

Can I Buy Your Lunch?

Evangelism as I first experienced it.

A lot has changed since 1971 when I became a pastor. I still preach to our church and staff (and anyone else who will hear me) that the message never changes but the methods do and must. In my first summer as a minister I joined Frank and the “God Squad” in our local city. Frank trained us to hit the streets every Saturday witnessing to everyone who would stop and listen. When we came back to check in with Frank he wrote the total number of people that got saved on the chalk board. We prayed for them and left for home only to return next Saturday and go through the process again.

People have come to faith in Christ by many different methods.

A few years later we tried going into bars and when the band took a break I would ask to use the PA system to share my testimony. Never did we leave the bar without God using us to stretch out His arms of grace to someone. We passed out tracts to anyone who would receive them. We distributed a paper called the *The Way* on Sunday afternoons. We had revivals in our local church as well as tent revivals. I still meet older people who were saved in those revivals. Since then I have tried *The Four Spiritual Laws*, *Evangelism Explosion*, *Power Evangelism*, *Contagious Christianity* and many others too numerous to mention. They all had their strengths and people came to faith in Christ by our effort.

My lunch story

My wife got stranded last Sunday afternoon. It was the first time the van let her down. I had just dozed off on the lazy boy when she called. She was about seven miles from home at a church in the country. I am not skilled in mechanics so we left the van and returned home. On Monday I called AAA who provides roadside assistance for a yearly fee. Their authorized place of service was about thirty five miles west of here so I had them call me when they came through Goshen and arranged to meet them at the disabled van. The guy they sent out did not know what the problem was so he loaded the van and hauled it back to our church where my fellow minister Gary, (the master mechanic) could take a look at it. By the time we had this task completed it was lunch time.

The thought came to me rather forcibly that all this happened for a purpose, so I turned to Jim, the AAA guy, and asked if I could take him to lunch. He said, “Wow, no one has ever asked me to lunch before with this job, let me check”. So he called headquarters and they said it would be OK. We went next door to Ponderosa. I learned that he was not a Christ follower, living in with his girl friend. That’s as far as we got till Larry, the manager of Ponderosa pulled up a chair and started talking to me about a fundraiser plan he has for our church. I’m thinking, “Come on Larry, I have an important conversation

going here, let’s nail it and get it over with. Larry was in no hurry so I introduced Jim, my triple A guest to him, thinking I could at least bring Jim back into the conversation. What happened next took me by surprise. Now Larry is a Christ follower and plays the bass on the worship team at his church. He was from the same city that Jim was from and in the same church that Jim attended in his childhood. They exchanged some names they both knew from the church and then Larry invited Jim and his girl friend to be his guest that next Sunday. Jim accepted the invitation. I’m sitting there amazed at the turn of events and excited that Jim and his girl friend will no doubt have the greatest gift of their life offered to them soon and it all started by asking Jim, “Can I buy your lunch”? Or did it start with the van, or where did it start? Maybe it began that morning when I asked God if I could represent Him in some situation today.

Evangelism has turned personal and relational, big time in our day.

It is not something you have to “gear up” for. It is about submitting to God’s agenda in every situation, in every conversation, in your moment-by-moment life. And like Matthew’s gospel says, He will be with you every step of the way. We are doing a sermon series, “Just Walk Across the Room” trying to raise the value of evangelism for everyone in our church. We are also trying to help those who are all locked up about their faith to see how natural it can be to walk across the room and say, “Hi, I’m Bill,” and see God take it from there. **BB**

Leadership Corner

WITH MEL SHETLER