

Becoming A Redemptive

By Joseph C. Aldrich

Joseph Aldrich:

White says it's just about 10 seconds till 10:00. I am going to fly out this door at quarter to eleven. I have a 12:20 plane to catch and have to check a car in two. Not because I'm antisocial or I want to leave, but I also don't want to miss the plane. Have to sit around LAX for another couple of hours to catch the next one.

So about a quarter till I'm going to grab my briefcase and probably go right out that door and some of you will rejoice. I just want to stay ahead of time. It's been fun thinking together about this probably this most important quality called love. I've never seen an old love wanted sign. Love is the world's largest, unnatural, undeveloped resource, and the ultimate mark of your growth in Christ is your capacity to love.

And I really haven't tried to define love. Trying to define love is kind of like metal housekeeping in a revolving door. We say, I love my wife, I love my baby, I love my biscuits dipped in gravy. We apply to all different kinds of circumstances and so forth. But in the light of Jonathan Edward's statement that the ultimate good is to treat something according to its true value, I like to think of love as an appropriate response to value.

And that's not bad. Love is always an appropriate response to value.

Now, the Bible says that our faith, that is what we believe works through love. And what it's suggesting is that if our faith is real, it will be expressed in the way in which we love. Faith without works is dead. Love is basically action, behaviors. Love is building a context in which the other individual can grow as we nourish and cherish.

We looked at that a little bit. So today I want to take this concept right out into the community and really relate it to God's basic strategy. Timmons has been bouncing around the concept of being a redemptive person reaching out. We think of evangelism. There are a lot of wild ideas that come to mind.

If we did a little word association test, we discover that there'd be some interesting words that would come to mind if I were to ask you to give me the first word that you think about when I mentioned the word evangelism. For some, evangelism is what Billy Graham does in the past or doesn't do. For others, it's a high level bombing mission from 30,000ft, safely protected by a cloud cover, where you drop gospel bombs all over the porches and lawns of the neighborhood and you win them the Christ. For other, it's kind of an evangelical mugging mission where you go to the local bus depot or park and you trap some unsuspecting soul and dump the evangelical dump truck on him.

For others, it's a trip into the evangelical phone booth on Tuesday night where you come out with a big red "S" on your chest and charge out in the neighborhood to win it for Christ. Sell them your own neighborhood. There are a lot of ideas and concepts about what evangelism is and

what it isn't. But one fallacy that underlies most of our concepts is the fallacy that evangelism is something that we do rather than something that we are.

And I don't know how I can say it and make it clear, and underscore it hard enough. But friend, you are the message. The gospel is not a message that you verbalize nearly as much as it is a message that you visualize and then share the words as people have heard the music of visualization.

And it's interesting as you study the terms used in the Book of Acts to describe evangelism. And then you get into the epistles where a Church is established. And once a local incarnation of the Bride of Christ is established, the terminology used to explain evangelism changes, and it now becomes God putting himself on display through the lives of his people. Now, obviously, when you go into an unchurched area, evangelism has to be very proclamational because there is no local incarnation of the character of God. But as believers come together in a redemptive community and as they're growing in their love for each other, and our Lord said, by this, everyone will know you're, my disciples if you have love for one another.

Then it becomes very important that we realize that visualization becomes extremely significant. Now, I want to make something clear, so I'm not misunderstood. You and I need to be prepared to articulate the gospel in two types of settings. One is the setting where you meet a stranger, and this is the only chance you have to share. And it's an appropriate time to do that. That's abnormal evangelism.

Nothing wrong with it evangelism, but it's abnormal. Not normal. Normal evangelism is you building relationships with nonchristians and allowing the gospel to flow down those webs of relationships.

One is short range, the other is low pressure, long range. One is immediate. You come to closure quickly; the other is you allow them to sense the fragrance of the indwelling Christ in your own life. And as we'll see, there are some other things you do also.

I was with the Billy Graham team in Boise, Idaho, and I'll be teaching in their subsequent campaigns in the area of evangelism training pastors. And one of the things I pointed out to them, I picked up their own brochure, and I said, you're featuring a tremendous Church here as a model for the kind of evangelism that you seem to be teaching. And this Church States they have 9000 members, and every week they have 300 people out sharing their faith in neighborhoods. I said, man, that's incredible. 300 people is about three plus times larger or more than the average Church in the United States.

