

# **ARM Prison Outreach International**

**"Ministers' Minute" Volume 8 Number 1**

## **SERIES: "WHAT THE NEW GENERATION THINKS ABOUT THE CHURCH -- WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO ABOUT IT" -- PART 3**

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Editor's Note: This "MM" is the first email message of 2009 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers, chaplains, and Christian workers around the world. This issue is the 85th "MM" sent. All are archived -- just [click here](#) to see links to all messages sent since January of 2002.

This month's message is the third of seven to be sent in the next few months. Larry Farthing, my older brother, deals with some crucial issues for the church and its reputation in each community. In this age of rapid change, a deteriorating culture, and expanding technology, IS THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST PUTTING IT'S BEST "NEW TESTAMENT FOOT" FORWARD? It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach, lead, and encourage. May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

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## **SERIES: "WHAT THE NEW GENERATION THINKS ABOUT THE CHURCH WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO ABOUT IT"**

### **#3: "All You Care About Is That I Get Saved"**

#### **INTRO:**

Many years ago I heard someone say, "They will not care how much you know until they know how much you care." That is so true...

Surveys that have been done in the last few years reveal that the two younger generations of adults have the impression that Christians, especially evangelicals, don't really care about them but just want to "convert" them.

Think about how you feel when your doorbell rings and you open the door to find a pair of young Mormon men or a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses standing there? You probably don't have a good feeling. Well, a lot of "outsiders" have a similar feeling toward you and me. They don't think we're really interested in them as individuals. They don't feel the love. They think we just want to "convert" them. They're skeptical about our motives. They think we just want to get another "notch" in our "evangelism belt."

"Steven" is a typical 30-something. He moved from Phoenix to New York. When he met another 30-something in a subway station, he was really excited about having a friend in the big city. They exchanged phone numbers, and, sure enough, the fellow called him. They got together for coffee, hung out awhile, and the fellow invited him to a Bible study. Steven told him, "Thanks, but no, thanks." The fellow never called him again. He felt like the guy didn't genuinely care about him -- that he was just a spiritual "headhunter."

The younger generations of adults are critical of Christians' tactics, especially *street witnessing* and the use of *gimmicks*. In this age of intense marketing, they're quick to be suspicious of our attempts to get them to church or to expose them to the Christian message.

Many "outsiders" here in America have been exposed to Christianity and the church many times and in many different ways. In a sense, they've "heard it all." So, many of the evangelism *methods* we tend to use just don't work.

How do we go about changing this perception?

First of all,

***WE NEED TO CHANGE OUR THINKING ON EVANGELISM.***

In his book, *Unchristian*, David Kinnaman writes:

*"To change the perception that we are focused only on converts, we have to embrace a more holistic idea of what it means to be a Christ follower. This requires us to focus our attention on spiritual transformation – or spiritual formation, as some describe it. ... the church must become a catalyst and environment for genuine and sustainable spiritual transformation"* (p. 79-80).

In other words, our goal is not just to get people to "make a decision for Christ" or "join the church" but to see them *transformed* into Christ followers.

There are so many "outsiders" who "made a decision for Christ" or "joined the church" when they were young, only to drop out when they went away to college or when they got out on their own. They did not become true Christ followers. They were "converted," they made a profession of faith and were baptized, but they never really went through a *spiritual transformation*.

Chuck Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries, has written:

*"One of the things I do when I meet people is ask them, 'What is Christianity?' Undoubtedly half will respond, 'A relationship with Jesus.'*

*"That is wrong. The gospel cannot be merely a private transaction. God didn't break through history, through time and space, to come as a babe, be incarcerated, and suffer on the cross just so you can come to him and say, 'Oh, I accept Jesus and now I can live happily ever after.' That's not why he came... Jesus came as a radical to turn the world upside down. When we believe it is just about Jesus and (us), we miss the whole point.*

*"I even dislike using the words 'accept Christ' anymore – because it is so much more than that. Christianity is a way of seeing all of life and reality through God's eyes. This is what Christianity is: a world-view, a system, and a way of life. (emphasis mine) I believe that when you truly see the gospel in its fullness, it's so much more. It is the most exciting, radical, revolutionary story ever told"* (*Unchristian*, pp. 87-88).

Evangelism is more than getting people to "make a decision for Christ" – more than getting them to make a profession of faith and be baptized. Jesus Himself said, "...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

**Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**” (Matthew 28:19-20). We must not only get people to turn to Christ; we must help them live for Him and like Him from that time forward.

Second,

***WE NEED TO DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH “OUTSIDERS,” SERVING THEM, LOVING THEM, AND GENERALLY SHOWING THAT WE TRULY CARE.***

This is not an easy thing to do, and unless we strategize for doing it, we probably won't.

Jesus was a master at this because He really cared. And people sensed that He really cared. How did He do it? How did He show He cared? *He served them.*

How can you and I serve “outsiders”? How about listening to a neighbor's troubles or helping him do some repairs on his house or car? How about running errands for him or pet-sitting? How about a meal or two for a sick neighbor or a cake or pie for a new neighbor? How about just socializing and building a friendly relationship?

I believe that if you genuinely want to lead someone to become a Christ follower and you show him that you really care about him, God will in due time open doors of opportunity to present the gospel to him. Finally,

***WE NEED TO LET OUR LIGHT SHINE.***

Jesus said, *“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). In other words, do something that causes people to look favorably in God's direction.

This is so simple that we underestimate its impact. This is what drew the attention of the people of Jerusalem in the first century. Luke recorded in Acts 2:42-47:

***“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”***

Why were they so successful in evangelism? They lived such “Christian” lives that people were drawn to God. People saw their good deeds and became receptive to God's message.

Why can't we be like those first century Christians?

Dr. Paul Brand was speaking to a medical college in India on “Let your light so shine before men that they may behold your good works and glorify your Father.” In front of the lectern was an oil lamp, with its cotton wick burning from the shallow dish of oil. As he preached, the lamp ran out of oil, the wick burned dry, and the smoke made him cough. He immediately used the opportunity. “Some of us here are like this wick,” he

said. "We're trying to shine for the glory of God, but we stink. That's what happens when we use ourselves as the fuel of our witness rather than the Holy Spirit. "Wicks can last indefinitely, burning brightly and without irritating smoke, if the fuel, the Holy "Spirit, is in constant supply." (Phillip Yancey)

## **CONCLUSION:**

So, the younger generations have the impression that the church is just out to "get them saved." In some cases, that's very true. Churches sometimes get caught up in the numbers game: attendance numbers, the number of baptisms, the number of new members, etc. But we know better, don't we? We care, don't we? We believe Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, don't we? We believe He's the only way to God, don't we?

So,

1. Let's change our thinking on evangelism;
2. Let's develop relationships with people who need to come to Christ and be a part of His church;
3. Let's let our lights shine.

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

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In 2007, ARM donated almost 40,000 FREE Bible courses to prisoners!