

LESSONS DRAWN FROM JESUS AND THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS

ETERNAL

IMPACT



LLOYD PULLEY

“In my experience as a pastor and an evangelist I have come to learn that all truly effective evangelism is at its core—relationally driven. God uses people as conduits for His message of hope and salvation. Whether it’s inviting someone to church or a public place where they will hear a presentation of the gospel, or just two people conversing over a cup of coffee, the human element is critical. God wants His people personally involved in the process. In this book, Lloyd Pulley will show you how to get started and how to effectively share your faith with those you meet today!”

Greg Laurie

EVANGELIST, SENIOR PASTOR, HARVEST CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

“Proverbs 11:30 says, ‘He who wins souls is wise.’ Those simple words express the true heart of God concerning the call of every Christian to go into the world and share the gospel. With biblical principles taken from the life of Christ, Lloyd Pulley stirs the Christian church to do just that—win souls! This book is sure to bless all who share God’s heart for the lost.”

Raul Ries

SENIOR PASTOR, CALVARY CHAPEL GOLDEN SPRINGS

“Everyday Conversations, Eternal Impact is an excellent approach to evangelism that will benefit every Christian. Its guidelines are clear enough to be remembered and applied, yet general enough to allow the Holy Spirit to be the One who leads and directs. Lloyd’s genuine love for our Lord Jesus, and desire to follow and lead others in His example, permeates every page. I recommend it to everyone who has a passion to reach the lost for Jesus.”

K.P. Yohannan

FOUNDER AND INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR, GOSPEL FOR ASIA

“Lloyd Pulley clearly demonstrates the need for, and key to reaching our generation with the gospel message. With insights drawn from Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well in John 4, Lloyd provides practical guidelines that will help Christians share their faith more effectively with those who do not yet know our Savior.”

Michael Rozell

EVANGELIST AND PASTOR, POTTER’S FIELD MINISTRIES

“Lloyd Pulley masterfully illustrates the way to share the good news. From the story of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman, Lloyd gives us an excellent picture of personal evangelism by studying the Master Himself. This book points you to Jesus and inspires you to point others to Him as well.”

Jon Courson

SENIOR PASTOR, APPLGATE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

“Through eyes moistened by the tragic events of 9/11, Lloyd sees men clearly, not as ‘trees walking.’ This book captures what should be obvious (but somehow escapes us) in reaching out to others. If you care to see people through the eyes of Jesus, this is your book.”

Gayle Erwin

PASTOR, AUTHOR, INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SPEAKER,
DIRECTOR OF SERVANT QUARTERS MINISTRIES

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EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS ETERNAL IMPACT



LLOYD PULLEY



Bridging the Gap Publications • Old Bridge, NJ 08857
732-679-9222 (ext. 0563) • www.everydayeternal.com

EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS, ETERNAL IMPACT
Lessons Drawn from Jesus and the Woman at the Well

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Some of the material in this book was previously published in 2003 under the title *Patient Evangelism: Reaching the Multitudes One at a Time*.

Printed in the United States of America

Published by Bridging the Gap Publications
123 White Oak Lane, Old Bridge, NJ 08857
(732) 679-9222 (ext. 0563)
www.everydayeternal.com

ISBN: 978-1-59751-978-6

Cover design by John Shaffer

Edited by Noreen Hay

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DEDICATION

To my praying grandmother, who showed me the love of Christ every day of my life,

To Steve Keeley, the son of my Big Brother of America,

To Ron Mack, a fellow student at Michigan State University,

To Mrs. Cleomae Dungy, my high school Shakespeare teacher,

To a wrestler named Steve,

To the family in the white van,

And to all the rest who left an impression on me for the Lord without even knowing it.

Thank you for being a piece of the puzzle that eventually led me to surrender my heart to Jesus.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

MATTHEW 5:16

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	By Pancho Juarez	9
PREFACE	By Brian Brodersen	13
CHAPTER 1	Beautiful Feet	17
CHAPTER 2	Divine Dialogue	29
CHAPTER 3	S.H.A.R.E. the Gospel	41
CHAPTER 4	Sensitive to the Spirit	53
CHAPTER 5	Humbly Build a Bridge	61
CHAPTER 6	Arouse Interest	69
CHAPTER 7	Reveal Sin	75
CHAPTER 8	Explain the Plan of Salvation	85
CHAPTER 9	Lasting Results	95
CHAPTER 10	A Harvest in His Time	101

FOREWORD

It was going to be an exciting day. Our church, Calvary Chapel Montebello was hosting a pastors' luncheon for nearly two hundred local pastors and their associates. My good friend, Pastor Mike Macintosh of Horizon Christian Fellowship, was coming to share a message. I woke up energized, looking forward to what the Lord would do. Then, around 6:15 a.m. (PST) my cell phone began ringing. One frantic caller after another told me, "Turn your television on ... you will not believe what's happening!" The date was September 11, 2001.

Most people who lived through that day have similar stories. One minute it was life as usual and then suddenly everything changed. That morning in California, the pastors still came to the luncheon, except for Mike Macintosh. After receiving a call from Washington, D.C., Mike made special arrangements to fly to New York City to serve as chaplain at Ground Zero. The rest of us gathered and watched the historic events unfold on television. Pastor Raul Ries of Calvary Chapel Golden Springs suggested we get on our knees and pray for our country. It was a time of prayer like no other—poignant, weighty, and powerful.

As we prayed, unbeknownst to us, the Lord was already answering. He was opening amazing doors for His people to move right into the vortex of this tragedy with the true and living hope of the gospel. He was also putting a timely message on the heart of another pastor in the New York City area—a message to remind us that God’s singular passion every day is to reach the lost. That pastor is Lloyd Pulley.

The message was originally published in a book titled *Patient Evangelism*. In it Lloyd chronicled the unique ministry the church was involved in during the 9/11 tragedy, and the simple yet reviving way that the Lord stirred His people to share their faith at that time. When I read it, I was blown away by how clearly Lloyd articulated a viewpoint about contemporary Christian evangelism that I myself have felt for a long time but have found difficult to put into words. I thought, *This is a vital message for anyone who shares God’s heart to win souls.*

When Lloyd sent me this new manuscript, which is a revised second edition of that original book, I was surprised to find that this updated version had more impact than the first. By shifting the emphasis off the specific ministry done in the aftermath of 9/11 and focusing more on Jesus’ encounter with the woman He met by the well, Lloyd has made the message of this book more accessible to every Christian. In a sense, he has

taken evangelism out of the realm of the extraordinary, ministry-centered outreach event and brought it down to where we all live—into our own homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, and classrooms.

I love that Lloyd offers no slick formulas or evangelistic methods. It's what makes this book truly stand out from others of its kind. Nothing I've read on the subject of evangelism does a better job of reflecting the true missionary heart of our Savior, and His calling for us to go into the world with the gospel. Each biblical principle is drawn from observing how Jesus spoke to an ordinary woman who crossed His path one day, and serves as a helpful reminder that we should make the most of every opportunity to share the gospel with others.

Unfortunately, evangelism has gotten a bad reputation because some of the techniques used by Christians can come across as pushy, unloving, or self-serving. Instead of drawing others to the Lord, many are actually turned away from Him. I do believe there is a place for tracts and other methods and formulas when witnessing and sharing our faith. Such tools in themselves are not bad and can be effective; however, nothing is more valuable in furthering God's kingdom than a person who is sensitive to the Spirit's leading. This is the main message Lloyd develops here, and it is one that is drawn from the Master Himself.

I am thankful to Lloyd for writing this book, and especially for taking the time to put together this second edition. Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well is such a timely message for the church today. Reading Lloyd's insights have personally blessed me, and as a pastor, his book has provided me with a useful resource for teaching others. It is a practical and memorable way to share the greatest news in the world—the hope of salvation through Jesus Christ—with those we love and encounter every day.

I believe it is for such a time as this that *Everyday Conversations, Eternal Impact* has been written. May God use this message in your life, and may He bless you, empower you, and open many doors for you, as you seek to share your faith with those around you.

Pastor Pancho Juarez

CALVARY CHAPEL MONTEBELLO, CA

December 2010

PREFACE

A few years ago, as I passed through London's Leicester Square, I noticed that a crowd had gathered around a man who was using a drawing board, which had some sort of a graphic riddle on it, to get people's attention. I stopped just in time to see the riddle solved and was thrilled to find that it concerned Jesus Christ and the salvation that He offers to mankind.

The man conducting this evangelistic outreach turned from his drawing board to the crowd, and in some of the harshest tones I've ever heard, began pronouncing damnation upon his audience. As you can imagine, it was only a matter of seconds before the crowd, initially numbering around fifty people, was reduced to two. I was one of the two.

As I stood there listening to the man rant and rave, I thought to myself, *What a tragedy. This man thinks he's preaching the gospel, but in reality, he's doing a great disservice to the cause of the kingdom.* At that moment, the man approached me, and in that same harsh tone, asked if I wanted to be saved.

I assured him that I was saved and asked if I might give him a bit of advice based on my observation of his evangelistic method. Although he made it clear that he

wasn't interested in what I had to say, even expressing doubts about my salvation, I felt compelled to challenge him about the way he was misrepresenting God.

I began by saying, "Have you ever thought to tell people that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives ...?" Before I could go any further, he pronounced me a heretic and stomped off, calling down judgments upon me.

Although this is somewhat of an extreme example of the wrong way to evangelize, I'm afraid this type of thing happens far too often. Just the other day, I saw a man carrying a large wooden cross down a busy street, forcing literature upon people as they passed by. Once again, I couldn't help but think how that kind of approach was so unlike Jesus and the apostles.

As Christians, we have the great privilege and responsibility of sharing the gospel with those who don't yet know the Lord. However, we must make sure that we are sharing it in a way that properly represents our Lord. The apostle Paul, in writing to the church of Thessalonica, said,

We were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8).

This was Paul's approach to people. This was also the approach of Jesus, who said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden ... for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:28-29).

This is something that Lloyd and I were so powerfully reminded of as we sought to bring hope and peace to the multitudes in New York City whose world had been turned upside down by the events of September 11, 2001.

This message was born out of those experiences. I was tremendously blessed as I read it, and I know you will be too. It is timely and reminds us once again that God's love is the greatest power in the universe.

Pastor Brian Brodersen

CALVARY CHAPEL COSTA MESA, CA

September 2002

CHAPTER 1

BEAUTIFUL FEET

*How beautiful are the feet of those
who preach the gospel of peace.*

ROMANS 10:15

IN SOME OF the most familiar passages in the New Testament, Jesus commissioned His church to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19) and to be His witnesses in every place and in every generation (Acts 1:8). Indeed, had it not been for the faithfulness and endurance of saints throughout the ages, how would you or I have ever learned about God's love and about the salvation He has provided through His Son, Jesus Christ?

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach

unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:14-15).

