

Bible Studies for Life Series for February 24: The model

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The model

- John 4:4-10, 13-18, 24-26

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If there is any one thing about the Christian life that scares us the most, it is evangelism. Part of the reason for that fear is the fear of rejection—none of us cares for that. Part of the reason is that we fear we won't know enough, that we won't have the answers the person we are witnessing to might ask. Or, it might be that we have been immersed in a confrontational style of evangelism that just doesn't fit.

Whatever the case may be, we are practicing evangelism less and less.

Today's lesson proposes to help us with that. It makes a point that Jesus "had" to go through Samaria. John makes a point to tell us that. There are numerous reasons offered for why Jesus might have had to go through Samaria, however I think the one that is most likely is that Jesus was obedient to the prompting of the Spirit.

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We rarely think of Jesus' ministry being accomplished by the power of the Spirit, but Luke makes it clear in 3:21-23 that Jesus did not begin his ministry until the descent of the Spirit. It is Jesus' attentiveness and obedience to the will of the Father that is most distinctive about his ministry. This is the case with the necessity of traveling through Samaria.

Jesus' obedience also tells us something about our part in salvation as well. Salvation is God's work. We get to participate in it, but God does the work. Jesus says in Matthew 4:19, "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

The natural result of following Jesus is sharing his good news with those around us. It should not be something we have to contrive, but something that should be a natural part of who we are as followers of Christ. If sharing the good news is not a part of our lives, then the best place to look is not at a formula for evangelism but at our own relationship with Christ. If we have become so confident of our salvation that we are not concerned with the salvation of others, then we need to take an honest look at the work God is yet to do in our own lives.

If salvation is God's work then we need to make it a priority of prayer. Make a list of five people you know who are not Christians and pray for them each day. If you don't know whether a person is a Christian or not, then if you know that they do not attend church anywhere, put them on your list. Make it a point to pray that God will open their eyes to all he has done for them in Christ and that God would use you or someone around them to share the gospel with them.

The first thing Jesus did with the woman at the well was make contact with her. Praying for someone makes contact easier. Evidently the woman was surprised Jesus would even recognize her. It is no secret that Jews did not have much to do with the Samaritans, but that Jesus would speak to her is made even less likely by her gender. Evidently she expected Jesus to sit, not speak, and completely ignore her. Jesus refused to accept any societal barriers set between people and consistently challenged those barriers that separate us.

Jesus did more than arouse the interest of the woman at the well, he raised the conversation to a different level. When Jesus began talking about living water the content of the conversation changed. Prior to that, their conversation was no different than one we might have with the wait staff at a restaurant. The conversation was mundane, it centered on daily and immediate need. Jesus raised the conversation to a spiritual level, taking the ordinary and giving it new meaning. It is evident from her response that she had not yet raised her level of conversation, "Give me some of this water so that I won't have to come here and draw water again." But Jesus wouldn't let the conversation reverse so quickly.

There is an old African proverb I have heard, "He whose stomach is empty has no ears to hear." Meeting physical needs is an important part of evangelism, but it cannot end there. Jesus used the physical needs of the woman to approach the spiritual. Much of our mission work does the same thing, we gain a hearing on spiritual needs by first addressing physical needs. Jesus saw beyond the physical need of the woman at the well to her spiritual condition. More than that, he helped her recognize it as well.

One of the things we believe as Christians is that we have the answer to the world's problems. All we really need to be able to share is, "Who is Jesus," and, "What has Jesus done in my life."

When his neighbors questioned the man born blind, his response was,

“Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. I went and washed, and then I could see.” He said the same thing before the Pharisees, “One thing I do know, I once was blind but now I see!” You don’t have to have all the answers to all the questions, just know and share that the answer is Jesus.

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