

PERSONAL CONTACT: ESSENTIAL FOR TAKING THE GOSPEL TO OUR WORLD

By Bob Young

In every generation, in every situation, the church is called and challenged to take the gospel to the world. After being involved in the ministry and mission work of the church across parts of seven decades, I confidently assert that the challenge before the church will not be met by the corporate, organized church. The challenge will be met by individual church members – Christians, disciples, believers. Few unbelievers are converted to Christ by mere contact with the church—such contact is almost always too impersonal. Personal contact with unbelievers is essential. Personal contact is a key to penetrating cities, counties, and countries with the gospel, the Good News about Jesus. Personal contact must become the goal of every Christian. The personal contact of staff and leaders, ministers and missionaries, will not take the gospel to the world. The challenge of establishing meaningful personal contacts with unbelievers must be accepted by the members in the churches.

To illustrate, I suggest three areas in which the church as an organization struggles to communicate the gospel in the context of personal relationships. This struggle has been brought into clearer focus during the pandemic.

First, the church corporately struggles to demonstrate that God controls all circumstances.

- The church can proclaim it, but the members must live out the truth that God is in control.
- The belief that Jesus is Lord of the universe, in control of all circumstances, will not be proclaimed most clearly by spoken sermons but by lived-out sermons.
- Faith that God's promises of provision are true will be demonstrated most powerfully by members.

Second, the church corporately struggles to demonstrate hope.

- Every crisis is an opportunity to present a message of hope. Hope is contagious. Hopeful people pass it on. Many people have been brought to believe in the Savior in times of struggles.
- The church will best use times of difficulty to reap the harvest, not by public proclamation, but by presence and persuasion, things done best by individuals who reflect hope through their words, attitudes, and actions.
- Christians who have personal assurance can effectively share hope and assurance in the midst of confusion.

Third, in the midst of great opportunities to show the love of Christ, the church as an organization struggles with how to show Christian love.

- Christians regularly come in contact with many unemployed people and thousands of poor people who are in need to help.
- Jesus calls his followers as individual believers to rise up and help the vulnerable.
- Preaching alone is not enough. Practical works of love must accompany the message. The most effective evidences of love are initiated and maintained by individuals who simply respond to the opportunities of daily life, not by church programs.

There are many ways individuals participate in carrying the gospel to the world. Invitations to church or church activities may be an appropriate and helpful first step in a few cases. But in many more cases, invitations to spend time together in homes, in public places, and in small groups are more personal and more likely to be accepted.

- Personal contact plays an essential role in knowing, identifying, and helping people in need, not only with physical needs but also with spiritual needs.
- In personal conversations and small gatherings, Christians can learn the personal stories of the unbelievers around them – how to meet needs, support, encourage, and share Jesus.

What the Bible makes simple the church has made complex. It is time for every disciple to shine and be involved in the great task of making disciples of all nations.