

# **ARM Prison Outreach International**

**"Ministers' Minute" Volume X Number 8**

**"COMMUNICATING OUR FAITH TO OUR WORLD"**

**#3: "What Our World Is Like"**

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**Editor's Note:** This "MM" is an email sermon, the 8th of 2011 --116th overall-- in a series we are sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This is the third message in our current series. It is my prayer that this message by my brother, Larry Farthing, will encourage you and honor God. Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, use it or components of it! May God bless your labors!

-- Rod Farthing, Development Director

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## **ARM QUICK FACT:**

ARM Prison Outreach seeks to respond to each missionary who requests a portable collapsible baptistry. We expect to be sending a number of these overseas toward the end of this year. One mission (or prison) portable baptistry may be sponsored for \$795. Would you challenge your small group, Bible class, or congregation to gather funds for one baptistry? For literature to promote this cause or for more info, please reply to this email or call my number at the bottom. THANKS!

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**"COMMUNICATING OUR FAITH TO OUR WORLD"**

**3: "What Our World Is Like"**

SCRIPTURE: 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Chronicles 12:32

INTRO:

A Christian recently commented: "I've been talking to people about Christ for years, but sharing my faith with people today is a whole lot harder than it used to be."

Another said, "People used to have a lot of respect for the Bible, but that's not the case anymore. When I use Bible verses to back up my beliefs, they just blow it off."

Have you discovered what other Christians have – that people aren't as receptive to the Christian message as they used to be? That people are a lot more resistant to the old, old story of Jesus and His love?

Paul told young Timothy to "*Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season...*" Well, what season is it, and how should we prepare?

In 1 Chronicles 12, we read of a time during the reign of King David when some capable men from the family line of Issachar rose to prominence in Israel. Verse 32 of that 12<sup>th</sup> chapter says that they "*understood the TIMES and knew what Israel should do.*"

I ask you, do we understand our "times"? Do we know what we should do? I have heard evangelism defined as "Taking the Gospel as it is to people as they are." I think we have to determine where people are, and I'm not speaking just geographically. We have to determine where the people of our society are spiritually, morally, and culturally.

I believe reaching people for Christ and His church today is much, much more difficult than it was in the 60's and 70's. Why? Why was there less resistance to the Christian message back then than there is today?

I think, back then, most people accepted the *premises* of the message. The concepts of God, Jesus, the church, Christian morals, etc. were generally accepted as valid. We were communicating a message that most everybody accepted as true. The Christian "worldview" was pretty much taken for granted.

Not so today! What's the attitude today? What is the prevalent worldview? What is our world like? What "*season*" is it?

It seems that

*IT'S THE SEASON OF "PESSIMISM AND ANXIETY."*

The twentieth century began with almost utopian predictions about the future that *Christianity, education, and the industrial revolution* would usher in. But after experiencing World War I, the Depression, the Holocaust, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the present political scene, we are into the twenty-first century with great pessimism and anxiety.

Someone has observed: "When the Boomers (those born from 1946 to 1964) were twenty-something, they were ready to save the world; Busters (their children) feel they are barely able to save themselves." The Gen-Xers (their grandchildren) aren't much concerned about saving anything.

Much of our society today has become very pessimistic about Christianity and the church, due to moral failures of church leaders and bad experiences with churches.

Furthermore,

*IT'S THE SEASON OF "FEAR OF COMMITMENT."*

In 1955, the average age of brides and grooms was twenty-one or less. Today, it's twenty-six or older before they're ready to commit, and half of them really don't commit. Marriages versus divorces are about 50-50 due largely to lack of commitment.

Few "boomers" have been at the same job or with the same company more than four or five years. The loyalty to their employers their fathers felt hardly exists. On the flip side, "Boomer" run companies are more interested in profits than they are in their employees. Profit trumps loyalty.

Generally speaking, people today don't want to make long-term commitments to anything.

Among the new phrases of today is "church shopping," a phrase I first started hearing in the late 80's. People today are very slow about committing to a particular church, and many never do.

Also,

*IT'S THE SEASON OF "LONGING FOR AUTHENTICITY."*

People of today's world are more focused on their idea of "real" than they are on "right and wrong." They don't seek purity from their leaders; they seek a genuineness with which they can identify. They don't seem to care as much about their leaders' morals or personal ethics as they do about their "realism" or transparency.

They've "had it" with hypocritical TV evangelists and other church leaders as well as those they perceive to be "politicians."

They've "had it" with hundreds of advertising messages a day, phone solicitations read from a script, and religious zealots ringing their doorbells.

