

The Benefits of Public Ministry

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The following is an edited version of a sermon preached by Brother James at The National Street Preacher's Convention, hosted by the Bible Baptist Church, Marysville, California, February, 1999.

For a verse of Scripture to get started, look at Luke chapter sixteen. Here is the rich man, speaking from hell. In Luke 16:27-28, ***Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.*** How about that for a commission?! As far as I know, this is the only case in the Bible where a man is permitted to speak from hell. What he requested was not salvation for himself. What he requested was not a second chance. But what that man asked was that someone go and tell his family, so they didn't have to join him in the place of torment.

Obviously, there was not a party going on down there. There was not a crowd having a big time, drinking and carrying on. When that fellow got to hell, he didn't want anyone else to go there. So he asked that a witness be sent to his relatives. Will you be used of God to answer a prayer from hell?

Some time ago I received a questionnaire. It asked:

1. How has public ministry benefited you?
2. How has public ministry benefited your town?
3. How has public ministry benefited your church?

I want to go over some of the answers that I sent in response.

In March, 1987, we started a church in Deland, Florida. In part, it grew out of street preaching. We had been preaching on the streets in that town for close to two years, at the end of which time we had a small nucleus of people, rented a building, and began regular services. So I admit that our church is unlike what some men experience when they try to introduce something as radical as public preaching to a congregation of people who have never done it. We started from public ministry and grew from there. So I realize our situation is a little different.

[In the discussion that follows public ministry is used in its broadest sense. The term includes holding signs and banners, distributing tracts, entering parades, etc. as well as preaching the word.]

How Has Public Ministry Benefited You?

First, it has helped me to preach through any and all distractions. You will find, especially you young men who are getting started, that if you can learn to preach with hecklers, traffic, and people walking about, you can stand in any church pulpit and preach through people falling asleep and dropping hymnals, through teenagers passing notes, and through children playing with toys. It will help you to learn to concentrate on your message and the delivery of your message, and not be sidetracked by all the little things that are going on around you.

Second, public preaching has made me free to teach Biblical, New Testament Christianity without condemning myself. How could I preach and teach through the gospels, where Jesus sent the disciples out into public places to give the good news to everyone with whom they came in contact if I was not doing the same? How could I teach through the book of Acts, talk about those missionary journeys, those trips into the theater, those confrontations with crowds and authorities, if I was unwilling to go out and do the very same thing? I would be a very compromised preacher in the pulpit of my church were I not at least trying to do what every prophet, every true disciple and every

apostle in the pages of the Bible had done. I could not teach the whole Bible without embarrassing myself.

Third, public ministry has helped teach me the importance of proper speech and clarity of pronunciation. Whether it is on a cassette tape, the radio, or from a pulpit, you will be able to hear and understand every word that is spoken by a man who regularly preaches on the streets. Such men have learned to speak to an audience that isn't listening very carefully. They have learned to make certain every vowel and consonant is spoken, so a hearer can grasp it. If you bring grandma to hear a street preacher, you can be sure she will know what he said. That is great. What is the point of getting up and preaching, if no one is going to grasp half of what you have spoken because you mutter and peep, or holler and hack? Making every vowel understood over traffic and in the wind will greatly aid the delivery of the Sunday morning message to the lady in row fifteen.

Fourth, public ministry keeps me mindful that the old man is still very much alive. If I was to speak of my unwillingness, my hang-ups, my reservations about going out to street preach, most of you would probably have the same ones. In the church-house situation people are patting you on the back, saying, "Boy, that was a great sermon. We sure love our pastor." After awhile you get to thinking you kind of deserve that credit. Maybe you are worthy of a little praise. "Bless God, I am a man of God, and I..."

Street preaching will really help keep you in your place. It is healthy to be surrounded by people who don't care what you have to say, don't think you are important and would rather see you drop dead than say another word. That is necessary for a minister. It is good for you. You can say what you will about the Bakkers, the Swaggerts and all that crowd, what ruined those men was the fact that they were surrounded for decades by people who only told them what they wanted to hear. They were surrounded by people who would agree with everything they said and backed them every time they made a suggestion. If Jim Bakker had made a few trips to

downtown Charlotte and heard some people speak from the other side of the aisle, it would have helped him stay closer to God.

