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The making of an evangelist

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A story has been told in Australia of a very famous man who seemed to have the world at his feet, and who had been hearing the Gospel preached by a world-famous evangelist. He was so moved by the message that he rang one of the team members asking could he see him as soon as possible, saying that he had a 'God-shaped blank' in his life and needed to do something about it.

Was it Augustine who said something like that? He stated that our hearts are restless and will never find their rest until they find it in God.

Those who wish to do personal or group evangelism need to understand this basic need of mankind. This is the reason that this chapter of the book is called 'God-shaped emptiness'.

The topic reminds me of the game really young children play in order to develop their thinking power and their powers of observation. They have a number of wooded blocks of varying shapes and sizes and a number of corresponding holes cut into a piece of board. The aim is to place the right piece in the right hole until all have been filled perfectly.

This God-shaped emptiness or God-shaped blank has been described in other ways, but actually comes down to the same result. We need the right and only shape to fit into the empty space of the soul.

This God-shaped emptiness is quoted in the Bible as:

(a) The restlessness of the sea on the shoreline.
(b) The broken cisterns that contain no water.
(c) The hunger for the true bread that satisfies the soul.
(d) The thirst for the living water which causes us to never thirst again.
(e) Those who worship gods of their own making.
(f) Those going about to establish their own righteousness.
(g) Those of the rebellious heart who will not allow this man (Jesus) to reign over them.

If we are to be successful soul-winners at all, we need to recognise the deep need of mankind which is really a crying out for the image of God, which we as humans have allowed to be defaced.

The world's biggest mistake is that it tries to replace God's image by putting things there. This is like trying to put a square peg in a round hole. In Ecclesiastes 2:4-26, the preacher, Solomon, found out the emptiness and vanity of living purely for material things. You fail if you try to fit the shape of the material things in the God-shaped emptiness of the soul. A list of the things Solomon tried and failed in from a spiritual point of view is very interesting.

He tried to: make great works; build great houses; plant vineyards; make dams and reservoirs; he got for himself servants and maidens; had great possessions of cattle (more than anyone else); gathered silver and gold and the peculiar treasures of kings; he had men and women...
singers and musicians to entertain him; he had sex with many beautiful concubines in his harem; he increased in greatness as a king; he also tried wisdom, foolishness and laughter.

Many would call this success. Yet in all this he hated life for all was vanity (that is, emptiness) and vexation of spirit.

It becomes obvious that the people of our day are still treading the same path as the preacher, Solomon, and are still trying the same material remedies to cure the emptiness of the souls. Man's remedies don't go far enough. the restlessness of the sea's edge is seen in the modern generation. A dear friend of mine, who was a great Christian teacher and thinker in his day, but who has gone to be with Christ, said in the hearing of myself and others that what is needed in this present age is to set the restfulness in Christ against the restlessness of the modern world.

People once knew God, but did not want to retain Him in their knowledge and have now lost their way (see Romans 1:18-23).

I know of a lady who does not profess to be a Christian and who shows all the symptoms of this restless age. She goes away for a break, then wants to be home again and then the same pattern repeats itself.

Even though some claim to be wholly satisfied with their life's pattern on earth, that is still not the end of the story. there are always disasters such as the loss of loved ones and possessions. It is here at this point that material possessions fail them. Then there is the experience of death and eternity to come, when the God-shaped emptiness will be even more evident.

What is not known by many an unbeliever is that 'God's block' to fill the God-shaped emptiness of life is cleverly designed to fit all the circumstances of life. It is cross-shaped for our sins; tomb-shaped for our justification and resurrection; it can deal with all the problems of life, death and eternity.

I have two friends who found this true. One, a man, who left his job and went overseas to try to cure what turned out to be his soul's emptiness. One day, in India, he was passing a mission house where an Australian missionary was stationed. My friend was discouraged after his pilgrimage to many places, where he found no heart's ease. True to His Word, God could see that this young man was seeking God (although he didn't know it), with all his heart, so in a marvellous way he found God. It happened like this: As he came to the missionary's house, he was prompted to go inside, and the God-shaped emptiness of his life was perfectly filled by the God who was seeking him. Later my friend became a missionary in Africa.

The other story is of a young woman who searched the various religions and the occult to try to fill that God-shaped emptiness but became more and more discouraged. But God knew she actually was seeking Him and through a marvellous chain of events, she was introduced to Christ by one of His servants, and she found that God is the only one who can fill the emptiness of the soul. Now she spends her life seeking to teach others about the Saviour.
What does all this restlessness of the people of the world say to the one who would evangelise?

We need to recognise that the soul is empty and without God to fill it, and that there is no other remedy for this hunger of the human heart.

Also, it is necessary to know that God can fill any empty heart because God's block is designed to meet all needs of the empty holes in the human heart. We need to also recognise that material things can never cure a soul's emptiness, or town water or any other water, apart from Jesus the eternal spring, can never take away the soul's deep thirst.

We need to ask God for a 'blue-print' in soul winning for every cause which comes our way. Trust God and lean not to your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6).

