

THE OCTAGON

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you."
Luke 10:1-6

The destiny of the Church is directly tied to how passionate she remains to her mission. In past decades, our zeal to fulfil the Great Commission has often led to the great omission - we've made converts without making disciples fully trained and equipped in all Jesus taught. As the Church, we are all to participate in God's command to go and make disciples according to the model that Jesus has given us.

How we approach outreach in today's culture has fallen under scrutiny in recent years, and rightly so. Many of the techniques that have worked in the past are obviously not working as well anymore.

We've already stated that Jesus was the wisest man that ever lived, as well as the best leader and teacher. It just makes sense that he would also be the best at evangelism. In his book *Permission Evangelism*, Michael Simpson looks at Jesus' interaction with the rich, young ruler (Mark 10) and sums it up this way:

"Christ was evangelizing, but it sure doesn't look like the way most people do it today. Even though it says Jesus loved him, he stood there and let the man walk away. Why did Christ not follow him when he walked away? Why didn't he try harder when this man seemed so eager? Why didn't Jesus 'get him saved' before addressing this difficult area of his life [his riches]?"

Christ didn't run after the rich young ruler because he knew the young man's heart wasn't ready. Jesus knew and let him walk. Jesus never ran after anyone. Instead, he made himself available to those willing to wholeheartedly seek the Way to God, the Truth about God, and the Life found in God."

Our eighth shape, the Octagon, is about sharing the Good News in the same way that Jesus did and as he taught his disciples to do. Don't let the fact that our Octagon has eight sides put you off. We are not going to load you with eight major theological lessons or eight principles you need to memorise. The Octagon has one key message: find the Person of Peace.

PERSON OF PEACE

As Jesus commissioned the seventy-two disciples to go ahead of him proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God, he gave them directions on how to proceed.

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you."
Luke 10: 5-6

Jesus' message to his disciples then, and to us today, is that as we are walking in this world, we are to be on the lookout for a Person of Peace. Who is this Person of Peace, and how do we recognise him?

Very simply, a Person of Peace is one who is prepared to hear the message of the kingdom and the King. He is ready to receive what God will give you to say at that moment. This should be our prayer as we venture forth each day. "Lord, bring into my path today a Person of Peace, and give me the grace to speak your words to this person." One who is not a Person of Peace will not receive what you have to say. We are not to belabour the issue. Jesus says to shake the dust off your feet and move on. No amount of coercion on our part can make someone become a Person of Peace. This is the job of the Holy Spirit; he alone can prepare a heart to hear the Gospel. Our job is to have our spiritual eyes open, looking for a Person of Peace to cross our paths. Perhaps this concept will make more sense as we see it modelled by Paul when he went out on his mission trips.

HOW PAUL FOUND THE PERSON OF PEACE

We read in Acts 16 that Paul, along with Silas, Timothy and Luke, made plans where to go next, but were "kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia." They then turned towards Bithynia, but once again the Spirit kept them from going there. Then in the night Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia crying out for help. Right away they packed up and set out for Macedonia.

Once they arrived in the Macedonian city of Philippi, Paul set forth to find a Person of Peace, someone prepared to receive the Word of God. It was the Sabbath, and Paul knew he would find devout Jews and "God-fearers" (Gentiles who worshipped God and adhered to the Jewish scriptures) by the river praying as the custom was. When they found a group of women there, Paul - a rabbi by training - assumed the role of a teacher and sat down.

As he proclaimed the Gospel, the Lord opened the heart of one woman, a dealer in purple cloth named Lydia. Paul recognised that she was a Person of Peace for that moment. We don't know what he said to her, or her exact words in response. We do know that she and her household were all baptised into the faith, and Paul and his friends stayed with Lydia while they continued to plant a church in Philippi.

They stayed in Philippi long enough that they became regulars at the riverside prayer meetings. One time as they were heading for the river, a slave girl possessed by a demon spirit followed them shouting "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Surely this must be a Person of Peace! This was an open door for evangelism if there ever was one, right?

Paul did not see it that way. He commanded the evil spirit to leave the girl, which it did immediately. The problem was the girl, under the influence of the evil spirit, could tell the future and was being used by her masters to make large amounts of money. Now her masters were furious that their way to wealth had been torn out from underneath them. They dragged Paul and Silas off before the magistrates, and the apostles were beaten and thrown in prison.

Once again, even in the confines of these circumstances, Paul was on the lookout for a Person of Peace. This time, it came in the form of the jailor who guarded them. You are familiar with the story: around midnight, as Paul and Silas were singing worship songs, an earthquake shook the prison so that all the chains were loosed and all the doors flung open. The jailor thought the prisoners must have escaped and, saving his commanding officer the trouble, set about to take his own life.

"Don't harm yourself!" shouted Paul. "We are all here!"

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" cried the jailor.

As Paul was present in the jail (not by his choice, but there he was), the person God had prepared presented himself, and Paul walked through the open door.