How Has Public Ministry Benefited Your Town?

Street preaching has forced the people in our community to confront their attitude regarding the gospel. You see, Marysville, California does not care what goes on in Bible Baptist Church. They do not care what your pastor preaches and teaches. They don't care what your convictions are. They don't care what your standards are. You can do anything you want here. You can sprinkle. You can pour. You can dunk. You can baptize them three times frontward, in Jesus' name or in the name of the Trinity. They could not care less. They don't care if people are getting born again. They don't care if you have a cult here and are cutting off the head of a chicken. **AS LONG AS YOU KEEP IT IN THE CHURCH** they don't have to deal with it. But when you go to their shopping centers, into their neighborhoods and occupy their intersections, you force them to examine their opinion of Jesus Christ the Word of God, and that is healthy.

None of us got saved until we fell under conviction. None of us fell under conviction until we were confronted with the facts of the gospel. The reason we don't see people getting under conviction and getting genuinely saved is because we are not confronting them with the facts of the gospel.

We are fond of Romans 10:13, and with good reason. Here the Bible says: ***For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*** But we cannot divorce that verse from its context. ***How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? They will not! and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? They can not! and how shall they hear without a preacher? They won't! And how shall they preach except they be sent?*** Oh, but we have been sent! Every saved man and woman is commissioned (Acts 1:8; 1:15) and empowered (Acts 2:1-4) to preach the good news to the world.

Next, public ministry has benefited our town because it has forced the city attorney to take laws off the books that were prohibiting the distribution of religious literature.

When we went to Deland there was a Southern Baptist college that has been there since the 1880s. In the Deland area there are probably a dozen large Baptist churches. In addition there are a dozen fundamental churches. There are a number of conservative Presbyterian churches, and conservative charismatic churches. If you have a pro-life rally, you get a big crowd in our town. It is a very conservative community. And yet, on the law books in Deland, Florida was a city ordinance prohibiting the distribution of religious literature.

Now, you know they can't make that law stick. You know that law is unconstitutional. But for over fifty years no one ever challenged that law to get it off the books. So the governmental powers in our community were allowed to pass and legislate unconstitutional laws, simply because no one would stand up and force them to do what was right. Public ministry has benefited our town because now anyone, from any church, who gets excited about Jesus Christ and wants to hand someone a gospel tract, may do so without having to answer to anyone, without having the police called, without going to visit the city attorney's office, or be harassed for five seconds. We have set at liberty everyone in our community who decides they want to do something for Jesus Christ, just because we took the truth outside the walls of the church and forced the issue.

We weren't ugly. We weren't obnoxious. The first time a police officer told us about the law we said, "All right. We will stop for today. But tomorrow we will be at the city attorney's office to get a copy of the ordinance. We want a meeting with the city attorney."

Three months later, we got a copy of a letter from the city attorney to the mayor and to the chief of police, stating that the law was unconstitutional and is not to be enforced. That unjust law would still be there, hovering over the heads of any teenage boy who got excited about living for Jesus, had someone not taken the light outside the church building.

Along those same lines, public ministry has benefited our town because it has kept the police and city council mindful of our first amendment rights. They know what our rights are. They learned them in law school or at the police academy. But people tend to forget. Given a little power people tend to grow abusive over time. In every area of life we see that evolution is a lie. Unless an active force intervenes, the greatest liberties will erode as years go by. Thus, it is a blessing to know that every man or woman who is hired on the police force in our town must, as part of their initiation, have explained to them the rules and regulations regarding the public preaching of the word of God.

What a blessing to know that every young recruit must sit in the commander's office and be told, "Now, on Friday afternoon, you are going to get some calls from some merchants complaining about noisy preachers. Here is how you respond to those calls. Here is how you must deal with those people. And don't bother them because they are doing it right."

What a blessing! It ought to be that way in every town in America.

