

Living In 3D

"Just Walk Across The Room"

The Gospel Blimp.

Way back in 1961, Joseph Bayley wrote a parable called "The Gospel Blimp." The parable goes like this. A group of Christian friends get together one evening and discuss how they can more effectively reach their neighbours for Christ and spread the gospel throughout their community. These are good people, full of good intentions. They really want to take seriously the commission of Jesus to take the gospel to everyone. While they are meeting and praying about this, one man comes up with the idea of an airship, or a blimp, to float over their town to bring the Word of God to the people of the town. The group of Christians get inspired by this vision. They form a ministry called "IGBI - International Gospel Blimps Incorporated". They get a blimp and hire a pilot. They get so busy with all the financing, maintenance, operations and advertising they haven't got time for anyone or anything but the blimp ministry. The blimp travels over the town with bible verses hung from underneath it. They drop truckloads of gospel tracts on to the town. They have loudspeakers rigged up to the blimp, blaring out the Christian message. It's all so cool and so exciting. Everyone is tired from working so hard at the blimp ministry, but they say to themselves that it's worth it because this is spreading the gospel message. Eventually, division and disillusionment sets in amongst those on the leadership of the IGBI board. The whole thing ends in tears, and no one gets saved.

Too Busy For Unchurched People

Like all good parables, this story has a point to it. It's a story about many well intentioned churches and many well intentioned Christians who are so busy running programmes to reach their communities for Christ, they don't have time for people. Or more specifically, we don't have time for unchurched people. We have time for our friendships with Christians. But no time for those outside the church. The disturbing thing about all this is research clearly shows that the longer we have been followers of Jesus, the fewer close friendships we have with people who feel far from God. Notice I said close friendships. I'm not talking about acquaintances who are not Christians. I'm not talking about work colleagues who are unchurched. I'm talking about people we would call our close friends. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but I want you to ask yourself how many people you would count as friends who are not followers of Jesus? People that you would go to a movie with, or invite for a meal, or hang out with for the sheer pleasure of their company. Chances are, the longer you have been a Christian, the fewer of those relationships you have.

Now if that is true for you, and that fact doesn't bother you, then it should. Our evangelical churches are full of Christians who call themselves evangelical who are no longer evangelical. People whose attitude is "I'm enjoying my Christian fellowship. I like being with my Christian friends. I'm really not interested in getting outside my area of comfort to make friends with people who are far from God. I'm just filling in time waiting for the bus to come to take me to heaven". Let's take a look at scripture to see what Jesus expected of his followers.

What Did Jesus Expect?

When he called his first followers he said this to them – ***"Come, follow me", Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17 NIV)*** His intention was that those who followed him would be involved in the business of bringing people into his Kingdom. When Jesus was having dinner at a tax collectors house it was the religious people – the Pharisees and teachers of the law - who were so critical of him spending time with sinners. Jesus heard them and said to them ***"It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners".(Mark 2:17 NIV)*** The normal hangout place for Jesus was not with all the religious people, but with the people who felt they were so bad and so far from God that no one would want to know them. I suspect if Jesus were a member of Westlake church, we wouldn't see a lot of him, because he would be hanging out with so many unchurched people.

Jesus had an expectation that those who followed him would be change agents in society. He said ***"You are the salt of the earth."* (Matthew 5:13 NIV)** Salt acts as a preservative to stop food spoiling. It brings out the flavour. But it is only effective if it is in proximity to that which needs preserving. It can only bring out the flavour when it is out of the saltshaker. Likewise Jesus said ***"You are the light of the world."* (Matthew 5 :14 NIV)** Light doesn't have a great effect when

it is surrounded by other lights, but even a flickering candle makes a big difference when there is darkness. The whole point of Jesus training the disciples was that they take up the task of preaching the good news and expanding the Kingdom of God. That's why, before he ascended into heaven, Jesus said to his disciples **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:19-20) That wasn't a suggestion by Jesus. It wasn't an option. It was a command. And it wasn't a command to be bible thumping, angry, sin condemning followers who give Jesus a bad name. It was a command to go and be the conveyers of extravagant grace the way Jesus was. It was a command to go out and show the love of God to people who doubt that God would ever want to love them. It was to go out and let people know that there is an irrepressible, inexhaustible, incomprehensible, inextinguishable life in Jesus that brings joy and peace and purpose and power. That's what he called us to do and be.

