

ARM Prison Outreach International

"Ministers' Minute" Volume X Number 9

"COMMUNICATING OUR FAITH TO OUR WORLD"

#4: "Questions Our World Is Asking"

Editor's Note: This "MM" is an email sermon, the 9th of 2011 --117th overall-- in a series we are sending as an encouragement to Christians around the world. This is the fourth 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

ARM QUICK FACT:

News Flash: ARM's Bible program is currently on a pace of sending *2,300 Bibles* per week to inmates! *Over 80,000* have been sent during the first eight months of this year!!

CURRENT NEED: We are raising funds to FINALLY print ARM's *eighth free Bible course for prisoners and their spouses*. We've had seven courses for years and need to print Denver Sizemore's third volume on "Christian Doctrine."

If you can donate toward this worthy cause, please send your gift of any size to:

**ARM -- ABA 8
3127 Hwy K
Salem, MO 65560**

Thanks!! And may the Lord bless you for caring and sharing!

"COMMUNICATING OUR FAITH TO OUR WORLD"

#4: "Questions Our World Is Asking"

TEXT: 1 Peter 3:15

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

INTRO:

Have you ever noticed what precipitated much of the teaching and testimony of Jesus during His three-year ministry on earth? *He responded to questions people asked.*

As we consider the matter of how to communicate our faith to our world, I think we would do well to note the way Jesus operated.

In his book, *Religion Without Wrappings*, David H. C. Read has a chapter called "Cool Christianity." He refers to Luke 18:35-43, which says:

As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, I want to see," he replied.

Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

Then Mr. Read says:

"We think of Jesus as the preacher and healer who sought people out to help them. Our version of this story would then read: Jesus of Nazareth looked for the blind beggar, went up to him, and said: 'Can I help you?' But this is *not* what happened. There is almost what you might call a cool, casual note in the story. Jesus was passing by. He was interrupted by the beggar's cry. And then he asked what must have seemed an utterly superfluous question: 'What do you want of me?'

Read then says, "The more I think about this story and the others like it in the gospels, the more I question some of our assumptions about Christianity in action. For haven't we been trained to think of the Gospel as an offer of help to men and women, God's approach to us with divine assistance? And isn't the popular idea of the Church that of a community commissioned to press this Gospel on the world? Don't we think of our task as a congregation, and as individual Christians, to go where the need is, saying: 'Can I help you?' Doesn't the very idea of 'mission' suggest reaching out for people, offering help, bringing them something they need? Yet this story, and the whole tenor of the Gospels, could make us wonder if we've got it wrong. When you begin to think about it, is there any recorded instance of Christ approaching anyone with his offer of help? We find him sought out by people

like Nicodemus, by a Roman centurion, by Mary Magdalene, by the Syro-Phoenician woman, by the woman stretching out her hands in the crowd, and by a host of others. But can you think of any instance where he took the lead, intruding himself with an offer of help?" (pp. 95, 96).

I believe that one of the most effective ways of communicating our faith to our world is by listening for its questions. When it asks, we need to be ready with an answer. The world will rarely listen when we take the lead and try to interject God's message before it asks the questions, but if we'll be sensitive and caring, we'll get the opportunity to communicate our faith.

Let me suggest to you some of the questions the world asks that you and I need to listen for and be ready to answer...

First of all,

THE WORLD ASKS PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS.

For centuries, the world has been asking questions like, "Where is the justice?" or "Is there life after death?" or "What is truth?"

And our world is no different. You've friends and fellow workers who ask such questions almost every day, as they deal with life's roller coaster ride – as they try to cope with tragedies, disappointments, failures, stress, losses of all kinds, and other problems.

If you live confidently and contentedly in Christ, I guarantee that you will get the opportunity to share your faith by answering philosophical questions.

Second,

THE WORLD ASKS THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS.

Does it ever! If you haven't heard some of these, you just haven't been listening! Among the theological questions you can hear the world asking is:

- "Does God really exist?"
- "Why is there so much evil in the world?"
- "What is there to live for?"
- "Does God really care?"
- "Why does God allow so many to suffer?"

Jesus dealt with questions like these all the time. So did the apostle Paul. Most of the contents of his New Testament letters are answers to such theological questions. He even faced the questions of the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens.

Of course, you need to be committed to Bible study if you're going to communicate your faith by answering the world's theological questions. Paul exhorts us in 2 Timothy 2:15, "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a*

workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

Third,

THE WORLD ASKS ETHICAL QUESTIONS.

Christians have always had to face ethical questions and issues. Jesus was once asked, "If a woman's husband dies and she remarries, whose wife will she be in heaven?" Paul was asked, "Is it all right to eat meat that was offered as a sacrifice to an idol?" and "Is it better to marry or to remain single?"