So you say, "Bless God, we have a legal right to do what we are doing." Yes, but the legal crowd doesn't know that. "Bless God, we have a right to be protected for what we are doing." But the police don't know that. If you will be a constant presence on the streets of your town, they will know it and will not be able to forget it. In time, they will come to be your greatest allies. The police in Deland are on our side. They go to bat for us. Most of them are not saved. They are not believers. They don't even agree with what we are doing. But they know we are doing it right. They know we have been faithful. They know we have been consistent, and they stand between the merchants and our little band.

I have been in meetings with the head of the merchants' associations, or the mayor, or the city attorney, and representatives from the police department. I have watched the representative of the police department stand against the powers to be, and side with us, even though he does not believe what we are preaching, because he

knows, legally, we are doing what we are allowed to be doing, and he knows, morally, we are doing what we are supposed to be doing. And that is the way it ought to be.

In addition, (everyone would not consider this a benefit) public ministry has rid downtown of six businesses. All went under after trying to shut down our preaching. Ours is a small, southern, county seat town. At the main intersection two highways cross. Both of them are only two lanes. At that intersection was a J. C. Penney department store. When we began our street preaching, the manager of the store who testified that he was saved and loved the Lord. Almost everyone in our town claims to love the Lord – they just hate the Bible and hate for anyone to hear about Jesus Christ. We get far more opposition from professing Christians than we do from Satanists or atheists. Anyway, this “saved” store manager would send his employees, on the clock, to park cars in front of our preachers and turn up their stereos in an attempt to drown out the word of God..

What did we do? Well, we couldn't preach over the noise, so we instructed our men to walk over, lean in the window and preach to the fellows sitting in the cars. *'Glad you came out today. Not everyone wants to stop and listen to the Gospel. It sure is a blessing to have you pull over here, so I could tell you about Jesus Christ.'* Those fellows earned their money. Between the stereos blaring behind them and the preachers blaring in their ear, they earned their money.

Then, after hours, when all the businesses were shut down, we went back downtown and got on our face before God. On that sidewalk we would pray, “God, change their hearts, or remove their business. We will not interfere with their right to earn a living, but we cannot allow these people to silence the preaching of the gospel.”

Six times: with Woolworth, Office Supply Store, Bikini Shop, and every other business that has ever tried to shut down the street preaching we have taken this approach. No picketing, no boycotts, no lying down in the doorway, no harassment of the customers: just prayer. Every single time God has either turned the heart of that

merchant and he or she has given up, or God has shut the place down.

They have a right to do business. But you need to firmly let such people know, “Sir, if you want mall privileges, you are going to have to pay mall prices. You don’t get mall protection on the strip or along the highway. This is public property. If you want private property where you don’t have to hear street preaching, you have to go pay rent at the mall.”

We have store managers come out with a yardstick, get down on their knees and measure three feet from their building, with the lease agreement in their hand, and draw a chalk line and say, “You cross that chalk line, I’ll have you arrested.” And we tell everyone, “Don’t cross that chalk line. That is his property.”

When the police say to stay clear of the traffic flow we warn everyone, “Don’t go off the curb and get in the road.”

But if you will do it right, the law has to back you. They don’t want to pay for a new fellowship hall. They don’t want to fund the paving of your parking lot.

God may leave hateful merchants to throw stones like Shimei, or He may shut them down. Preach on!

Last under this heading, we have provoked other churches and individuals to enter the public arena for Jesus Christ.

When we first entered a float in the Christmas parade, (and there is no better chance to reach the majority of people in your town than to run a float in a parade). The first year we did it, no other church was entered. Last year, eight years after our first entry, there were *fourteen* churches that had floats in the Christmas parade. It was like the gospel on wheels. Here came the A. M. E. church. Here came the Methodist church, the Assembly of God, the Baptist church. I wish there were a hundred of them.

Listen to the crowd muttering, “Hey man, what is all this Jesus stuff at Christmas time? What is all this babe in the manger stuff? This is supposed to be a Christmas parade. What is all this Jesus business everywhere?” I’ll tell you what it is. It is someone going first. So maybe some of the other churches, out of strife or envy,

said, “We better get out there before they do.” Some may use them for an advertising tool. But for whatever reason, I’m glad last year there were fourteen floats in the Christmas parade and four churches out there, passing out tracts to the crowd – because someone went first.