Now I want to briefly cover three things that you may have already read in the book "Just Walk Across The Room". It's about living life in 3D.

1. Develop Friendships.

This is the first part of living life in 3D. It might come as quite a relief to some of you, but nowhere in the Bible are we told to evangelise our neighbours. What we are told to do is love them. I've already talked at Westlake about the research that shows that 90% of people come to the Lord through relationships. Most people come to faith in Christ because a relative or a close friend, or a workmate or a loved one shared Christ with them. Dr Joe Aldrich of Multnomah Bible Institute gives some interesting results of research on this subject.

- **80% of those who trust Christ and remain members of a local church are led to the Lord by a friend. Furthermore, they have had over five (5.9) exposures to the gospel before their conversion.**
- **70% of those who "trust Christ" and drop out of church are led to the Lord by a stranger. These converts average a little over two exposures (2.16) to the gospel before conversion.**
- **70% of those who remain as members of a local church were led to Christ by someone who viewed evangelism as a non-manipulative dialogue. 90% of those who "drop out" were led to Christ by someone who perceived evangelism as a manipulative dialogue.**

What is this saying to us? That friendship with a follower of Jesus is the number one factor as to why people come to faith in Christ. I've asked myself over the years, if friendship is so crucial, why do we mess around with so many programmes that are so ineffective? We still seem to love our gospel blimps.

2. Discover Stories.

Here's the second part of living life in 3D. Discovering stories. I remember a few years back walking down a beach with Mark. Mark doesn't go to church. As we walked down the beach together I asked him about himself, and he told me his story of why it was so hard for him to trust Jesus. When he was a policeman on the beat, he got to know the Pastor of a church. He really liked the guy and started attending his church. He made a commitment to follow Jesus and started to grow in his faith. But then he got disillusioned when he had to arrest the church treasurer for embezzling a sizeable amount of church money. He was just trying to get his head around that when his Pastor friend was arrested for sexually molesting young children. As we walked down the beach, Mark told me that finished it for him. As I listened to Mark, I was filled with compassion for him. Here's a man who wanted to believe in Jesus, but he got so screwed up by the sin of Gods people. A hardened policeman had just got so much harder towards Christ because he didn't see authentic Christianity.

Now can you imagine what damage I would have done if I had just charged on in there with a 10 minute gospel presentation? Mark needed someone to listen to his pain. He needed someone who would be able to be a friend to him, even if he never trusted Christ. Lyn and I just hung in there with Mark and his partner. We had them over to our place for meals. We ate with them at their place. And guess who keeps bringing up the conversations about God? Mark does. The Holy Spirit is still at work in his life. Do you know one of the prayers I have to pray often? "Lord, teach me to shut up and listen". Because their story is far more important than my story. And by listening to their story, I can discover ways that the Holy Spirit is at work in them.

3. Discern The Next Steps.

Here's the third part of living in 3D. The next steps vary from situation to situation. Sometimes it's offering to pray with a person if the Spirit of God prompts you. Sometimes it's giving a person just the right book to read. Sometimes it's inviting them to a meeting, or introducing them to another Christian. Sometimes it's asking more searching questions or even explaining how they can become a follower of Jesus. Every situation will be different. But there is one common factor in discerning the next steps. It will require prayer on your part, listening to the Holy Spirit, and stepping out in faith. Next steps almost always mean relying on the Holy Spirit and feeling like you are out of your comfort zone. But next steps are necessary. For if we don't take the next steps, we just stay at the level of friendship and never share the good news about Jesus.

As I finish this message, I want to have Lyn share a story of how she took a walk across a room, and how one walk across a room resulted in a whole new church being planted in Cambodia.

Lyn shares the story of Chhear Dy.

David McChesney, Westlake Church Nyon, Switzerland