

Reaching Out

by Tom Abshire

Tom Abshire emphasizes the importance of relationship evangelism in a secular world and encourages Christians to actively engage with their non-Christian friends and communities.

Duration: 1:10:08

Scripture: Luke 7:33

Topics: "Evangelism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of Christians becoming too isolated from the world. He emphasizes the importance of being separated from the world but not isolated, and highlights the danger of being too involved in the Christian subculture. The speaker also discusses the imbalance between the words and the music of the Gospel, pointing out the lack of evangelism in churches and the low number of people involved in full-time Christian work. He shares a personal experience that revolutionized his thinking on evangelism, allowing him to freely share small references to the Lord without feeling the need to overwhelm people with a full presentation. The sermon concludes with a discussion on a Bible verse and its relevance to lifestyle evangelism.

Transcript

The subject that I'd like to talk about today is evangelism in a secular world because it's really where we're living. And this is going to be kind of an interaction time and also sharing a lot of personal experiences that the Lord has brought me through. And at the outset, I want to let you know my desire is not to offend anyone by proclaiming a particular method of evangelism.

And as a friend of mine just shared with me who had a big influence on my life in this area just yesterday, that often when we get excited about a particular method in Christian life that may fit our gift, we have this idea of gift projection, that because we do well in this area, that everyone else can do well in this area. And I do happen to think that lifestyle evangelism is cut out for most people, but my purpose is not to lay a burden of guilt upon you through this discussion. So I wanted to clear the air from the outset.

I graduated from the Air Force Academy 10 years ago and left the pristine atmosphere on the hill and had a fairly effective ministry with cadets. Although for those of you who know anything about the military and even more about cadets, you'd realize that they're basically a different breed. And I'll let you take that whatever way you want to take it.

And I went to medical school right from the Academy to New Orleans. I mean, I went from the hilltop to the valley in terms of the people that I related to. I mean, it was like culture shock, something I was totally unexpected for.

I mean, I thought I knew how to relate to people, but I really didn't know how to relate to the secular world. And that was the first cold-water experience that awakened my eyes in terms of broadening my vision and how to relate to people. Because I realized that my sometimes rather canned approach of sharing the gospel to a particular group of people just wasn't going to hack it.

Because I would go to a function with some of my medical student friends and someone would be smoking a joint over in this corner and you'd be trying to have a conversation with someone and they're saying, you know, I'm an atheist. I don't have any interest in God. And I'm just reeling and wondering where are all these people? Plus, New Orleans, I'm sure you're aware of the nature of the city.

It contributes to that somewhat. So that was kind of the motivation that got me going. A few people that have had an influence on my life, Randy mentioned Dave Simon, and also two authors, Jim Peterson and Joe Aldrich, have had a tremendous impact upon my life in this area.

And also a former NAVSTAF person who's now with Church Resource Ministries, Scott Horn, has had a tremendous impact on my life. The theologians say that approximately in the United States now, 50% of the people that you and I relate to are secularized. What they mean by that is they have absolutely no interest in God, spiritual things, the church or whatever.

They don't really even care. So when you approach them from the standpoint of, you know, are you interested in God? They're not even interested in that. And that's been a change over the last several years.

At least when I grew up, most people went to church. They may not have had much more interest, but there was more of a common ground. Today, there is less of a common ground.

When you look at churches, only about 4% of people do any sort of evangelism. It's a pretty sad commentary. And that's any kind of evangelism, whether it's door-to-door, being involved with Billy Graham, having an evangelistic Bible study.

And what I feel is an even sadder commentary on our Christian heritage is, and this has been well studied, 90% of people involved in full-time Christian work are from Christian heritages. And that's not to downplay the importance of a Christian heritage. I only share that, that we're not getting the job done.

Because if we are, we should have people who have been reached from the secularized world who are being used of the Lord. I wanted to spend about, we'll divide the time discussion into four equal parts. And we're still just now on the introduction part.

And under point A, I titled the issue, the issue at stake. You know, we've basically lost touch with the non-Christian community. And people have also looked at this figure, that once a person becomes a Christian, within two or three years, they've practically lost every one of their significant non-Christian relationship.

And it's like they don't have any more non-Christian friends. And this is probably a result of kind of the environment that we've grown up in. And there's basically three types of evangelism.

There's proclamational evangelism, like Billy Graham does. There's persuasional evangelism, where you go out and talk to someone and present the gospel, whether you're at a military base or on a campus door-to-door. And both of these are effective techniques.

However, they are more effective for people who are at the reaping point, where they've been prepared beforehand, and God uses that message to allow them to come to know him. And they're also effective if you're in a ministry where you're trying to establish a small group of believers, like a beachhead, and then grow your ministry out of that. It's a very effective technique.

That's why missionaries often do that. They go and talk to people about the Lord and make as many contacts as they can to get a small group of believers and then launch out with Bible studies from there. And it's also a very effective technique for those people who are skilled in reaping.

And what I mean by that is, as you know, there is a gift of evangelism, but also the Bible states that God expects all of us to be witnesses. The people who have the gift of evangelism usually have the gift of reaping. God uses them in such a way that they can share a word of the gospel and it convicts people and they repent and come to know the Lord.

But that's a very small percentage of the Christian population who have that gift. So what we'll be addressing is, how can the rest of us fit into what God has commanded? The last type of evangelism is relationship evangelism. This is what we'll be discussing.

