

Reaching Seekers
Isaiah 42:1-9; Acts 10:34-43
January 9, 2011

In 1995, Newsweek ran an article called, “The Search for the Sacred.” In 2000, David Meyers wrote a book entitled, The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty. As far back as 1660, Thomas Watson, in speaking about the Beatitudes, talked about the blessedness of those who hunger for things spiritual. It is an ongoing struggle with mankind, and it continues today – this desire to have the spiritual as an integral part of our lives. And if you go into any bookstore’s section on spirituality you will see that this hunger can lead people down some very strange paths.

The challenge for Christians is reaching these seekers with the good news of Jesus Christ. In our passage from Acts 10, we find Peter confronted with a seeker. Through a remarkable sequence of events, God led Peter to the home of Cornelius, the Roman Centurian. Earlier in the chapter, we are introduced to Cornelius as a God-fearing man, who prayed and gave to the poor. However, as a good Roman, he was likely raised to believe in the traditional Roman gods. Yet, during this time in history, there was widespread disillusion with traditional beliefs. As a centurian he would have been forced to worship the Roman emperor as a god; yet, he seemed to be drawn to the God of Israel. Although, if you were to pin him down as to why, I’ll bet he couldn’t give a precise answer. That’s the way it is with many seekers. They don’t know exactly what they’re looking for – they just know what has been presented to them up to that point isn’t sufficient to fill the God-shaped hole in their life.

As you think about people in your life who you may be able to identify as seeking; I want to share with you a strategy for how to communicate with them based on Peter’s message to Cornelius and his family.

In Peter’s message we find four (4) strategies for telling seekers about Christ.

I.

Peter started by admitting his own changing attitude toward seekers. In Acts 10:34-35, Peter said, *I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.* God had to give Peter a vision to teach him that lost people such as Cornelius mattered to God. You and I must remember that it is not only the righteous that matter to God, but God also longs for those who are misguided and broken in the world. He calls us, just as he calls Peter, not to condemn them (for we are not their judges), but to lead them to Christ.

II.

Next, Peter built a bridge of commonality between him and Cornelius' family. He did this by describing Jesus as "the Lord of All." This title doesn't occur in the Jewish Scriptures, but it was a common title for a pagan deity in that day. Cornelius would have probably used that title as he declared his loyalty to Caesar. By utilizing this common phrase, Peter built a language bridge. This was nothing new as a strategy. Jesus did it all the time as he taught using parables containing images of everyday things. The Wesleys who founded the Methodist movement wrote beautifully theological lyrics and set them to the tunes of well-known bar songs. You must find a way to build a bridge between the person you are talking to and Christ. You can only do this by knowing them well.

III.

In verses 36 & 37 we see that Peter began teaching at the level of knowledge possessed by Cornelius. We hear him using the phrase, "you know..." as he started where Cornelius was in his understanding of who Jesus was.

Far too often we assume far more than seekers actually know. We refer to biblical characters like *David* or to concepts like the *Roman Road of Salvation*. We assume that people know what we mean when we use terms like *grace*, *sin* and *justification*. Peter's example challenges us to begin where the seeker *is*, not necessarily where we think they should be. We can't just assume because some people describe America as a Christian nation that all Americans know a lot about Christianity. They don't!

IV.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, Peter focused on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, Peter made the most important thing, the most important thing. He didn't speculate or engage in philosophical discussions. He didn't offer arguments for the existence of God. He simply bore witness to what he had seen in the person of Jesus.

Many times we hesitate to share with the seekers in our lives because we think our job is to persuade them to believe. I want to remind you that your role is only to be a witness who testifies to Christ and how you have seen him work in your life. You are not an attorney who is trying to persuade, or a salesman trying to close a deal. You just witness and let the Holy Spirit close the deal.

I want to close by asking you a question that carries a mission in the answer. Who do you know that needs to hear about Christ?

Peter gives you a great example to follow for how to effectively communicate the Good News of Christ to them, no matter what their age or place in life. Before he left, Jesus gave us a job to do.

And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

We best be about doing it.