Let me tell you about some of the floats we have entered in the Christmas parade. On one we had an empty manger at the front and a bloody cross in the middle. On the back we had a big throne with Jesus sitting on it, a scepter in His hand and His foot resting on a globe. On the side of the float it said, “HE IS NOT A BABY ANY MORE.” That gets the message across.

One year we had people dressed in costumes from many different periods of history. All of them were facing a manger. This one read, “AGES CHANGE BUT WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM.”

Another featured a family sitting around a tree, presents were piled high, a TV was blaring. Mom was talking on the phone, and dad sitting there watching the magic box. Then we had a wall, door and windows, and on the outside was Jesus knocking on the door. On the side of the float it said, “IS THERE STILL NO ROOM FOR HIM IN THE INN?”

My personal favorite had Jesus sitting on a big rock and little children gathered around Him. On the other end of the float was Santa on a big seat like the ones at the mall – with no children near him. The float said, “CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY WHOM YE WILL SERVE.” It did not win any awards.

It seems everyone in town is coming to the parade, because their little girl is twirling a baton, or their son is marching with the Boy Scouts wearing his Rudolph nose. The whole town is there; so we are there. It is a great opportunity. You can give out more tracts at a Christmas parade and Fourth of July fireworks show than you will all year long downtown trying to give one or two to people who are shopping.

We have become a part of such events. We often hear comments like, “We knew you people would show up,” or “He we go again.” That’s good. That’s very good.

During the political season it seems every intersection is filled with campaign signs. *Bush-Gore in 2004* or *Hillary's Great in 2008*. So we have signs made up. In small letters across the top is "Your best choice." Then in big letters: "Jesus Christ." And on the bottom is Romans 6:23, Acts 16:31. Everywhere there is a campaign sign we stop and put up one of ours. And do you want to know something? The first time we tried this there was no church name on the signs, but people all over town were calling our church wanting to know where they could get some of them. Isn't it funny that they didn't call Saint Peter's? Isn't it funny that they didn't call Trinity Lutheran? Why did they call our church?

This is what street preaching does for your town. When people decide they want to do something for Jesus, when they decide they want to find Jesus, they won't need the Yellow Pages. They will know who to call.

Our signs, preaching and floats have made the newspapers several times. In each case, photos or quotations of the Bible verses were in the paper. You cannot buy advertising space on the front page of a daily newspaper. Inside, you can't buy ad space on the top half of the page. Did you know that no matter how much money a church raised they could not put "Ye must be born again" on the front page. You could not buy three column inches on page 1 to tell your community "Ye must be born again." Yet, thousands of people going into restaurants this morning saw, "Ye must be born again" on the front of the Sacramento paper. Everyone checking out of the motel across the street saw, "Ye must be born again." Every kid throwing newspapers saw, "Ye must be born again." Every man or woman who opened their copy this morning saw, "Ye must be born again." You can't buy that kind of advertising. All those people saw, "Ye must be born again," just because someone took the gospel outside the church. What is that worth in dollars? You can't put a price on it. What a blessing!

How Has Public Ministry Benefited Your Church?

Number one, public ministry has given everyone an opportunity to be actively involved in the work of the gospel. Everyone is not equipped to teach a Sunday school class. Everyone does not qualify for the office of a deacon. Everyone cannot stand in the pulpit and preach or sing. Everyone cannot play a musical instrument. But we don't have one person in our church that cannot hold a sign in their hand and thereby tell thousands of people about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our teenagers enjoy going out on the streets to distribute gospel tracts. It is something they want to do. Will all the young men grow up to be pastors? Probably not. Will all the young ladies travel one day to the foreign field? Probably not. But every one of them is already an evangelist and a missionary.