Now, I want to lay the groundwork here so you don't have a misconception when I'm talking about it. Some people consider, when they say relationship evangelism, it's kind of like you witness by your life. You never say anything.

And that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about aggressively pursuing relationships with people and praying for opportunities and sharing the gospel as God provides those opportunities. Now, what makes this so exciting is that all of us have a web of relationships, either in our neighborhood or at the office.

We all know people who we relate to. And no one else relates to them. Your pastor doesn't relate to them and Skip Gray doesn't relate to them.

But you have certain people that only you will relate to and you may be good friends with them. And there's a certain web of relationships that are around you. And why this is important is if one of that group in your web of relationships comes to know the Lord, it is like wildfire that that changed life spreads to the other people.

And it's like something that you can't even contain. Whereas, you have these different friends and you may not even know some of them, and one person out of that group comes to know the Lord, it has a tremendous impact upon that circle of friends. Also, your follow-up matrix is already established.

How many of you have been put in a situation where someone asks you to follow up this person that you never knew? Well, you know, sometimes that works out, but you have to build a relationship there. And we'll talk more about this as we get into the details of it later. But the follow-up matrix is already established.

You already have a friendship with these people. It's already within the context of life. I mean, you don't have to go out of your daily schedule.

You live in a neighborhood, you work. It's not a lot of emotional energy to meet these people that are already around you. And lastly, we've already mentioned this, you may be the only person to reach that individual.

As I said, half of the people in the United States are secularized. They have no interest in church. They're not going to turn on the TV and listen to Billy Graham or go to church.

You may be their only contact. And I don't mean to say that to you to threaten you, but just to try to encourage you that God wants to use us in our respective environments. Now, why do we have hindrances to healthy relationships? And I just jotted down six ideas here.

The first is we have too many relationships or too many activities. Now, some of us, I'm not a sanguine, but some people are sanguine. And as Lewis Hill mentioned yesterday, they are ready to die for 100 people in a night.

I mean, they have lots of relationships. That can be a danger. If you know too many people, you can't get to know anyone.

I mean, if you have too many contacts. And often, on the other side of the coin, we're too busy. We're too busy to meet with people because we're involved with the board meeting one night and then we have a docs meeting the next night and then we may be involved with a Bible study another night.

We have to prepare for Bible study and then we're at church all day on Sunday. And God help us if we want to go out to the movie with our kids because there isn't any time in the schedule, much less try to have someone over to get to know them any better. Secondly, the pace of our life is, quite frankly, too fast.

And we've already talked a little bit about this this weekend. But we're running through life and we have little time for relationships with people. We're a punch clock type of society.

Thirdly, we've had unhealthy role models as the norm in evangelism. And I wanted to share three of the role models that most of us have been exposed to. The first is what is referred to as the aquarium type evangelism, where you feel you're going to bring someone in the church and a pastor or someone who's gifted in evangelism throws the line out there and reels it in and hopefully you can get some fish within a closed environment.

Secondly, we have, and Skip mentioned this the other day, the ambush philosophy, where we feel that evangelism is solely door-to-door, where you go and you ambush someone and lay the hot gospel on them. And thirdly, that was the safari type of evangelism, where you go out on a little mission door-to-door. The ambush is really best described where you may have a prayer breakfast, for example, and you mislead people to get them to come.

Hey, why don't you come and hear this guy speak on something? You don't let them know that they're going to share the gospel and then they get in there in this closed room, you close the doors, and they can't leave. Now, I don't mean to cast dispersion on these methods, please understand me, but I think a lot of times these methods are held as the norm for everyone and the rest of us get discouraged about sharing our faith. Fourthly, we have promoted the axiom of separation extremism.

Now, I don't mean to step on any toes here, but there is a trend in Christianity in this country today that greatly disturbs me, and that is we need to pull into this city on the hill, this beacon of shining light. And

there are a lot of people talking about building Christian communities where you don't have anyone but Christians around. Your shopping is there, your school is there, everything is there.

And I'm sure for those of you who follow the political scene in the last several years as evangelicals have come to the forefront in our politics that there is a little bit of that that might disturb you also. Now, God does state very clearly in the Bible that we need to be separated from the world, but not isolated from the world. And I think too many of us, and this goes back to the figure I gave earlier, that's why after two or three years of being a Christian we don't have any non-Christian contacts anymore.

We're too involved with the Christian subculture. Fifthly, I've titled it a disharmonic symphony. What that means is an imbalance between the words and the music of the gospel.

The music of the gospel is your life witness around people. You attract them by the way you live, the way you react to situations, how you treat your wife, how you treat your children. The words of the gospel are actually sharing the message of the gospel.

Both are important. If you have someone who's playing the music all the time, no one's ever going to know what song you're singing because you never tell them the words. On the other hand, if you're shouting the words all the time and you don't play the music, people can't see the life context around being a Christian and you'll be less effective.

Lastly, we have a reaping mentality, and I wanted to just spend a little minute on this, that we acquaint evangelism with reaping. There is nothing further from the truth, and we'll share a scriptural basis for that here in just a minute. We feel that if we haven't led someone to Christ, you're ineffective.

Please do not take that type of thinking. It'll discourage you more than anything. First of all, you are probably one of the most of us that are not gifted in reaping.

Second of all, as Skip mentioned, God may not want you to reap. He may want you to do the hard work. That's what Jesus said, that the person who's out there plowing and cultivating, that's the hard work.

