I noticed that Kristina was fidgeting with the ring, switching it from one finger to the next. When I cautioned her about losing the ring, she explained that the ring was a little small for her ring finger, but a little large for her pinky finger. She was thus trying to discover where it would fit best. She finally settled on wearing it loosely on her pinky. We arrived in London early the next morning and were met by our English friends. We had planned a busy first day, with a stop at Windsor Castle and a visit to one of the beautiful botanical gardens outside of London. Our day was to culminate with a nice meal with our friends and an early evening to bed. This was designed to combat travel fatigue and the time change.

After all this and a warm shower, I was relaxed and ready for a refreshing night's sleep. As I approached the bed, I noticed a note affixed to my wife's pillow. I read: "Dear Mom, I lost your ring. Please don't be too mad." I handed the note to my wife and started to crawl into bed.

"What are you doing?" she inquired.

"Going to bed," I replied, with a hint of sarcasm.

"Aren't you going to look for my ring?"

"You must be kidding! I've been up for nearly two days. We've been all over London, and you want me to look for your ring."

Needless to say, I crawled out of my comfortable bed and began my search. We looked all over the house; we scoured the grounds around the house; we trekked back out to the tennis court where the kids had played earlier in the afternoon; but no ring was to be found.

The thoroughness of the search was in direct correlation to the preciousness of the object. That ring held a special meaning to us that made

it worth far more than the value of the gold and the chips of diamond. How thorough has been your search for those persons who are missing from your Sunday School class or church? How precious are they to you? To their Heavenly Father?

—Ken Hemphill

Rescuing Animals

Recently I flew to Alaska to participate in the state Evangelism conference. In one of my messages, I told the story of the three whales that were entrapped in an icy potential tomb. One of the pastors later told me that that national spectacle had taken place near his church.

You may recall the event, which received national attention. Three whales had become imprisoned in the ice and were unable to swim to warmer water. We watched as the smaller one gave up the struggle and sank beneath the waves. The larger two struggled for life as the locals risked life and limb to free the trapped whales. Locals stood on the edge of the icy precipice with huge chain saws, trying to cut a path to safety. Finally, a Soviet icebreaker steamed to the rescue.

That same year, dead and dying dolphins began to wash up on the shores of Virginia and the Carolinas. I remember it well because I was pastoring in Norfolk, Va. People from around the United States converged on Virginia Beach. Some sported “Save the Dolphins” T-shirts. Fund-raising efforts began. The press showed pictures of business executives walking up and down the beach during their lunch breaks. They were seeking for dead or dying dolphins, hoping that someone could discover the cause of death and stop the needless loss.

I appreciate the sacrifice and diligence of those who are moved to seek the dying whales and dolphins. We ought to be concerned by environmental issues. But where is our concern for lost people, dying from the lethal effects of sin? Why aren't we willing to comb our neighborhoods looking for our lost brothers and sisters in Christ? What have you done to find God's lost people? What will you commit to do right now?

—Ken Hemphill

Eskimo Priorities

It has been said that Eskimos probably enjoy food more than any people in the world. One man reported seeing six Eskimo men eat 50 pounds of meat in one sitting! Yet, while hunting for seal, an Eskimo will stand motionless over a hole in the ice for many hours, even days, forgetful of food in his or her intense eagerness to spear a great seal. Hunting takes priority over eating at certain times. Eskimos understand that ineffective hunting means insufficient eating. The long-range goal becomes more important than the short-range goal! For Jesus, the long-term goal (mankind's salvation) was more critical than the short-term need (His empty stomach).

—James Henry

Preach with a Broken Heart

The other day I heard someone tell about a pastor who was invited by a Pulpit Committee to visit a prospective church field. The first day he was there, the chairman of deacons took him out to see the brand new pastorium that they had just completed.

“Preacher,” he said, “we've just built this home at a cost of more than \$70,000, and if you'll come and be our pastor, you'll have the privilege of being the first person to live in it. And not only that, we'll pay you \$40,000 a year salary, buy you a new car every January, and provide for all your incidental expenses. All we expect you to do is to preach with a broken heart.”

“Preach with a broken heart?” he replied. “What is there to be brokenhearted about?”

I suppose that story was intended to be humorous, but it really wasn't very funny, for it has about it the deadening ring of familiarity. There are hundreds of churches all over this country who feel exactly that same way. As a traveling evangelist, I see them all the time. Week after week, I preach in churches, many of which are blessed with material and financial prosperity unequaled in the history of Christendom. And yet, how very rare it is to find a congregation made up of brokenhearted folks who actually weep over those who are lost and headed for hell.

—Junior Hill

Weeping Over the Wrong Things

The other day, I conducted a revival meeting in a big, influential church. From a numerical and denominational standpoint, that congregation is outstanding in every detail. They have one of the most beautiful and elaborate buildings I have ever seen. Their auditorium will seat almost 1,500 people, but on the last night of the meeting, I do not exaggerate to say, there couldn't have been more than 75 folks present for the service.

I preached the sermon and gave the invitation, and, as you could well imagine, the service was cold and barren. I was so disappointed, I wanted to rush out the side door, go to my motel room, and be alone for a while. But I had to stand down at the front and shake hands with a few of those sweet folks who were kind enough to come by and try to encourage me.

As I stood there shaking hands with those who came around, I saw a man approaching with a troubled look upon his brow, and with a trembling voice he took my hand and said, “Preacher, we lost, didn't we?” I felt my heart leap with joy, and I thought, “Lord, here's a fellow who's seen the spiritual barrenness and poverty of this church and he's come to share my burden with me.” I rejoiced in his apparent brokenness.

But then all of a sudden it occurred to me that I ought to ask him what he meant by that, so I said, “Brother, what do you mean, ‘we lost?’” With real tears welling up in his eyes, he sadly replied, “Preacher, Ten-

nessee got beat today!”

Now listen to me, dear Christian. The tragedy of that story is simply this—that pitiful man is but the visible evidence of a vast unseen multitude just like him who come to our churches every Sunday morning. They sit in our pews. They teach in our classes. They sing in our choirs. Sometimes they even preach in our pulpits. And yet they do it all without the brokenness and contrition of a crushed heart.

—Junior Hill

The Power of Heaven on Our Hands

Anywhere there is a preacher or church who will accept the principles of the Word of God and will faithfully implement God’s cure for barrenness, the blessings of heaven will invariably come.

I saw that truth dramatically demonstrated in my own life several months ago. I had been invited to conduct a revival meeting at a rather large evangelistic church, and, for a number of weeks prior to the meeting, I had an unusual burden that the Lord would do something out of the ordinary. It seemed my heart was broken with an intense hunger to see folks get saved. As I began to pray about the meeting, I asked the Lord if there was something definite He wanted me to pray for. My heart was deeply impressed that I should ask Him to save at least 200 souls during that week of revival. So, for a number of days prior to the meeting, I prayed this earnest prayer: “Lord, please save at least 200 souls in that revival.” Over and over again I prayed that prayer.

Well, the week came, and I delivered the same simple sermons I had preached in a hundred other places before, but, oh, how different it was that week! The power of heaven was upon my words. It turned out to be one of those meetings where the Lord falls upon a place, and you get caught up in the wonder of what He is doing. I left that meeting not fully knowing all that the Lord had done. When I got back to my home the next week, I went to the mailbox one day, and there was that church’s bulletin reporting on the previous week’s revival. And right there on the front of the bulletin in large, bold type were these words—“Hallelujah for revival blessings—200 professions of faith!”

