

Who We Want to Be, part 4: A Serving Community  
August 18, 2013

When are you ready to hear good advice? You are ready to listen to it when you realize your need for it. Let me illustrate by telling you about a book I recently read, titled The Hole in Our Gospel, by Richard Stearns, (2009). Richard Stearns is the president of World Vision, a Christian charity organization that does all kinds of good work around the world. The first story takes place in India.

In 2001 a terrible earthquake struck **Gujarat (goo' ger rot)** India. It killed twenty thousand people. The region had been flattened; nearly every house and building had collapsed.

A bit later several of the world vision team were there to dedicate the first of hundreds of new houses built through a partnership between **World Vision, Habitat for Humanity, and USAID (United States Agency for International Development)**. The resilient Indian people, with some help from outsiders, were beginning to put their lives back together and move on, even though their human losses had been huge.

During the dedication proceedings, a group of village elders sat just a few yards behind the World Vision team observing everything. As the event wore on they were having a quite lively conversation in their local dialect. They could not have known that one of the World Vision team, Atul Tandon, had grown up in that very region and understood every word they were saying.

After the ceremony, Atul shared with the head of World Vision what he had overheard. He said that the men were speculating as to why "these Christians" had traveled thousands of miles across the ocean to help their community rebuild. They wondered what motivated complete strangers to help them. They were experiencing the love of God through the concrete help of Christians. This caused great wonder in them.

What we see in this story is the Jesus method of pre-evangelism. Let me explain what pre-evangelism is by taking you back a couple of sermons to the Great Commission. This is what Jesus said to His followers after He was raised from the dead, but before He returned to heaven.

**Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)** Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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."

Note that there are three separate commands in this mission, make disciples of all peoples, baptize those who become disciples, and then teach those disciples to obey all of Jesus' commands. We believe these commands are for all Christians, together, as the church of Jesus Christ.

It is the first command we are interested in right now. In order for someone to become a disciple or follower of Jesus, they must hear the good news. This is the good news that forgiveness of sins and eternal life are available through faith in Jesus. The telling of this

good news is evangelism. **Evangelism means to tell good news.** That is what the word means, to tell good news.

But how do you get to the point with someone that they are ready and willing to hear the good news from you? Whatever you do is pre-evangelism. You could go door-to-door and try to engage these strangers in conversation that you work around to the good news. You could give out pamphlets that have the good news written on them and hope that someone will read it. You could invite people to a stadium (crusade, rally, revival services, etc.) where someone will tell them the good news. You could invite them to a Christian worship service at your church where they might hear the good news. Members of our church have done all of these things. All of these are methods of pre-evangelism.

Here is my definition of pre-evangelism. **Pre-evangelism is the process of trying to gain another person's interest, curiosity, respect, or wonder so that they will be open to hearing the good news.** Pre-evangelism centers on doing something that will get people receptive to hearing the good news.

The Jesus method of pre-evangelism centers on good works. Jesus both demonstrated this method and taught His followers to engage in it. It involves the doing of good deeds, loving each other like He did, helping out our enemies, and pursuing reconciliation with everyone. These are what Jesus demonstrated and teaches us to do.

As a church, we have made such action an objective of our church. Let's read this aloud together.

**Under God, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and in the name of Jesus, the Christ; we commit ourselves... IN MINISTRY... To practice our love by meeting physical and spiritual needs as taught and demonstrated by Jesus.**

As we meet people's needs, we give the Holy Spirit of God something to use to attract people to the good news. Let me tell you another story from Richard Stearns' book.

There is a pastor in Cambodia who is a rice farmer, but on Sundays he pastors a church of 86 people in his home. World Vision president Rich Stearns asked him this question: "Pastor, living in a country that is 90 percent Buddhist, how did you come to be a Christian?" The man answered this way.

"Five years ago World Vision came to our community and began to work. I was suspicious of these outsiders to our community and was convinced that they had their own hidden agenda. You see, in Cambodia, since the genocide by the Khmer Rouge, we are always distrustful of strangers. But these people from World Vision, some of whom were Cambodians, set up a TB clinic to care for those suffering from tuberculosis. They improved the schools our children attended, and they taught better agricultural methods to the farmers to improve our yields. But I was still suspicious and even angry, convinced they were up to no good. *Why would these strangers help us?* I thought.

"One day I decided to confront them, and I went up to the World Vision leader and demanded to know why they were here. His answer took me by surprise. He said, '*We are followers of Jesus Christ, and we are commanded to love our neighbors as*

*ourselves. We are here to show you that God loves you.'* The man introduced me to Jesus and I became a believer."

Rich Stearns then asked him where his church members came from. The man replied, "I was so excited to learn about Jesus that I had to share this good news with everyone I knew. That is where this church came from."

World Vision went to his village to help with real needs, health needs, farming needs, education needs. They did not demand an opportunity to tell the people about Jesus. They did not say, "Since we are doing all these things for you, won't you listen to our motivation?" They simply came to help, and expected the Holy Spirit to do what only the Holy Spirit can do.

Only the Holy Spirit can speak directly to a person's heart. The Holy Spirit spoke to this man's heart and raised a question that he had to have an answer to. So he asked. And in asking he heard their story. He heard the good news about Jesus.

