

Life on Mission: Connect
September 16, 2018
Lynn Haven UMC

Introduction

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:9-13 NIV)

We have the ability to make connections every day in the smallest of ways if we only take the time. Whether we're at the grocery store, gas pump, eating out, or on vacation, the opportunities are there. But are we making the most of each of our interactions? We are the wheels on God's bus so we need to keep our evangelistic engines running at all times. Yes, you should say hi and smile at that grumpy cashier. Hugs are free. It will not kill you to engage in a conversation with that stranger. Our mission field is vast and wide and is limited only by our level of interest. This week we will discuss how to connect with non-believers for the sake of spreading God's love and truth so we can begin to live our lives on mission.

Digging Deeper

We connect with unbelievers when we care...

OTHERS more than OURSELVES.

- In this week's text from the book of Matthew, we read about Jesus getting out into the trenches and meeting with people who were considered the dregs of society – tax collectors like Matthew. Jesus knew He was needed in places where people were lost, hurting and as a result, living in sin. That is why almost every story in the Bible about Jesus takes place in less than holy environments amongst less than holy people. You can probably picture who those folks might be today. They are the ones frequenting the streets and establishments where we nearly break a finger slamming the door lock down as we drive quickly past. Is it possible we are speeding right past the exact people who need to hear our testimony of God's provision the most? Rick Warren is quoted as saying, "We will never win our enemies to Christ, only our friends." But how do we make that transition from stranger to friend so we can win over the lost for Christ? Those people's problems can't be solved through a quick 5 minute conversation over a free cup of coffee or tea, that's for sure. Does the idea of how much it will require of you personally scare you too much to get started? Do you personally know anyone who is down and out and drowning in a sinful, Christ-less existence? Can you think of anyone you've spent more than 5 minutes talking with in the past year that is outside of your socio-economic class structure? How can you use your life experiences to connect with those who don't even know they are lost? There's a God-shaped hole in every heart that can only be filled when we have a relationship with Him. We have to care about those people who aren't trying to fill those voids with His truth more than we care about our tee time (or perhaps our tea time, depending on your preference of course). 😊

LOST people more than RELIGIOUS people.

- Just as Jesus shared a meal with those despicable tax collectors, we too must consider the fact that perhaps we should be expanding our focus beyond those friends with whom we share common interests and beliefs. This will surely include people who might tarnish our “good Christian image” if we are seen in public with them. After all, isn’t it a common belief that we are guilty by association? Well, Jesus wasn’t concerned with what the Pharisees thought about the character of those with whom He chose to keep company. As a matter of fact, He went out of His way to find them because Jesus knew that lost people matter a whole lot to God. Are you willing to be misunderstood by others in order to make a connection with someone who needs to find Jesus? How can they ever be influenced by the example of someone who knows what it means to live the Christian life if they never spend time with one? You can’t put a basket over a light that was meant to shine. Hmm...that sounds like something from that Bible we read doesn’t it? (See Matthew 5:13-16 and stay salty too!)

GRACE more than LAW.

- How do you manage the transgressions of others? Are you quick to condemn or do you take a minute to walk in the shoes of the offender? Who but God knows the condition of their hearts? Do you even care what provoked their need to behave in a way that caused you harm? If we are being honest, the common (and most socially practiced) reaction is to seek revenge of some kind. Truly, most sinners don’t need a harsh dose of punishment to realize they have done wrong. They need medicine; and the very best medicine is mercy or grace. After all, how are we to point them to a God who forgives if we will not exemplify His manner of forgiveness? Are you struggling with being able to forgive someone today? Conflict can be an opportunity for grace. Do you believe we can lead people to Christ through the way we deal with difficult situations?

Conclusion

Early believers were called “Christians” because their behavior, activity, and speech were like Christ Jesus. The word Christian means, “follower of Christ” and to claim that name is a privilege. Are we living up to it? Rather than ignoring or condemning those who are lost and broken, why don’t we try taking a cue from Jesus’ playbook and connecting with them as they are? Maybe in doing so we will love them into the Kingdom by caring about grace more than law.