You come along and share the gospel of someone who becomes Christ, you better believe it wasn't you that did that. God used you to share that message with that person at that point, but there has been a lot of groundwork laid before that. And this really revolutionized my thinking on evangelism.

It freed me up. It freed me up so that when I had coffee with someone and a little bit of a spiritual door opened up, I didn't feel like I had to dump the whole truck on the person because I'd never see him again. I could just say some little, make some little reference to the Lord or maybe a little word of testimony.

Because you know you'll see that person again. Or maybe if you don't see him again, you know that God will use that. Yes, Dave.

Yeah, we'll share that. In fact, what a good break. I wanted to open up.

Are there any other comments on what I had to share? Any other insights that you wanted to share with the group from what we discussed so far? Yes, Reg. Sure. We are in a world, and you mentioned it when you said 50%, immunity titer against the gospel is extremely high.

And that's because of repeated exposures. And also, repeated exposures to vaccine, which is false gospel. People have named the name of Jesus Christ, but they have not been Christians.

And so forth, they get exposed to the true gospel and the false gospel, either of which, if you don't respond, is capable of producing immunity. And so here we are, we're in a field where there are susceptibles, mostly exhausted, and we're just trying to infect people. And it takes a great deal of effort and a great deal of God's spirit to infect people in an area where there's immunity.

And then somebody comes from another country and they say, oh, I just proclaimed the gospel and 24 people received Christ the first night. Well, they were in an area where there was a large degree of susceptibles and not so much immunity. That's good.

That thing, the illustration has helped me a great deal in not feeling guilty about the fruit. Okay, very good insight. Very good.

Thank you. Anyone else wanted to share anything about what we discussed so far? Okay, I passed out some verses for some unsuspecting souls here to help me go through. And on your sheet there, Galatians 2, 4, and 5 omit that.

That was a mistake. And the first one, 2 Corinthians 6, 14, and 15, that was the verse about an unequal yoke. We already talked about that, how people have taken that verse and taken separation to an extreme.

Who has Luke 7, 33, and 34? What I'd like for you to do is if you could read the verse and then give a brief comment on how this relates to lifestyle evangelism. Oh, you don't have a handout. Oh, gee.

Yeah, I do. There's in the folder there, there's many more. Who else doesn't have a handout? Gee, I'm sorry.

Raise your hand high, and there's plenty more here. I apologize for that. I thought I'd gotten everyone.

Well, at least you didn't have to read the verse. I missed you. Okay, who has Luke 7, 33, and 34? For John the Baptist, when ye say he hath a devil, the Son of Man is come eating him, right? He's a friend of publicans and sinners.

Okay, how do you think that has to relate to our subject today? I see two points here, really. There were criticisms of John the Baptist for not doing these things, and there were criticisms of Jesus for doing these things. But really, focusing on evangelism, Jesus was in amongst the sinners.

Very good. Very good. Who has 2 Corinthians 5, 9-11, and 20 and 21? Okay, Terry.

So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home or at home. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while on the body, whether good or bad. Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord.

We try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God. And I hope it is also plain to your conscience.

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.

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. We are automatically an ambassador for Christ in our situation. Our representative says that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God.

That there is something unique about Christ being in us to represent the world. Very good. Very good.

Thank you for reading that, Terry. 2 Corinthians 2, 14-17. Yes, Jim.

Let thanks be to God, for we are not speaking in Christ. Okay, good. What insight do you have out of that group of verses? I think that we are going to be ambassadors.

It is going to be Christ working through us in His life. Excellent. For Him and the breakers.

Excellent. And something that you will notice out there, when people smell perfume, some like it, some don't like it. So there will be some people who don't like it.

There will be some people who will like it. But let Christ be the perfume, not you be the perfume. And I love that phrase at the end, where it says, we are not like many, peddling the word of God.

I think that just communicates so much, that we should pray that we are not out there just peddling the word. That we are Christ's fragrance, as you mentioned. 1 Corinthians 9, 16-23.

Who has that? Okay, Gary. Before I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion. For it woe me if I do not preach the gospel.

For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward. But if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me, what then is my reward? That when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the war.

And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews. To those who are under the law, as under the law. Though not being myself under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.

To those who are without the law, as without the law. Though not being without the law, God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak.

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. With the priority that God has, God's priorities, so that my purpose in life is to give people the knowledge of Christ that I have.

His desire was to become all things to all men. How much of a desire do we have to reach our friends and neighbors around us? Do we have enough of a desire to get into their world? And we'll be talking more about that in a minute. Yes, Terry.

Excellent, yes. Very good, thanks for sharing that. John 4, 35-38.

Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor. Okay, Wayne. It says several things.

First of all, it says, it's not to procrastinate, don't think that the harvest isn't ready for four more months. It's white, ready to harvest now. We can do that many times where we really make God and the Holy Spirit very impotent in thinking that our next door neighbor just isn't ready yet, or some associated work.

There are many excuses that we can make to think that it's just not the right time to start in. And then he goes on to talk about both sowing and reaping. First of all, he says the fruit that we will get will be an

eternal kind of fruit for the people, that it's an eternal thing, an eternal life.

And that there's two different jobs. There is the job of sowing and reaping, like you were talking about, and I guess alternating that you don't have to do both. You're going to enter into labor.