Today, the awesome responsibility of sharing the gospel with all people has been passed down to our generation. We now carry the message of the hope of Christ to a dying world around us, and we only have a short while to do this crucial work. Therefore, we must ask ourselves these questions:

- How are we doing?
- Do those around us know we care about them?
- Are we representing Christ and His love in the way we live and in the way we share the gospel?
- Do we have beautiful feet?

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

These are the questions that weighed heavily on my heart as our fellowship began ministering in New York City in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The magnitude of this challenging opportunity to share the hope of Christ with so many who were hurting and vulnerable went far beyond the scope of any outreach our church had ever planned. More than ever, we sensed how desperately we needed the Lord’s leading to effectively reach others with the gospel.

At the same time, my daily Bible reading included John 4—the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well. As I prayed about our extraordinary circumstances and studied this familiar passage, the Lord gave me some fresh insight. I began to notice the way Jesus was interacting with this lost woman and how markedly different His example was from our modern approach to evangelism. I thought to myself, *His ways truly are not our ways.*

Too often our Christian evangelistic outreaches become more about us than about Jesus. They become more about our clever dialogue and perfectly orchestrated events, and less about His love and provision for the lost. Even on a personal level, Christians sometimes make the wrong impression when attempting to share their faith with others. While I do believe most have the right intentions—they want to tell others about Jesus—the way they go about it can sometimes come across as pushy, arrogant, or self-serving. Instead of leading others to the Lord, they wind up having the opposite effect.

This was especially obvious to me as I walked around New York City after 9/11. I noticed a lot of Bible tracts littering the sidewalks and many believers wearing bold Christian T-shirts. But, despite the fact that there were thousands of hurting individuals all around I didn't see a lot of direct, personal ministry going on. Sadly, I saw

just the opposite—Christians debating with those they were trying to reach. It grieved my heart. Our evangelistic efforts should never result in arguments.

Studying how Jesus approached the Samaritan woman, I saw a perfect example of how we should relate to those around us. His motivation, while born out of a genuine concern for her eternal soul, also revealed a deep respect for her temporal situation. He said and did nothing that personally offended her, yet He never compromised the truth. Truly, this is one of the most masterful conversations recorded for us in the Bible—and I couldn't get it out of my mind.

REACHING THE MULTITUDES ONE AT A TIME

A few days after the terrorist attack, a group from our church had the opportunity to minister in Lower Manhattan's Union Square Park. It was late at night but the park was teeming with people despite the hour. Mourners continued to pour in and out twenty-four hours a day. Pictures of the missing along with sympathy cards for those lost in the World Trade Center lined the walkways. A somber atmosphere prevailed throughout the park. Candles burned everywhere—a silent vigil bearing witness to the gruesome reality that had just befallen this great city.

As I took in the scene, I noticed a man sitting alone on a park bench with his leg in a cast and I felt drawn to

Speak to him. So despite all that was going on around me, I walked over and introduced myself to him. His name was Francis. I asked if he had been in the World Trade Center. He said he had worked there and was in his office that morning. And then he was quiet. I sat down next to him and waited a moment before asking if he would share his experience with me.

Francis worked on the twenty-sixth floor of one of the towers. He was going about his normal routine that morning when a violent explosion rocked the skyscraper. At the time he had no idea what was happening, but he knew that he needed to get out of the building as quickly as possible. He started to make his way down the crowded staircase, but before he could safely escape, the building began to collapse. Steel and debris rained down all around him, and thick smoke hampered his ability to see or breathe. In the end, his leg was broken, but he was still alive.

The worst part of Francis' harrowing experience was not his broken leg, but it was the brokenness he felt in his heart. His world had come crashing down along with the building that day. Thousands were killed in that brief moment, yet for some reason his life was spared. Like so many others who lived through that awful tragedy, he could not make sense of it all.

As I listened to him recount the events of that fateful day, I could see the deep sorrow of his soul reflected in his eyes as he relived each moment. When he ended his story with a heavy sigh, I told him that I wanted to help him come to terms with some of his questions and understand the depth of God's love and provision for him. Afterwards, I thought how different our meeting would have been if I had just walked over to Francis and handed him a Christian tract. If I had approached him with some clever scripted dialogue, instead of taking the time to listen to his story, it would not have had the same effect. Francis would have never known that I truly cared about him, and more importantly, that God knew and cared about what he was going through.

After I left the park that night, I realized that just as the Holy Spirit had led Jesus to meet the Samaritan woman at the well, He had also led me to meet Francis at a bench in Union Square Park. The significance of what God was showing me in the Scriptures began to overflow my heart. I knew at that moment that He wanted me to share the lessons I was learning with others.

ANSWERING THE CALL

Since that unique and tragic time, our world has moved forward. The smoke that filled the air around New York City for weeks has cleared. The mountain of rubble that burned for months has been hauled away.

Strong foundations have been laid in the deep chasm where the World Trade Center once stood, and a new structure—the Freedom Tower—is now rising from the ashes. Yet the message God formed in my heart, as I walked around those city streets ten years ago, has not changed. The Lord wants His people to know how to effectively and boldly communicate the gospel.

That is why I have written this book—to equip and encourage Christians to step out and share their faith in everyday situations. God has placed us in this world to tell others about Him. Once we are in heaven we won't need to do that anymore. Everyone there will already know Jesus! But if we want those who do not know Him to be with us in heaven one day, then we must tell them what we know, today.

How we do that is key. People don't need to be preached down to—they need to be inspired to look up. They need to see real people with real solutions to real problems. They need to know people who live in the same neighborhoods and deal with the same frustrations, but who do so with joy, peace, and love. They need to hear something that is true and good, something that really works and comes with no strings attached. They need to hear the gospel and see the power of Jesus Christ demonstrated in the lives of believers, every day and everywhere.

The truths I share are nothing new. Since the day Jesus ascended into heaven and commanded His disciples to go into the world and be His witnesses, many helpful books on the topic of evangelism have been written. Most of them provide training or some methodology or formula geared towards teaching believers how to reach the world for Christ. While some of these ideas are useful, the problem with most is that they focus more on a method than on depending upon the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit. He is the only One who can open effective doors for the gospel to go forth.

The message of this book differs because it is based solely on the example of Jesus Christ. And Jesus' approach contradicts many of the evangelistic models and techniques taught and practiced in Christian circles today. We learn from Jesus that being an evangelist is not something we need to be taught how to do, but rather it is an overflow of who we already are in Him.

WHAT IS AN EVANGELIST?

Often what comes to mind when we hear the term “evangelist” is a caricature of a fiery, obnoxious, hypocritical Christian. However, this depiction has nothing to do with the real meaning of the word, or of the biblical calling to share our faith with others.

The Greek word *evangelion* means “good news” or “good message.” In the New Testament, it is often

translated “gospel.” So an evangelist is any person who brings good news to others. As Christians we have the best news of all. The gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is something others need to hear. Do you believe that? Are you sharing that good news?

Recently, a friend sent me a video of an outspoken atheist celebrity named Penn Jillette from the magician team, Penn and Teller. In it, Penn speaks about a man who came up to him after a show one night and gave him a Bible. What he said about their encounter is worthy of our attention.

Penn said:

I don't respect Christians who don't proselytize. If you believe that there's a heaven and hell and that people could be going to hell ... and you don't tell them because it would be socially awkward, that amounts to hate. How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate a person to believe that everlasting life is possible, and not tell them that news? If I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you, and you didn't believe it, and that truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point where I would tackle you. And this is more important than that.

This guy was a really good guy. He was polite and honest and sane, and he cared enough about me to proselytize and give me a Bible....

Now I know there's no God, and one polite person living his life right doesn't change that. But I'll tell you, he was a very, very, very good man ... that was a good man who gave me that book.¹

It's pretty convicting to hear an exhortation like that coming from an atheist, isn't it? But he's absolutely right—the gospel is a life preserver in a world drowning in sin. It is hateful, indeed, for any Christian who professes to know the way to eternal life, but doesn't share it with others. Paul said in Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”

Obviously, receiving the Bible that day did not result in Penn giving his heart to Jesus. But that Christian was obedient to the Lord's command to go and tell—he became one piece of the puzzle. And the impact he made for the Lord should inspire us all to share our faith, even when we think people won't respond.

¹ ATHEISM: Penn Jillette urges evangelism, by Erin Roach, Feb. 12, 2009, Southern Baptist Convention, Baptist Press.

AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

I know a few people who are called by God to be evangelists. These men have bold evangelistic ministries, and it is an awesome calling. Whether on a street corner or at a large crusade, they often see people come to the Lord en masse through the preaching of God's Word.

God has not called all Christians into that kind of ministry, but God has commanded all of us to be witnesses of Him. We cannot neglect that responsibility or relegate it to something we do occasionally—at an outreach, on the mission field, in a hospital room, or during a crisis situation, such as 9/11.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul wrote, "... [it is] as though God were pleading through us ... on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." Every Christian has received this beautiful ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, evangelism should be as much a part of our everyday lives as working, eating, and sleeping. We should be everyday evangelists, telling others about Jesus through our words and actions.

The message of this book is simple, but it could have a profound effect on the way you live your life if it is taken to heart. All the principles are drawn from observing the life and ministry of the One who has given us a perfect example in all things. What we learn from Jesus' encounter with this one Samaritan woman will

help us develop a new mindset—His mindset. After all, we are His ambassadors. We are representatives of His kingdom, and messengers of His grace and love everywhere we go. Who better to learn what that looks like than from the Master Himself?

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5).

CHAPTER 2

DIVINE DIALOGUE

He needed to go through Samaria.

JOHN 4:4

THEY WERE HUNGRY, thirsty, and tired when they arrived at the ancient well outside the Samaritan city of Sychar. It was midday and they had nothing to eat, so the disciples went into the city to buy food, leaving Jesus behind to rest. That was when she first saw Him.

No one usually came to the well at that time of day. The women typically drew water in the cooler morning or evening hours. However, this woman's lifestyle made her an outcast in her own community, which was why she came alone in the heat of the day to fill her empty waterpot.

As she arrived at the well and lowered her pot to the ground, a man was there. She could tell from His clothing that He was a Jew—which was quite an

unusual sight in that part of Samaria. Silently, she went about her chores until the sound of His voice and His unusual request startled her. Jewish men never spoke to Samaritan women. Yet He asked her for a drink.

His tone intrigued her. She had forgotten what it felt like to be treated so courteously. Her curiosity about this stranger grew and she responded to His request. Thus began a conversation that literally changed her life and her community forever.

LEARNING FROM THE MASTER

In the days immediately following the terrorist attack of 9/11, I was studying this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. This portion of Scripture in John chapter 4 is such a familiar text to me. It is one I have known since childhood and taught dozens of times as a pastor. Yet in the midst of the chaos that filled our world at that time, the Holy Spirit riveted my attention to this simple meeting and breathed fresh life into this story. I saw it through new eyes and from a changed perspective. Suddenly it became personal, relevant, and redefining.

