

BUILDING BRIDGES. . .TO THOSE WHO ARE LOST!

Introduction:

In this series about reaching people, many munchies have been shared involving successfully reaching others for Christ. I would urge you to review the past munchies shared. And I would encourage you to make a notebook of all of these and make them available for others, maybe you could even make a copy for some of your special Christian friends who live elsewhere. May the Lord give each one of us vision and passion. But could it be that normally vision and passion comes through a fervent prayer life which opens the soul so the Holy Spirit can work in our hearts in a new way? My prayer for you is that you will be used in a special way for God's glory. Amen!

WE MUST DISCERN THE NEED:

We Need to Work With the Receptive-Responsive People: We must realize that some people are *receptive-responsive people*, and others can become receptive at some time. Those in our circles of influence are the ones most likely to be receptive-responsive, if we have been doing our part.

We must invest our priority-time reaching those who are receptive because: time is short, resources are limited, it follows the biblical example, through laboring to win others we will produce the greatest results. We need to reach out to those who are receptive-responsive: so we can be as fruitful as possible, so we can reach the winnable while they are winnable. Their receptivity may not continue a long period of time.

People Vary In Receptivity at Different Times! Some who may be receptive today may be closed of heart tomorrow. Receptivity varies from person to person, and also from time to time. People change with the passage of time and the change of events. Those who are unreceptive and indifferent can be cultivated. Those who have a hard heart toward God can become soft of heart.

Such changes in receptivity could be referred to as "*Seasons of the soul.*" Just as there is a season to plant and a season to harvest, so there are times in the seasons of people's lives when they are "*ripe to harvest,*" or they become *responsive to the gospel message.* (Consider the woman at the well in John 4:34-38.) The *season of the soul* is a tender time in the heart of the unsaved.

Consider these questions:

- What produces seasons of the soul?
- What makes a person more receptive to God than previously?
- What softens a person who is hardened to the gospel?

Some will be more receptive at times of joy, others at times of sorrow and loss, some at times of special milestones in life. We need to be aware of these times.

Factors that produce Seasons of the Soul!

Super-natural factors that make a person receptive-responsive: 1) The conviction of the Holy Spirit that causes the person to see his sinfulness, lostness, and its result in his life. 2) The convicting power of the Word of God that has been shared. 3) The ministry of the Holy Spirit that brings a person to understand his lost condition and the provision of salvation in Christ. (Tit. 3:5)

Natural factors that make a person more receptive to the Lord.

These produce some of the *seasons of the soul.*

- marriage,
- the birth of a child,
- sickness,
- or death in the family,
- job change, such as being fired,
- financial stress or loss,
- being jailed, or some other crisis,
- moving to a different location,
- experiencing rootlessness,
- birthdays,
- anniversaries,

- special events.

All of these have to do with some shock to the person, some loss or tragedy in life, some special time of joy, celebration, so it can be a dramatic event that changes the way the person views life!

WE MUST DISCERN OUR PART

Receptivity Must Extend to both Message and Messenger! People do reject both at times. Maybe some will reject the message while they accept the messenger. Others may accept the message of the gospel, but reject the messenger. (Consider Matt. 19:21-22; 13:54-47; 1 Cor. 1:23; Rom. 11:9; Matt. 10:14) Many times those who are close to us are also receptive to the gospel, if they see Christ in us, know our love, and are responsive to us personally. If the relationship is positive -- a trust has been built. If a close relationship has been established, we should use that relationship to share the gospel.

We Must Build Bridges to Others -- for Receptivity CAN Be Cultivated: Often it begins by winning the person to ourselves . . . by building the kind of relationships we have already shared. Before people will hear the gospel from your lips, you must establish credibility by winning them to yourself. You must take the initiative to contact them, begin building a friendship if you have not been doing that. Paul clearly taught that Christians should make contact with people for the gospel's sake. (1 Cor. 9:20-23)

Once you win the person to yourself, you must then win a hearing for the message -- the gospel -- the good news of salvation in Christ. You should demonstrate that Christ is meeting your needs. (II Cor. 9:8) You must point out that Christ Jesus is also sufficient to meet their needs. Share with them the sufficiency of Christ by both victorious Christian living and verbal testimony of what Christ has done for you. Be open and transparent with people you are trying to influence for Christ.

- Allow them to see you have problems, burdens just like they do, but God helps you through them. (Phil. 4:19; 4:13)
- Share with them how God is meeting your needs and lifting your burdens.
- Use the Word of God in this process. (Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 2:2; 1:23)
- Expect the Lord to use YOU. (Heb. 11:1-2, 6)
- Trust the Holy Spirit to DO his WORK in the life!

Stair-step the person to Christ!

7. *I repent of my sin, and accept Christ.*
6. *I am willing to be saved.*
5. *I recognize I am reconciled to God through Christ.*
4. *I realize my sin has alienated me from God.*
3. *I realize I am a sinner.*
2. *I know I am responsible to God.*
1. *I know there is a God.*

Consider:

1. Showing people that *they are special to you* is part of building bridges.
2. Building bridges takes time, but there are few things that over the years will bear more fruit.
3. There are many practical ways you can show people they are special. (If such are shared in a class time, write them down, use them.)
4. An excellent time to build bridge, for example, is during times when the person is sick, or there is a death in the family.
5. During times of sorrow, (maybe in midst of marriage problems, difficulties with a child, etc.) people are far more apt to be open to your interest and love shown to them.

6. Building bridges is a continual process. It should become a part of your very life on a daily basis.
7. The closer we are to the Lord (loving Him) the more person-oriented we will become.
8. **We must work at building bridges to our circles of concern:**

- our immediate family,
- close friends,
- business associates,
- and person X who we don't know.
- relatives,
- neighbors,
- acquaintances,

We must build bridges to the whole circle of influence God has given to us!

9. Ask the questions:
 - *How can I touch this person?*
 - *What can I do that will allow the Lord to use me to reach the person for Him?*
 - *How can I build a bridge, make a point of contact?*
 - *How can I converse about the things that will interest him?*