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Secret to Great Evangelism – A Reflection Paper

For the last eight years the focus of my life and ministry has been discipleship. The great commission of making disciples of all nations has been a burden and vision shared by both Sandi, and I. It has now become a vision for our entire family. A prime component of my conversion experience and of the Lord bringing me to repentance was embracing the responsibility to be a doer of the word and not a hearer (or talker or knower) only. As I began to take only small steps to align my life and walk with God's word, great changes occurred in my marriage and my family.

As Sandi and I began to see the fruits of family worship (worshipping God as a family, not worshiping the family) we were inspired to continue in it. Little by little we made career changes and lifestyle changes to better follow the scriptural model for a household. The doors that opened and the insights we received as we simply walked in relationship with God and each other were too thrilling to keep to quiet about – we had to share with others what God had done.

After reading Steve Elzinga's book, "The Secret to a Great Evangelism Ministry," I have to admit I was inspired all over again. Elzinga paints the picture of what

early Christianity must have been like. Using the setting of modern day England, he brings us back to the excitement and joy that characterized the early church. Meeting daily in the synagogue and from house to house, breaking bread, fellowship, continuing in the Apostle's doctrine and prayer - Christianity spread to the very ends of the earth.

But on another note, in the notes that the reporter Jack took on the fictional book, "The Rise and Fall of Christianity," I saw the cycle of Christianity thriving while it was based on relationship and becoming irrelevant as it became the preferred religion or institutionalized. If you look at the church in America today, it is possible to lose hope and come up with the same conclusion the fictional book did, Christianity is not sustainable and is destined to fade away like it has in almost every other country.

It seems that as the Spirit begins a new work, we try to figure out what we did to make it happen. In reality we did nothing at all it was the Holy Spirit working, and like the wind, blowing wherever He wishes. But, nevertheless we will turn what He did into a method or some type of form or model. Pretty soon we will begin to trust in the method, form or model for the results. Even though we are full of life and give life to the form, the next generation will continue the form, even if the Spirit has moved on. The next generation will fight for the form, defend the form and even divide the body of Christ if they try to change the form, even though the Holy Spirit has long since moved on. At this point the Spirit is beginning a new

work and those who follow the Spirit will move on as well. Unfortunately this cycle tends to repeat itself again and again throughout the history of God's people.

My hope is that by God's grace, He will keep me sensitive to *where* He is at work. As I consider a church plant and having an "evangelism ministry" to my community I know my personal walk with the Lord Jesus is where it all begins. The kingdom of heaven begins first, in my own heart. My desire is to be consistent in prayer even when it feels like He doesn't hear me. To read and study God's word even when new and fresh insights are not coming. To resist temptation when passions are strong and no one (except God) is watching. To serve others when I am weak, tired, or out of energy. This is where evangelism to my community begins - sharing the fruit of a changed life.

As I proceed, however meager my progress may seem, I realize I am not alone in this mission. God has brilliantly provided a helper suitable for me. That may be a strange way to describe my wife, because she seems like so much more than just someone uniquely designed to complete me. And she *is* so much more than that. I thank God that He has put the same vision in her heart and that He has united us in following Him. Without my wife on board there would be no ministry at all.

The vision for evangelism must extend itself to our marriage. Sandi is designed by God to react (sometimes passionately) when I display qualities that are less than Christ-like. Other than the direct work of the Holy Spirit there is no greater means for sanctification in my life, than my wife. I have learned over the years to appreciate her ability to see right through me and God uses her to keep me real.

Sandi is very down-to earth and remarkably practical. She can sometimes get overwhelmed with the day-to-day activities. Often the details and ongoing pressures of being my wife and the mother of our children (mostly being my wife) can cause her to lose heart. She is sensitive to the needs and emotions of others and has proven to be very intuitive. Although I don't always recognize when she is in duress, when I do, I help her to see the big picture and I try to continually wash her with God's word. The combination of her remarkable practicality combined with my ability to see the big picture and cast vision has increased our combined efforts immensely.