But I said, a little bit of simple math reminds us very quickly in the model Church that less than 4% of the people are involved in actively sharing their faith. And I'm very concerned about that other 96%.

Let me just put up here some very simple terms that the Lord has used in scripture that the Bible uses to help us understand that we are the message. The Bible calls us a beautiful bride. In Ezekiel chapter 16, there's an incredible passage where God describes his efforts to take Israel

from the rubbish sheep and describes her as being moments away from death, her umbilical cord uncut, squirming in her blood. And God rescues her. He romances her, she becomes his bride.

He renovates her, pours out the beauty of his character into her. And quite a description of Ezekiel 16 of God's efforts to make his bride beautiful. And the text says she advanced to royalty, that her recognition went out throughout the whole Earth because of God's splendor which was upon her. And God's strategy for evangelism has always been a beautiful bride. Brides are irresistible.

Men of steel are known to melt in their presence. In the New Testament, we're now the bride of Christ. And God's strategy for evangelism is to display the universals of his character, his faithfulness, his Holiness, his love, his compassion, his justice through the particulars of your everyday life.

The ancient Greeks had an effective communicator at three qualities. These are the three canons of classical rhetoric which some of you probably have studied in your speech or homiletics courses. The first is ethos. You can be an incredible rhetorician great ability with words, but if you're not ethical, it's the word ethos. You've lost your credibility. All on Nixon during Watergate.

We thought something might be a little putrid and crude there. And so no matter how brilliant his words were as he tried to handle this situation somehow because we sensed that there was a lack of ethos, he would be judged as not an effective communicator. The second quality was pathos.

So where did you get empathy and sympathy from? The ancient Greeks said you can be ethical, but if you have a cold, cruel type of personality, the message isn't going to get through.

And it's the old principle, isn't it, that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. When love is felt, the message is heard. The world listens. When Christians love. Third quality is "logia," where we get logos from. Word. You do have to have something to say. There has to be a message of verbalization of what you're trying to say. But most of our evangelism training programs are teaching people how to say the words. Very few are training anybody how to play the music.

The music of the gospel is ethos and pathos. My wife and I were in seminary. I think I mentioned we made a commitment that our friends would come out of the nonchristian community. We went and lived in a high class red light district. And we made it a point to open up our home and our life to these people in that apartment building.

I want to tell you, we had some wild, wild experiences. Make a great movie. But because we tried to take at least one couple either out to dinner or have them into our apartment once a week, nonchristian couple or individual, we often get to get to know these people. They had opportunity to hear the music of the gospel in our own lives. And we saw many, many of them come to know the Lord. So we're a beautiful bride; we're called a shining star in Philippians; we're called wise fishermen, not hunters. Hunters ambush. Fishermen select an appropriate lure, recognizing the different kinds of species. You don't catch yellow tail with trout flies.

By the way, they used fishing lures back in those days. Don't say, well, all they used was nets. It's not true. There are all different kinds of fishing lures. I was delighted to discover that; supported my prejudices.

We're called a fragrant aroma of life unto life to those that believe and death unto death of those that don't believe. Notice the appeal to the senses here, the eyes, the nose. And the message is, hey, you got to smell good. You can't have spiritual B.O., how important that is. In Matthew 13. We're going to look at that and then it says, we're good seed.

Yeah, it's the Greek word Kalos, not the Greek word Agathos. Agathos is the Greek term that normally refers to intrinsic goodness. It's ethical goodness. It's interior goodness. Kalos is the outward evidence of that inward goodness.

And it's the Greek's favorite word for beauty. And God wants to display you and me out in his world as beautiful people, not perfect people, not letting our perfection be made known to all man, which is what we think we have to do and involve evangelists. No, it's just progress. Progress implies you haven't arrived yet, you're still on the way. And the nonchristian isn't looking for perfection, he's looking for progress toward a positive direction. And often we think, well, boy, I don't want the Christian to know that I ever had bad thoughts; ever blow it. But the Bible says we're two or three gather together and someone's going to spill his milk. You know, it's going to happen all the time.

Living Epistles, a book that's alive, that is to be available for the nonchristian to pick up and turn the pages up and read the fine print. Living Epistles, read by all men.