One day someone will be driving through our town thinking, "Those wicked public schools are ruining my kids. These gangs, I'm so scared for my kids. I wonder what I'm going to do with my son or my daughter?" Suppose they see a bunch of clean, well-dressed, happy boys and girls, out standing up for Jesus Christ. Is it not possible they will think, "You know, I'm not much for that Bible stuff. I've heard a lot about that preacher down there, but there has to be something good going on there and we better check it out."

Second, public ministry has kept us mindful of how the world and most professing Christians really feel about Jesus Christ. Gentlemen, you can stand in your pulpit and preach until you are blue in the face, telling your people that the world hates Jesus Christ and has no use for the Bible. Even some of your best members will consider that just your narrow minded, bigoted opinion about their friends and neighbors and good people with whom they work. But let them go out there and stand with a Bible in their hand and say, "Jesus is wonderful! Don't you think so?" They will find out in a hurry that their town is populated by a bunch of self-righteous hypocrites who hate Jesus Christ and the gospel. That is something your church members need to see. It is good for a church.

Third, public ministry has enabled us to find out which men are called to the ministry, and which ones simply want a position in the church. “Well preacher, I think I’m called to preach.” Do you mean you think you are called to take over someone’s pulpit, or you think you are called to preach? If you are called to preach, you will preach. You won’t sit around, doing nothing, waiting for an opportunity to preach to people who will agree with you. An active ministry on the streets will enable you to find out which men really have the fire in their bones. It will help you make those choices and decisions.

Fourth, and please take this the right way, Jesus Christ is the builder of His church (Matthew 16:18), but we are to build with Him (1 Corinthians 3:9-11). With Jesus’ help, we want to build a church that is moving forward and doing something for Him; something that we hope will make a mark in this world. There are churches in town for activities. There are churches in town for social affairs. There are churches in town to get a little dose of the Bible. I understand that. But there needs to be a place in every town for people who want to sell out and live for Jesus Christ.

So I am going to say this, after much careful consideration, public ministry has benefited our church, because it has kept the carnal babies away. Over the course of decades, do not underestimate the importance of keeping the wrong kind of people away from the right kind of church. I wish everyone in our area was saved, believed the Bible, was washed in the blood, loved the Lord and was part of our church. But if everyone is not saved, not washed in the blood, does not believe the Bible and love the Lord, all they are going to bring with them is trouble. Such people will put a drag on what we are trying to do.

The carnal crowd is not going to be drawn to the street preaching church, because they don’t want to stand at the water cooler on their job and hear, “You mean, you go to *THAT* church? I heard they were some kind of cult. I’m really surprised you would go to a place like *THAT*.”

The person who will back down at that water cooler confrontation isn’t going to last in your church anyway. There are

plenty of churches for a man who will place job considerations over the commands of Christ. But those aren't the men to build a strong church around. So a public ministry will send them on down the road to the Barney and Mister Rogers' church, where they will be more comfortable.

Number five. Public ministry has kept us too busy fighting the world to think of fighting each other. For some reason, Bible believing people just naturally find enemies. It seems Bible believing people instinctively want to fight about something. So if you can keep your fighting with the liquor crowd, the bar traffic and the dance hall bunch, if you can keep your folks fighting together against the world, the flesh and the devil, that will diffuse their natural tendency to fight each other.

If you are a Bible believing, King James, independent church, your people are going to fight. I don't know why, but they are going to fight. And you have to keep them fighting the world, or they will be fighting each other. If you can have a common enemy at the occult shop, or a common enemy at the dirty-book shop, or a common enemy at the strip joint, they can unite and fight the world, instead of divide and fight each other.

Next, street work has helped us raise a church of young people who will have childhood memories of tract distribution and downtown gospel singing with their friends. They will grow up with the blessed privilege of thinking it is natural to spend the day with friends, telling the lost about Jesus Christ. Do you know what our trouble is? We grew up making fun of Christians. We grew up ridiculing the gospel. And you can't ever get away from that. Every time you go out there, you think, "Man, they are making fun of me. They are giving me a hard time," because that is how we treated Christian witnesses in the times of our ignorance. What a blessing to know our children will think, "Man to go out there is the best time I ever had. That is where all my precious memories are. That is where the best days of my life were spent." They won't have to overcome what you and I had to overcome. Praise God!

