

Search Party
2. Party with Purpose
August 14, 2022

Anyone remember washing their groceries during the early days of Covid? Or how about taking off your clothes in the garage or sanitizing the mail? Covid was a new virus and no one knew much about how it spread. Then we learned that the virus doesn't spread much by contact – it's airborne. Covid spreads when an infected person gets near enough to another person for their breath to pass along the virus. So the prevention strategy became to wear masks and to keep our distance from each other. Today we know that the good news of Jesus – the Gospel - is spread by word of mouth. When one person who has the life of Jesus gets near someone else and tells them about it, then salvation, life, healing, and hope spread. But if we mask what we believe – or if we stay away from the people who need to catch life in the Spirit - then the Gospel won't spread and people will live without real hope.

Jesus calls us to be contagious!

We are to be carriers of his life wherever we go. In Acts 1:8, the risen Jesus tells his followers, "You will be my witnesses." What is a witness? In court, a witness is someone who tells what they have seen and experienced. Jesus calls us as his followers to tell others what we have seen and experienced about him in our own lives. But if you ask a random Christian in America today about how they are witnessing to Jesus, many will feel

uncomfortable with the question and want to change the subject.

Maybe it's because we have a flawed idea about what evangelism is. Evangelism is not something we do *to* people. It is not a sales pitch. It isn't a sermon on the street.

Sharing our faith is an expression of caring for those who are not followers of Jesus. 1 John 5:12 says "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." As followers of Jesus, we've received an amazing new life. Colossians 2 says, we were dead in our sins and God made us alive in Christ. We have an eternal hope, incredible promises, the power of the Holy Spirit. We care enough about others to want people to have life. So we share how we have experienced Jesus in our lives. Being a witness is simply the natural overflow of the life of God in us. When we see a great movie or go on an amazing vacation, we want to tell our friends about it. It's natural. We don't stress over it. That's the way witnessing to Jesus is supposed to work.

Matthew understood this. We read about him in the first book of the New Testament. **Matthew 9:9** *As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.* Jesus spots a tax-collector sitting at his booth and invites him to follow him as one of his disciples. This was not a popular decision by Jesus. Consultants would have advised Jesus to steer clear of recruiting Matthew to his inner circle, because Matthew came with significant baggage. For one thing, the

respectable people of the community disliked him. We know this because Jewish people hated all tax collectors. They were not like our IRS workers today. Back then, tax collectors worked for the Romans, who were a pagan military force occupying the land that God promised the Jews. So tax collectors took money from their fellow Jews and gave it to the Romans to pay for occupying their land. People hated that.

And tax collectors were corrupt. Here's how the system worked. The Romans would tell the tax collector, "You need to give us \$30,000 per week from your territory. Anything you raise above that you can keep for yourself. You have complete authority to demand whatever you want from the people." Bottom line: Matthew collaborated with the enemy and got rich by extorting money from his neighbors. That's the kind of guy Jesus was getting. Even so, Jesus said to Matthew, "Follow me." Matthew did and his life changed. A whole new world opened up for Matthew. He felt accepted by Jesus and became part of a brotherhood with the other disciples. Naturally, he wanted his friends to be in on this. So, he devises a bold evangelistic strategy. Matthew decides to help his friends know Jesus too. And here is the plan ... are you ready for it? ***He throws a party.*** He figures, "If I just get my friends in the same room with Jesus, something good will happen." ***Matthew 9:10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.*** Matthew throws a party and all of his tax-collector buddies show up. So do the "sinners."

“Sinners” refers to irreligious people. Matthew invited fellow crooks and irreligious people because they were the only friends he had. Respectable people wouldn’t socialize with him. But Jesus and his disciples did. And the Pharisees noticed this.

The Pharisees were dedicated to pleasing God by keeping all of God’s laws and rules. The name “Pharisee” means “separated one” because they not only worked at keeping all the rules, they also stayed away from those who didn’t. The Pharisees see Jesus eating with this shady, irreligious crowd and they have questions.

Matthew 9:11 *When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”* Kevin Miller points out that behind their question the Pharisees are saying, “Hey Jesus, by eating with these sinners you are condoning their sinful lifestyle. They’re going to think that you approve of what they are doing. And by the way, the food you are eating was bought with money stolen from fellow Jews. “Psalm 1:1 says, ‘Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.’ So you are not faithful to the scriptures. Jesus answered by teaching them (and us) about the purposes of God. **Matthew 9:12-13** *On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

Truths that fuel Jesus’ mission:

Jesus is seeking irreligious people

The Pharisees made it their goal to stay away from people who ignored God. But Jesus came looking for those people. He told them, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”* If someone says, “I want to be a doctor, but I don’t want to be around sick people,” we know they’ll never be a doctor. Similarly if someone says, “I want to be like Jesus, but I don’t want to be around irreligious people,” that won’t work, because Jesus came seeking lost people. Jesus said, *“For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* There’s Jesus’ mission! He went to Matthew’s dinner party because it was a perfect opportunity to connect with the people he came to find. And Jesus made sure his disciples were invited too, because he wanted them to catch on to his mission. Then when Jesus ascended back to heaven, he told them, *Go into all the world and preach the Gospel... Matthew 28:19-20* He gave that same mission to you and I too.

