

What are Ways We Can Reach People? July 5, 2009

Handout Sheet and Other Material Available at: <http://20s30s.WWJDtoday.com>

1. Review of "Part 1," from June 21, 2009
 - a. Great Commission, Culture, Samaritans
 - b. Books: unChristian and No Perfect People Allowed
2. When Jesus said "Make Disciples," what does that mean, exactly?
3. unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters, 2007, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons (The Barna Group)
 - "...the title of this book, unChristian, reflects outsiders' most common reaction to the faith: they think Christians no longer represent what Jesus had in mind, that Christianity in our society is not what it was meant to be."
 - "One outsider from Mississippi made this blunt observation: "Christianity has become bloated with blind followers who would rather repeat slogans than actually feel true compassion and care. Christianity has become marketed and streamlined into a juggernaut of fear-mongering that has lost its own heart!"
 - **"One crucial insight kept popping up in our exploration. In studying thousands of outsiders' impressions, it is clear that Christians are primarily perceived for what they stand against. We have become famous for what we oppose, rather than Who we are for."**
 - In our national surveys with young people, we found the three most common perceptions of present-day Christianity are
 - antihomosexual (an image held by 91 percent of young outsiders)
 - judgmental (87 percent)
 - hypocritical (85 percent)
 - DO PERCEPTIONS MATTER? "Gabe and I frequently encounter the idea that Christians should not care what outsiders think about us. After all, Jesus warned that the "world" would hate us. Scripture even promises persecution for those who follow Christ... However, before you dismiss the unChristian perception as "just Christians doing their duty" realize that the challenge runs much deeper. The real problem comes when we recognize God's holiness but fail to articulate the other side of his character: grace. Jesus represents truth plus grace (see John 1:14). Embracing truth without holding grace in tension leads to harsh legalism, just as grace without truth devolves to compromise. Still, the important insight based on our research is that Mosaics and Busters rarely see Christians who embody service, compassion, humility, forgiveness, patience, kindness, peace, joy, goodness, and love."
4. Matt 13:24-30 – What is the significance in our present context?
5. No Perfect People Allowed: creating a COME AS YOU ARE culture in the CHURCH, 2005, by John Burke
 - First, *The Upside Down Funnel* (audio available at <http://20s30s.WWJDtoday.com>)

Quote One -- It was not so much that Chris didn't like me; after all, he didn't really know me. What he didn't like was what I represented. He didn't like Christians, or should I say, the stereotype of what Christians are like. I'm afraid Chris's sentiments extend more broadly than most Christians care to realize. I've since discovered that the average person has a strong perception of what Christians are against, but little of what Christians are for. I was simply confirming his negative stereotype of a narrow, intolerant, arrogant person who just wanted everyone "to be like me." In our postmodern world, you can't separate the message from the messenger. I think Chris was really saying, "Arguments don't convince me. Show me a faith that's attractive, and I'll consider it. Otherwise, I'm not interested, no matter how 'true' you say it is."

Quote Two -- In every culture, a leader must consider the factors that have shaped the people he or she seeks to communicate with and reach: What language do they speak? How do they hear this message? What issues are highly sensitive and why? What has happened in the past that put up barriers to belief? What metaphors or symbols communicate in positive or negative ways? What styles of communication or stories or art forms or songs best connect

with both the head and the heart? What factors shaped who they are today? And most importantly, the question for every culture: How do we best contextualize the unchanging truths of Scripture in ways they can understand and live out in their culture? Answers to these questions are critical for creating a come-as-you-are culture at any time, for every generation, in every place..

Quote Three -- Culture creation that allows dialogue requires immense trust in God. It requires letting go of the need to fix, change, or control others' beliefs or actions. It requires trusting that God's Spirit can work behind the scenes in people's hearts as we create a culture where they are free to question, doubt, and explore faith at their own pace. This shifts the burden to change people back where it belongs—with God alone. *This does not mean we hold back telling the story of God's work in our lives and throughout history.* Nor does it mean there is not a time for proclamation—for speaking God's truth revealed in the Scriptures. But timing is everything! Creating a culture of dialogue requires us to walk in the shoes of the other person. To consider how it feels to be an "outsider" to faith; desiring to understand, but not having a clue; wanting to ask questions, but afraid to offend; needing to fit in to explore, but not sure of the rules.

Quote Four --

- "We have two services, nine o'clock and ten thirty," I said as nonchalantly as possible.
- "We're thinking about coming, but can I ask you a question that might offend you?" she hesitantly inquired.
- "Sure! Don't worry, you're not going to offend me." I tried to make myself vulnerable while praying for wisdom for whatever arrow was pointed my way.
- "Well ..." She hesitated. "Are you a loving church? I mean, do you teach people to love others?"
- I laughed, feeling some relief and trying to ease her tension, "Of course—that's the central point of the message of Jesus, 'love God and love others.'"
- "Well ... but how do you feel about gays?" she finally spit it out.
- Not knowing why this was so important, I decided to try to both ease her mind and understand more, "We feel they are people that matter to God. Is that something you have dealt with personally, or do you have close friends who are gay?"
- "No," she replied, "I just need to know you're not one of those hateful churches. I just couldn't go to a church that teaches people to hate others."

Quote Five -- Creating a culture where questions and doubts can find voice is not only healthy, it's thoroughly biblical. In the Bible, you do find those who had absolute certainty. But those who never doubted, struggled, or wrestled with what it meant to do the will of God were not the heroes of faith ... they were the Pharisees who crucified Jesus! The religious leaders' certainty of what was true and right gave them confidence to crucify the Son of God. Stop and consider that for a second. Do we think we are "above" being deceived by our religious cultural conditioning? Do we feel pretty confident we have faith all figured out? Has our theology boxed out the mystery of God who sometimes works in strange ways? Maybe we should ponder the plight of the Pharisees who crucified Jesus. How about the apostle Peter? In his confident declaration of what he knew was "right," Peter had to be rebuked by Jesus saying, "Get away from me, Satan!"

Quote Six -- Instead of acceptance that draws them into relationship and says "I'm for you," seekers pick up an "us versus them" mentality from many Christians. It is subtle but deadly. *We had to work hard to root out lobby conversations or attitudes that portrayed to seekers, "We are right and you are wrong" or "I have it all together, and you have nothing without Christ."* While some of this may be true, the attitude conveys a message that stinks of ungrace — as if we did something for ourselves apart from God's grace. This attitude gets interpreted as looking-down-the-nose in judgment. As Mark Twain so appropriately put it, some people are "good in the worst sense of the word." This attitude sends the message, "We know the law and live it, and you don't." Nothing could be more patently false.

Quote Seven -- ***Acceptance but Not Agreement:*** Of course, the big argument against taking the risk of accepting everyone with open arms is — they might not change! They may misunderstand our acceptance as agreement with beliefs or behaviors God would not agree with. If we accept others, are we accepting wrong behavior and therefore condoning things God clearly says are against his will—sinful? And if you've been fighting these thoughts, you're not the first. In Romans 6 Paul heads this fear off at the pass by saying, "So since God's grace has set us free from the law, does this mean we can go on sinning? Of course not!" But what he proceeds to show is that grace-based relationship is the only hope for authentic growth—*there's no other option.*