

Some Thoughts on Personal Evangelism (Lee Wildman for SITS 2023)

We've had two baptisms at Lakeview in the last month. One of those was the husband of one of our members. She has been a Christian for a long time and he has been attending with her regularly for the past few years. One of our elders set up a study with him and after some months, he obeyed the gospel.

One of our younger members befriended a man at work who he saw was struggling in life. That man and his wife lived not far from Tim and his family. His wife became interested and Tim and his wife studied with her (her husband isn't interested right now) and she obeyed the gospel.

One of our members (Martin) set up a study with the father of one of our members (who was taught by Martin about 3 years ago – met him at a department store) and asked me to help. Martin has led the last two studies without my help.

I tell you these things because such stories are so encouraging to me. When we hear of our brethren doing this work and the rest of the church hears about it, it can light a fire under us!

I believe our work is in part to stir up the hearts of our brethren to talk to others about the Lord and to help equip them to do the work. (Eph. 4)

We do so by first setting the example.

Do they know that I have studies with folks going on outside of the assemblies?
It's kind of hard to convince others to do this great work if I am not doing it.

Brownie Reaves held a weekend meeting with us last August to talk about this work. He asked us to ask ourselves these questions. "What is my magnificent obsession? Do I see everyone as a prospect for hearing the gospel?"

David Tant has been a fine example over the years of talking to others about the Lord and setting up studies with them. This 87 year old servant wrote the following recently in an email he sent out (he is sending out several emails a week with various teachings):

The day was hot, and they walked a long distance. They were passing through unfamiliar territory among people of a different culture, and some were possibly nervous. By now it was noon, and the sun was beating down. At last, a resting place ahead - a well. The group left their leader there and went into a nearby village seeking food. The leader rested, but had nothing with which to draw water.

Soon a local woman approached, and He asked her to draw water for Him. She was startled, for Jews had no dealings with Samaritans, especially women, and she voiced her surprise. With that, Jesus turned the conversation to spiritual things - living water. You know the story (John 4). What an example of how natural it is to use personal contacts to interest people in spiritual matters.

This did not happen just because Jesus was God, but because He recognized and took advantage of opportunities whenever and wherever they presented themselves. And this we can all do, regardless of age, sex, occupation or learning. Please permit a few examples from my own experiences. I do not feel I am an expert, yet I have made a conscious effort through the years to approach others and lead them into discussing things eternal.

As I was getting clothes from the cleaners on a September morn, I engaged the young clerk in conversation. After asking if she lived in the area, and where she went to school, I asked where she went to church. She looked sheepish, and I said, "You don't go, do you?" "No." "Why not?" "Well, you can't really believe the Bible. It's full of legends and fairy tales." "Really? Who told you?" She said that her Bible professor in her Methodist college so informed her.

Then I proceeded to tell her of the Bible's interesting evidences showing that man could not have written it unaided. "Would you like to study about this?" She would, and she did. Nancy was baptized in a few weeks.

While in a store one day, I talked with the three teens who worked there, and then met their parents, the owners, In the conversation, I asked about their church affiliation, and learned they had none. They had become disillusioned, and had little interest in religion. I gave them a tract (written by Dale Smelser) and invited them to visit with us. They said they would (you've heard that before!) We talked on occasion over the months, but no visit with us. But Roger didn't seem to shy away from our conversations.

Finally, I asked for an hour or so one evening to present a concept of simple, New Testament Christianity. (Later, he admitted he consented just to get the matter over with.) We had a good study, and Roger and Donna wanted to know more. After studying five or six weeks, Roger and Donna were baptized. They then began to teach Bible classes, and Roger did some preaching and led singing.

Thinking back through the years, I recall so many people I have met in the common, everyday situations we all have. Some complain, "But I don't have any contacts." Are you a hermit? Consider some of those that have been baptized. My postman (then an elder in a denomination); a next-door neighbor; the bookkeeper (and owner's wife) of a local service station; two bank tellers I often talked with; the receptionist of a business I called on (who later married a gospel preacher); a drug-store clerk; a teacher in my son's grade school; two neighborhood teens who were my children's friends; a woman for whom my wife worked part-time; a hitch-hiker I picked up (carefully) one day; a young woman I met in the bus station during a bus delay; a young couple we took into our home who were out on the street with nowhere to go; and on ... Now, mind you, these did not come asking to be taught; they did not first visit our services; they were not related to Christians; nor were they referred to us. They were simply people whom we met in the normal, everyday affairs of life.

Then there was Thony Nguyen who my wife Flora and I saw limping while pushing a bicycle with a flat tire on a road miles away from any place to get help. We loaded him and his bicycle in our van and took him to a bicycle shop. He said, "I don't have any money." Well, I did, and a new innertube only cost \$20. This encounter led to good discussions and Bible studies over the next few weeks until Thony was baptized into Christ. (And you may have guessed that he is of Vietnamese descent.)

And I can't count the number of contacts and discussions I have had with those who served our table at restaurants. I engage them in questions about the existence of God and the truthfulness of the Bible. Invariably they trust me with their email addresses so I can send information to them.

Brethren, we all know such people, and if they are receptive to the gospel in my town, it is likely there are such in your town. The only "skills" necessary are friendliness, an interest in people, talking to them, asking questions. I usually carry cards or tracts to hand out. As Sewell Hall has said, "It is our job to look for people who are looking" (See **Matthew 9:37,38** and **Ephesians 5:15,16**).

I hope these words will not be taken as if I am boasting about myself. There are others who I believe are better at this than I am, but I did want to give some personal examples to show the readers that personal evangelism *can* be done, and it *must* be done if we want the Kingdom to grow.

David Tant