

## 2012 Camp Hill Evangelism Series

### Part 8 “The Finer Details of the First Impression”

In this series on evangelism, we have been discussing what the evidence shows that searching souls are searching for in a Savior. We have also been covering what the same souls are searching for in a church family. In the last lesson we exposed some of the primary issues that they seek in the church family that stand out to them.

- They are looking for the sound doctrine of the Bible, for a people that are friendly and care for each other, for strong preaching from the pulpit, good children’s programs and ministries that reach out to the poor and broken-hearted. It just so happens that we as a church are to have such qualities as spelled out in the Holy Scriptures. This is because God knows what is important at the heart of all searching men and women, for He created them. He knows how we function at all levels. In most of these areas Camp Hill does quite well and in a couple there is still work to be done.
- The reality is that we could have the best presentation of the gospel, the deepest teaching from the scriptures, the friendliest attitude with the best youth and outreach ministries, but if we make a bad first impression, then we could blow a second chance. We must make a good first impression on those whom we invite to meet the church family.

Matthew 3:1-3 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” <sup>3</sup> For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, “THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!’ ”

- The arrival of Jesus and His earthly ministry was about to be underway. It was predicted centuries in advance in Malachi 3:1 that the coming Messiah would be ushered in by a messenger. “*Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,*” says the Lord of hosts. This messenger was John the Baptist and he prepared the hearts of the people in such a way that they might be more receptive to the message that was to come.
- It was this John the baptist that was fulfilling the passage of *Isaiah 40:3-5* “*A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.”* <sup>4</sup> “*Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley;*” <sup>5</sup> *Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*”
  - In the culture of the ancient world kings would take tours of their conquered lands. They would load up their royal entourage and venture to some of the remotest parts of the kingdom; therefore they had to plan well in advance.
  - Part of this planning was to make sure the road was smooth and easy to access. The peoples of the nations that were being visited would often build a smooth road into their town and did so with royalty in mind. If the road had some dips, they would fill it in. If there were a hill in the way, they would level it. If there was a boulder in the way, they would move it. If there were a tree in the path, they would chop it down. The result was a road that was straight, smooth and worthy of a king making a visit to his people.

2012 Camp Hill Evangelism Series  
Part 8 “The Finer Details of the First Impression”

- This is what John the baptist was doing when he preached repentance for the coming King of kings and Lord of lords. There was a King coming and His name was Jesus Christ. All the people were focusing on the message of John so that by the time Jesus showed up, the Messenger could easily say, “*Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world*” (John 1:29).

The Charge for the Congregation

- Brothers and sisters, we possess that message of salvation today, the message that Jesus came into the world to save sinners like you and me. He lived a perfect life, died the perfect death as a perfect sacrifice that we might be cleansed and perfected to live eternally with God. Jesus had a messenger that prepared the people to encounter God in the flesh face to face. He cleared the way for Jesus and His message of the gospel.
- We also at times must face a similar struggle when we are trying to lead others to the throne seat of God. You cannot have a groom without a bride in the same way that you cannot have Christ without His church. You can’t have the universal church without a local body of believers in which to fellowship. This is where we are in the 2012 Camp Hill Evangelism Series, the finer details of the local church family. We must make a good first impression on our visitors, for there will not likely be a second. Let us study some of the finer details of the first impression and see what we might learn.

In Thom Rainey’s research publication *Surprising Insights of the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, he interviewed more than 350 recent converts who chose a church family to grow in their relationship with God. The information he gleaned from them is quite insightful concerning the first impressions from those seeking out a Savior and a church family in which to deepen that relationship. I would like to elaborate on some of these finer details that pose stumbling blocks.

Facilities:

Of the 353 who were surveyed, 161 or 43% mentioned that their first impression of the facilities were extremely important to them. When pressed for a deeper explanation, they elaborated in the following factors that were important to them in the beginning of this search.

- Clean rest rooms are essential. There were many unsolicited comments about dirty rest rooms and facilities.
- Some basic comfort issues mentioned frequently were pew or chair comfort, indoor climate control, adequate seating space, and covered walkways and drop-off points.
- Sound systems engendered a few interesting comments, but only if there were problems. Apparently the best sound system is one that is unnoticed.
- Adequate parking was mentioned as a need only if the person experienced problems finding a parking place or if the parking was too distant.

