

A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR EVANGELISM

(Mark 12:28-31)

Last year during our sermon series on the “Holy Spirit,” you will remember I leaned heavily on the writings of Dr. Gary Friesen concerning how we as New Testament believers are to make wise decisions. Last week, in my first sermon of 2020, I asked you if you were hungry for fruit. For the next several weeks we are going to look at some very practical ways that you and I can do more for God and His kingdom work. [Last week I said that God is interested in not just **faithfulness** but **fruitfulness** as well.] And in this sermon series, the wisdom I have gleaned from professor and Bible college president Joseph Aldrich will play a significant role regarding this matter of how we as God’s people— all with very different giftings and personalities—can make the biggest difference possible for God’s kingdom work. (Is anybody here hungry for fruit?)

Mark 12:28-31 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?”²⁹ Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.’³⁰ And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.³¹ And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Dr. Joe Aldrich asked a Christian brother from India, who having great success in bringing **Hindus and Muslims** to Christ, how he was able to do what so many thought was impossible. This was his reply to Aldrich:

Each Sunday, he told me, he and his wife host somewhere between thirty and fifty students for dinner. That's a key part of his strategy. Food and camaraderie break down barriers. There's something about eating a meal with someone that accelerates friendship. "So you talk about Christ at these meals?" I asked. "No," he said ... "So how," I asked him, "are you able to see so many find Christ?" "I love them," he replied, "until they ask me why."

Doesn't that brother's reply have a familiar ring to it? Earlier in our text from Mark 12, when our Lord was asked to state the greatest commandment in the Bible, He said, "**You shall** love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." But He didn't stop there. He adds, "**And the second**, like it, is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The Indian brother said:

"**Through loving them**, they meet Jesus Christ, even though they don't know whom they've met [yet]. Once they've sensed the reality of His love through me, they're open to discuss the reason for the love and acceptance they've experienced."

Do you know what this Indian brother's foundational strategy was for introducing people to Christ? Love. *“Love them 'til they ask you why.”*

You see, **love** lays an amazingly solid foundation for evangelism—for bringing people to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Title: Loving Others As Yourself: A Solid Foundation for Evangelism

(Prayer)

Long-time pastor, author, and chaplain of the US Senate, John Lloyd Ogilvie, passed away this past June at the age of 88. He shared the following short but powerful quote regarding the role that both **God** and **believers** play in the salvation of those without Christ:

“Without **God** we can't; without **us** He won't.”

One of the key truths that I hope to be able to get across to each one of you in the coming weeks is this: **“What is the usual and typical means that God uses to draw people to Himself?”**

Now, I didn't say the means He **always** uses---I said the “usual and typical” means---His “bread and butter” game plan---the one that has brought the greatest success and the greatest numbers since time immortal.

- If you and I were to become committed to reaching others for Christ, how would we do that?
- If we were committed to seeing, let’s say, our fellow co-workers (or a neighbor), come into God's family, where would we start?
- What plan would we follow? What tools would we use?

I would like to contrast the story I told you about our Indian brother with a hypothetical story, but one that I think that most of you can relate to.

In “Scene One,” we have a couple named John and Denise who hunger to reach others and bear fruit to God. They really do.

Now the “Setting”: They have just returned home from an evening of evangelism training. They feel challenged... **and guilty**. Mostly, they feel discouraged and dejected. After a few moments of tense silence, Denise speaks:

“I just can’t do it, John. I’m sorry, but I’m not comfortable sharing with strangers.”

“But Denise, you signed up for Tuesday evening! Why didn’t you speak up?”

“What could I say? *‘Excuse me, please. I’m dropping out. I’m not interested in seeing folks go to heaven.’* I **do** want to get involved in sharing my faith, but I’m no good with words. Nothing comes out right.”

“Denise, that was the whole point of the evening— to teach us what to say and how to say it. We **all** need help, dear.”

I know, John, but... I’m uneasy about it. Seems to me it’s such a narrow, limited strategy. It doesn’t fit me.”

“Well, I wish you’d spoken up sooner. We’re committed now.”

“I know, I know. But what could I have said? Who wants to oppose evangelism? Let’s drop it. You just don’t understand.”

We can all relate to the feelings that couple had. When I became a new believer in Christ in the Chicago area years ago, in the church I was saved through, there was really only one kind of evangelism method being pitched--and it was this:

“If you really love the Lord and are not ashamed of Him, you will set aside at least two or three hours of your week to go door-to-door to total strangers and give them the message from the Bible they so desperately need to hear.”