That neighbor might be ready, because someone like you, just the other day at lunch, may have just given some, may have planted the seed, may have said some words of wisdom very briefly out of God's Word or something. You don't know that, but maybe the Lord has inspired you to come along and to be the reaper. Very good.

Thanks for expounding that. Let's see, the next passage, 1 Samuel 30, 24. Yes, Bob.

For as his share is, it goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share a life. Extracting that, there's supportive functions, evangelism, and they're in the front line.

And then here it tells us that both share a life and blessings. What an encouragement that God doesn't put the same price tag on things that we do. 1 Thess 1 5. Randy.

But also with power, deep conviction, know how we lived among you for your sake. What Paul's pointing out here, I think it supports the point you're making earlier. It's not just a matter of living a life.

It's not just a matter of sharing the words. And it's not just a matter of both. It's a matter of doing both those plus the power of the Holy Spirit to give power to the message, bring conviction of sin, and then the ultimate fruit.

Very good. Thanks, Randy. I think, Bill, you had the last verse.

Romans 15-20. Very good. That is one of my life verses, so to speak, that I pray for myself, that God would let me reach the people that may not be reached by anyone else.

I just wanted to share these verses with you to give you a scriptural basis for what we're talking about. It's there, and there's many other references in Scripture to support this aspect of being out there, rubbing shoulders with the secularized and winning them for the Lord, doing a lot of plowing, some reaping. Now let's go on to the third aspect, the principles of lifestyle evangelism.

Yes, Lynn. One thing that has really struck me, sometimes our husbands are out meeting me. We're back with the children at home.

That has been a tremendous encouragement of support. If I free Bill up to be able to be out in the front lines sharing and don't make him feel resentful about me being away and so forth, but free him to be able to be out there, then I can also enjoy the blessings of that. Excellent.

Thanks for sharing that. That is a very good insight. CB, did you want to share something? I want to share that it's really been a blessing to have him.

That is, we have a five-year-old, and by the time Steve gets home at night, he's in bed. He's a basketball player. And Steve's tired, too.

And so we looked at his schedule, and we found a time in the schedule that's really prime time where all the patients want. But we take two of those hours a week, and that's Chris's time, and I'm running around

to see his dad. It's really built in his life.

Chris chose toys from his room that he took to his dad's office, and he has time there. And it's hard on me, because I'm learning all the time, but it's really helped him as a child. Thanks for sharing that.

It's a prime time that all the patients want, but we don't have enough of it. That's another example of what Lynn just shared. Okay, as we go on here, I'm going to try to disperse these with some personal examples that the Lord has allowed us to be involved in, and we're going to talk briefly about some principles of lifestyle evangelism, and then I'm going to give you just a way that we have found helpful, practical aspects of relating.

That's the fourth point. As I already mentioned, we need to get into the non-Christian arena. Jesus was criticized for relating to sinners and publicans.

You're going to have probably your greatest source of conflict will be from other Christians wondering what in the world you're doing. But if you have your heart squared away before God, you can know that the Lord wants you to relate to non-Christians. And why is it that we have a hard time relating to the non-Christian and getting into his world? Well, I jotted down a few things.

I think, first of all, our lifestyles are too different. Now, that's not to say you take the non-Christian's lifestyle, but that often hinders friendship. Rather than looking for other things that you could build that friendship upon.

Often we have evangelistic motives for friendship. I have a friend from medical school. He's an agnostic Jew.

This is just after I came out of the academy. I still haven't learned much yet. I had him over for dinner, and the first night I just shared the gospel with him.

Well, I didn't really even know where he was coming from, and he shared with me that he didn't really know much that God is there, much less that there was even a God. This kind of took me back. And I thought, well, gee, can I be this guy's friend? Our friendship kind of waxed and waned through medical school more on the basis of how interested I thought he was in the gospel rather than just being his friend.

We had more chances in Iraq. Well, he stayed in New Orleans for a couple of years in a surgery residency, and then he got tired of that and got married and moved out to Seattle to do emergency room medicine work. And his wife, and let's talk about the sovereignty of God, his wife was frustrated in their marriage because of his work schedule and the like, just walked into a church one day and got saved.

I didn't know his wife at the time because it was, I just didn't know her, but I didn't know what cultivating that, going on behind that. Well, she went home and told Matt what had happened. And here's this agnostic guy, and he's not very interested, but she said, well, this really means a lot to me, and she got involved with a Bible study, and she said, would you promise me one thing? Would you get involved with a Gospel of John Bible study with me? So Matt was in that thing for a year and a half, and he, this chokes me up a little bit, he finally came to know the Lord.

And the other day, well, it was not the other day, it was about a year and a half ago, he called us up, and Diane and I noticed something different about his attitude on life. But he didn't share anything, and we had one of those call waiting things where he had to go to another line, and we talked amongst each other. I

said, you know, it sounds like he's interested in spiritual things.

And so we came back on, and we said, well, Matt, what's happening? And he had shared that he had become a Christian. And the reason why I shared that story is because I looked at our relationship, and I had more of an evangelistic motive for our friendship rather than to really just love and accept him. And I'm not sure God really used that to show me that when you relate to non-Christians, you can't have any price tags thrown on there.

And the Lord was gracious enough to use other people to influence him, and God really used that example to really minister to me. And I wanted to share that as a principle that don't get into friendships just with evangelistic motives because the non-Christian will pick up on that, and it won't work. The other aspect, kind of sharing my failures at the start here, is that we're too busy to be involved with non-Christians.

