

Planting Through Relationships

Our objective as sowers of the gospel is to plant the seed effectively into the hearts and minds of those who do not know Christ personally. That is not an easy task, however, because so many people have built up barriers against religion and spiritual discussions.

As sowers we need to cultivate that hard soil, break up the hard ground and cultivate it into soil which will accept the planted seed and allow it to grow. One of the most effective ways to do that is through a relationship established and developed with the non-Christian person.

In this lesson we will consider some reasons why the soil is hard, some barriers we have to building non-Christian relationships, and some practical principles that will allow us to maintain contact with non-Christians and develop relationships with them.

LESSON OUTLINE

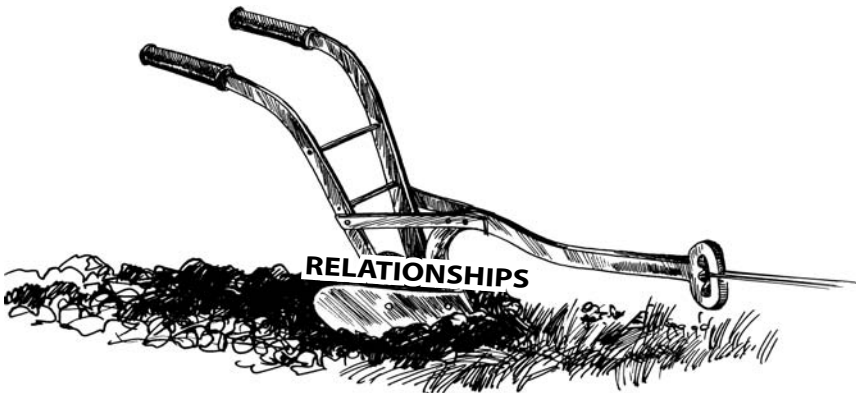
- I. Relationships Break Up Hard Soil
 - A. All People Are Winnable!
 - B. People Are Conditioned Against Christianity
 - C. People Are Negative About Christianity
 - D. People Are Trapped

- II. Barriers To Relationships
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 - E. Give Specific Invitations
 - F. Don't Necessarily Follow The Crowd
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LESSON OBJECTIVES

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

1. Describe why relationships with non-Christians are important in evangelism.
2. Identify one or more barriers that hold you back from developing non-Christian relationships.
3. Interact with non-Christians at work, school, or your neighborhood with more confidence.



I. Relationships Break Up Hard Soil

“Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain” (Mark 4: 4-7).

When Jesus Himself talked about communicating the Word of God to others He gave us this parable. It indicates to us the various degrees of receptivity people have toward the gospel. Some people won't accept anything spiritual. Others will allow some contact with the gospel, but life's concerns and other interests stop the growth of the seed in their life.

This also indicates to us that the sower's efforts will not always be successful. Nor will his efforts be easy. Yet this same parable does indicate that success will come if sowing continues.

Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times (Mark 4: 8).

The problem for the sower is this: he does not know which person will become good soil. People do not stay the same — they change constantly. Their attitudes shift. Life's events cause them to see things differently. So perhaps today a person is hard soil. But tomorrow they may be receptive to the seed and be good soil.



Exercise 1

Connect Peterson's book with what you have been learning in this lesson. Do you believe that it is possible for a person to change from hard to good soil? Why or why not?

For the sower, this is encouraging. It means that given the right time, circumstances and power of God,

ALL PEOPLE ARE WINNABLE!

A. All People Are Winnable

A friend of mine was called home to the bedside of her ailing father. He had been a hard man all his life and now in his 70's was lying on his death bed with cancer. Through this experience, and the accumulated prayers and testimony of his believing children over many years, he gave himself

to Christ in repentance, faith, and tears one night on his bed. Immediately assurance of his place in heaven flooded his soul. He desired to reconcile bad relationships with people, and share with neighbors about the grace of God. After his conversion he said, “My hands are in the air praising God, and I feel like I can’t bring them down!”

One day this man was hard soil, but the next day he was good soil. As sowers we must not judge the soil but understand why it’s hard and then cultivate it so it becomes receptive. A close, honest, open, relationship with a non-receptive person is a very effective means in cultivating.

What makes the soil hard?

B. People Are Conditioned Against Christianity

Because our society is very materialistically oriented, the non-Christian as a result invariably becomes less and less informed and interested in God and an eternal relationship with Him. He is consciously unaware of the spiritual level of life and operates only on a materialistic plane. His only information about God comes from an antagonistic world which continues to picture religion as a myth, or drug, or something no longer needed. Not having any alternative, he believes what he’s told and continues on toward hell.