What the Scripture is saying is that our intellectual attainments, nor the man-made plans for soul winning can ever make any impact on a sin-sick soul unless we trust God to supply the wisdom and show us the way. This entails prayer. Proverbs 16:1-3 gives a wise answer (as does the paraphrase in the Living Bible of the same verse).

There is a little booklet of great value put out by Moody Press called "Great Personal Workers", by Faris Daniel Whitesell. It is really a most helpful book. If it is out of print or unobtainable for other reasons, perhaps you can get something about some of the people written about in the book, in some other publication(s). For your information these great personal workers are:

Henry Clay Trumbell
Uncle John Vassar
D.L. Moody
R.A. Torrey
Charles M. Alexander
Will H. Houghton
H.C. Mabie
L.R. Scarborough
John Timothy Stone
Dr Walter L. Wilson
William McCarrell

These people were famous for their ability to win souls. Their fervency and hard work at winning souls is an inspiration. Uncle John Vasser won large numbers to Christ and spoke to about 75-100 different men a day. His aim was to witness to the saving power of Christ.

There are no doubt many famous soul-winners today. Lists of these can be found in bookstores. However, I urge you not to ignore these older men listed here lest you miss a tremendous blessing.

I read, or heard, once of a Dr E.G. Daniel who listed four things that Christ saw in the lost.

1. Their departure from God.
2. Their depravity in sin.
3. Their destiny in Hell.
4. Their despair without a shepherd.
What every personal worker or group worker should seek to learn quickly is what J.A. Pennington has called 'the eternally important word – concern'.

We need a Holy Spirit concern for the lost because of our love for people. See some biblical characters concern. For example, Moses (Exodus 32:31-32; Psalm 126:5-6; Paul (Romans 9:3 and 10:1; Acts 20:18-21).

Jesus' concern (Luke 19:10; John 9:4; Matthew 9:36; In the garden of Gethsemane; also John 3:16; 1 John 3:16.

The soul winner should spend much time in the study of the Word of God, especially reading the soul-winning sections. Remember to ask for compassion for the lost; for open eyes to behold their need; a heart burdened by the Spirit of God because they are lost. He or she should also pray for the lost by name and expect God to work in their hearts (see Proverbs 21:1 – a verse which shows how God can turn hearts to Himself).

At one time in my ministry, I had a program entitled 'The small companies of the concerned'. Briefly, it was to encourage cell groups to study the lost condition and terrible fate of the lost.

Two passages studied were found in the Book of Revelation. The first was Revelation 6:12-17 where unbelievers saw the face of Almighty God and their reaction was one of terror. The second portion was from Revelation 20:11-15.

The people were asked to meditate prayerfully on the passages and think of those among their neighbours, acquaintances, loved ones and friends were to experience these catastrophes and what could they (the people gathered at the meeting) do to save them. They were urged to start a prayer list of lost people and to try in various ways – by tracts, letters, home meetings, etc. – to win them to Christ.

To start out in soul winning, the heart of the soul winner needs to be clean and repentant over failure to seek the lost, and other things done in disobedience.

Then we need to ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit, and to give us the power to witness; messages to give; ideas to work out a plan; and then we need to heed the advice of the Chinese Christian who was a great soul-winner. Asked what he did to win them, he replied, 'First talkie, talkie, talkie (with God) and then go walkie, walkie, walkie (for God).

A simple way of witnessing, either to one person or a group is by giving a testimony. In a simple outline of five points, which can be learnt on the fingers of one hand. It divides in this way: the first two finders are used for the before section and the two last fingers are the after section with Christ as the middle finger. It goes like this:

1. What I was.
2. I had a need.
3. I was introduced to Christ through a person or by Bible reading.
4. Christ met my need.
5. What I am now.
These five points can be used as a straight-out salvation talk or can be used to lead up from where the person is to where they ought to be. For example, a person says, 'I'm so worried', then you say, 'I have been worried too. I certainly had a need for release of my burden. I was introduced to Christ. Christ met my need. Now I have cast my burden on Him'.

The same method can be used if people say they are lonely or scared or in need. Just go down the five steps. Sometimes it is good to use a little booklet like Billy Graham's 'Do you know the steps to peace with God?'. Just say, 'I would like to give you this little booklet as a gift, but I will need to explain it to you so that you will get the best out of it.

Other ways to witness are by writing letters, or visiting the bereaved or sick, or writing to families who have lost a child or those getting married. The paper columns will give you ideas.

So ask God to help you, and to lead you to some needy soul, and go right ahead and tell them about Jesus and His great love. Other hints will be found later in this book.

Please prayerfully consider some of these ideas and ask God to make you a soul winner. Jesus did say, 'Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men (Matthew 4:19). So first ask Him to make you a soul-winner. That's what I did when I was young and Christ did what He said He would do. The Psalmist in Psalm 18:34 tells how God taught his hands to war. I know that was in a physical sense, but I've prayed that God would do that for me in a spiritual sense. That also has worked for me.

Keep praying then, and expect blessings from God, and go and do what he says you ought to as you read His Word and may God bless your efforts.