As I observed the Samaritan woman's response to Jesus, the faces of so many of the individuals that we had met on the streets of New York began flooding my mind. As I eavesdropped on the conversation between Jesus and this woman, I heard the same questions, reservations, and objections that I had heard from those we had met

in New York. And in Jesus' response, I saw a perfect example of how Christians ought to relate the gospel. Love for this Samaritan woman motivated everything He said and did. Jesus had a sincere concern for her eternal soul and a genuine compassion for her temporal situation. Both respect and truth seasoned His speech and drew her to want to know more.

As I studied this passage—the longest recorded conversation that Jesus had with anyone in the Bible—I realized how much we could learn from the Master Himself on how to share our faith with others. Five key biblical principles stood out to me.

SENSITIVE. Jesus was sensitive to the Spirit's leading. As a man, Jesus walked in this world fully yielded to the Spirit. He anticipated that the Holy Spirit would guide Him into situations where He would be able to speak to people about their need for a Savior. The most important aspect of sharing our faith with others is that we too would be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading.

HUMBLE. Jesus humbly chose to build a bridge. He took the time to cross over the cultural barriers that existed between them. Jesus could have very quickly and easily made her feel spiritually inferior. Yet, He chose to build a bridge instead of building a wall—like we so often do.

AROUSE. Jesus aroused her interest and curiosity to want to know more. This is very important. We will never convince someone of their need for a Savior unless they want to hear what we have to say.

REVEAL. Jesus revealed the issue of sin. He excused her ignorance but not her sin. At the appropriate time, He addressed it directly. He did not sidestep it. Unless a person recognizes the bondage of their sin, they will never see their need for a Savior.

EXPLAIN. Jesus explained the plan of salvation. This encounter is unique in that Jesus met a stranger, and by the end of their conversation, she was a believer. I wish it happened that way all the time. Most often we don't get to this point in one conversation. But when a person is ready to hear—now here's the key—we must always be ready to share the plan of salvation with them.

I shared these principles with everyone involved in the ministry at Ground Zero, and developed a simple acronym, **SHARE**, to help people remember and apply them.

- Sensitive to the Spirit's leading
- Humbly build a bridge
- Arouse interest
- Reveal sin
- Explain the plan of salvation

EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS

The woman Jesus met at the well in Samaria is no different from the countless individuals we encounter

daily in our workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods. Our world is filled with men and women who are in need of the same living water that Jesus offered her that day. They know their pots are empty. Daily they set out to find something that will fill them, but nothing will ever quench their thirst—until they come to Jesus. He is the only One who can truly satisfy a thirsty soul.

Do you remember the person—or persons—who led you to the Lord? What was it about them that influenced you to believe? Or maybe you met a Christian who turned you away from the Lord? An elder in our church recently told me of an experience he had like that, before he came to know Jesus.

DAVE'S STORY

Before I came to know the Lord, I worked with a Christian whose life reflected a strong commitment to God. The only problem was, instead of sharing the grace and forgiveness of the gospel with me, all I ever heard from him was a constant reminder that I was going to hell. In my heart I longed to know God, but I was so turned off by his “turn or burn” message that it drove me away from Christians—and Jesus.

The one good thing he did was to give me a small pocket Bible. I kept that Bible for fifteen years, reading it regularly. Thankfully, other Christians came into my life years later and shared the gospel with my wife and me, and we both accepted Jesus.

Today, Dave is a strong believer and an active part of the ministry. Sadly, many years were wasted because

of a Christian whose intentions were probably good, but whose methods were all wrong.

CHRISTIANS WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

I met a lot of well-meaning Christians before giving my heart to Jesus. Thankfully, not every Christian I met had a negative effect on me. One time, while I was hitchhiking to a high school wrestling meet, a family in a white van stopped to give me a ride. All these years later I can still recall our conversation.

They were very friendly. As soon as I hopped into the van they began asking me questions. I told them I was on my way to a wrestling match. Before I knew it, the conversation went in a direction I didn't want it to go—they asked me if I had ever heard about Jesus.

At that time I had turned my back on my Christian upbringing, so as soon as they mentioned the name Jesus, my guard went up. Being raised in the church I knew exactly what they were up to, so I gave them the correct answer. "Yes," I said, "my grandmother told me all about Him." Then I quickly steered the conversation back to the wrestling match and how thankful I was for the ride they had offered me.

I'll never forget what happened next. They actually respected my desire not to talk about Jesus or my faith—or lack of it. They didn't force the subject even though I'm sure my slick, evasive moves didn't fool them. It was

clear I wasn't a believer, yet they respected me enough not to push the subject. Instead, they showed a genuine interest in me when I shared about the wrestling meet I was competing in. When they dropped me off and drove away, I remember thinking how nice they were—even though they were Christians.

It's interesting how much their lives impacted mine. They have probably totally forgotten about me, but thirty years later, I still remember them and the blessing of our brief encounter. As I reflect back, I recognize that by respecting my wishes and not pushing their views upon me, they accomplished more for the Lord than they probably realized.

Much like a farmer who first must till the soil in order to prepare and cultivate it to receive the seed and produce crops, God used them to cultivate the hard soil of my heart. It was an unseen work being done below the surface, but God sent them into my life to break up this hard ground and prepare it for the day when I would yield my life fully to Him.

SOWING AND REAPING

That day came in 1976 during my first semester at Michigan State University. I was miserable, lonely, depressed, and struggling—a testimony shared by many young people who have grown up in the church but walked away believing the world had something better

to offer. It was then that I met Steve, a Christian on my college wrestling team. He never pushed his beliefs on me, but his life spoke volumes and that attracted me back to the Lord. He reflected Jesus' character in the choices he made and the way he lived. As I watched him, I saw an authentic example of Christianity. I wanted what he had.

In the past I had found it so hard to be a Christian. I could never seem to meet the standard, which is why I walked away. I thought Christians were all hypocrites, because no one is really good enough to live the Christian life. I figured they must all be pretending. But this guy was the real deal. So, one day I asked him, "What's your secret?"

"No secret, Lloyd," he replied. "It's Jesus. You just need to yield your life completely to Him and He will empower you and direct your path."

Instead of avoiding the conversation as I had done so many times in the past, I listened to what he said. I knew he was right. I had never fully surrendered my life to the Lord. But now I was willing. I was finally ready to live for Him. As I rode my bike home later that evening, I gave my heart to Jesus. I have never regretted that decision.

It took more than one conversation for me to give my heart to the Lord. Each person along the way was a piece of the puzzle. The family in the white van, my high

school Shakespeare teacher, my godly grandmother, and many others who prayed for me—all had left a sweet fragrance of Christ behind. Their obedience to share the good news and God's faithfulness produced a harvest in my life.

Every farmer knows that time is one of the most important ingredients in bringing forth any crop. Once the planting is done, the farmer must wait for the seed to grow and ripen before it can be harvested. I wasn't ready to receive Jesus until that final conversation with Steve in college, but the tilling, seeding, and watering along the way prepared me to truly hear the message of the gospel on that day.

Jesus compared soul winning to farming in John 4:36-38 when He told His disciples,

Both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.

WHAT IS OUR LIFE SAYING?

How we approach people with the truth of the gospel is so important. If the person we are speaking with doesn't think we care, they aren't going to care what we think. If we are pushy or too forceful in our witness, it won't help them to realize their deepest need. We must

be sensitive to the Spirit's leading and willing to be the piece of the puzzle that God wants us to be in their lives, even if it means letting them walk away.

We see this example when Jesus encountered the rich young ruler who asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Mark 10:21-22 records how Jesus responded to this young man.

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

This young man sought Jesus and desired to know the way to eternal life. He was a good man, willing to keep the law and do even more. Yet, he chose to neglect the one thing necessary to receive eternal life. He was not willing to lay down his life and follow Jesus. Instead, sorrowfully he walked away from the One who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Notice what Jesus did here—nothing. He let him walk away. He didn't argue with him or try to show him his mistake in putting his trust in the law rather than in the One who came to fulfill it. He didn't open up the Scriptures and show the young man all the places where

they pointed to Him, the Messiah. He didn't debate the merits of grace over works. He didn't perform a miracle or two to prove that He was the One whom Moses prophetically told them about. He did none of that. He didn't run after him or plead with him to think it over. He didn't even ask him to pray about it and come back in the morning to discuss it some more. He just let him go. And as He watched the young man walk away, undoubtedly His heart was broken.

It's sad when those we love walk away from their only hope of salvation. Surely, Jesus felt that pain more deeply than we could ever imagine. Yet, He dignified the fact that it was the young man's choice to make. That is a powerful lesson and example to us. Jesus told him the truth and showed him where he was lacking, but He didn't argue the point. In the end, Jesus allowed this young man to make the decision.

Perhaps one day he realized that Jesus was right, sold everything, gave it to the poor, took up his cross, and followed the Lord. But on this particular day, he wasn't ready to do that. The soil of his heart was being tilled, and we can only hope that it produced a bountiful harvest later in his life.

He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together (John 4:36).

KAREN'S STORY

I met a Muslim woman who worked at the mall in one of the stores I frequently visited, and over time we developed a friendship. One day she told me that it was always good to see me. She said most of her customers were rude but I was always kind. I knew the difference she was seeing was because of Jesus. So I told her I was a Christian and that Jesus loves her and so do I. She was curious and began asking me more about what it meant to be a Christian. I shared the gospel with her that day.

Over the next few months I noticed she seemed to be growing sadder each time I saw her. One day I asked her what was wrong. She told me it was her marriage—her husband was a very hard man. I asked her what comfort she received from her faith. She thought for a moment and said sadly, “I don’t get any help from my religion.” That opened a great door for me to tell her how Jesus is always available to help us when we need Him. He is a “very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

She was amazed at the concept of being able to have a personal relationship with God. She said, “If I could become a Christian, I would, but I can’t. My husband would not be happy if I did that.”

Although she is still not born again, I know the Lord used me to plant seeds in her life. We still keep in touch, and I am praying that one day she will accept Jesus as her Lord and Savior.

CHAPTER 3

S.H.A.R.E. THE GOSPEL

They marveled that He talked with a woman.