In some of these areas we are doing well and with others we need to address. First and foremost we are very grateful to be in the family of God and as an added bonus a facility for our use. On the other hand we must always ask “Without compromising on the Word, how can we make the

## 2012 Camp Hill Evangelism Series

### Part 8 “The Finer Details of the First Impression”

facilities even better for the people that we invite to our services and classes?” Let us examine each of these important areas and see how we are doing.

- If you were here in the congregation a few years ago, you would know that our bathrooms were very much outdated and for the most part non-handicap accessible. We had some major updating projects and the results went well. The bathrooms were brought up to date; we built a new wheelchair ramp and even installed a new air conditioning system to replace the 1950s chiller and furnace.
- Harold and Karen do a wonderful job making sure that the facilities are always neat and clean. If you appreciate the job they are doing then let them know.
- Concerning the auditorium, we have recently brought up to date our aging sound system, upgraded the computers and even broadcast the worship services every week. These were all things that were done in mind of not only the people we are trying to reach out to, but also for the regular members.
- We tend to do okay on the comfort and room in the auditorium, but that could change quickly if we have a growing spurt. For now we have plenty of comfortable seating.
- In the area of parking space we have suffered for many years. We actually have parking for only about one half of the congregation if you count the spaces directly in the street in front of the building. This is a very large problem when we are trying to reach out to individuals on a congregational basis. Some suggestions that might work with this problem are:
  - Go to two services, one before the Bible class and one after. This is not as difficult as you might think and could accompany another hundred in growth.
  - Buy a different building. This is probably not a wise investment of funds since the model that we are trying to do is to plant new congregations.
  - Have a group of members pledge to park a block or two from the building, leaving the spaces for the visitors, the elderly and those with young children. This we could do starting today without a committee meeting or master planner.
- Recently some of the members have undertaken the task of making our lobby more functional and appealing. They met with a friend that was a professional interior decorator and the following is the assessment. We must remember that this lady was a visitor and not desensitized to what we might have grown accustomed to. She was an outsider looking in.
  1. Overall, the foyer/hallways are mismatched and chaotic – different trims, floor coverings, styles, etc.
  2. The ceiling is pretty horrendous – textured, crumbling, dingy, ugly vent grates, etc.
  3. The bulletin boards are busy and cluttered.
  4. The walls and trim are dirty, scuffed.
  5. The carpet is a little dated.
  6. Lack of lighting is pretty terrible, and the existing pendant in the foyer is the wrong shape for the space – additionally, it draws your eye upward.
  7. Few pretty areas – few attractive focal points
- We can be grateful for our physical structure to meet in and at the same time be honest in respect to reality. We have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus and understand His

## 2012 Camp Hill Evangelism Series

### Part 8 “The Finer Details of the First Impression”

mercies, but that does not mean visitors whom we invite carry the same understanding about appearance that we do.

The issue that generated the most intense comments was the cleanliness, neatness, and safety of nursery, preschool, and children’s areas. Of those that emphasized the facilities, 63 percent volunteered their observations about children’s facilities. Safety was the number one concern.

- “Parents want to know that no dangerous toys or other items are in the children’s rooms. They want to be certain that only the parents can get to the child. Easy accessibility to their children is their second concern...The apparent concern and attitude of adult workers were mentioned next. Cleanliness was also mentioned frequently.”
- Recently you might have noticed that all the classrooms have had windows installed so that anyone walking by can always see what is going on. We have been trying to make it a better environment in the classrooms and in the long run it will not only be a nice thing for the visitors, but also for the regulars.

