

Evangelism Sunday School

- Remote access evangelism...drones and Clinton

In 1998 Bill Clinton ordered Cruise missile strikes on Sudan and Afghanistan in response to the bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. This was done in order to strike back at Al-Qaeda, and was an attempt to kill a person that was strange and unknown to Americans: Osama Bin Laden. Do you I remember where I was when I heard this news story. I was working as a paramedic on an Ambulance in Palmdale, driving back to my station, and my partner and I made fun of the way that Bin Laden's name sounded, we hadn't heard his name before. And as you know, his name would not be a laughing matter for long.

Of course the missile strikes were NOT successful. Bin Laden was not killed. But one of the targets that was destroyed, an alleged chemical weapons factory, turned out to be a pharmaceutical plant. Even very accurate long distance attacks like this may strike their intended target and in the end be ineffective because distance had kept important information from the planners.¹ Americans often want to fight and win wars this way. It is less messy for us; we end up with fewer American casualties and we do not have to see the painful reports of American losses on the news. We continue to do this with drones.

In many ways Christians want to do evangelism this way, from afar. Distance is comfortable.

Illustration: Several years ago Sermonaudio.com did a campaign to mail a copy of the gospel of John to everyone in NY. This is admirable, and I don't question their motives. But in too many cases this is how we want to share the good news in America. Is that the best way to spend a couple of hundred thousand dollars?

Distance evangelism isn't the biblical norm. After Peter brought the gospel to Cornelius and the gentiles he was criticized for it. What was the criticism? Not that Peter had preached to the gentiles. Acts 11:2-3 says "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³"You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." They might have been happy to hear that Peter had stood with a bull horn on the street corner shouting to the gentile dogs, calling them to repentance. But he ate with them, and this was only have God had pressed him into with a vision.

I would like to share some of our story and in the process help you understand **why relationships are central to the great commission.**

- We moved to the Fresno area to plant a church in 2008. And at the time we only knew a few people, and so our journey has been one of building friendships so we can advance the gospel.
- BTW, I am a lousy evangelist. Not an expert. We have made plenty of mistakes, and also learned a lot along the way. We are still learning. I am often afraid, often lazy, and plenty of times I struggle with even caring out my neighbors!
- But, I would like to share a few things from scripture and give you some suggestions and encouragements on how you can build relationships for the sake of the gospel.

Luke 5:27-32

- What is going on in this passage? A man named Levi has become a follower of Jesus, he is a new Christian. And he wants his friends to meet Jesus. What does he do? He hosts a huge party for all his friends, and invites them to his house to eat and meet this man that is so utterly different than the rest of the rabbis.
- What is Jesus doing at the party? Eating and drinking with the untouchables. With Tax collectors and sinners.
- Who else was there? His disciples. Jesus is teaching his disciples how to do ministry.
- What happened? There is criticism from the Pharisees. “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” The implication is that he is endorsing and supporting their sin.
- What is Jesus answer?
 - Physician/sick person illustration.
 - He came to call to sinners to repentance
 - The Pharisees are not criticizing the idea that Jesus would call sinners to repentance. They did as much. It is not what he did that bothered them. It was HOW he did it that made them angry.
 - How was he calling sinners to repentance? By eating and drinking with them. Eating a meal with someone in the ancient world is a sign of friendship!
 - This is not all that Jesus did, he also preached publicly. We shouldn't miss that. But this text gives us an important part of his method.
 - And if the son of God needed to do this to call the lost to himself, how much more do we need to do this?

I Thess. 1:5, 2:1-8 (READ)

Paul successfully gave the gospel to the Thessalonians. He brought the message of Christ and planted a church. What else could be said about Paul's giving of the gospel?

- 1:5, how did the gospel come? Not in word only, there was also power but also a relationship. He could say- "you know what kind of men we were among you."
- 2:3-6, he could talk about his trustworthiness because of his conduct. People were making false accusations about them, that they were just taking advantage of the people.
- V. 7- how did he feel about them? Deep love and concern.
- V. 8- What did Paul give them? The gospel, YES absolutely! This is essential. But that is not all he gave. He also gave himself! His own life!
 - There is a famous statement: "Preach the gospel and use words when necessary."
 - This is a stupid and unbiblical statement. Because if you are going to share the gospel, you have to share the message. It is good NEWS. Jesus died and rose again for our sins.
 - But here is another problem, the way most Christians respond to this statement is also stupid. There is this idea that we either have to give people the gospel, or behave in a loving way. As if we have to choose one or the other.
 - And that is NEVER true in scripture. They are always together!
- What did Paul's example create? (trust...confirmation)

So, relationships are a key part of making disciples in scripture. This was Jesus' way, and this was Paul's way. But it is even more important for us for these reasons:

1. Post modernism as a system of doubt.

- a. Most of our neighbors have been raised in a deep culture of skepticism. Not just doubting religion. We doubt Politicians, corporations, accounting firms, health insurance companies, used car salesmen, the media, etc.
- b. We don't know who we can trust. And this trust will only be established through humble relationships over time.

