

The Power of Personal Relationships in Witnessing

The famous French painter, Paul Cezanne said, “The relations between objects are more important than the objects themselves.” Pat Morley, a men’s ministry leader, says, “Relationship is the task.” Leonard Sweet, church futurist says, “We’re a remote-controlled, security-fenced, internet-commuting, environmentally insulated society. We’re increasingly cut off from genuine experiences and expressions of community. We’re increasingly removed from real, dynamic relationships. Our high divorce rates, our fractured families, our corporate superstructures, and our let’s-just-move mindset all evidence our failures at relationships.”

These quotes show the value and need of establishing relationships with the unchurched. People come to Christ when we love them as Jesus does: without an agenda. We can’t get to know people simply “so that they’ll come to church,” but we have to truly love them for who they are. Because of the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, they will come to Jesus by getting to know us. When God’s love comes down from above into our hearts and lives and then flows out from us to others there is a compelling draw for the seeker to turn to Christ.

The added bonus of doing evangelism this way is that when people make a decision for Christ they have a clear picture of what living life as a Christian looks like. In addition, because our evangelism effort is through relationships, and thus built on friendship, there is an automatic follow-up procedure in place.

Seven ways to build relationships with others:

- 1) **By listening.** We’ve already talked about this—you must REALLY listen. No interrupting, no daydreaming, no planning your response—just listen.
- 2) **With laughter.** Clip cartoons, share articles and funny stories. Your gift will say, "I love to laugh with you."
- 3) **Use a written note.** It can be a simple "Thanks for the help" note or a full sonnet. A brief, handwritten note may be remembered for a lifetime, and may even change a life.
- 4) **Share a compliment.** A simple and sincere, "You look great today," "You did a super job" or "That was a wonderful meal" can make someone's day. We call these “pedestal words.”
- 5) **Do a favor.** Every day, go out of your way to do something kind for someone you love.
- 6) **Through sensitivity.** There are times when people want nothing better than to be left alone. Be sensitive to those times and give the gift of solitude to others.
- 7) **With a cheerful disposition.** The easiest way to feel good is to extend a kind word to someone. “Hello” and “Thank You” are truly beautiful words that people like to hear.

Often the deepest relationships can be developed during simplest activities. Have you ever wondered what attracted people to the church and ultimately to Christ? In his book *Evangelism That Works* George Barna indicates that 7% of the unchurched plan to attend church this year. He says that another 33% of the unchurched are open to attending church and the most likely thing to attract them is the invitation of a friend. We are told that 70% to 90% of all Christians came to know Christ as a result of the influence of a family member or a friend. Just the invitation from a Christian friend can make all the difference for the unchurched.

We have to start by building intentional relationships. This relational pathway isn’t the only way to get the job done, and it might not always be the best way. However, in today’s postmodern world, the relational bridge might be the only way you can reach certain people. As

we connect to the unchurched we must keep our focus on a relationship with Christ. George Gallup, Jr., gives the results of a study showing that “Most young Americans believe it is ‘very important’ that life be meaningful and have a purpose. Yet a high percentage of these same people believe that ‘most churches and synagogues today are not effective in helping people find meaning in life.’”

The best way to get around people’s false stereotypes of Christianity is to build a personal trust, show by your example what it means to be “alive in Christ,” and keep your focus on the person’s relationship with God.

We also have to be what we seek to create. Expert speech communication theorist Albert Mehrabian has shown that, in a face-to-face setting.

- 55 percent of the meaning is communicated by the body,
- 38 percent by the tone of voice, and
- only 7 percent by the actual spoken words.

As communications expert Suzette Haden Elgin says, “When the words and the body language don’t match, believe the body.”

Local church congregations must also do their best to connect with those who visit the services. Lee Strobel in his book “From Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary,” suggests that there are creative ways in which the church can attract those who are seeking to know more about God. He lists the five reasons he was attracted to church while he was investigating the claims of Christianity:

- 1) They played his music
- 2) The unexpected became expected
- 3) They connected with the TV generation
- 4) They did not use art to preach-they used creative arts to deal more with emotions than solutions
- 5) They made him laugh.

This is a great acrostic for making friends:

Forgiving
Reassuring
Interesting
Empathetic
Nice
Devoted
Sincere

Rick Warren of the Saddleback Community Church says in a recent podcast, “We simply ask people, ‘What do you love to do most? Go do that with unbelievers.’ One example he uses is “If you like to shoot guns get five guys who are lost who don’t know the Lord and take them down to the shooting range and shoot guns.”