

## **Required: A Personal Touch (Mark 5)**

**By Bob Young**

What a wonderful mission trip—thank you! Wish I had time to tell you all about it. We will schedule a report soon, probably on a Sunday evening after our small groups cycle concludes.

I want to encourage you to faithfulness. I have been attending church a long time; I have been a Christian for some 50+ years. In those 50 years, I have perhaps missed assembling on the Lord's Day with a local body of saints 4 or 5 times—I can only specifically remember 3, two for sickness and once when our family was on vacation at least 2-3 hours from the nearest congregation (we had anticipated the situation and taken the elements of the Supper with us, so our congregation was one of five Christians that day).

The math: less than a handful of absences in thousands of Sundays.

I want to tell you why.

Because I know the answer to the question: How many times can I miss? Once you become a Christian,

- really give your heart to the Lord,
- decide to seek first the kingdom,
- love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, strength,
- set your priorities according to God's purpose,
- deny yourself and leave all to follow him,
- really love the brotherhood,
- understand the nature of worship,
- see that spiritual development only occurs in the context of the Christian community,
- love the church the way Christ loves the church,
- YOU CAN'T MISS. You don't want to miss. You are present with God's people every week, not deceived by all the talk about individual worship at the lake or the mountains or the deer stand.

I want to talk to you freely about our Christian lives and commitments and opportunities to study and worship and fellowship and share.

One reason that is on my heart is that I have been to Latin America. I have been reminded of the power of a commitment that is visible and obvious, undergoing persecution and problems. The contrast is striking. We must see it, we must change; we must become involved players in the evangelism and missions tasks.

### **I. We must preach the necessity of personal faith in Christianity.**

US churches are often seen as soft on this issue. We must honor the dynamic of personal faith in Christianity. Africans and Latin Americans may see a basic disconnection between our personal experience and our faith as we strive to share the gospel. Too often, those involved in missions speak from a relatively shallow faith to people of deep faith, who are very aware of the difference God has made and his making in their lives.

### **II. We must preach the demand for personal morality in Christianity.**

US churches are seen as countenancing immorality and failing to take a firm stand on moral issues, as emphasizing some aspects of Christianity with little awareness of other important points. We must preach morality and allow Christian leaders in other lands to assist in the application of those moral principles, taking care that we not demand a too-often impotent version of US morality for those who are more committed to morality than are we.

### **III. We must preach personal responsibility in Christianity.**

Christianity is built on the autonomy of believers. I can have a personal relationship with God through Christ without the intervention of anyone else. One of the great errors we can make in missions is to think that those

to whom we are speaking cannot understand the Bible on their own. We often think that others are incapable of reading and studying and applying the Bible without our help. These are capable people who are apparently spreading the message of Christ more effectively than we have and are applying it more seriously.

#### **IV. We must preach the power for personal change in Christianity.**

We must preach a Christianity that both saves eternally and changes lives here. US churches are often seen as practicing a powerless version of Christianity, incapable of dealing with sickness and poverty and the problems of life. Real Christianity alters every dimension of life and is capable of reining in the power of Satan in the life of the individual. This is a powerful message that is too often missing from the gospel preached by US missionaries.

#### **V. We must preach the necessity of personal application in Christianity in the context of culture.**

Christianity is independent of culture. We must be careful that we do not demand that their culture become like ours. Christianity can thrive in their culture, and it is their job to determine what it means to live for Jesus in the midst of their world. Effective mission work is always sensitive to both the message of God and the context in which that message is proclaimed. May we be sensitive so that souls may be saved!

With our renewed focus on reaching our community, I want to think with you today about evangelism.

Last month Enrique was baptized. His story is not particularly unique or unusual. He attended services at the church one Sunday. After services, he was greeted by the visiting preacher who chatted and studied with him over lunch. The visiting preacher passed the contact information on to the local preacher who continued the study during the next week. Enrique was baptized the next Sunday.

A recent mission report from Leon, Mexico told of the baptisms of two new sisters in Christ. Both were baptized after contact and study.

Two weeks ago, Jan and I witnessed four baptisms at the end of the worship assembly at the Quito North congregation in Quito, Ecuador. Later during our travels in Ecuador, we learned that one of those baptized was a sister in the flesh to a brother from Portoviejo. This brother, recently returned to Ecuador from New York City, had made a special trip to Quito to visit with his sister about the Lord. When she learned how to properly respond to the call of Jesus to discipleship, she obeyed the gospel.

Yesterday, I got an email from Suyapa, a sister in Christ from Honduras. She wrote of another new congregation in the area of Honduras where she lives—now the number of churches is 53. I know how that congregation was established because last summer I saw the powerful influence she and her husband exercise in entering a city, visiting with the residents, setting up Bible studies, and attracting people to services in a new church. This process of contacting, connecting, teaching, encouraging, and maturing has been repeated time and time again—part of the reason for the increasing number of congregations in that area of Honduras.

Last Monday, I was with the Guayaquil (Ecuador) Central church. On a Monday night when the church assembled to greet U.S. visitors, they had perhaps six or eight visitors from their community. Why visitors on a Monday night? Someone invited them! I made it a point to chat with the visitors, welcome them, learn their story, and encourage them to study with the brothers and sisters in the church.

Last Tuesday morning, we visited the Guayaquil South church. This is a new congregation in existence only a little over a year. They have about 60 in attendance; they have had 21 baptisms so far this year. They distribute literature at least two days each week. They teach the Bible to all who will listen and study. Theirs is a story that is repeated again and again in church planted in last few years—churches that are growing and prospering.

What do these stories have in common? Someone made a contact, someone encouraged, someone shared, someone taught, someone cared.

When Jesus shared a personal touch, Mark 5:21-43, story of Jairus and his plea for his daughter.  
But, on the way.... Specific text is Mark 5:24-34.

What do you see?

**\*1 To make a difference in the life of another required a personal touch.** It is not enough to put together programs and events, activities and opportunities. People are not seeking a friendly church, they are seeking a friend.

Someone must see and connect and establish meaningful relationship. The personal touch is the only way we can communicate that we care. People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

- How much do you care?
- What if we did benevolence with a personal touch? How might it work?.....
- What if we did outreach with a personal touch? Can you imagine?....
- What if shepherding were with a personal touch? What would that look like?.....
- What if fellowship were personal? How would it be different?.....
- What if we lived our lives in this community with a personal touch?

The only way to imitate Jesus in this text is through a personal touch.

**\*2 A personal touch will not be without cost.** Power had gone out from Jesus. Something will leave us, we will have to share something of ourselves. We will have to forget self, deny self, give self.

It will be costly to follow Jesus. It will cost everything—prestige, personal desires, personal gain, personal goals, perhaps even family, friends.... There is no way to tell what will happen when we decide to follow Jesus, but what we can know is that it won't matter, because he will be with us. If only I can touch him. If only I can get close to him. I can escape this wretched world, I can find newness and hope and comfort and peace. And when it happens, who would not fall at his feet trembling.

I am sharing how we live our lives as we seek to take Jesus to others and to our world, but these principles are first about how much of Jesus we are allowing into our own lives.

- Do you experience daily his personal touch, personal presence, personal power, his purpose and love, his grace and mercy, talking and walking, sharing, dreaming?
- Do you know how much it cost him so that you might have that possibility?
- Will you bow before him, obey him, commit to him anew, find freshness for the journey, seek faithfulness simply because of who Jesus is.