2. **Social disintegration**, we don't know our neighbors. And our smart phones and social media is making this even worse
 - a. We no longer need each other. When we see a person hurt or sick, we don't stop and help, we call the 911 as we drive by. When our car breaks down we don't call our friends, we call AAA. When we loose our job, we depend on anonymous checks from the government. When we are depressed or anxious we hide it from friends and go to the doctor instead, who promises absolute confidentiality.
 - b. Our culture has been built around driving our cars long distances and we return home, and park the car and close the garage door behind us.
 - c. Article about murder suicide. Peter Lovenheim has written a book on the subject of neighbors and neighborhoods in America. He writes this about his journey:

I had not been particularly interested in neighborhoods until about 10 years ago when a tragedy occurred on my street: One evening, a man shot and killed his wife and then himself; their two middle school-age children ran screaming into the night. The kids soon moved to their grandparents' house in another part of town. What struck me about this event — besides the tragedy — was that a family who had lived on my street for seven years had, in essence, vanished overnight. Yet the effect on my neighborhood seemed slight. No one, including me, knew the family well. In fact, as far as I could tell, no one seemed to know anyone beyond a casual, superficial level.ⁱⁱ

- d. In an Article called “The End of Neighbors” in the Canadian Magazine “Macleans,” Levi Nicholson writes:
“It’s a new day in the neighbourhood all across the Western world. More than 30 per cent of Canadians now say they feel disconnected from their neighbours, while half of Americans admit they don’t know the names of theirs. An Australian sociologist investigating community responses in the wake of the 2011 floods in Queensland found relations in “a precarious balance”; neighbours were hesitant to intrude even in emergencies— leading the scholar to conclude that “we are less likely than ever to know” our neighbours. Quite right, too: A recent poll of 2,000 Britons found a third declaring they couldn’t pick their near neighbours out of a police lineup.”ⁱⁱⁱ

3. We not only don't know our neighbors, but there is growing distrust and fear of other people.

- a. Fear of neighbors. Story of the couple from Children's hospital, inviting them to dinner. We thought you might be serial killers!
 - i. We are so afraid that we keep our doors locked.
- b. When a stranger comes knocking at your door? How do you feel?
- c. We live in a culture of sales and marketing where everyone is trying to sell you something. Your mail, your email, your phone, your facebook account, at the mall, etc. Churches have fed into this.

4. Distrust of Christians in particular.

- a. Their past experience with Christians and the church is often not very good.
- b. There is a cultural narrative concerning Christians. That we are self-righteous, hateful and judgmental.
- c. Turkey illustration. A friend who was a missionary in Turkey had won a Muslim man to Christ, and was going to baptize him. The man came back to the pastor saying that one of his friends told him that he gets 10K for every Muslim he baptizes!
- d. That is in Islamic countries, right? One of our pastors Aaron invited a friend to church, and he said- hey wait, why are you asking me? Don't you get a gift card if you bring a friend to church?
- e. They question our motives, and many have given them good reason to be suspicious.

My Suggestions- 9 of them:

BTW, this NOT a recipe for success. These are some principals that scripture teaches and that you can use to help love people and make disciples. And I am not saying this is the only way to do it! But the good news is that you don't need any special training or degree to do this. If you are a Christian, you can do this!

1. **Have no agenda but love.** This may seem counter intuitive. But people are very perceptive. They know when they are a project.
 - a. Story of Pastor Randy who had befriended a rabbi in his town. The Rabbi later asked him, Did you become my friend just because you wanted me to become a Christian? "I would want to be your friend even if you never became a Christian."
 - b. Our Hacienda ministry. What it is and what we did. I will make several references to this. The story, birthday party. How would we go? We went in without our flak jackets full of tracts. Cake and Ice cream and presents and friendship. The result?
 - c. They were asking us for help, input, and encouragement.

- d. I Peter 3:15 “15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”
 - i. This assumes several things: 1-you will be living your life around people, 2- you will have a life that is different, one that is filled with hope. 3- this will lead people to ask you about it!
 - ii. Jeff Vandersteldt: Live in a way that demands and explanation, and when people ask, give them the gospel.
 - iii. The story of a member’s mom in dying of cancer at home. Our church took meals to her family. Her concern about her dad, he didn’t understand. My explanation- this is exactly how it is supposed to be.