We mentioned that earlier. But when I was at the Air Force Academy, I was so heavily involved with the navigator ministry. I was leading Bible studies.

I was one of the key men at the Academy. And this kind of grew as my four years went on. In my first two years there, when I wasn't as involved in the ministry, I had excellent non-Christian relationships.

And I remember when I was a sophomore, I had like ten of my classmates involved in a John study. And some of them came to know the Lord. I don't know where a lot of them are right now, but I did things with my friends in the squadron.

But then my senior year when I'm, quote, doing the ministry, I had very little contact with the non-Christians. So much to the point that I really hardly even knew my classmates very well when I left. And that, I think, is a sad commentary on our Christian subculture that we get people so busy in activities that we don't give them enough time to relate to non-Christians.

And I share that as a warning. The other aspect that keeps us from getting involved in non-Christian arenas is that we expect them to have Christian attitudes before we can develop a friendship. And Jim Peterson, who directs the NAV work in Latin America, and for many years learned this principle in Brazil, that, boy, you know, if you try to get to know someone, you have to have the right type of personality before you get to know them.

You'll never get to know many non-Christians. It really will block you from significantly developing a friendship. You'll never have significant relationships.

So, in this aspect of the non-Christian arena, we have to really ask God ways to show us to get into their world, to relate to them, because no one else is going to reach them. The second point is, I entitle the stupor of culturally drawn methods, that, you know, you look at the things that you do or that the things that you're told in the church or Bible study are involved, ideas that we have about non-Christians, so much of it is culturally related rather than scripturally related. That's why I wanted you to read that, where we shared that verse about Jesus relating to the publicans and sinners.

I mean, that was directly against what the Pharisees, which the Jewish laws at the time, rulers, said you should do. I mean, he was criticized for that. When you think about why you do something, it's often good to say, is there a biblical reason why I do this, or is this because I live in this culture? Because sometimes the two can seem to be close together, and I'd caution you against that.

Which leads into the third point about the tension of Christian opinion. I think I have taken more, I haven't personally taken a lot of shots from other Christians, but I know there have been a number of people that have not understood what Diane and I have been doing. Because when we go in an area now, and we'll develop this here in a little bit, we want to relate to non-Christians.

And like I've already said, to do that, you need time. I'm busy in medicine. We have small children.

That consumes most of it. So when we get involved with a church, what we usually say is, we find one thing that we can do to serve in, but we tell them that we're not going to be there every time the door is open, because of our schedule. We just do not have the time.

It doesn't mean that we're not supporting them, and praying for them, and giving for them, but we just aren't able to minister to both worlds. And as I mentioned earlier too, non-Christians, many of them are unchurched. And if your ministry is in your church, you're going to limit the people that you can minister to.

So, in this area of the tension of Christian opinion, and I don't mean for you to go on and offend anyone, because we should never have that as our goal, but if you feel before God, that He wants you to minister to non-Christians, and you have to make a decision about your activities, it's better to offend the Christian by that decision, than the non-Christian. Hopefully that won't ever have to happen, but I guarantee that you will have misunderstandings, and hopefully the Lord will allow you to clear that up with the Christian, but if you have to choose between offending a non-Christian, and offending a Christian, I hope you know how to make the decision, because that non-Christian will not have anyone else maybe to relate to. Now, also in this tension of Christian opinion, I think we need to be careful too, that we hold to biblical absolutes about sin.

The Bible is very clear about things that are sin, that you should not get involved in. However, there are a lot of things that our Christian subculture makes sin, in terms of relating with non-Christians. One example is in the area of alcohol.

Now, I don't mean to step on anyone's toes here about their conviction about alcohol, but I can tell you that there are Christian missionaries, in the Navigators and other places, that have found through trial and error, that they have gone to a subculture, whether it's overseas or in this country. My friend Scott Horn, who related to the Southeast Louisiana Cajuns. Their idea of a good time was having a beer and eating crawdads.

And if you were going to have a get-together, if you didn't have beer there, you offended them. That's not to say that the Bible is clear about drunkenness, but there are some aspects that, and I know probably all of you have related to this in some sense of a word, there are some areas of the Christian life that we have put a taboo on, from our own personal conviction. You need to be careful about that, because you may be put in a situation where the people you're relating to, you may offend them more by this position that you have held, that, quite frankly, you cannot make a strong case from Scripture.

So make sure you hold to biblical absolutes, because that is the light that attracts people to Christ. Yet don't cling to a lot of things that aren't really clearly spoken against in the Bible. There are many of them.

You will turn people off. Yes, Billy. Would you say the same thing would apply in terms of our participation in them? Well, that's a question I can't answer for you.

Diane and I have found, I guess the question is when you go there, what will be going on? If it's just a drunken orgy, that's often not productive. I think most of us wouldn't have any problems with that. But oftentimes that is the way that professional people mingle.

And you can go there, at least we've found too, that going early to some of these functions is a lot better than going late. And you can get to know people. And let me say here also that, this kind of goes back to what I said at the beginning, not all of us are able to relate in some of these circles.

Maybe because of your past, maybe because you've had an alcoholic family, or you've had a particular problem before you were a Christian with an area like that, and you just know before God that you can't even get involved with that. And God honors that. I don't mean to push you into an area that you feel the Lord has spoken you not get involved in.

