

Bridging the Gap

Part 4: 'Focus, Focus, Focus'

We've been talking about *Relationship Evangelism* as a vehicle for reaching the lost and advancing the Kingdom of God. As I've indicated before, this is the primary means by which God is bringing His children home. More than three quarters of those who come to faith in Christ, report that they became part of the Church through a personal relationship with a disciple of Jesus.

We all agree that we live in difficult times and that our city and nation desperately need a revelation of the love and grace of God. We need to see righteousness re-established in our nation. The glory of God needs to flood this great southland. But how is that going to happen? Let me first suggest how it will *not* happen. In my opinion it will not happen by running evangelistic rallies and events. God will use any ministry in His name, but the Kingdom is no longer advancing at any significant pace in this nation through mass rallies and events like it may have in the past.

It will also not happen by building more mega-churches. In the corporate sector we have small business operators being forced into bankruptcy every day by multi-national corporations. Department stores and national chains are getting bigger and multiplying while smaller specialty shops with personal service are rapidly disappearing.

Well the same thing is happening in the Church. Bigger is seen as better and so we see mega-churches emerging with huge budgets and all the resources imaginable. But most of their growth in the last two decades is the result of people coming from other Churches. Like a giant leech they drain the life from all Churches in their area and do very little, proportionally, to advance the Kingdom of God. Mega-churches will not bring this nation back to God. They will simply become targets for the media and will continue to attract criticism from inside and outside the Church. A number of mega-churches have literally imploded recently and disappeared. In fact a serious mega-church drama is playing out right now in New Zealand with *Arise* – the largest Church in the nation. It is so tragic to watch.

As radical and bold as it may sound, I would like to suggest that the established Church as an institution, as a separated minority group within society, cannot and will not be successful in bringing this nation back to God. Let me explain what I mean. If I was able to ask all those people outside the Church in our nation to describe the Christian Church, what would they say? Well, many would talk about buildings, but once we moved beyond that, the vast majority would talk about those people in their community who separate themselves into various groups and meet together in special buildings on special days to worship, pray, study the Bible and do whatever it is that Christians do when they are together. Now that sounds like a reasonable description.

Let me say it again, however, that what those people see as the Church is not what God is going to use to bring this nation back to Himself. There is nothing wrong with Christians gathering together to do all that, in fact it is important for our health and growth. However if that is all we do; if feeding the flock and worshipping God in designated sanctuaries, at arm's length to those who need Him most; if that is our primary purpose and activity, then our impact in this nation will be (and in fact is) negligible. **That's because individuals cannot relate to groups or institutions – they can only relate to individuals.** If our times together are not preparing us in such a way that we can go back into the places God has ordained for us in the community and 'be Jesus' in the marketplace of life, then our times together are of questionable worth to Jesus and the advancement of His Kingdom.

God has deployed us in ministry already - every single one of us. We each have a circle of influence. For some that may be potentially thousands of people each week – for others maybe only a handful, but we are already in the mission field. We don't need to “go into all the world ...” because we are already there - every single day. All we need is to be equipped and encouraged to bloom where we are planted and make a difference.

Ok then, with all that in mind, let's continue this journey. Up to this point in this teaching series, we have been dealing with the preliminaries of *Relationship Evangelism*. Today I want us to begin looking at some of the practical 'how to' measures. One of the first steps to successful evangelism is to make sure you have a clearly defined target. If you don't know where you are aiming then you will rarely hit anything! So I want to suggest that if you are serious about making a difference in this nation then you need to prepare and maintain what I will call a 'Focus List'.

What is a Focus List? Well it's a list you focus on! Nothing complicated there. Specifically, it is a list of five people in your circle of influence whom you would like to see come to faith in Christ. This is a list which you keep in some prominent place where you see it every day and pray for them every day. Some won't even need a physical list, we can all remember five names without writing them down. Now I am sure you have lots more than five people in your circle of influence whom you would love to see come to Christ. However, we cannot really focus on too many people at one time. So I want to encourage you to ask God to bring just five people into focus for you at this point in your journey and theirs. These will be the five people you focus on and our focus list is a really important key to leading people to Christ. We must keep them constantly on our minds and in our prayers. (See Romans 10:1).

Consistent success in any venture depends upon two things:

- Setting goals (which gives you direction)
- Keeping those goals constantly before you (which provides motivation to your actions)

Setting goals gives DIRECTION. Keeping those goals constantly before you gives you MOTIVATION. Having a Focus List is a very helpful tool in this process. By having five specific names we are able to concentrate our attention and our prayers where they are needed most. By referring to that list every day and praying for those people every day, we are constantly reminded of our goal to reach these people for Christ. Before we intentionally start to build relationships with these people we need to be praying for them every day.

