

# Four Excuses About Reaching the Lost

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## Introduction.

- A. For the past several months, as a congregation, this church has been fairly inwardly focused. We've spent a lot of time and effort in the process of appointing deacons, and we've had to deal with some membership turnover as well. Now, there's nothing wrong with that. From time to time, every church needs to consider itself; otherwise, internal problems will be allowed to grow unchecked and lead to even bigger problems.
- B. What's important, though, is that we recognize that the Christians who assemble here and their spiritual needs are only half the equation. We can't become so caught up in the work of edification that we forget the work of evangelism, and let's face it, friends: both take work. It's not easy for a hundred people with a hundred different perspectives to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. That's something we have to wrestle with, and I'm proud of this congregation for putting forth the effort to be the family that God wants.
- C. Similarly, though, it's important for us to wrestle with the work of evangelism. I've never seen a congregation that had any success at evangelism without devoting itself to that success first, and the same thing holds true for us. Every one of us, from the elders all the way down to the newest and youngest members, must be dedicated to saving souls if this church is to grow as God wants us to. Without this unified commitment, Satan will find us all too easy to distract and defeat. With that in mind, let's look at some of the tricks that the devil uses to try to neutralize all of us. Let's look at four excuses about the lost.

## I. Four Excuses.

- A. The first excuse, an excuse that I think all of us have heard in our heads from time to time, is that little voice that says, **"I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY."** We think of actually talking to someone we know about Jesus, someone at work or school, and all of a sudden, this massive wave of panic engulfs us. We care very much about serving God, but we're afraid that if we try to find the words to persuade someone else to our point of view, we'll come up empty and end up saying something that makes no sense to them or to us.
- B. At least, that's what Satan wants us to think. We need to recognize, friends, that part of the reason why we find evangelism so difficult is that the devil is pushing as hard as he can the other way. There are few things that he fears more than Christians who are actively seeking to spread the gospel, and it's his fear that gives rise to our own fear. There are a couple of different ways that we can defeat the devil in this.
- C. In the first place, we can realize that not knowing what to say isn't that big a problem, because we don't really have to say that much. Generally, just one or two sentences will get it done. Let's look at an example of this in John 1:45-46. We don't see any kind of Scriptural sophistication in what Philip says to Nathanael. That's not surprising; after all, Philip is a new convert himself. All he says is, "I've found this great new teacher; come and see Him." All of us can do the same as Philip, if only we're brave enough to do it.
- D. Second, though, if we don't know what to say, whose fault is that, really? Is the problem that we haven't been told what to say, or is the problem that we just haven't been paying attention to it? Let's look at what the Bible says about itself in Hebrews 4:12. The point is that we don't have to come up with these killer eloquent things to say because God has already come up with them for us. If we only study His book enough, and if we are only willing to tell others about what we know, we have enough material for a lifetime of saving souls.
- E. Of course, that's far from the only excuse that Satan plants in our heads. Another popular excuse is, **"THIS AREA ISN'T RECEPTIVE TO THE GOSPEL."** This is certainly one that gets a lot of play around here. Let's be blunt: if you talk to a group of Chicagoland Christians about evangelism, somebody is going to start complaining about how hard it is to talk about the Bible with Catholics. The funny thing is, though, that although the details change, this same complaint is raised by Christians all across the country. When I lived in Columbia, Missouri, Christians complained that the atheistic nature of a college town made it hard to save souls there. In Austin, they said the city was too immoral to be a fertile field for evangelism. In Houston, it was that there were too many different races and cultures for us to effectively connect with. Everybody's got a reason why their situation is a special case, but if we run into a special case wherever we go, then it boils down to "I have to talk to people who aren't Christians and convince them to become Christians."
- F. The thing is, that's what evangelism is about. It's about meeting people where they are and convincing them to become something different, and there are always going to be obstacles to that. Satan's no dummy; he knows that in order to win with most people, all he has to do is to keep them right where they are. It's an uphill battle to save souls, and that's true whether we find ourselves in Chicago or California.
- G. We need to look past the problem, though, and learn to see the opportunity instead. Back in the first century, Christians could have made the same excuses. They could have complained how Jerusalem was full of devout Jews, Corinth was full of prostitutes, and Ephesus was full of Artemis worshippers, but that wasn't their attitude.

Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 9:36-38. His words here are every bit as true today. The fields are still white for harvest, if only we are willing to leave behind our preconceptions and start reaping.

