



## WHAT IS SERVANTHOOD EVANGELISM and HOW DO I BEGIN?

### Servanthood Evangelism Manual

*Dr. David Wheeler*



#### ***Servanthood Evangelism Defined***

*Servanthood evangelism involves intentionally sharing Christ by modeling biblical servanthood. It is the simplest, most transferable, and yes, most fun approach for moving believers closer to a biblical lifestyle marked by consistent witnessing. With all that said, Servanthood Evangelism is also the most biblical approach, as it is Christ who first exemplified this lifestyle of reaching out to an unsaved world.*

#### ***Servanthood Evangelism Described***

*Servanthood evangelism is a combination of simple acts of kindness and intentional personal evangelism. The concept is as old as the New Testament. Like many profound truths, this one is so simple it is easily missed: Get a group of believers, say for instance at a local church or a group of students, and begin practicing simple acts of kindness with an *intentional* aim toward evangelism. In many cases, such acts of kindness open the door for the greatest act of kindness a Christian can give: the Gospel.*

It is essential that Christians understand what kindness means; as it does not mean telling people what they want to hear so they will feel good about themselves. It also does not mean doing mere acts of kindness with no purpose. Not to be mistaken, there are valuable ministries, such as taking a loaf of bread to newcomers, and others, which are helpful, but they are not explicitly evangelistic. For instance, if one does not believe in God, then one would likely not recognize that there is something that special about humans, namely that we bear the image of God. Therefore, all acts of kindness done by Christians are done with that fact in mind. Servanthood evangelism recognizes this, in that it is *intentionally evangelistic*. However, by no means does it seek to coerce in a negative sense. When doing an act of kindness, the witness says, "I am doing this to show the love of Jesus in a practical way." Then, as the Holy Spirit opens the door, usually through the individual responding "why are you doing this or that," the one performing the act of servanthood has a captive audience and proceeds to share their conversion testimony coupled with the gospel presentation. If the other person is not open for discussion, the witness goes no further, except to offer a gospel tract, literature, or prayer. However, experience reveals that Servanthood Evangelism leads to a presentation of Christ more than twice as often as when servanthood is ignored.

Again, Servanthood Evangelism must be intentional about sharing Christ! Think about it, wouldn't it be a cruel gesture to offer to wash someone's car and fail to tell them about the Living Water that is offered by Christ? To give a light bulb without telling of the Light of the world? To clean a toilet without telling about the only One who can cleanse a person's heart from sin?

The Rawlings School of Divinity associated with Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA, uses this approach in their personal evangelism classes. Servanthood Evangelism is required for both undergraduate and graduate students. Part of class is used as a laboratory with students venturing out into the community to evangelize. Some students have chosen to purchase bottled water and give them to passers-by in the town's business district, athletic fields, etc. Others go door-

to-door in older communities with 9-volt batteries to check residents' smoke detectors. One student doing this was able to lead a person to Christ for the first time in his life—was he ever excited! Another group may have a one dollar car wash (no money accepted, a dollar is actually given to the person being served with the encouragement to pass it on), at a local church, mall, grocery store, or the parking lot of a department store, local park or school, etc. Patrons will usually try to give money, but the students refuse. Their response is always, "We're simply showing the love of Christ in a practical way," or "just because we care." At one of the car washes, a man from a Hindu background was saved.

Keep in mind, *Servanthood Evangelism means intentionally sharing Christ by modeling biblical servanthood.*

Some believers have gone door-to-door giving away free light bulbs: "You'll probably have a light bulb go out sometime, so here's one," they say. "By the way, did you know that Jesus said He is the light of the world?" They will do the same by offering to shovel snow, rake leaves, or just deliver a fresh plate of baked cookies. One of my classes raised \$500 and purchased fifty \$10 gift cards from Chick-fil-A, then proceeded to write personal notes of appreciation to construction workers and custodians on campus, many of whom do not know Christ. It is amazing to see how responsive people become as the result of a simple gift or act of servanthood.

The same testimonies can be multiplied one-hundredfold across America and the rest of the world by congregations, student ministries, denominational agencies, youth groups, and many others who have adopted Servanthood Evangelism as a mode of intentionally sowing and reaping the gospel seed. Whether feeding quarters into a washing machine at a laundromat to share the gospel, washing car windshields at the mall, giving away coffee or sodas at local stores, going door-to-door with packages of microwave popcorn with the note attached "Pop in and see us sometime," providing free gift wrapping for a local store at Christmas, delivering Danishes to the teacher's lounge at the local schools, or simply reaching out to serve an unsaved neighbor, Servanthood Evangelism provides an effective approach to intentionally share one's faith in today's contemporary culture.

### ***How do I begin Servanthood Evangelism?***

#### **Personally/Individually**

It is not by accident that we are discussing how to do Servanthood Evangelism personally/individually before we discuss how to do it corporately. Unless it first becomes a lifestyle that is practiced by the individuals in your church, it will certainly not take hold in a corporate setting, such as a local congregation. This is true with any effort that is being attempted by a large group of people. For instance, in a battle the odds of winning are much better if each individual soldier believes in what he or she is doing. The question still remains: how can the individual be spurred on to get involved and to develop a lifestyle of evangelism?