The sower, then, confronts a soil which initially sees him as old-fashioned, superstitious, perhaps insane, and dangerous. The seed the sower bears will most likely not be accepted because the sower is seen as negative.

To cultivate — break up — this hardened soil, the wrong stereotype of the sower must be dispelled. How does that happen? It happens when the hardened person (soil) sees that the sower is not at all like the stereotype he was taught. The non-Christian finds the sower to be sane, loving, honest, a man of principles with an attractive positive lifestyle. As the stereotype image breaks down through personal contact — life-on-life — so does the person’s resistance to the seed. The soil changes from hard to receptive. People who were conditioned to ignore Christianity, are now realizing it may have some validity.



Question 1. How can this be accomplished?

C. People Are Negative About Christianity

Others are hardened and negative to the gospel because they have had a bad experience with a Christian, or church. One man refused to come to Christ because several church people had cheated him out of some money and never made that right. A son would have nothing to do with Christ because what his father preached to others, he did not live at home. Another person refused to join the church because two church members were gossiping, criticizing and being hostile to one another.

Often our lives speak louder than what we say. These hardened people who are not receptive can become good soil when a believer befriends them and lives out the life of Christ with them. This does not mean the believer needs to be perfect. Rather it means he needs to be humble. He needs to say "I'm sorry", or "I was wrong, please forgive me," to the non-Christian when he has been wronged.



Question 2. Why is it important to be transparent in our relationships with non-Christians?

Therefore a close, personal, honest relationship between a committed Christian and his non-Christian friend can overcome the negative attitudes of the non-Christian.

D. People Are Trapped

Many people will not listen to the gospel because they are trapped in their sin and do not like to be exposed. No one likes to have his sins brought out in the open to be seen clearly and dealt with. Yet Jesus did that when people came to Him. So instead of coming, people shy away. "Men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." (John 3: 19)

However, a personal relationship with them can help bring them to the light. If the sower is accepting and loving of the sinner and does not bring into the relationship a judgmental attitude, the atmosphere exists for the hardened person to see himself as he really is. He can see how Christ has

made a qualitative difference in the sower's life, how Christ helps him with everyday problems and gives him strength, how Christ changes character and builds in principles of living, and how Christ gives hope.

This closeness between the sower and the non-Christian can change the soil from hardness to receptivity.

We have seen, then, that there are several reasons why non-Christians are not initially receptive to the gospel — they are conditioned against Christianity, negative toward Christianity, and trapped in their sin. Yet a personal relationship between them and the sower can break up this hardened soil and make it more receptive to the gospel seed.

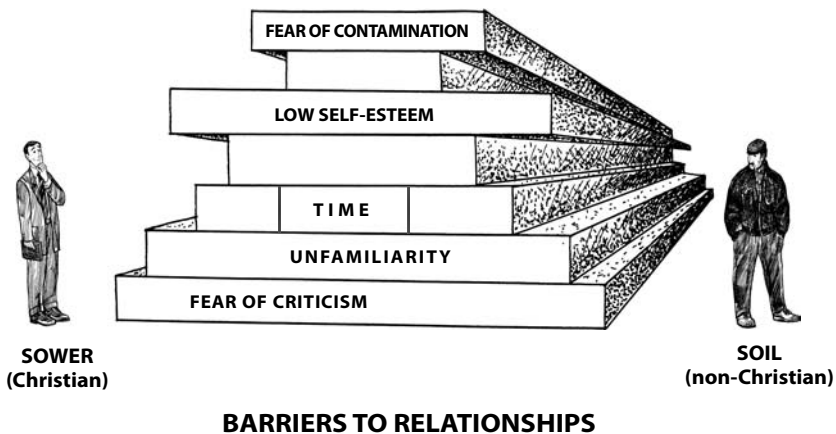


Exercise 2

Think about your non-Christian friends or other non-Christians around you. What are some of the sins that they are entangled in? What is your attitude toward those sins? How do you respond to these people when they are with you?

II. Barriers To Relationships

Relationships are a vital part in effective sowing, especially where the soil is not receptive. Yet many sowers find it difficult to build close relationships with non-Christians. What are some of these barriers to relationships?



A. Fear of Contamination

A number of young people in a church were asked how many non-Christian friends they had. The answer each gave was, “none.” They further explained that they were afraid of having contact with non-Christians because they might become like them. They were afraid of contamination by the world and therefore stayed away from these people. In the process, however, they also were not able to sow the seed or to see any non-Christians come to Christ.



Question 3. How many non-Christian relationships do you have? Write their names in the space below.

