

LIFE ON PURPOSE 6

“YOU WERE MADE FOR A MISSION”

“Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also.” 2 Corinthians 5:18

Of all the purposes discussed thus far, how many of you would agree that this one is the hardest, or at least, scariest to consider, and especially to fulfill? We have little ‘trouble’ offering worship to God. Most of us don’t find much difficulty spending some time to deepen or grow our lives. All of us would probably agree that belonging and sharing fellowship is the most fun and easiest to fulfill. More and more of us are believing and coming to realize we have gifts and God wants us to use them inside and outside the church. It’s not been easy for some, but we’re making progress. But, few of us, and I mean very few of us get excited about the prospect of sharing our testimony, or witnessing to our faith, or reaching out to our neighbors, am I right? Thank God for those few who are willing, and may their number increase.

There are some inherent problems with evangelism, even witnessing as we consider it today. The biggest problems have to do with the way most of us perceive evangelism must be done. The way evangelism was done 50 years ago, isn’t very effective today. I’ve heard many people say our church should be more like the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, we should have more people going door to door sharing their faith with people, winning our neighbors and neighborhoods to Christ. They usually cite how many Mormons there are world wide to back up their desire. I usually follow up with a couple questions. 1) How many of you like to have people come unannounced knocking on your door? Years ago, that kind of visiting was quite common and natural. Neighborhoods were made up of lifelong friends who lived in the same house for generations, people knew and trusted each other. A house being locked was as foreign a thought as the Internet, but today is a different day.

And the second question I often ask is; 2) how many of you have ever done that kind of witnessing? It's hard, and frankly, not very effective any more. This philosophy of doing evangelism like was done 50 years ago reminds me of a story. A fellow was out hiking one day, and happened to fall into a deep abandoned well. He called out for help for hours until finally a 'good Samaritan' passed by and pulled him out. They two exchanged greetings, and gratitude, and the Samaritan went on to share his personal faith with the well dweller. The man from the well became a Christian that day. As they parted the Samaritan suggested that the man do all he could to lead others to Christ by sharing how he had become a Christian and so he embarked on that challenge by pushing people into wells the rest of his life!

You see most of us believe that everyone must come to Christ the same way we did! I got saved in a Legion Hall, any one else? It's a misconception to think that everyone must have the same experience in the same way you did. God is always about taking ancient unchangeable truth and packing it into new wine skins for delivery to new generations! Another story.

Susan and I used to live in a house that had those pull down type shades in our bedroom. Let's just say we each employ a different 'theology' of opening the shades. One of us gently, gracefully, incrementally lifted the shade in the morning, while the other grabbed the shade, gave it a yank, and watched it crash to the top, flutter uncontrollably, and often watched it hit the floor. I'll let you figure out which of us used which technique but let me tell you the point.

Both methods accomplished the purpose; it got the sun in the room! Some people come to Christ in like manner. Some literally grow up as "Christians", live in Christian families, gradually and genuinely decide at some point to follow Christ with their whole lives. Others have dramatic and emotional experiences of meeting Christ and being dramatically changed.

Which of these is the right way to be saved? Remember the point; its all about getting the SON into the room! We have a number of hang-ups about evangelism if we'd be honest, and I want to try to clarify some of those today. We'll consider them in 'reverse fashion' today:

REASONS NOT TO DO EVANGELISM:

1. **WE DON'T DO EVANGELISM TO MAKE OUR LIVES SAFER.**

I'm reading a book right now that is greatly challenging my thinking about a number of things. John Fischer writing in Fearless Faith discusses how many Christians today hold to an extreme doctrine of separation from the world as fulfillment of Jesus' command to be 'in the world but not of the world.' I'm agreeing with him that this is a dangerous condition for the church in the 21st Century. Let me whet your appetite:

"On the surface this cultural separation masks itself as a form of godliness, but a closer look reveals an enterprise driven more by self-preservation than anything else. 'We may bemoan a moral decline in the country, but our actual concern, if truth be known, is not to see a vital Christianity flourish, but rather to secure a more orderly and less violent society in which to live out our comfortable and self-satisfying lives. In other words, we want a safer world. We are not as concerned about the salvation of those in the world as much as we want them to behave better around us for our comfort and safety! This doctrine of safety through removing ourselves from the world could be one of the most dangerous doctrines to invade the church in recent years."

I'm tending to agree with him. I see examples aplenty of people desiring a more moral country, a more safe living environment, a more satisfying retirement, a more comfortable existence, but I'm seeing fewer and fewer Christian people honestly and humbly living out their lives, working for the changes, and especially engaging their culture in order to effect those changes God would be proud of.

It's easier to complain than to act, it's easier to be critical than to be caring, it's easier to label and dismiss, than to learn and change. Jesus engaged his culture to change his culture, and we need to better follow that example. We don't do evangelism so we'll be safer.

