

REACHING OUT TOGETHER

Robert Manry was copy editor for a Cleveland newspaper. After ten years behind a desk, he decided that was enough boredom for a while, so he took a leave of absence to fulfill his secret dream. On May 24, 1965, he sailed his thirteen-and-a-half-foot boat out of the marina at Falmouth, Massachusetts. His goal was to sail across the Atlantic to Falmouth, England. It would be the smallest craft to ever make the voyage. Many people tried to talk him out of the trip. Everyone except his wife, Virginia. She was his greatest source of support. The trip was anything but pleasant. He spent sleepless nights trying to cross shipping lanes without getting run down and sunk. Weeks at sea caused his food to become tasteless. Loneliness led to terrifying hallucinations. His rudder broke three times. Storms swept him overboard, and had it not been for the rope he had knotted around his waist, he would never have been able to pull himself back on board. Finally, after 78 days alone at sea, he arrived in England. During those nights at sea, he had fantasized about what he would do once he arrived. He expected simply to check into a hotel, eat dinner alone, then the next morning see if, perhaps, the Associated Press might be interested in his story.

Was he in for a surprise! Word of his approach had spread far and wide. To his amazement, the Royal Navy and three hundred vessels, with horns blasting, escorted him into port. Fifty thousand people stood screaming and cheering him to shore. Robert Manry, copy editor turned dreamer, became an overnight hero. Robert couldn't have done it alone. Standing on the dock was an even greater hero: Virginia. Refusing to be rigid when Robert's dream was taking shape, she allowed him the freedom and support to pursue his dream. We all need people in our lives like that, don't we?

Last week we talked about how community helps us in five different areas of our lives. These are things that God has for your life but cannot be fulfilled on your own. We need other people. We were built by God for community. You don't need a hundred friends but you do need a few that are really there for you. The tragedy is most people today don't have a single intimate friend.

Today we're going to start with the last purpose of your life. God made you for a mission. God wants you to share His love with other people that don't know Christ yet.

Phil 1:3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now

We are going to look today at seven ways to partner with other believers to help reach your friends, your relatives, the people you care about most with the good news. Together they spell out the word PARTNER:

P PRAY together

The first way a small group can help you is that you can ask them to pray for you and your friends who do not know Christ. Ask them to pray and then spend time praying together. You can't force anybody to become a Christian but you CAN pray for them. Prayer can melt hard hearts, warm up cold hearts, activate apathetic hearts and change stubborn hearts.

People can reject your arguments. They may refuse to listen to your logic. But they are powerless against your prayers. It goes straight to their heart. The great thing about prayer is that it can go anywhere, even cross oceans. You do not need a Visa.

What do you pray for? You pray for opportunities.

Col 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

When you pray for opportunities to share your faith you will start seeing them everywhere. Often the issue is not that we do not have opportunities but that prayer makes us aware of the opportunities we have all around us every day. When I start praying for my family then I start seeing the needs of my family. When I start praying for my friends, I start seeing the needs of my friends. When I start praying for my co-workers, I start getting concerned about my co-workers. It changes my heart and makes me more ready to share.

In the spring of 1872, a relatively unknown preacher called D.L. Moody and his family visited England. A pastor asked if he would preach the morning and evening services ... he didn't want to, but agreed to anyway. He preached in the morning but they were so dead and unresponsive that he could hardly get thru the message. He dreaded the thought he had to go back in the evening when he's supposed to be on vacation. But behind the scenes, something was going on. An elderly woman that morning went home to her invalid sister, and told her about Moody being there. Her eyes lit up, for she had been praying that God would send Moody to England. "Put lunch away, we'll spend the rest of the afternoon in prayer and fasting," she said. And they did. That night Moody stood up before the people, and he could tell something was different. It was alive with the electricity of the power of God...you could feel it in the air. He preached and then gave the invitation to rise if they wanted to be saved. 500 stood to their feet. Shocked, he thought maybe they had misunderstood. "Be seated," he said. Now, I'm saying, stand up if you have never received Christ again 500 stood. It was the beginning of a revival that swept England and eventually America. Why? 2 old ladies, 1 bed-ridden, said they needed the power of God on their church...and they paid the price in prayer!

When I was a youth pastor in Hamilton, we had prayer triplets. I would love to see us as a church break up into groups of 3 and each make a list of 3 people you would like to see come to the Lord in the next year. Can you imagine the impact that would have?

A APPEAL to common interests

The A in PARTNER means to appeal to common interests. As we begin a number of new small groups in the coming months, one of the things I want to challenge us with is making our small groups more outward focused. That means that once in a while we use our groups to try to reach out to our unsaved friends. Before you can share the good news with anybody you have to establish a relationship with them. Before you can reach people, you must learn to relate to them.

If you want to reach out through your small group then make a list of the things you as a group have in common. What do you like to do as a small group? Then you ask if you know people who would also like to do that who are not yet believers. I am sure you can think of many. Perhaps the easiest thing you can do is eat. Everyone likes eating!

R REACH out in love

Why do you share Christ with your friends? Why is it so important? The goal is not just to get people to come to our church. The reason is that people need Jesus. Our motive is love.

1 Thess 2:8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

Only a monster would withhold food to a starving person. It would be criminal to have the cure for cancer but not share it. Love for others demands our action. Our motivation is to help people. Christians can often look down on non-Christians and condemn their actions.

When was the last time you were with a small group of people and you heard someone swear? Here is a little principle to remember. Never expect an unbeliever to act like a believer until they are one. They can't. They don't have the power to change. There are a lot of things in my life I wanted to change before I invited Christ in. But I couldn't. There are some things that will never change in our lives until we have the power to change them. It is crazy to try to make laws so people can act like Christians before they are one. They can only do it with God's power in their life.