Does the believer need to fear contamination by the world? Or should he be relating to win these men to Christ? We believe the Christian can maintain his walk with Christ, and his Christian commitment while at the same time relating to non-Christians. This barrier can be overcome. A full discussion of this issue is in Appendix C, *The Believer's Relationship to the Non-Christian and World Environment*.

Read Appendix C now and then answer the following questions.



Question 4. According to this article what is the Biblical definition of the term “world” in relation to evangelism?



Question 5. What are some things that people use to replace God as the center of their lives?



Question 6. What three things must we do to be effective in the world, but not of it?



Question 7. What are four principles from the life of Jesus and of Paul that we can use to influence non-Christians.



Question 8. Explain the principle of acceptance.



Question 9. What is the objective of accommodation? What about the dangers?



Question 10. How should we encounter non-Christians?



Question 11. Think back over the last two weeks. List the names of non-Christians and how you served them.



Exercise 3

Evaluate your present life style, using these questions:

1. Does my present life style attract or repel non-Christians?
2. Do non-Christians have to accommodate me, or am I free to accommodate them?
3. Do non-Christians feel comfortable around me? If not, why not?
4. Do I accept non-Christians or am I so repelled by their sins that I ignore or separate myself from a relationship with them?
5. Am I afraid I will be influenced by non-Christians and therefore stay away from them? If I am walking close to Jesus and obeying the Scriptures, will they be able to influence me?

The principles covered in Appendix C are key to Christians influencing the non-Christian world. Spend time in prayer over them. Evaluate your daily life. Ask God to show you how you can develop relationships with non-Christians.

B. Unfamiliarity

Many of us have grown up in a Christian environment. Our friends have been Christians and with us in the church as long as we can remember. Non-Christian contemporaries have not understood us and have often rejected us. Their lifestyles and habits are not attractive to us. So we have lived with the non-Christian environment kept at a distance. We talk briefly to non-Christians but we do not invite them into our homes. Nor are they inviting us.

This distance between us means that we do not feel comfortable in their presence. If we went to their home we would feel unfamiliar and uncertain about how to relate. This unfamiliarity is a barrier which causes the sower to be ineffective in sowing the seed.

This barrier, however, can be overcome. Any sower can learn to become familiar and secure in relationships with non-Christians. They are also people who have similar needs. We were lost; they are lost. We desired hope for the future. They want hope. We lived with guilty consciences. They live with guilty consciences. We cry and weep when someone dies. They miss them forever. We had a need for Christ. They have a need for Christ.



Exercise 4

What do you have in common with your neighbors? Make a list in your notebook.

We are all basically beggars. However we have found the source of bread and He has made us into well-fed, sanctified saints. Now He has asked us to go out and find starving, unsanctified beggars and bring them to Him! If we are out-of-touch and unfamiliar with these beggars, then we must learn how to relate to them again, so that we can carry out the command of the Master.

C. Time

Another barrier to building relationships with non-Christians is that of time. It takes time to establish and maintain a relationship. Often we will not take the time to do this; therefore, no non-Christian relationships are built. Someone has said, “We have time for that which we consider important.” If our desire is to be an effective sower, then we must give time to meeting with some non-Christian friends. This doesn’t just happen. Rather, it takes a willful decision to utilize time in this direction and take it away from some other activity. It may mean reorientating our life so we can include time for non-Christians. This is not easy but it must be done if we are to succeed as an effective sower.



Question 12. Are you spending enough time with non-Christians? How can you make more time to develop relationships with them?

D. Low Self-Esteem

Some of us have a tendency to view ourselves as very insignificant and small in comparison to non-Christians. We belittle ourselves and think that we have nothing to offer them, or that they look down on us and won't be interested in us and what we say.

The children of Israel had this problem once also. Moses sent 12 spies into Canaan to spy out the land and gather intelligence for the upcoming invasion. When they returned ten of them gave a bad report and only Caleb and Joshua encouraged the people to move ahead and take the land by faith. The report of the ten showed that they had low self-esteem. They did not see themselves as they really were — God-led, God-empowered people.

But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.' And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, 'The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them' (Numbers 13:31-33).

They looked at themselves as grasshoppers. But they also imagined that the giants looked at them as grasshoppers. "...we looked the same to them." How did these ten men know that they looked like grasshoppers to these people? Did they talk with the giants and ask them? No. They only imagined what the giants were thinking. What do you think the giants were really thinking? Forty years later the next generation was ready to move in. Two more spies were sent in. They found out what giants really think when God opposes them.

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, 'I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below' (Joshua 2:8-11).

