

Missions

Top 10 worst summer missions projects for your group.

The Small Group Network Community posted 7/12/2006

10. Yard work for the elderly at the condos downtown.

Contributor: Carol Perry, New Harvest Christian, Oregon OH

9. Entertaining the folks at the nursing home with a "bobbing for Spam" contest.

Contributor: SmallGroups.com

8. Fund raiser for new Luxury SUV for small groups pastor.

Contributor: Rick Lowry, Crossroads Christian Church, Evansville, IN

7. Mission trip to Spain to evangelize the folks along the course of the "running of the bulls".

Contributor: SmallGroups.com

6. Used diaper collection.

Contributor: Scott Newland, socc

5. Tract handouts on lover's lane.

Contributor: SmallGroups.com

4. Septic tank repair at the small group leaders' home.

Contributor: Rick Lowry, Crossroads Christian Church, Evansville, IN

3. Snow removal.

Contributor: Carol Perry, New Harvest Christian, Oregon OH

2. Counter-terrorist activities in Central Asia.

Contributor: Rick Lowry, Crossroads Christian Church, Evansville, IN

1. Passing out hot chocolate for servant evangelism when it's 102 degrees in the shade!

Contributor: Maila Stevens, Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Greater Portland

What to Expect When You Share the Gospel

When you partner with God, expect encouragement! As a result of this study, you should be encouraged, prompting you to partner with God more and more in evangelism. There is no greater joy than seeing people come to faith. If we are motivated by fear or guilt to share the gospel, we are unlikely to make permanent changes in our behavior. Instead we must be motivated by internal conviction and joy.

Identify the Current Issue

Entertainer Garrison Keillor recalls the childhood pain of being chosen last for the baseball teams.

The captains are down to their last grudging choices: a slow kid for catcher, someone to stick out in right field where nobody hits it. They choose the last ones two at a time—"you and you"—because it makes no difference. And the remaining kids—the scrubs, the excess—they deal for us as handicaps. "If I take him, then you gotta take him," they say. Sometimes I go as high as sixth, usually lower. But just once I'd like Darrel to pick me first and say, "Him! I want him! The skinny kid with the glasses and the black shoes. You, c'mon!" But I've never been chosen with much enthusiasm.

Did you ever think about the fact that you are so valuable to God he chose you early—with enthusiasm? "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:4). (Robert Russell, *The Southeast Christian Church Outlook* [6-8-00])

This joy of being chosen by God should delight us so much that we can't wait to see who else will "join the team."

Discussion starters:

[Q] Do you feel privileged to be chosen by God to be part of his family? What adjective would you use to describe how you feel about sharing your faith: joy, fear, angst, privilege?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) I love to share my faith.
- 2) I'm terrified to share my faith.
- 3) I never share my faith.
- 4) I don't know how to share my faith.

Explain why you chose the statement you did.

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: When we partner with God in bringing others to faith, we ourselves are encouraged.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6–13. Paul obviously didn't see the Thessalonians as a burden; he saw them as a joy. They were so much a joy that Paul found comfort through them in his persecution.

Mark Buchanan shares this story in *Things Unseen* (Multnomah 2002, pp.148–149):

From 1985 to 1987, Rick Hanson, a paraplegic athlete, circled the globe on his wheelchair to raise awareness of and money for spinal cord research. It was a grueling trip. There are photos of him

in all kinds of weather: burning heat, slashing rain, swirling blizzard, howling wind; and in all terrain: desert wastelands, dense forests, patchwork farmlands, craggy mountains.

He strains his head back, his neck fluted with stretched cords, his arms taut with aching muscles, his body a skein of bulging veins and his fists like stones, as he climbs the near impossible steepness of China's Great Wall. He thrusts his head forward, flint like, his jaw set firm, as he wheels through rain-blackened street of some nondescript city, its inhabitants indifferent to his plight and his cause. Mile upon mile upon tiresome mile. Hands thick with calluses. Thighs bruised, back blistered. Weariness in him like a rumor of death.

But on May 23, 1987, Rick Hanson came home. When he was still far away, many miles from Vancouver, people gathered to welcome him. As he got nearer, the crowd thickened along both sides of the highway: hundreds of people, then thousands, then thousands on thousands. They roared, clapped, cheered, and wept. They threw flowers. Rick moved with power and grace, effortless. He climbed Thermal Drive in Coquitlam, one snaking precipitous section steeper than the steepest part of the Great Wall of China, and did it with jaunty ease.

And then he headed toward B.C. Place. A capacity crowd of sixty thousand people—national and international dignitaries, rock stars and movie stars, television crews, family, friends, those lucky enough to get tickets—waited inside, delirious with anticipation. As Rick got nearer the stadium, the streets grew impossibly dense with people. Helicopters hovered overhead. Police in cars and on motorcycles flanked his sides. Other wheelchair athletes joined him, coming up behind like a legion of charioteers, flashes from their spinning spokes spilling down the roadway like fistfuls of tossed coins.