#### **Learn to Identify Needs**

The first step in developing an evangelistic lifestyle is very simple. Learn how to identify the needs of the people. Police officers are trained to spot certain things immediately. If there is a problem or something suspicious going on, a good officer will be able to recognize it and handle it in a professional and effective way. Much in the same way, we as Christians need to train ourselves to spot needs in other people's lives so we can then minister to those needs. Of course, this mindset stems from one thing: a selfless heart. It is so easy in today's culture to become consumed by all the things we need. After all, we have jobs that demand our attention, families that demand even more attention, and bills that must be paid. All these things can be overwhelming and will blind us to the lives of other people. However, for the Christian this should not be the case.

Matthew 6: 32-33 states plainly that while the unsaved spend their lives chasing after their own needs, Christians ought to first seek after the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In other words, as Christ followers, we need to first be concerned with advancing God's kingdom and not our own. That means taking the focus from ourselves and aiming it towards those around us who are in desperate need of an encounter with Christ. Jesus modeled this attitude perfectly in

John 4. In this chapter Jesus and his disciples travel through Samaria, (this went against Jewish religious tradition). Verse 4 states that “it was necessary” that Jesus went through Samaria. This was undoubtedly confusing for His disciples, because as good Jews they would never travel through Samaria. We don’t find out why Jesus went that way until we get to verse 7, where we observe His encounter with the woman at the well.

Being omnipotent and led by the Holy Spirit, Jesus was aware of the woman’s need. Rather than purposefully traveling around Samaria, which was the common practice for most Jews, Jesus went through Samaria for the purpose of ministering to the woman, and eventually the whole town of Sychar. The application that we can glean from this, is that Jesus’ main concern was not meeting his own earthly needs. On the contrary, He was driven to honor and glorify His Father and meet the needs of others. The woman at the well is a perfect example.

### **Go where needs are**

The next step to developing an evangelistic lifestyle is to go where the needs are. Returning to the example of Jesus in John 4; we can see that Jesus not only identified the needs of the people, but He went to them regardless of how it looked to others. As His followers, we need to have the same attitude and drive when it comes to evangelism. We need to identify needs and be willing to go to where those needs are, even if it means going into an unpleasant or unfamiliar setting. So many times, because of fear we avoid the most hurting and needy areas in order to focus our witnessing efforts on less abrasive places and people. This was not the approach of Christ.

The woman at the well was not the type of woman with whom the Jews would have felt comfortable. Not only was she a “half-breed” according to the Jews, but she was also an adulterous woman. In the typical Jewish mind, this made her less than human. Samaritans were the offspring of Jews that had intermarried with people of other faiths and mixed pagan traditions and teachings with those of Judaism. With that in mind, it is not hard to see why the Samaritans were viewed so lowly by the Jews. Not only were they not full-blooded Jews, but they had compromised their theology and teachings and abandoned the faith of their fathers.

This makes the events of John 4 even more spectacular. At that moment, the disciples must have felt a thousand miles outside of their comfort zone. However, this did not hinder Jesus. As Christians, we need to be willing to step out of our comfort zones and interact with cultures that might not be the same as ours. We need to go where the needs are most apparent.

### **Initiate a plan**

The third step is to develop a life that is characterized by evangelism. When Jesus went to the woman at the well, He had a strategy. He listened to her politely, and spoke to her in a non-aggressive tone. He confronted her with the truth without embarrassment or manipulation. Then, when she was ready, He offered the ultimate solution to her problem. Once we identify the needs of people, we must initiate a plan to help meet that need. This is where the fun of Servanthood Evangelism comes into play. For example, let’s say your neighbor’s yard is full of leaves. According to the size of the job, the obvious response is to secure willing helpers from the church to assist in the servant opportunity. If you are sensitive and willing, hundreds of possibilities will soon arise.

This step centers on doing intentional acts of kindness for other people, simply because they are loved by God and made in His image. Isn’t this what Christ’s sacrifice was all about? Did He not come to us while we were yet sinners, and die even for the ones who were hurling insults at Him while He hung on the cross? Indeed, the incarnation of Jesus should be seen as the ultimate act of “Servanthood Evangelism.” He identified the world’s need for forgiveness and a restored relationship with the Father. He was willing to come where the need was, namely to earth; and so He wrapped Himself in human flesh and came as one of us. He also initiated a plan to meet the desperate need of humanity; which was to die on the cross in our place in order to make restoration to the Heavenly Father possible for all people. Lastly, He didn’t

give up on us and leave us to our own devices to figure out how to live the Christian life. He sent “another,” the Holy Spirit who is our comforter and sustainer. This leads us to the last step to developing a lifestyle of evangelism.

### **Be willing to stay**

Once we initiate a plan to meet the needs of the people, we need to be willing to stay. In John 4, after Jesus had ministered to the people from Sychar, He stayed with them for two days. Why is that? It seems logical that He stayed with them longer because He cared for them and wanted to develop relationships.

This is exactly what we need to do as we try to develop lives that are characterized by evangelism. We need to be willing to forge relationships with people in our spheres of influence. They need to know that they are not just numbers, and that we are not simply marking off “evangelism” on our own personal list of things to do. Once this happens, people will realize that we care about them individually. This is one of the best illustrations of Christ’s love for humanity.