

Frontline Evangelism

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One thing I think we can agree on is this: every man would give treasure and fame for one moment in which he could rescue a damsel in distress while delivering a Chuck Norris round-house kick to the dastardly villain. Sweeping the fair maiden up in one arm, he would first use his free hand to tuck his nunchuks in his belt, tie the bad guy up with the telephone cord just ripped from the wall, then jump to safety from the third floor window, deliver the damsel into the waiting arms of her awed, but now annoyed boyfriend, and then disappear into the quiet of the night with the soft voices of the crowd drifting along in the wind, saying, "Who was that guy?"

In fact, if truth be known, there are few men who would not heed the call to battle if it meant saving someone's life. He would run through fire, swim through ice, sling rocks at giants, wield a sword against the talons of a dragon, or an M4 against a terrorist. He would offer his final half-ounce of water in a burning desert, tie the last parachute on the back of anyone but himself while the plane spiraled toward the ground, or dangle by the strength of only his finger-tips over a precipice of peril to reach a fallen and frightened stranger. Right?

You would do this. Wouldn't you? Though the socially polite thing to say when asked this question is, "Well, I would like to think I would act heroic, but I guess you don't really know until you're faced with the situation for real." However, deep inside, deep in your heart of hearts, you just know. You know you would take up the challenge. It would seem like instinct, but upon further reflection, as you looked back on your David against Goliath moment, you would know. You would know that you had been preparing for that moment your whole life.

"3, 2, 1, swish. Buzzzzzz!"

"Bottom of the ninth. Two outs. Bases loaded. Down by three. Pitcher's ahead, no balls, two strikes. Pitcher seizes his advantage. It's a fast ball low and away. You have to protect the plate. Swing. Foul ball. Next pitch. Same location. Change up. It throws your timing off a fraction. Swing! Another foul ball. Next pitch. Heater high and inside. Foul ball. Pitcher starts to sweat. He delivers the pitch. The fatal mistake. A curve ball intended to leave you standing. But you know it's yours. One micro-measurement too little from the pitcher's fingers. The curve ball hangs. Crack off the fat of the bat. Walk off homerun."

"Run, run, dive, tuck, roll, back up again. Bopbopbopbopbop fires from the barrel of your Thompson 45...and then you see it...the white flag of surrender. Your enemy has met his match."

"You hear the creak of a floorboard and a small thud as something goes bump in the night. Every fiber in your radar starts to tingle. You pick up your 19 inch, 6 D-cell MagLite and silently position yourself hidden behind a corner. Soft foot-steps indicate someone drawing closer. A stranger! An intruder! In less than a second you realize your precious family is in jeopardy. Swing! Down slams the 50 oz MagLite against the jaw line of the creeper's head. He goes down. He's out. You turn on lights. Check for weapons. Secure them. Remove his belt. Bind his hands behind his back. Only then does anyone else enter the room. Quickly, you demand, "Call 911." You stand sentinel. He's the bad guy. You? Yup, you're the hero."

A thousand scenarios have played themselves out in your imagination. You've been preparing. You are prepared. Even the impossible seems possible: "A left, a right, down goes Chuck Norris!"

In true moments of victory, your evaluation would not be pride. It would not be arrogance. No, it would be a simple evaluation of something you have always known. There would be no need to inform anyone else. It would be more than enough to have that certain knowledge now safely tucked away in your Man Portfolio. Stamp it bright red with "For Your Eyes Only" and then file it under H for Hero. Pull it out every now and then, not to gloat, but to prepare yourself even better for the next magical moment.

You can relate to this, right? Then why is it that so many of us who know Jesus as our Savior, know his truth as our wisdom, walk with his Spirit as our scout, and acknowledge his Father King as our Liege Lord, fail to heed his call to arms? Why do we pass by as Satan's victims languish in the bowels of his infernal kingdom of darkness? (Go ahead. Think about this a little while.)

Why? Why, especially since one of the most often used motifs in the Lord's Great Commission strategy is the motif of rescue?

Look. In Luke 4:14 through 19 we read,

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

In Mark 10:45, we hear the Savior say,

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

In John 8:34-36 we read about when Jesus said,

Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

The Holy Spirit of God moved the Apostles of God to pick up this motif and record it in the word of God. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 6:17 and 18,

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

When writing to a young pastor, Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:2 through 4,

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he wrote (10:3-5),

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Let there be no doubt, there are damsels in distress. There are feeble men with neither the physical presence nor spiritual strength to engage the spiritual combat of our times. There are weak-willed women walking like zombies into the pit of despair. There are wonderful little children, confused and frightened, covering their eyes both at night and in the broad day light. There are teenagers acting brave on the outside, but running scared from what torments them on the inside. And there is a dragon on the loose (Revelation 12:1-17). He's looking to scorch every man, woman, and child. And there is a roaring lion on the prowl (1 Peter 5:8). He is looking to devour the rich and the poor, the big and the small, the busy and the lazy. The dragon would torch his own mother if he had one. The lion would consume his own pride if he thought it would help his cause. The dragon is foul of breath and the lion is fierce of stench...for those with spiritual sense. For the blind, the lost, the unbelieving...the lion covers himself in light...a flimsy raiment of white silk...and the gullible fall for it until it is too late. They have but one hope: the Lord of Hosts and those of his who will rally to the sound of his voice..."Go, therefore, into all the world."