Another area that was often mentioned was whether the worship services and classes were organized well or complete chaos. Paul wrote concerning worship in the church in *1 Cor 14:40* *But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.*

- Bill Kridlo and the other men involved in the worship services try very hard to make sure we are all on the same page. The list of who is serving on the table is released at least a month in advance. There are certain people that prepare the Lord’s Supper in advance.
- We have the scripture reading for the service posted on the front of the bulletin. The song leader tries to pick out songs that line up with the lesson. For those of who would like manuscript notes ahead of time, they are provided.
- I want to commend all of you for all that you do that paves the way for unobstructed worship. Some areas that we might focus on concerning this are:
  - Turn off all pagers and cell phones prior so that we do not have to listen to your latest ringtone.
  - Try and teach the young children to be respectful of the visitors and the aged to not make the auditorium their personal playground. I once knew an old woman that was knocked over following worship when two kids ran by her. She broke her arm and two weeks later suffered a blood clot from that wound and died shortly thereafter. The kids felt awful for the longest time.
  - Try to be in your seat at the appropriate starting time. If you sit toward that center back, you might want to leave those seats open for the visitors if they arrived late and preferred not to walk up to the front.
  - When worship is over, it would be good to pick up any trash from the pews that you might leave behind.

### This is Ridiculous to Discuss Concerning Evangelism!!!

We might quickly dismiss this if it were not for the fact that we in the saved world are also human. I want to place you in the shoes of a searcher. Imagine if came to the realization that you have been going through a hard time in your life and decided to find out more about Christ and what He has to offer the hurting. You open up the phone book in your city and eventually decide

## 2012 Camp Hill Evangelism Series Part 8 “The Finer Details of the First Impression”

to come to “Stumbling Block Church of Christ”. You and your wife decide to take the kids for a visit on a Sunday morning. You arrive at the building as directed by the GPS.

- The first thing you notice is that all the parking places near the church building are taken. You think to yourself, “This must be a good place because it looks packed.” After parking a couple of blocks away, you finally arrive by foot and notice there are gum wrappers and litter in the parking lot. The foliage around the building looks neglected and untrimmed.
- As you enter the front door you notice the Bible class has already started and that you were late because of the extra time it took park. There was nobody to tell you where your children’s classes are, so you meander around until you see some kids in a room that look about their age. That was not all that you noticed, for the classroom for your youngest looked more like a storage facility. Well at least the lady that was teaching the class looked friendly. The mother is wondering if she made the right decision to drop the kids off with these strangers.
- Walking back through the hallway and up the stairs, both of them notice that it has been a number of years since paint was applied. There were stains in the carpet of the lobby and the bulletin boards were cluttered and out of date.
- Before the worship service begins, your wife makes her way to the bathroom to change the baby. She is appalled by the condition of the bathroom. There was nowhere to change the baby, so she does the best she can from the sink area. Not a good experience.
- By the time she makes her way through the crowd of people and into the auditorium, she has already decided that this is not the place to be. It isn’t that she was shallow or not spiritual, but that she could not look past the first impression.
- The husband was not quite there, but it did not take long to catch up. The sound system was not working properly and echoed static in the background. The worship appeared a little disorganized. It started 10 minutes late because all the people were visiting in the lobby. There was no order of worship in the bulletin so they did not know what came next in the service.
- The message they hear from the pulpit was convicting and powerful. The prayers were sincere. The singing was good. As they are leaving someone finally greets them for the first time. It is too late by now. It did not matter how great certain things were concerning



2012 Camp Hill Evangelism Series  
Part 8 “The Finer Details of the First Impression”

the experience, too many negatives already occurred. They talk about it on the way back to the car and decide to look somewhere else that might be a better fit.

You might think that does not occur, but the evidence says it happens all the time. The sad part is when trying to set an appointment to bring them the gospel of Christ for conversion, they will likely not be receptive because the “Way of the Lord was not made straight for them.”

We do the same.

When we go to restaurants, hotels and markets, we often judge them by what we see and not what might be reality. I know that our family tends not to eat in a restaurant if the bathroom is sick or it looks trashy outside. We reason that if the public areas are sick, the kitchen likely will be as well. There are many places we simply will not go if there is no parking. If an area looks unsafe for someone in our family, we avoid it. We are not shallow for doing such things and neither are they if they so choose that concerning a church family. When you buy a house you often figure in the decision on the image of the neighborhood. We can pretend all we want that these things do not matter, but in the end it likely will. Make the way straight by addressing finer details of a good first impression. True evangelism is inclusive to removing the rocks and cutting down the trees that stand in the way of a gospel presentation.