

CONNECTING WITH THE PEOPLE JESUS MISSES MOST

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Witnessing. Few words strike more fear into the heart of the average Christian. How do you do it, anyway? What if you get rejected or look stupid? What if you get tongue-tied or don't know the right answer to someone's question?

Think about it. If God commissioned us to struggle for the hearts and lives of those who don't know Him yet, why would He make evangelism so hard?

We might assume we're the problem—too lazy, not bold enough, etc. After all, those of us “ordinary” types (who aren't gifted with brilliant speaking skills or an extroverted personality) find ourselves uncomfortable with the methods we've been taught—they feel too much like sales pitches, and we're not natural salespeople. But maybe the real problem is this: we have analyzed evangelism for so long that we're stuck with strategies ordinary people can't use.

The presentation sounds fine, rehearsed in a classroom's safety, but it disappears completely once we're at work or talking with a friend over coffee.

MISSING PEOPLE

One of September 11th's most unforgettable scenes was the desperate people who, while waiting for word of their loved ones, held up and posted handmade signs that read:

Missing...John Ramos

Missing...Sarah & Frank Williams

Missing...my dad, Chris Chan

Watching this play out was tragic—we knew the “missing people” were probably lost forever. But the sign-makers called them “missing” for one reason: they loved them.

While Jesus did refer to non-Christians as “**that which was lost**” (**Luke 19:10 NIV**), I've begun to think of them as individuals He “misses.” Why? **Lost** feels final and hopeless—it evokes disconnection and distance. **Missing** implies something loved is worth pursuing. This name signifies connection and identity.

The **Luke 15** parables about the coin, the sheep, and the wayward son actually focus on how something was found, not so much on how it got lost. Consider the Prodigal Son's story. (**Luke 15:11-32**) Having scorned his father's love, this poster child of “**lostness**” finally runs out of resources and heads home. But instead of rightly accusing him, the father chooses to celebrate his “**foundness**.” True, the son was technically lost, but from his dad's point of view, he was **missed**. This shows us God's heart toward those who ignore or reject Him. While we may find this kind of love irrational, it's sure helpful

when we're the ones returning home! I never felt lost until I sensed Jesus missing me—that's when I realized how far from home I was and how much I needed to be with Him.

Seeing others in this way can dramatically transform how we Christians think of, talk about, and relate to the people Jesus misses most.

WJDD (What Jesus Didn't Do)

Jesus didn't have one standard approach to evangelism. He never set anyone up to **"close the deal."** (In fact, He seemed to walk away from a number of evangelistic opportunities.) When He was with the common people, He neither avoided **"sinners"** from fear of rejection nor focused on telling them how wrong they were.

But while He didn't give us step-by-step instructions on how to **"do evangelism,"** Jesus showed us by example, leaving us with stories to learn from. If we consider His experiences in light of two practices He did spell out—speaking the Gospel and serving the Gospel—we'll discover the real thing. Most of us have been taught to focus on either speaking (**Mark 16:15 NIV**: **"Preach the good news to all creation"**) or serving (**Matthew 25:40**: **"Whatever you [do] for one of the least of these . . . you [do] for me"**). But when we practice both together, we can just be ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to move. **"Missing"** people loved being around Jesus, and the more we're like Him, the more they'll be attracted to Christ in us.

PREACH TO SERVE, SERVE TO PREACH

To follow both of Jesus' teachings, we should preach as if we're serving and serve as if we're preaching.

We preach as servants when we:

- Use words that carry a person's heart to Jesus rather than just correcting their mistaken beliefs.
- Refuse to steer the conversation towards our own agenda.
- Ask more questions than we give answers.
- Talk about Jesus in a way that is real and matches the person's receptivity.
- Desire others to experience Jesus' love and reality (not just to hear our beliefs).

We serve as preachers when we:

- Anticipate our "missing" friends' needs, meeting them where they are.
- Pray for them privately.
- Put others ahead of ourselves without expecting credit (for us *or* for our faith). People aren't shopping for religion; they're looking for something real. Jesus commissioned us to invite others into His reality by living it and loving them. So just be you. Be open, be real, be intentional. And expect God to do the work.