

EVANGELISM 201

Shortly before Christmas of 1938, a young man from the UK named Nicholas Winton was planning to travel to Switzerland for a skiing holiday. He decided instead to visit Prague and help his friend Martin Blake who had called to ask him to assist in Jewish welfare work. Winton single-handedly established an organization to aid children from Jewish families at risk from the Nazis. He set up his office at a dining room table in his hotel in Wenceslas Square. In November 1938, following the Kristallnacht in Nazi-ruled Germany, the House of Commons approved a measure to allow the entry into Britain of refugees younger than 17, provided they had a place to stay and a warranty of £50 was deposited for their eventual return to their own country.

Winton found homes in Britain for 669 children, many of whose parents would perish in Auschwitz. Winton's mother worked with him to place the children in homes and later hostels. Throughout the winter, spring and summer, Winton placed advertisements seeking families to accept them. The last group of 250, scheduled to leave Prague on 1 September 1939, did not reach safety. Hitler had invaded Poland and World War II had begun.

Winton kept quiet about his humanitarian exploits for many years, until his wife Grete found a detailed scrapbook in their attic in 1988. It contained lists of the children, including their parents' names, and the names and addresses of the families that took them in. By sending letters to these addresses, 80 of "Winton's children" were found in Britain and in 1988 were invited to be a part of an episode of the BBC television program *That's Life!* Winton was invited to be a member of the audience but was not told what the show was about. At one point Winton's scrapbook was shown, and his achievements explained. The host of the program then asked whether any in the audience owed their lives to Winton, and, if so, to stand – let's watch what happened;

VIDEO

If you are a Christian then somewhere in your past someone took the time and effort to share Christ with you. What was the name of the person who really influenced you to be a follower of Jesus? What is your story? We all have one. Somewhere in the past someone influenced you to receive Christ. So who are you influencing?

Last week we talked about the fact that Jesus calls us to be His witnesses in your Jerusalem – with people who you know or already things in common with. That means that you use the relationships and interests you already have to reach out to others. Today we want to extend that a little further.

Most people in this room have a much larger circle of influence than you realize. Every day you have the opportunity to impact people around you. Maybe it is just a familiar face at the gym, or the neighbor a few doors down or the server at the restaurant where you like to eat. Maybe it's a coworker down the hall from you or a classmate of yours in high school or in college. Maybe God has placed them within your circle to alter their eternal destiny. Do you think that's possible?

Who is in your circle of influence? Try this. Imagine that there is a ring around you that extends fifteen feet in every direction. As you go through the coming week pay attention to the people who step into your circle. And then pray - "God, someone's in my circle. How would you like me to influence them?"

Last week we looked at John chapter 1 where the first disciples were invited to “come and see” Jesus. These disciples were the same background and were from the same area that Jesus was from. This week we want to jump to John 4. Jesus is going to meet a person that is from a very different background. In the encounter with the woman at the well we see modeled for us several important things to remember when telling others about our faith.

1. SEEK OPPORTUNITIES

John 4:5-8 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

Influence requires proximity. You cannot influence people you're not around. You cannot reach out to non-Christians if you're not around non-Christians. That is a challenge for a lot of us ... studies show that the longer you're a Christian, the less likely you are to be around non-Christians. After being a Christian for two years the average Christian no longer has a single, significant relationship with a non-believer. Do you? Scroll through the names of people you share life with.

John Stott once wrote that “Many believers are "rabbit hole" Christians. In the morning they pop out of their safe Christian homes, hold their breath at work, scurry home to their families and then off to their Bible studies, and finally end the day praying for the unbelievers they safely avoided all day.”

Influence requires proximity. In seeking not to be OF the world, often we have so isolated ourselves from the world that we are no longer IN it. What are some ways that you can place yourself in positions where, like Jesus, you will have the opportunity to influence non-Christians?

2. ASK QUESTIONS

John 4:7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

Jesus begins the conversation by asking a question. He asks her for a drink. When you ask a question to someone who steps inside your circle, you're saying to them, “I value your opinion. I want to listen to you. I need your help.” It’s a good way to test the responsiveness of the person you are talking to. It doesn’t even need to be an overtly spiritual question. Just a simple question.

From this story we learn to ask questions that are from our immediate experience. Jesus is at a well; he asks about water. A few weeks ago I was getting a haircut. I asked the lady who was cutting my hair where she was from. I found out she grew up in the Punjab – near to a village I had visited last year when I went with David Lundy to visit some of the schools we support through the Dalit Freedom Network. It was an easy way to start a conversation.

3. MOVE FROM SUPERFICIAL TO SPIRITUAL

John 4:9-15 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 Sir, the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus moved the conversation from superficial to spiritual. When people step into your circle of influence and you begin a conversation, look for ways to move the conversation from the superficial (small talk) to the spiritual. Depending on who you talk with, this is also a difficult step to take.

When I lived in Kuwait it was very easy to talk with people about spiritual things. However, here in Canada there are a lot of people who have been exposed to Christianity and have been turned off by it. Many have concluded that the Christian faith is boring and it doesn't relate to their lives. Because of this it can be tough moving conversations towards spiritual things.

I have found the easiest way to do this is just to be natural. Be yourself. When I was speaking with the lady when I got my haircut it was easy to move the conversation to spiritual because I simply said that I was a pastor and that our church was supporting the work amongst the Dalits because we were seeing to show the love of Jesus.