Today's world is asking tough questions about such things as suicide, assisted suicide, euthanasia, abortion, homosexuality, capital punishment, genetic engineering, absolutes in right and wrong, etc. God's Word addresses some of these things directly and others are addressed indirectly. There are biblical principles and insights that apply.

We need to be ready to answer these ethical questions.

Fourth,

THE WORLD ASKS HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS.

Our world has a curiosity about it that generates all sorts of hypothetical questions. And some people just seem to enjoy asking such questions for the sake of argument. You've probably encountered the type.

How about the co-worker who with some regularity approaches you with some off-the-wall question like, "If God can do anything, can he make a rock so big that He can't lift it?"

And how many times do people around you express "What if..." questions? These are all opportunities to communicate Bible-based, Christ-centered faith without being intrusive.

Are you thinking, "But I don't like to get into those kinds of discussions"? Just remember what the 18th century philosopher Joseph Joubert said: "It is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it."

Time and time again in Scripture we read of how the onlooking crowds were "*astonished at his teaching*" when Jesus dealt with hypothetical questions.

When I was a very young, newly married preacher, I was getting a haircut at the barber shop in the small town where we lived. The barber happened to be an agnostic. When he found out I was a preacher, he began asking me questions in much the same manner the skeptical Jews questioned Jesus. I answered as best I could and defended the faith. There were four or five other men in the shop at the time. A few days later, one of those men told me how much he appreciated my answers and that in his opinion I had won the debate with the barber.

Heated arguments probably don't do much good, but holding your own in a debate over a question from the world can be quite a witnessing opportunity.

Fifth,

THE WORLD ASKS PERSONAL QUESTIONS.

Live your life openly godly and I guarantee that sooner or later someone around you will come to you with questions of a personal nature.

Anxiety and discontent have always been plentiful in society, but today they are running rampant. And millions have questions of a personal nature, and they're looking for people who can answer them. What wonderful opportunities to communicate your faith!

When people learn that we have an adopted daughter that walked out of our home and our lives almost twenty years ago, some of them will approach us with questions that provide us with opportunities to talk about how God helped us through that traumatic experience.

Just think of the questions and introspections that occur following things like 9-11, the Oklahoma City bombing, the Columbine shootings, corporate lay-offs and terminations, etc.

Be a transparent, caring, compassionate person, and listen, and you'll discover opportunity after opportunity to communicate your faith to your world.

CONCLUSION:

David Faust, president of Cincinnati Christian University and editor of *The Lookout*, a weekly magazine distributed in adult Sunday School classes, has written:

"While serving as a minister in New York, I received a phone call one day from a woman named Nana. 'You don't know me,' she began, 'but I've heard that you're willing to speak to different groups about Christian faith.'

"Yes,' I replied, privately wondering what I was about to get myself into!

"My husband, Charles, and I have a little group of friends who share a common interest in finding out more about different faiths,' Nana continued. 'Would you be willing to come and talk to our group about what it means to be a Christian?'

"Sure,' I said. And a few days later, my wife and I sat in Charles and Nana's house dining on authentic Greek food – lamb, feta cheese, stuffed grape leaves. After dinner we headed downstairs to their large basement, where to my amazement, Charles and Nana's 'little' group of friends continued to grow until about fifty people crowded into the room and sat on folding chairs. As they greeted me, some of the guests identified themselves as atheists, others as disenchanting Catholics; some were Jewish; others said they were Greek Orthodox; and others simply called themselves seekers.

"Soon, our hosts quieted everyone down and Charles announced, 'Everybody, this is Dave Faust. He's come here tonight with his wife, Candy, to talk to us about his faith as a Christian.' Then turning to me warmly, he said, 'Dave, tell us what you believe.'

"Now, I hadn't prepared a fancy speech! Thinking quickly, I came up with a simple outline that focused on three key points: why I love Jesus, why I love the Bible, and why I love the church. Not particularly controversial topics – or so I thought. But after I spoke for about half an hour, the group kept me standing on the floor for another ninety minutes of polite but vigorous questions and answers. Like Paul at Athens, I was 'bringing some strange ideas to (their) ears, and (they wanted) to know what they mean' (Acts 17:20). By the time my wife and I said our goodbyes and left that night (with an invitation to return at a future date) I was more convinced than ever that spiritual curiosity is alive and well in our culture" (*Taking the Truth Next Door*, Standard Publishing).

People, many in our world want to know why they should bother to get up in the morning and face another day. They want to know if God is real – and if He is, what difference does He make in ordinary life? In their honest moments of introspection, they want to know if life after death is more than just a pipe dream.

To people like these, we Christians dare to make an audacious claim. We say there is indeed a God who is there, and that the reality of God makes all the difference.

We say there's hope. We need to be ready to give our reasons why, when the world asks – and they will.

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

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Check out our web sites: www.arm.org www.abarc.org

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