- H. Another excuse that, sadly, all too many Christians offer up is, **"SOMEONE LIKE THAT WOULD NEVER OBEY."** The problem is that sometimes we think we have a better idea for who should become Christians than God does. This arises because in our normal dealings with the world, we naturally gravitate toward people who have a moral outlook similar to our own. People like this are often members of churches that do not teach all of the truth, but at least encourage their members to behave in a morally upright way. To our human way of thinking, those people are closest to the kingdom of God, and our co-workers who straggle in to work on Monday morning hung over are so far away that we shouldn't even waste our time with them.
- I. Indeed, one of the criticisms that the Pharisees raised against Jesus was that He DID waste His time on the riff-raff of humanity. Let's see how that conversation went in Luke 5:30-31. Jesus replies that He has come not to call the righteous, but to call sinners. Friends, that's who Jesus is still calling today—the sinner.
- J. Now, of course, everyone is a sinner, but the problem is, not everybody realizes it, and the more steeped they are in man-made religion, the less likely they are to understand that they need Jesus. Many of those "good" people we know today are in the same boat as the Pharisees, and will be lost for the same reason. The worldly person, by contrast, is often under no illusions about his eternal destiny and is looking for a way out.
- K. This reminds me, in fact, of the story of my friend Kendra. She grew up with a horrible family life. Her father was an abusive drunk, and her mother wasn't much better. When she got old enough to get away from her parents, she pursued the course of life you would expect. She also started drinking and using drugs, moved in with her boyfriend, and wholeheartedly embraced a lifestyle with few redeeming virtues. Then, one night, she hung out with an old high school friend who happened to be a Christian. This Christian had never tried to teach Kendra the truth, figuring, I suppose, that she was too far gone, but on this evening, the conversation just happened to drift to spiritual matters, and Kendra heard about Jesus for the first time. Less than 24 hours later, she was baptized, and since that day, she has not ceased to faithfully follow God. As Kendra herself describes it, she always knew there was more to life than pleasure, and she'd always been looking, but she just hadn't found it until she heard the gospel. Friends, there are people out there like that right now: honest hearts who are looking to find God. We need to be willing to find them and teach them, whoever they are.
- L. Finally, though, there are Christians who excuse their failure to evangelize by saying, **"I'LL SAY SOMETHING TOMORROW."** Of all of the excuses we've looked at, this is perhaps the most insidious. It allows us to do nothing while feeling like we're doing something. It permits us to postpone a possibly unpleasant conversation and still feel OK about ourselves, because for sure, tomorrow is the day things are going to change. Of course, the problem with tomorrow is that tomorrow never actually comes. Excuses don't wear out, and they will work just as well tomorrow as they did today, and we'll postpone saying something again, to the next day, and the day after that, and so on into the dim reaches of eternity, until we end up never saying anything at all.
- M. Instead of giving in to the siren call of procrastination, let's remember what God wants from His people. He wants servants who are working, not waiting. He wants our obedience, and He wants it now. Let's consider the attitude that Paul expresses in 2 Corinthians 6:1-2. As the saying goes, friends, there's no time like the present. Today may be the best opportunity we ever have, and even if it's not, there's no rule against approaching someone about God more than once. Let's use the day the Lord has given for His glory.

## II. Four Ways.

- A. When we consider these things, friends, it's evident that evangelism is something all of us need to work on, and we need to start working on it now. Let's spend some time now looking at four ways we can reach the lost. The first of these four ways is to **INVITE SOMEONE TO SERVICES**. In fact, this is something that's easier for us to do than ever. If you'll look on the back pew, there you'll see a business card box that has cards we can use for our invitations. Let's be diligent in distributing these to our families, friends, and neighbors, so that God's word in this community can really bear some fruit.
- B. Second, we can **TAKE A MORAL STAND**. Because of the wickedness of the world around us, we often come in contact with people who say things that are opposed to the word of God. In times like those, we're often tempted to say something noncommittal and move on, but that's not what we should do. Instead, we should take advantage of those opportunities to talk to someone about the truth, however briefly.
- C. Third, we can **HAND OUT A HANDOUT**. Actually, this is an idea I've borrowed from some of you. When I distribute those sermon outlines after each sermon I preach, you're allowed to take more than one, and you're even allowed to give them to people who aren't Christians. This works best if we give them to people we already know. This doesn't require a speech. Just say something like, "I thought my preacher made some really good points last Sunday, and I wanted you to look at it." Who knows how far that may go?
- D. Finally, though, we work for God when we **MAKE NEW ACQUAINTANCES**. On one level, evangelism is a numbers game. Only a percentage of the people we talk to are going to listen, so the more people we share the gospel with, the better our chances get. The more at-bats we get, the more home runs we hit.

**Conclusion.** If you want to obey the gospel this morning, now is the acceptable time for you.