

BaptistWay Bible Series for November 25: Let nothing hinder you

November 14, 2012

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In only 24 hours we managed to take several youth to the hospital. The health department arrived. We were in the local newspaper and sent 20 Girl Scouts home five days in advance. And in doing so, we shared the gospel successfully?

I'm still dumbfounded by the Lifeway 1991 hymnal. It has an egregious error that I guess no one realized. It has exactly 666 hymns! That's so hilarious to me. Couldn't they have added just one? Mix in "Bringing in the Sheaves" or something!

The Bible has no error. But, those who added chapter numbers and verse numbers were not inspired by the Holy Spirit. Much like the Lifeway hymnal, there is a particular verse that haunts me and gives me hope at the same time. It also has an odd number.

John 6:66: "From this time on, many of his disciples turned away and no longer followed him." This chapter begins with many people following Jesus as he performs miracles. It comes to a conclusion with one of many of the hard teaching of Jesus, and people tragically walking away. I think it is horrifying. They walked away from God in the flesh

It gives me hope because it defines success and failure about faith sharing in different terms than what we hear today. In *Share Jesus Without Fear*, author Bill Fay teaches something that changed my life. It has to do with

“success” in witnessing. We pastors often define success in witnessing as someone trusting Jesus Christ as Savior. That seems to be the prevailing thought of our day.

Nothing could be further from the truth. If success is equal to conversion, then in our story, Paul was a miserable failure. Even further, if success is equal to conversion, then Jesus Christ himself is the most miserable failure of all time in witnessing: “... many disciples turned away and no longer followed.”

Rather, success in witnessing is found simply in scattering seeds of the gospel and trusting the Lord of the harvest for the results. What freedom this truth brings to my soul.

There is a modern worship song that proclaims, “Your love never fails, it never gives up, it never runs out on me.” Following this line, Paul never gave up on the gospel because God’s love is unending. Your literature proclaims correctly: “Paul’s life teaches us that we are not called to be successful. We are called only to be obedient.” Even as Paul finished his ministry, surrounded by constant persecution and rejection, he never gave up on sharing the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Would this be the story if Paul believed, like many of us, that success in witnessing is equal to someone being converted? It is impossible to know. But, he certainly would have been discouraged a lot. And maybe that is part of the reason you or your church gets discouraged. It’s time to change your definition of success to a biblical definition. Live your faith. Verbally share the gospel. Scatter seeds. But trust God for the harvest. Don’t give up.

Inspiration and application

It’s the hardest \$50 I ever earned. The article I wrote about the disaster of a mission trip won first place in a national youth minister’s magazine. To this day, it’s legendary in the minds of those who went.

The people of Hesperus, Colo., had no idea what they were getting into when I rolled into town in a bus (aka a moving incubator) with 43 excited youth and sponsors. We were there to help a new church plant launch by way of Backyard Bible clubs in the mornings. We were also helping a local church in the afternoon.

We stayed at a small but wonderful camp. Twenty-four hours after arriving, one girl felt a little sick to her stomach. The next morning, she looked terrible. She stayed behind with an adult as the rest of us started the grand adventure of a VBS in the great Colorado outdoors. Many smiling children anxiously awaited the perpetual cowboys and cowgirls from Texas.

By that afternoon, a few other youth were sick to their stomachs. Not a little sick. I mean Montezuma sick. We assumed it was food poisoning and quickly alerted the camp (we learned later it was a virus).

By Tuesday night, Satan arrived in full force as about 10 youth and one adult were down for the count. Hell hath no fury like praying to the porcelain god! It was awful. One kid hospitalized and nine really sick ones.

By now, the health inspector arrived. In the middle of the night, we were asked to submit a vomit culture to the hospital. I remember driving into Durango with a buddy and a zip-lock bag full of barf, thinking "they don't teach you about this in seminary." A thin piece of plastic was all that separated us from Montezuma and his nasty revenge.

At 4 a.m. Wednesday morning, I knew I was in big trouble. My stomach was churning. What followed, well, no horror film could ever depict. Thirty out of 43 people had the 48-hour stomach flu that lasted 72 hours. It was crazy! The healthy youth and adults packed up again and went into town to teach kids about Jesus while we loved our neighbors by barfing on each other.

The health department shut down the entire camp! They sent home a troop of Girl Scouts 18 hours into their five-day camp. They were devastated, and

we felt terrible. We sold the tricounty area completely out of antinausea medication and had several youth in the hospital. The county health inspector begged us to go home, and we did, two days early.

With 36 of 43 sick, we boarded the bus for a glorious 24-hour bus ride home. Some of the moms on the trip tied a bag to every seat. I quickly purchased the movie *Outbreak* with Dustin Hoffman about the spread of the Ebola virus. We watched it on the way home and laughed ... a little. We managed to get all the way home without one person getting sick.

When we arrived at the church parking lot, a little grandma asked me, "How was your vacation son" as her grandson chummed in the bus behind me. In all, 39 of the 43 got sick on the trip or after we returned.

By all intents and purposes, the mission trip was a totally catastrophe. It was carnage. But we didn't give up. We shared the love of Christ with children and unexpectedly in hospitals, clinics and pharmacies (and most certainly with our bus driver).

We all learned a valuable lesson: Success isn't equal to someone professing faith in Christ. Success is scattering seeds of the gospel. We also learned one other lesson: Always take Imodium on a trip!

Since we are morphing your Bible study group into a "Bible-doing" group, I have three possible applications for you this week:

1. Discuss this definition of success in evangelism: "Success in witnessing is scattering seeds of the gospel." How has a wrong definition hijacked your evangelism efforts?
2. On whom have you given up? What would Paul have to say about that?
3. If you want to be radical, engage an unreached people group. It will take patience and persistence. If nothing else, study the people group and

pray for them specifically for the long haul.