

# Communicating the Gospel in a Secular Setting

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## A Biblical Perspective

In Matthew 28:19 (NIV) Jesus says, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nation.” As we search the Scriptures, we see Jesus going where the people are and meeting them where they hurt. His caring for the masses was recorded in Matthew 9:36 (NIV), “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them.” Even though the crowds were great, he had time for individuals. Crowds surrounded Him on the day He went to dinner with Zaccheaus, the tax collector. Jesus took time to get to the real issues of individuals. Jesus’ discourse with the woman at the well, recorded in John 4, showed how He crossed the social and racial barriers of His day to get to the heart of her issues. He looked upon the individual as someone with dignity and value. He looked past the outward appearance and looked at the heart. He saw people for what they could become in Christ.

Our world is full of hurting people who need to know the One who brings hope. Sometimes hurting people come to our churches, but most of the time you find them in secular settings. To have a great impact in our world, we need to go into the secular setting organized and empowered to share the hope of glory Jesus Christ. Organization is placing yourself in the best possible position to be used by the Holy Spirit. Share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the results to God.

## Work of the Holy Spirit

Many proven ideas and methods will be shared through this publication. All of these are worthless without the power, guidance, and work of the Holy Spirit. Before you begin, pray! As you begin, pray! As you continue, pray! Knowing the heart and will of God is most important. God is at work all around us. We need to get in on where He is working. We need to depend on Him to open doors and guide us with the appropriate methods as we reach out to secular society.

Be flexible and sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. After you have prayed and planned, those God-given plans may change. God draws people to Himself through various means. He used a rained-out concert at a shopping plaza to bring a lady into a right relationship with Himself. Summer missionaries were set up to do a performance at an outdoor shopping and entertainment complex. Their early show had approximately 100 in attendance. The second show was expected to draw about 300. Between the shows, dark clouds rolled toward the shopping plaza. The missionaries began to pray for God to hold the storm so that the performance could proceed. The rains came despite their prayers. The group rushed to move the equipment to a dry area. At the same time, a Brazilian lady ran from the other side of the complex to the dry area. She had not been at the first performance, nor had planned to see the second. Due to the storm, she sat next to a summer missionary who was very open and friendly. The two engaged in a conversation about the weather, their homes and their activities. Before the storm ended, the Brazilian lady prayed to receive Christ. The missionaries had planned to use the performance as a means to have with a few hundred. God was working in the life of a Brazilian lady and needed His messenger to share with her. God is at work all around us! We need to be sensitive to His leadership so that we can be available and allow him to work through us.

### Developing Long Term Relationships

All ministries (churches, associations, etc.) need to be seen as part of the local community. Join organizations that will help you be a part of your community such as the Chamber of Commerce, Motel and Hotel Association and the Convention and Visitors Bureau. These will give you credibility and allow you to be treated as a peer and colleague. Networking through these organizations will open many doors and help you develop long-term relationships with individual businesses, as well as the community.

All kinds of venues are available for a Christian witness: shopping malls, entertainment complexes, theme parks, hotels, motels, fairs, special events, racetracks, ballparks, attractions, multi-family housing, and the list can go on and on. Wherever people gather to work and play is an appropriate venue for a Christian witness. What venue is God leading you to be a witness in?

Developing a relationship with management is the key to gaining and keeping a venue. Management wants to know how is your ministry going to benefit their business? What is it going to cost them? What are you hoping to accomplish? Do you have a hidden agenda? Can they trust you? All of these are legitimate questions. These people have been entrusted to run a business. The welfare of their customers, guests, employees, and employer is of utmost importance to them. Their livelihood is at stake.

Design the ministry so that it will benefit the management, meet needs, and give an opportunity to share Christ's love. Seek to gain an understanding of management goals, and offer to help meet these through the services you can provide. Be service-oriented! Jesus said in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Earn the right to be heard, do not be demanding. Be willing to pay your way!