Yet the average Christian has no nonchristian friends after he's known the Lord for two years. Nobody's reading the book. Salt in Matthew chapter five and Light. And there are other ones, too. But it just helps us understand that we must be good news before we share good news, because no one will receive Jesus Christ through you who will not receive you first.

Okay, let's look at Matthew chapter five for a minute. In Matthew chapter five, our Lord is visiting with his friends in this teaching session that he's having. They're up at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, and he's not in a Chapel or anything. He's out in his Chapel, probably sitting in a meadow, somewhere, talking. In Matthew chapter five, a very interesting thing is happening. The Lord is describing in verses three through ten, a God flavored person.

The first four qualities are "God-ward." The second four qualities are "man-ward." The first quality of the first four is the key to the first quality of the second four. In other words, if you don't have this one "God-ward," you won't have this one "man-ward." It's very interesting.

If you are not poor in spirit, that's "God-ward," you're not going to be merciful "man-ward." If you're not one who mourns over that which separates you from God and keeps you from being all that you know you need to be, you're not going to be pure in heart because you don't have a concern about those things that God has declared to be important. If you're not an individual who

is meek, you're not going to be a peacemaker. And if you're not someone who hungers and thirst for righteousness, verse ten, you won't be persecuted for righteousness.

And having set forth these, what we call the Beatitudes, he then immediately makes an ontological statement, that's a statement of being. And he turns to his friends and immediately says, you're two things, your salt and your light. And then he talks about the two great dangers that will hinder our effectiveness of salt and light. And the first thing he says is salt can lose its taste, its flavor. Now what he's talking about here is the danger of becoming so identified with a nonchristian community that we lose our radical difference.

Compromise takes place, and when salt loses its flavor, there's a chemical change that takes place, and it's not salt or it's different. Now, to be able to be involved in radical identification with the non Christian community, we have to be committed to radical difference.

And those are the two polarities that have existed in the Church since day one. The monastic people became very committed to radical difference, and they thought if they built walls and huddled in their monasteries that they could maintain their separation from the world. But they discovered that worldliness existed just as much, if not more, behind those monastic walls as it did out there in the real world. The other extreme are those Christians who feel, well, the key is to identify with them, and we're just going to go out and be no different and mix it up with them and so forth. And they don't maintain that radical difference.

And so the Lord says, hey, I want you to be salt, creating a thirst for and preserving and so forth, but don't lose your flavor. Now, probably most of us don't err in that direction as much as we do the other one. And he said, you're also light, but don't lose your visibility.

So I have two problems. One is compromise, the other is concealment.

And I think that's what's happened very much in our Christian community today where we don't have nonchristian friends. We view the nonchristian as the enemy rather than the victim of the enemy.

And we're worried about the doctrine of separation. And we think that separation equals isolation, which it doesn't. Paul said in his letter to the Church at Corinth is man, you misunderstood me. I didn't tell you to separate from the fornicators and the adulterers of this world. I told you to separate from the fornicators and the adulterers in the Church.

And part of our problem is we expect a nonchristian to be Simonized and Sanitized and San Franized before he sanctified. We expect regenerate behavior before regeneration takes place. Yet the reality is Christ was often where the beer cans and poker chips were, and the religious community couldn't handle it. They were after Him all the time to launder his lifestyle.

Christ did not, in any stretch of imagination, avoid the appearance of evil, and neither can you. We need to go back and study that passage in 1 Thessalonians chapter five and see what it really means.

As far as the religious establishment, the conservative religious establishment was concerned, Christ was a regular law breaker.

Peter tried avoid avoiding the appearance of evil by stopping eating with the Gentiles when the Jewish Christians showed up and Paul got after him, and I'm sure the dialogue went something like this. Paul said, hey, Peter, you're inconsistent. You'll eat with the Gentile Christians when no Jewish Christians are around.

The Jewish Christians show up, you bail out. And Peter said, I don't want to offend the Jewish Christians. And Paul says, offend them anyway because you're distorting the gospel of Christ by separating.

And I think we need to take a good look at what separation really means. It means a commitment to Holiness. It's separation unto God and then taking the risk of being redemptive out there in the very real world. Salt and light. Now, flipping from there to Matthew 13, we'll just go on over here to another teaching time.