Praise God! Hallelujah to His dear name!

If the charismatic folks want to believe that they have a corner on Christian joy, then let them. But, brother, I have news for them. The days of old-time shouting Baptists aren’t over yet! When I saw that bulletin and I realized that God had done exactly what I asked Him to do, I wanted to lift my grateful hands to heaven and to the top of my voice triumphantly shout, “It works! It works! Praise God, it works!”

—Junior Hill

A Day of Good News

There is a story in the Old Testament. It is about four men who were lepers. A famine was in the land, and they decided that rather than die, they would take a chance and go to the camp of the enemy. But what they did not know was that the Lord had gone before them. He had scattered the enemy, and when they arrived, they went into the camp and ate and drank their fill.

These four men, on the brink of death, suddenly have their fill of food and drink, and all the wealth they could imagine, left from their scattered enemy. Second Kings 7:9 (RSV), however, records the moment they came to their senses: “Then they said to one another, ‘We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news; if we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us; now therefore come, let us go and tell the king’s household.’” So they did, and the city was fed.

It was a day of good news. And the city was fed because of the discovery of these four men and their willingness to announce the good news. They had dared to chart the deep waters—to not do things as usual.

—Ron Johnson

Budget Evangelism

I will never forget the first time I went to First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. I was a college student. This was one of the largest churches in the world and the largest church in the Southern Baptist Convention. I was thrilled over the opportunity to visit this legendary congregation while I was in Dallas for a weekend. It was awesome! The choir loft stretched from one side of the balcony, down across the platform, and then all the way up to the balcony on the other side. They had a full symphony orchestra, and I had never seen anything like that in church before. The music was so dynamic that I wondered why they did not install seatbelts in the pews to keep people from floating off during the praise time.

We got to the time of the sermon, and Dr. Criswell stood up and said, “I’m going to do something that I have never done before.” I was thrilled, because that meant my only visit to the church would be an historical occasion! And then Criswell said, “I am going to read the church budget.” I’m thinking, “No, he won’t.” He’s thinking, “Yes, I will.” And at that 11 o’clock Sunday morning service, being carried live on television and radio, Dr. Criswell opened a folder, put on his glasses, and read line by line through the church budget. For 30 minutes, he read the church budget.

By the time he finished, I was bored almost to tears. In fact, I was more than bored. I was mad at his waste of an opportunity to preach the gospel and call people to salvation! To my surprise, he indicated that an invitation would be extended in spite of the unusual nature of his “mes-

sage.” I thought we would surely beat the Methodists and Catholics to the cafeteria today. He closed his file folder, took off his glasses, put them in his pocket, and began the invitation.

Twenty minutes later people were still responding—coming down the aisles, coming from the back, and coming from the balcony. I said to myself, “I’m going to get a copy of that budget for my next revival.” I envisioned a whole new approach to evangelism: budget revivals! Collect budgets from the great evangelistic churches of the world and read their budgets instead of preaching.

The invitation was finally over, and Criswell began introducing people who had made their decisions for Christ to the congregation: “Oh, glory, glory, Tom come and stand here, lad. This is Tom. Some of you may recognize Tom. He is a sportscaster on one of our local stations, and now he comes giving his life to Jesus. Oh, glory. Bob, Mary—come and stand with Tom. You don’t recognize Bob or Mary, but they are on the other side of those cameras showing Tom, this good looking lad, and they have been telling Tom about Jesus. Now Tom comes to be saved.”

On and on he went, introducing each one who made a decision that day. In most cases, he pointed out somebody in the congregation who had been witnessing to them. Slowly it dawned on me. The secret to First Baptist, Dallas, was more than the man behind the pulpit; it was the people in the pews telling the people they knew about Jesus. The secret to every great church is not just a great pastor. It is a great congregation who leaves church each week to go and tell the people they know about Jesus.

—Chuck Kelley

Cowards for Christ

I’ve been thinking about starting an organization called Cowards for Christ for people who are afraid to witness. I have been working on the membership criteria. To be a member of Cowards for Christ you must show up for visitation, get your assignment, and, as you are going out to visit, you must pray feverently, “Oh, dear God, let no one be home.” Or, if you hand somebody a gospel tract and the ink is smeared because your palm was sweaty from being nervous, you could join Cowards for Christ. From this passage in 1 Corinthians 2:1-3, it sounds as if Paul could have been a charter member of Cowards for Christ!

I still remember the first time I learned this lesson. I have a friend who is an evangelist. He is a bold, fearless guy who will witness to anything that breathes. I went to hear him in a crusade, and afterward, we went out for dinner and a visit. At the table next to us was a group of 12 to 15 people. They were having a good time. And the more they drank, the better time they had. By the time we finished our meal, they were having a really good time. When we got up to leave the restaurant, my friend walked ahead of me. As he got to their table, he stopped; and I

said to myself, “Oh, no! Surely he won’t.” He did.

He said, “I see you people are having fun.”

“Oh, yeah, man, we are having a great time,” they replied.

“I love people who know how to have a good time.”

“Oh, man, that’s us. Come on, sit down and have a drink on us.”

He said, “As a matter of fact, I’m here in town this week telling everybody I can about Jesus Christ and the wonderful time He has given to me.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes, and I would love for you folks to come one night, because I would like to know somebody out in that crowd knew what a good time was all about.”

We walked out after he gave them a tract, and as we left, I said to myself, “Can you believe this guy and his boldness? I wish I had that kind of courage.”

We got outside in the street, and he said, “I find I have to do that to keep my courage up.”

Say what? He told me that the longer he went without telling someone about Jesus, the harder it was for him to open his mouth. That was like the experience of the apostle Paul.

—Chuck Kelley

Using Your Strength

When she was in the second grade, my oldest sister began dating the guy who would become her husband. That meant he was around our house all the time when I was growing up. He felt his role in life was to give me a hard time, and he took the responsibility seriously. He would tickle me; he would beat me up; he would hassle me; and I had no chance at all, because he was so much older and stronger than I was.

By the grace of God and in answer to my prayers, they got married and moved away. They came back for a visit one weekend, and by this time I was a sophomore in high school. They arrived very late that night, and everybody was asleep. My brother-in-law walked in the front door, dropped his suitcase, ran up the stairs and down the hall, threw open the door to my bedroom, jumped on top of me, and began to tickle me. I was sacked out and in a deep sleep. I had absolutely no idea what was going on around me. All I knew was that something was on top of me that I didn’t like. Without thinking, I simply picked him up and threw him against the wall. The rules changed that night. He never bothered me again. I don’t know how long I could have handled him. I was so accustomed to my weakness, I never noticed my strength, until I used it.

—Chuck Kelley

The Witnessing Muscle

One Saturday afternoon when I was a student, the manager of our church softball team called in search of one additional player in order to

avoid forfeiting a game. I didn't have anything that needed to be done that afternoon, so I agreed to play. I arrived just as the game was getting under way and asked him where he wanted me to play.

He said, "I need you to play catcher, and, by the way, this is a double-header. We need you for two games."

I had never played catcher before, but I figured, "How hard can it be?" All you do is bend down and catch the ball and then stand up and throw it back. I knew I could handle that assignment. What could be so bad about bending down and standing up over and over again?

We finished the two games, and I was a little tired and worn out. I went home, took a shower, and went to bed. I woke up the next morning, and, if I could have moved, the manager's wife would be a widow today. I have never hurt so bad in all of my life. It took me 15 minutes to sit up in bed. I discovered the anguish that can follow using a muscle you never used before.