Did God use that? Absolutely. If I had to guess, I would say 20% of the church members were doing this on a fairly regular basis. And with that many people going out week-after-week, God used those brave believers to bring people into the kingdom. But I have a few questions.

- What about the other 80% of the congregation that were not going out door-to-door?
- Wasn't there some way that the other 80% could be used of God to bring people to Christ aside from door-to-door, confrontational soul winning?

Of course there was, but the church never said what that way was. In fact, if you didn't want to do outreach their way and get out on the streets every Saturday or Thursday night, there was something wrong with you spiritually. That was not only implied, it was preached.

Now someone might say, "Bob, D.L. Moody told the story about a woman who came up to him and said, *‘Mr. Moody, I don't like the way you are evangelizing.’* And Moody, who won a lot of people to Christ, said, "Oh, I'm sorry about that. By the way ma'am, how do you evangelize?" And she replied, "I don't." and Moody said to her, ***“Well, I think I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it.”***

I like that story and I believe it with all my heart. But all that to say this. I wonder **how many people in the Chicago area** could have been brought to Christ if my church had promoted door-to-door soul winning for those who like that form of outreach **AS WELL AS** an approach like the Indian brother who got to know people and loved them and THEN shared the good news? I wonder **how many more** people would have been won?

Listen to this:

Research indicates that only about 10% of believers are gifted to share Christ using the methods presented in almost 100% of the classes on personal evangelism (confrontational).

If you aren't intimidated by speaking to strangers about the Lord, great! Keep it up! But I would also like to answer how we can help the other 90% of you **discover** and **fulfill** the role you can play in bringing people to Christ!

If there are 100 Christian adults in a room, only between 5 & 10 have the ability or desire to do the kind of evangelism that my church in Indiana said that **everyone** ought to be doing. So what I am saying today is that, not only our church, but churches everywhere need to rethink their strategies for bringing lost people to Christ in this new decade that is upon us.

How great would it be if 80% of the new members at RPF were people you and I brought to Christ? (*Well, that's impossible!*) Last week, I thought that we agreed that the Scripture, "With God, nothing will be impossible" was going to be our motto for 2020? I believe that God is aching to do the impossible through us—to bring scores of people to Him through the power of God.

Allow me to close with a few principles that are extremely important:

1. **In the initial** stages of outreach, [we can call this "pre-evangelism"] **God is not so much asking you to tell people "what a friend they have in Jesus" as in showing them what a friend they have in you.**

What was the second greatest commandment after loving God? "Love your neighbor as yourself." Treat him or her just like you would like to be treated. How do every one of us want to be treated? With love. With respect. With true concern. To know that someone truly cares. It might be hard for some of you to speak to others with words, but everyone can speak to others through the kind things they do for them.

2. **A significant flow** of people into Ridge Pointe [and all local churches] **is not likely until the majority of us use our unique gifts and abilities to touch the lives of unbelievers as well as believers.**

The real question is not, "Can you explain all of the difficult texts of the NT?" (as great as that would be). When it comes to helping people find Christ, the most important question may be,

- "Can you make someone a plate of cookies?"
- "Can you mow a neighbor's lawn?"
- "Can you be kind and welcoming around others?"
- "Can you pray for someone you want to win every day?"
- "Are you sensitive to the needs of the people God places around you?"

In 2019, author Philip Yancey traveled to Beirut, Lebanon. The Pastor asked him not to take pictures because Muslims who become believers in Christ are often threatened with murder. Yancey asked the pastor why they believe in spite of the danger.

The pastor replied, "There are two main reasons why they become Christians. Many have visions or dreams of a man in white beckoning them, and they then discover the man is Jesus. I hear this story over and over from converts. The second reason is simply love. Not so long ago this city was besieged by the Syrian army, bombed every day. Six thousand died, with many more injured. You can understand why not many volunteered to help at the Syrian camps right away."

He then led Yancey downstairs to an underground parking lot, and said:

"Once our church got to know the refugees, though, we felt compassion for them. They have lost everything, and live in a kind of limbo, people without a country. So we converted this indoor parking lot into a school that now educates 650 kids. Not all our neighbors approve—we've been to court many times. But **Jesus' love wins.**"

3. **You can reach others for Christ!**

And the way to do that is by letting the love of Christ flow through you like never before. **Love them 'til they ask you why!**

Isn't it about time that we got back to the Bible's way of moving people toward the cross of Christ?

(Closing prayer)