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Intentionality in Witness

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All too many people don't intentionally go after the things they want, they just sit back and let life come to them. Obviously, there are things in life that come to us unexpectedly. But when it comes to specific things we have in mind to accomplish, that should never be the case. When working to fulfil specific goals, we need to be intentional.

In dealing with the topic of our Christian witness, this is particularly important. A Christian worldview expects that a person will be an intentional witness. In fact, we are actually commissioned by Christ to make disciples, and the New Testament admonishes believers to do everything they do to the very best of their ability. It couldn't be more plain than that. But unfortunately, while most believers would agree to these things, the number of people who intentionally put effort into making it a reality in their lives is relatively minuscule.

The Foundation of Intentionality - Purpose

It is one thing to be aware that we ought to do something. It is another thing altogether to know why it is important enough to actually make a plan and carry it out. When it comes to sharing our faith, this is a critical component. It is critical because the stakes are so high – in fact it has eternal consequences. In our Christian faith, it is this eternal significance that becomes the motivation for our actions. Interestingly, there are two places where this eternal purpose plays out – in our own life and in the lives of those with whom we share the witness.

As it relates to our own lives, witness is important because God wants us to do it. In fact, he has

actually commissioned us to "go and make disciples." Thus, obedience in this arena has to do with our very fellowship with God. Of course, if we are not obedient witnesses, that does not mean we lose our salvation. But it does mean that there is an area of our lives where we are displeasing our Savior, and this affects our ability to have unrestricted fellowship with him.

As it relates to the lives of people who don't know Christ, the consequences of disobedience are obvious. If they do not come to Christ before physical death, they will be eternally separated from him.

Of course, we must recognize that the ultimate responsibility for a person's decision to receive Christ, or not, is theirs and theirs alone. We cannot take credit for a person's decision if they come to Christ and cannot be blamed if they do not. We are only a messenger. That said, Christ has called us to partner with him as the messenger.

The motivation we have to witness is found in our purpose for doing it. We should do it because we want our fellowship with Christ to be deep, and we should do it because we care enough about those who do not know Christ to share the message of salvation with them. So the foundation of intentionality is purpose, and the initiative to stand in that purpose lies in our intentional decision to carry it out.

Steps to Become Intentional

In order to truly be intentional in our witness, there are several things that have to happen. Part of that relates to knowledge and skills we must learn. We can't carry out what we don't know and understand. Another part relates to planning. The very idea of intentionality

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implies that some kind of plan is being carried out. The third part of the equation involves execution of the plan, as intentionality also requires action. So with these in mind, let's look more deeply at what we need to do in order to be intentional in our witness.

Establishing the Knowledge Base

I know it is a hassle to take the time to read, study and practice new things. Life is busy enough without the extra work, right? But for a Christian, that should never be the attitude. While learning new things may not be a part of most people's vocational package, it should be a part of EVERY Christian's lifestyle. Truly, every Christian is a minister of the gospel in his or her place in life, and every one should have a solid basic educational foundation in this arena. We are admonished all over Scripture to grow in our faith, and an essential part of that is learning new things that promote discipleship in our own lives.

Some of the things we need to learn relate to new knowledge we need to grasp. Other things relate to skills we need to master. Let's look for a moment at what that might look like in the life of a Christian who is committed to spiritual growth.

While some of the things we need to learn relate specifically to God's work in our lives individually, there are other matters which apply generically to every believer. It is kind of like in school where we have our general studies, based on knowledge everyone needs to have, and our major, which is more specifically geared to our own special needs and interests. With that in mind, let's look at how that might look in the life of those who are determined to grow in their faith life.

Your Christian General Studies

There are a couple of important things that should be a part of your general Christian education. Without this knowledge it will be very difficult to live a faithful Christian life. This does not mean that without it you are not saved or that you can't enjoy fellowship with God. But it does mean that you will find it difficult to be faithful to him in many parts of your life.

The first thing you need to master is the basics of your own Christian faith. There are basic beliefs which define the outer boundaries of the Christian faith. Unfortunately, too many Christians don't know what those boundaries are and begin incorporating beliefs into their lives from the culture at large which run contrary to Christian teachings. When that happens, it allows non-Christian lifestyle elements to also creep in.

But protecting your own faith is not the only reason you need to master these basics. These are also the beliefs which we need to be able to share with others so they can receive Christ. Once this is mastered, you have the means to protect your own faith as well as share it with others.

A second part of your general studies education is to learn about the faith of others. This does not mean you must become an expert in World Religions. It does mean, though, that you should, at the very least, have a solid grasp of the concept of worldview. In modern society, we all must interact with people who hold non-Christian beliefs. Our world has become pluralistic that way. An understanding of worldview gives us an easy way to understand others in order to more fully interact with them.

Your Christian Major Studies

The next category of knowledge you need to master is more specific to your particular situation. God has called every individual believer to fulfill a par-

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ticular ministry in the world, and there are things you need to learn in order to be effective in that ministry.

A part of that has to do with your spiritual gift(s). God has equipped you with special spiritual abilities to enable you to minister effectively in your calling. Getting a handle on your spiritual gift(s) puts you in a position to do that work. If you don't learn about your gift(s), that doesn't mean you can't serve God, but it will inhibit your effectiveness. Too many people try to serve God doing things he has not equipped them for and they struggle to find fulfillment in their faith life.

Another part of your faith life major is to learn all you can about the target group God has called you to serve. Sadly, many Christians find this kind of talk to be rather strange. They have never considered the possibility that God has called them to be a missionary among a particular group of people. But he has. Of course, those God has called you to serve could be some group outside of those you live and work among in daily life. I have dear friends who minister among the homeless or those in prison, for instance. But it may be the people at your work, others in your profession, or some other group that you belong to. This is very individual based on God's calling to you. But whatever group it is, you need to learn their culture and the best way to minister among them.

Developing a Plan

Once you have your basic knowledge down, it is then time to begin the planning process. How are you going to reach out to the people God wants you to serve? What are you going to do to intertwine yourself in their lives?

Of course, there are basic principles you can draw upon to help you develop your plan. You will need to ascer-

tain such things as who, in particular, you need to befriend, what is the best way to touch their lives with the love of God, and what will be the best approach to share Christ with them. Then, after you gather your group, you must discern the best way to help them grow so that they, too, can become ministers to others.

But figuring things out is only half the battle. You need to then actually develop a strategy to pull it off. And the plan you develop for reaching your target group will be very individual to your situation.

Executing the Plan

Once you develop your plan, the final step is to execute it. You have to actually begin working among the people God has called you to serve. You need to develop relationships, share your faith with non-believers, encourage those who are believers, and create opportunities to help them grow in their faith. In the process of executing the plan, you can't think of it as a short term tactic. You need to commit yourself to them in a way that allows God to work in and through you to accomplish a long term goal in your missionary situation.

Your Intentionality

For the most part, in every area of life, you will only be consistent in doing what you make intentional. If you truly have a desire to serve God the way he is calling you to serve, you will have to make a decision that you will do it, make a plan, then carry out the plan – over the long term. To the degree you do that, you will put yourself in a position to become who God wants you to be and to do what he wants you to do.

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