

INTRODUCTION

This is the final message in the series "Evang-YOU-ism: Share your story, Share your faith." Our theme for this series is found in Psalm 96:2, "Each day proclaim the good news that He saves."

Sports fans are pretty loyal to their teams, especially in Alabama. Two boys were walking through a neighborhood in Birmingham when a Pit Bull came barking toward them in attack mode. Thinking quickly, one of the boys pulled a board off a nearby fence and jammed it under the dog's collar and started twisting it with all his strength. The dog choked to death, but the boy saved his friend from being mauled.

A Birmingham news reporter witnessed the whole thing. He rushed over and started writing a story about the event. He wrote in his notebook, "Brave Crimson Tide fan saves friend from vicious animal." The boy said, "But I'm not an Alabama fan." So the reporter changed it to read, "Brave Auburn Tigers fan rescues friend from mad dog attack." The boys said, "I'm not an Auburn fan either. Actually I'm from Louisiana and I'm an LSU fan." The reporter walked away and the next day the headline read, "Louisiana Redneck Hoodlum Kills Faithful Family Pet."

The one team I really love is the team of the church that works together to spread the good news. During this series we've been discussing different ways to share your faith. Personal evangelism involves GOING, SHOWING, and SOWING. In this message I want to challenge you to plant seeds of kindness where ever you go. We learned in the last message that there is a fundamental difference between performing random acts of kindness and intentional acts of kindness that point people to God. The question is, "Who gets the credit?" If you perform a random act of kindness to someone, and say nothing, then you get the credit. If you perform an anonymous act of kindness, the force of human goodness gets the credit. But if you perform an act of kindness in the name of Jesus, you are pointing people to God.

There is a wonderful passage of scripture from the Psalms that speaks of the practice of sowing and reaping. Remember the Psalms weren't written to be read, they were songs. So here's the song from Psalm 126:3-6.

"The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him."

How many of you grew up before the time of electric clothes dryers? When I was a boy growing up in LA, we had a solar-powered clothes dryer. It was called a clothesline and it was behind our house. My mom worked as a nurse, so all three of us kids had chores. I can remember carrying a basket full of heavy, wet laundry to the clothesline. Then we'd take clothespins and hang them up. It was a lot more fun to bring them back in than to take them out. They were dry and light.

There's a fresh smell to sheets that have been hanging out in the sun to dry. We even had a song at church about those sheets. So as I brought in the laundry I would sing, "Bringing in the sheets,

bringing in the sheets. We shall come rejoicing bringing in the sheets." Of course that song wasn't about sheets. But that's what it sounded like to me! The song was actually about bringing in the sheaves but I didn't know at the time that sheaves were bundles of wheat.

Knowles Shaw wrote the words in 1874. The lyrics are based on this scripture from Psalm 126. "Sowing in the morning, Sowing seeds of kindness, Sowing in the noontide, And the dewy eve; Waiting for the harvest, And the time of reaping, We shall come rejoicing, Bringing in the sheaves. Going forth with weeping, Sowing for the Master, Though the loss sustained Our spirit often grieves; When our weeping's over, He will bid us welcome, We shall come rejoicing, Bringing in the sheaves."

The chorus was the why I thought it was about laundry. "Bringing in the sheaves, Bringing in the sheaves, We shall come rejoicing, Bringing in the sheaves."

As we think about sowing seeds of kindness, I want to give you two challenges and one promise.

1. ASK GOD TO BREAK YOUR HEART FOR LOST PEOPLE

The Psalmist speaks of "Those who go out weeping..." Why would a farmer be sad about planting? The seed represented food. That seed could have been eaten, but instead, the farmer makes a hard choice. He decides to throw it away into a bunch of dirt and bury it. It was risk for him. Crops didn't always make. They could dry up with no rain, or wash away with too much rain. The future of his family's survival was at stake. The farmer was making a sacrifice, and sometimes sacrifice hurts to the point of tears.