The Person of Peace is someone God has prepared for that specific time. It is no good trying to force open doors that God has not opened, and we must not be distracted so that we miss the doors he has opened. This really is exciting news. Even in the most important task we have been given, the assignment to go and make disciples, God does most of the work. Our main job is to walk through life with our eyes open and our ears listening to the Spirit as he reveals to us the Person of Peace he has prepared.

EMPOWERING EVANGELISM

Our outward relationships are not just to be occasional outreach projects or evangelism programs. We are to live a lifestyle of mission, evangelism and service. Jesus explained his mission imperative to his disciples as "the reason I have come" (Mark 1:38). He spoke of sending his followers as the Father had sent him (John 20:21), commissioned them as disciple-makers (Matthew 28:19), and described them as his witnesses in continually-expanding spheres until their message reached the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). In every account of Jesus

addressing his disciples (the 12 and the 72) he recounted their mission. This Biblical strategy for evangelism is the focus of the Octagon.

PERCEIVING THE PERSON OF PEACE

There are seven other principles in our model but the Person of Peace is the key, so let's take a look at five things to keep in mind as you look for the Person of Peace before we move on.

Time

Jesus preceded his sending the disciples with an exhortation that there are specific times and places the harvest is ripe (John 4:34-38). He links this discernment with an observation: lift up your eyes. Not every section of society, subculture or individual is equally ready and open to the Gospel. In some contexts we need to sow, while in others we should be prepared to reap. Part of our mission task is to have God's perspective showing us where there is a spiritual openness. Remember what we learned with the Triangle: before we can have an outward relationship, we must have the upward connection.

Every Christian community is to be involved in both sowing and reaping. Many of our current ways of doing church might make us uncomfortable with what Jesus is telling us here. Jesus says we should be glad to invest in a harvest even though the benefit of our labour might go to the church down the street. If our mission is the expansion of the Kingdom, it shouldn't matter who reaps the benefit of our labour. As Kingdom workers, our job is to learn to discern the season of each person's soul. Is it sowing time or reaping time?

Team

Our inward relationships lead to our outward ministry. We are not called to go it alone, as we have seen in our discussions of the inward dimension of the Triangle and in our discussion of the contrast between organisations and living organism (Heptagon). The mission-minded church will develop a team model for evangelism.

There are good reasons for this even apart from the fact that it is the way Jesus did it. In our culture today, longing to belong makes authentic community a very powerful drawing force. Just as in the times of the early church, unbelievers are compelled to check out the message of such groups. This principle can be seen in the ministry of Paul. He is constantly referring to his teammates - Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Titus. Jesus' presence is promised wherever two or three believers are together (Matthew 18:20).

Target

Jesus was very strategic in his outreach. He knew he could not be everywhere at once, and neither could his disciples. He focussed their outreach on the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6) and warned them against being distracted by those not ready to receive their message (Luke 9:5 & 10:4). In mission and evangelism we should look for people who are open to us and our message. We should concentrate on these receptive People of Peace, and not force dialogue or relationship where they do not naturally flow.

Task

The assignment for the disciple is to share the good news of the Kingdom with the Person of Peace, whenever and wherever that person is found. How do we recognise the Person of Peace? According to the instructions Jesus gave his disciples in Matthew 10 and Luke 10, the Person of Peace will

- Welcome you. If he does not, you are to "shake the dust off your feet" as you leave his home (Matthew 10:14).
- Listen to you. Those who listen to you are listening to Jesus (Luke 10:16).
- Serve or support you. We must allow a Person of Peace to serve us (Matthew 10:10).

Many of those we lead feel very uncomfortable when they hear the word "evangelism" - perhaps guilty. However, Jesus simply said to look for people who want to listen to you - people you will encounter in your

everyday walk. This is something they can do within their existing contacts and relationships. There is a great burden lifted from our people as we share with them God's part in the process.

Trouble

If the teacher is not received, said Jesus, the student should not expect a warm welcome either. As we go out into the world looking for the Person of Peace and sharing the good news of the Kingdom of God, we must expect trouble in our lives. There will be many who are not yet ready to hear the message, and they will react strongly against what they perceive as intolerance or insensitivity on your part. It is not an "if" but a "when" as to this happening. Our mission to the world has not changed. What we need now is to express it in such a way that everyone in your Huddle and wider community feel empowered to participate. Many Christian leaders spend their entire lives within the confines of the church campus and wonder why they see little breakthrough in the area of evangelism. Leaders define culture and as such, your disciples and the Huddles they lead will imitate what you actually do, not necessarily what you teach.

Let's look at the final seven principles in the Octagon, aiming to build and equip our people for this mission.