Finally, public ministry keeps me from being invited to the ministerial association, Promise Keepers and other such ecumenical cupcake parties. I don't like to say no. It is rude. When you preach on the street, you don't have to say no as often, because you don't get asked. It is a great time saver for those busy in the ministry.

Some Vital Lessons

Here are the most important lessons we have learned through our years in a small town.

1. Don't expect results. Our purpose is to make Christ known to a community that does not want to know Him, so that when they do come under conviction, they will know where to go for help. In fourteen years of street preaching almost every week in downtown Deland, Florida, we have never seen one person bow their knees and trust Christ as their Savior. In all those years we have seen one man and his wife come and join our church because of the street preaching. That's it.

So what good does it do? Probably a third of our congregation, the first time they walked through the church door had had no one visit to their house. No one had handed them a tract. No one had called them on the telephone. They just showed up. How many people did God send to our church in reward for our faithful proclamation of the gospel? You cannot count or measure the results, because the Lord puts every piece of the building and every living stone where He sees fit. Over here He sees a family that is looking for the right kind of church. Over here He has some people on the street looking for the right kind of people, and they don't meet up until God brings them together. You cannot measure the results. You just have to be faithful to do what God has told you to do.

2. Be at every major function. Be consistent. Attend every art show, every fireworks show, every music festival, every outdoor concert and be a witness. Over time, you will actually be recognized as part of the activity. Opposition from authorities will all but vanish, and reception will greatly increase. When groups are planning their events they will have to take into consideration the presence of the tracts, the signs, and the street preachers. They will accommodate you. They will plan for you. They will stop harassing you. They will accept you as a part of whatever they are doing.

As we put out tracts on the Fourth of July, do you know what we hear? We will walk through the crowd and won't even have to say anything. "Oh, what do you have for us this year?" "Oh, you have a new one?" They seldom call the police anymore. The art show directors no longer worry about us tearing up their exhibits or knocking down their paintings. They know we are not going to do that. They know we are orderly and well mannered. That doesn't happen in a year, two years, three years. You have to be there every time. Eventually, you will become part of the landscape.

3. Don't stop what you are doing to argue or debate. Satan will always send someone who will not hear a word you say to keep you from talking to those who will hear what you have to say. I cannot think of a single verse of scripture that obligates me to argue.

Say a belligerent man comes along and wants to fight with you about Acts 2:38 and at the same time there are fifty people waiting to board a city bus. Should you lose the opportunity to give the multitude the truth while you throw verses back and forth with a man who is no more likely to accept your position than you are to accept his? No. Kindly tell him, "I will be finished preaching in about an hour. At that time, if you wish to calmly and politely discuss the Bible we can do so. Right now I have work to do." And ignore him.

4. Do not allow rude people to drag you down to their level or rob you of your good testimony. A polite response to a rejected tract today may result in an accepted tract next month. "May I give you a gospel tract?" "No." "Well, if you want to go to hell, then go ahead

and burn. See if I care.” That may satisfy your flesh, or it may be a nervous reaction, but it is not going to bring that woman any closer to receiving Jesus Christ.

The news media, Hollywood, Satan, and past experience have convinced people that a bold Christian is a brute beast. Change their opinion. “May I give you a gospel tract?” “No, I don’t want it.” “Okay, have a great day. Good to see you.” When they realize you are not a rude, belligerent jerk, but are just a nice person who really does care about them, there may well be a payoff. It may be six months, it may be a year, or two years, but one of these days, when the husband has left, or one of these days when the kids are flunking ninth grade, or when dad has been in a car wreck, they are going to take that tract, because Christians have won their confidence by faithful, consistent, charitable behavior.

5. It is their world. We don’t belong here. They are free to drink. They are free to smoke. They are free to cuss. They are free to wear black paint, to put rings in their nose, and to do cartwheels in the middle of the street if they want to. It is their world. You wouldn’t go on visitation, walk into someone’s house and throw away their ashtrays and put your foot through their television. You wouldn’t dare do that. Why? It is their house.