JOHN 4:27

ED KIMBALL WAS a Sunday school teacher. One day, he felt a strong leading from the Lord to speak to one of his students about the condition of his heart. He knew the teenage boy would be working at his uncle's shoe store that afternoon, so he decided to pay him a visit. This was not something Kimball normally did, but he knew he needed to do it that day. Remembering that moment, he wrote:

I determined to speak to him about Christ and about his soul, and started down to Holton's Shoe Store. When I was nearly there, I began to wonder whether I ought to go in just then, during business hours. I thought that possibly my call might embarrass the boy, and that when I went away the other clerks

would taunt him. [But] I determined to make a dash for it and have it over with. I found the young man in the back part of the building wrapping up shoes. I went up to him, and putting my hand on his shoulder I made what I afterward thought was a very weak plea for Christ. I don't know just what words I used ... I simply told him of Christ's love for him and the love Christ wanted in return. That was all there was. It seemed the young man was just ready for the light that then broke upon him, and there, in the back of the store in Boston, he gave himself and his life to Christ.²

That young man was D.L. Moody. Moody grew up to become one of the greatest American evangelists of all time. It is estimated that during his lifetime, he preached to over 100,000,000 people—before the age of radio, television, or the Internet. Most Christians today have heard of D.L. Moody. But how many have ever heard of the faithful Sunday school teacher who shared the gospel with him?

Ed Kimball was a man who cared enough about the soul of one seventeen-year-old boy to seek him out and explain the plan of salvation to him. He too was one of the greatest evangelists of all time.

² Pickering, Hy ed. *Twice-Born Men: True Conversion Records of 100 Well-Known Men in all Ranks of Life*. London: Pickering & Inglis, 1932.

Like many Christians, Ed Kimball probably never thought of himself as an evangelist, nor did he have any way of knowing the effect that this young man's life would one day have for the Lord. By the words of his own testimony Kimball admitted he wasn't comfortable with what he said to Moody that day, but he knew the Lord was leading him to speak to the boy. He didn't know if his words would be received, but he went for it anyway—he was sensitive and obedient to the Spirit's leading. He opened his mouth and took a chance. Like Paul he believed that “the gospel of Christ ... is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe” (Romans 1:16).

The most important call upon our lives is to make disciples. Whether we are Sunday school teachers, preachers, mothers, fathers, friends, or co-workers, we all have been given the same mandate from the Lord to go into the world and be witnesses of Him. Fear of rejection hinders many of us from sharing our faith. Taking a stand for Jesus can be a little risky and may cost us friendships, but aren't you glad someone took that risk and told you about the Lord?

GO, BUT WAIT

After the resurrection, Jesus spent forty days with His disciples. During that time, He spoke to them about the kingdom of God and cast a glorious vision of the work

He desired for them to do. He told them to “go ... and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) and to be His witnesses in “Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Quite a tall order for a small group of frightened followers who spent most of their time locked behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. Yet Jesus told them not only to go but also to wait. Waiting was an important part of the calling. They were to wait for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, who would impart God’s power to them to share the gospel.

The magnificent vision for the expansion of the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth must have seemed both marvelous and impossible to those early believers—something they knew God could do, but at the same time could not fathom how He would use them to do it. Certainly if they had not waited for the Holy Spirit, we would never have heard from any of them ever again. But they did wait, and they became witnesses of Jesus in all the world.

In light of this example, the trend I see in Christian circles today that emphasizes the training of believers in evangelistic methods is a little troubling. Methods in themselves are not necessarily a bad thing. In the right setting, some can be useful. For instance, on Halloween my wife and I love to give out gospel tracts along with a bag of candy to the neighborhood children who come

knocking on our door. The tracts are fun for the kids and have a great evangelistic message. However, when believers rely more heavily on methods than on the Holy Spirit, problems can arise. My wife and I realize that the key to effectively sharing our faith isn't in handing out tracts but rather in being sensitive to the Spirit's leading in the lives of those He brings to our doorstep.

Can you imagine the apostles going out to share the gospel with these tricks up their sleeves? The only evangelistic method they used was the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Some things should never change. In Ephesians 6:19-20, we see Paul's method of evangelism when he asked the church to pray for him, "that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

I truly believe that if Jesus were here today, His philosophy of ministry would be very different from a lot of our modern Christianity. As we examine John 4, we see a great example of how Jesus related to an individual.

Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but

His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink" (John 4:1-7).

Samaritans were considered second-class citizens by their Jewish neighbors because they were a mixed race of people—having both Jewish and Gentile ancestry. For this reason, animosity existed between the Samaritans and the Jews. This prejudice was so great that even though the most direct route to Galilee was through Samaria, Jews would travel out of their way in order to avoid the area.

As we look at Jesus, we learn that He ignored this cultural custom and chose instead to go through Samaria on His way to Galilee. In fact, the text says, "He needed to go through Samaria" (John 4:4). The Holy Spirit led Him there for a specific purpose—to meet this thirsty woman.

The Bible tells us that during His earthly ministry, Jesus lived in this world fully yielded to the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Holy Spirit He was:

- Conceived (Luke 1:35)
- Baptized (Luke 3:22)
- Filled and led (Luke 4:1)
- Empowered for ministry (Luke 4:14-15)
- Resurrected from the dead (Romans 8:11)

In this, He is a great example to us in the way we should live.

He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you (Romans 8:11).

BY THE WELL

Jesus arrived at the well in the “sixth hour” (or noon), just as the woman was coming to draw water. Although to us this does not appear to be strange, this was actually quite unusual in that day. Normally, the women of the town did not come to the well in the heat of the day, nor did they come alone. Jesus observed this peculiarity and knew that she was an outcast, rejected by the other women in her community. Yet, He spoke to her anyway, saying to her, “Give Me a drink.”

In our culture, this may sound a little rude, but in that society asking someone for help in this way actually honored that person as your equal. This show of respect immediately grabbed this woman’s attention. Jesus used His thirst as an opportunity to build a bridge

that would reach into the soul of a thirsty woman. He connected with her on common ground. He knew her greatest need was not to fill her empty waterpot—it was to fill the emptiness in her soul.

When I see the Son of God going to this extreme to speak to one lonely woman, my Christian walk is challenged. God has time for the least of us—the ones who are cast aside and hurting, the ones who cannot help themselves.

The searching question is, do I? Do I assign greater value to those that the world thinks are more important? That is not what Jesus did. He deemed each soul of great importance.

I am also challenged by the way Jesus goes about engaging this woman. He does not assault her with the facts. Instead, He gently comes into her life through an open door. He begins a conversation with her that is sensitive to her temporal situation, but also shows a genuine concern for her eternal soul.

Jesus was not looking for confrontation. That was not His purpose. He told Nicodemus in John 3:17, “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Jesus wasn’t looking for someone to debate. He was looking for someone who was thirsty. He found one

thirsty woman by the well that day. He used her temporal need for water to help her see that what she truly needed was eternal life.

As Christians, this is also our calling. We are to forget our prejudices and comfort zones and selflessly reach out in love to the people around us. Do you know the needs of the people in your life—the ones you are trying to win to God? Do you have a genuine concern for them? Do you respect them? Do you really care about them, or are they some kind of a project to you?

It doesn't matter how wonderful and exciting the gospel is, we will never share it effectively with a person who thinks we do not respect them or care about their needs. Through His humble approach, Jesus let this woman know that He respected her. He entered her world, and that eventually led her to enter His. Such is the incredible love and missionary heart of our Savior.

In the next five chapters of this book, we will closely examine how Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman about her need for salvation. From observing His example, we learn some valuable lessons on how to evangelize to those who come across our path.

In each chapter, I will briefly discuss the five biblical principles that form the acronym SHARE.

- Sensitive to the Spirit – Chapter 4
- Humbly Build a Bridge – Chapter 5
- Arouse Interest – Chapter 6
- Reveal Sin – Chapter 7
- Explain the Plan of Salvation – Chapter 8

As we look at Jesus' example, keep in mind that His ultimate goal is to reveal the plan of salvation—not to win her friendship. He wants more for her than she wants for herself. She was looking to fill one waterpot. He wants her to receive “a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).



SID'S STORY

While visiting California, my wife met an old neighborhood friend named Sid who had opened a hamburger place near where we were staying.

When she walked into the restaurant and asked for Sid, an employee pointed to the back of the room. She saw a man with a cigarette in his hand, engaged in a lively conversation with two women. Not wanting to interrupt, Karen turned to walk away saying that she would come back another time. But the worker insisted she stay, saying that Sid would love to see one of his old neighbors. Reluctantly, she followed him to the table where they were sitting and said, "Hello, Sid."

When he saw her, he threw away his cigarette, and told the girls he would talk to them later. "Karen!" he said in a very loud voice while giving her a big hug. "How are you doing?"

They spent some time catching up, and she was sad to learn that even though Sid seemed successful, his life was empty. His marriage had failed, he rarely saw his kids, and he had recently suffered some financial setbacks. She could see the sadness in his eyes and knew that this visit was a divine appointment.

She asked him if he remembered any of the Bible stories or lessons he learned when they were kids. Sid used to come to the Good News Club that her mother ran. With tears in his eyes he said he often recalls those stories and knows he needs to get back to church. Sid returned to the Lord that day and is now involved in a Bible study once again. The Lord had sent Karen there that day to remind him who Jesus was. Had she left before speaking to him, she would have missed what He wanted to do. She was sensitive to the Spirit.

CHAPTER 4

SENSITIVE TO THE SPIRIT

Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

JOHN 4:6

THE MOST IMPORTANT factor in every Christian's life is sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The "S" in SHARE reminds us to allow the Holy Spirit to direct us in all we do. Other influences, pressures, and motivations can easily propel us at times, but only when we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading will we experience His power, accomplish His purposes, and see people's lives truly changed.

Jesus was led by the Spirit to meet the Samaritan woman by the well. He did not allow anything to distract Him from where the Spirit was leading Him. This is a compelling example for us.

EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

God uses those who are willing to yield their lives to Him. Spirit-led ministry is the only activity God desires for His people. He wants to reach the lost, and does so by empowering believers to impact the world for Him. His desire is to save souls, revive hearts, and build His kingdom. So why do we see so much ineffective ministry taking place? Where is our power?

I believe the answer lies in part with our approach. Oftentimes there is too much planning and too little waiting on the Lord in prayer; too much organizing and not enough agonizing. God wants us to be a part of what He is doing. He is not interested in merely blessing our plans—He is looking for those who are willing to carry out His. In order to have a powerful effect on the lives of others for the kingdom of God, we must first begin in prayer, patiently seeking God's direction and allowing Him to order our steps.

We also ought to be mindful of the way Jesus spoke to individuals. We learn from His example in John 4 that He was led by the Spirit to speak to this woman.

Jesus used this meeting as an opportunity to draw close to her, without giving off the impression that He was dealing with a spiritual inferior. He was humble.

Most importantly, He allowed the conversation to be empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit who knew what would unlock this woman's heart.

Patience requires discipline. Waiting quietly and allowing God to show you just what part you are to play in a person's life takes spiritual power. That is why it is key to allow the Holy Spirit to empower us. He will equip us and lead us as we seek to share our faith with others. Jesus was just as effective preaching to a crowd as He was speaking with this one woman. In the same way, we too can be effective in any situation.

