

Christmas outreach: show caring, consistent love

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Some men arrived carrying a paraplegic on a stretcher. They were looking for a way to get into the house and set him before Jesus. When they couldn't find a way in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof, removed some tiles, and let him down in the middle of everyone, right in front of Jesus. Impressed by their bold belief, he said, 'Friend, I forgive your sins.' Luke 5:18-20 (Msg)

Seven ways a small group can reach people for Jesus

#1 - Give caring, consistent love to those who don't know Jesus.

Like the paralytic's friends, sometimes it takes something radical to lead someone to Jesus! And sometimes it just takes the caring, consistent love of a small group of Christians. As we enter the holiday season, make plans with your small group to reach out to friends and neighbors who do not know Jesus. The reason God used the friends in Luke 5 is because they cared for the paralytic. Like those four, your life mission starts with love - caring enough about those around you that you reach out to them. The number one reason Christians don't share Christ with others is that they are too preoccupied with themselves.

Before you can care about others, you must become aware of them. When your small group meets, try to identify the people you know who need to know Jesus. And start praying for them, that God will give you an opportunity to share your faith in a non-threatening way. Pray that God will soften their hearts and soften your heart. Then, make a plan for how you can reach out to these people as a small group.

2 -- Believe that God can work through you to reach people for Jesus.

No one is hopeless. When the four friends looked at the paralytic's condition, they could have responded in doubt: What could Jesus do? Instead, they believed God could heal him -- they had faith. The Bible said the paralytic's sins were forgiven when Jesus saw the faith of the four friends.

There are people paralyzed in our world, who aren't necessarily physically paralyzed, but who have a paralyzed faith. Whether they're paralyzed by doubts, loneliness, fear or anything else, the result is the same -- they need the faith of the others.

In a sense, they don't have enough faith to believe, so your faith is going to have to bring them to Jesus. The Apostle Paul asked for prayer, so "that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ ..." (Colossians 4:3 NIV)

#3 -- Your small group must make a plan.

Although faith and prayer are important ingredients in bringing others to Jesus, you also need to *do* something! You need a plan. When the four friends saw that access to Jesus was blocked, they came up with a plan to get the paraplegic to Jesus. Your small group needs a plan to bring people to the Savior. Without it, you won't lead anyone to Him. The Bible says that God has a plan: "*The God of our ancestors has handpicked you to be briefed on his plan of action.*" (Acts 22:14 MSG)

God's plan of action for us is summed up in the Great Commission: "*Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new*

disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20 NLT)

#4 -- Your small group must overcome difficulties.

When the four friends saw the path to Jesus blocked, they had every reason to feel discouraged, but they didn't give up. They looked for another way to bring the man to Jesus. We all get discouraged at times. But in order to share Jesus with our friends, we must persist through those difficulties. I remember a small group at Saddleback who prayed for a lost friend for two years before that person made a commitment to Jesus. I know that man is glad the small group didn't give up after a year and a half of prayer.

Jesus told a story about seeds falling to the ground. Some failed to develop deep roots and fell away when they encountered problems. (Matthew 13:21) Jesus wants us to deepen our faith in him so we *"produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"* (Matthew 13:23 NLT)

#5 -- Your small group needs the courage to do something different.

When faced with a discouraging situation, these four friends did something different to get their friend to Jesus -- they went through the roof! Sometimes we have to do the same. You may not want to tear apart a roof to get someone to Jesus, but you could host a party. For a small group in San Diego, that meant buying season tickets to see professional football games. Besides buying their own tickets, they bought one extra ticket -- for someone who didn't know Jesus. 13 couples came to Christ through that experience.

We can have courage as we tell others about Jesus because the Holy Spirit is working through us. It doesn't matter how well much we know or how well we talk because God inhabits our abilities: *"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus."* (Acts 4:13 NIV)

#6 -- Your small group must work together to get the job done.

Have you ever tried to carry someone on a stretcher with only three people? It doesn't work. If all four of the friends hadn't helped, the paralytic would have fallen off the stretcher. Some people will only come to Jesus through a group effort. Studies have shown that people come to Christ faster when they come through a supportive environment! That's why small groups are so essential in bringing people to Christ.

When you talk to someone at work and it's just you and that person, you're the only witness. If you're able to bring them to a group event -- particularly one that is fun -- they'll go, "Wow, these people aren't goofy. They aren't religious nuts. They're normal people."

Jesus says that *"where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."* (Matthew 18:20 NIV) This means when we reach out to others, we're *"working together with one mind and purpose."* (Philippians 2:2 NLT)