When God looks down on East Texas He sees two kinds of people. It's not black and white. It's not rich or poor. It's not Republican or Democrats. He sees lost people and saved people. He sees people on the way to heaven and people on the way to hell. The words "lost" and "hell" are no longer politically correct. We want to say people are "unchurched" or "unsaved" or "redemptionally challenged." But the Bible says they're lost. Jesus said, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10)

We don't sing, "Amazing grace how sweet the sound; that saved a wretch like me; I once was confused" or "I once was unsure" or "I once was unchurched." We sing, "I once was LOST and now I'm found; Was blind, but now I see."

In 2000 there was a movie released called "Brother, Where Art Thou." It was a Hollywood satire based on Homer's Odyssey. The most popular song in the movie was called, "I am a Man of Constant Sorrow," which was written in 1913.

According to the Apostle Paul, he really was a man of constant sorrow. He was broken hearted because of the lost condition of his fellow Jews. He wrote, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel." (Romans 9:2-4)

Paul made the audacious claim that if would result in the salvation of the Jewish people; he would be willing to forfeit his own salvation. In other words, he was willing to go to hell if that's what it took for the Jews to be saved. That's theologically impossible, but that speaks of the burden he carried. Do you have a burden for your friends and family members who don't know Christ?

In a few weeks I'll be walking down the road that leads from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. The same road has been used since long before the first Century. Halfway down the mountain we stop at a place where there's a beautiful chapel build called Dominus Flevit, which means, "Our Lord's tears."

The Bible says in Luke 19:41 that as Jesus approached Jerusalem on the Sunday before the cross, "He burst into tears." The word for weeping there is strong word, which means his body was racked with sobs. He looked at that city of people and he said, "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! How often I would have gathered you like a mother hen gathers her chicks, but you wouldn't let me. I you only knew who could bring you inner peace, but you did not recognize the day of God's visitation to you." Jesus also wept because He knew that in less than one generation the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans.

Do you know what made Jesus cry? He looked at a city of people who were more religious than we will ever be, but they were lost without Jesus. They were lost without a personal relationship with God.

That reminds me of East Texas. This is a religious area. With almost 500 churches in Smith County, you'd think that this area would be the purest, most moral, most ethical, most law-abiding place on the planet. But there's a difference between religion and righteousness. I think when Jesus looks at Tyler He feels the same way he did when he looked at Jerusalem. It's a city full of religious people, but many people who don't really know God.

You know people who may be religious but they don't have a personal relationship with Jesus. My question to you is, "Is it breaking your heart?"

Take-away Truth: Friends don't let friends die without Jesus

We're familiar with the effective slogan against driving drunk which says, "Friends don't let friends drive drunk." Of course, it's too bad Justin Bieber doesn't have those kinds of friends. Poor Justin is the perfect proof of the verse in 1 Corinthians 15:33 which says, "Bad company corrupts good character."

If you let friends drive drunk, it shows you don't really care about them. But the ultimate relational apathy would be to have a friend and let them die without at least having had the opportunity to respond to a clear presentation of the Gospel.

Tony Campolo is a Christian author and speaker. He spoke to a group of Christian college students. It's hard to shock college students, but he did it. He said, "Most people on this planet are lost and dying and going to Hell." Then he said, "The problem is, most of you in this room

don't give a !@#* about it!" Of course, I'm not going to repeat the profane word he used, but you can imagine. There was an audible gasp from the audience and after he paused he said, "The real problem is you're more concerned that I used that word than you are concerned about those people dying and going to Hell."

Will you ask God to break your heart? You've got to go forth with tears as you plant seeds of the Gospel.

2. INTENTIONALLY LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO PLANT SEEDS OF KINDNESS

The Psalmist continued, "Those who go out...carrying seed to sow."

Acts of kindness are the seeds evangelism. But as we plant these seeds, we need to make sure we point people to God. The easiest way to do that is to have a card you can simply hand to someone when you perform an act of kindness.

When you arrived today, you should have received several SOW GL cards. This stands for Show Our World God's Love. On the front side there's a heart with the message: "This act of kindness was to show you God's love in a practical way." Then there's the message: "God is in love with you!" On the flip side it says, "Experience more of God's love at Green Acres." It has the time for our Sunday services and our website. I challenge you to use these cards this week to plant seeds of kindness. Feel free to make as many copies of it as you want and go out and spread those seeds.