Matthew 13. The Lord is pointing out the characteristics of the age in which you and I happen to be living today. Matthew, chapter twelve. His deeds are attributed to Satan, and that's the unpardonable sin. Remember that passage?

And the Lord had been sending people that he healed to the temple regularly, all in the early part of his Ministry, forcing the religious leaders of Israel to make a decision about who he was. The laypeople came to the conclusion he's the Messiah. And that really got the religious leaders upset. So they had a meeting. They published the official decision of the religious leaders.

They say, hey, all these things that he's doing, they couldn't deny that he was healing these people. He's doing them by the power of Satan. And as soon as they came with that official declaration, the Lord now turns to his disciples to prepare them to initiate the Church age. And he starts doing something he's never done before. He starts talking in parables, and even the disciples don't understand it.

And he is describing in parable form what will be happening during the age in which you and I live. And he only interprets the first two parables. And to let rest, he just leaves to us to worry about trying to figure out what in the world he meant. First two are very clear. The first parable, remember, talks about four soils, and the focus is on the character of the soil.

Now, if we had time for each of you to share your testimony, I know some of you say, oh, boy, there was a time in my spiritual pilgrimage when my soul was like the hard packed path or my soil was like that field that was full of thistles and thorns, and the word of God was bouncing off my life, but the cares of this world and materialism and some other things just kind of choked it out and never took root. Some would say, well, boy, the birds were raiding my field. As soon as the seed had hit, Satan's birds come pick it up and be gone.

And if you and I are going to be effective in evangelism, we got to take seriously the condition of the soil.

The other parable, the second one, the focus is not on the condition of the soil. The focus is on the quality of the seed, not the quality of the soil. And if evangelism is going to be effective, we've got to take seriously the quality of the soil and the characteristics of the soil and the quality of the seed. And that's where the Lord says in the second parable, good seed. And in the first parable, the seed is primarily a verbal message.

In the second parable, the seed is people. And it says, God is in the business of sowing good seed. And then the Lord interprets that to mean the sons and daughters of the Kingdom. So God puts you in this great big seed bag, and he throws you out in the world and you grow and the counterfeit wheat grows right up alongside of you. And the farmer gets all shook up. He comes running in and he says, hey, we got the good and the bad mixed together. We got to separate them. And God says, don't separate them. Leave them together. Now, in the natural world, you can't take darnel or what's called bastard wheat and good wheat and plant them together and turn the bad wheat into good wheat.

But in the miracle of regeneration, that's what happens. And the whole Christian community has suffered from this "Holy huddle" syndrome where we get everybody inside the Church, and we think evangelism as fishing in the stained glass aquarium where the big fisherman gets up and throws the lure over the pulpit. And your mission in mine is simply to herd fish into the stained glass aquarium. No, not at all.

The purpose of the Church gathered Sunday morning is not evangelism it's edification; to send people out to be redemptive in their webs of relationships. Now, we've been talking about love, but there's a little contextual bedfellow that follows love all around through scripture. It's the word neighbor. Love your neighbor. Who's my neighbor?

Nice try. There are some other folks way back there who asked the same question. Lord, look, whoever is in need, and if you have the capability of meeting that need is your neighbor. Now, living on a resident campus is pretty tough to have non Christian neighbors. But most of you will someday. You'll be neighbors to somebody geographically, but very few will be neighbors to anybody spiritually.

The word neighbor. If I ask you to give me its derivation, if you thought for about 17 seconds, you'd come up with it. What's the first syllable? "Neigh-" comes from both a Latin and Greek root, which means to draw near. A neighbor is simply someone who is developing the capacity to draw near to somebody and it presupposes distance.

There's a lot of distance. We're the only army that shoots our wounded soldiers. Those people who get out and get involved with a nonchristian often have to wear their Ephesian six armor to protect them from other members of the body of Christ. That puts the fear of God in you. The average local Church has not implicitly given permission for its members to mix it up with the non Christians.

We mouth that we talk about it. But when Joe Christian doesn't come to prayer meeting on Wednesday night and his buddy calls him Desperate from Joe's Bar and Grill, and he goes in there and sits down and shares Christ with him at Joe's Bar and Grill. And the word gets out. The fact the guy trusts the Lord is buried under the criticism, ya know, you shouldn't have been there, what were you doing, et cetera?

