



Reaching Lost People

By Dr. Gregory Wiens

Most of you think and reflect on God's desire for you, the community and those far from him. I have thought and prayed, reflected and experimented, and succeeded and failed a lot in this endeavor these past 30 years in multiple settings. Obviously the application changes from one context to another, but the principles seldom do. I have found four principles from leadership experience and scripture that you may find helpful in your processing.

The first is that the Sunday experience (often called worship) cannot be seen as the only and necessarily primary tool to reach people who are away from God. Too often pastors think they have to do it all on Sunday morning...and the reality is, most people far from God aren't going to show up for anything on Sunday morning. In reality most often people are drawn into a trusted relationship, which has developed elsewhere.

A second principle is you have to decide whom you are called to reach. By that I mean who has God gifted you to reach and who is in the community that can be reached. I state this in terms of degrees of separation from Christ. This is a missiological term, which identifies how distant they are from a personal relationship with Christ.

- Do they believe in a God?
- Do they believe that it is possible to know this God?
- Do they believe that the God has attempted to communicate with us?
- Do they accept the scriptures as this communication?
- Do they acknowledge God has absolutes?
- Is there a relevant witness to Christ in their culture?
- Do they see their need for dealing with their sin?
- Do they understand Jesus Christ?
- Have they ever accepted Christ as their savior?

These are actually progressive distances people are from God (they obviously get closer as you progress down these questions). I used to think God had called me to reach people early in this progression...in fact, I wasted about four years of my life (early in a church plant) attempting to reach people who didn't even believe in God (very distant from Christ). Finally, I realized that I wasn't necessarily called to reach those people and they are the hardest to reach. However, they are no more valuable than those who are fairly close to Christ...they all matter to Christ. The farther up the scale, the longer it takes to lead people to Christ...and I finally figured out that in our community these were a very small percentage of people...so this is very important as you look at reaching people who don't know Christ...what do they know?

A third principle has to do with identification. You can only reach people who identify with you. So as followers of Christ it is essential that lost people are able to identify with us on some level. I have always found this identification principle a challenge. This is why I usually don't tell lost people that I am a pastor. I want them to identify with me on some level. As they identify with you, they are able to trust you. People must trust the messenger before they will trust the message. I might say, I am uncomfortable with many Christians who intentionally drink alcohol and smoke

cigars for this point. Ironically, I can not tell you how many neighbors and friends I have led to Christ and I have never had to drink alcohol or smoke a cigar to get them to identify with me...that is a pretty shallow view of identification. The depth of your identification determines the depth of your conversation...if it is a surface issue of identification it will allow only surface conversations.

The fourth principle on this subject is that we are called to be distinct from lost people. We are called aliens in a foreign land, ambassadors and told to be IN the world but not OF the world. This is the balance to the third principle...as followers of Christ our lives should demonstrate a different quality or different life beat than those who don't know Christ. We are servants of the King and his lordship should be obvious in the way we live. Everything about us should smell of redemption...

So there are the four principles that I have learned about reaching lost people and help guide a local church to figure out how it can effectively reach lost people...I hope they help.

The ideas in this article come from a recent Training Phone Call: "Reaching The Lost". As a gift, Dr. Wiens has given access to this recording. If you would like to listen, please go back to the newsletter and click the link.