

Date: March 8, 2020

Series: Evangelism

THE THREE PHASES OF EVANGELISM: PART 1---CULTIVATING

(1 Corinthians 3:1-9)

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; **3 for you are still** carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? **5 Who then is Paul**, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. **8 Now he who plants** and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

Sonya Federov¹ lives in a communist country---a country that would put her in jail for a minimum of ten years without blinking an eye if they knew her reason for living. You see, her reason for living is to share the good news of eternal life through faith in Christ. In spite of the tremendous obstacles she faces, she is definitely a faithful sheep in the midst of a huge wolf pack. Without books, tapes, tracts, or videos to hand out, she brings people to faith in Christ.

Now, I could rattle off several reasons why she makes such a difference in a part of the world that is very anti-Christian, but allow me to give you her own take. Referring to her success in bringing people to Christ, Sonya says:

I'm not sure I know all the reasons why, but let me give you an example. I was going through the check[out line] in the village grocery store. As I glanced out the window, a mother and her two children caught my eye. Their poverty was obvious. Thin, bony hands, sunken eyes, and tattered clothes underscored their [desperate] need. They [huddled] together outside the store. All they could think about was a decent meal and some warm clothes. My heart was strangely tugged toward them.

I picked up my two sacks of groceries, walked out the door, and handed this mother and her kids my groceries. Their faces lit up. We made small talk and I left.

The Lord prompted me to pray for this family, so I did. Several weeks later I spotted them again. I followed them home. Now I knew where they lived. I continued in prayer.

The Lord prompted me to buy some women's shoes and take them to her. I purchased the shoes, hiked over to her house, delivered them, and made small talk. I [didn't] mention Christ, but I continued in prayer.

¹ Last name supplied to improve story

The Lord prompted me to buy the children some sweaters. I made the purchase and made my way over to deliver them. The kids were delighted. I visited with them for a bit, then headed home. I continued in prayer.

The Lord prompted me to take over a couple of hankies. No big deal, but apparently it was part of God's agenda. We visited again, and then I returned home. I continued in prayer.

Then the Lord prompted me to do something for which I had to pray a little longer. He apparently wanted me to bring over some women's underwear ... a somewhat unusual request. I prayed about it a little longer before I was convinced. The purchase made, I showed up on her doorstep and delivered my package. The dear lady looked inside and was elated, then became very upset.

"How is it," she asked, "that you're able to listen in on the conversations between my husband and myself?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," was my reply.

"Then how do you know what our needs are?" she asked.

"God tells me," [I replied].

"He must! Several months ago I was waiting for the bus. The street was muddy. I stepped into the bus as it was pulling away and left a shoe in the mud. It was the only pair I owned. When I got home, I explained to my husband what had happened. As you know, Sonya, he's an alcoholic. He drinks up everything he brings home. He told me if I was dumb enough to leave a shoe in the mud, I could go without shoes. That afternoon you showed up with the shoes."

"Several weeks later the weather started getting cold. School was soon to start. I asked my husband if I could get some sweaters for the kids... I got cursed out for even suggesting it. Then you showed up with the sweaters."

"The kids caught cold, and I asked if I could get them some hankies. It was just a little thing. The answer was a clear and decisive NO. Yes, you know. You showed up with the hankies."

"As you know, I've been looking for work. I finally found a prospective employer who thought he might have a place for me. He told me I'd have to have a physical. I knew I'd feel a lot more secure about the physical if I had some decent underwear. I explained to my husband about the job possibility and pled with him to allow me to buy some underwear. He ridiculed me and denied my request. And you showed up with the underwear."

Do I even need to tell you that this woman became a believer in Christ?

Was it hard for her to believe that there was a God somewhere who cared for her and her needs?

How could this woman argue with a person who gives and gives and gives?

What I would like to do for the rest of March is to finish our sermon series on evangelism with three very practical messages entitled “**The Three Phases of Evangelism.**”

Today we are talking about **phase one---cultivating** (this is what takes place first---it is what Sonya did before she ever shared the message of life in Christ with her new friend).

Later we will talk about **phase two**---sowing and **phase three**---reaping.

Now that we have seen cultivation illustrated in the life of Sonya, allow me to give you a definition:

I. The definition of cultivation

Webster’s:

1 : to prepare or prepare and use for the raising of crops; *also* : to loosen or break up the soil about (growing plants)

2 a : to foster the growth of 〈 *cultivate* vegetables 〉

Cultivation is an appeal to the lost person’s heart through the building of a relationship.