Notice that this fear and lack of courage which was still existing 40 years after the Israelites left Egypt, began shortly after they came out of Egypt. That's how the giants really thought! They were afraid of the grasshoppers. They had no courage to fight against them. Rather they went behind their walls and cowered there waiting to see what the grasshoppers would do. Do you look at yourself as a grasshopper in comparison to the non-Christians around you? They are probably feeling the same, and are afraid to come in contact with you. They sense God is on your side and that you have answers, direction, and power in life. Therefore, move in boldly, build a relationship and don't shrink back because you imagine that the non-Christian thinks poorly of you.



Question 13. Why should we not be afraid of non-Christians? Read Deut. 31:6.

E. Fear of What Others Will Think

Sometimes we do not move out and develop these relationships because we are afraid other Christians will criticize us for that. As soon as a non-Christian becomes our friend and we spend time with him, others may think we are departing from the faith or falling back into sin. Rather than be criticized, we hold back from those relationships.

The issue is, however, penetration with the gospel as a sower. Christ said to preach the gospel to every creature. If we don't have relationships with any of these creatures, then how do we fulfill the command of Christ? We must relate if we care to sow successfully.

Jesus is my example for this. He not only preached the gospel, but also got deeply involved in the lives of people. When Levi was converted, Jesus went to meet his non-Christian friends. What was the religious community's reaction to that?

As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners' (Mark 2: 14-17).

Jesus was not concerned about criticism because His goal was to reach people with the gospel. To do that He needed to relate. He needed to go to their homes and eat dinner with them. He knew He would have to associate with them. He knew He might get criticized, but He did it anyway. He was obedient to God's will and that will was to call sinners to repentance.



Exercise 5

Record your answers to the following questions in your notebook.

1. Where do you find the “sinners” today in your city or town?
2. Are the Christians out there where the sinners are, to call them to repentance?
3. Are you willing to go out there to call them to repentance?
4. As you consider these barriers to non-Christian relationships, which one(s) poses the greatest problem for you? Which one(s) of the following reasons holds you back the most from developing non-Christian relationships?
 - a. Fear of Contamination
 - b. Not Knowing How to Relate
 - c. No Time to Give
 - d. Low Self-Esteem
 - e. Fear of What Others Will Think
5. Is there anything you can do or change to eliminate this barrier to building non-Christian friendships?

III. Principles Of Relating

We have many opportunities for contact with non-Christians. We meet them in our classroom, at the factory, in our apartment buildings, on the street, and in the stores. These initial encounters either give us further opportunities for contact, or close that door to us.

In the following article, Mr. Paul Little, an effective sower among university students in the United States, gives us some principles for relating initially to these non-Christian people. Applying these principles will allow the person to know where we stand, yet it will keep the door open for further contact:

Anyone who moves out of his secure environment and gets involved in the real world is sure to run into difficult situations. We need to consider beforehand how we may cope with some of them, working out principles that apply in varying circumstances.

A. Use The Casual Touch

How, for instance, should we react to profanity or filth? Probably a lot of us tend to display a holier-than-thou attitude by critical remarks or complete silence. When we react like this to non-Christians who are only doing what comes naturally to them, we lose many potential friendships.

If we grow judgmental whenever a person swears, he'll start dredging up every profane expression he's heard in the last two years and rediscover it in our hearing, just to make us angry. We've intensified the problem we were trying to solve. On the other hand, some casual humor can do wonders for a situation like this. After someone has unwound his long string of profanity, we may comment half-jokingly but so he knows we're dead serious, 'Say, your vocabulary's sort of limited isn't it?' We don't have to condemn him outright to get the point across. Once he realizes that we don't appreciate this part of his speech, he may even make a positive effort to modify his vocabulary. As we are gaining his respect instead of provoking his hatred, the problem can gradually solve itself.

Voicing our disapproval of profane language without destroying our relationship or closing a door of friendship, is a challenge of relating properly to a non-Christian. The same challenge applies to the jokes non-Christians tell.

B. Have A Good Joke Ready

We can react to profane stories in a similar way. If possible, of course, it's best to be absent when they are known to be the subject of conversation. But sometimes we're caught and can't excuse ourselves. Then our best course is positive preparation. Be alert for the first lull in conversation and then jump in with a good clean story. Tell one so funny that people can't help laughing. Some people think I'm joking when I say this, but I'm not. I'm convinced that every Christian should always have five excellent jokes at his disposal. Well-chosen, well-timed humor can reset the whole tone of a conversation; it can carry you over a seemingly impossible hurdle. Like remembering names, the only way to remember a joke is to use it immediately after you hear it. If necessary, write it down afterwards. Then tell it whenever you get a chance.