JUST A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

Often in our enthusiasm to see a person saved, we feel it is our "duty" to share the whole gospel, lead them in the sinner's prayer, and then begin discipling them—all in one brief encounter. If we do not complete this entire process, we usually feel that we have somehow failed God. Maybe some of you can relate to this. Whether at an evangelistic outreach or on the telephone with a friend, many of us feel from time to time as though we did not complete the job. What we fail to understand is that we may not be the full answer for a person. We may only be a piece of the puzzle.

Think about your own life. How many people did God send into your life before you accepted Jesus? If we

were honest, most of us would agree that we would not have responded favorably to a pushy Christian thrusting a Bible in our face and coercing us to believe in Jesus. While we may not see ourselves as being this extreme, whenever we share our faith we need to be careful that we do not let our eagerness cause us to become insensitive to the person we are talking to. Never let it be said that you were a stumbling block to someone giving his or her heart to the Lord.

It is of great importance that we are faithful to share the Word of God without compromise, but it is equally important to share it in the power of the Holy Spirit. If we ask the Holy Spirit which piece of the puzzle we are in a person's life, He will show us how to minister to that person. He will empower us with the wisdom and patience necessary for each situation and individual. If we start each day asking the Lord to give us divine appointments and the sensitivity to recognize them, I believe we would see effective and powerful doors opening for us to share our faith with those we encounter.

Again, John 4 is our example. Jesus took time with an individual. He went out of His way to reach this outcast woman and to minister to her. He was patient with her. He could have told her that He was the Messiah and that she was going to hell if she did not trust in Him. Instead, He brought her to the place where she recognized her

need for a Messiah, and then He revealed Himself to her. If Jesus took the time to minister to the need of one woman in this way, surely we should do the same.

When the Spirit leads us, we will not push people—we will not need to. Instead, we will be able to sense whether or not there is an open door.

The apostle Paul was a bold evangelist. He preached the gospel everywhere he went. Yet he recognized the need for prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit. Paul's most important need was to know where the Spirit was leading. He asked the Colossians to pray for him "that God would open ... a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak" (Colossians 4:3-4). He also encouraged the Colossians in the same way in their ministry.

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one (Colossians 4:5-6).

Though Paul was probably bolder for the Lord than anyone we know, it was not his style to come into a city, get on a soapbox, and start preaching at people. The Spirit always led him to where he was supposed to be,

and once there, he waited for an effective opportunity to share the gospel. He prayed and received the Spirit's leading and empowering everywhere he went, and none of us can deny that his was a powerful ministry.

Some popular evangelistic methods today train Christians to use certain scripted dialogue to help break the ice and turn the conversation to the Lord. This can be a very helpful tool, especially when we are looking for ways to draw people we don't know into a conversation; however, I want to offer a word of caution. Methods such as these should never be a substitute for waiting on the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that they would receive power to be His witnesses when the Holy Spirit had come upon them (Acts 1:8). While we may have our own clever words, they will amount to nothing unless we have "power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

We learn from both Jesus and Paul something very important about the work of God—it is only effective when it is empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit.

* * * * *

SUSAN'S STORY

A Christian co-worker casually asked me one day what I believed about God. I told him I was also a Christian. After all, I celebrated Christmas and attended church once in a while, so in my mind I was a Christian. But he knew right away by my answer that I was not saved.

Instead of debating the issue with me, he began treating me as though I was a fellow believer. He would open his Bible and share different Scriptures with me. I started to develop a love for God's Word. After I left that job, I continued to read the Bible and listen to Christian radio. Eventually, I didn't need anyone to tell me I wasn't a Christian—I knew my life was not in line with the truth. I finally committed my heart to the Lord while listening to a testimony on a Christian talk show.

One of the first calls I made after my prayerful commitment was to my former co-worker. I wanted him to know the impact that his life had made on mine. He didn't know it, but I had some bad experiences in the past with a born-again Christian relative. Her life had turned me away from God. I remember thinking that if I was going to be like her, then I didn't want to become born again. By simply respecting the fact that I thought I was a Christian, my co-worker helped tear down a wall and build a bridge, which enabled me to eventually receive the gospel.

CHAPTER 5

HUMBLY BUILD A BRIDGE

Give Me a drink.

JOHN 4:7

JESUS KNEW THAT the Holy Spirit had led Him to the well that day. Because of that, when the woman arrived on the scene, He took the next step. The “H” in the word SHARE reminds us that as the Lord leads us to share the gospel, we need to approach people with humility and respect. When we do that, we immediately begin building bridges into their lives instead of erecting walls, which keep us separated. In our text, Jesus does this by starting a conversation with the woman, asking her for a drink.

In order to appreciate what Jesus is doing, you have to understand the cultural significance of this act. For us, a man speaking to a woman is an ordinary occurrence. But in those days, a Jewish man would never speak to

a woman in public, and especially not to an outcast Samaritan woman. By doing this, Jesus broke through the social, religious, and cultural barriers that separated them. He built a bridge.

Building bridges can be difficult. Starting a meaningful conversation, especially with a stranger, is challenging. But building bridges is a necessary part of reaching others for Christ. One must reach across those things that divide people in our society in order to have a real impact.

The manner in which Jesus approached her is very important. If we come off with a holier-than-thou attitude, it does not help the bridge-building process. When Jesus asked her for a drink, it was honoring and respectful. In that culture, asking for her help served to elevate her to equality with Him. Because of this, she responded saying, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (John 4:9).

Jesus never conformed to the ways of the world. If He had, He would have ignored her. Instead, He treated this woman with dignity and respect. He honored her by building a bridge over a cultural divide. This amazed the woman, and His question opened up an opportunity for Him to have a meaningful conversation with her.

This is the challenge you and I face as we attempt to share our faith with others. How do we get past the

surface issues to have a meaningful conversation? How do we speak to others about their need for the Lord without making them feel like we are judging them?

DO THEY FEEL LIKE A PROJECT?

When I first became a Christian, I was so zealous—I wanted everybody to know the Lord! Regrettably, I had become too pushy. Instead of drawing my loved ones to Jesus, I actually had the opposite effect. I was obnoxious. Because of all my preaching and nagging, my own sister wanted nothing to do with me for about four years. I lacked the understanding of real ministry. I was so unlike Jesus.

Jesus genuinely loved this Samaritan woman, and it was His sincere love that drew her into the kingdom. He showed His love for her by accepting her for who she was and respecting her as a valuable human being. I, on the other hand, had not shown that kind of love toward my own sister. I did not accept her for who she was. I did not show a genuine concern for her life. I was only interested in changing her, and that turned her away from me and the gospel.

I finally reached a place in my walk with the Lord where I realized how badly I had behaved toward my sister. So I wrote her a letter and let her know how much I missed her and how I wanted my kids to know their

aunt. I did not mention anything spiritual or reference any Scripture. I just brought her up-to-date on our lives and asked about hers. I wanted her to know that I cared about her—because I really do. A week later, I got a response. She said my letter moved her to tears. She wrote that she had always wanted to be a part of our lives, but was very hurt because she felt more like a “project” than a sister.

My clumsy attempt at expressing concern for my sister’s eternal soul severed our relationship. I was overbearing and came on too strong and that turned her away from me and the Lord. She interpreted my behavior as a lack of love. In my zeal, I had built a wall instead of a bridge. Through this experience, God taught me patience and showed me the mistake that I had made by trying to hurry along the process and pick unripe fruit in my sister’s life.

Patience is a hard lesson to learn, but if God is in it for the long run, we should be too. Maybe you realize that you have tried to pick unripe fruit in the lives of those closest to you. Learn to be patient and love them right where they are. Come down from your soapbox and become a bridge-builder. You never know. Perhaps by doing this, they may actually want to know more about your life, which in turn may lead to an opportunity for you to share your faith with them.

STRIKING UP CONVERSATIONS

There are many ways to build bridges with people. When I stay at hotels, I often use the elevator in an interesting way to start conversations. Instead of turning around and facing the door, which is the acceptable norm, I stand and face the other people. When the doors close I say, “I suppose you are wondering why I gathered you all here today.” After the laughter at this bit of frivolity, I ask them where they are from and begin a conversation. I know it’s silly, but I’ve had some interesting discussions as a result.

When I am shopping, I look for ways to connect with people. One time in the produce section of the supermarket, I noticed a woman picking out a particular kind of bean. So I asked her how she cooked them. Her face lit up as though I had named her the greatest chef in the world. She was very excited to tell me how delicious they were when cooked a certain way. As we were discussing beans, I was also praying for an opportunity to take the conversation to the next level. After all, how do you go from beans to Jesus?

Striking up conversations with strangers is not that difficult. We just need to take an interest in who they are or what they are doing. The next time you see someone working on a car or building something, go over and begin asking them questions. People love when you pay attention to them. By doing so, you will not only learn

some very interesting things, but one of your little conversations may actually lead to an effective open door for you to share about Jesus.

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PHILLIP'S STORY

I grew up in the church. In high school, when I was struggling with the big questions of life, I will never forget how patiently my father dealt with me. I was studying different religions and philosophies, and would constantly pepper him with questions. I was argumentative and difficult, and very quick to accuse him of being dogmatic and anti-intellectual.

Yet he was always patient. His willingness to listen to me, and his incredibly wise responses often disarmed my fiery arguments. Eventually I ran out of questions and grew tired of trying to stump him. That's when I began to realize how much my father loved me and how much more my Father in heaven loved me.

They both wanted the same thing for me—they wanted me to find my way home. In the summer before I left for college I recommitted my life to Jesus. Since then I can truly say that I know God, not only in my mind, intellectually, but also in my heart, experientially.

I will always be grateful to my father for being so patient and truthful with me during those days. I was arrogant and misguided, but because he loved me, he listened to me and treated me with respect—and that led me to Jesus.

CHAPTER 6

AROUSE INTEREST

*If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you,
“Give Me a drink,” you would have asked Him, and He
would have given you living water.*

JOHN 4:10

ONCE YOU HAVE broken the ice and found some common ground, the next challenge is to keep the conversation alive and interesting. In this chapter, we will be looking at the “A” in our word SHARE—Arouse Interest.

In John 4:9, the Samaritan woman questions why Jesus, being a Jew, asked her, a Samaritan woman, for a drink. He responded by arousing her interest saying, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (John 4:10).

Jesus does not really answer the question she posed in verse 9, but He also does not come right out and tell her the good news either. Instead, He appealed to her

intellect. What He said intrigued her. Undoubtedly, her curiosity about Jesus grew, and she wondered what this “living water” could be. She felt honored that He took the time to give her a riddle to solve, and she was curious to know more. So she replied:

Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock? (John 4:11-12).

First, she states the obvious—He could not be talking about real water. Then she challenges His authority—did He think He was greater than Jacob, the patriarch who drank from this ancient well himself? This is just the reaction Jesus desired. He gets her attention and engages her in a thought-provoking spiritual conversation. I cannot help but wonder if there was a little smile on His face as He said,

Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:13-14).