Speaker 2:

Please turn the tape to side 2 for the continuation of this session.

Joseph Aldrich:

...Desperate from Joe's Bar and Grill, and he goes in there and sits down, shares Christ with him at Joe's Bar and Grill, and the word gets out. The fact the guy trusts the Lord is buried under the criticism, ya know, you shouldn't have been there, what were you doing? et cetera. And unfortunately, that's true. We also fear rejection, don't we? We don't want to get rejected.

We fear failure. Well, we have to develop that capacity to draw near. Now, what I want to do and just my remaining time is let you see that evangelism is a process. Number one, not everybody is a Reaper. Number two. So I want to take all the guilt off of you I can possibly take off and then put a little back on again.

In John chapter four, and we're going to stick with Matthew 13. This is just incidental comment.

In John chapter four. I was studying that a few months ago and something registered, which probably should have registered years ago, but it didn't. The Samaritan woman has been there.

The Lord blew all the circuit breakers of the disciples because he violated social barriers, cultural

barriers, religious barriers, and everything else to deal with this woman, and they just couldn't understand that.

And after this little dialogue took place and the Lord told him he had food to eat of that they didn't know about. And he said, My will is to do God's will. My food is to do God's will. That's what keeps me going. The Lord said, look under the fields.

They're white all ready to harvest. And he said, I send you out to reap for what you didn't sow. Others have done the hard labor. Three times he mentions the fact that others have done the hard labor. Now that was a great encouragement to me because it says a number of things, says, hey, reaping is the simplest process in the whole evangelism enterprise.

The hard labor isn't reaping. You go through a wheat field once and that's it. What's the hard labor? That's getting that tough soil ready to receive the seed. The wise farmer doesn't throw seed indiscriminately out into a thorn and thistle patch. But on the other hand, he recognizes that there's a potential of fertility there. So he goes to work and gets involved in cultivating and how important that is.

Some of you will be cultivators all your life. You'll never be Reapers. But what does the Bible say? Some people cultivate, some people sow, some people reap. But we put an incredible guilt trip on the Christian community because we're not all out there reaping. But you're not supposed to all be out there reaping.

You're not gifted to reap, all of you, but we still have responsibility. Now, cultivation, here it is, cultivation is an appeal to the heart through the building of a relationship. That's where evangelism begins.

Cultivation is an appeal to the heart through the building of a relationship. In salesman's terms, you must reduce task tension or you must reduce relationship tension before you introduce task tension. When you meet a total stranger, I'll be flying back in the airplane; if I happen to share the Lord with somebody, he doesn't know what my motives are. He doesn't know if I'm from Southwestern Company going to put this trip on them and try and sell them the Bible.

He doesn't know if I'm going to get a bottle of sawdust out and roll it on the floor and have him go and do one and a half up and down the aisle of the airplane. He doesn't know if I'm going to sprinkle him with water. He hadn't the foggiest idea because he doesn't know me. He doesn't know if I have ethos, and he doesn't really know if I care. That does not mean I should not be ready and desires of sharing Christ with him, but I've got a much more formidable task.

Now, it's possible in his life that others have been cultivating for years and others have been sowing and I'm just the Reaper. And I've had opportunity to leave many people to Christ, where that's the case. So I do want to have ability to be articulate in sharing my faith. But I believe God has given me the gift of evangelism. Many don't have that gift.

Cultivating. What do you do? You just begin to build relationships. And I will guarantee you that within the web of relationships in the non Christian community, the contacts that you have in

your vocation, your career, your Ministry, whatever, there will be people prepared to receive Christ.

And the question is, how in the world do I find them? Here's the answer. The people who respond to you socially are the schooling fish. So what do you do? You open up your web of relationships to include nonchristians.

You keep your home circle and open circle. You're inviting couples and individuals into your home. Some people just won't click. They will not reciprocate. They don't invite you into their home.

And for some reason it just doesn't fit. Well, those aren't the people you're going to influence for Jesus Christ. So you extend that web of relationships and there will be some people who are just clicks. You enjoy being with them, they enjoy being with you. There seems to be a camaraderie.

You seem to strike it off. Well, those are the individuals you're going to influence for Christ. You may never lead them to Christ, but you may do a lot of cultivating and sewing now, a lot of things you can do. We've had, I guess, three block parties. Now get the police, come out, block off the barricade, the streets.