We have come to realize that not only are our individual relationships with Christ crucial in building God's kingdom, but becoming one, as husband and wife are equally important. No matter how successful we are as individuals, unless our marriage exemplifies the relationship between Christ and His church, our efforts will be in vain. Our marriage can actually preach the gospel to the world around us. My willingness to lay down my own desires out of love for my wife portrays the love that Christ has for His church. Sandi's desire to respect me and submit

to me, tells the world that Jesus is trustworthy. It says that you can trust Jesus and submit to Him in everything. It takes both of us to preach the full gospel story. I display the sacrificial love of Christ for His Church and Sandi shows faith and trust in Christ. Our oneness must be defended at all cost, because without it, the gospel is unclear.

When we practice hospitality or reach out to our neighbors, there is a certain atmosphere in the home. When we are one, peace and warmth permeate our house. Relating to others is natural. When we are at odds, the guards go up and relationships are on edge. I'm sure we have all experienced visiting with friends, when you could tell things were not quite right. Our oneness is the key to developing open and honest relationships with other people. These warm relationships are the ideal environment for discipleship opportunities. Whether they are Christian or not, we are still called to disciple others and live out the gospel before them.

This brings me to another area that must be developed for a successful evangelism ministry to my community. Family life. God, in his divine wisdom, has prearranged the perfect boot camp for future evangelists. It is called your family. If we are to disciple the nations, we must first be able to disciple our own households. As we grow and become more excited about family worship and discipleship in the home it will begin to impact our neighbors and all who visit the home.

If we cannot disciple our own children, if we cannot get brothers and sisters to be tender and care for one another, if we cannot love and serve our own family, what can we possibly offer to our neighbors? We need abundant life in the home before we can offer abundant life to the community. As my home progresses from a place of consumption to a place of productivity, as we develop a culture of caring, prayer, music, encouragement, and faith, as we grow in obedience to God's word, and as we reap the fruits of sowing righteousness, then there will be an overflow of abundant life to those around us. Evangelism will be the overflow of God's grace in the home.

My endeavor is not only to realize this vision in my own home, but also help the other households in our church to rise to the call. Multiplying Godly households that are full of life can and will change our communities. Gathering with like-minded families and inviting family, friends or neighbors along, will be bound to have an eternal effect on some of them. Openly displaying the love of Christ and the joy of the Lord around unbelievers is a sure way to spark interest, or at least interesting conversations.

Many times our children can open the door to relationships with other families. Offering a video series on parenting to young parents in the neighborhood can open the door to building a relationship with some of them. Ted Tripp has a 15 lesson video series on "Shepherding a Child's Heart." We have seen young

parents open their hearts to the Lord out of the natural love they have for their children. God uses the natural affection they have for their children to bring them to repentance and faith in Christ.

Our family has made use of the musical talents the Lord has given our daughters. Sandi has invited some of our older relatives over for tea while the girls play the harp and recite scripture to them. No one has ever been offended, and they consider it a privilege to be invited. We have taken the harp to nursing homes at Christmas time, with a Pastor friend of ours. The girls played Christmas songs on the harp, while reciting related excerpts from the Bible. Our pastor friend played the piano and led everyone in Christmas carols. Music has been a great open door to, in a simple way; share the love of Christ with others.

We typically maintain a pretty aggressive hospitality schedule and see this as a means for discipleship and extending the kingdom. This does not work unless your whole family is involved. From our oldest to the youngest, they each see their contribution to hospitality as real kingdom work. My little two year old (Mia) was standing on the step stool by the sink the other night, scrubbing potatoes with a brush and rinsing them under the water. She was helping us practice hospitality. Yes, she did make a little bit of a mess, and yes, we probably could have done it faster ourselves, but the look on her face said it all; she was helping. She was building God's kingdom. This is the culture we must maintain in our home.

Mia rinsing off potatoes is my vision for evangelizing our community. To bring my household to the place where every member sees their part in building the kingdom is my calling. To equip each member according to the gifts and talents that God has given them is my calling. To shape my household into a vibrant, productive, proactive base for extending God's kingdom is the key to evangelizing my community.

As this household transformation takes place, through hospitality and living our lives openly before others, we must infect other families with this same vision. We must encourage others in their home discipleship walk. We must support others as they transform their homes. We must fan the flames and let our lights shine before all.

I am committed to the discipleship of all nations, to teaching them to observe everything our Lord Jesus has commanded us, to baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These are my marching orders and until our King returns and tells me otherwise, I will continue on, and by the grace of God, I will some day be able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith, I have finished the race." Until then I will take joy in watching my daughter rinse potatoes for the glory of God.