



None of Us Can Reach Everyone

I arrived early to speak at Modesto Covenant Church in the central valley of California, parking a distance down the street to review my notes. I was there for the opening service of the Pacific Southwest Conference (PSWC) Annual Meeting.

As I sat in the car, I noticed three young men with gang-associated clothing and massive tattoos walking down the sidewalk, and I imagined what might happen if we engaged around spiritual things. I carried on a conversation with God as I acknowledged my limitations. “Lord, I really doubt I would have much credibility with them.” I don’t doubt the power of God to bridge cultural divides, and indeed I have seen God do just that in powerful gospel encounters. However, I think I was being honest about my cultural reach, and I was saddened by the realization. I returned to a quick review of my notes and then made my way into the church.

As the service progressed, evangelism in the PSWC was highlighted, and three young men were invited to give their testimonies. It was the same three who had been walking down the street. I had doubted my ability to connect meaningfully, but others had already done so.

It drove home this point: none of us can reach everyone, but together, all of us can reach anyone. God hadn’t placed me in their lives, but God had placed someone else. And God has placed me in lives where he has not placed you, and vice versa. On it goes until the kingdom is deployed for the strategic purposes of the King.

Recently, leaders from our Spanish-speaking partners in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Spain, Uruguay, Peru, and the United States gathered in Medellín, Colombia, to equip, encourage, and challenge one another. God is doing inspiring things through these friends and partners. The theme of the conference was “Unidos, somos mas,” or “Together, we are more.” It is an important nuance to the familiar sentiment “Together, we can *do* more.” Indeed, the only reason we can do more is because we are more.

Being more means that cumulatively we have more networks of relationships, more cultural acuity, more socioeconomic diversity, more geographic spread, better insight, more expertise,

more muscle, more heart languages, and more responsiveness than we would have on our own, whether as individuals or congregations. Because first we are more, we can then do more.

And so my question to you: do you own the fact that God has strategically placed you where you are because he has something for you to do? And more important, someone for you to touch?

Evangelism is a key value for us. One of our six affirmations is the necessity of the new birth. For us, faith is not an intellectual assent to a set of doctrines. It is a living relationship through faith in Jesus where any person can know God’s love, grow in God’s love, and unleash that love to the world.

We especially value relational pathways. We sense that “life on life” is a key way to talk about the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. Whether the emphasis has been Bringing My World to Christ, One Step Closer, or currently, 72, we have underscored the importance of praying for, serving, and engaging with those in our relational networks, watching for God to open doors.

As former Covenant president Milton Engbretson was fond of saying, “If evangelism is not the first priority, it will quickly become no priority at all.” He rightly observed that the press of other things will crowd out our efforts if we are not intentional. And Lon Allison, a Covenant pastor who recently concluded serving as the executive director of the Billy Graham Center, reminds us that “the mission of the church is more than evangelism, but it is never less.”

I don’t have the gift of evangelism, and most of you likely do not either. But I count the tender moments of being alongside a person who embraces the grace of God as among the most meaningful in my life.

In all of the complexities of life, in the quiet of each person’s heart there is a yearning. Is there a God? Does God love me? Can God fill the nagging void? In Jesus the answer is yes, yes, yes. And he has precisely positioned you to share that wonderful news. ■

...do you own the fact that God has strategically placed you where you are because he has something for you to do?