GIVE THEM MORE

Imagine this scene—the mighty Creator of the universe, humbly taking the time to captivate the heart

of one lowly woman He met at the well in the heat of the day. Jesus is teaching us a lesson that we often miss in our enthusiasm to see others saved. The truth of the gospel cannot be effectively passed on to someone who is not interested. It is incumbent upon us to heed His example if we desire our evangelistic work to have an eternal impact.

Jesus aroused this Samaritan woman's interest and now she wants to know more. This is very important, because unless a person acknowledges that there is something lacking in their lives, they will never see the benefit of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Notice the woman's response. "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw" (John 4:15).

Although she obviously knew this was not real water, she had a thirst for it, and was curious to know what this water represented. It reminds me of a similar conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus, a Pharisee who also became intrigued with what Jesus had said.

He came to the Lord one night asking questions. Jesus answered him saying, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus responded, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:3-4).

Here we have a very intelligent man asking a question to which he obviously knows the answer. Doing this was

just another way of saying, “I know You do not mean this literally, so tell me what You are really trying to say.” We see the Samaritan woman asking the same type of question.

Jesus did not make the mistake that we so often do. He did not confront her before the time was right. With this patient approach, Jesus was successful in stirring up an inner desire in her heart to know the truth.

BACK TO BEANS

In the course of my bean discussion with the woman I met in the supermarket, I finally came up with a way to get from beans to Jesus. I asked the woman if the beans could be made for a large group. “What kind of group?” she asked. “Do you have a large family?”

I said, “Oh, I guess you could say that—about 5,000 in all. But probably only 500 will be coming to our picnic next week. Others will be bringing food too, so we will only need to make enough beans for about 200 at the most.”

Well, this really piqued her interest, and as we continued to talk, I told her it was for our church family. By this point in the conversation, even if she was predisposed against religion, I haven’t made her feel like I was trying to proselytize her. I really was interested in the bean recipe, although I was more interested in her soul.

Since I was only going to go as far as she was willing to go, I “dropped a few dimes” to see her response.

Christians most often cross the line with those they’re speaking to by being insensitive to their comfort level. If people are not interested in talking about God, you should let them off the hook graciously. Whenever I sense that a person does not want to continue the discussion, I thank him or her for their time and move on, knowing that a seed has been planted. If I start pushing the conversation, I will leave a bad taste in their mouths about Christians, Christianity ... and yes, Jesus.

I can still recall some aggressive Christians who tried to win me to the Lord but caused me to go the other way instead. I thought to myself, *I will never be a Christian if it means I have to become like them!* If a person is not ready to hear the gospel, you always want to leave them wanting to know more.

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MARIAN'S STORY

When I was sixteen, a group of us would hang out drinking in front of a little church. Inside the church, a small group of Christians often met. One Jewish believer named Glenn, who was in his early twenties, noticed us and began coming out to talk with us. He told us that we didn't need to drink. Alcohol and drugs were Satan's way of destroying our lives, he would say. He warned us not to fall for the Devil's lies.

We didn't listen to his wise counsel, but we were always happy to see him. There was something very likeable about him. He seemed to really care about us. And even though we disagreed with him on just about everything, we still liked talking to him. He would always patiently consider our opinions and answer us with great wisdom.

It's been over twenty years, but I still remember our conversations. One that stands out in my mind is when Glenn said, "What you like about me is Jesus in me." That stuck with me. When I came to know the Lord, I realized that Glenn was telling the truth. What appealed to us was Jesus in him—it was because of Jesus that Glenn cared.

His witness in my life has influenced me in ways too many to list. Recently, as I was walking on a path near my home, I noticed beer bottles and cigarette butts lying on the ground and realized this was a place where teenagers hung out. Now I'm praying that I will run into those kids. I want to tell them that Jesus loves them, and to pray for them just as Glenn did for us. I want them to see Jesus in me!

CHAPTER 7

REVEAL SIN

Go, call your husband, and come here.

JOHN 4:16

ONCE YOU HAVE established a relationship and stirred up an interest for the things of God, you need to take advantage of the open door that God gives to lovingly speak the truth to others. This is another area where Christians often fall short. They are reluctant to rock the boat. But if we don't address the issue of sin, we have totally missed the point.

While some may be too zealous and pushy in sharing their faith, others are often too meek and fearful. The fear of rejection keeps them from getting to the main point, which is twofold—to reveal sin and to explain the plan of salvation. We must be faithful to address the issue of sin as the Holy Spirit reveals it. We can remember this

by the letter “R” in our word SHARE, which reminds us to always reveal sin.

Notice how Jesus takes the conversation to the next level. He earned the right to speak frankly to this woman about the sin in her life because He had invested time and built a relationship with her. He did not blast her with the error of her ways right at the beginning. Instead, He showed her that He really cared about her, so she was willing to listen to what He had to say. He speaks the truth to her, not in a condemning way, but rather with words of grace and knowledge. He gently turned the spotlight onto her personal life, saying,

“Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly” (John 4:16-18).

Imagine for a moment the impact of His words. He touched the deepest cord of her emotions—she wanted to be loved. Obviously, five husbands had not been the answer, and there was not much hope for her current relationship either. She had been drinking from the wrong well, and her life was barren as a result. Now she stood before the One who could quench her thirst forever, but there was something she had to deal with

first—the issue of sin. In essence, Jesus is saying that the first step in drinking “living water” is to get away from the polluted wells. This is key. A person must realize they are drinking from the wrong well. They need to understand what they are being saved from before they can really appreciate having a Savior. One must acknowledge a Savior and turn from their sin.

CALL IT BY NAME—SIN

This woman sought to fill the emptiness in her life with something other than God. This is idolatry, and idolatry is sin. Sin can be subtle, and if we are not aware of its power in our lives, we will make excuses for it or minimize it so that it does not sound bad. Be careful when you blame other people, society, or your past for the choices you make. It doesn't matter how reasonable you try to make it sound, sin is sin and it needs to be dealt with completely. Stop making excuses for sinful behavior.

Jesus was faithful to gently, but straightforwardly, bring the woman's sin to her attention. He was not interested in making her feel better about her circumstances. In a sense He was saying to her, “Look how thirsty you are! You went from one man to the next, and you cannot find any satisfaction. You are looking to the wrong things. I can show you something that will truly satisfy.”

People in our world today are on this same treadmill. They are thirsty, yet drinking from the wrong wells. Folks think they will be fulfilled when they get more stuff, make more money, or like this woman, when they get a new relationship. They strive, sometimes at the expense of others, to fill themselves with what they think will satisfy. However, it is an endless pursuit—a marathon without a finish line. Oh, for a while, there may be a sense of fulfillment, but ultimately nothing in this world will ever satisfy the thirsty soul apart from a relationship with the living God.

How many of us know extremely wealthy people who are still searching for something more? Their money is not much comfort to them when their marriage falls apart, or when they lose their health, or when they find that their children are on drugs. That is why Jesus warned us of the deceitfulness of riches. Having money can make people think that they are secure, but when the hard realities of life set in, money is just another dry well.

I heard a story recently that illustrates the inability of money to make a person happy. A lady earned minimum wage as a factory worker. One day her boss overheard her saying, “If only I had a thousand dollars, I would be perfectly happy.” The boss thought, *Boy, I’d love to see a perfectly happy woman.* So he went to her and said, “Here’s a thousand dollars, I heard what you said.” As

he was walking away, he overheard her again, this time moaning, “Why didn’t I say five thousand dollars would make me perfectly happy?”

We can all relate, right? Our human nature is never satisfied. We will never have enough. King Solomon, the richest and wisest man who ever lived, said, “The eyes of man are never satisfied” (Proverbs 27:20).

SHIFTING THE FOCUS

The Samaritan woman went from man to man thinking, *This man is the one—he is my answer. This will be different from my last relationship.* But before long, his flaws would begin to show, and someone else started looking better. Her life had become one of seeking and never finding, until this divinely appointed day when Jesus Christ came into her life. Gently, He pointed out to her, “What you are looking for, you will never find there.”

Jesus hit the mark. It was up to her now. How will she handle the issue of her sin? How does she respond? She does something a lot of us do under similar circumstances—she changes the subject. It is a natural defensive mechanism. When someone gets a little too close for comfort, we tend to shift the conversation, taking the focus off us and putting it on something else. She does this by bringing up the issue of religion.

Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship (John 4:19-20).

This is a very divisive topic between the Jews and the Samaritans, which could have served to derail the conversation. But Jesus does not get sidetracked. He keeps His focus on the main thing—her need for salvation.

BACK TO THE PRODUCE AISLE

So there I was, in the produce aisle continuing the conversation with the “bean” lady. After I mentioned the church picnic, we were on the verge of a more spiritual dialogue, so I took it one more step by telling her that I was the pastor. Sadly, at that point I could tell she was unwilling to go any further. I sensed it was time to move on. I thanked her for the information on the beans, and I wished her a good day. As I walked away, I prayed that God would send another Christian into her life one day to pick up where our conversation had ended.

Perhaps if I were a little more quick-witted I may have been able to speak more with this woman. Jesus certainly knew how to address the Samaritan woman when she diverted the attention away from the subject. However, I could only go as far as the Lord led, and

in this case, I felt that an effective door was not open to continue. On other occasions I have seen the Lord really move on a heart, and have had the privilege of sharing the gospel and leading someone in a prayer of repentance. But I sensed that this encounter in the grocery store was not one of those instances.

Some would strongly differ with me on this point thinking I'm more concerned about being liked by others than finishing the job. I agree, up to a point. We should never allow what others think of us to prevent us from sharing the gospel when we sense the Lord has opened a door for us to do so. However, if we insist on forcing the subject when a person obviously is not interested, we can do more harm than good. Strong-armed evangelism was not Jesus' approach, and it shouldn't be ours either.

I recently came across this e-mail from my son-in-law. He wrote it to me after listening to a radio interview I did seven years ago on this same topic.

I just finished listening to your interview and I wanted to tell you that the points you made really put my mind at ease. Since I was young, I have always felt the need to "seal the deal" when it came to evangelizing. If I wasn't able to convince a person of their need for salvation by the end of the conversation, I always felt like I had failed God. My goal in sharing my faith

was always to get right to the point—I never cared about getting to know the person. All that mattered was that they needed to be saved.

After hearing what you shared about Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, my eyes have been opened to the importance of getting to know the person that I am sharing my faith with. It reminds me a little of how we build business relationships at work. The key in closing a business deal is not so much the product that we are bringing—although that is important—but it is mostly the relationship that we have established with those who are purchasing our equipment. Because we have taken the time to build bridges and get to know them and their corporate needs, they are interested in hearing what we can do for them.

If we take that much interest in closing a business deal, how much more should we be willing to invest in the lives of those we are sharing the gospel with? In the future I will be more sensitive to the opportunities I have to get to know a person instead of just jamming Jesus down their throats.

