

Sharing Jesus In The Streets

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The Holy Spirit convicts people of sin and cultivates saving faith in individuals (John 16:8-11; Romans 10:17). I Corinthians 3:5-9 explains how conversion can be a process. A person may not be ready to accept Christ at our initial contact. Sometimes, when sharing Christ, we are breaking fallow ground or planting seeds to be later watered and harvested by other faithful servants.

Ultimately, the goal of evangelism is a response of faith to the Gospel of Christ. Often, I will pray, asking God to give me people who are "good soil" as discussed in Luke 8:15. Good soil is a reference to people who have "honest, good hearts." They hear the Word, accept it, hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance. At other times, I will ask God for people who, after receiving Christ, become spiritual multipliers. Spiritual multipliers are people who disciple others who disciple others (II Timothy 2:2).

"Ground-Breaking" Evangelism

The following is an example of breaking fallow ground in others' lives. While taking square dance lessons, I became friends with a young couple. This scholarly man and his bright significant other were great conversationalists. We soon had a budding friendship. The three of us hung out together.

One evening, I felt led to ask them, "Have you ever heard the phrase, "born-again Christian?"

"No-o-o," they drawled.

I explained what the phrase meant. I then asked, "Do you have any born-again Christians as friends?"

They emphatically and simultaneously said, "No."

With a smile on my face, I replied, "You do now!"

After pondering, they said, "Yes, we do."

"Seed-Planting" Evangelism

Sometimes, we till the soil. At other times, we sow seeds, water the soil or even reap the harvest. But, God is the One Who causes the growth. Here are a few examples of "seed-planting" expeditions.

At times, my skiing vacations were mini-evangelism trips. I would always pray and expect God to bring people my way to tell them of God's love.

I had plans to see a girlfriend's new home after one such trip. On my last day of skiing, I realized, although I had the address, I did not have directions to the city where my girlfriend lived. I felt led to pray, trusting the Lord to place skiers from that city in my path.

About midway through the day, I was on the triple chairlift with two studely jocks who were definitely party animals. We exchanged the customary introductory questions: What's your name? What level of skier are you? What slopes have you found good?

I then asked, "Where are you guys from?" They promptly said they were from the city where my girlfriend lived. Without thinking, I asked these two athletic playboy types if they had ever been answers to prayer.

In shock, they said in perfect unison, "NO."

I replied, "Well ... you are today!" I told them of my morning prayers and how they were my divine answer!

These ski dudes knew the odds of my meeting them were quite unlikely. Because of God's providential Hand, these men provided the specific directions I needed. They listened as I shared about being God's friend and finding eternal life in Jesus. We were seventy-five feet up in a chairlift. They were a captive audience!

Good Fishing

Jesus compared evangelism to fishing. He told the fishermen He called to follow Him: "to not fear ... for from now on you will be catching men" (Luke 5:10, Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17).

A good fisherman knows to catch some fish a certain kind of lure is used. Fish feed on different kinds of bait. Using this analogy, when evangelizing, we can depend upon the Holy Spirit's leading on how to "bait the hook" in each situation. The rule is TO BE RULED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BE TO SENSITIVE TO HIS PROMPTINGS.

Evangelizing Strangers

Jesus' early followers shared the Gospel with complete strangers. Because of their example, I did the same. One day, while in seminary, my class discussed this topic: the "how to's" of Christian witnessing.

All the students-minus myself-said, to do evangelism, one MUST first develop a friendship with the unsaved. Later, IF the opportunity was presented, the Gospel could be given. I was deeply grieved, because the book of Acts is so contrary to their concluding statements.

After class, I joined the carpool van. Soon, we reached my drop-off place. I was still concerned about my fellow students' beliefs on evangelism. I slowly walked to my car. Just then, a car sped recklessly past me and screeched to a halt.

A woman yelled frantically out her window, "Can you help me? I'm lost."

Balancing research books in my arms, I shouted back, "Yes, I can help. Let me get my maps."

The Holy Spirit impressed me with this thought: "She is lost and needs directions to Jesus."

Talking through the open car window, I said gently, "Hi! My name is Bette. I am a born-again Christian. By that, I mean I have asked Jesus to come live in me. I get the sense you are lost in some other ways and could really use Jesus' help."

Immediately, this woman began to cry hysterically and shake violently. I looked at her in shock. She looked like she was beginning to have a nervous breakdown. I began to prayerfully debate. Should I get her immediate psychiatric help? Or should I tell her about Jesus?

After praying, I sensed God's leading. I asked if I could join her in the car.

She motioned, "Yes." She continued to shake violently. I quickly asked her if she had ever sinned.

She said she was an aspiring actress and listed her recent areas of sinful addictions.

I briefly described Jesus' death and resurrection on her behalf and how He would like to live inside of her. All she needed to do was to repent of her sins and ask Him in. He would come in as He promised.

She said she desperately needed Jesus and that before she got off the freeway, she had contemplated taking her life by a car accident.

We closed our eyes, praying silently. I felt led to gently place my hand on her shoulder, rebuking a presence of darkness. Because she was shaking violently, my hand shook violently as I made contact with her.

In a few moments, my hand was still! I opened my eyes to see what had happened. This stranger had gone from a disheveled, upset person to a smiling, peaceful individual.

I asked, "What happened?"

She declared, "I asked Jesus in. He's there." She asked, "Whose voice was that?"

I probed, "What did the voice sound like and what did it say?" She said, "The voice was real quiet and it said, 'Joni, I will take care of you.'"