We'll have 80 or 90 people there. Bicycle decorating contest for the kids, get five or six barbecues lined up in the middle of the street. The wives get together and put together a menu and the fellows take care of the drinks. And the guys will usually have a keg of Heidelberg, a

cage of Schlitz and a Coke and a Pepsi thing there. But I mean, you're dealing with non Christians.

What do you expect, my little daughter, one of these things walked up to, I think it was Schlitz one, and she was about two or three years old, filled up her little deal and I was tempted to run over and grab and I thought, well, she could get a good lesson. She took a big chug-a-lug, and I had given anything to have a camera because I'll tell you, she'll never touch the stuff the rest of her life. That was really funny. And then after a block party in our own neighborhood, like, I swear, where we live currently, then we had a cider press party. And out of this 80 or 90, we kind of sent some people that seem to be open, seem to be responsive. We invited probably ten or twelve families over. Maybe eight or nine would be more accurate. And we made Apple cider, got my dad's Apple cider press, and we cranked out a bunch of gallons of this stuff. And Ruthie was in the kitchen with some of the other gals making hot Donuts.

And again, just getting to know these people been in their home many times for dinner. We go to parties that they put on. I don't enjoy all that goes on. We went to a costume party one time. I went dressed as a belly dancer, head on a veil and a wig and a naval jewel and a skirt.

And they couldn't believe it. I mean, here's the Reverend, and we won first prize for the contest, too. Now, fortunately, I live far enough from school that my neighborhood activities don't get discovered over at the school. I had visions of someone being there who would take one of those pictures and get it over to Multnomah somehow and show up front page student newspaper. It wouldn't have been too good, but we had a lot of fun.

It means you do things together. God has given all of you spiritual gifts. Some of you have the gift of hospitality. That's an incredible gift for evangelism. Some of you have the gift of help, serving.

Paul has a principle in First Corinthians, chapter nine. That is a key principle in evangelism. It says, Paul says, Though I'm free and I belong to no man, I make myself a servant, a slave, a helper to everyone, to win as many as possible. And the point is, there's a direct correlation between your willingness to use the talents and the abilities that God has given you in service of the nonchristian in your effectiveness and evangelism. I've had neighbors come to know the Lord through helping them put in sprinkler systems, through helping them build a deck, a sunshade, through helping wax cars.

One got a heart problem. I used to wax his car for him every time I wax mine. It's amazing how that happens. That's why I went down three or four months ago and spent a whole Sunday afternoon helping my neighbor dig a drain ditch. Because I wanted to know that to be a Christian doesn't mean you have to have lace on your underwear and limp wrists and that you can sweat and you can do some things.

They need to see that because sometimes they think the Christians the before and all the bodybuilding pictures, the guy gets the sand kicked in his face at the beach.

And I think it's a real revelation for them to discover that Christians are the people who have fun.

So the Mormons have discovered this. I may have mentioned that they're monitoring the maternity wards now and they show up front door or the hospital room and they'll come in if you have a new little baby. And they'll say, hey, we just excited about this new child and your family and know that you're going to have some needs when you get home for the first week or so. And we think it's a real privilege to be able to provide meals for you for the first week that you come home. They're doing this all across the United States now.

And I would be willing to wager that a local Church that would get a bunch of wives together and begin to do that same thing would see more people and more families come to know the Lord Jesus Christ than if they doubled their Tuesday night crew going out in the neighborhoods. So that's evangelist. There are two points in an individual's life when they are sensitive to spiritual things. One is the birth of a child. That's a miracle.

Tell you what, when you have that first baby of yours, if the Lord gives you that privilege, it is so awesome. You made this little thing. It's a miracle. And boy, your heart is soft and tender. The other is a death.

And the Mormons now are researching a program to be at your door when somebody dies in your family. So they know a whole, Satan is so much wiser than we are.

And so in those times of building, of waxing cars, of being available. And by the way, letting them Minister to you, very important, letting them do things for you. I've got a neighbor going

down to me this weekend to my beach cabin to help me put the deck on the front of it. He's the guy I helped dig the ditch a couple of weeks ago. Three or four weeks ago.

