

Valentines Day --- I hope you had a good one:

After she woke up, a woman told her husband, "I just dreamed that you gave me a pearl necklace for Valentine's day. What do you think it means?"

"You'll know tonight." he said.

That evening, the man came home with a small package and gave it to his wife. Delighted, she opened it - to find a book entitled "The meaning of dreams"

Becoming a Contagious Christian

1. Have you ever thought what it would be like to have your best friends in heaven with you?
 - a. Or thought about what it would be like to not see your best friends or family in heaven? It is a sobering thought.
 - b. We deal with our feelings concerning this in a variety of ways.
 - i. It isn't easy to adopt a biblical view concerning the destiny of mankind, especially when you know loved ones have gone on ahead and we struggle with what we knew about them.
 - ii. We hope that they had trusted Christ, we hope that their lives had been faith filled even if it wasn't always on the surface, we hope and hope.
 - c. According to the [Barna Research Group](#), it was discovered that
 - i. (44 percent) of Americans believed that all people will experience the same outcome after death, regardless of their religious beliefs.
 - ii. Satan is not a living being but is just a symbol of evil. (60 percent)
 - iii. If a person is generally good or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven. (55 percent)
 - iv. These figures do not apply to non-Christians. The pool of respondents included *all* Americans, the vast majority of whom described themselves as at least nominally Christian.
 - d. The [Barna survey](#) also found much disparity among Americans' views of hell.
 - i. "Three in ten adults (31%) see hell as an actual location: "a place of physical torment where people may be sent."
 - ii. Slightly more adults, nearly four in ten (37%), say "hell is not a place, but it represents a state of permanent separation from the presence of God."

- iii. Describing hell as merely a symbolic term, not referring to a physical place was true for two in ten Americans (19%).
 - iv. Ten percent of adults were undecided on their views of hell." In some respects it's heartening that the statistics aren't worse--though the trend is decidedly in that direction.
 - v. It is no small wonder, considering how hell gets depicted in popular culture.
- e. **Let's Look at some Different perspectives concerning salvation & eternal life:**
- i. Universalism: everyone will be saved eventually, regardless of what they do or don't do, because God is a loving God and not send anyone to hell.
 - ii. That this doctrine has been congenial to human nature there is ample evidence stretching back to the day when our first parents heard and heeded the assurance: "Ye shall not surely die."
 - 1. This is not based in God's word, but has developed to assuage people's fear of not seeing loved ones as well as to release others from accountability to God's justice.
 - 2. This is not just in Universalist churches, Unitarian churches, but is a belief held by many Christians, and is evidenced by their failure to tell others the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - iii. The second view of salvation is one that is passive, because it takes a view that is Calvinistic in nature that says, "God saves the people he wants to save" and I can't do anything about it. This passive approach to the eternal destinies of men is contrary to Jesus' Great Commission that told us to "make disciples of ALL nations (peoples)".
 - iv. The third view is that all men are lost and must come to a knowledge of the truth, by receiving the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their sins and surrendering their lives to His lordship.
 - 1. This is the biblical Christian view that we hold here at Here's Hope. Every person is spiritually separated from God because of sin. We don't have access to Him, or His resources. We wonder why He seems so far away? It is because we are alienated and have been so since we were born. And it is for this reason that Jesus came to pay the penalty for our sin and to restore us to our relationship with God.
2. I heard recently an interesting saying: "When were you saved?" And the reply wasn't "when I was 11 years old" but rather, "2000 years ago on a cruel cross at calvary." This is closer to the truth than we realize. The opportunity to be saved is made available to you and I by the actions of Jesus...He saw your face and knew your name, He died for you and extends the offer for you to receive it now. You can "open" the gift he gave you today. Won't you?
3. Contagion – what is it? It means *communicable by contact*
- a. The world would quarantine us.
 - i. It would tell us to "leave us alone!"
 - ii. The world tells us our words are offensive, that they don't want to hear our message.