I'm just trying to open up the avenues to be creative here in relating to people. The fourth point is that, we've already mentioned this, evangelism is not an event, it's a process. You meet someone and there is a period of time that they may take for them to become a Christian.

And please get out of this reaping mentality and get into more of relationships and seeing people progress, as some authors have said, from the pit to the kingdom. You may meet someone who is way over in left field. Don't get discouraged with that.

I mean, maybe after your two or three years with that, they'll know that there's a God and that you have a life that's different from them. They may not be Christians yet, but God has used you to do that cultivating. The fifth aspect under this is that actions really do speak louder than words.

And I'll go into that a little bit more detail here, as I share some of my personal examples in the last part of this talk. But some areas that I just want to throw out for you to consider is that, there are certain qualities that will allow the non-Christian to be attracted to you. And one of them is hospitality.

And I think we've already mentioned this a little bit. Your home is a tremendous avenue for you to reach out to people. Because the world doesn't see that.

I mean, if you open up your home and have a doctor and his family in, and see how you relate with your wife and your kids and that you're real people, that really speaks volumes. The other thing that really speaks volumes is a serving attitude. You're willing to go over and help out your buddy, you know, build a fence or do this and that.

That really speaks volumes also. And the last thing is, in this aspect of our actions with non-Christians, is that there are certain godly qualities that really minister to a non-Christian. And that is how you respond to suffering.

Are you honest? Are you a generous person? Is your marriage strong? And are you competent in your work? Those are just five aspects that I thought of. See, in order for a non-Christian to see this, he has to see your life. You have to be transparent.

I mean, for you to be able to share, I'm not talking about dumping the truck here, but just to be honest with people that you do have problems that you go through. And it just blows their mind that they see that you go through the same thing they do, but you're able to come through with a smile on your face. And that you can be a Christian and still be pretty competent in your job.

And the point is that for a non-Christian to see this, they have to be around you enough life and life exposure to get that kind of exposure. The sixth point is that try as best as you can to eliminate Christian caricatures. Now, what is a caricature? It's an over-exaggeration of truth, and sometimes not so truth.

But you would not believe the caricatures that non-Christians have of Christians. I mean, they think, I don't know what, everything from, gee, to become a Christian means you have to give up everything that's fun, or you have to go to church every time it opens up the door, or God is going to take away all your possessions. You wouldn't believe what people hold as their caricature of a Christian.

And this is where Dave has really helped Diane and I. He's often said, just relate to people and have fun. You can break down a lot of these caricatures just by relating to people, and they say, gee, Dave's a Christian, and he doesn't seem to be having a bad time here. He can go ski and have fun, and he's able to still be competent in his work.

So God can really use you to blast those caricatures away. Lastly, and I'll just mention these in the interest of time, because I do want to spend the last 15 minutes on some practical aspects, is that there are three hindrances to evangelism, and I'll just list them for you. You can go look up the passages later.

The first is hypocrisy. Boy, there's nothing that will hurt your witness more than hypocrisy. That's what the Pharisees did.

You say one thing and do another, or you do one thing and say another. And the reference on that is in Matthew 16. Impurity of life.

With the current moral persuasion of our culture, boy, it speaks volumes to have a faithful husband-wife team, and for people to see that. That is something that will wreck your ministry, impurity of life. 1 Corinthians 5. Legalism.

You're so dogmatic about something that the Bible doesn't really speak that much about that you turn people off. Legalism will also destroy relationships. Galatians 5. Yes, Jonathan.

I think, I'm not advocating dropping the ball, but I think God really uses that. Especially if you're honest about it. They can see you, that you have problems.

They're not blind. But what they don't understand is how you're able to rise up and keep going. Or how you're able to overcome a problem.

That you're honest about it. Most people that we live and work around have this mask on. They're always keeping the mask on because they want people to see how they really are.

So I would just be honest with people. Anger. That's aggravating.

I find myself having to go back and apologize. But I wonder, I worry that that's calling a witness. But yeah, I still go back to you and apologize to you.

I guess what they need to see is that God is working and changing you. Very good. Bill, did you want to comment on that? I have the same problem.

And one of the greatest witnesses is going back and asking for forgiveness. Yeah. Yes.

Also, I think it's important, at least with the other people who I know in my professional life, the thing that I get commented about so many times is that you make mistakes. I think it's important to let them see that Christians, we're no different. We're struggling with sin.

We're struggling with being hypocrites. We're struggling with going against things we believe in. Because those are things that they're struggling with too.

I think the difference is that we are trusting in the Lord to help us get through that. And like you said, we rise above it. But I think it's important for them to see that we do make mistakes.

Very good. Because I think that's one of the caricatures they have. Christians have got to be perfect.

And there's just no such thing. If there was, Christ wouldn't have had to come. Yes.

Very good. Yes, Billy. Bob, would you consider moralism and judgmentalism as part of legalism? Yes, very much.

It will kill a relationship faster than anything. Moralism and judgmentalism being part of legalism, it really is part and parcel. Like what you were saying earlier about we can't expect them to have a Christian attitude and lifestyle.

Right. It seems so simple, doesn't it, when you think about it? When I go back and think of the relationships I've had, a lot of times I think, if this person doesn't seem too Christian, I don't know if I really want to get involved with them. What's the purpose of our... Like Dave was sharing with that Bible study, when they invited that couple, they decided they'd rather go out and get a Bible.

Well, that's where we should be. That's where we should be. Why don't we just spend the last 10 or 15 minutes on some practical aspects of relating? And see if I can share some examples here.

