

SOWING GOOD SEED

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, February 21, 2010

Our focus during this month of Sundays is “Preparing the Field,” or “How to turn disinterest into curiosity.”

I began by speaking about “Gathering Good Seed,” for we must begin with ourselves and learn how to become “good news” to others. There are just too many “bad news” Christians, who know all too well how to represent Jesus Christ as insipid, hollow, irrelevant, and offensive. We must not be like that!

We have a Savior who is alive, dynamic, deep, relevant, and comforting! He may challenge our status quo, but He will not break a bruised reed. Jesus is a wonderful Savior!

Then, Linda spoke about “Preparing the Soil,” because there is much we can do to ready the hearts of the unchurched through prayer.

God will use your intercessions for others to open eyes that have been blinded through unbelief, to soften hearts that have been hardened because of sin, and to awaken spiritual curiosity and faith.

Today’s topic is “Sowing Good Seed.” Having prepared myself and prayed for others, what shall I do when I am face to face with an unchurched person? How should I begin the process of sowing God’s Word in their hearts?

If we have been faithfully praying that God would open their eyes, we may expect Him to do so.

How is life different for a person whose eyes are open? [They notice light and shadow. Curiosity is aroused.]

How can we recognize this? [They will comment and ask questions to see if others see what they see.]

If we have earnestly prayed that God would soften their hearts, we may expect Him to do so.

How can we recognize a person whose heart has grown softer? [More mercy and compassion. Conversation shifts away from self to others.]

If we have asked God to awaken their spiritual curiosity and faith, we may expect Him to do so.

How can we tell when spiritual curiosity is active? [Searching for meaning, significance, justice for others, wondering about the future, trying to identify God’s activities.]

The most important question is this: will you be around when these things begin to take place? You will if you have been developing a relationship with the people you have been praying for.

You needn’t become someone’s “best friend” in order to build a significant relationship. You have people you talk to every day, but you also have people you talk with every week, and others you talk with every month, and some you only talk with once a year. The more frequently you speak together,

the more aware you will be of changes in their lives, and the more opportunity you will have to speak to their heart issues.

Learn to Converse

Develop relationship through natural, casual conversation. It does not need to be about God or the Bible all the time. Initially, God and the Bible may not even be mentioned. If your conversations revolve around their interests you will get to know how they feel and what they think, what they love and what they hate.

Even if their ideas and expressions are contrary to your own, you can learn how God is working in their lives if you permit them to speak freely and pay attention. You don't have to agree with everything they say, but neither do you have to point out every difference and offer corrections. Here is where we need to have the right attitude, which is respect, and let our responses be guided by the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 3:15

Worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way.

Jesus gave us a wonderful example of this very thing in John 4. As he sat wearily beside a well, while His disciples walked to town for food, a woman came to draw water from the well. "Please give me a drink."

Look for Hooks

"Hooks" are the points of conversation where you can connect and relate and serve other people. They reveal awareness, curiosity, or need.

When a person reveals their moments of awareness and discovery, pay particular attention. These are usually the buds of faith, even if they are not yet directed toward Jesus, or even God. In fact, their discovery may be patently false, but its effect may yet be positive.

As an example from my own life, in my late teen years, I had a drug-induced revelation of the god of the universe. It was a thoroughly unbiblical concept, totally false, yet intriguing. Even though I believed a lie, it prompted a persistent search for God that eventually led me to Jesus Christ. Initially, I got the details wrong, but I got the right motivation, and ultimately discovered the truth.

Right here is where many Christians blow it. They cannot bear for unchurched people to hold to any false idea or bad behavior, so they scold them and correct them as if they were already born again, and in doing so, they snuff out the glimmer of light the unchurched one had gained.

Remember the saying, "Curiosity killed the cat"? You can kill someone's curiosity by overfeeding it.

When your friend asks you why God lets good people suffer, you can say something as simple as, "You know, He has a much bigger perspective than we do about our lives." Or, you can turn the fire hose on them and present a 15-minute treatise on dispensationalism and pre-millennial eschatology. Which do you think they can swallow without choking?

It's not a complete answer (if you even have one yourself), but it's enough for the moment. And it keeps curiosity alive, which is a good thing.

When you learn about a real need in your friend's life, take time to think about how much God wants to meet their need. You may discover that He has already begun to address it; then you can tell them what you've observed.

And don't be reluctant to offer to pray for them, asking God to meet their need. Then, when He does, they will remember that you asked Him to do so, and they will begin to learn for themselves that He answers prayer.

If they permit you to pray in their presence, keep it simple, saints! Stick to the one point of need, ask God to make Himself real to your friend as He answers your request, and thank Father for hearing you.

Build Faith

Build faith, don't bury it. Look for the slightest glow. Fan the smallest spark. And keep fanning it until it becomes a flame.

Don't chide. Don't become irritated. Don't burden them with a list of do's and don'ts.

Remember who you're talking with: a wanderer, who's only just begun to journey; an unchurched person, still caught in a web of sin and misunderstanding. If they were churched, like you are, they would understand what you understand and their life would be as perfect as yours (the last part is a joke!).

It is perfectly all right to leave them with unanswered questions, especially the persistent, won't-let-you-rest kind that will keep their thoughts aimed at God or their new spiritual awareness. But try to end each conversation by reminding them to recognize that God is surely (even if subtly) at work in their lives and He wants them to see it.

Introduce Scripture

Wherever you can, try to relate their experiences to Scripture (not the other way around), as an illustration or an explanation of God's ways. Help them to see their own life circumstance as another example of the principles of the Bible in action.

This way, you will feed them "bite-sized" pieces of truth that are relevant, instead of doctrinal dissertations that are inedible. Only introduce the Scriptures that apply to their past experiences; this makes the truth "tangible" to them. Avoid using Scripture to direct their future; that will be "intangible" to them. Just as we must lead people to the God of the Bible, we must also lead them step by step to the Bible of God. They cannot receive the whole counsel of God at once, especially before they have received the Savior!

John 3:3-7

³ *Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."*

⁴ *"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"*

⁵ *Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. ⁷ So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.'*

This Paul echoed when he wrote: *“People who have only physical life can’t receive the truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit means.”* (1 Corinthians 2:14)

When you see your friend beginning to “get it,” even if only partially (which of us gets it completely?), rejoice, for it is a sure sign that God is at work in them, and you should tell them so.

Next Sunday, I’ll speak about how to serve your friend once his awakening is underway, and your Curious George has become a genuine God-seeker.

Seeking and finding are two very different things, and there may be a lot of road between them. If you’re patient, you can serve them well as they search. And everyone does better on the journey with a guide.

Hallelujah! This is a year of harvest!