Now here is the point of the story. I ended up playing in several games for the team that year. I always played catcher. By the end of that season, I could have caught for a triple-header and never felt it the next day. The difference was frequency of use. In the same way, the more you use your witnessing muscle, the more comfortable and confident you will become. The Holy Spirit places witnessing muscles in our souls, but they must be exercised to release the power. If you will only work through the awkwardness that comes with the first time that you do anything, you will discover the Lord making you an effective witness.

—Chuck Kelley

A Vision for the City

Eighteen years ago, I went to New Orleans to be part of a "think tank" with the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. It was dealing with strategies to reach the cities of America. A member of that think tank was E.V. Hill, who then was, and still is, pastor of a church in the Watts area of Los Angeles, Calif. Many things happened that week that I don't remember, but I never will forget his testimony. He shared how God had put a burden on his heart and had given him a vision for the area of Watts. He had claimed the entire community for God, a population of a million people.

Eighteen years ago, Jacksonville, Fla., didn't have a million people. We don't have a million people today. His testimony burned in my heart. As I came back from New Orleans, I thought, "It's no accident that God put this church in the heart of the city and has kept it and has blessed it in the heart of the city." When I got back, I shared with the folks on that Sunday morning what God had done in my own heart. I told how God had taken a few words from a preacher, burned a message in my heart, and expanded my vision. The Scripture says that where there is no vision, the people perish. God had given me a vision for the entire city of

Jacksonville—that we were to make every effort we could possibly make to present the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to every man, woman, and young person living in this city. We adopted as a slogan: "That Jacksonville May Know Christ."

We have sought to do that. The church has been very enthusiastic in its response. Of course, this is not the same church we had 18 years ago. This is not even the same church we had 10 years ago. The church is continually changing. The commitment we had then, we don't have now. The dedication is different. The people are different. But the command of our Lord has not changed. The commission of our Lord has not changed.

—Homer Lindsay Jr.

The Need for Power

I have a TV set in the house, and it won't work. The Olympics are coming soon, and I want to see those Olympics. I want to see those guys run dashes. I want to see them run those distances. I want to see the Dream Team play again. But my TV won't work. I fuss at it. I growl at it. I snarl at it. I say, "You sorry thing, you cost me a lot of money, and you won't work. The guarantees they give you are not worth the paper they are written on."

I just carry on. So, I'm going to appoint a committee.

"Shirley, you will be chair of this committee. We must have a committee to find out what's wrong with this TV."

So, Shirley has her first meeting and says, "Let's get an expert in here." She calls Steve Carswell, the repairman, to come over and fix the TV set.

Steve walks in and says, "What's the matter, preacher?"

"The sorry thing won't work. I've turned this button on and off until I've almost worn it out. It won't work. I want to get a picture on here, because the Olympics are coming and I want to see them."

Steve gets out his box, takes out his tools, pulls the set out, takes the back off, and looks over there and says, "What's this? Where does it go?"

I say, "I don't know."

He says, "Let's plug this in."

He plugs it in and turns it on. The picture comes right on.

"Preacher, you haven't had the TV set plugged into the power. You must have the power."

"I had a committee, even had Shirley as the chairperson."

"That doesn't matter; you must have the power."

Church, you must have the power. Church buildings won't do it, you must have the power. Music programs won't do it, church. You must have the power. The power comes from God.

—Homer Lindsay Jr.

Being Salted with Fire

Now frankly, I must admit that I don't understand all that this verse (Mark 9:49) means. In looking at it, it reminds me of an experience I had when I was a child. My mother took me to visit my uncle quite frequently. His name was Uncle Broad. He didn't live on a farm, but he did have some animals. At a certain time of the year, my uncle would kill hogs. After killing the hogs, he would take them to the smokehouse and bathe them in salt. Sometimes he would ask me if I would like to help him salt down a shoulder or a ham. He would be on one side of the salt bin on his knees, and I would be on the other side standing up. I can visualize myself now as a child, reaching down into that salt, taking two handfuls, and rubbing that salt all over that shoulder or ham. We did it for a pretty good while, and we would cover it extensively.

After a while he would say, "Now, it's ready." He would hang that shoulder or ham up in the smokehouse so that it would become a cured ham. The salt was rubbed in to preserve the ham.

I get a picture of hell as I see myself rubbing that salt into the flesh of a hog. Every individual who rejects Christ will be salted with fire. It is as if an individual will be preserved by that salt of fire to constantly burn without being consumed. That is not a very pleasant picture, but the Bible teaches us that an individual who rejects Jesus Christ as Savior will be separated from God in a place called hell to burn forever. Do we really believe that? If we really believed that, we would constantly be sharing our faith. I'm convinced that if we could just get a picture of a place like that, we would be eager to share with every person about the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

—Jerry Passmore

A Lost Man in Cape Coral

Tom Welch was a very wealthy man in the Cape Coral community, which is near Fort Myers, Fla. Three of us were visiting in his home. I was teaching two people how to share their faith by using the CWT presentation. In entering the home, I found a mother and a son who were saved, but the father, Tom Welch, was lost. After a while, Tom allowed us to share with him how he could invite Christ to come into his life.

When asked if he would like to invite the Lord to come into his life, initially he responded by saying no. Then I reminded him that his son was saved; that his daughter, who was away at college, was saved; that his wife was saved; and that the time would come when he would eventually be separated from his family. Tom couldn't take that. He responded by saying, "Preacher, my ears are ringing, and my head is swimming; I want to be saved." Tom Welch prayed to invite Christ to come into his life, and he was gloriously saved. The simplicity of the gospel penetrated his heart, and he invited Christ to come into his life.

—Jerry Passmore

A Senior at Montana State

I was preaching in Bozeman, Mont. In a restaurant on Tuesday night, I spoke to a beautiful young lady working as a cashier. She was a senior at Montana State University. I asked her where she went to church, and she said, "I don't go."

"Where did you go when you were young?" I asked.

She said, "Well, my dad took me to the Catholic Church."

Then I simply asked her these words, "Have you come to the place in your life where you know for certain that you have eternal life and that when you die, you're going to go to heaven?" She replied, "No, I haven't."

I said, "Do you want to?"

She said, "Yes."

Since she was working as a cashier, I had to move out of her way as she checked people through the line. I finally gave her an "Eternal Life" booklet, asked her to read it, and told her when she came to the end of the tract to pray the closing prayer and mean it from the depth of her heart. She said she would.

I went back to that restaurant on Wednesday night and noticed that her smile seemed even more beautiful than it had on Tuesday night. I asked if she had read the tract, and she responded with a yes.

"Did you pray that prayer?"

"Yes."

"Do you really believe that Jesus Christ has come into your life?"

She said, "Yes." Then she said, "Now, what do I do?"

I introduced her to a Baptist preacher in the area. Cathy prayed to invite Christ to come into her life.

—Jerry Passmore

A Fellow Baptist Pastor

Recently, Bill Anderson, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Clearwater, Fla., made a commitment at the end of a service in which I had preached. He asked God to place the image of two people in his mind and said that he would go witness to them. By letter, Bill shared with me that he asked God to reveal two men to him who were in his Sunday School class. Bill immediately went to see one man and led him to the Lord.

He told the class about that the next Sunday morning and stated that there was another man he was praying for and was planning to share with him. Bill wrote that while he was working in his garage the next week, this man drove up and said, "Preacher, I've got to talk with you." He continued, "That other man that God placed in your mind was me, wasn't it?"

Bill said it was and led him to a knowledge of Christ.

