

Befriending & Hospitality

a meditation on inviting others into your joy in Christ for Evangelism

Mark Olivero, July 2017

"I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus Christ than unravel all the mysteries of the divine Word, for salvation is the one thing we are to live for."

Charles Spurgeon

Evangelism requires sacrifice. The sacrifice it requires is not for anything we must earn to have God's favor. We have already total grace in Christ. In fact, we should say Evangelism requires nothing so much as it inspires every good reason to invite the sinner in.

In her talk at a meeting of The Gospel Coalition Gloria Furman spoke about her book, *Alive In Him*. In doing so she gave an overview of the Book of Ephesians. A phrase that she gave great emphasis to and really impressed me was the idea that Evangelism is simply "inviting others into your joy in Christ." There is a direct link to the talk at www.theologydelish.com

What a great motivation and a great way to think of the Gospel – **to invite others into our joy in Christ**. This should be our primary focus in our mission to Evangelize. In fact, we can know that mission and especially Evangelism does not get accomplished by good intention. It gets done by doing. When it comes out of joy for who Christ it will be authentic.

Theologian Michael Reeves reminds us that "The **jewel** in the crown of Christianity is not an idea, a system or a thing; it is not even 'the gospel' as such. It is Jesus Christ. I'm going to dare to say, in fact, that most of our Christian problems and errors of thought come about precisely through forgetting or marginalizing Christ."

Christ is for us a **great mentor** in how to evangelize. Rarely did he sit and wait for people to come to him. He went to where the people were. He went in. That is the very essence of his mission in the Incarnation. He came into our world and he kept going into the barren places, the turbulent places, the God-forsaken places, the crowded places.

Jesus was good at **engaging others in conversation**. He knew how to ask good opening questions. He knew how to ask questions that go into the heart, not just into superficial information. He was not aiming to take over intellectual space. He was about conquering hearts. Ashley Null a theologian who has studied the work of Thomas Cranmer has put Cranmer's view of man in a simply sequence: "What the heart wants, the will chooses and

the mind justifies.” How true. This is why befriending and being hospitable to those outside Christ is so very important. We cannot get to their heart by winning arguments.

Another good lesson we can learn from our Lord is how **he was a host** to those in need of him. The much beloved Parable of the Prodigal Son describes the setting in which Jesus told the story. *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.* (Luke 15:1).

The sinners and the outcasts came to Jesus because he was hospitable to them. We can learn from him by putting into practice specific steps in our place and time that move us into a habit of hospitality. Here is a list of suggestions for putting **hospitality into action**.

1, Do I see befriending those who need Christ and being hospitable as an **inconvenience** to myself? Am I willing to invest love, the sacrifice of time, effort and resource to witness?

2, How are my **conversational** skills? Am I learning to be a good listener? Do I interrupt others while they are in the middle of a thought or in the middle of a sentence? Do ask questions that show genuine interest or am I being superficial?

3, Do I **pray** for those I meet who need Christ? Am I praying before I enter an office, a store, a neighborhood, a restaurant, etc. that the Lord would use me to speak the joy of Christ into someone’s life? How much of the time do I tune out what those around me are doing or say? How can I improve in being friendly, attentive to the needs of others, smiling or saying thank you often to those who help me in public places?

4, How are my name remembering skills? Can I improve in this? Why is learning a person’s name so very important? How is calling someone by name showing you care?

5, Am I willing to invite those who need Christ to coffee, to a meal, to my home for dessert or to play games or talk hobbies, etc.? Are there common interests between myself and them that we could do together – like fishing, baseball, hunting, book clubs, etc.?

6, Am I willing to meet in a small group with folks from my church to learn ways to befriend or be hospitable to those who need Christ? What books could we read together? What are some specific things we should do and pray about to make this happen?

7, What are ways we can set up or increase a befriending presence in our local community? Is there some service or effort we could engage in regularly that would keep us mixing with the local community? Why is being in the community important for advancing the Gospel?

8, Do I generally invite to coffee or a meal people with whom I am comfortable or have shared interest or people I like to talk to you? How does the Gospel call me to go beyond my comfort zone to befriend people that are different than I am?