- iii. The world has tried for 2000 years to get rid of our message, just as in Vietnam they closed 300 churches last month; or in Columbia, pastors are targeted for execution by the FALN because Christians won't join the rebel cause. Their logic: Get rid of pastors and you stop people from becoming Christians.
- b. Worse than what the world would do to us, it is what we do to ourselves.
 - i. We would quarantine ourselves from the world. (Christ vs. Culture)
 - 1. We would say...No, don't let the world contaminate you...stay away from this, that and that! Don't do this, don't touch that, don't do this. Our preoccupation with what we call "holiness" (which is more likely our desire to keep our feet clean) keeps us from even walking in the world in an effective manner.
 - ii. Don't need to, we have been immunized from the effects of the world
 - 1. Remember Jesus words when he washed Peter's feet? Peter at first said no, then asked Jesus to wash him all over. But Jesus told him he had already been washed (by his upcoming sacrifice) and that only his feet needed washed. This was an illustration of how you and I will get our feet dirty if we are truly walking in the world in a way that requires us to minister in it.
 - a. Imagine the people working in homeless shelters? What they must put up with? The language, the smell, the alcohol, the leers, the stares?
 - b. That is the smell of sin. But it no longer holds you and I.
 - c. We have been cleaned, inoculated by Jesus. We can go into the slums of the world where sin has worked its awful havoc and make a difference because we have been immunized. We may get dirty, but we won't get lost.
 - iii. Article about the Amish...fear that they will live like the world and become like the Yankee (outsiders); that somehow they will lose their community. Key word: fear.
 - iv. Our unchurched friends, co-workers, acquaintances, and family members swim in the same "cultural water," which is what makes this subject of such fundamental to us..
 - 1. Even so, churching and unchurched people often regard this "water" in very different ways—ways that can tragically hamper sharing the Gospel.
 - v. The "Christ Against Culture" stance crops up regularly in the New Testament, nowhere more clearly than in First John 2:15-17:
 - 1. *Do not love the world or the things of the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.* (RSV)
 - 2. It is precisely this kind of concern that leads many evangelical Christians to avoid mainstream entertainment—[films](#), television shows, rock music, literature, and so on—and to select Christian variants.

- a. By the same token, research has shown that within two years of conversion to Christianity, most believers have dramatically reduced their friendships with non-believers.
 - b. But the passage in 1 Jn doesn't mean we should avoid the world. Indeed, it says not to LOVE the world and the things in the world.
3. Charles Colson's *The Body: Being Light in Darkness*, underscores this point:
- a. Expressions Christians have used for decades, like "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," no longer necessarily connect. Christians understand them, but few others can relate. For example, proclaiming that "The Bible says . . ." commanded respect in the 1930s and 1940s, even into the 1960s—when 65 percent of all Americans believed the Bible to be literally true. Today only 32 percent believe the Bible is true. The majority find it an interesting collection of ancient legends and stories, but they don't believe it. So if you say, "the Bible says," only one out of three Americans is even ready to listen.
 - b. The prevailing world-view denies the existence of absolute truth.
 - i. So when the Christian message, is proclaimed, modern listeners hear what they interpret as simply one person's preference—another autonomous human's choice of lifestyle or belief. *If Christianity works for you, that's great. But it doesn't mean much for me.* Thus, even sharing your personal testimony may not be convicting
- c. We must become contagious, infectious to the world with Jesus Christ. It is how we earn the right to be heard!
- i. Conversion is the work of God's Spirit. God is the One who makes Christians. Becoming a Christian involves being, 'born from above' (John 3:3) We can't make people Christians. Only God can do that.
 - ii. Yet have you ever considered how the Spirit works? What means does the Spirit use to bring people to Christ? Conversion usually doesn't occur in a vacuum. To convert Saul of Tarsus, God used a bright light and Jesus speaking from heaven. But that's not God's normal way of dealing with sinners. Usually He works through His people, through Christians. He uses us to bring His message to people. In **2 Corinthians 5:19-20** we read about what God has done in this regard. The apostle Paul wrote,
 - 1. "And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."
 - iii. **There are two aspects of presenting the gospel.** On the one hand **there's the verbal message**. It is absolutely essential. In **Romans 10:14** Paul wrote,

1. "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"
- iv. But there's more than the verbal message involved in presenting the gospel. **Our living message: our behavior either gives weight to the gospel message or detracts from it.** We see this implied in Paul's words to Titus in **Titus 2:9**. Paul wrote,
 1. "Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive."
 2. We Christians are to live so as to make the gospel attractive. Our behavior is to give weight to our witnessing. It's not enough to clearly and accurately verbalize the gospel. We need to live it. Ephesians 5:1f tells us to be 'imitators of God' and to live lives of love. We need to live such lives of love that unbelievers will see Christ in us and thereby be drawn to Christ.
- d. Most people who accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour are first introduced to Him by a friend. Especially for people without a church background or a basic understanding of Christianity, evangelism must be seen as a long-term process beginning with friendship. The larger the friendship network of believers with unchurched people, the greater the evangelistic potential of the church
4. How was Jesus contagious?
 - a. Focused upon the heart of the matter and person.
 - i. The Woman at the Well: John 4
 1. He went straight to her needs.
 - 2.
 - b. Not interested in winning a verbal duel or expressing his own opinion.
 - i. Jesus didn't spar with the Pharisees for the ego trip of winning an argument. In fact, many times he gave answers by not speaking or replying, or simply by asking them questions in return for their questions. His goal was to expose their hearts and to cause them to see the truth, not to "win."

