

Developing a Vision for the Lost

~ Virgil Heisey

As we move about in our world, we do not have to go far to find someone who is not a Christian, who does not know Jesus as Savior and Lord of his life. It is God's will that His people continue with the mission He left us—to seek the lost and point them to the Lamb of God. For us to have any effectiveness in evangelism, we first need a vision for it. Vision is a very important aspect in any venture we might undertake in life, and can be a key factor to experience success. evangelism is no exception.

Thinking of developing a vision for the lost, there are a few Scriptural principles we need to keep in mind. Evangelization is a command of the Word of God and is emphasized by the living example of Jesus Himself, Who came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). If we are indeed His disciples, we should follow in the steps of His example.

In John 4:35-38, which is in the account of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus has a few things to teach us. First is that there is a time when the harvest is ripe; there is a time when opportunity to hear God's Word and receptivity to the Gospel coincide, and this does not last indefinitely. Most often this principle applies on a soul by soul basis. Most mission work is done one soul at a time.

Another thought from these verses is that at times different people through different circumstances have an opportunity in the evangelization process. Not all people involved will ever know in this life the extent of their effectiveness, but all such labors are noticed and will be rewarded by God. Sometimes we are called to sow; sometimes we may reap what others have sown, or we may even nurture the growing process. The Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 3:6-9 echoes this thought; one may plant, another may water, but God gives the increase. And again we have the thought, "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." Whatever our place or responsibility, it's important that we are faithful in what God calls us to do. John 12:48 teaches us another principle about reaching the lost: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Since God's Word will judge all men, it is ever so important that people know what it says. Although there are many different ways that people may hear the Word, God has chosen the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1Co 1:21). It is true, however, that many may never audibly hear our preaching or teaching, but they may read a printed page, hear a testimony or singing, or be touched by some other aspect of our outreach efforts.

The Apostle Paul again in Second Corinthians 3:2-3 tells us, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart." The testimony of our lives should reach to those who never read a Bible. Thus was Noah in his time; not only was he a preacher of righteousness, but the testimony he left as he built the ark for the saving of anyone who would have joined him and his family inside it, spoke to all who observed him. His life was a standing witness that condemned the world. People could see his life and what he did; this, coupled with his verbal testimony, made a

powerful combination. We too can have such potential, having the whole inspired Word of God, the guidance and unction of the Holy Spirit, and the support of a local body of believers.

Another ingredient of effective vision for evangelism is an awareness of eternal punishment for the ungodly. I believe that too few of us, including myself, realize the horror of eternal doom and an eternal destiny without Christ. The soul who lives without Christ is sad indeed, but to die without Jesus is much worse. We ought to be sobered by this reality and endeavor by God's grace to do more to help those who day by day are going toward a Christless eternity. This awareness ought to stimulate our desire to share the Good news!

Let us look now at a few practical points on how we can develop a vision for the lost.

1. Ask God for a sinner friend. It may be a person you meet or even work with, a neighbor, or a relative who does not have the joy of the Lord. It could be an elderly person or a troubled teenager or someone else God brings into your life that you can befriend. Visit with them, testify to them, care about them.

2. Pray regularly for those who do not know Jesus. It may be a person or family who came to your church service, or whom you met while shopping or in business life. When you see a tattooed person with metal protruding from their face and other places, do you ever think that this person actually has an eternal, never dying soul and is a potential candidate for the kingdom of God? Prayer is a good way to deter impure thoughts that might come to our minds when we see the immodestly dressed. These poor folks will need to answer to God for the way they dress, and we do well to pray for them and ask God to have mercy on them before it's too late. So often it is easy for us to make fun of the drunkard or the drug addict, or to make critical or belittling comments about someone's rough appearance. But this is not the spirit of Jesus. He loves these people, He died for their salvation, and He will save them if they repent and turn to Him! He wants to use our testimony and our prayers to make a difference in their eternal destiny.

3. Become an active participant in the outreach efforts of your local brotherhood. Do not criticize what another does, but support them; do all you can to work together; evangelism is not easy. Show up for outreach activities; support by presence and by prayer those who lead out.

4. Become involved in foreign missions. Inform yourself about what God is doing in other parts of the world. From the north Pole to the South Pole and all around the world are millions who yet need the Lord. Pray that God would send forth laborers into His harvest, and be ready to go if He would call you. Pray for missionaries, support financially if you can. And eventually a vision and a burden for the lost will become a part of your life. One more thing to remember is that you or I could have been born into a family where the Bible was not known; we could have had parents of a totally different religion. If our home were the jungle hut in the Amazon, or an apartment on the tenth story of a large city, would we know Jesus today? Were it not for the grace of God and the fact that someone taught us, prayed for us, and showed us the way, we could be as lost as anyone else who is not a Christian.

May God instill upon our hearts a vision for the lost so that more may be gathered into the kingdom of heaven before the end!

~ Lebanon, PA
June 2013