Are we not citizens of heaven? Are we not ambassadors in a foreign country? It is their world. They have a right to listen to any kind of music they want to, to wear any kind of clothes they want to, to marry anyone they want to, or shack up if they don’t want to get married. It is their world.

Be a polite guest. Be on the street in the role of a public witness, as you would be in a living room on a house to house visitation program.

I have relatives who are not interested in the gospel. I want so badly for someone to reach them. I know who is not going to reach your sister; the one who calls her a whore or rails on her clothing or says she is a devil lover. That person is not going to reach her. I know the one who is not going to reach your brother, the one who calls him everything but a man. I want someone on the street corner

to speak to my kin the same way they would speak to them in their living room. I don't care how weird that guy looks, he is someone's little boy. That is some grandmother's prayer burden. *And such were some of you.*

When I had been saved two or three months, I began to load a bicycle basket with tracts and ride through my hometown from dusk to midnight, looking for people to whom I could witness. Not long after that, a friend and I thought about making signs to hold at intersections or to put up around town. We would spend time painting Bible verses on bed sheets and go and hang them from the walls of the Masonic Lodge. We hung them from overpasses. We hung them off bridges. We went at night and put tracts in all the lockers at the high school.

I've done a lot of things I wouldn't do today. On Saturday nights we would stop by the grotto at the Sacred Heart Church and put cigarettes in the two uplifted fingers of the Mary statue. We preached in the parking lots of the Catholic Church after midnight mass or in the parking lot of the Elks Lodge when they had a big dance going on. I did a lot of things I wouldn't recommend. I've gone to Christian Science testimony meetings, got up and testified. "Would someone else like to testify about their healing?" "Yes sir, I was sick with sin," and I would go right through the gospel. I've gone to Pentecostal revivals and when they would ask for testimonies about how people got the gift of the Holy Ghost I got up and told them how I got the gift of the Holy Ghost. Anywhere we thought there might be a group of people there we would go. We would find out where the high school drinking party would be on Saturday night, and we would go to the drinking party and sing, testify and preach until they ran us off. We would preach at boardwalks, fishing piers, art shows and such. We would make a huge banner, carry it in all wrapped up on sticks and go to the homecoming football game. At half time we would unfurl that banner. And it didn't say, "Go Bulldogs." It would say, "Ye must be born again." Hey, there is always a big crowd at the home coming game.

None of these things were done to show off or build a church. We weren't preachers and were soon to be booted from the church we attended, because of such practices (our zeal without knowledge probably made this necessary for all parties involved). In time, there were seven of us tearing up our hometown for Jesus. All the while, church leaders and professing Christians, kept hammering away, trying to calm the fanaticism, to save the "good reputation" of the church. Of those seven young men only two of us are even in church today. The other five are out of church all together. I'm not bragging. I'm sad. As far as I know, I'm the only one who is still making signs, causing trouble, preaching in public places. The others did not drop out because of the world, it was not because they fell into sins of the flesh, and it was not because of the devil. What killed those other guys were fellow church members who claimed to love Jesus Christ, who beat the desire to fervently serve God right out of them.

As I was growing up my dad drilled something into my heart. It seems he said it a thousand times. "Son, if you are right, it doesn't matter if anyone else agrees with you."

The man who took me under his wing and disciplined me put me through a routine every morning. First, he made me quote Romans 3:4, ***God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.*** Then I would have to repeat 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and he would tell me, "It is not your gift, it is not your ability, it is God's blessing and God's power that matters." Then he made me look him in the eye and say, "Watch out for the Christians." I hate that he had to tell me that. But I'm so glad he did.

I've seen a lot of young people in the last twenty some years get excited and zealous, do some things wrong, say some things wrong, go over the borderline if you will, but with God helping me, I'll never throw a bucket of ice water on them. With God helping me, I'll never break that spirit or that desire. If I can redirect it, if I can guide it, if I can mold it, I'll do so. And if I can't redirect it, guide it, and mold it without breaking it, I'll just get out of the way and let God produce a little temperance in them somewhere down the road. I don't want to stand before the Lord and explain my part in driving a young soldier from the army.