SENSITIVE TO THE SPIRIT'S LEADING

If we are sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, we will know when to talk and when to walk. We will sense His leading with the individual that is right in front of us.

Sometimes that leading will be to walk away. Other times, we will spiritually discern that we need to take the conversation to the next level.

If all it meant to be His witnesses in this world was to get information out, then every Christian would be on a street corner yelling out the facts of the gospel. This is not always the wrong approach, but I will venture to say that in my opinion it is the least effective and the least influential.

I know some amazingly gifted street evangelists who are called to this kind of street ministry. God opens doors for them all the time with passers-by. They are enabled by His Spirit to share the gospel in this way and still leave a sweet fragrance of Christ behind. But they would agree that God has not called everyone to do what they do. The bottom line is to remember that we may not have an opportunity to share the complete plan of salvation with a person in just one meeting. And that's okay, because we may only be one small piece of the puzzle in that person's life.

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PAUL'S STORY

In the Army, I had a squad leader who was born again. Every week he invited us all to come to church with him. He was always respectful, even when some of us would mockingly pretend to want to go with him. He never wavered. He came every week and showed us love, always. Secretly, I respected him for that.

One day a friend and I agreed to go with him. I told him I was going under one condition—if I didn't like it he would have to promise to stop asking me. He agreed. What I didn't tell him was that I wanted to go because I was curious. His life intrigued me and I wanted to know more.

I stepped into that church with a bit of trepidation—I didn't know what to expect. But my fears were calmed when I saw families talking and friends calling each other brother or sister. It was a loving and festive atmosphere. When the service began, the worship freaked me out a little. I had never seen people raise their hands in worship before—though before long I felt compelled to raise my hands with them. I was impressed both by the love and the sense of God's presence in that place.

When the pastor began teaching from the Bible, I didn't realize it at the time, but the Holy Spirit was tugging at my heart. And it scared me. So, I made an excuse and left early. Later that night I prayed, "Lord, if You are real, show me."

It took ten very long and difficult years before I found myself in church again. This time I was a broken man, and when the Bible was read, I allowed the Lord into my heart and committed my life to Jesus. He showed me that He was real, and I've never left again!

CHAPTER 8

EXPLAIN THE PLAN OF SALVATION

I who speak to you am He.

JOHN 4:26

ONE CHALLENGE WE face as we witness to others is how to avoid entering into a religious debate while explaining the plan of salvation. That is what the final letter “E” in the word SHARE represents. Many times people will try to derail the conversation by instigating a religious argument, as the Samaritan woman’s comments could have easily done. But we can see how Jesus does not deviate from His purpose. He gets right to the heart of the issue as He answers her.

Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the

Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24).

From this passage, we see Jesus bring the conversation to the main point—the hour which is to come. He did not allow this divisive issue to turn the discussion into a debate, but instead shifted the focus to something they could agree upon.

DO NOT ARGUE

He does not argue with her even though she was clearly wrong. The Samaritans did not worship God in the right way—they had turned away from the Law. They had developed their own religion based on their own thinking. It was more convenient for them to worship in the mountains of Samaria than to travel all the way to Jerusalem. So they built their own altars, choosing what was convenient over what was right. They mixed in just enough truth to make it sound good and to ease their consciences. They had created their own god according to their own image, and this was whom they now worshiped—not the God of the Bible.

We have a lot of this kind of “high place” religion in America today. People do not realize they are making

up their own gods when they say things like, “If I were God, this is what I would do.” Or, “If there is a God, then He surely would look at it this way.” But that is exactly what they are doing—creating gods in their own image. They determine for themselves what is right, and they live and serve their own debased standards rather than the standards established by the true and the living God.

I’ve read many polls recently, and most of them agree that less than one out of every three adults in America attends church on a weekly basis. And only half of those who say they are Christians actually live their lives based on biblical truths. That is why people who are unfamiliar with God and who live contrary to His ways will still say to you, “Oh yes, I believe in God.”

But in whom are they really trusting? Is it the God of the Bible? Or is it just a figment of their own imagination—a god of their own creation? It sounds good and it eases their conscience, but it is really idolatry. They are worshiping a false god, one they made up themselves.

So why doesn’t Jesus make the Samaritan woman’s religion the main issue? Why doesn’t He set her straight? Why should we, as Christians, avoid telling others how wrong they are in the way they approach God? After all, it is true—they are wrong to approach God on their own terms instead of His.

If we are willing to learn, Jesus has something valuable to teach us in the way He handles this. If He had taken a superior attitude, He would have lost the opportunity to get to the real issue—her salvation. Instead, the issue would have become proving who is right and who is wrong. I love Jesus' sensitivity. He knows she does not understand, so He sidesteps this trap. Rather than proving His point, He offers her something better.

This is where Christians so often fail. When we begin arguing, we miss the point and lose the opportunity to share the truth with a needy soul. Why argue with someone whose doctrine may be off when you have something more to offer them? In fact, some groups are quite adept at purposely provoking Christians to get mean-spirited or judgmental to justify their own decision to reject Christ. They may turn the conversation to argue evolution or so-called Bible errors or hypocrisy in the church. They know all the scandals and are quick to incite believers into a battle over non-essentials.

Instead of being swayed from the issue by her lack of understanding, I love what Jesus does—He tells her that she is right. The things that divided the Samaritans and the Jews really were not all that important, and pretty soon none of these issues—the wells, places of worship, etc.—were going to matter anymore. God was doing a new work through Jesus and that was where He wanted to direct the conversation.

DO NOT AVOID THE TRUTH

We also notice from the previous verses that although Jesus does not argue with her, He does tell her the truth. When we begin defending our position, oftentimes we get off track. Here, Jesus makes it clear that the Jews worship in the correct way, and it is through that way that salvation will eventually come to the whole world. Yet, He does it in such a way that lets her off the hook—she does not need to fight this battle with Him. He reminds her that the issue is not the style of worship, because there is a better style coming. And she picks up on that, saying, “I know that Messiah is coming ... when He comes, He will tell us all things” (John 4:25).

With a lot of patience and gentle, loving correction, her thinking comes around to the real issue. Her response shows the shift that has taken place in her heart as she willingly turns from what divides them to an issue they agree on—the coming Messiah. And as soon as she does, Jesus reveals, “I who speak to you am He” (John 4:26).

This was the work He had come to do—to win a soul.

S.H.A.R.E. IN REVIEW

Jesus cared and did not allow divisive issues to create a barrier between Himself and this woman. He used what they had in common to bring the woman to a

place where she could hear the truth. That needs to be the focus of all our evangelistic efforts—not to prove we are right, not to make a name for ourselves, not to push our own agendas, but to win a soul for Christ. Nothing is more important than that. So don't waste time arguing with people over minor issues of doctrine. All of that will be straightened out in time. When you are talking to someone about the Lord, keep it simple and keep it focused upon the main thing. Keep it about Jesus. Remember to **SHARE** the gospel the way Jesus modeled for us. He is our example in all things.

- **SENSITIVE TO THE SPIRIT'S LEADING.**

This is the most important factor—it is the way God desires and designs for His people to live.

- **HUMBLY BUILD A BRIDGE.** When we genuinely care about people, we cross over the barriers that divide us.

- **AROUSE INTEREST.** People are drawn to the truth by their desire to know, not our desire to tell.

- **REVEAL SIN.** Before a person can really appreciate salvation, they must acknowledge their need for a Savior.

- **EXPLAIN THE PLAN OF SALVATION.** Stay focused. Don't argue minor things when you have something far greater to offer them—the love of Christ.

Amazingly, all of these steps occurred during one encounter between Jesus and this woman at the well. This is often not the case. Usually, these things take place gradually and God uses a number of different people in the process. That is why we need to let the Spirit lead and to understand what piece of the puzzle we are in a person's life. Jesus was not aggressive in His ministry to this woman—He was responsive to her. Because of His sensitivity, her desire grew.

I have discontinued many conversations with people, simply because I did not want to force the issue and turn them away from the Lord. I always pray that my actions would never make it harder for someone else to plow and plant in those same fields.

We may not get the opportunity to see someone accept Jesus every time we share our faith. We need to bear in mind that God may be using us to fulfill a specific role in that person's life. It is extremely important to be patient and sensitive to the Lord's leading as we minister the gospel.

While it is rare to be able to plow, plant, water, fertilize, and harvest all in one encounter (as Jesus did with this woman), it does happen occasionally. And when it does, it is the most exciting experience a Christian can know in this life.

FINISHING THE WORK

I can recall an amazing encounter I had on a plane. I was praying before opening a conversation with the person sitting next to me and before I knew it, he switched seats with someone. My new seatmate was engrossed in a self-help book. I asked him about his book, and he began to explain in detail what he was learning from it.

As I listened, I sensed a hunger in him. I responded by saying I was speaking at a conference on the same subject. This aroused his interest and intrigued him. I went on to share that I was a pastor and a Bible teacher, and how alive and relevant the Word of God is for us today. The more I spoke, the more his interest grew. Instead of pulling away, he asked more questions.

I got to a place in the conversation where I addressed the subject of sin. I didn't sense the Spirit giving me any words of knowledge about any particular sin in his life, but as I shared my own testimony, he related to it. I clearly outlined for him the problem of sin, the solution found in the gospel of Jesus Christ, my own personal testimony, and how he could experience eternal life through Jesus. And right there in that seat, he eagerly prayed with me to receive the Lord!

I gave him a Bible and a copy of *Under His Influence*, a book I wrote on being yielded to the influence of the Holy Spirit. We were so excited to see how the Lord

genuinely touched his heart. He said, “I believe it was totally God that I changed seats.” By the time we parted, I had given him some information on a church he could visit in his area, and he was on his way with the Lord in his heart and life.

Words fail to express the joy of being able to “finish the job,” so to speak. When God gives you the honor of leading a person (who was a stranger to you when you woke up that morning) all the way to the point where they pray to receive Jesus—nothing this world offers can compare. Jesus said it best when He told the disciples that He had food they did not know about.

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MICHELLE'S STORY

When I was younger I knew about God and I was always interested in learning more about Him. The Christians I knew in high school seemed to have something special, and I was curious. But for some reason nobody ever told me about the cross, and what Jesus had accomplished when He died and rose again. When they invited me to Bible studies, I would go—but even there, no one ever shared the gospel with me. I guess they just assumed that I knew.

It wasn't until years later that a woman I had never met in person shared the good news with me 3,000 miles away over the telephone. By that time, I already had many scars from living in this world without God and without hope. When I heard the words of eternal life spoken for the first time, they immediately sounded good to me. I accepted Jesus into my heart and it changed my life forever. Knowing that God loves me and that my sins are forgiven is the best news I ever received.

I will always be thankful to this woman who cared enough about my soul to share the gospel with me even though we had never met. The added blessing is that today she is my mother-in-law!