Call to set an appointment with a manager several months before the proposed ministry is to take place. Submit a business proposal! In the proposal tell whom you represent, what services you offer and when you would like to offer them. Avoid churchy language in your proposal. Be honest, but in the language they will understand. Be specific, but leave room for negotiating. Allow them to share concerns as well as ideas. Liability is a major concern in the world we live in today. How are you handling this matter? Many times, management will bring up concerns about liability. Your presentation needs to be very professional!

Make sure the ministry project is well done! Concentrate on quality instead of quantity! Take care of the details, even the small ones! If the project is well done, it will have a chance to grow. Gain the confidence of management. Help them to see you as someone they can call a friend-someone who cares about them, their employees, and guests. When a need arises, they will call you.

A few years ago, the marketing director of a shopping plaza was really impressed with the family entertainment that was provided by the local Baptist association during the summer. She was working on a major project for Christmas with the Chamber of Commerce. Needing ideas and volunteers, she invited the Baptist association to take part. The Chamber of Commerce project lasted only a year, but the Nativity, which the Association provided, has continued.

Remember to say, "Thank-you!" After every ministry project, send a gift or thank-you card. If the ministry project is continuous, find appropriate times to say, "Thank-you." Special occasions, such as Christmas, are great times to send a present or card. Special times provide an opportunity for you to develop the relationship, as well as share Christ.

Developing long-term relationships will help the ministry grow, be accepted as part of the community or industry, and reap great rewards for the kingdom. Managers will feel comfortable in giving you a reference, which will help open new venues.

### Sharing the Good News

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever-but we live in a changing world. The heart of the message is the same, but the methods, or the packaging of the message, will change according to your audience, location, and season of the year.

Know your audience! Have a general knowledge of their interests and needs. For instance, senior adults can be reached through blood pressure tests, a cup of cold water on a hot day, or a cool place to rest. Teenagers can be reached through sports clinics, Christian rock concerts, and beaded salvation bracelets. If internationals are present, provide literature in their language.

Many times, location will dictate the kind of ministry you will offer. Pedestrian traffic flow and control are major considerations at a mall, boardwalk, and at special events. Some venues are themed, which will assist you in developing the appropriate entertainment. Try to fit the ministry into the context of the venue. If the venue has a 50s theme, use 50s style music and costumes in your presentation. Remember that you want to benefit management!

Take advantage of the season! Seasonal ministry is normally welcomed with open arms. Many venues are open at Christmas time, even the difficult ones. The Nativity, Christmas caroling, and offering Christmas cheer are welcomed in secular settings. Worship services at Easter are welcomed in hotels and attractions. Ministering to postal workers and patrons with free soft drinks, and smiling to them on income tax day, are welcomed stress relievers to the post office. Yes, you can even minister in a government setting with the appropriate method. July 4 celebrations are also naturals since Christians, especially Baptists, played a major part in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

In all secular venues where you are sharing, you need to gather a crowd, build bridges, open the door, and share your faith. The crowd may be several thousand or it may only be one. Whatever the case, you want to gather the crowd and keep it so that you can establish a relationship, build a bridge. Open the door by getting to know the individuals in a crowd. The ideal is to plant seeds in a crowd and move to one-on-one sharing with individuals.

A good example of this method is found in a Baptist association's approach using family entertainment. Many attractions and malls enjoy offering guests free entertainment. That particular performance team used music that people recognize from the radio, movies, and local theme parks to attract a crowd. Through the quality performance, they built a bridge-they connected with the audience. Puppets, juggling, fire eating, and creative movement were used in the high-energy performance. The performance transitioned from secular entertainment to sharing about the love of Christ. All of the performance was positive and did not compromise the gospel in any form. An announcement was made as the last number was about to be performed the team wanted to meet the audience and get to know them after it was over. After the last number, the team flooded the audience. Conversations began by finding out where each person was from and what they were doing there. Many times, conversations to a full presentation of the gospel.