I explained that the voice she heard was the Holy Spirit, and to remember His voice, because He would speak again.

Joni and I met several more times. Establishing her in this newly found faith was my privilege and joy. Joni was no longer a stranger. She is my sister in the Lord.

More "Stranger" Encounters

On another occasion, I had planned to carpool to San Bernardino, California. My carpool cancelled. I could not find another ride.

I sighed to my roommate, "I can't figure out what is going on here. I guess I'll ride the bus."

We stared at each other. Simultaneously, we had this impression: God had some divine appointments for me.

I was dropped off at a deserted place in the middle of nowhere but somewhere in Southern California. The bus driver said, "Wait by the lighted sign for a transfer bus."

A young couple walked up. We exchanged names.

The guy asked, "What's your line of work?"

I said, "I work for God! And I tell others how they can know Jesus as their Savior. Would you like to know Jesus?" They nodded affirmatively.

I pulled a tract from my pocket and explained the Gospel. When I asked the young lady if she would like to receive Jesus, she said she already had done so.

Turning to her male friend, I asked, "How about you?"

He said, "I would like to receive Jesus." In a few moments, the young man made a sincere commitment to Christ.

Then, they told me their story. A month before, they had decided to marry. They called a nearby church and learned that all couples were required to have pre-marital counseling before the ceremony. The couple complied. While being counseled, the young lady accepted Christ. But, the young man did not want to make that commitment. At that point, the pastor said he could not marry them because they were now unequally yoked. The young man steamed angrily out of the church.

Then, God had our paths cross. He heard the Gospel again. After observing the changes Jesus had made in his fiancée's life, he, too, wanted Jesus to live in him.

My bus arrived. I gave them the tract and wished them a happy wedding. They glowed ... not just because they loved each other but because they both knew Christ, the Lover of their souls.

God Sets Us Up!

I was higher than a kite. What a blessed divine appointment. I boarded the bus. It was packed. At the back of the bus, I found one seat by a young serviceman.

Sitting next to the young man, I said, "Hi! My name is Bette. What's your name?"

After his brief reply, I asked, "Would you like to receive Christ as your Savior?"

He said, "Yes."

In a few moments, I was leading the young man in a sinner's prayer. He explained why he had been so ready to respond. He had been home on furlough. His sister had become a born-again Christian. All weekend he had watched her changed life. He wanted what she had. But, she never told him how he could receive Christ. He was ready to receive Christ and He did!

Evangelizing Neighbors

Does this mean we cannot be friends with a person before witnessing? No. But, what it does mean is to follow the Holy Spirit's leading when presenting the Gospel. When God led Joni to me that day, our friendship was not "cultivated." I became her friend when I offered her help.

Taking the good news to the ends of the earth includes taking it to the people down the street! Often, I find God has an appointed time for neighbors to hear the Gospel. We do need to earn the right to be heard-by sincerely listening and caring for others. Jesus was a friend of sinners and often sat with them (Luke 15:1-2, 10; Mark 2:15-17).

Being single, I have spent most of my adult life living in apartment complexes. In each neighborhood, God had His plans on how and when to reach my neighbors with Jesus' love.

A lady named Lisa lived in my apartment building. Lisa was a hurting woman. When passing in the halls, despite my friendly greetings, she avoided looking at me.

God began to burden me to pray for her. I did not force my presence upon her. Gradually, I could see her walls coming down. I made time to sit around the pool and to get to know my neighbor. We would talk about hair, clothes, diets, recipes. Casually, I shared with Lisa how Jesus was my best Friend as well as my Savior and Lord. Lisa was open but not ready to receive Christ. I did not press her. Caring for Lisa was easy. I wanted her to know Jesus and someday spend eternity with Him. I did not want to be in heaven someday and not have Lisa there!

The Lord had me take care of Lisa's preschool daughter on Sunday mornings, thus giving this single mom some free time. I took her daughter to church. Jesus quickly became a part of this preschooler's vocabulary and life.

As our friendship developed, Lisa sought me out during difficult times. We prayed together about her problems. God had other Christians enter Lisa's life to minister to her. In time, Lisa made a commitment to Christ.

God taught me that there were not specific rules governing evangelism. He made the way and time clear in each situation.

Felt Needs Lead to Real Needs

The lost are open to receiving prayer. To pray effectively for the unsaved, we must become aware of the difference between their "felt" need and their "real" need. Many times, these two needs do not mean the same thing to the nonbeliever. According the Holy Bible, man's most important "real" need is salvation through Jesus. But, the "felt" needs of the unsaved are what their most pressing, current need is right then. It is what they feel is most important to them now.

We can pray for their current "felt" need. As God meets that need, they in turn become more open to the Gospel.

Jesus' first miracle, the turning of water to wine, is an example of meeting an immediate need at a wedding party. However, Jesus clearly let His disciples know His priority of "seeking and saving the lost."

Meeting "felt" needs of individuals helps them to become open to hear of their "real" need of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

It's Never Too Late

I had also been praying for an opportunity to share Christ with the man living in the apartment next to mine. Our schedules were different so I seldom saw him.

One evening upon returning from work, I walked by his door to see him packing his belongings. Peeking in the door, I

said, "Hello! You're not moving? I have not had a chance to get-to-know you yet."

He explained this was his last night. He'd be gone in the morning.

Inwardly, I sighed. I had wanted to share Christ with him. "Hey," I asked, "Is there any way I can help?"

He gave me a few errands to do. In the process, God graciously allowed me to share my faith with him. It is never too late to venture into an opportunity to bless those living near you.