A foul-mouthed person doesn't need to be told that he's crawling in the garbage pit of life. He knows he is. But he doesn't think he could enjoy life without his garbage pit. He probably thinks that Christians have to give up their sense of humor when they become Christians. He may have identified the Christian as someone who can't have any fun. Our first job is to correct his negative impression of Christianity. We want him to realize that we still have our sense of humor — even though we don't indulge in his kind of fun — and that Christian enjoyments are on a higher, more lasting plane than his.

By the grace of God we can, without compromising ourselves or condoning his words, respond with love to the one who swears or tells profane stories. It will take more than a hollow protest about our happiness in the Lord or a big front about what a ball the Christian life is. If we are natural and spontaneous in everyday situations, many of which have an amusing aspect, we can show our friend genuine, wholesome humor and the delight that we enjoy in fellowship with Jesus Christ. If we are prepared to overlook his words and demonstrate that we love him despite them, we can gain a friend.



Exercise 6

What should your response be? How can you let your friends know that you don't appreciate certain vocabulary or actions without offending them and giving off a holier-than-thou attitude?

As you consider relating to non-Christians, you may think you are already so isolated from the non-Christians around you, that you cannot now begin relating to them. Little addresses this issue and encourages us on.

C. Begin Now - Where You Are

Right now someone's probably thinking, 'This sounds good, but I would need to start over, go some place where no one knows me, then I could make a go of it. But the mess I've made — I can't redeem this situation!' If you feel this way, be encouraged. No situation has to be a lost cause. On your part, things can be transformed.

I know a secretary who resolved before God to make a new beginning right where she was. She'd been working in the same office for eight and a half years. And every noon hour while the rest of the office staff ate lunch together, she had gone off by herself to eat and to read her Bible. She didn't want to be defiled by the world of her co-workers' repulsive language and jokes. Finally, though, she began to realize that distance could never promote opportunities to witness about Jesus Christ. Motivated by love for the office staff, she abandoned her separateness and began to mix with them. Six months after her first nervous but courageous attempt, she joyfully told me that her office had received her openly. In those six months she had had more opportunities to share the good news with them than in all the previous years. You see, if we launch out in faith with a new loving attitude, we can make a new start where we are, no matter how bad the situation has been.



Question 14. When is the best time to begin relating to non-Christians? And where should you begin?

Little continues his discussion with another issue of relating to non-Christian friends. The issue is: How openly should we show our Christian behavior when we are with non-Christians? How do some of our habits affect them? Do they create distance between us and our non-Christian friends, or do they bring us closer together?

D. Giving Thanks In Public

Another secondary issue that deserves some thought is the correctness of asking a blessing before a meal. When we're alone in a restaurant, we shouldn't have any question about bowing our head to give thanks. But as considerate Christians, what should we do when we're out with someone who doesn't know us well? When the awkward moment arrives our natural reaction is to want to conceal our action; we don't want our companion to realize what we're doing. We fumble with our napkin or clear our throat, and hope for two seconds of silence so we can pray and start eating before the meal gets cold. The waitress if she's looking must wonder if we have a headache, want to smell the food, or just happen to have a peculiar habit. Giving thanks can be embarrassing! One of my Christian friends brought me up short the day we dined together. 'Shall we scratch our eyebrows?' he asked casually and caught me with my hand in mid-air. We had a good laugh, but I learned my lesson too. Before then I'd never realized how enslaved I was to this diversionary tactic.

Sometimes, unintentionally, our way of saying grace offends the other person. Our behavior implies, 'You're a pagan.' To avoid creating this barrier, which could deter our friend from considering the claims of Jesus Christ, it may be best for us to keep our eyes open while we thank God for our food. No verse of Scripture dictates, 'You shalt say grace with your eyes closed.' Since thanksgiving is your purpose of saying grace, our motivation matters more than whether our eyes are opened or closed. Why am I unwilling to bow my head and give thanks? If I'm ashamed of acknowledging Jesus Christ, I need to become willing in my heart to kneel down publicly on my knees and give thanks. But if I'm truly thankful, but don't want to erect an artificial barrier between my friend and the Lord, that's another matter. Each of us knows his own motives before God. Some of us probably think that praying before a meal is a special opportunity to witness by our example. It may be that — but there are dangers in this approach, especially if it will offend a dining mate.

Praying before a meal is still acceptable in many cultures, like religion in general. In restaurants we often see little cards that list three prayers — for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. My bowed head won't tell a person much about Jesus Christ. Even if he concludes that I'm religious, he won't learn anything about my Lord. When it comes to effectiveness in witnessing, praying before the meal can be as unhelpful as our stating, 'I don't do such-and-such because I'm a Christian.'

As we determine how we will behave in this matter, we need to be aware that differences in our behavior may be called for because of the location where we eat. If we are in his home, we should follow his custom, not bring in ours. If in a neutral location like a restaurant, or if we are in our home, another way of behavior is appropriate.