Important: Not all people come to faith in Christ the same way (last week we spoke of the Ethiopian eunuch in contrast with Saul of Tarsus as an example), but many if not most come to Him after a Christlike person has done some “cultivating.”

II. Insights concerning “cultivating a soul”

(What can we learn about this necessary “relationship building” from Sonya’s story which we shared earlier?)

Cultivation...

1. ...is responding to a need

(Sonya saw a desperate family).

Ministry often begins at the point of need.

Many people don’t have a friend. We need to look around and see how we can meet people’s needs.

2. ...is responding without any assurance of the outcome

Did Sonya know that first day what would happen weeks later because of her efforts? Of course not.

So we need to understand that as God allows different people to cross our paths---whether we minister to them spiritually or materially---we do so trusting that God will use our efforts even though we may never know what the outcome may be.

(It would be great to know that if we gave so and so \$100 on Thursday, it would be instrumental in bringing him to Christ on Friday---but none of us have any assurances like that. So we give and give and trust that God will use our efforts--- WHY? Because we are laboring together **with Him!**)

3. ...is responding even though we are in the dark about what God is doing on His end

God took Sonya's simple gifts---shoes, sweaters, hankies, and underwear---and turned each one of them into miracles--**and Sonya didn't have a clue!**

That's the kind of God with whom we co-labor!

4. ...is taking the initiative

Sonya didn't wait for the woman to come to her---she went to her first and bought her some groceries. That's what Jesus did for us---He died for us on the cross to make our salvation possible and then sent Spirit-filled people into our lives to tell us how to be saved through faith in Him.

Yes, it costs to walk in Christ's footsteps---but let me say this---the interest rate on investments in the kingdom of God according to Jesus are 30-fold (3000%), 60-fold (6000%), and 100-fold (10,000%). I'll take those numbers any day!

5. ...is understanding the power of loving deeds

As Sonya blessed this mother and her family, I'm sure that this poor lost woman was saying---"You love my kids, you love me. You listen to me---my pain and heartaches---and I'll listen to you."

We can say it this way: "People will be more apt to believe in Christ if they can first believe in you."

6. ...involves heartfelt prayer

Over and over in her story, Sonya said, “I did such and such...**and I continued in prayer.**”

And it was none other than Charles Spurgeon who said (and I’m paraphrasing), “I suppose that no one has ever come to faith in Christ apart from another person’s prayers.”

If someone on your “Top 10 List” seems unreachable---keep on praying---**prayer changes things!**

7. ...involves knowing when to speak

When did Sonya finally bring God into the picture? It was when the woman asked: “How are you able to listen in on the arguments I am having with my husband---how do you know what my needs are?” Her reply after weeks of demonstrating the love of God: “God tells me.” The other woman’s reply: “He must!”

8. ...involves tremendous patience

Do you know what our problem is as modern-generation microwave Christians? We want everything NOW---including the souls of men and women. But it doesn’t work that way.

Now sometimes we can win people on our very first meeting, but most of the time, we cannot. The question is this: **Are you willing to wait no matter how long it takes?**

9. ...involves a journey out of our world and into theirs

The barriers of poverty and alcoholism did not keep Sonya from entering this woman’s world. Love does that. God demonstrated His love for us in that when we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Thank you, Lord for journeying from Your world to ours!

10. ...involves deeds more than words

“Preach the gospel always. If necessary, use words.”

Cultivating is deeds. The next phase in evangelism, sowing, is words.

Cultivating demonstrates. Sowing declares.

Cultivating prepares. Sowing presents.

Now, if you meet someone and realize that they have been prepared by others for the message of the gospel---go for it! That's what it's all about.

If they ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you, by all means, **tell them!**

But let's never try to tell them if it is obvious they are not ready. If you say something about the Lord and the other person raises his or her hand and says---"Hold it, there are two things I don't talk about---politics and religion..." I would advise you to say no more at that point.

A few years after Kelly and I moved to Dallas, I spoke to a doctor about Christ, but He was not happy about it. He told me in no uncertain terms to never bring Him up again and if I planned on doing that---to never return to him for treatment. I did not say anything to him about Christ for a dozen years or so. (Interestingly, he mellowed a little---he wasn't nearly as combative and even allowed me to talk a little bit.) Maybe since he was in his 70s at that time, he was thinking about death a little more than when he was in his mid to late 50s.

III. How do I begin "cultivating others"?

1. Make your "Top 10 List"
2. Pray over them daily asking God to open doors (for loving deeds as well as the gospel message)
3. Love others according to **your** talents
4. Never give up!