

GARAGE DOOR EVANGELISM

SCRIPTURE: I CORINTHIANS 9:16-23

¹⁶ For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel. ¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

SERMON

Dary Northrop is the Senior Pastor of Timberline Church in Ft. Collins, Colorado and he has written a book called “GARAGE DOOR EVANGELISM”. During his 14 years as pastor, the weekend attendance has grown from 125 to 3,000 people. In the book he discusses some new ways to “do church” in the 21st century. He says that often churches give a picture of perfection, meaning only the beautiful Front Door Image. People who are not used to going to church are fearful of entering because they are afraid they can’t live up to the image. Weary of disappointment and failure, people want to know that we are real--genuine and that what we claim to be really matches our lives. What do people see during the week as you live your lives on the job or wherever you go? Do they perceive you as a “Pat Answer” Christian who tries to convince them that when they come to Christ it will solve all of their problems? Do they perceive you as a Christian who speaks one thing and lives another? We want people to see us as we are, genuinely trusting the Lord in our pain and struggles. Do they see us as we really are knowing that, “Yes, Christ does make a difference?”

Northrop says that we should open the garage doors of our churches and our lives so that “what you see is what you get.” That is probably a little scary to some of us as we try to live up to a certain image of a Christian. If we open the garage door of our lives to people, we are afraid they will judge us or criticize us. They might

disagree with our opinions. It might reveal our lack of spirituality and knowledge of the Bible. They may see that we don't have all the answers to life's problems. But at the same time, people can get a glimpse of our interests, our hobbies, our work, the things that bring us joy in our life in spite of the clutter and mess we are still trying to clean up in our lives.

Most of us are more prepared for the front door than for the garage door. We would rather convince others that we are who we would like to become rather than who we really are. We wonder if people would still like us and accept us if they discover things about us that we would never tell them.

When people look into the garages of our houses they may say, "What a Mess!! This place is terrible!! Maybe say, "this person is really organized. This is so neat. Or this person loves gardening, or skiing, or motorcycles or any number of things." Let's take a look at bringing people into the church by way of the garage door rather than the beautiful front door. Well, you say, "Churches don't have literal garage doors." Right, but what I am getting at is that we allow people to see how Christianity is affecting our real lives all week long, not just on Sunday morning. Is it real to us? Does it make a difference like we say it does? I believe this is so important these days during this pandemic. People today want to experience an authentic faith. We must be able to create hope in people who sometimes view us as more spiritual than we really are. When we admit our faults before people discover them, we succeed in building bridges of trust rather than barriers. They, too, have a garage. We must be willing to connect with those outside the church walls.

Actually, Northrop's book is not a brand-new concept. In today's scripture Paul had the same idea. How can we become more effective in conveying the Good News to people around us?

We need to be "*Adaptable*"

Paul says in verse 19, "*I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people for Christ.*" He says, "*to the Jews I became like the Jews to win the Jews. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law. To the weak I became weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*"

Paul adapted himself to the religious, non-religious, those with meticulous morality, loose living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized; whoever, in order that he might win some.

He quickly adds though "*I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ, but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view.*"

For too long we have asked people to break all ties with the publicans and sinners not realizing that God put those same people in their lives for a purpose.

There was a movie a few years ago called Orange County? A very good student from an extremely dysfunctional family wanted to get away from his family because he wanted to be a writer. He had applied for college at Stanford, and he was extremely upset when he found out that his guidance counselor had sent the wrong person's transcript, and he was denied admission. He met the professor who was his idol and he told this boy, "You don't have to come to Stanford to become a writer. You are ALREADY a writer. You don't have to isolate yourself from these dysfunctional people. They are there for you and you are there for them."

Jesus told his disciples pretty much the same thing, "***You are in the world, but you are not of the world***" (*John 17:16*).

You don't live the sinful lifestyle of the person who does not know the Lord. You are not going out drinking with your buddies or experimenting with drugs or any number of other things that are clearly wrong. Paul, in this chapter is not COMPROMISING or acting in an unprincipled manner. But he tries to find COMMON ground and COMMON interests and fit in as much as possible that he might win some.

Paul ADAPTED both his conduct and his presentation of the God's message to various classes and conditions so as to effectively communicate to them the truth of God's love whether they be Jews, Gentiles, or pagans.

Think of some of the people you have shared your faith with. What groups of people are you especially aware of who need God's love?

- the poor
- the homeless
- those in jail
- troubled teens
- those in nursing homes

You would present the gospel in a variety of ways to people in these different groups. What barriers are there between you and some of these people? What "rights" would you willingly give up in order to communicate with them?

Paul said that he was willing to sacrifice his personal rights and comforts as a Jew and a Roman citizen for the sake of others. This is a question to ask ourselves. Am I willing to adapt to others and find common ground with people. Or do I insist on doing things the way it always has been done. Same old same old. In what ways would you be willing to change in order to see someone know Christ?