With all these difficulties, how should we thank God for our food? In a restaurant it's best to casually say to our companion, 'It's my custom to give thanks for my food. Would you like me to pray for both of us?' Including him in the invitation implies our assumption that he prays before eating; he'll appreciate this implication. By our invitation we also convey the fact that we know



and speak to the living God. Later we may be able to specifically ask our friend about his relationship to Jesus Christ.

The situation is a bit different in a home. In our own homes there's no question about what to do. A simple word of explanation like, 'It's our custom to give thanks for our food before we eat, so John is going to pray now,' will prepare the guest. If our guest isn't a religious person, and we don't explain our custom, he may be nervous because of his uncertainty about our ritual; it's only courteous to tell him what we're about to do. The same principle applies if we have Bible reading and prayer after dinner. We don't need to apologize for our custom or alter it because we have a guest. But considering his sense of strangeness, we should keep him informed about what's happening. When, on the other hand, we are the guest and our host doesn't pray at his meal, it would be impolite to put him on the spot by praying ourselves. His resentment of our rudeness in this minor issue might block a later discussion of more basic issues.



Question 15. How important is it to you to pray before you eat? Is it important enough to make an issue out of, or do you feel that at certain times it can be omitted? Explain.

E. Give Specific Invitations

A broader aspect of our social involvement with non-Christians is the whole question of inviting them into our homes. We often think, 'I don't have anything in common with a non-Christian,' then we're stopped. If we share no interests at all, why get together and have a boring time? We're afraid he'll be bored if he joins us in some activity we like; and we dread being embarrassed if we go somewhere with him. This dilemma is easily solved by planning what we'll do together beforehand. Instead of just saying, 'Can you come over Tuesday evening?' or 'I'm having several of the students home for the weekend. Can you come?' we can specifically suggest to listen to music or to go skiing. This solves the 'What shall we do?' problem at the beginning. The person who's being invited knows what to expect; if he's not interested he can decline the invitation without embarrassing anyone. But more often than not, he'll want to come.

We also need to think about secondary issues that arise in our relationships with a group. Many of our group associations are by necessity rather than preference. Since we don't choose the other members of the group, they seldom consider our individual behavior as a personal affront to them. Individual feelings aren't hurt as easily in a group as they are in a personal relationship. In the group, therefore, we can do things that on a personal basis we would hesitate to do for fear of condemning the friend.



Question 16. What are some things that you could specifically invite a non-Christian to your home to do?

Little now addresses the issue of how to enter a new situation and identify with Christ there.

F. Don't Necessarily Follow The Crowd

Going to college throws many of us into group life with non-Christians twenty-four hours a day. Most fellows can also anticipate a time of military service. Before we enter any group situation, but especially one of considerable duration, it's good to determine exactly what habits we're going to keep as Christians, and then keep them from the beginning. If you usually give thanks for your food, remember to pray at the first meal. If you have a daily quiet time, include it in your schedule the very first day. If you don't establish your pattern at the outset, each day you put it off will make it harder to begin.

Groups often decide to do something together as a body. As Christians, what should we do if we don't have the liberty to participate in a proposed activity? We're members of a democratic group that has reached a majority decision. But if we go along with the gang we'll be unfaithful to our Lord. Whenever this is our dilemma, whether the issue is inherent in Christianity or less directly related, we need to excuse ourselves graciously. We can explain to our companions without hesitating, 'I won't try to legislate for you, but personally I can't go along with that; you'd better count me out.' Being straightforward, honest, and not judgmental will be highly respected. In private conversations they'll admit their admiration; they wish they had enough courage and conviction to take a stand too. So they respect us because we're inner-directed instead of other-directed. They will also respect us if, while we have the courage of our convictions, we don't arbitrarily legislate for them.



Question 17. What are some ways that you can graciously get out of doing something that would compromise your relationship with Christ?

Little concludes this discussion by emphasizing the importance of love as our inner motive.

G. Express Love

In all of these secondary issues, a little advance thought now can prevent much embarrassment. We aren't devising tricks to get at people with the gospel indirectly. We're seeking ways of expressing the love of Jesus Christ. Because the Lord has come into our lives our capacity to love is deepening. His love is being enlarged in our hearts to be poured out for others. We love people for themselves, as total men rather than abstractions. If Jesus Christ is a personal reality to us, His love will reach out through us to some very unlovely people whom everyone else despises; He gives us the capacity to love them as people.