Well, I'm hoping in the course of being there this weekend that I'm going to get to talk about the words we've done on a couple of occasions. It's been probably six or eight months ago, had him down at the beach and right out of the clear blue sky turned to me and he said, Joe, Susie and I aren't religious people. That's kind of a stupid statement. We weren't talking about religion. But what was he doing?

You see, if we listen within attentive ears, he's really saying, you know, Joe, I've heard some music. I've been around enough to know that you're real, that you sweat. But there's something a little different there that I don't have. And I don't quite know how to back into this conversation. So I'll just start off with a statement and see what happens.

And that's what he did. I said, hey, Andy, I'm not religious either. In fact, I'm not even interested in religion. He kind of blinked. I said, Andy, the exciting thing for me was to discover that Christianity isn't a religion.

Religion is spelled "D.O." Christianity is spelled "D.O.N.E." And it's been a neat thing to establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And to grow in that relationship. Well, then you listen.

See, most of us dump the whole evangelical dump truck, right? At that point, the guy mentioned the word religion or you sneeze, and he said, God bless you. So, hey, he's interested in spiritual things. We dumped the whole dumptruck. Well, what you need to understand is that between the cross and where the nonchristian is, there are probably ten or 15 caricatures that are keeping him from knowing Christ.

One is that Christians don't sweat. Christians don't have any fun. Christians are kind of out of it.

Religion is Christianity's works. I just got to try harder. And I've tried as hard as I can, and I'm not getting into that rut again. Well, I saw a great big caricature go down in Andy's mind as I just chatted for just briefly, a couple of moments about the fact, hey, real Christianity isn't "do." It's "done." It's a relationship. Now, if Andy accepts what I shared with him and I believe that he did, he can no longer reject Christianity because it's a system of works. And if he recognizes that in his mind, he's already made a predecision. He's taken one step closer to the cross.

He doesn't know it, but I know it. Research shows an individual goes through eight stages before he becomes a Christian. One stage, for example, is changing from a negative attitude to a positive attitude toward the gospel. And if you can go through your life and influence 100 people and all you do and I should say all you do, emphasizing the power of it is simply change a person from a negative to a positive toward the gospel. You've made an incredible impact for Jesus Christ. It cultivation.

And it goes on and on and on. You're limited only by your creativity, and I'm limited by time. So sewing is the second phase.

Sowing is an appeal to the mind through the communication of revelation. You got that? Sowing is an appeal to the mind through the communication of revelation.

Now when you cultivate a field and plant seed, you don't quit cultivating. When you got the corn seed in the ground, it comes up, cultivating isn't over. You got to go back and keep on cultivating. So these two at the same time.

Sow a little bit go back to cultivate. Sow cultivate all kinds of things you can do here. When I just planted that seed in Andy's mind, hey, Andy, Christianity's relationship not a religion, I was sowing. When I gave another neighbor a copy of Chuck Swindoll's book Strike the Original Match, I was sewing. If a good article comes up on raising kids and one of the neighbors is kind of struggling in that area, and Dobson or somebody has a good article in Family Life or something and you tear it out and say, hey, this has been helpful to me, 'take and read,' your sewing. When you take them to see Chariots of Fire, you're sowing. When you encourage them to go see a Francis Schaeffer series on how then should we live, you're. Sowing when you take them to a Dobson series, you're sowing you take them to Church fellowship, if they can handle that, you're sewing. On and on and goes, and you're sewing too, just by the way you live, they're seeing that. The Bible says that we're to be ready to give an answer to every man who asks us the reason for the hope that's in us.

Hope presupposes contact. It presupposes that the individual has the opportunity to see us living in a situation where there's not a lot of reason for hope, otherwise hope has no meaning. And he sees you struggling with an illness in your family or a crisis that would undo many. And there's an attitude of hope and expectancy that he's not used to seeing.

And we'll be ready, having allowed them to observe us in this context, to provide them with an answer, to give an answer, that's the verbalization.

We got to play the music. Got to play the music.

Sewing can involve just all kinds of things. Testimony tapes, or if you got some good tapes and they're struggling in the area of marriage and family, give them a tape. It's amazing how God will use that. My most effective evangelistic Bible studies have been around the topic of human relationships, and it's amazing how you can get them there. I remember I taught a group of more than 55, 35 Episcopalians in Texas.