Personal witnessing is the key! Performances and other methods help build bridges so that you can share. Many ministries make the mistake of wanting the performance to be

the total message. Church choir musicals have been performed with little effect in the secular setting. Whatever you do, get an ear to hear, build a bridge, open the door, and share your faith!

Building witnessing relationships and sharing your faith can be difficult in a secular setting. Some of the relationships will have time-days, weeks, months, even years to develop. Others will only have the moment. Personal openness, common interests, and a listening ear help build trust in relationships. Be friendly and sincere! Listen to where the person is coming from what do they believe? When you have truly listened, the right to be heard has been earned. Share what Christ has done in your life and what Christ wants to do in each individual's life. Be sensitive to the person and their needs. Recognize that every person is not at the same level of preparedness.

Develop a witnessing vocabulary for people in the secular setting. Churchy words and phrases such as *washed in the blood, are you saved, justification, sanctification, baptism*, etc., are not readily understood by people in the secular setting. If they do have an understanding of them, many times it will not be a Biblical understanding. The following words and phrases are suggested: undeserved love, forgiveness, freed from unbearable burdens, healed, made complete, made whole, weight of the world on my shoulders, joy, fulfillment, second chance, and new lease on life.

## Volunteers

The greatest mission resources are volunteers. People who love the Lord, love people, and have willing hearts are the right people for the job. Some ministries will take special skills or talents, but all will take an on-mission heart. There are times when age or gender makes it inappropriate for them to serve. For instance, one association has a ministry to dancers in men's clubs. Men are not allowed to participate, only women. Prayerwalks during gay festivities are a great ministry, but are inappropriate for children and young teenagers. Volunteers need to be trained for every project. They need to know expectations from the venue as well as the ministry. Training in FAITH, or Evangelism Explosion is helpful for all.

### *Ministry Tools to Consider...*

#### Prayerwalks

All ministry venues should be covered in prayer. Regular prayerwalking in venues may open doors for vendor visitation, and assist in developing relationships. Ask vendors if there is something in their life that they want you to pray for. Very few people turn down prayer.

#### Kids Clubs

Children's programs are very popular with management and parents in hotels, multi-family housing, campgrounds, and, sometimes malls. The program provides a break for parents and relieves pressure from management. A backyard Bible club program has been well received in various locations.

#### Bracelets

A color-beaded bracelet can be used to explain the plan of salvation. Various versions of the salvation bracelet are available. Keep Christ as the focus! Avoid using a black

bead for sin due to racial overtones. Craft items fit well with fairs and festivals. People are attracted to them.

### Face Painting

Free face painting is a hit with the young and old alike in many venues. Develop a chart where people can choose what they want painted. Relate each drawing to the Christian faith. Be creative! Use various drawings, including Christian symbols. With face painting, you have a captive audience.

### Balloon Sculpting

Many stories can be told with balloons. Balloon animals, with a written message, also are a hit.

### Entertainment

Free entertainment is a hit wherever people gather. Puppets, singing, clowning, creative movement, juggling, fire eating, and street drama provide an opportunity to share the gospel in creative ways.

### Fluorescent Paints

Using a black light, a board, and fluorescent paints in a busy marketplace gathers attention. Through drawings and verbal communication, share God's love for each individual.

### Sand Sculptures

Large sculptures have gained a lot of attention at the beach. Sculptures of Jesus calming the storm, the Last Supper, and many other scenes are used to share the gospel.

### Tract Distribution

Professionally designed tracts can be very useful. Tracts can be developed for special events, for promotion of the event, to tell history, to relative information, and to share the gospel. Quality brochures with church information, directions, a map, times of service, etc., are welcomed in hotels, visitor centers, shopping areas, and restaurants. Scripture should be included.

All tracts should be attractive and theologically sound. The focus should be on Christ and what He can do for our lives. Keep positive as much as possible. Separation from God is not positive, but must be addressed.