In addition,

*IT'S THE SEASON OF "DESIRE FOR COMMUNITY."*

Surrounded by computers and emails, cell phones and text messages, and bombarded by electronic options and talking-head TV news reports, people of today's world hunger for what the Bible calls *koinonia* or "fellowship." They want to share their lives and their journey of faith and love, but in today's fast-paced world of faxes, e-mails, and text messages, there's little opportunity to connect meaningfully with other humans. The younger generation is struggling with face to face interaction about like a young fast food cashier struggles to make change when the computers go down.

Then,

*IT'S THE SEASON OF "DISLIKE FOR DOGMATISM."*

Eighty-one percent of today's younger generation (the "Gen-Xers") do not believe that there is such a thing as absolute truth. They don't buy the idea of absolute standards, absolute right, and absolute wrong. They think everything is relative, so when someone contends for what he believes or criticizes some other person's actions or beliefs, they object.

And no wonder! They're getting different, conflicting messages from every direction! They don't know who's really telling them the truth, so they've decided that there must not be such a thing as truth!

People today don't like what comes across to them as preachiness, narrow-mindedness, or intolerance. The favorite Bible verse of today's society is Matthew 7:1 – "*Judge not, or you too will be judged.*" They really don't understand what Jesus was actually saying, but it's the verse that they think fits where they are. They believe that anyone who contends for truth as truth is just being judgmental toward those who reject that truth.

*IT'S THE SEASON OF "INTEREST IN THE ARTS."*

Never has music been so popular, personal, so available, and so high-tech-state-of-the-art. Attention spans are shorter, and communication styles tend to be more right-brained (touchy-feely), nonlinear, and feelings-oriented than ever before. Visually oriented young people who cut their teeth on a TV/VCR/video games remote control don't much want

to slow down and read a serious book or engage in a logical conversation. As a result of this programmed mind-set, church, for most Gen-Xers, is b-o-r-i-n-g-!

### *IT'S THE SEASON OF "DIVERSITY."*

America has always been a "melting pot," but there was a common "Christian" thread that ran through those in the pot. That's not the case anymore. Diversity used to mean Catholic and Protestant, or Methodist and Baptist, or black and white, or Anglo and Latino, or maybe church member and non-church member. Diversity was the reality, but the goal was unity in that diversity. The emphasis was that we are all children of God and Americans.

What does diversity mean today? It means a belief system other than Christian. It means "an alternate life-style." And the goal seems to be that of emphasizing what makes us different and denigrating our status as children of God and our unity as Americans!

We use to be proud of our unity in diversity, and now we just want to be proud of what makes us diverse.

### *IT'S THE SEASON OF "TOLERANCE."*

Tolerance is a combination of patience and strength, but when it is emphasized in a truth vacuum, it becomes the enemy of truth. We live in such a tolerance-worshiping world that few still believe that there is such a thing as truth, let alone listen to a message of truth. That makes the Christian message of the one true God who created us and this world and to whom we're accountable *intolerable*! That makes the message of Christ, who said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,*" intolerable! Our society's love affair with tolerance makes *truth* intolerable!

### CONCLUSION:

Wow! What a world! What *obstacles* we Christian "contenders" and "communicators" face! Or are these *obstacles* really *opportunities*?

In his book, *Taking Truth Next Door*, David Faust suggests that we keep in mind four things as we seek to communicate our faith to our world and points out that the characteristics of our world, while being truly challenges, are not necessarily obstacles, and that we can use them as

opportunities to *"speak the truth in love,"* as Ephesians 4 encourages us to do, and show our world that Christianity really works.

1. *"People are still interested in spirituality, but they are attempting to redefine what spirituality means."* A relationship with God through Christ is the key to ultimate spirituality!

2. *"People are still interested in the Bible, but often they do not know what it really says."* We can show them what it really teaches!

3. *"People still long for meaningful personal relationships, but have lost confidence in traditional family ties."* We can help them experience a true, loving family again through Christ!

4. *"People are increasingly committed to the concept of pluralism (or diversity)."* The fellowship of believers is the ultimate in unity in diversity!

I'm reminded of the story of the two shoe salesmen who were sent to Africa around the turn of the century to sell shoes.

The first said, "Nobody wears shoes here. Send me the money to come home."

The second said, "Nobody wears shoes here! Send me more shoes!"

We have exactly what the world is looking for. We just need to learn how to communicate it to them.

Someone has said, "The darker the darkness, the more effective the smallest light."

Let's turn on some light! Let's be sparks that get fires going!

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"Remain faithful unto death ..." Rev. 2:10B

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Check out our web sites: [www.arm.org](http://www.arm.org) [www.abarc.org](http://www.abarc.org)

In 2010, 71 ABA Bible courses were mailed from ARM every day!