I don't think any of them knew the Lord. And the hostess turned to me after my first session on marriage and family. We were back in loving marriage in the beginning, kind of looking at the Genesis account, and she had tears running down her face and she said, Joe, I know the people in this room. We don't know what you're talking about. When you talk about a personal relationship with God, are you going to tell us how we can have one?

Wow. Yeah, we'll get around to it. She trusts the Lord, her husband trust the Lord, or a whole bunch of people committed their lives to Christ. So sewing, you're getting material in your classes. When you take that course on marriage and family, don't take it just to help yourself.

Take it and be thinking, how could I communicate this in my neighborhood, in the webs of relationships that God is giving me? How could I package this? What kind of a study could I put together that God could use to impact the nonchristian? So you want to begin with the felt need and move to the real need. See, the gospel is a lot more than good news that God saves us from hell.

It's good news that God wants to invade our marriage and our family and all our other relationships and bring about change and get us heading in a redemptive, positive success building direction. So you can go from a troubled marriage back to the real issue. You can go financial crisis back to the real issue. You can go from illness and be available to help and so forth. By the way, allow them to evangelize you.

I think it's very important for you to go out with them, as often do, sit down at lunch and say, hey, tell me about your spiritual pilgrimage or some things that you're committed to, and maybe that whole lunch hour, you just let them talk. But you plant seeds. They say, oh, no, Bill, Mary, sometimes you ever have time make it as vague and as indefinite as you can, time wise. So it's not threatening. Sometimes I like to share some principles with you that maybe would bring into focus a little clearer for you what it means to have a personal relationship with God.

And that's what in my book I call my I forget what I call it, but it's kind of a probing type question, pilgrimage question. Where are you at on your pilgrimage? And if you listen, and almost inevitably, if you build a friendship, they'll say to you, Joe, I'd like to share those with me sometime. Then the next question is the schedule question.

What's your schedule look like? You're free in the next month or so. Very vague, very general. And you listen because you may be crowding a little too much at this point. Yeah, I could get some time free.

Well, what's the best day for you? Wednesday, could we meet for breakfast? And you try and get it down to some appropriate time. Sowing. Final is reaping. Reaping is an appeal to the will. We are looking for response.

Now in evangelism. We have said evangelism is event oriented rather than process oriented. And as a result, we have a lot of guilty people who are not gifted in reaping, but we have a lot of people who are gifted in the hard labor. And our Lord told his disciples, like, you guys are going out sent to do the easy work, reaping. Others have done the hard labor.

Now it's my understanding of scripture that all of us are to be involved in doing the work of an evangelist. And cultivating, doing some sewing, but many will never reap. But I want to tell you something. If you're involved in cultivating, sowing and reaping is so much easier, they will pull it out of you. I had one guy finally called me up after I dropped the hint, let's get together and I'll

share some principles. He called me up two weeks later and said, Joe, you got to share those principles with me.

My goodness, I could have stuttered all the way through the Spirit of God would have made it happen. Well, I've got to scoot out that door. Remember, you are the message. McLuhan is right when he says the medium is the message. No one will receive Christ through you that won't receive you first.

So work hard at becoming good news. Focus hard on being a lover. That's key. All these things we talked about earlier in this week equip you for evangelism and then just get out there and love people and leave the results to God. Let's pray, Father, take these dear students, these dear people and encourage them.

Just remind them again of your great love for them and how that you came to this Earth to demonstrate your irrevocable commitment to them. And then, Father, give them the desires of their hearts. We pray, Lord, that each one early in their pilgrimage would exchange their lives for what you've declared to be important. And then, Lord, gives them the Grace and the courage to reach out when it's appropriate in their lives and build some redemptive relationships. Becoming redemptive neighbors and Father, gives them the joy of fruit of being spiritual parents, of seeing new birth, new life flow down broken webs of relationships and begin to heal and restore broken lives.

And, Father, I pray they never get over the thrill of that. And, Lord, you send us from here not feeling guilty but encouraged and challenged to be about the King's business of living Godly lives and opening up our webs of relationships to include those that you love so much. And Father, give us the skill to bridge back to that nonchristian culture without losing our flavor and give us the courage to be lights and to move out knowing that there is no impact without contact. And we'll thank you in Christ's name, Amen. Have a good weekend. Thank you.

Thank you.