Looking for Evangelism Opportunities?

Outreach to the Unlikely: A Fresh Take on Matthew

Stories of Hope: Ministering to the Marginalized

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Looking for "Evangelism Opportunities?" Orwellian language and an attempt to call attention to the problems of language and thought control, as in George Orwell's novel "1984." The March 15, 1984 edition of "Looking for Evangelism Opportunities?" features a story about the Samaritan and his willingness to help a fellow human being in need. The text encourages readers to look for opportunities to share the Gospel in their daily lives, rather than waiting for Sunday or the traditional church setting.

The Samaritan encountered a helpless man while traveling during the day-to-day grind of conducting business. He meets him at his point of need, right where he is, outside of the church (temple or synagogue) walls. 

This is an important point about outreach. Sometimes we can become stuck in our routines, thinking that Sunday is the day we go and minister in a church building to those who might darken the door. Yet, as this parable illustrates, Christ's call to love and reach others should extend to our entire week, integrating ministry and outreach into our daily lives beyond our church walls.

While certainly we cannot stop for everyone, we can ensure that we live our lives in such a way that we are open to the Holy Spirit's leading by not being held captive to our schedule with our own agendas. We should always be open to the possibility that God may want us to talk with someone or meet a need. Look around, hurting people are everywhere.

2. Our greatest need is not necessarily more knowledge, but putting what we already know into practice.

Sometimes we become paralyzed in evangelism, thinking we have to know more about the Bible, other religions, or advanced apologetics to do a good job. Because of our hesitation, we miss opportunities. But the passage suggests that the effective evangelist is not always the one who knows the most. The priest and the Levite were experts in the law and could probably quote and defend large sections of it. The person that Jesus points to may not have had much knowledge, but he put what he knew into practice by loving his neighbor enough to stop and get involved.

Being ready and available at any time to put what you know into practice, can radically increase your opportunities in evangelism. Simply pray something like, "Lord, open my eyes to the people and opportunities around me and help me put what I know into practice." Then be prepared to watch Him bring you opportunities and use you for His glory.
Christ's ministry was characterized by reaching and ministering to "the least of these"—those who were overlooked, ignored, or deemed unimportant by the world. But who were valuable to God? Matthew highlights and emphasizes this throughout his Gospel.

He begins by listing Christ's genealogy through His earthly father Joseph. Notice, however, two unusual things for biblical genealogies. First, four women were mentioned: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Second, these women were unlikely ancestors for the Messiah.

Tamar was a Canaanite Gentile impregnated by her Jewish father-in-law. Rahab was a Gentile refugee who had been a harlot. Ruth was a Gentile refugee from Moab, a country infamous for its scandalous beginnings. Finally, Bathsheba, though possibly Jewish, was originally married to a Gentile and was involved in one of the greatest scandals in Scripture. The point is that these women were the least likely to be in the genealogies. First, four women were mentioned: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Second, these women were unlikely ancestors for the Messiah.

Matthew goes on to highlight the ministry of Jesus. Notice Jesus' genealogy and bloodlines of the Messiah (these were Mary's ancestors for the Messiah). Notice, however, two unusual things for biblical genealogies. First, four women were mentioned: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Second, these women were unlikely ancestors for the Messiah. They are in His genealogy. They are in His DNA. They are found throughout Matthew's teaching. They were a ministry priority.

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Matthew goes on to highlight the ministry of Jesus. Notice Jesus’ strategy. When He visited a town, He typically started with the poor, the outcasts, the sick, the lame, the homeless, the lepers, the demon possessed, those with questionable pasts, immigrants, etc. In other words, Jesus started with the least likely people imaginable.

This emphasis can also be seen in Jesus’ parables. In one of them, Jesus stated, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it unto Me.” (Matt. 25:40). The point being we should be willing to help anyone in need whom God is calling us to reach, regardless of their status or importance in the eyes of the world.

Throughout Matthew and the other Gospels, Christ has a huge heart for “the least of these,” including the forgotten, overlooked, counted out, or least likely people the world would consider. They are in His genealogy. They are in His DNA. They are found throughout His teaching. They were a ministry priority.

Shouldn’t the truth throughout Matthew’s Gospel, influence how we approach Christ’s Great Commission “Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19)?

In your personal witness and ministry, as well as that of your church, is reaching “the least of these” a priority? Sometimes we get stuck in a rut, only connecting with those who look like us and act like us. Other times, we focus on reaching “the least of these” in foreign missions, but overlook those right in our own cities. While we should be burdened to reach anyone and everyone with the gospel, let’s not overlook the ones Jesus went to first. Who are “the least of these” in your community—those whom the world and possibly the church are overlooking? What can you do to reach them?

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