Not long after **Joni Eareckson** was paralyzed in a diving accident she entered the rehabilitation ward of a hospital. Her parents asked the doctor, "How can Joni best be helped?" Joni doesn't tell us how the doctor answered. But she gives her insight into her answer to that question. She writes, (p.3)

"What was the one thing I needed most? Friends!"

One young man who became her friend, **Steve Estes**, helped her grow in her Christian faith. At first, she didn't want to listen to him when he talked to her about God's purposes. But here's what she said about him,

"I was surprised that this guy had such empathy. And because of that empathy, I listened further."

We Christians need empathy. We need to have a love for unbelievers that is concerned to help them, no matter what situation they are in. We need to reach out to them and help them. We need to reach out to them and **show them Christ**. We must not just tell them about Christ, we must show Him to them.

Joni Eareckson Tada writes, writes,

"When I was in the hospital, I dreaded people who would come into my ward prepared to announce the gospel to me. And I don't use that word 'announce' lightly. I'm sure they had a definite notion of how the conversation would go. Maybe some of those people assumed I would ask the standard questions. In their minds they had standard answers."

"Looking back, I wish those conversations could have been more successful. One problem was that those people were more concerned about *imposing* their faith, rather than *exposing* it. Yet even now, years later, I fall into the same trap when I talk about Jesus to friends or neighbors who don't know Him. I impose rather than expose."

- c. Genuinely cared about people in need.
 - i. This is evidenced over and over again in the way Jesus treated people. He responded to their needs in real ways, not just to manipulate them. Take the 10 lepers, all were healed yet only one who gave thanks. Jesus didn't revoke the healing from the other 9 because of their lack of gratitude. He ministered to their needs and let God sort out their hearts.
 - ii. A suicide prevention hot line notes that people called for all sorts of reasons and hailed from all walks of life, but they had one thing in common: no social network. No one to comfort them, no one to care. No Social Network. It is the plague of our society. It is the need of people. If we had to identify one overriding need in our society, it is that of connecting to other human beings.
 - iii. *I Thought I'd Call*
 - iv. *Long before caller ID, there is a story about a New York City policeman investigating a case. Even before he finished dialing, he somehow knew he'd made a mistake. The phone rang once, twice – then someone picked it up. "You've got the wrong number!" a husky*

male voice snapped before the line went dead. Mystified, the policeman dialed again. "I said you got the wrong number!" came the voice. Once more the phone clicked down. "How could he possibly know I had the wrong number?" the policeman asked himself. A cop is trained to be curious –and concerned. So he dialed a third time. "Hey, c'mon," the voice said. "Is this you again?" "Yea, it's me. I was wondering how you knew I had the wrong number before I even said anything." "You figure it out!" The phone slammed down. He sat there for a while, the receiver hanging loosely in his fingers. He called the man back. "Did you figure it out yet?" the man asked. "The only thing I can think of is nobody ever calls you." "You got it!" The phone went dead for the fourth time. Chuckling, the officer dialed the man back. "What do you want now?" asked the man. "I thought I'd call – just to say hello." "Hello? Why?" "Well, if nobody ever calls you, I thought maybe I should."

- d. Was present to the moment and listening to His Father's instruction.
 - i. Jesus said, "I only do what I see my Father doing." He made his prayer life a priority and made sure that He was in communion with His Father. He paid attention to what was happening around him and did not get self-absorbed.

e.

5. Contagious Christians live...

- a. Deliberately – that means that we don't just let life "happen" to us, but that we are looking for opportunities. We aren't passive.
- b. Walk By the Spirit
 - i. We look for what God is doing and we go where He is. If we see God working in someone's life, we should step in and work there too! We have to develop the spiritual sensitivity to be able to sense when God is leading and when He is not. This is a discipline and a maturing process. (more later).
- c. Build and deepen relationships with people outside the family of God
 - i. Intentionally join organizations that will allow you to build acquaintances with non-believers. Work is not always the best environment. We have to build relationships outside of our homes and work and church.
 - ii. Jennifer and Toastmasters. Me and Flying Club. Find an interest that requires you to spend time with others, and get to know them. Then do this next step.
- d. Raise spiritual topics in conversations.
 - i. I get my haircut by the barber down the street. His name is Jerry. Jerry doesn't go to church. He hasn't really said why yet. I have spent the past 6 months just getting to know Jerry and letting him get to know me. I will probably ask him a probing question soon, something like, "Jerry, where are you on your spiritual journey?"
 - 1. I will have to bite my tongue, because he could answer that in a 1000 different ways. But my role at this point in the relationship is that of listener and learner. I

have to understand his needs before I can share the gospel with him. That takes time and effort.

