

Evangelism in Transitions

One of the most effective ways to lead an evangelism, those effective times can be those times of transition when people are going through major change. People are often open to God in transitions. What do I mean by transitions? Well, marriages, funerals, job change, baptisms—these things that people are changing from one place in their life to another place in their life. But in these transitions, one thing to keep in mind—it is always about forming relationships, and in the forming of those relationships, introducing the love of Jesus Christ and the message of the gospel when and if that opportunity arrives to show the love of Christ in deeds.

Many times in my ministry, I've seen someone go through a terrible tragedy. Just by having the people of the church bring food to somebody, it sets up an opportunity for goodwill and that person looking at Christ in a way that they had not seen Christ before. Let me go over some of those transitions and give you a few suggestions on how you can utilize those transitions to proclaim Christ. Well, let's just talk about weddings.

People in Western culture and in Africa, in Asia, if they want a Christian wedding, that doesn't necessarily mean that they're walking with Christ right now. It means that maybe somewhere in their background, they have some church-anity in them. So what they're interested in this having church wedding, they've seen some program on television if they're on the west or somewhere in their family. They are interested in a Christian wedding, a church wedding. So they will find a pastor and ask you if you will marry them.

Now, marriage is a, I believe, a creational institution. It's before the fall of man and women to sin. When in Genesis, we hear how the man would leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. So just honoring marriage and being an officiant, so to speak, as we call it, is an honorable thing. To help someone actually tie the knot instead of living together to be married. Now again, some of you may disagree with marrying people who aren't Christians. But what I'm arguing this is that you honor the institution of marriage and utilize it as an opportunity to proclaim the gospel.

So one thing you might consider doing, and I do this, I offer to do weddings in the community. So what happens is people might hear about this, and they want a meeting. So you get a meeting. And you find out where they're at. It is totally appropriate. You are a pastor, you know? To ask the couple, "Do they know what a relationship with God is all about?" And you know what I have found? People say no. What is that? So I can share the gospel right there. This is what a relationship with God is all about. And I

am surprised at how many people want to know. And I'm also amazed that how many have come to know the Lord because I offer the opportunity to do a wedding.

Now, it could turn out that if you feel that they're not going to walk with God, you can even at that point say, "You know, I'm not interested to do weddings in the community. I only do practicing Christians" or you can say, "I will marry you but I'm still going to live out my convictions of my faith. So at your wedding, if you're okay with me proclaiming that God gets all the glory, well fine." And what often happens is that people will come to you and they know that you're a Christian pastor. And they know that you're going to proclaim Christ.

Often, a couple has talked about God in their own pre-existing to come into see you time. and when they come to you, they do want an opportunity to talk to a pastor about God. Like maybe, one of them has walked with God and the other is struggling, and so they come together and they want to talk about walking with God. And it's a time of transition. It's a time that people come to your turf, on your home court. You have something that they want and you have the platform to share Christ with them there.

Let's talk about the transition of a funeral. There are great opportunities there too. Here you usually will not get asked by the community, someone outside to do a funeral. It will be someone from within your church. But in every funeral opportunity, it seems like there are opportunities to share the gospel. Now, I want to go back to this reality. Remember, form relationships, and when you form relationships, understand there are a lot of elephants in the room. That's a kind of an American phrase. It has the idea that there is all this stuff going on in the room and people have all sorts of issues, all sorts of pain. Maybe that person's who's deceased created good, bad, ugly feelings and people are at the funeral. If all of that stuff that's maybe not being said, it's prompting someone to ask spiritual questions.

So you do the message at a funeral. You're asked to do the message. Now, this is an opportunity to share the gospel. But now, understand. Do that in a sort of a subtle way. You're ultimately at someone's funeral asked to encourage the people there. Now, if the person really loved the Lord, you can share the testimony of the gospel through the testimony of the deceased in their well-lived life. So you have an opportunity there to proclaim the gospel, but remember it's about forming relationships. You want it to be about the agenda of the family and going through that grief while you still can bring in the gospel good news claims.

Now, what if somebody who you're doing the funeral for did not know the Lord at all? Wasn't interested in Christ? At least you can minister to those who are there. And in an encouraging way,

encourage everyone to find Christ as their Savior and Lord in a way that doesn't make the person now all of a sudden a believer. "You don't preach someone into heaven," a pastor once told me.

But yet, you look at death. You can take that as the metaphor for the day because that's what it is. And how sad we feel. And this family asks me to share a few encouraging words and all I can say is we may not know about the spiritual destination of the person that we're doing the funeral for. But we can say, our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. And we can do it in such a way that's not offending but points to Christ. Remember, it's a transition. It's a transition in the lives of people.

Baptisms. A lot of times when you do a baptism service, you will find that a lot of people who don't know the Lord are invited to come. So here is an opportunity to make a proclamation. And here, often you have the opportunity to paint a picture of a preferred future of a life to be lived. Whether you have the view of that baptism is for infants or baptism for adult believers, this same applies. As the baptism is occurring or the message associated with it, you can talk about the wonder of walking with the Lord and serving Him. When baptism signifies as sure as the water's waves, so sure are the promises of God. Share how the gospel will transform that individual or individuals being baptized.

There are many other transitions in life. There's job change. People often evaluate who they are when they lose their job or when they're looking for a new job. Now, to tell you, grace for a new start not judgment for past struggles, is what you want to be a part of. Now, that does not mean that the past struggles are not important to learn from. But when they come to you, in some ways, be a pastor ought to be the person where there's a future. There's a new start. If they want to counsel in the past and so forth, you may be dealing with some of that. And that's fine. But in the end of the day, be about new start and fresh starts.

And often, what happens? You can bring up the question of, "You know, as you begin in this new chapter in your life, how is your walk with God?" And a lot of times, you'll find that that walk with God is really struggling. It's an opportunity many times I've noticed for evangelism. Like you'll have a spouse who comes to the church and the spouse who got unemployed does not come to the church. And so the pastor knows a lot of people. They're motivated to talk to you. So you talk with them. And here is an opportunity that you can potentially proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Any change. People often evaluate who they are when changes occur. Remember that grace for a new start, not judgment. But remember, it's about relationships. When people talk to you, it's amazing that subjects come up when they have that motivation to talk with you. Transitions are these great

opportunity for pastors to talk to people. To build relationships. To hold their hand through a change. To explain why certain things have happened without being the answer person for everybody's trouble.

It's about loving them. It's about caring for their future. It's about connecting them with resources. But, in those times, embedded in those transitions are great opportunities to proclaim the gospel that just because you're a pastor or a leader in a church, these opportunities come to you. And when those opportunities come, seize the day.