In 1 Peter 3, we're told we should always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us. Sometimes when you perform an act of kindness, people want to know, "Why did you do this?" You can tell them, "I did this to show you God's love." Or, you can just hand them this card and they know without a doubt the reason for the hope that is in you.

We should be sowing thousands of seeds of kindness. The more seeds you sow, the larger the harvest will be. The Bible says, "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." (2 Corinthians 9:6)

In the parable of the sower in Mark 4, Jesus said the farmer broadcast his seed over a large area. Some of it fell on hard soil, and some of it fell on shallow soil. Some of the seeds started growing, but the weeds choked out the good plants. But some of the seed took root and produced over 100 fold. These four soil conditions represent four levels of receptivity to the gospel. Some people aren't going to respond to your acts of kindness, their hearts are hardened. But it's not our job to judge the soil. Just broadcast the seed, and some of it will land on fertile hearts.

Here are some of the things you can do with your cards. Take a couple of bags of groceries to someone who may be having a tough time financially. But the SOW GL card in the groceries. At a restaurant, tell you server you want to pay for the ticket at another table and ask the server to give them this card when they bring the bill that says it is paid. However, let me caution you. Don't do it at lunch on Sunday. Last week, I talked about this and many members of our church

said they got their meals paid for! Choose another night of the week and choose people who don't look like they've just come from church!

Go through the drive thru and pay for the car behind you and tell the worker to give them a card when they pull up to pay. Go to a local laundromat with some envelopes filled with four or eight quarters; put the SOW card inside and just give an envelope to people sitting there. Get some window cleaner and paper towels and go through a parking lot until you find some of the dirtiest windshields. Wash them, and put a note and maybe some cash in an envelope along with a SOW card.

Pass out bottles of water at a health club or at Rose Rudman, and give them a card. If people ask you why you're doing it just say your church challenged all of its members to perform acts of kindness. Come up with your own acts of kindness and give them a SOW card.

Yesterday, my granddaughter, Lizzie, and I drove around a neighborhood in Tyler. When we saw people who looked like they might need some help, we stopped and Lizzie handed them some cash and she said, "I'm doing this in the name of Jesus." Or she said, "I'm doing this to show you that God loves you." People were amazed. One Hispanic girl who was about 12 years old asked, "Can I hug you?" She hugged Lizzie. We had fun. I was teaching Lizzie that it really is more blessed to give than to receive.

Take-away Truth: Acts of kindness in Jesus' name will point people to God

Before *Les Misérables* was a movie or a musical, it was a book written by Victor Hugo in 1862. I first saw *Les Mis* as a musical in London many years ago, and then I saw the movie starring Hugh Jackman a couple of years ago. Both times I cried like a baby. It's a story of grace, which makes it our story.

Jean Valjean is an ex-convict who steals silver candlesticks from a priest's home. When he is arrested, the priest claims the silver was a gift and insists Valjean be released. This one act of kindness from a man of God literally transforms Valjean into a different man. From that point on, he lives a life of kindness and grace.

God has shown kindness to each one of us. We are guilty sinners, and yet He has chosen to show us His grace and mercy. Now, it's up to us to show that same kindness and grace to others.

Imagine what could happen in East Texas if all 5,000 of us here today performed just eight acts of kindness this week. That means there would be over 40,000 expressions of God's kindness. I'm not asking some of us to do this. I'm challenging ALL of us to perform acts of kindness in Jesus name. If you are a child of God, and you don't take some cards and perform some evangelistic acts of kindness I want to say, "Shame on you!"

You may be thinking, "Pastor, you're riding us pretty hard about this. Actually, I want to SPUR you to do good works. The Bible says in Hebrews 10:24, "And let us consider how we may SPUR one another on to love and good deeds." In Texas we know a lot about spurs. A cowboy may use his spurs to "motivate" a reluctant horse to move along. Some of you need a little spur

today! Come on! In the name of Jesus, Giddyup!! Go out and give 'em heaven!

