

NATURAL OUTREACH: WHAT I HAVE SEEN AND LEARNED ACROSS FIVE DECADES

By Bob Young

Few are the Christians who have not heard of the Great Commission. Matthew's version is familiar: go and make disciples. Many have heard that the "go" is not an imperative but a present participle, "as you are going." The commandment is "make disciples." The command is one word in Greek: *matheteuo*. The verb means to enroll learners or students, identify those interested in being disciples of a teacher or master, instruct, or teach. This word is not the word that appears at the beginning of verse 20, "teaching them to observe my commands." What is Jesus saying to his followers? Jesus is describing what I call "natural evangelism." If Jesus' instructions are for natural evangelism ("as you are going"), perhaps we would do well to try to understand, "What is 'unnatural evangelism?'"

"...as you go..." Jesus says that every contact we have is a point of entry for the gospel. Good news—twice over! **"...enroll students..."** In your daily comings and goings, be on the lookout for those interested in the teachings of the Master. Jesus says that actively "making disciples" should occur as one goes about one's daily life. Daily interactions, friendships, encounters, conversations present evangelistic opportunities.

In my first preaching work, as I visited in the homes of the church members, I met a woman who cleaned the house of an elderly widow. I found this new acquaintance wanting to know more about Jesus. That was the beginning of a Bible study. Soon, she was baptized and a new follower was added to the faith community.

In Latin America, I was invited to a home Bible study with a policeman and his family. We studied long into the night. When they decided to be baptized the same hour of the night, friends and church members were called to be present for the baptisms. Two other policemen came to witness the baptisms. I learned that one of the policemen had moved next door to a church member who shared the gospel. When that policeman became a Christian, he started talking to his coworkers. Three policemen, now Christians with their families.

A new family visited the church where I was preaching. In conversations afterward, the man said that he grew up in a church that taught the necessity of baptism, but that he had never been baptized. I asked him, "Why?" He said, "Because no one ever asked me." To which I responded, "Someone is asking you now." After a Bible study with him and his wife, they were both baptized into Christ.

I could multiply examples and write many pages. I strike up spiritual conversations at restaurants, in grocery store lines, at the repair shop, on airplanes. I carry contact cards. I distribute teachings and study guides.

Across 50+ years, God has filled my path with opportunities "as I was going." Visitors, family members of members, friends of members, hospital contacts, neighbors, coworkers of members, weddings, funerals, teaching parenting classes, teaching adult education classes in the local school system. Nothing special. Nothing extraordinary. Nothing programmed. My regular life, regular schedule, normal activities.

May I tell you how and why that happened?

- During my years in ministry, I sought to help churches develop a "come and see" spirit, with invitations, special outreach events, always reaching and expanding networks.
- In ministry and mission work, I have not had to seek contacts beyond my own "as you are going."
- God has filled my life with contacts and opportunities to touch others spiritually. Jesus' words say that God does that for all Christians.
- One must have open eyes to see the opportunities.
- Your daily encounters can have an eternal impact. Pray!