The first is visualizing God using you in your sphere of influence. And we've already talked about the value of being in the same trade, for being in a neighborhood, people that you relate to around you. You have natural affinity groups there that I really am of the conviction that you ought to pray that God lets you start there, unless He specifically calls you out to another type of ministry.

Because if you're being a doctor, working in this neighborhood, decide to go work with the high school group across town, well, that may be what the Lord wants you to do. But you're going to have to spend a lot of other emotional energy to cultivate relationships and time and all that. Whereas in your sphere of influence, there is the natural relationships that are there that we often forget.

We're looking elsewhere and we don't see the own nose on our face in terms of people that we can relate to. Secondly is you start out with making acquaintances. And this is what Diane and I do.

Every time we move someplace, we spend time praying that God would just let us meet people. And we don't make it spiritual. We just try to get to know the people that we enjoy being around.

A lot of times I was under the guilt trip about, gee, I better go meet 50 people and I may not like half of them. Well, we all have different temperaments and the like. You don't need to worry about that.

Just as you get to know people, and you have to go out of your way initially, go down and meet them in your neighborhood, have some people over, go to these cocktail parties early, go to these functions where

you can meet people. And don't spiritualize it, just let it be natural. The people that you enjoy getting to know are the ones that you can begin to cultivate a friendship with.

We've also found helpfulness to try to get interested in what they're interested in. People love to be listened to. You probably have already noticed that if you're on a plane or something and if you just ask people questions about themselves, boy, they love to talk.

Then after they finish they say, gee, I really enjoyed that conversation. Because you allow them to express themselves. So much of our culture is expressing about me, me, me.

When you have someone who finally wants to listen to you, you, you, it really speaks volumes. So when you're getting to know someone, find out what they're interested in because you may find an area of common interest. Maybe you can play tennis together, sew, cook, watch kids together, whatever.

But get into their world and interact on their terms. Be flexible enough. This is where you have to have your time schedule free enough that you are able to interact on their schedule.

The third point is begin to establish a growing relationship. And two keys in this is that it's going to take time and trust on your part for God to keep the relationship together. And you have to be available.

It will cost you. I'll just tell you at the outset that being involved with people will cost you your time and it just takes a long time. When I was at the Academy, I had this vision of, you know, gee, someone comes to know the Lord after three weeks of evangelistic Bible study.

Six months later, they ought to be a growing disciple. One year later, they ought to be leading their own Bible study. And two years later, they're leading all the Bible studies.

And then three years later, they're ready to go overseas on missions. Well, it just doesn't work that way in the context of life. It may work that way in a college where people have a little bit more time and commitment.

But you're talking about busy professionals with families and children. I mean, it takes a longer period of time. But the results and the dividends are very great.

You tend to have a more committed person after that long haul. Let me share a couple of examples with you. These are on the positive side here now.

There are two couples that Diane and I know. One, both of them I knew from the Academy. And one was in my squadron.

His name was Rob Sayers. And we seemed to follow each other everywhere we go. He went to 18th squadron of the Academy.

I went to 18th squadron. He went to medical school at Tulane. I went to Tulane.

I just followed him a year later. He went in pediatrics at Travis. I went into pediatrics at Travis.

And I remember getting to know him at the Academy and talking about making acquaintances. I did everything I could to interact on his terms. I'd say, well, let's go run together.

Well, I don't want to run. I'm not interested in running. Okay, well, let's go out for dinner together.

I mean, it always seemed like I was initiating a relationship. I don't know if you've ever been put in that situation. Don't be discouraged about that.

If you just remember, non-Christians, you know, a lot of times they're interested in their own world. And don't be discouraged if you're always initiating a relationship initially. Well, I got to know Rob a little bit at the Academy.

Went to medical school. And after being there for a year and a half, we got him and his wife in Bible study. He was in Bible study for about a year.

And finally he came to know the Lord, him and his wife. And then we continued to develop our relationship. And they're now overseas.

And funny thing, now he's following me. I'm leaving Eglin. He's coming to Eglin.

But him and his wife are very committed to the Lord and having an active discipling ministry with other physicians. And another couple is Pete and Cindy Crow. Pete and I are also Academy graduates.

And he went to medical school in Chicago, and I went to medical school in New Orleans. And since I'm from Chicago, I'd see him. I'd drop in and see him.

And we had this relationship for six years. And Pete's a real nice guy, very likable type person. So he enjoyed being around him, but not much interest in spiritual things.

And finally, after knowing him for six years, Diane got to know his wife. We both got married in between. And I asked Pete if he'd be interested in getting involved with evangelistic Bible study.

You know, we felt after five years, six years, it might be time maybe to initiate that. And he said yes, and his wife said yes, but it was a little bit more reluctantly. And we had one Bible study.

And then the next time we got together, they said, you know, we don't want to do this anymore. We don't do this anymore. You mean we just started this thing.

And they said, no, we just feel like God wants us to stay. And they're both in the Catholic Church, and they said we want to stay involved with the Catholic Church. And we don't want to have any interest in Bible study.

So it was hard for us, but we prayed that we would still keep the relationship going. And we didn't say much more. Well, a year later when we went out, we did the residencies.

He was in family practice. I was in pediatrics at Travis. After about a year, they finally started to show some interest again.

And then they then decided to get back in Bible study and finally came to know the Lord. And they're just doing super. Right now they're overseas also.