E.g. buying the pizza for the street kids in the park in downtown TO – why did we buy them pizza? It was the only way we could think of to show that we care and tell them that Jesus loves them.

4. MOVE FROM SPIRITUAL TO PERSONAL

John 4:16-18 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." 17 I have no husband, she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

The next thing that Jesus did was to move the conversation from spiritual to personal. The goal of sharing your faith is not to get into a theological debate with someone. It is not simply to share a theological worldview. The goal is changed lives.

Again, moving the conversation from spiritual to personal can be difficult because it requires a degree of vulnerability that many people are not willing to give. There are a lot of people who have been burned in the past by religion. There are a lot who live in denial and they live behind a mask and act like they do not have any problems.

e.g. talking with Muslim leaders in Kuwait. It was easy until you started to get personal and then there was just lots of denial.

One of the ways we can help move a conversation from spiritual to personal is to share our own testimony. In doing this and speaking about our own faults we are making ourselves vulnerable with others. That often will open the door to others being vulnerable with you.

As a pastor, I know that everyone has issues. Everyone has been hurt. Everyone blows it from time to time. There are so many people around us that are hurting in silence. Maybe they've lost a loved one or been diagnosed with an illness. Maybe they're having financial pressures or their marriage is falling apart. Maybe they're having difficulties with their children.

God has given us a message of hope and good news that they desperately need to hear. I know with all my heart that the answer to all life's problems is Jesus. Jesus works.

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...

However, I want you to catch what happens when he gets personal. She tries to sidetrack him.

John 4:19 Sir, the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

She brings up a controversial, theological debate. The Jews said that you should worship Mount Zion; the Samaritans believed that you should worship on Mount Gerizim. There was this running debate and she tries to draw him into this debate. That will happen to you, too. When you share your faith with someone, in the moment you start to get a little bit personal, you need to be aware of spiritual smokescreens. It's at that time that you'll start to be asked questions that are meant to take the focus off the person. These questions are asked as a way to keep God at a distance.

5. ANSWER QUESTIONS BUT MOVE ON

John 4:21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Jesus sets a great example for us, He doesn't ignore the question but He also doesn't get bogged down with it. He answers it but then moves on. He doesn't get drawn into a debate. He answers the question but he moves on. Jesus answers the question and she doesn't really understand his answer.

Often people we seek to share our faith with will do the same thing. When things get uncomfortable they will try to sidetrack the conversation by getting into a theological debate. I am not saying that questions are not important. Just be careful not to get sidetracked by them.

Sometimes we as believers do not like it when others ask questions because we fear that we will not have the answers. When you are sharing your faith with another person you do not have to answer every question. It is fine to just say "I don't know". E.g. Alpha program – don't answer questions in the first weeks – let people wrestle with them for a while – don't get distracted by them.

John 4:25-26 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." 26 Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

The woman tries to dismiss the debate by saying “Well, someday when the Messiah comes we will be able to figure all this out.” In other words, I don’t have to deal with this right now, I can just wait until later. Jesus presses in to say “I who speak to you am he.” The time for decision is now.

People have asked why I do not do more ‘altar calls’ during the services. Many here grew up in churches that did an altar call every week. I don’t really have anything against them. I believe that it is important to call people to make decisions, but that does not have to be through an altar call.

There is really no example of altar calls in the New Testament. We see Jesus and the Disciples calling people to repentance, but not with “heads bowed and eyes closed.” The problem with altar calls is that they can be manipulative. People can feel pressured to respond and come forward, not because Jesus is calling them, but because they are expected to. It can also leave people with a false sense of security – trusting in an act instead of trusting in the promises of Scripture and the evidence of a transformed life. It can also communicate to people that you can only be saved under the direction of the pastor, when in fact it is most natural for the friend who brought them to help them receive Christ.

You always have the opportunity to respond. There are always teams available after the services for prayer. If I don’t say that often enough, I apologize.

The woman believes, and is so excited that she runs back into town to tell everyone. The story concludes by saying that “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” Immediately she went from simply hearing about Jesus to telling others about Him.

God wants to use you where you are. He wants to use you to touch your circle of influence.

Dr. William Leslie was born in 1868 in London Ontario. He went to school to become a pharmacist. When he was 20 years old he moved to the Chicago area, where God began to grip his heart with the desire to become a medical missionary. He joined American Baptist Missionary Union and moved to the Congo service in 1893. He faced many trials and faced serious illness. A young missionary named Clara Hill took care of him until he recovered. Their friendship ripened into love and they were married in 1896.

In 1912 they decided to leave the comfort of the mission station and travel inland to do a pioneer work in a remote village called Vanga on the Kwilu River with the Yansi people. Many of the surrounding villages were still practicing cannibalism at the time. William and Clara set up a school. They would travel to the surrounding villages telling Bible stories and teaching the children how to read and write. They saw very few come to Christ. After 17 years they returned to the USA, feeling like failures and believing that their work had born very little fruit. Just 9 years after they returned he died.

In 2010, a team of missionaries with Mission Aviation Fellowship did a survey trip into the interior of the Congo. They flew into the area and then hiked and took canoes deep into the jungle until they came to the first of the Yansi villages. They were amazed at what they found. In every village they found a network of reproducing churches throughout the jungle. Each village had its own gospel choir that wrote their own songs and would have sing-offs from village to village. They found a church in every village they visited scattered across 34 miles. One such church was a 1000-seat “cathedral” that was packed. So many villagers walked miles to attend.