When you get saved, you get zeal but no knowledge. Then you get knowledge and lose the zeal. It seems we spend the rest of our lives trying to get the zeal back. May we do everything we can to let people enjoy that zeal just as long as they possibly can!

A Final Thought

In Proverbs 11:30 the Bible says, *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.* Let me ask you a series of questions. Who is righteous? By partaking of whose fruit may one obtain life? If you answered Jesus Christ, we are in agreement. Then, who is the “soul winner” in this verse?

Suppose a man moves to our town. He gets up in the morning he gets in his car to go to work. Not being familiar with the area stations, he is scanning the radio dial to find his favorite style of music. As the scanner pauses over the local religious station he hears a preacher say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” That sure isn’t what he is looking for, and he lets the device pass to the next station.

There is a car in front of him with a bumper sticker (and human nature being so curious, people must read bumper stickers). It says: BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED. He considers this an odd coincidence.

When he gets to work, it is Friday. In Florida many business allow their employees to dress casually on Fridays. (Florida is always casual, Friday is often abominable). T-shirts and shorts are the norm today, but one man stands out. His T-shirt says, across the front and back, Believe On The Lord Jesus Christ and Thou Shalt Be Saved. (By the way, Jesus endorses such messages on one’s attire in Revelation 19:16. For messages on caps and hats see Revelation 14:1.) Our newcomer is getting a bit spooked.

After work he must go to the bank. He makes his way downtown, parks his car, and as he steps onto the sidewalk he hears a couple of men shouting. They are surrounded by smiling youngsters and ladies holding placards. It must be some kind of protest, he

thinks, as he makes his way toward the scene. The a sort of terror grips him as he sees in the hand of one of the men – a Bible. The fellow holds it high and cries out; *BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED*. He feels as though some one hit him. He grows angry.

A very nice lady, modestly dressed, smiles, reaches a piece of paper in his direction and says, “Hi. May I give you some good news about Jesus Christ?”

“NO!!! I don’t want that,” he says as he hangs his head and ducks into the bank. (He exits out the side door so he won’t have to face that woman again).

On the way home he asks himself why a grown man would be angry with and then afraid of a nice woman with a piece of paper. Why had that Bible frightened him as though it were a gun?

Turning the corner he sees a sign stuck right in the middle of someone’s front yard with that very same “Jesus thing” on it. He wonders what in the world is going on.

That evening as he settles down for another boring round of flipping channels someone knocks at his door. He just moved to town. He doesn’t know anyone. This is odd.

“Hi. We are from the church down the street. We are out visiting tonight hoping we can tell someone about our wonderful Savior, Jesus Christ.”

This is too much. He doesn’t know why but he lets them in. They talk. They show him things in the Bible. He doesn’t really hear anything they say. He doesn’t see what they are trying to point out in that book. All he knows is that God must really be trying to tell him something.

“Would you like to be saved right now, sir.”

“What? Saved? Ah, I don’t know. I’d like to think about it.”

Not willing to close the sale but lose the soul, these men pray for the man and arrange for someone to pick him up Sunday morning and bring him to church.

The next day people are busy mowing the grass at the church house. Others are cleaning restrooms, vacuuming carpets, and putting

song books in their proper place. That night many pray for the lost, for their preacher, for God's blessing upon the services.

The driver picks up the man, he is warmly greeted at the church door by many happy people, the congregation sings heartily as unto the Lord, the preacher proclaims the word, the Holy Spirit touches a believing heart and opens blinded eyes. At the close of the message our newcomer walks the aisle, bows his knee, and BELIEVES ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND IS SAVED.

Now let me ask you again: who is the soul winner?

Is it the person with the bumper sticker, T-shirt or tract? The radio preacher, those who paid for the program, the street preacher, or the visitation team? The kid that cut the grass, the lady who cleaned, the choir member who sang with a smile, the driver, the musician, the preacher, or the one who prayed.

JESUS CHRIST saves souls through the ministry of every single member of His body.

There is some part in this great work for you.

Will you play your part so others can be saved?