2. WE DON'T DO EVANGELISM TO GROW OUR CHURCH.

We've both been around here long enough to know my feelings about church growth. I strongly believe every church should grow, but that is not the reason we do evangelism, but rather it's result. Our focus and reason for engaging in the challenge of evangelism must never be to fill the pews, or the plates, but to fill heaven with lost people! Let me get this before us first. Rick Warren graphically reminds us that every church that intentionally decides it is 'big enough'; in essence says to the rest of the world: "Go To Hell"!

Should every church grow? Yes, as long as the bars are open, the church must stay open! Think of this. Who are the churches greatest evangelists? Her newest members. Why? Because the largest part of their circle of influence is still outside the church. The longer you are part of the church the more your friends from church fill your circle, and the more intentional you must become to reach out to people who don't know Jesus. Plus, our newest members are often still filled with the joy of knowing Jesus that for some of us seems to wane the longer we are inside the church, or at least that's the way it seems.

3. WE DON'T DO EVANGELISM BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE LOST.

I hope this statement has gotten your attention. I need it to finish. It was Oswald Chambers who first brought this realization to my mind. As much as we must love, care for, be patient with, be forgiving of, reach out to, and be engaged with people who don't know Jesus, they are not our ultimate reason for doing evangelism. Though it is our mission to reach them and win them, they are not the driving force behind our evangelistic efforts. They are the target, but not the goal. Their needs ought to be important to us, the reality that people without a personal relationship with Jesus are going to hell ought to inspire us, but they are not ultimately the fundamental reason we do evangelism. Stay with me. Let me get the last point before us then finish the message;

4. WE DO EVANGELISM BECAUSE GOD TOLD US TO.

We were made for a mission, and that mission is to reach God's world with God's good news. A 'mission'ary is someone sent by Jesus Christ just as He was sent by God. But the great controlling factor in doing evangelism is not the needs of people, but the command of Jesus. The source of our inspiration in our service for God is behind us, not ahead of us. The tendency today is to put the inspiration out in front—to sweep everything together in front of us and make it conform to some contemporary definition of success. Or, to decide that success is defined by maintaining some tradition for tradition sake alone, or for hanging on to things that have failed, because 'that's the way we've always done it.

That's the inherent problem with allowing; "reaching the Lost" to become the goal instead of just the target. The goal is obeying GOD! That's the problem with thinking that Evangelism is some program or committee of the church, and doesn't affect me as long as I can stay off that committee.

That's the problem of allowing any attempt to be relevant, and contemporary to overshadow the command behind what we do. We don't do evangelism so our neighborhoods are safer or to grow our church; we do it because Jesus told us to do it. We don't do traditional, contemporary and blended worship because we necessarily prefer one of those styles; we do them because God used Paul to remind us that we are to "become all things to all people, in order that we might reach some." We do evangelism because God told us to do it. And we always ought to be doing it in new ways and forms because God warned us about the danger of trying to bottle up "His New wine in old wine skins." And so, not to be doing evangelism is what? Disobedience!

Our inspiration predates even Jesus, if you can imagine that; it is build and based on the Covenant God offered to Abraham and all his succeeding generations, even us. When we think of the covenant, we tend to focus on the promised blessings, the descendants like the stars and grains of sand. We tend to remember Abraham's many livestock, his expanding family and growing influence. But we often forget that there was a second part of the covenant, our responsibility, our obligation. The condition upon which our blessing would be granted was obedient fulfillment of the second prong of the covenant: SHARING GOD'S GOOD NEWS WITH THE WORLD! God would like the whole world to love Him and believe in Him, and he has chosen the Hebrews, and their descendants, us, the Christians, to be the agents, emissaries, and missionaries to get the job done. Listen:

"You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me, I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." Isaiah 49:6

We tend to forget that the one great reason underneath all missionary and evangelistic work is not primarily the elevation of the people, not their education, not their needs, but is first and foremost the command of Jesus Christ—

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . ." Matthew 29:20

My friends we have a mission, and this is it: To obediently follow God's command and Jesus', example to reach our lost neighbors and friends with the good news of Jesus. We don't do it by pounding on doors with a 20lb King James Bible under each arm, but by being kind and respectful, even by serving, our neighbors. We don't do it by dragging people to 'revival services' designed for believers to think their doing evangelism, but by building relationships with co-workers or students, or taking time to get to know our neighbors. We don't do it by expecting someone else to do it, but by genuinely allowing God to share His story through our story. We don't evangelize people by throwing people into wells, but helping them out, because that's what Jesus told us to do!

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2. WE DON'T DO EVANGELISM TO _____ OUR _____.

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4. WE DO EVANGELISM BECAUSE GOD _____.

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