Some people insist on using nothing else but the King James Bible and they refuse to use an easier to understand version of scripture. They just say, "They'll understand it after awhile."

Great changes would take place in our lives and in the lives of those around us if we had the compassion that caused us to think in terms of helping others come to know Jesus.

Self Discipline is needed in order to be a genuine follower of the Lord. In less than two weeks we will enter the season of Lent. During that season, self-denial and prayer is a part of the forty days. But it goes beyond giving up something for Lent. Walter used to say, “I’m giving up sky diving for Lent” but the problem is that he didn’t sky dive before Lent.

Self denial and self-discipline happens when we make the choice to go God’s way rather than our own. When we don’t jump up and shout for joy when we know that this is what God wants me to do. Yet you are saying, “I am willing.” It is in our daily choices, little daily choices, the tough ones where it is me and my self-centredness or going God’s way to spend time with people we would rather not spend time with. We must listen when they need to tell their stories, over and over. We need to go the second mile when we actually didn’t want to go the first mile.

Jesus said to his disciples, ***If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*** (Luke 9:23).

I believe that Paul got Jesus’ message. He said, ***I am willing to do whatever it takes that I might win some*** (v. 23). Paul was talking about Garage Door Evangelism back then just as this 21st century book describes. He let people see him as he really was. He adapted himself to a variety of situations. He said, ***I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*** (Philippians 4:12). But he went on to say, ***I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me*** (Philippians 4:13).

Why Was Paul Like This? He had the big picture and saw it in the light of eternity. He compared himself with a person running a race. He said, ***Do you not know that in a race all the runners run but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize*** (v. 24)

Are you going for the gold? Or are you just putting in your time?

How would you describe your “Gospel Readiness” training program?

- a. I haven’t found the gym yet.
- b. I’m not sure if I’m ready to make necessary sacrifices.
- c. I’m ready for anything if only I had a few people training with me.
- d. I’ve run the race and I’m exhausted!
- e. I’m raring to go!!!!

As individuals as well as the church in general, we must adapt the Good News to meet the unique needs of each individual we meet. Personal, voluntary self-discipline will always be necessary. A church that cannot adapt to change will not

be effective in reaching the unchurched. Change that meets the needs of our generation is not change that compromises the truth of the gospel.

Are we a church that will do whatever it takes to see lost people come to Jesus? Do we have that kind of mentality as a church? Will we do whatever it takes? Will we change the way we've always have done things if that is what it takes? Will we give up our own personal preferences if that is what it takes? Will we break with tradition if that is what it takes? Will we be dissatisfied with the status quo if that is what it takes? Will we think strategically and creatively of how we can do whatever it takes to reach more lost people in our community and world with the message of God's love for them?

Let us pray.

God of our life, our everlasting, never ending hope; by Your great will and power You have created and sustained the vast and unfathomable universe.

In the midst of all this greatness and splendour, You have made us creatures in Your own image. By your grace You have called us to serve You and to be Your people. In your love and mercy, You have chosen, guided, and directed us to be a light in the darkness. Teach us, O God, Your ways. Help us, each day to turn aside and to listen for You, and to study Your word, and to pray to You, so that we might live as Your people, and give

Ourselves, all we are and all we have, in obedience to your will.

We know that You have promised to give us strength and hope, peace and joy so that we might be able to impart these to others in your name.

Lord, You are the giver of life. In the midst of suffering we celebrate the promise of Your peace and in the midst of oppression the promise of Your freedom. In the midst of doubt and despair You promise to be with us.

In the midst of fear, You promise everlasting joy and salvation and renewal. You also promise us that in death we will have life eternal. May we dwell in your promises and lift them up before others with love and compassion. Loving God, so many people are in need. We pray for them as we pray for ourselves.

God, our healer, we pray for those who are sick, and for those who look after them. We pray for those who are full of dread and anxiety and for those who carry the word of courage and faith.

God, our consoler, we pray for those who are sorrowful, and for those who are grieving.

We pray for the weary and for those weighed down by chronic illness, pain or frailty.

We pray for those exhausted by the demands of work or caring for others and for those who turn to you for new strength.

We pray for those who are hungry, those who are without a home, and all those live under the threat of war.

We also pray for our world, as it faces this threat of Covid19.

Many have lost lives or their loved ones. The health care workers and family members who are caring for the sick are weary. Give them strength to continue in their responsibilities.

O God, we pray for the concerns and the individuals whom You have placed upon our hearts this day. Hear now the prayers that rise from our midst.

We ask these things through Christ Jesus your Son, our Lord, our brother, and our friend as we continue with the words You have given us through Your son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BENEDICTION

In the power of the Holy Spirit, we now go forth into the world, to fulfil our calling as the people of God, and the body of Christ.

Go in peace, and may God touch you and embrace you. May He raise you up on his wings and give you strength, and wisdom and joy. May His Word dwell in you and His Spirit guide your steps and may His praise endure forever in your hearts and cast His light upon all about you. We ask this both now and forevermore.

Amen