God placed these two men in his mind, and Bill was faithful to pursue them.

—Jerry Passmore

Witnessing with Tracts

I was in a church years ago, and this dear old lady came to me and said, “Brother Rios, I want to be a soul winner.”

I said, “Well, praise God alleluia.”

She said, “But I have a problem.”

I said, “What’s the problem?”

She said, “I can’t get too close to people.”

I said, “You don’t have to get too close to them.”

She said, “I can’t talk to people.”

I said, “You don’t have to talk to them.”

She said, “How do I do it?”

I said, “Give me your hand.” She gave me her hand, and I gave her a whole stack of tracts.

I said, “Take those with you. Now, tomorrow morning don’t change anything; do what you always do on Monday. Get up in the morning, read your Bible and pray, have your quiet time before you do anything else. Let’s say you go over to the grocery store and you have to buy some green beans. Well, then, go on to the store. Let’s say you have your cart at the store. Put your purse right there in the place where the child goes, keep it open, have the tracts out on top.”

She said, “How will I know it is time to talk to someone?”

I said, “Honey, don’t worry, you will know.”

Your throat gets dry; your stomach gets nervous; your knees get weak; you think it’s the flu, but it is not the flu.

Let’s get honest, folks. You know when God wants you to talk to someone about Jesus, don’t you? You know because the Holy Spirit tells you. When the Spirit tells you to talk to somebody, it’s because He is already preparing that person; He works at both ends.

I said, “Lady, learn to relax in faith; learn to relax in faith. Just keep pushing your little cart, park it over there by the green beans. You may know the people; you may not know them. But you see them, and God says, ‘Give that person a witness.’ Just relax in faith. Keep pushing your cart, reach in, and get your tract out. When you get about four feet from the person, with a real big smile, throw it and run. I mean, at least you can do that.”

—Herman Rios

A Minority Report

When I think about getting ready, I think about a young black family with one son that moved to South Texas. They moved into a community where everybody was Mexican, except them. The next day, when they went to enroll their son in school, they found everybody at school was Mexican, except this young black boy. He thought, “How am I going to get these Mexicans to accept me?” So he decided, “I am just going to excel in class.” And so, the teacher announced that the next day there would be a history exam, and it would be an oral exam. That young man

went home and stayed up all night—didn’t sleep. He memorized the book from cover to cover; he knew it. The next morning he went to school, and he was ready. The teacher says, “All right, let’s get ready for the test. First question: What was the name of the man who sailed across the Delaware River standing up in a boat, wore a white wig, was known as the father of our country, and was our first president?” The little boy raised his hand. He knew who he was, but the teacher just ignored him and called a little boy named Carlitos. She said, “Carlitos, what was his name?” Carlitos said his name was Jorge Washington. The little black boy said, “I knew that.”

The teacher said, “Second question: What was the name of the guy who rode on a horse, yelling, ‘The British are coming; the British are coming?’” This time the little boy got on the desk and waived both hands; he knew the answer. But the teacher ignored him, calling on a little girl named Carmelita. She said, “Carmelita, what was his name?” And Carmelita said his name was Pablo Rivera (Paul Revere).

This time the little boy got off the desk, grabbed his books, slammed them down, and said, “I am getting out of here; there is nothing but Mexicans everywhere you look.”

The teacher said, “Who said that?”

He said, “David Crockett, the Alamo.”

He was ready; I mean, he was ready.

Paul says, I am a debtor, then he says, I’m ready. And then he says in Romans 1:16 (KJV), “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”

—Herman Rios

Go to Hell

I was in Monterey, Mexico years ago, and I had to go downtown. I got on Constitution Blvd., and a young Mexican teenager pulled in front of me. He had the prettiest car you’ve ever seen, an antique. It was immaculate; it looked brand new. And I followed him, because the car was beautiful. But there was something about that car I will never forget. On the back of the car on the bumper, there was a bumper sticker, and the bumper sticker was in English. I don’t know if that young man spoke English or not, but this is what the bumper sticker said: “Go to hell.” “Go to hell.” And I followed him for seven or eight miles. God began to speak to my heart, and God said: “Do you see that?”

I said, “I see it.”

God said, “You don’t see it.”

I started getting upset. I said, “Lord, why do You say I don’t see it?”

He said, “You don’t see it.”

I said, “Tell me what I don’t see.”

And the Lord said, “Every time I give you an opportunity to tell someone about Jesus and you don’t take that opportunity, without saying a word, you just told that person to go to hell.

I said, "Lord, I would never tell anybody to go to hell." As far as I know, as far back as I can remember, I have never told anybody to go to hell. I said, "Lord, I would never do that; I would never tell anybody to go to hell."

He said, "But you do every week. My people do every day, when they don't tell someone about Jesus when they have the opportunity."

—Herman Rios

Give Her a Witness

I was preaching in Glorieta, N.M., years ago, to our missionary staff. It was a glorious week; God blessed that week. Oh, it was wonderful. One of my pastors was with me. We got back to the airport at Albuquerque, and we were standing in line to check in our luggage. We were eager to get back home. We had been there all week.

I was standing in line thinking about getting home, and God spoke to my heart, "See the lady behind the counter? Give her a witness."

I didn't want to do it. I said, "Now wait a minute, Lord. I've just preached three times a day for a whole week to all those missionaries. That should count for something." The Lord said, "Give that lady a witness."

I said, "Lord, there are people behind me. It's Friday afternoon, and there are people behind me who've been on the road all week. If I engage that lady in a witnessing conversation, these folks will miss their flights, and that wouldn't be fair."

He said, "Give her a witness."

I said, "Lord, this lady could lose her job. If I engage her in a witnessing conversation, she could lose her job, and that wouldn't be right."

He said, "Give her a testimony; give her a witness."

I said, "Lord, this is not the right place and this is not the right time to give a witness."

That was the wrong thing to say. Do you know what the Lord said? He said, "Son, if you are ever anywhere that is not the right place nor the right time to give a witness, you have no business being there."

Phewwww! So, when I got up to the counter, gave her my ticket, and put my luggage on the scale, I took one of my little tracts, and I put it on the counter. I said, "Ma'am, when you go to your coffee break, will you read that, please?"

She said, "All right."

That's all I had time to do, but it was something. I went on with my pastor. We went on to get some coffee. Thirty minutes later, we went to get on our flight. The airplane was going to be late.

About that time, I heard my name over the loud speaker, "Mr. Rios, please come to the counter."

When you are away from home and that happens, your heart starts beating really fast. You think something has happened at home, so I

hurried to the counter and said, "Yes, Ma'am."

She said, "Are you Mr. Rios?"

I said, "Yes, Ma'am."

"I just got a call from upstairs, from the ticket counter. The lady up there, where you turned in your luggage, told me not to let you on this plane." When she said that, I got scared. I thought, "Dear God, here we go."

I said, "Lady, I am Brother Rios. I am an evangelist. There is my pastor over there; I will go get him. I haven't done anything wrong. I am behaving myself. You have to let me on that plane; I want to go home."

She said, "No, no, the lady upstairs said not to let you on the plane until you left me a dozen of what you left up there."

I said, "What are you talking about?"

She said, "When you turned in your luggage, you gave that lady up there a Kojak." She said, "A Kojak." I said, "No, no, Kojak is a bald-headed detective on TV; I gave her a 'KLUJICS.'" (the name of the tract). So I counted 12 "KLUJICS," left them there, and went back over to drink my coffee with my pastor.