As one expression of our love for them, we want to communicate the gospel. But no friendship should depend on how the other person responds to the gospel. Unfortunately, many non-Christians today are suspicious of all Christians because of a previous contact with a friendly religious person who had ulterior motives. Some non-Christians refuse to listen to a single word about our Lord until they're sure we'll be their friends regardless — even if they reject Jesus Christ. We must love each person for himself.

None of us can play God for another person. We can't determine the stage of the Holy Spirit's work in his life. It may take several years for him to come to the Savior and a long period of disinterest may precede his decision. For Christ's sake we must love him nonetheless. It is the Holy Spirit, not we, who converts an individual. We, the privileged ambassadors for Jesus Christ, can communicate a verbal message; we can demonstrate through our personality and life what the grace of Jesus Christ can accomplish. But we must not go around converting, taking credit for the Holy Spirit's work and saying, 'I have seven! You have only got three.' Such stupid and ridiculous spiritual pride is nauseating. We have the privilege of being ambassadors. We ought to anticipate the possibility of reaping, of being the last person in a long process, of inviting a person to receive the Savior. But let us never naively think that we have converted a soul and brought him to Jesus Christ. When someone says, 'I've converted twelve people!' I think I know what he means. But I shake my head in amazement and wish that he knew a little more about what he meant. No one calls Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

And yet the tremendous privilege of presenting Jesus Christ is ours. We are His only representatives in a lost world that yearns for reality.¹

¹ Paul Little, *How To Give Away Your Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977) 47-53.

These principles apply to our contacts with non-Christians. One of the largest groups of non-Christians with which we have contact is our neighbors. Many of you live in large apartment complexes with thousands of potential contacts. As commissioned sowers, we must figure out how to share the gospel effectively with these people.

Dr. Joseph Aldrich, former pastor and now president of Multnomah School of the Bible, has written a book on evangelism for churches called, *Life-Style Evangelism*. His chapter on, “Your Nonbelieving Neighbor”, although written for an American audience, does give helpful insight and ideas on penetrating a neighborhood. It should stimulate you with applicative ideas for your own situation. You will find this chapter in Appendix B, where portions of Dr. Aldrich’s book are printed.

Read Chapter 10 in Dr. Aldrich’s book now.



Exercise 7

What kind of a vision do you have for your neighborhood? Think it through, pray about it and write it out in your notebook.



Question 18. How can you find out which of your neighbors might be spiritually open to the gospel?



Exercise 8

Make a list of twelve different things you can do to get to know your neighbors better. Make sure that you include items to help you get started in a new relationship, conversation topics, and personal touches (such as some homemade cookies). Now use at least three of those ideas every week for the next month. Bring your list of ideas to the next seminar and be prepared to give an account every week about how you have been reaching out to your neighbors.



Exercise 9

Make a list of non-Christians. Using the list that Dr. Aldrich provided and your own ideas, write the names of three non-Christians that you know, then write down at least two activities beside each name. Use this list as you seek to reach out to these people.



Exercise 10

Make a list of the five biggest holidays in your area. Beside each holiday write some activities that you can plan for that day. Do you have any special traditions (that are not religiously oriented) that you could share with your friends?

Make a list of the seasons. What are some seasonal activities that you could enjoy with friends?

Bring your lists to the next seminar and be prepared to share them with the others in your group and to get fresh ideas from them.



Exercise 11

Write the titles of two good Christian books that you would consider giving to a non-Christian that are available to you right now.



Question 19. What is a harvest vehicle?



Exercise 12

What are some caricatures of the gospel in your area? Make a list of them, then make suggestions about how you can dispel that caricature.



Question 20. When do you need to be prepared to share the gospel?

IV. Conclusion

Are you praying for the conversion of your neighbors and neighborhood? Have you ever invited a neighbor to your home for a social evening? Do you believe you could utilize your home more as a center for evangelism? These are the questions before you now. Do you have a burden for the lost who are around you every day, and if you do, what are you doing about it?

This is a time to really evaluate what you can do. Talk it over with your family because they will have to be involved too if you are going to be effective in using your home. Pray together about what God wants you to do.



Practical Assignment 2 (continued): Witness

Share the *Four Spiritual Laws* with at least two more unbelievers this week.



Practical Assignment 3 (continued): Share Your Testimony

Share your testimony with another unbeliever this week. Remember that you are to share it with at least 5 unbelievers before the end of the course.



Practical Assignment 4: Develop a Friendship

Establish a relationship with a non-Christian. This week, as God leads, choose a non-Christian you know, and begin to make specific applications in your relationship with him. Use your answers from Exercise 2 as a foundation for the changes that you need to put into practice with this non-Christian. Write down three things that you need to change and how you are going to change them. Then spend time with this person (more than one hour), and come back and record your successes or failures. Be prepared to share about this at the next seminar, as well using your report to show the church leader who is verifying your assignments.



