

Flea Market Ministry

Hugh Cooper

Warning: If you get involved in a ministry at a flea market, there are people who will say such things to you as, “Be practical . . . what do you expect to do with those people anyway?” Or, “Why are you trying to minister in a flea market? You will only see those people one time.” Or, “Don’t you know that you could be spending your time more wisely?”

Well, why would you want to get involved in such a ministry? That’s a good question and there are other such questions which need to be raised about a flea market ministry. Hopefully, we can answer some of these and perhaps raise a few others.

I hope that this will challenge you to get excited and interested in beginning such a ministry in your area!

Why Begin a Flea Market Ministry?

When one begins thinking of starting such a ministry several things must be understood.

The nature of a flea market ministry:

- Seeks to minister to the dealers who are there for a weekend.
- There is a continuing ministry because the people will call on you when illness or death strikes their family.

The people of the flea market:

- The size and duration of a flea market influences who is there and whether dealers stay overnight or come in just for a day.
- Usually multi-ethnic in make-up. Many nationalities will be included which means you will deal with different types of religions and denominations. Some will attend who are not involved in any church. It must be stressed that if you start a flea market ministry, keep it inter-denominational if you want to reach the people.
- Dealers come from a wide age span and economic background. You may have retirees and others who have full-time jobs during the week. You may have farmers to executives to mail carriers to housewives to young people who are in school.

What is Involved in a Flea Market Ministry?

How do you begin?

1. Be sure there is a need.
2. Check with management to secure permission. This must be done before you can have a space or begin a ministry.
3. Find a space or a building in which to meet. You will need to consider weather limitations in selecting your meeting site.
4. Be absolutely sure that you are interested and concerned and can love this type of ministry. You will have to learn how to deal with these people who are dealers. Many have a tendency to be “stand-offish” and hard to get to know. Many of them have nothing to do with a church and don’t care to.

What about having worship or Bible study time together?

1. Remember, Sunday is a very busy day for the dealers. They arrive early and get their booths and spaces set up for the day's business and you must respect this because to them "time is money."
2. Begin promptly when you say you will and also end promptly at the time that has been set. Many of the dealers would not attend if you did not respect their time and understand why they are there.
3. I recommend you begin with prayer requests followed by prayer. Provide a Bible study or message about 20 minutes in length.

What kind of ministry should be done?

This is an important decision and will depend on the response from management. They will let you know whether they want to limit your outreach to the dealers or to include all who frequent the flea market. Everything hinges on management's permission and cooperation because the markets are private property.

The two major types of ministry are:

1. For dealers only
2. A booth or space for an associational-wide outreach for everyone who visits and comes through the market

Several ideas for ministry are

- Bible study
- Worship service
- Puppet shows
- Clowning
- Tract distribution
- Child care
- Day camp or Bible club for children

How do you get people interested and then keep them coming?

- Visitation—you must spend time getting to know people and showing interest in them and their needs.
- Respect people's time—spend a few minutes and keep moving unless they are talkative or have a special need.
- Show them you care—love shown will be returned time and time again.

Some Things to Know about Flea Market Ministry:

- Management must be contacted.
- It takes time to organize, plan, and motivate.
- Be willing to accept and meet people where they are.
- Be clear and open in all of your communication.

- Be ready to deal with a secular environment.
- Be ready for rejection.
- Dress appropriately.
- Be on time in starting and stopping.
- Respect their time.
- Be biblical in your message.
- Learn to adapt.
- Be loving and be prepared to receive love in return.
- Be persistent and plan for the long haul.
- Be yourself.
- Be willing to listen.

Some Things to Avoid in Flea Market Ministry:

- Don't hurry. Take your time.
- Don't nag or get pushy.
- Don't get churchy.
- Don't over-commit yourself.
- Don't be a "know it all."
- Don't be inconsistent.
- Treat everyone the same way.
- Be real.
- Don't discount anyone.
- Be willing to succeed or fail.

The results will depend upon the work, interest, and time that are put into this ministry. But there will be results! We must realize that there are people who have to work during "normal" church meeting times. There are others who have other interests that take them away from church on Sundays. So we must discover new ways of reaching them. We must learn how to deal with and witness to people who are not "just like us." The flea market ministry is one of the ways to do that.

Our opportunity for evangelism is now! It may be gone tomorrow. The fields are "white unto harvest." Will you become a laborer to help gather the harvest in before it is too late? Will you catch a vision of going into the "market places" of this country and be a witness for Christ? I pray that you will!

Adapted from material by Hugh Cooper that originally appeared in the 1987 National Recreation and Resort Ministries Conference notebook. Used by permission