As soon as I got over there, that lady embarrassed me in front of the people waiting for the plane. She said, "Mr. Rios, get back over here!" And all the people behind her were watching me. As I was walking back, I know what they were thinking: "That dumb Mexican." You know, that was exactly what they were thinking.

I said, "What is it?"

Now the people were behind her and they were watching. And she said, "What in the world is 'KLUJICS'?"

And when she said that, I realized why the plane was late. It wasn't because of the schedule; it wasn't because of the weather; it was because holy God had a divine appointment with 90 people, and I was at the right place at the right time. Just like you are at the right place, at the right time, every day of the week.

Well, I didn't need a microphone. Since she asked, and since these people were looking to see, I said, "Ma'am, 'KLUJICS' means Keep Looking Up, Jesus Is Coming Soon. And this is how you get ready for His coming. . . ." In less than three minutes, I shared the plan of salvation with 90 people.

—Herman Rios

From Generation to Generation

I recently had one of the biggest thrills of my life. After I preached at a Southern Baptist seminary, a young student came up to me and asked, "Do you remember me?"

I said, "I don't think so."

He said, "When you were pastor at First Baptist Church of Warren, Ark., you came out to visit my mom and dad and led them to Christ. I

want to thank you for coming out that night. I'm now studying for the ministry."

I then remembered that this young man's father was a repairman and had worked on various things around the parsonage. I remember saying to myself, "Bailey, you get up and tell people to witness, but this man has been in your home a half-dozen times, and you have not even witnessed to him." So, one night I did go out on a gravel road in the country and was able to lead Harris Smith and his wife to Christ. They were baptized and immediately began to bring their children to our church. Now, their eldest son, Roland, is a ministerial student in one of our seminaries.

—Bailey Smith

Blood on Our Hands

Years ago in Kentucky, a family in a rural valley had the only radio within miles. On that little crystal-set radio, they heard that a tornado was spotted, and it was headed in the direction of the valley. The father sent his young son to warn the Renfros, their neighbors, of the coming storm and to advise them to get in the cellar. The boy ran out of the door, and, just a few yards from his home, he noticed a lone bird on the tree over his head. As boys will do, he picked up a rock and threw it at that bird, but missed it. After a moment or so that bird came back to that same limb. This time the rock was on target, and the little bird fell to the ground.

As the boy was holding the slain bird, he heard a terrible roar and noticed the ominous greenish-black clouds and, in their midst, a swirling tornado. Instantaneously, it struck the Renfro house and his horrified eyes saw four bodies thrown as straw out into the thick woods.

The little boy threw down the bird and ran to his home. The father had seen the tornado strike the Renfro home and the family destroyed. As the boy approached the front porch of his home, the father grasped him with his strong hands cupped on the shoulders of his son. He said, "Merle, you had plenty of time to warn the Renfro family. Why didn't you?"

He said, "Oh, Daddy, as I was going, I saw this bird in a tree and I threw this rock at it. I missed it, so I threw another one and hit it, and I was just holding the little bird when . . ." The father interrupted and said, "Merle, what's that on you hand?" He said, "Oh, that's the blood of that little bird." The father said, "No, son, that's the blood of the Renfro family that you never told."

I wonder if we too often get busy throwing rocks at birds and families go untold. If so, the words of Ezekiel 33:8 (KJV) ought to be considered: "When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand."

—Bailey Smith

The Rainbows Are Dead

The dilemma facing Americans today reminds me of one of my favorite stories. A young boy had gone to work with his father, who managed a small convenience service station. It was to be quality time with dad, and the lad took his bike so he would have plenty to do for the long shift. While he was at play, a thunderstorm moved in, and the boy was forced to abandon his bicycle and remain in the cramped glass cubicle with his father for the next couple of hours, the only relief being the beautiful rainbow he watched attentively through the sheets of the downpour. When the rain at last subsided, the youngster scampered outside to get a better look at the colors in the sky. The rainbow, however, was gone. The father, observing the boy between the advertisements pasted on the windows, noticed the boy staring at the ground, and just then the lad rushed back to the doorway. With tears in his eyes, he gushed out, "Daddy, the rainbows are dead and lying on the ground."

For many of us here tonight, that sentiment may express more than an observation about petroleum stains on a parking lot. Many of you feel that your rainbows are indeed lying dead on the ground. I can certainly relate to that feeling. I know what it feels like. I felt that way when my father left us. I felt that way when my mother was forced to give away my brother for financial reasons. I knew the abrupt slaughter of dreams and ideals when I was physically abused by more than one stepfather. I knew it again when I was arrested on drug charges. I know what that feeling is, but I also know Someone who can put the rainbows back in the sky.

—Jay Strack

Sterile Professionalism

I fear there is much sterile professionalism in the church today. Too often we view people as either objects or obstacles. I was in a service recently where there were many decisions for Christ. A large number of these were teenagers who had come out of horrible lifestyles; others were adults who had made many bad choices in life. They were coming to Christ! We were excited about the movement of the Spirit of God. But one of the church leaders there had a different perspective. "Oh, it was a good meeting," he commented afterward, "But the wrong kind of people were saved." How tragic! I didn't know there were any "wrong kinds of people." But if there were, I guess that when I came to Jesus, I was one of them, too. Yet, those who see with the vision of Jesus and care with the heart of Jesus will see people, not as obstacles or objects, but as opportunities to demonstrate the love of God.

I have a concern about much that is today called "church growth." We hear much about target groups, market shares, and specific audiences. We employ all these means in our crusades, and I did the same as a pastor. One of the dangers of all this, though, is the temptation to build new kinds of elitist, "homogenized" churches. New Testament evange-

lism, on the other hand, is knocking on every door in the city, no matter the age of the car in the driveway or the color of the faces behind the walls. Whoever lives there, we can have confident assurance that Jesus is the answer to the needs in that home. Is it a black family? Jesus bled on Calvary for that family. Are they Koreans? The heart of Jesus broke for them. Is it a young man with AIDS? The cross of Golgotha ran red for the soul of that ravaged young body.

—Jay Strack

Ron and Janet Greenfield

Several months ago, I read in USA Today one of the most moving stories I've ever heard. Ron and Janet Greenfield adopted twin boys from the former Soviet Union. It's a bit unusual to adopt twins. It's also a bit unusual to adopt from the Soviet Union. But it is even more unusual to adopt twin amputees. Not, however, if you are Ron and Janet Greenfield. In May 1969, Ron was shot down piloting a helicopter over South Vietnam. There was a flash of light and an explosion. That was the last he remembered until he awoke, lying in a rice paddy, in excruciating pain—pain so severe he kept blacking out. He came to two days later in an army evacuation hospital. To his horror, his leg had been amputated. The next year was one of pain and agony as skin grafts followed infections, and prosthesis was followed by often painful physical therapy.

Upon returning home, Ron experienced what many other veterans of that conflict experienced in this sad chapter in our history. I believe our nation has attempted to atone for our lack of support for these veterans, but that didn't negate the pain that many felt at that time. But, being a strong man, Ron began to work his way back to normalcy.

One day, while watching a report on CNN about the condition of orphans in the Soviet Union, he was horrified to see twin boys who had been abandoned and neglected. The story showed them in an orphanage, but it was clear that these boys were not playing with the other children. It seemed that, when the youths were born, complications resulted in each of them having a leg amputated. When the parents pulled back the bed sheet each morning, there was a little stump where there should have been a leg. Before the boys reached toddler age, the parents had sent them away. For some months, the kids were sent here and there. Potential parents came to see them, even from the West, but when they saw those empty pajama legs, they turned away.