2. I also haven't begun to pray for him yet. (Pull out the Impact Prayer List). To try to share the gospel without praying for someone can be relational suicide. We must take on the spiritual forces and we must battle the fleshly side of ourselves so that the message of God's love comes out and is understood.
3. Look at the instructions: Notice that half of the prayer request suggestions are focused on YOU and not on the person you are trying to reach?
 - ii. Look up HollywoodJesus.com, which explores "pop culture from a spiritual point of view. It is a great conversation starter with others who have seen a recent movie. Do your homework! Check out what your friends are watching and look for the spiritual connections!
- e. Invite friends and acquaintances to outreach events that will help them move toward Christ
 - i. Ie. When do people come to our church? When friends or relatives are doing something special, ie. performances and/or baptisms. It is the rare time that we have their attention other than funerals and weddings. We must be proactive in our planning of special speakers to coincide with these events. And you and I must be faithful in inviting those in our circles of influence.

6.

7. Closing Example

Somewhere along the line, John's parents' faith diverged. Mom stopped attending Central College and began worshipping at the Evangelical Church (not its real name). Dad, for reasons John didn't fully understand, stopped going to church altogether. Maybe he had just been going through the motions while we were youngsters, but I don't think so. I think he was deeply disappointed in God. It was as if he no longer believed in God and, paradoxically, was angry with God for not existing.

His Mom became worried that Dad was going to wind up in Hell. John said that he didn't think he was revealing secrets when he said that while Dad may have disbelieved in God, he passionately believed in Hell, and knew its precise address: 6355 Birkewood Street, Columbus, Ohio 43229. His family life had assumed the aura of a bad Tennessee Williams play.

To 6355 Birkewood Street one evening came the pastor of the Evangelical Church, flanked by three parishioners who were present, to see evangelism in action. They arrived at nine o'clock on a week night, totally unannounced but obviously at John's Mom's behest. The pastor asked, in an overcontrolled, Hannibal Lecter-like voice, if he might speak with his Dad. The seven -- pastor, parents, parishioners, and John--settled into the living room. The pastor began to sort of creep up on the whole business of spiritual emptiness, the wages of sin, the specter of Hell.

John's Dad just listened impassively. He didn't argue, didn't really react except maybe his jaw clenched a little. Seeing that he was getting nowhere, after a half hour the pastor played his trump card. He knew John was a Christian. He knew John had issues with his Dad. He asked John what he would think if he were in his Dad's shoes.

"I think," John said, "that if I were Dad, and a bunch of strangers showed up, uninvited, at nine o'clock at night, after I'd spent a long day working hard to put bread on my family's table and faced another hard day tomorrow, I'd be resentful as hell."

The pastor turned to John's Father. "Is that what you think?"

"I couldn't have said it better myself," his father replied.

Looking funereal, the visitors got their coats and departed. John wondered if they just chalked up their failure to hardened hearts.

Or maybe the pastor simply didn't have a clue.

In thirty disastrous minutes, that pastor made almost every possible mistake you can make when trying to talk about Jesus Christ.

He displayed blatant disrespect toward John's Dad by showing up uninvited.

He took no time to find out about the kind of day he had had, much less the kind of life he'd had.

He defined John's father's needs as he perceived them. He didn't bother to inquire about his father's needs as his father had perceived them.

The last point is moot anyway, because the pastor hadn't earned the right to inquire about anything, except maybe John's Dad's opinion of the weather.

- a.
- b. What about You? Have you been talking and not listening to others, discovering their needs before you try to write the prescription?
 - i. Next week I will preach on some communication skills for the gospel that we all can benefit from.
 - ii. But this week, we need to learn how to listen first. Earn the right. Be contagious. Have you been afraid of catching the world's illnesses so that you don't become contagious yourself? Choose this day to change that!

- c. What about You? Have you come to the place where you wish to accept Christ's claim on your life? Are you ready to receive the free gift of eternal life that Jesus offers you and that He paid for? He made that gift available 2000 years ago, but you have to receive it by faith.

Six Styles of Evangelism

1. Confrontational
2. Intellectual
3. Testimonial
4. Interpersonal
5. Invitational
6. Serving