The enemy's challenge is no different than a rude man talking offensively to your wife, mother, sister, or girl-friend. This is the same as a neighborhood bully slapping your precious ten-year old daughter. This smacks of the same evil as the users and abusers who lead our boys and young men astray and away. This is terror. This is abuse. This is crime. This is kidnapping. This is false accusation, slavery, discrimination, and torture. This is war!

This is why the Holy Spirit guided Jude to write in verses 20 through 23,

But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

When we leap into the fire, when we charge across the battle field, when we bend down to lift a child from the dung-heap of humanity, when we take up weapons of spiritual warfare, we are to outfit ourselves in the gospel armor. This is not jihad. It is the firm conviction and faithful compassion of a tender warrior. The Apostle Paul wrote this very thing to the First Church of Ephesus:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

When Jesus readied himself to return to his Father's side he prepared his disciples for the departure. Central to his instructions is what we have come to call the Great Commission. It was not the Great Suggestion. It was not the Great Sound Bite. It was not the Great Encouragement. It was delivered as marching orders...it was the Great Commandment, the Great Objective, the Great Cause, the Great Commission. So, if like that first batch of disciples, we want to be ready in season and out we need to ask ourselves some questions. And just so it lands close to home, let's be sure the questions are voiced in the first person singular.

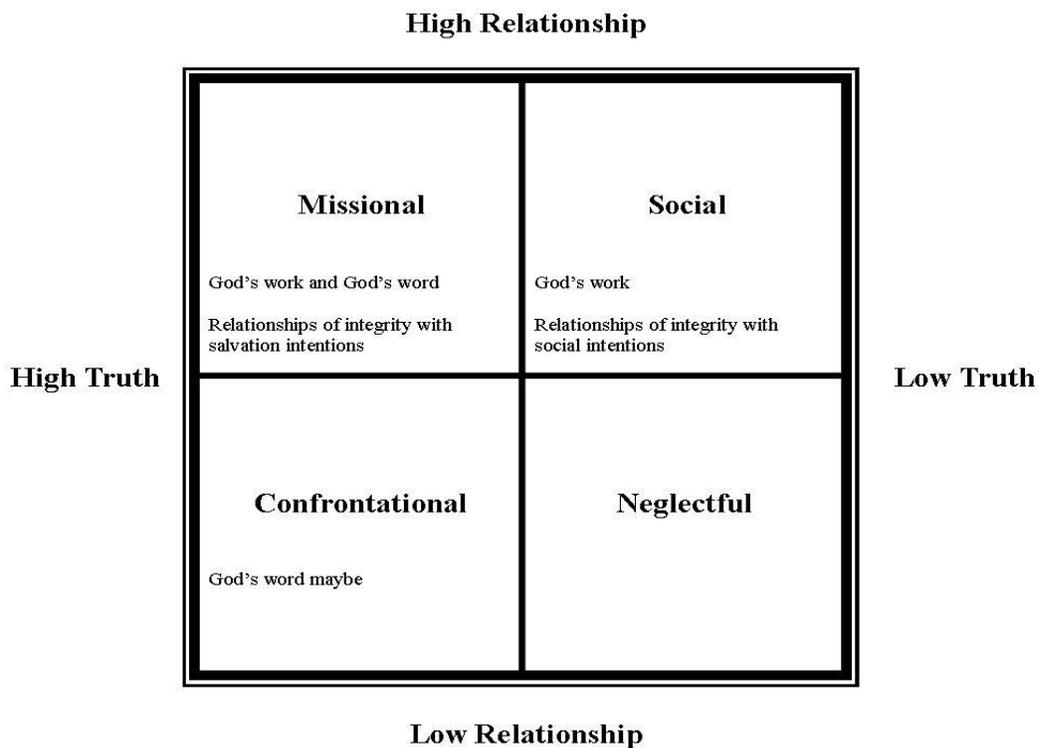
1. What am I celebrating lately regarding my part in the Great Commission?

2. Do I really believe people need to be snatched from the fire? How is the prospect of a Christ-less eternity for the lost demonstrated in my worldview?

3. In Mark 2:40-45, I can read about Jesus touching a leper. The Bible said he (Jesus) was moved by compassion. Is this true of me? If I prepare like a ninja to protect my family or to rescue damsels in distress, what would preparing for this kind of compassion look like?

- How do I assess (if I ever do) the needs of people I know who do not know the Savior?
- How do I assess (if I ever do) the needs of people I meet occasionally?
- How do I assess (if I ever do) the needs of those I may only meet once?
- In what ways do I have consistent contact with unchurched people?
- How do I identify and build relationships with the pre-Christians in my life?

4. When I look at the following chart of evangelism styles, where do I see myself? If I asked my closest loved ones, what might be their evaluation?



Let there be no doubt, only one of these quadrants is biblical: missional. Let there also be no doubt, I do not have today's nuance in mind when I use the word "missional." Instead, I mean it in its normal sense: the sense that points to every believer being on mission. With this in mind: the Church is a missionary force and every born-again believer is a missionary.

5. In what ways do I help my local church to corporately work at evangelism?
- If the following statement is true, "Some give so others can go," what am I doing to facilitate its truth?
 - What other resources do I have or can I acquire to facilitate the above statement?
 - When was the last time I balanced my Great Life-style vs. my Great Commission ledger?

*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?
And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?
And how can they hear without someone preaching to them
And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?
As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"
Romans 10:14-15 NIV*