Suggestions for setting up your Focus List

a) *Pray for wisdom (James 1:5)*

Once we start listing all the people in our circle of influence, it will be evident that to work effectively the list needs to be narrowed down. So wisdom (which can be sought through prayer) will be essential determining which five people God's Spirit has prepared at this point in their journey. Only God knows the people who may be open to establishing a meaningful relationship with you at this point in time. Seek His counsel when fine-tuning your list.

b) *List the names of all the non-Christian contacts you can think of in your wider circle of influence.*

Not just the people you already know – but everyone with whom you could develop a relationship if the Lord so leads. Your list may include visitors at services; spouses of Church members, new residents in your community; relatives or friends who live close by; your own neighbours, co-workers, people you connect with in other community groups.

Initially, concentrate on just developing the list. Add names to the list over a period of time as they come to mind. If you have trouble coming up with any names, don't be discouraged, it has become too easy for some of us to be isolated in our own little world. In future sermons I will be suggesting ways to make initial contacts so your list may be easier to prepare.

c) Prioritise your list.

Some guidelines for determining priority:

- Those you believe are closest to being open to the gospel
- Those with whom you already have open communication
- Those who may have shown some spiritual interest
- Those whose respect and friendship you have gained
- Those for whom you have been praying regularly already
- Those you may have a limited time to reach
- Those who have a Christian spouse
- Those in whom others have already invested some 'sowing' and 'watering' time
- Those who seem to repeatedly come across your path (is it coincidence, or is it God?)
- Those for whom you have the greatest burden when you pray

Narrow your list down to ten people and then ask God to help you narrow that down to five people which will be your Focus List for now.

d) Begin praying for these five people intentionally every single day ...

- Asking God for OPPORTUNITY to be of service to these people (1 Cor. 3:5-7; Col. 4:3)
- Asking God for WISDOM to make the most of the opportunities you have (Col.4:4-6)
- Asking God for BOLDNESS to share the gospel when the right time comes. (Eph. 6:18-20)

Developing a Focus List can be a major step to being successful in reaching others for Christ. As with so many areas of life, the reason many individuals fail to achieve their goals in life is because THEY NEVER SET THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE. If our goal in life is to see people come to Christ, then a Focus List can help to define our goals and keep them ever before us.

In the next sermon I will expand on this concept and offer suggestions on how to develop meaningful relationships with those outside the Church. But if you have time between now and the next week, then get started! Sort out your list and start praying in a focused way every day for five people.

Even if you never do anything other than pray intentionally for five unbelievers every day - that in itself will see us turn the corner towards advancing the Kingdom of God in this city and this nation. I believe we will end up doing far more than that, but exercising the discipline to focus on five people in prayer in this way is a huge step towards bringing this nation back to God. While you are praying for your five people, spare a prayer for those around you who are doing the same. Encourage one another.

Each one of us has a different circle of influence and so there will be great diversity in our Focus Lists. Some will be praying for the housewife next door, the man who delivers the mail or the lady who serves you at the Post Office. Some will be praying for business and community leaders; others may have school teachers and doctors on their list.

We need to pray for and long for the day when the people of God have so engaged with the society around them that people at every level are being prayed for and are on someone's Focus List. Wouldn't it be great if our local, state and federal government leaders were all on someone's list? How will that happen? It will only happen when we put Christians into those governments or the offices of MP's so they can build relationships with those people put them on their Focus List! It really is that simple. Wouldn't it be great if all the leaders of our Schools and Universities were on someone's Focus List, assuming they are not already Christians, as some certainly are.

Wouldn't it be great if that old man you drove past last Saturday night in the park with his flagon of grog was on someone's list? He could be - but only if a disciple of Jesus decided to build a relationship with him. Praying for him as you drive by is a great thing to do but the chances of him finding Jesus if that is all that happens are very slim.

From Prime Ministers to street sweepers and everyone in between our goal should be to see that each and every one of them, at every strata of society, has a Christian somewhere close by, praying for them and building a relationship bridge over which the Holy spirit can move when He is ready.

So Church - let's get to work - let's engage our hearts as the Lord leads us to focus in on just five people from among the hundreds around us every week – just five people with whom we are able to have a relationship if we so choose. This is not a difficult task at all really, if we seek God's wisdom and guidance. God already knows who those five people are. The challenge will come after we have our list, as we seek to discipline ourselves to start praying for these people every day and building those relational bridges for God to use.

God is ready. He is always ready to energise and empower His children right across our nation. The only question which remains is: are we listening for His call and ready to fulfil our purpose in Christ as we advance the Kingdom of God, by His grace - for His glory?