When I see somebody who's not a believer acting in a way that is kind of foul or stupid or dumb, I try not to judge them. I just remember that's the way I was once. What is sharing the good news? It's one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread. That's it. I'm not any better than anybody else.

T TELL your stories

1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Declaring the praises means the most effective way to let other people know about the great things that God can do in their lives is to tell them the story of what God has done in your life. You can debate theology all day but there is no debating a changed life. People can be experts in different fields of study but only you are an expert when it comes to your life. People like stories. They want to hear our stories. Not the long version - fifteen minutes into the story and you're still five years old. We owe it to them to take the time to think it through so that we can tell our story of what God has done for us in two and three minutes not two and three hours.

Jesus said, "*You will be MY witnesses.*" What does a witness do? They simply say "This is what I have seen and heard." As believers we are told to tell the story of what God's done for us and in us. One of the things we can struggle with is how to start? How do I begin telling the story in a natural way so it doesn't seem fake or phony? There is no one way. It depends on the circumstances. It depends on the situation. Look for natural openings. Here's an action step with this. It's a simple action step. Write out your story and then practice telling it by sharing it with your friends and the people who are close to you.

N NURTURE friendships

Building friendships with people means you build a bridge between your heart and theirs so that Jesus Christ can walk across it. One of the best ways to build a friendship is a deeply biblical method that I love – THROW A PARTY! Much of Jesus' ministry was done at parties. In fact, He was such a party animal that the religious leaders of that day called Him a glutton and a drunkard because he was always at parties. Why? Because that's where the people were that He wanted to share the love of God with.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we see his story of when he came to Christ:

Matt 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. 10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples.

I encourage you as small groups to have parties. Not just fun events for your group but outreach events. The focus is not teaching but on having fun. You just bring some people over who don't know the Lord and who you want to get acquainted with and build friendship and show love.

Some of you are thinking that if you don't have a Bible study then it's not worth going to. Our mission is to reach out to people and nurture friendships. Christians tend to fall into one of two extremes. Either imitation or isolation. On the one hand some Christians isolate themselves from the world by building walls. They withdraw from culture and break off all contact with non-Christians in an attempt to protect themselves from being 'polluted' by the world. On the other hand, some people fall into imitation which says, "Let's just be just like the world". They dress and act like everyone else. We need to be in the world but not of the world.

The answer is not isolation or imitation it's insulation and infiltration. The Bible says you are to be salt and light in the world. You need to penetrate the world with the goodness of God. Fish live in salt water all their lives but if you order one in a restaurant you will want to put salt on it. Why? That fish is insulated. If God can take a fish and keep it in brine, in salt water, its entire life and not have it infiltrate and pollute the fish then certainly God can take you or me or any believer and put us in the world and keep us from being corrupted by the wrong values. In the next month I challenge you, bring a friend to your group for a party.

E EXPECT God to act

Matt 9:28 When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. 29 Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you"

I don't know if you realize this but God works in people's hearts when they expect Him to do so. One of the greatest pastors of the nineteenth century was Charles Spurgeon. Many people came to know Christ through his life. One day a young man came to him and said, "Mr. Spurgeon, I don't understand it. Whenever you talk to people about the Lord, they always end up accepting Christ. When I talk to people about the Lord nobody's interested and nobody comes to Christ?" Spurgeon said, "Young man, you don't expect people to come to Jesus Christ every time you talk about Him, do you?" He said, "Of course not." Spurgeon said, "That's your problem."

Expecting God to act does not mean that we tell Him what to do. I don't know how it works but I do know that when I pray and expect God to move, it makes it easier for them to choose the right way. I heard about a pastor who would preach every week with fervor and faith -- never doubting that God was ready to open a heart or change a life. Occasionally he would stop during the message and look down at the pulpit and then continue. One Sunday a member from his congregation went up and saw what it was that inspired him. A plaque, fastened to the side of the pulpit, reads: "Expect a miracle."

People have asked me why I do not give an altar call every week. Don't I expect people to respond to Christ? I do expect people to respond, but in reality, few people come to Christ the first time they hear the good news. They've got to think about it. That's why we never push anybody. We never pressure anybody here. Take the time to make the right decision.

I believe if a person is intellectually honest, they'll make the right decision over time if they consider all the facts. So, we say take the time and we let them consider it.

R REPRESENT Christ with your life

1 Tim 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Audiovisual Christians are those who walk the walk and talk the talk. They do what they say. They live it and share it. They communicate it and demonstrate it. You need to do both. You need to live the Good News in your life and you need to share it with your mouth. The fact is God specifically put people in your life and you are God's representative to them. If not you, who? For some people the only Jesus they will ever see is the one you live out for them. How will the people know unless we tell them?

You've heard me say before, the most dangerous prayer you could pray is two words: Use me. I dare you to pray it. I dare you to pray it during these next few weeks. "God, use me! Use me to show Your love to people who don't know You love them. Use me to show Your purpose to people who don't know that You have a purpose for their life."

in 1949 John Currier was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison. Later he was transferred and paroled to work on a farm near Nashville, Tennessee. In 1968, Currier's sentence was terminated, and a letter bearing the good news was sent to him. But John never saw the letter, nor was he told anything about it. Life on that farm was hard and without promise for the future. Yet John kept doing what he was told even after the farmer for whom he worked had died. Ten years went by. Then a state parole officer learned about Currier's plight, found him, and told him that his sentence had been terminated. He was a free man. Let me ask you, "Would it matter to you if someone sent you an important message—the most important in your life—and year after year the urgent message was never delivered?" We who have heard the good news and experienced freedom through Christ are responsible to proclaim it to others still enslaved by sin. Are we doing all we can to make sure that people get the message?