3. WE SHARE THE JOY WITH OTHERS WHEN SOMEONE TRUSTS JESUS

The Psalmist shared a powerful spiritual principle. "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy." There are many things that give us joy in life. There is joy at a wedding. There is joy at the birth of a child. There is joy at graduation events. However, the greatest joy we can experience is when someone places his or her faith in Jesus. Jesus said, "There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:10)

At the end of a movie when the credits roll, most people get up and leave, but my wife has a thing that she wants to sit and watch every credit. So we're often the only ones in the theatre. The workers are cleaning up the trash and we're sitting there reading the hundreds and hundreds of names scroll down the screen. Movies aren't just made by the directors, the producers, or the stars. It's a team effort. Evangelism is the same way. If you just plant a few seeds of kindness, you might have a part in the salvation of someone.

Take-away Truth: Even tiny seeds of kindness may result in a harvest of salvation

Last night Cindy and I enjoyed baked potatoes from Brookshire's. Those baked potatoes were the result of a team effort. Someone plowed the field, and someone planted the potatoes. Someone else watered them. Someone else picked them. Then someone transferred them to the production facility where they were washed and bagged. Then someone transported them to the Brookshire's warehouse, and someone delivered them to the store and put them out on the display shelves. I brought them home, and Cindy washed them and put them in the oven. Those potatoes we enjoyed were the result of a team of people.

The same is true for every person who comes to Christ. It's a team effort. The church at Corinth was confused about who should get the credit for all the converts, and Paul had to clear up their confusion in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, "The Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

CONCLUSION

Most of you know Dr. Sasha Vukelja in our church. She has written a book about her life appropriately named *Seeds*. Dr. V. was born in Yugoslavia during communism reign. Because her mother was an outspoken anti-communist she spent her childhood in poverty moving from place to place. This journey included time in a refugee camp and a short time in prison. Today she is one of the most renowned oncologists in America and she is passionate about her faith and her practice of medicine. How did that happen? Seeds were planted in her life.

She writes in her book: "One day, a patient came to tell me he was stopping further treatments for his cancer. Usually, patients just call to tell me that, but he insisted on coming to see me in person. When I walked into the room, he said to me, 'I know I'm dying, but I'm worried about my doctor.'

I raised my eyebrows, surprised at his candor. 'You're worried about me? You're dying, and you're worried about me? Now, why is that?'

He looked me square in the eye. 'I know where I'm going, but I can't leave just yet because I am not sure where my doctor is going.'

Where was I going? I couldn't forget his question and his genuine concern for me that day. More and more, I seemed to keep running into people like him who lived with purpose and peace despite the news that they had cancer. It reminded me of finding wildflowers in the spring that you never knew were there. You didn't plant them, but these unexpected backyard discoveries are beautiful in their own way.

I realized this was a picture of the spiritual dimension of my life. All the people and experiences from my past had planted a tiny seed in me along the way. The seeds that I thought were scattered rather haphazardly had come together, taken root and flourished underground. And one day, they unexpectedly and mysteriously took on a life of their own and came to the surface where I could see them—really see them—for the first time."

Dr. V. is a devoted follower of Jesus. I'll never forget when she was baptized here. I was in the water next to her and I asked her, "Tell us Sasha, who is your Lord?" She didn't say it quietly, she shouted, "Jesus Christ is my Lord!" There was so much joy everybody was laughing and crying. That's the joy of the harvest. And that's the result of hundreds of seeds being planted.

All of us have seeds of kindness planted in our lives, and we should be scattering seeds of kindness as well. You will never know until eternity how God used your seeds. Evang-YOU-ism is about you and me. It's just sharing your story and sharing your faith!

OUTLINE

Theme: "Each day proclaim the good news that He saves." *Psalm 96:2*

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"Those who go out weeping..."

"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel." *Romans 9:2-4*

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3. WE SHARE THE JOY WITH OTHERS WHEN SOMEONE TRUSTS JESUS

"Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy."

"There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." *Luke 15:10*

Take-away Truth: Even tiny seeds of kindness may result in a harvest of salvation.

"The Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." *1 Corinthians 3:6-7*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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