

BaptistWay: 14 Habits of Highly Successful Disciples: Witnessing

August 8, 2014

• *The BaptistWay lesson for Aug. 24 focuses on Romans 10:8-15 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.*

What witnessing is not

In college, I temporarily joined up with a men's ministry leader who loved to engage in what he called "popcorn evangelism." After being asked repeatedly, I finally agreed to go with him on one of these outings. I found myself in the local Wal-Mart parking lot, watching my friend go up to random strangers and tell them he was a student conducting a religious survey for a school project. He would then go on to ask simple, disarming questions: "Do you go to church? Do you have any specific religious beliefs? What do you wish the church would do better?"

After pretending to write the answers to these questions down on a notepad, he shifted to more overtly evangelistic questions: "If you died tomorrow, do you think you'd go to heaven or hell? Why? Can I show you what the Bible says about that?" Next, he would lead them quickly through the Roman's Road and ask at the end of his presentation: "Is there any reason why you would not want to receive this gift of eternal life today?" After most people responded "No," he would then lead them through "the sinner's prayer" and pronounce them "saved."

Initially, I felt guilt over not wanting to participate and for refusing to go to anything like this with him again. After further reflection, I've come to the conclusion the reason I did not want to be a part of what my friend was

doing was because it was not evangelism. It was deceiving people into listening to a sales pitch and then putting them in a situation where they felt ashamed to not say a certain prayer. I think the reason we do not talk about witnessing much in church today is because too many of us have seen or been on the receiving end of a similar experience.

Someone once told evangelist D.L. Moody they did not like his evangelism methods. Moody asked the person about his method. After admitting he indeed did not have a method, Moody told him: "I like what I do better than what you do not do."

Witnessing doesn't have to fall to one or the other extreme. Based on this week's Scripture, I am going to highlight two characteristics that I think will keep us on a sensible, but effective witnessing path.

A simple witness (Romans 10:8-15)

In Romans 10:8, as the Apostle Paul presents his desire for Israel to be saved and the need for a witness to share the gospel with them, he quotes Deuteronomy 30:14: "But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim."

He is saying that sharing the gospel with them should not be very hard because of their background in the law and their understanding of their need for a Messiah. He believes God will use what already is in their heart from their exposure to the truth as they understood it to guide them to the truth of salvation in Jesus. He goes on to describe the simplicity of belief: "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

My friend started with a good premise—connect with people based on their current knowledge and understanding of God. But he used that simply as an icebreaker. Nearly everyone in Texas has some sort of connection with

religion and church. We have to find out where they are before we can point them to Jesus. This involves getting to know them personally. It can't authentically be done in a parking lot. Once you have a decent handle on a person's understanding of God and the gospel, you can then make a more informed opinion on how or if to share more.

A thoughtful witness (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

Witnessing should be simple, but not simple-minded. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, Paul reminds his audience of the gospel he preached to them that likely started the church in Corinth. In verses 3-8, he elaborates on how he knows the gospel to be true and gives an impressive list of people Jesus appeared to after being raised from the dead. In essence, he was answering the implied question, "How do you know the gospel is true?"

This took some thought for him, and it should take some thought for each one of us. Perhaps it was the witness of a parent or grandparent that proved to some the truthfulness of the gospel. Perhaps it was an intellectual book filled with logic that confirmed its trustworthiness on a cerebral level for others.

Whatever it was for you is an important piece of your testimony and witness. People need to hear more than formulas and facts. They need to hear the thoughtful witness of someone who understands how and why they became convinced of the truth of the gospel.

Who do you know that might need a simple, thoughtful witness of God's love?