PRESENCE: JESUS IS WHERE YOU ARE

Presence evangelism occurs when you are present in a situation or with an individual or group. Where you are is always an opportunity to model Jesus, acting as he would act, speaking as he would speak. As you show kindness and speak encouragement, a Person of Peace may become evident to you. Perhaps you are in a committee meeting, and you speak in a positive way where others are complaining. After the meeting, another committee member comes up to you and thanks you for remaining positive. This could be a Person of Peace making himself known. An opportunity to share why you are upbeat is open to you because you are present. As the wise man said, "wherever you go, there you are." And wherever you are may be an opportunity to meet with a Person of Peace.

PASSING RELATIONSHIPS: THE SPRINT

People we meet only once or twice are what we would call passing relationships. The clerk at the gas station, a stranger standing in line at the bank, the person we happen to sit next to on a plane. Most likely, even if they show themselves to be a Person of Peace at that moment, we are not going to lead them into a personal relationship with Christ in our brief encounter. But we may be used to take them closer to that point. Paul said that some plant, some water, and God gives the harvest (1 Corinthians 3:6). In a passing relationship, you may be called on to plant a seed or to water what has already been planted. Just because you do not see the end result does not mean you are not a vital part of the process.

PERMANENT RELATIONSHIPS: THE MARATHON

Permanent relationships are those in your family and with close friends. If a passing relationship is like a sprint, permanent relationships are a marathon. You are with these people often, and for extended periods of time. It is important that you do not force the Gospel message when this person is not ready. You may have to wait for a long time before he or she is a Person of Peace for you, but until that time their heart is not ready to hear you. It seems we have the hardest time sharing our faith with those closest to us. Perhaps this is in part due to our impatience. We want so much for them to live in the incredible Kingdom life we are experiencing that we rush them before God has prepared them to hear us. Pray, wait, and watch. God is never in a hurry, and he is never late.

PROCLAMATION AS IDENTIFICATION

Most pastors love opportunities to proclaim the Gospel to those who are not believers. Weddings and funerals are two gatherings of nonbelievers with whom we can share a salvation message. This is fine, as long as we understand we are not going to convince those who are not ready to receive. That is not how it works. Our proclamation should be used to identify those who are Persons of Peace, then enter into relationships with them,

or connect them with others who can walk with them in the initial stages of discipleship. This is what evangelism really is: inviting a person to walk the walk of faith, not just pray a prayer.

PREPARATION: MOVING PEOPLE ALONG THE SCALE

Preparation is similar to cultivating soil and planting seed in advance of the harvest. Often our words will be one turn of a person's soil. Another comes along and, sensing an opportunity with a Person of Peace, turns the soil once again. The next week, the soil gets turned over one more time. Then yet another comes and plants seed. A few more come and water the seed. None of these individual workers see what the others have done, and perhaps none will be there for the harvest, but all have had a hand in making a disciple.

Dr. James F. Engel (Wheaton Graduate School) developed a model that is helpful for those engaged in the communication of the Gospel. Known as the Engel Scale, this model gives insight into the decision-making process of the unbeliever. On this scale, a person who asks forgiveness of sin and is born again spiritually would be at the 'zero' point of the scale. To the right of this point are positive numbers - +1, +3, +5 etc. As the disciple grows and matures in his walk, he progresses to the right of the scale.

To the left of zero are corresponding negative numbers. A person who is open to listening to your experiences with God and is asking questions about the Kingdom could be said to be a -1. This is a Person of Peace. Someone who is not interested at this time in spiritual matters could be a -5. And the one who would rather knock your teeth down your throat than hear about Christ is a -10. If, in the preparation phase of the Octagon, you move a person from -5 to -3, is this not evangelism? We may not be there for the 'zero hour', but we will have been used by God in the process.

POWER: AWE AS EVANGELISM

Jesus often used demonstrations of the power of God to identify the Person of Peace. Praying for the sick and seeing a miraculous healing will often reveal a Person of Peace, whether the one prayed for or simply one watching. Our God is, truly, an awesome God. He will do things to create awe in those who have yet to commit their hearts to him. We do not create these miracles, nor can we box God up and manipulate when and where miracles will occur. All we can do is be ready when they do happen. The Person of Peace for our life may be revealed at that moment, and we should be ready for this time.

PERCEPTION: FEELING THE TEMPERATURE

Perception is what Peter Wagner called 'testing the soil'. We need to be spiritually perceptive to situations and circumstances as well as to individuals, in order to identify the Person of Peace. For instance, in a presence evangelism setting, you are golfing with three other men you just met on the first tee. As you complete your round and are shaking hands after the 18th hole, ask yourself, "what was the temperature of the soil? Was it hot, warm or cold?" If the temperature was cold - none of the men exhibited any signs of being open to you sharing the Good News with them - move on. Shake the dust from your cleats, as it were, and wish them well. But if you sense any warmth in the soil, pursue a further relationship with that person. He is a Person of Peace for you. The eight principles of the Octagon provide a comprehensive but not exhaustive approach to evangelism that, along with the other Lifeshapes, have proven to be incredibly effective teaching tools.