Don't assume that everyone who shows up to a Bible study, small group, or church has heard the gospel. Just because they are in church doesn't mean they are saved. Care enough to find out if they know Jesus. Who knows, you may get an opportunity to tell someone the best news they will ever hear.

CHAPTER 9

LASTING RESULTS

*Lift up your eyes and look at the fields,
for they are already white for harvest!*

JOHN 4:35

THE TIME JESUS spent with this one woman produced a harvest beyond what anyone could have possibly imagined. The disciples certainly did not see it. The text says that when they returned from their journey to Samaria, they “marveled” at the sight of Him speaking with her (verse 27). They just could not understand, because from a human perspective it didn’t make sense. But the Holy Spirit had led Jesus to this appointed meeting, and this woman’s transformed life was used to reach an entire city.

The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” Then they went out of the city and came to

Him. Many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days (John 4:28-30, 39-40).

In her excitement to tell others about Jesus, the woman hurried off, leaving her waterpot behind. After all, she had something much more precious now—“living water.” As a result of her testimony, many from Sychar came to meet Jesus and they also believed. They invited Him to stay, and for two days Jesus ministered in that city. During this time, the people of the city became convinced that this Man was the Christ.

Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world (John 4:42).

Isn't that amazing? God opened a door to an entire city through one conversation with an outcast woman. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to touch one life and she in turn touched another—and before long, the entire culture began to change. Isn't that something we need more of today?

THE SECRET TO LASTING HAPPINESS

Let's shift gears a little and take a look at what the disciples were doing at this time. Remember, they had left Jesus sitting by the well to go into town for food. When they returned, they found Him talking to a Samaritan woman. They thought this was odd, but they did not say anything to Him. After she left, they urged Him to eat. He responded, "I have food to eat of which you do not know" (John 4:32).

The disciples were confused by this statement and started asking each other, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?" Jesus explained to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:33-34).

Jesus explained that the food He is referring to is not temporal, but spiritual food. He wants His disciples to understand that the secret to lasting fulfillment and happiness in this world comes from one source—obedience to the will of the Father. That is the greatest food because it nourishes our souls. This is one of the lessons Jesus wanted His disciples to learn. They could see that Jesus was no longer hungry or weary after this encounter with the woman. And, despite the fact that He never seemed to get a drink of water from her, His thirst has also been quenched. In effect He was saying to them, "Guys, I have food you have no clue about." His joy in ministering to this woman and pleasing the

Father far surpassed the temporary hunger and thirst
He experienced.

The first time I ever led someone to the Lord, I too forgot about all else except for the joy of that experience. No temporal pain, hunger, or distraction could hinder my sense of ultimate fulfillment and satisfaction.

In our world today everyone is searching for lasting happiness. But apart from the will of God, the best anyone can hope for is conditional, shallow, and temporal results. It is only when a person discovers and chooses to live out God's will for their lives that they will be truly satisfied. When you are fulfilling the purpose for which you were created, you will experience no lack.

THE HARVEST

It is interesting to note that it was into this very same city of Samaria that the disciples had traveled for food, and yet they did not seem to notice the spiritual hunger of the residents. As the people of the city were coming out to meet Jesus, He said to the disciples, "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (John 4:35).

It makes you wonder what the disciples were thinking about when they went to town. Had they possibly missed something while they were in the city? Perhaps there

was an opportunity to minister, but they did not see it. Maybe they were blinded by their racial prejudice, or perhaps they were too preoccupied with meeting their own temporal need for food. Whatever the reason, they went into the city without Jesus and were unaware that the fields were “white for harvest.”

We sometimes do the very same thing. We go about our daily routines without Jesus and we forget that the purpose of our lives each day is to work in those same fields. We get easily distracted taking care of all our own needs, and we miss opportunities to minister to others.

If you're like me, you can think of countless times when you've rushed into a grocery store focused on one thing—how quickly you can get what you need and get out. At times you may have also prejudged the people who came across your path, thinking that because they are of a different religious background or ethnicity that they would not want to hear about Jesus.

Therefore, the exhortation Jesus gave His disciples is one I believe we need to heed today. We need to ask ourselves these same questions: Have I lifted up my eyes to see that the fields are already white for harvest? Am I missing opportunities to partake of the spiritual food that brings lasting joy?

When that becomes our desire, the Holy Spirit will open effective doors of ministry for us as we pray. He

will transform our barren lives into productive ones. So put aside the things that are distracting you, and lift up your eyes. Who knows? God might want to use you to bring about an even greater harvest.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 10

A HARVEST IN HIS TIME

He who sows and he who reaps ... rejoice together.

JOHN 4:36

IHAVE TO admit that there was a time when I envied those fiery street evangelists. I admired their boldness and fearless courage in preaching the gospel. The gift God has given these preachers truly is to be desired. It enables them to win many souls to Christ in such tremendous ways. However, I have become convinced that for most of us, this kind of evangelism can be a lazy approach, and it is not the example Jesus has given to us.

Paul the apostle, bold as he was in preaching the gospel, never set out indiscriminately. He always prayed for God to open an effectual door through which he could preach, and he faithfully went wherever the Spirit led him, no matter how unimportant it appeared to be on the surface.

In Acts 16, after spending several days in the city of Philippi (a key city in the region of Macedonia where the Holy Spirit directed Paul to preach the gospel), Paul shared the gospel with just a few women beside a river. Only one of them, a woman by the name of Lydia, actually gave her heart to the Lord as a result.

The amazing thing about this story is that, like Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, at first glance Paul's encounter with Lydia seemed unimportant in light of the fact that there was such a great metropolis to reach. But with the Lord, every soul won is a victory, and with every victory, new ground is taken for the kingdom of God.

Paul's obedience to the Spirit's leading brought him to this city. He humbly spoke to the few women he found outside the city on the Sabbath day and was invited to stay in Lydia's home. This ultimately led to his establishing a church in the city of Philippi, which was the first Christian church in Europe. Several years later, Paul wrote a letter to the growing church in Philippi that has become part of our Bible today. The book of Philippians is an encouragement to us all and serves as an example of what God can do when we are obedient to His specific call on our lives.

God has a specific call on your life too. He wants you and me to make the same kind of personal investment in the lives of individuals. He doesn't want us to lose

sight of the value of one soul. He wants us to take the time to get to know them—to look into their eyes, feel their pain, and sense their struggles. He wants us to offer real comfort and hope; the same comfort and hope that we have received. We can't do that from a distance. We can't merely preach at people—that is the lazy approach. If we are going to have an effect on our families and our communities for the kingdom of God, we have to be led of the Spirit and be sensitive to the people He brings across our path.

REACHING THE LOST

Years ago we had a neighbor named Darren. He and his girlfriend lived next door, and they were completely opposite from us. My wife and I homeschooled our kids, and I was a pastor of a growing church. They were unsaved and living a hedonistic lifestyle.

As a mother of impressionable teenagers, my wife instinctively felt the need to protect our kids from their negative influence. Yet as a Christian, she also had a strong desire to reach out to them in love. She believed God had put them next door for a reason.

At the time our son had begun to show signs of rebellion towards God. He was watching Darren, and before long he began asking if he could hang out with him on Sunday mornings instead of going to church with

us. My wife really wanted to ask Darren to stay away from our kids, but God changed her heart. She began to see him as God saw him. Instead of banishing him, she invited him and his girlfriend over for dinner. An interesting friendship blossomed between us.

Over time Darren began opening up to us. One day he dropped by, visibly upset. He started to tell us about his childhood and the relationship he had with his father. It turns out Darren was a backslidden Christian. He had grown up in a Christian home—he was a pastor's son. He knew the Bible and what it meant to be saved, but had walked away from God and Christianity because of the hypocrisy he saw in his father's life. The man he knew at home was not the same man in the pulpit. He did not practice the things he preached. He was a fraud, and that drove his son away from God.

Darren told us that he had peace about his decision until he met us. He said, "You guys are a loving and happy family. Your family is nothing like ours. You are a father first, Lloyd. You love your wife and kids. You even play basketball with your son." He then turned to my son, Jeremy, and looked him in the eyes and said, "You have a great dad. In fact, I might still be walking with the Lord if I had a dad like yours."

My wife's jaw dropped—we were all crying. We prayed with Darren for the first time that day. He and his

girlfriend started coming to church and I had the blessing of performing their wedding ceremony.

Remember, evangelism is not something we do; it is an overflow of who we are in Christ. It is about being sensitive to the Spirit, as Jesus was, and showing respect to those who cross our path each day. It is about picking fruit in its season and knowing what piece of the puzzle God is asking us to be in an individual's life. Most importantly, it is about having the same missionary heart as Jesus—who willingly entered our world so we could enter His.

AN EXAMPLE TO LIVE BY

As I was studying John 4 while ministering in New York City after 9/11, I felt like I had stepped into the story. I was one of His disciples traveling into Samaria and marveling at the unusual sight of Jesus speaking to an outcast woman. I was awed by His example.

This story continues to inspire me today. It is a rare glimpse into Jesus' personal style of evangelism, and a wonderful picture of how He walked among the people of His day. We can learn much from observing the Master and His ways.

One lesson we learn from Jesus in this encounter with the woman at the well is not to lose sight of the powerful

impact of one-on-one ministry. That is the heart of evangelism because it is the heart of our Savior. In these days of organized outreaches, ministry teams, budgets, and time constraints, there are enormous pressures in the Christian world to “get results.” Sadly, many of our ministries have succumbed to this pressure and have become professional, performance-driven operations. This shift in emphasis has resulted in many individuals being overlooked, or even worse, turned off by what they perceive as pushy, self-serving Christianity.

Sowing into the lives of individuals is the thrust of true effective evangelism and outreach.

Don't lose sight of the importance of sharing your faith with those God has placed right in your path.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that what you are doing to win souls for the kingdom is somehow insignificant compared to the efforts of others.

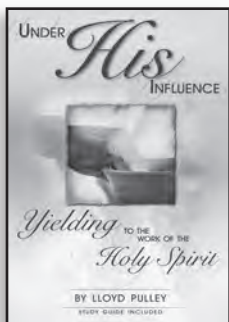
Evangelists such as Billy and Franklin Graham, Greg Laurie, and Raul Ries, to name a few, would be the first to tell you that it is the personal influence of Christians in the lives of individuals that lays the groundwork for every crusade. Without those who are diligently plowing, sowing, and watering in the fields, harvest times at these types of crusades would never be successful.

Oh, that the Lord would slow us down to follow the loving example He has set for us. Remember, you may be one who sows or one who reaps, but whatever you are doing, be patient and sensitive to the Lord's leading, and in the end we will all rejoice together.

And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together (John 4:36).

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JOHN 4:4

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Bridging the Gap Publications
123 White Oak Lane
Old Bridge, NJ 08857
732-679-9222 (ext. 0563)

CHRISTIAN LIVING / EVANGELISM

ISBN: 978-1597519786



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