How often have you as a Christian been afraid of evangelism because you think of evangelism as being pushy? You have been taught a vision of evangelism that implies that God told the church to go evangelize the world and God would sit back and watch, not involved. This idea of evangelism has us confronting people with the good news even if they are not interested in hearing it. This method of evangelism is unnatural, and intimidating.

Instead, Jesus demonstrated and teaches us to partner with Him in sharing the good news to all people. Our first part is to do good for those in need, to be kind to all. There is nothing intimidating about doing good deeds for people. We do this believing that God will speak to people's hearts by the Holy Spirit and create an interest in them for the good news. There is nothing unnatural about arousing their curiosity and interest so that they are then ready to hear us tell them about Jesus. We then share that good news, believing that when we do so the Holy Spirit convicts their hearts that they are sinners and the message of salvation is true. They then are faced with a decision to make to believe the truth and repent of their sins.

We are partners with God in making disciples, starting with pre-evangelism and then doing evangelism, and then following up by bringing people who convert to baptism and church membership. Doing good works

This is part of what our church is doing. When we provide the free flea market, we are doing pre-evangelism. When we provide a free, quality Vacation Bible School, we are hoping to peek the interest of the children and parents. When we help the staff at Waugh Chapel Elementary, we are praying for the Holy Spirit to stir people's hearts. We believe the Holy Spirit will use these efforts of pre-evangelism to draw someone to Jesus. Someone will ask why we do these things. That is our opportunity to share the good news with them. Then they will be most receptive to hearing it.

Look again at our stated objective. The key word is ministry. Ministry has become a church word to many people. They think of it only in terms of clergy, of professional Christians like a pastor or missionary.

But the word ministry, in the Bible, simply means serving. The same word is translated as ministry, minister, serving, or service, depending on the context. Ministry is service. To minister is to serve. **Ministry is serving someone.** Ministry is any act of kindness you do to help another person.

There are two spheres for our ministry. The first is our good deeds out in the community. This is pre-evangelism work. There are a million ways to serve. Your neighbor is having a baby, so you mow the grass during this busy time. You make meals and take them over during an illness. You rake the leaves of an elderly person. You give a homeless person some money. You write a letter to a soldier in Iraq. You hold the door for someone coming through.

Our goal is not just to meet needs. Our goal is to provide the Holy Spirit an opportunity to speak to hearts where they see the love of Jesus in a practical way. Now here is the goal for you this morning. **Join Jesus, and us, in serving others.** Join us out there in serving people needs. Look for ways, pray for eyes to see opportunities God is giving you to help others.

The second sphere of ministry is in the church. The last command in the Great Commission says we are to teach each other to obey all of Jesus' commands. Obedience to Jesus is a mark of Christian maturity. I spoke about Christian maturity last Sunday. In order to help each other grow towards Christian maturity, we minister in the church in various ways. Each of us, as we serve, is contributing to the spiritual needs of us all.

Your ministry to others may be a one time act or a continuing effort. It may be very informal, like helping in the nursery, or more formalized, like teaching a Bible study group. It may be occasional, like serving on a church committee, or weekly, like singing in the choir. It may be something you do one-on-one, or something you do to help a large group of people.

Many of you are involved in ministry in the church family. I want to thank you. Thank you for serving.

If you are not involved in serving in the church, I encourage you to volunteer. Your efforts are needed. Your skills can be put to use for the cause of Jesus.  
**Join Jesus, and us, in serving others.**

There is one more thing about service that God wants us to see this morning. All service for Jesus is of great value. You may think you are doing something really small and of little importance, but that is not the case.

I once thought my efforts were too small. But I found out differently.

When I was in college, I served one summer as a Summer Missionary with the North American Mission Board. I was sent to the wilds of north central Tennessee to partner with another young man and serve as chaplains in a state campground.

We arrived to find no job description, no preparation, no help, and little experience in either of us. We were unsure of what to do and did not think we were doing much. We held a worship service in the recreation building each Sunday morning. And we tried to

engage the campers in witnessing conversations. But we felt we were doing very little for God or those who were supporting us financially.

It was a frustrating summer until one day when our state supervisor paid us a visit. We shared with him how little we felt we were doing for the kingdom of God. He pointed out something to us we had never heard or considered before. He said that the Lord uses many events in a person's life to bring them to salvation. Our conversations with people that summer were just one link in a chain of experiences that God would use in those people's lives.

His words were an encouragement to us. Thinking about what he said I realized that God used a series of people and experiences to bring me to salvation, just like my supervisor said. I feel that the same was true for many of you, too.

Every time you serve someone, even if it seems nothing is accomplished, your service to Jesus is not wasted. Jesus will accomplish through you what He plans to do. Believe it and be encouraged in your service. If you plan a Bible lesson and no one shows up, or only one or two, know that Jesus will honor your service and use it to expand His kingdom.

If you are facing discouragement today in your service to others, believe that serving Jesus, in faith and with love, is never a waste. It is of great importance to Jesus. It honors His name. It magnifies His presence in our world. It will be used by the Holy Spirit.

**So Join Jesus, and us, in serving others.**