2. Look for people that God is preparing.

- a. NT theology of open door.
- b. Look for people in crisis, people willing to talk.
- c. Don’t practice “Red apple Evangelism.” Trying to pick unripe fruit.

3. Look for natural opportunities

- a. The distrust of the stranger, vs. when you are “supposed” to be hanging out.
- b. Neighbor vs. soccer team, workmates, school, etc. This means you need to get out of your Christian Ghetto. You need to cultivate non-christian friends.
- c. People are often more willing to have conversations and build friendships in these natural settings.
- d. The difference between trying to talk to skeptical neighbors vs the people we were serving with in the marching band.

4. Serve people.

- a. We should be doing this anyway. This is our identity, we are servants.
- b. When you love people you help them, you meet their needs.
- c. Illustration of our neighbor with the loud music. Praying for him and a way to serve him that resulted in an opportunity to help him fix his fence.
- d. And this is not only serving the people you are befriending, it also means serving along side them!

5. Look for repeated exposure over the long haul.
 - a. Most likely there are people in your life that you will see again and again. Those are the people you should work to build relationships with
 - b. My friend the missionary in Bagdad. I asked her How do you meet people in order to share the gospel? Her answer: The same way you should be doing it, we go to the same grocer every day, we go to the same shops and build trust with people and then look for opportunities to share.
 - c. When Paul would share the gospel, he would go to the marketplace every day, he would go to the same synagogue week after week.
 - d. In scripture, sharing the gospel is compared to the work of a gardener or farmer. There is planting, and watering, and tending and then reaping. Most people that talk about evangelism talk about reaping. And bless God if you get to reap!
 - i. But in reality, most of the work that farmers do is not reaping. Reaping the harvest is a couple of weeks of work at the end of the season.
 - ii. Most of the work in farming is NOT harvesting! But most evangelism programs focus on this.
 - iii. I want to encourage you to take the long view. Pray for reaping, but don't worry about it, and don't rush it. Take your time, pray and trust God.
6. Eat with people
 - a. This is kind of a shock! Be like Jesus! You are going to eat anyway! And so are they!
 - b. Joe Aldrich's book, "lifestyle evangelism." He says the 2 most powerful tools in evangelism are a healthy marriage and a healthy church.
 - c. Invite people into your home and into your life to get to know them and love them.
 - d. Eating with the homeless.
 - e. Story of our Russian neighbor.
 - i. When we moved in April had her over for dinner a number of times. And had a chance to meet this woman. We talked for hours, I asked her all kinds of questions about her family and upbringing. About Russia, etc.

- ii. She was a burly Russian woman, not very attractive by American standards. Thick Russian accent. At the end of the evening, she said in passing how nice the evening was, and how she was a little surprised because men never spoke to her.

7. Ask Questions and listen!

- a. This is very much like Jesus! The book “Questioning Evangelism.” Jesus is always asking questions!
- b. One author writes, “To be precise, Jesus asks 307 questions. He is asked 183 of which he only answers 3”^{iv} I didn’t confirm this myself, but it makes sense.
- c. Other estimates range easily in the hundreds.
- d. Questions do several important things, when they are asked sincerely, and when you listen to the answer.
 - i. They show that you are humble and care.
 - ii. They help you to understand the person and where they are coming from. And you will find that people are interesting!
 - iii. The right kinds of questions are disarming, they are not threatening.
 - iv. They help people come to grips with the truth of what they already believe.
- e. The story of the Hacienda, hostile table. Lots of questions from me and how the end was very different.
- f. Street Evangelism- Moving people from withdrawal, and suspicion to conversation. Introduce myself and start asking questions: Story of the old man that told me he was a “Christian” but that he was afraid God wouldn’t let him into heaven. And right there on the street he confessed to me that he was addicted to pornography.

8. Look for Common Ground

- a. One of the best things to do is connect with people based on what you have in common. Common experiences, common spaces, common interests.
- b. BTW, one of the greatest areas of common ground come from our weaknesses and struggles. When Christians paint themselves as having it “all together,” it can destroy common ground. But if you find out that a neighbor is struggling with their

teenagers or marriage, one of the best things you can do is talk about your own struggles as a family.

9. Pray

- a. This is not an afterthought. This is one of the most important things. Because God is the one who changes hearts.
- b. Colossians 4:2-6 “²Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. ⁵Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” ¹

ⁱ Retrieved from 1.07.10 from <http://www.cnn.com/US/9808/20/us.strikes.01/>

ⁱⁱ <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/apr/08/opinion/la-oe-lovenheim-neighborhoods-20110408> retrieved on 1.31.15

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.macleans.ca/society/the-end-of-neighbours/> Retrieved on 1.31.15

^{iv} <http://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Is-Question-Questions-Answered/dp/1426755147>

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Print.