Ron and Jan couldn't take it; they boarded a plane and flew to Moscow. They went immediately to the hospital and waited behind the curtain of the little crippled boys' room. One of the youths had learned to hop around on his good leg, while the other could only roll on the ground. As he pulled the curtain aside, tears streaming down his face, Ron began to say, over and over, "I know, I know." He held each of the boys in turn, and then, removing his trousers, he showed the boys his

leg. He removed the prosthesis and let them examine it, and then putting it back on, to the boys' amazement, he began to jump around. Ron then took the young Russians to himself, and said to them, "You're in my family now. Because I have made it, you can make it, too. You're in my family now."

When I read that story, I thought to myself, "What a hero! What a man! What a father he will make!" Then it occurred to me that our God is like that. The father in this moving story is almost a type of Christ, because Jesus wraps us in His arms and says to us, "Because I made it, you can make it, too."

Because of Christ and His suffering on our behalf, there is hope for us, no matter how crippled or maimed we are from the tragedies of life. Ron Greenfield decided he couldn't keep it to himself. Southern Baptists, neither can we!

—Jay Strack

Adam and Eve

A man by the name of Adam was created in a perfect garden. I remind you that Adam was created in the garden of perfection, not the ghetto of sin. It was not his environment that caused Adam to sin. It was something within him. "Adam, you can have anything in life you want. Look all over this garden—you can have anything you want. However, there is one tree in the midst of the garden; do not eat the fruit of that tree."

You know the rest of the story. The serpent came and tempted Eve. She ate the fruit and offered it to her husband. He ate it. Since that day, we have been doing to each other what Adam did when God called him on the carpet. Adam simply said, "She made me do it." That's how we handle so much of our sin nature. We make it the responsibility of someone else. It is difficult to get a person to be responsible for his or her actions.

Adam could have had anything in the garden, but he could not have everything. He ate the fruit, and he lost the garden, never to return. As a result, humankind has become the recipient of original sin. Though the terminology "original sin" is not in the Bible, we must have some explanation for the irrational actions and activities of humans. We have to confront the reality of original sin each time we pick up a magazine or a newspaper. But a theology of the irrational action of man toward God and toward other people is found other than on the pages of the Scripture.

Nancy and I have reared three children through the teenage years. "The tribulation" may be a welcomed relief! This is a tough day for parenting. I cannot remember a time in our experiences with our children when they gathered to hear me declare, "Kids, you're being so good it's driving me nuts!" I never said, "Now, Dad's going out of town, and I know you are going to be so good I won't even have to call home to check."

What do I remember? I remember those times I had to eyeball them down and say, “If you don’t shape up, you’re going to pay for the consequences of your actions!” They are the recipients of original sin and were acting out that nature.

Adam, you can have anything, but you can’t have everything. Adam paid the price; he lost the garden.

—John Sullivan

The Power of Compassion

I remember an experience I had a while back. One night, when my visitation partner and I were out visiting, we entered the home of a man. I made my “beautiful” presentation of the plan of salvation, using my “scintillating powers” of speech to convince that man to be saved. I laid on him my “irresistible logic” to have him accept the Lord Jesus Christ. You might guess, I got absolutely nowhere with him. It seemed as if the sooner I could leave the house, the better he would like it. I made a total flop of my witnessing presentation. In a sense of desperation, I asked, “Could we have prayer?”

“Yes, you can pray if you want to.”

So I knelt and prayed the best I knew how. When I stood up, I looked at his teenage daughter and said to her, “I imagine you’d like to see your daddy saved, wouldn’t you? I reckon you’ve prayed for your daddy to be saved.”

I saw tears in her eyes as she answered, “I sure would like for Daddy to be saved.”

Then I looked at his wife and said, “I suppose you have prayed many times for him to be saved, haven’t you?” I also saw tears welling up in her eyes.

She replied, “Preacher, I have prayed many, many times for him to be saved.” Then I looked over at their sweet Down syndrome boy who had big tears rolling down his cheeks.

I asked, “Son, you’d like to see your daddy saved, wouldn’t you?” He nodded his head.

I looked at my partner, and there were tears in his eyes, too. I even cried a little myself. The power of God came down in that house. What I couldn’t do, what scintillating speech couldn’t do, and what logic couldn’t do, the power of compassion did.

—Jerry Vines

Spurgeon and the Young Preacher

I heard about an inexperienced young preacher who had become discouraged, so he visited the great Charles H. Spurgeon for advice.

“Brother Spurgeon, I’ve been preaching a few months now, and I’m having many services where no one is being saved.”

Spurgeon replied, “Young man, you surely don’t expect people to be

saved every time you preach, do you?” The fellow answered, “No, not every time I preach.”

“Young man, that’s why they’re not saved every time you preach.”

I expect it. If you will, He will. It’s like a marriage ceremony—when you say, “I do,” and she says, “I do,” you are made one. The Lord Jesus Christ, 2,000 years ago on the cross of Calvary, said, “I do.” Now the Lord asks, “Will you?” If you say, “I do,” you can be saved.

—Jerry Vines

Religious Opinion Polls

George Gallup surveys the religious opinions of Americans every year. In 1992, only 4 percent of Americans were totally nonreligious. So, in your office, out of 100 people, only four of them would say, “I have no interest at all in spiritual things.”

Ninety-six percent of Americans believe in God. You don’t have to go out and prove God. The vast majority of the people around you already believe that He exists.

Seventy-seven percent of Americans believe the Bible is the Word of God. That means the vast majority of the people you work with already accept the Bible as the Word of God. They just need to be shown what it says.

Seventy-one percent already believe in life after death. In fact, the percentage is higher in California. In California, 79 percent believe in eternal life.

In 1978, 78 percent of Americans believed that Jesus Christ was who He claimed to be, the Son of God. Today, more than a decade later, that percentage has increased to 84 percent. That doesn’t mean that they are Christians; it doesn’t mean they have committed their lives to Christ. It just means they believe He is who He said He was.

So who you are dealing are people I call “pre-Christians.” They are not anti-gospel, they are not turned off to Jesus. They are just turned off to church. Make the distinction there, because I would be turned off to most churches, also. But they are not turned off to Jesus Christ.

Eighty percent believe that God still works miracles today, and 80 percent of Americans believe Judgment Day is coming when they will answer for their sins.

—Rick Warren

Popular Magazine Stories

You know, every year, smart people on Madison Avenue and in other marketing centers study America to figure out what to put on the cover of American magazines. They want to put on the cover of what sells. And what sells is what people are interested in. So, I just picked up a stack of magazines from the last few months to show you a few covers. God makes the covers more frequently than you realize.

Here is one from Life magazine, “Finding God on Flight 232.” It is filled with stories of how people find God in a crisis. Testimonies.

Here is one from U.S. News & World Report, “The Rekindling of Hell.” It probably talks more about hell than you do. It reports that record numbers of Americans now believe in hell.

Here is an article from Time, “Evil: Does it Exist, or Do Bad Things Just Happen?”

People are interested in spiritual issues.

Here is a U.S. News & World Report story, “Who Wrote the Bible?” Now, why in the world would the editors put that on the cover of a national magazine? Because people are interested in spiritual issues.

Here is a cover of Life, “Who Is God?” Here is a cover of Time, “Who Was Jesus?” Do you know which issue of Time sold more issues than any issue in recent history? The “Who Was Jesus?” issue.

Satan has gotten you to believe a lie that the people with whom you work aren’t interested. Who do think is reading those magazines?