Answers to Questions

Question 1

Soil can be changed from hard to receptive through personal relationships.

Question 2

If we are truly transparent in our relationships with non-Christians they will realize that we are not perfect, but that we also are willing to admit our imperfections and change. People sense very quickly when we are covering up. They are looking for honesty in real people, like where they live — not saints in a church to idolize.

Question 3

Your answer.

Question 4

In relation to evangelism the term “world” means “the individuals who are separated from and who are against God, and the environment that is created by them.”

Question 5

Listen to the lyrics of modern or older music or watch a movie or the news and you will soon see that many people have replaced God with money, cars, beauty, power, strength, etc.

Question 6

1. Maintain a close relationship with Jesus
2. Maintain a close relationship with God’s Word
3. Take the offensive and influence non-Christians, rather than letting them influence us

Question 7

1. The principle of acceptance
2. The principle of accommodation
3. The principle of encounter
4. The principle of service

Question 8

The principle of acceptance means that we as Christians need to accept non-Christians, rather than pushing them away and equating them with their sins, we need to accept them as people while rejecting their sin.

Question 9

The objective of accommodation is to put non-Christians at ease so that we can openly bring Jesus Christ to them. The main danger of accommodation that we need to be aware of is that we must not accommodate people if it means compromising our relationship with Christ.

Question 10

With godliness and the gospel.

Question 11

Your answer. What was their reaction to your service? Was it merely a returned favor or was it completely unexpected and undeserved, without expected return? Which type of service do you think would be more likely to draw a person to Christ?

Question 12

Your answer.

Question 13

Because the Lord is with us.

Question 14

Now is the best time. Immediately. And you should begin with those non-Christians whom you have known the longest. Co-workers, family, neighbors, seek to build relationships with them all.

Question 15

You need to be aware of your actions and of the person that you are dining with. If your praying before you eat, puts them on the spot or makes them feel awkward, you may want to think about approaching it a little differently so that you do not put them off of Christianity by your insensitivity to their knowledge and understanding of religion.

Question 16

You might invite non-Christian friends over to play some games or do some baking or for a picnic or a walk in the park/forest, maybe to go fishing. Even if it is an activity that you don't often, people are still likely to find it enjoyable. Invite some friends over for shashlik.

Question 17

You might say something like what Little has suggested, but most of you will be in situations where it is easy to back out. However, what happens when a coworker begins to pressure you to drink at a party? How can you graciously step out of the situation without offending your host and other coworkers, but while keeping your convictions? You might say something like, "I've made a commitment not to drink, so I won't be drinking anything tonight." If they continue to press you, continue to smile and be gracious. Don't get into an argument, but don't be afraid of the opportunity to give more details of why you don't drink if there is someone who shows sincere interest. A simple way to explain it is just to say that you have made a pledge to God that you will not drink, as did many people in the Bible.

Question 18

By building relationships with them.

Question 19

A "harvest vehicle" is any event or activity in which the gospel is clearly presented and a decision asked for.

Question 20

Right now. Every day.



Answers to Exercises

Exercise 1

Your answer should include the following ideas. If you have an answer that is very different that is ok, but be prepared to explain yourself at the next seminar.

Yes, it is possible for a person to change from hard soil to good soil. It may not happen overnight, often there are a variety of circumstances that soften a person so that he becomes good soil, but it does happen every day. God is at work in people's lives even when the soil seems impenetrable.

Exercise 2

Your answer. You might include such things as drunkenness, immorality, lying The question is do these people feel your love despite their sins, or do they feel censured (judged) every time you are around because you are always preaching against their sins?

Exercise 3

Your answer.

Exercise 4

Remember to include things like your environment: the same apartment building, the same grumpy neighbors, the same potato bugs, or the dog that always barks until half past three in the morning. Also include emotions, and other situations, like weddings, births, deaths, etc.

Exercise 5

Your answer.

Exercise 6

Your answer. Remember that love is a key word here.

Exercise 7

If you don't feel you have a vision for them, re-read your assignment in Appendix B and pray and ask God how you begin to feel a burden for your neighborhood. Maybe even take an hour or two to walk through your neighborhood and pray for the different families, whether you know who lives there or not.

Exercise 8

Your answer.

Exercise 9

Your answer.

Exercise 10

Your answer.

Exercise 11

Check with your pastor or other Christians who might have access to more Christian books if you need ideas.

Exercise 12

Your answer. Try to look at the people from your church with the critical eye of an outsider. A caricature might be someone who hates them because they have sinned. Look at the suggestions from Aldrich and put yourself in their shoes. Be prepared to share at the next seminar.