So I shared those two stories as examples that it takes time. You've got to really initiate the relationship. Don't be discouraged if it's always on your terms.

Don't abandon the relationship if it doesn't seem to be going too far. Because God will use that. And he may even in a setting maybe not use you.

He may use someone else to actually bring them to know the Lord. Just a couple other points as we're running out of time here under establishing a growing relationship. I found it helpful to identify with Christ early in the relationship in a positive way.

The way Diane and I do this is as we're getting to know them, the couple, we have them over for dinner and usually you're saying, well, gee, how did you get to know each other and all that. And in that context, we just share how we kind of got to know each other and were married and give a little testimony as to the fact that we're Christians. I find it helpful because early in a relationship there seems to be more freedom to share that.

And then there's a period of time where you're getting to know everyone and find out where you're coming from that it's a little bit harder to share about spiritual things. And then later on as you get more comfortable, I think probably everyone's been through this, you're more free to share spiritual things. It really helps to identify with Christ in a positive way early in the relationship.

We talked about using the home. It's a tremendous vehicle. Spend as much time together doing social things and the like.

And then the last thing you want to do is you want to pick a few people that you really feel that God is leading you to be around and really pray for them specifically. Now you've gotten to know a bunch of people. You've related a few of those out of that group that you enjoy being around.

You're establishing a growing relationship. And now you're praying for just a couple couples specifically. And that leads us to the next point about using an appropriate harvest vehicle.

That after you've gotten to know someone for a while, what we do is we pray for them and we feel if it's at the right time that we ask them if they'd be interested in studying the claims of Christ from the Bible. We start out with a vehicle that Dave mentioned the other day, a study of John, the Gospel of John. And we tell them the only commitment they have to make is being there.

And we give them a little sheet and we say we want you to read the chapter beforehand. And it's a freewheeling discussion. We may have people who have little interest in God to who may be closer.

And a funny thing happens. We tell people, you know, commit yourself to these six Bible studies. And if you don't like it, you can get out after that.

But what happens is after they get into the group, they get the relationships going. The relationships usually keep them in the Bible study. And here's another key point.

This really has influenced my concept of evangelism. Oftentimes I get them in there, I think, well, gee, after six lessons in the Gospel of John, they ought to be Christians. Isn't that right? Well, that hadn't been our experience.

When we were out at Travis, we had about eight docs and their wives in Bible study. Half of them were not Christians, but they wanted to be in the study. So I got to the end of the six chapters of John.

I thought, well, now what do I do? You know, I have these half Christians, half non-Christians. I thought, well, we'll just keep going. And we went through some follow-up principles.

So we're having non-Christians having a quiet time, memorizing Scripture, getting together. And one guy in particular, he was from a Catholic background. He wanted to be a priest, and then he went into medicine.

It took him two years of Bible study before he made a commitment. And it kind of just came out one night, him and his wife, in the context of our Bible study. We were studying Romans then.

We were doing chapter analysis Bible study. And this really changed my thinking, because in the past, I would have thought, you know, if you're not a Christian, boom, you get out of here. We're going to take these Christians and run with them.

And it's made us be more flexible, because, gee, you think, what in the world am I going to do? But I haven't found it to be offensive to them, and it's a very effective technique, because you've already followed them up even before they become to know the Lord. And it sounds funny, but, I mean, this guy was having a quiet time every morning. And particularly with Catholics, it's time in the Word that changes their thinking.

It's when they see that what they have been taught is different than what the Bible says. That is really what will strike a chord. So don't abandon these people.

If they want to stay in your Bible study, let them stay in, and it may take several years. For them to actually trust Christ. And then lastly is just sharing the words.

And, you know, that's when you get to the point where finally that individual will say, you know, I just realized that you've got something that we don't have. And you're giving the chance to the reaping. God may not ever give you that opportunity.

You may be always in the cultivating stage. Don't be discouraged about that. We're over time.

I'm sorry I took too much of your time. But I guess we have just a couple more minutes for any other inputs. Yes, Billy.

Do you have any particular pertinent comments to make about non-Christian families? Being in your own family? Yeah, the only comment I have to make is that it's very, very difficult. Because I think what it is is our family sees what our lives were like before we came to know the Lord. And any time we go back into that environment, that's how they expect for you to relate.

And it really is lifestyle evangelism at its hardest. Because it really is the grace of God. I mean, it always is the grace of God, but particularly in that setting.

Any other comments? Yes, Randy. Out of some sense of protection under Caleb, we feel like we can't just leave him. We would never let Caleb go to their house.

And when he's at our house, one of us, we've determined that he can come to our house as long as one of us is supervising the interaction all the time. But there's a concern about the interrelationships between the children. Just because we are concerned about Caleb and his self-image and his own development.

Have you been confronted with this? And if so, how have you dealt with it? We don't want to isolate ourselves, like you said. But on the other hand, we want to protect. The only point I'd have to say about that is we have a negative example regarding the kids.

Our neighbor across the street, their kids are absolute, which is wild. Diane and I have communicated, I know by body language, how we feel about their children. It has hurt our relationship.

And children can be either an asset or a liability in terms of ministry. The only caution I would have is you have to be very careful that even if you have an irritating child that you're relating to, or that situation you gave, how you project yourself to the non-Christian family. Because if they realize you don't accept their children, it really does put a strike, drives a nail through the relationship.

And sorry I went over there.

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