—Rick Warren

A Flight Attendant

I heard Howard Hendricks telling a story about a flight he was on recently; it was an American Airlines flight. He said the man in front of him was being a jerk—rude and irritable—and then he got drunk and was even more rude, especially to the flight attendant. Howard said the attendant was handling this man with complete class, poise, and confidence. She was polite, gentle, and patient. He said he was incredibly impressed with how unflappable this attendant was with this jerk. After some time she went back to the galley, and Howard went back to the area to talk to her.

He said, “I am a regular flyer on American Airlines, and I am very impressed with how you handled that irritable, rude guy. I would like to write a letter to those in authority at American Airlines to thank them for your great service, if you will just tell me your name.”

She said, “I thank you for that, sir, but you need to understand. I don’t work for American Airlines. I work for Jesus Christ, and He is the One who helps me be patient with people.”

He said, “After I picked myself up off the floor, she started witnessing to me!”

Now, until she verbalized why she did what she did, nobody would have known. He would have thought she was just a nice lady. She had to say why she was doing it.

—Rick Warren

A Paper Hanger

I know a guy who is a wallpaper hanger, hanging paper in big homes in the area. After he finishes a job, he writes out the bill. As he hands it

to the owner, he says, “Now you have seen my side job; let me take five minutes and tell you about my real work.” He takes out a tract and spends some time telling the good news before he leaves.

—Rick Warren

A Sheriff

This week, I was backing out of a parking space in a shopping mall, and an Orange County, Calif., sheriff came over and tapped on my window. I thought, “Oh, boy, what have I done?” He just wanted to introduce himself; he had been coming to Saddleback for a few months.

I asked him, “How did you find Saddleback Church?”

He started smiling and said, “I pulled over one of your members to give her a ticket, and, as she got out her license, I saw how young she looked compared to what her age was on her license. I asked what she attributed her young appearance to. She said, ‘I am a follower of Jesus Christ, and I try to live that way. He has made a difference in my life. By the way, I go to Saddleback Church.’”

She invited him to church, and he has been coming ever since. You can witness anywhere, even while getting a ticket! That is what I call making the most of an opportunity.

—Rick Warren

A Manicurist

I had a manicurist tell me one time, “Pastor Rick, I don’t see how my job makes any difference in the world.”

I said, “Wait a minute, can you imagine what a committed Christian could do in your job? You have people in one-on-one situations; you have their undivided attention, a captive audience. You have opportunities to build relationships, opportunities to talk about intimate problems, and opportunities to share the good news. They are not reading anything; they are just sitting there looking at you for 30 minutes.”

And all of a sudden, she got a vision of how her work could make a difference. She’s a missionary manicurist. And you could be a missionary on your job, too.

—Rick Warren

APPENDIX B

INVITATION SUGGESTIONS

For Reflection and Action

1. Have there been Christians whose negative thoughts and comments have impeded your witness? Have you had a tendency to think negatively about how people may respond to you?
2. Take several moments to reflect on what your relationship with Jesus Christ means to you. Complete the statement, “Because Christ rose from the dead and lives in me . . .” Isn’t this truly the greatest, most joyful news you could ever share with another person?
3. Based on your obedience to Christ’s command to share your faith with others, what conclusion do you think He would draw about your love for Him?
4. Can you think of at least two people with whom God was leading you to share Christ during the past week? How did you respond?

—Bill Bright

Friends Telling Friends

Jesus has a plan to change the world. If you don’t like the violence and crime, if you don’t like how tough our nation has become, and if you don’t like the problems that we are having, consider the plan of Jesus to make it different. All He needs is a life. It doesn’t have to be a great life; it doesn’t have to be a smart life; and it doesn’t have to be a rich life. You don’t have to be good-looking, or intelligent, or trained. All He wants is an available life. The more ordinary the life, the better. For when He has an ordinary life into which He can pour His supernatural power, He has a platform from which to change the world. Friends telling friends is the key to telling the world about Jesus. It is also the key to the daily experience of spiritual power.

Cowards for Christ (see Appendix A) was an organization founded by the apostle Paul. As a very quiet and shy teenage boy the summer after my sophomore year in high school, I filled out a membership card and joined, making my life available for Jesus to use. I wonder, will you join me in saying to Jesus, “Maybe there is a better life for you to use somewhere, but I will give you mine. If I can do nothing else, I will look for every opportunity I have to say a good word about Jesus”?

That, my friend, is the key to power. Get a piece of the action in sharing Christ with others, and you will experience a piece of the power.

—Chuck Kelley

Invitation to Prayer

For 18 years, we have averaged baptizing more than 900 people a year. That’s not by accident. That didn’t just happen. Shouldn’t this church, which

now is about five times as large as it was 18 years ago, be baptizing more than we did 18 years ago? Shouldn't we have more committed people than we did then? Shouldn't we have more people on the firing line than we did then? If we are to reach this city and make the impact on this city that God wants and expects us to make, then we had better start praying. We had better become men and women of prayer, men and women who have a burden, and men and women who have a concern.

You say, "I don't have any compassion." You can. All you must do is ask the Lord to give you some. The Lord has enough for all of us. The Lord's compassion and His love were so great they took Him to the cross. The Lord will give you compassion. My compassion gets weak at times. Then all I must say is, "Lord, please forgive me for not having the concern I ought to have, the burden I ought to have." The Lord will put the burden back. That's one burden I like to have, because it comes from the Lord. Love comes from God. It is something I do not manufacture.

Won't you join me in praying? Won't you join your brothers and sisters in praying? Won't you become one of the faithful prayer partners and prayer warriors in this church? Diligently commit yourself to pray that God would make this church a great lighthouse, a great instrument of God to be used in this city, a tool of God to reach in and touch lives in hundreds and hundreds of homes, to bring the love of Jesus to people who have never been acquainted with Him. I pray that you will.

—Homer Lindsay Jr.

Invitation

Every head is bowed; every eye is closed. Tonight, my dear friend—sir, ma'am, young person, mom, dad—if you have never given your heart to Jesus, if you've never invited Jesus to come into your heart—I want to invite you in a few minutes to get out of your pew, come, and take the pastor's hand here at the front and say, "Pastor, I need to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior."

You say, "Why must I come forward?" That is what God requires. He never called anyone in secret; He has always called people publicly. He said, "If you confess me before men, I'll confess you before my Father, who is in heaven" (see Matt. 10:32). And, as you come and confess, you'll be an encouragement to someone else who needs to do the same thing. Some of you, perhaps, need to come to join the church, or follow the Lord in baptism, or surrender your life because God has something special for you in the future. But He will not reveal exactly what He wants you to do until you first surrender totally. I want to invite others to intercede for those people whose faces God flashed across your mind. Bombard heaven with their names. In a minute gather, around this altar and say, "Father, I am burdened for this neighbor; I am burdened for my father, my mother, my son, my daughter, my friend." God has put those people on your mind for a reason. Whatever God is saying to you

tonight, will you be obedient? Because, as you obey, you'll experience the power of God. Obedience always results in power.

Father, this time of commitment is the most important part of this service as we commit ourselves to live holy lifestyles, as we empty ourselves of sin. And as we allow You to fill us with the Holy Spirit, a natural thing will happen—we will tell people about Jesus.

There are some folks here tonight who do not know You. Lord, will you give them the strength and the courage to come publicly, to take the pastor by the hand and say, "Pastor, I need to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior"?