God's mercy changes us.

Jesus is quoting Hosea 6:6. **v. 13** *But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'* God would rather we show kindness than perform rituals. God's purpose for us is that we know him and the only way that can happen is through mercy – which is undeserved favor. If a Pharisee approached Matthew he'd say, "Shape up. Stop ripping people off. Quit being so greedy. Go get an honest job, clean up your act, and maybe then you'll be allowed to worship God at the synagogue." When Jesus saw Matthew at his tax collecting booth, Jesus knew what kind of guy he was. Jesus knew that Matthew was dishonest, greedy and ripping off his neighbors. Yet he called him anyway. Matthew didn't deserve that invitation – it was mercy. And Matthew became a world changer. Jesus knew what kind of person you were when he said to you, "Follow me." He knew all the good stuff about you and all the stuff you hope no one else ever finds out about. He knew every moral high point and low point of your life. And he said, "Follow me. Be my disciple and learn from me." God doesn't wait for us to clean up our acts before inviting us to himself. We don't deserve it, but he shows us mercy. When we experience God's mercy and follow him, we are transformed. Some say, "Come as you are, and stay as you are." Others say, "Come only after you shape up and change your life." But the way of Jesus is, "Come as you are, but expect to be changed by the Holy Spirit." As the church, we are a group of people who have received mercy and said "yes" when Jesus called us to follow him and along the way, we are being changed to be

more like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are grateful for mercy and embracing transformation. Jesus calls us to be contagious with our faith and join him in his mission of seeking lost and irreligious people. How do we do that? How can we be his witnesses? There are many ways. We offer a training class called “BLESS.” That’s an acronym that stands for the five actions that we can naturally fold into our daily lives: Begin with Prayer, Listen, Eat together, Serve, Share your Story. We hope every Crossroader takes that training.

Today let me encourage you to take a specific step. Next month we are going to work together as a church to join in Jesus’ mission. It’s called Invite Your One during the week of September 18. Invite someone to Worship and/or Life Group. During the week of September 18, we are asking every Crossroader to invite someone to either a worship service or Life Group – whichever you sense they would be more open to attending. That weekend in worship we will start a new series called, “The Big Questions.” We’ll be addressing questions everyone has asked at some point like: “Is God real? Is the Bible outdated? Why is there suffering?” This will be helpful for new people and it will also help Christ-followers to be more confident and grounded in our faith. New people will realize that is OK to ask questions and seek truth. And that week your Life Group can have a Matthew Party. You can have a dinner, barbeque or a game night or something fun and invite people from your list. Play volleyball, board games, or have a bon fire. Have fun and invite someone with you. If your friend doesn’t seem open

to coming, they may be open to going to your party. Invite them to whichever they are most open to attending. Here is a simple step to take this week: **Make a List** of people you would like to see to come to Christ who you could invite on September 18.

Many long-time believers might say, “I don’t know who I would invite, all my friends are already followers of Jesus.” If that is you, remember that your mission field is broader than just your friends. You interact with a lot of different people throughout your week even if you are not close friends with them. Your mission field is where you “live, work, play, and learn.”

My Relational Network

Relatives:

Friends:

Work colleagues:

Hobby / groups:

Write down the names of people in each category. Who are your relatives? Who do you work around? Write down the names of some people and select a few that you will invite to come with you. There should have been a card on your seat when you came in. Take it with you and write down the names of a few people that you would like to invite. It will become your prayer list. Our church worshipped in a restaurant banquet for the first 4 years.

During that time, we passed out cards to people and invited them to create a “Most Wanted” list. That’s a list of people we know aren’t followers of Christ but we’d like to see them transformed. This is my card from about 25 years ago; I wrote down 4 names of guys I knew who I wanted to see commit to follow Jesus. It turns out that 2 out of 4 chose to follow Christ and one of them became a church planter. I don’t know about the other two – they moved away. It makes me smile to see this card. And you have the opportunity to create your own card. Life Groups can do this too – they can make a list of people they are praying for weekly.

George Muller was a man of prayer. He ran orphanages in the 19th century, relying only on prayer for financial support. George had his own list of 5 men he prayed for to come to Christ. He started in November of 1844, and he prayed for them every day without fail – no matter what else was going on in his life. After 18 months the first of the five was converted. Five years later, the second was converted. He thanked God for the second and prayed on for the other three. Six years later the third was converted. He thanked God for the three and went on praying for the other two. For decades he prayed for the other two. He said, “They are not converted yet, *but they will be*.” Those two men were still unconverted when Muller died in 1897 after having prayed daily for their salvation for fifty-two years. But a few years after Mueller’s death, both came to follow Christ.

God can work in amazing ways when we pray for people. Jesus came to call the irreligious. Let's join him in that mission, starting with prayer and inviting on September 18.