As Rick came over the Cambie Street Bridge, he could hear, even above the din of the crowd around him, the roar of voices coming from inside the stadium. A hurricane brewing. A landslide loosening. But not even that prepared him for what happened next.

Rick Hanson entered B.C Place. He swooped through the wide lower gates and glided onto the stadium floor—and 60,000 people went berserk. Leaping, dancing, blowing horns, the air shrill with wolf whistles, exploding with applause, swelling with throaty shouts of welcome and triumph. Wild, raucous, hypnotic. Metal girders hummed like struck turning forks from all the noise burned into them. A roar to deafen, to open the ears of the deaf, to raise the dead. And every time it seemed about to taper off, a fresh wind caught it and carried it higher, louder, brighter, fuller. Such a great cloud of witnesses.

- [Q] Who makes up our great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1)? How is this cloud of witnesses even better than Rick Hanson's?
- [Q] Will we only have joy over sharing our faith in the next life? Can we have it now? How?
- [Q] Share an example of how sharing your faith has encouraged you.

Teaching point two: Seeing others walk with Christ boosts our own faith.

Reread 1 Thessalonians 3:8–9. In his book *Sources of Strength*, former president Jimmy Carter shared this lesson: “After a personal witnessing experience with Eloy Cruz, an admirable Cuban pastor who had surprising rapport with very poor immigrants from Puerto Rico, I asked him for the secret of his success. He was modest and embarrassed, but he finally said, ‘Senor Jimmy, we only need to have two loves in our lives. For God, and for the person who happens to be in front of us at any time.’ That simple yet profound theology has been a great help to me in understanding the Scriptures. In essence, the whole Bible is an explanation of those two loves.”

If we can learn to love God and the person in front of us, we'll experience joy in our own lives.

- [Q] What do you think Paul meant by “now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord?”
- [Q] How did the Thessalonians bring joy to Paul and his companions?

Activity: Divide the group into two smaller groups. Ask one group to come up with as many reasons as they can why they should share their faith based on fear of God. Ask the other group to come up with reasons why they should share their faith based on joy in God. Compare their answers after about five minutes. Ask them which reasons motivate them the most.

Teaching point three: When we are convinced of God's love for us and for others, we experience a lasting joy.

Reread 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13. When we let God fill us with love for others, it has the surprising value of giving us joy. If we love others, we will want to share Christ, who is love, with those around us.

Bryan Chapell shares this story in his book *In the Grip of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992):

On August 16, 1987, Northwest Airlines flight 225 crashed just after taking off from the Detroit airport, killing 155 people. One survived: a four-year-old from Tempe, Arizona, named Cecelia.

News accounts say when rescuers found Cecelia they did not believe she had been on the plane. Investigators first assumed Cecelia had been a passenger in one of the cars on the highway onto which the airliner crashed. But when the passenger register for the flight was checked, there was Cecelia's name.

Cecelia survived because, even as the plane was falling, Cecelia's mother, Paula Chican, unbuckled her own seat belt, got down on her knees in front of her daughter, wrapped her arms and body around Cecelia, and then would not let her go.

Nothing could separate that child from her parent's love—neither tragedy nor disaster, neither the fall nor the flames that followed, neither height nor depth, neither life nor death.

Such is the love of our Savior for us. He left heaven, lowered himself to us, and covered us with the sacrifice of his own body to save us.

How can we not want to tell others about a love like that?

[Q] What makes you experience God's love for you? How might you use that experience to express God's love for others?

[Q] Share a time where you found joy over someone else's faith.

Apply Your Findings

John Powell shared this experience in his sermon "Prayer as Surrender":

Once I was giving a talk to all of my [Jesuit] order's houses in the Midwest. I was the third speaker on a panel of three. I'm never nervous before I speak—I mean, I have too much mileage on my mouth. At least I was never nervous as we traveled around all the other houses.

We came at last to Loyola University, here in Chicago, where I teach. I'm confronted with my own community. I wanted to impress them. They'd never heard me speak, and I wanted to tell them, "Fulton Sheen is coming out from wraps tonight, brothers, you've had a gem right here in your midst. You may not have known that, but you did."

So I was nervous. My mouth was dry. My hands were cold. When all else fails, you try prayer, right? So I tried prayer. And nothing happened.

I said, "Jesus, I'm asking in your name. You said whatever we ask in your name you're going to give us." And nothing happened. So I said, "You're trying to tell me something?" And he did.

I heard inside me (you can debate my sanity later), "You're getting ready to give a performance. You're getting ready to perform for your brothers so they'll know how good you are, and they don't need that. They need you to love them so they will know how good they are."

I looked out at the community, and I said, "I'm going to love you. I don't know whether I really have in the past, but from now on I'm going to love you."

It is true what they say, that when you love you are not nervous. All nervousness disappeared: the saliva came back into my mouth, the blood came back into my fingers, and I felt very much at home. And I knew the effect when I love. When we love, God acts. God did act that night through me. I know he did.

[Q] Conclude this study with Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians in verses 11–13. Ask the group to use the thoughts expressed in these verses to form their own prayers for each other.

—Study by Jeffery Arthurs, with JoHannah Reardon