Father, some here need to join the church, some need to come in rededication, some need to follow you in baptism, and some need to surrender their lives. Some need to come to the altar, Father, an old-fashioned altar, and just kneel here and say, "Lord, I have a burden for this neighbor, or this friend, or this relative."

Lord, don't let anyone go from here without obeying you. Father, we know there is no danger here, for God is love. Help us obey you. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

—Herman Rios

An Invitation to Commitment

Our invitation today is different. It is addressed to our church members. It may be the most significant commitment you have made since you made your initial commitment to Christ. It is certainly an important one.

We are not trying to pressure you, manipulate you, or embarrass you. We are seeking to give responsible leadership in a strategic ministry in our community.

During the next several weeks, we will try to give a personal invitation to as many people as possible to make the same kind of commitment to Christ that you have previously made. Most people who have become Christians through the centuries have done so as a result of some friend, relative, neighbor, fellow worker, or fellow student encouraging them. To give the best possible leadership, we need a statement of your willingness to help. We know by experience how much it will mean to you, the church, and the people ministered to. We know God will be pleased, because it is His plan for us, His church, and His kingdom. Will you stand as we pray together?

Father, we thank you for these sacred moments as we make commitments together. We simply pray that each person will make a commitment with which she or he can be comfortable as God's person. Amen.

Ushers will pass out the commitment cards. We will read them together, fill in our names and addresses, and check our commitments.

Following are possible kinds of commitment:

- As Jesus suggested in Matthew 9:38, I will pray the Lord of the har-

vest to send forth workers into the harvest.

- Along with thousands of other Southern Baptists, I will pray the above prayer daily for 60 days.
- I will prepare a list of people for whom I will pray daily.
- I will focus on praying for people in my home, workplace, school, and other places (name them).
- I will accept a goal of trying to witness to at least one person a day for 60 days, or a total of 60 people during the period _____.

—Leonard Sanderson

How to Establish a Spiritual Base for My Life

If I were to teach you a theology lesson, I would tell you that the Bible says that there are four essentials for having salvation: faith, grace, repentance, and lordship. But those are words that people don't understand, so I have put in them nontechnical terms. Simply, here are four questions to ask an unsaved person and then a prayer. The verses that correspond are on the back of the card.

What I would suggest is that you hold the card out so that both of you can read it through together. If the conversation happens to come up about spiritual things, you can say, "I ran across a little card the other day about how to establish a spiritual base for my life from the Bible. Would you like to see it?"

You ask the questions, and let the person answer. If the person says yes, you go on to the next question. If he or she says no to any of the questions, you simply say, "If I could get you some information that would help you make that decision, would you read it?" If the person says yes, great. Turn the conversation on to something else. You don't have to argue, it is just being a witness.

1. Am I willing to . . .

Believe Jesus Christ died on the cross for me and showed He was God by coming back to life? (1 Cor. 15:2-4)

As I already told you, the vast majority—80 percent of all Americans—already believe that. Notice on the back of the card the Scripture that goes with that:

B 1 Cor. 15:2-4 (TLB): "It is this Good News that saves you. . . that Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures said he would, and that he was buried, and that three days afterwards he arose from the grave."

(It is a fact. Millions and millions of people celebrate that every Easter.)

2. Am I willing to . . .

Accept God's free forgiveness for my sins? (Rom. 3:22)

I don't know anybody who is not willing to do that. Notice on the back:

A Romans 3:21-22 (TLB): "Now God says he will accept and acquit us—declare us 'not guilty'—if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we have been like." (Isn't that good news?)

3. Am I willing to . . .

Switch to God's plan for my life? (Mark 1:16; Rom. 12:2)

(That is a nontechnical way of talking about repentance. Notice what the Scripture says:)

S Mark 1:15 (TLB): "Turn from your sins and act on this glorious news!"

Romans 12:2 (GNB): "Do not conform outwardly to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind."

(Say that from here on, I am not going to let my parents determine my future; I am not going to let my boss determine my future; I am not going to let anybody else—or even myself—determine my future. I am choosing God's plan for my life from here on out. I want to live the way He made me to live.)

4. Am I willing to . . .

Express my desire for Christ to be the director of my life? (Rom. 10:9)

(Notice what the Bible says:)

E Romans 10:9 (NIV) "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

("Confess with your mouth" means to express Jesus is Lord. What does "Lord" mean? It means director, it means manager, boss, chairman of the board. He is in charge.)

Now that took me about 45 seconds to share the basics of how to know Christ. If the person says yes to all those, you simply say: "Will you say this simple prayer aloud? 'Dear Jesus, I accept what you've done for me and want to begin following your plan for my life today.'"

You can use this approach this week. Just keep the card in your wallet, bag, or pocket, so that when something comes up, you have it ready. Now it may be that you have never given your life to Jesus Christ, so let's look at it again for you personally. Let's bow our heads, and in your heart say, "Yes, I believe," as we go through each of these four questions. If so,

would you say this prayer in your heart: “Dear Jesus, I accept what you’ve done for me and want to begin following your plan for my life today.”

With our heads still bowed, if you prayed that prayer, I believe God heard you. We read earlier that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now, look up here a minute. If you prayed that prayer and meant it, you have begun to establish a spiritual base for your life. It is that simple. Jesus made it so simple that no one could say it was too hard to understand. He said that even a child could understand it. If you made that decision today, let me know about it. I would like to send you some materials. Check the box on the back of your registration card where it says, “I am committing my life to Christ.” I will send you some materials this week that will help you with your decision.

—Rick Warren

APPENDIX C

My Mission in the Marketplace: It’s Not Just A Job

Rick Warren

Acts 20:24 (TLB): “Life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God’s mighty kindness and love.”

I. What is my mission in the marketplace?

“You shall be my witnesses . . . to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, RSV).

Witness: Sharing what God has done in _____ life.

“I sent them into the world just as you sent me into the world” (John 17:18, GNB).

Every Christian is a _____.

II. Why is it so important?

1. We have a _____ message

“Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them” (Rom. 10:13-14, TLB)?

“. . . [the] Good News . . . to heal the brokenhearted and to announce that captives shall be released and the blind shall see, that the down-trodden shall be freed from their oppressors, and that God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him” (Luke 4:18-19, TLB).

2. People are _____ to hear it

“What pity he [Jesus] felt for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn’t know what to do or where to go for help. . . . The harvest is so great, and the workers are so few” (Matt. 9:36-37, TLB).

III. How can you be a witness at work?

“Whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17, TLB).

1. By the _____ of your work

“The quality of each man’s work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it” (1 Cor. 3:13, GNB).

2. By your _____ attitude

“Do all that has to be done without complaining or arguing . . . and you will shine in the world like bright stars because you are offering it the word of life” (Phil. 2:14-15, TJB).

3. By _____ the good news

“Make the most of your chances to tell others the Good News. Be wise in all your contacts with them” (Col. 4:5, TLB).

“Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the

hope you have in you. But do it with gentleness and respect”
(1 Pet. 3:15-16, GNB).

Tool: How to Establish a Spiritual Base

“The Holy Spirit . . . does not want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them. If you will stir up this inner power, you will never be afraid to tell others about our Lord”
(2 Tim. 1:7-8, TLB).

““ The pulpit is central in creating a climate for evangelism in the church. The pastor’s personal, intentional witness to the lost and his preaching to inspire the laity in witnessing are the keys to reaching the lost. . . . *Fifty Great Soul-Winning Motivational Sermons* will be an inspiration to the witnessing life of the reader. Pastors will find it an excellent resource for their preaching and equipping ministries.

”
Darrell W. Robinson