



THIS WEEK'S PONDERING

MAY 6, 2021

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“Then Peter began to speak...While Peter was still speaking these words the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.” Acts 10:34a, 44

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” I Corinthians 3:6

In baseball, the most conspicuous role is that of the “closing pitcher.” They are supposed to seal the deal – get the last out(s). All the effort of the other players on the team come to naught if they fail to “nail down the victory.” Closers get too much of everything in my opinion – blame when they fail and praise when they win. They are the guys pictured walking off dejectedly when an opposing hitter’s “walk-off home run” clears the fence or they’re jumping victoriously into the catcher’s arms when they get the final out. In truth the game may have been determined by a great defensive play in the 4th inning or a two-out hit in the 6th, but all of that is forgotten when everyone focuses on the last play(s).

There is nothing as gratifying to a Christian than to know they had a positive influence on someone’s faith. Most of the time that is some sort of kindness expressed or word of encouragement given. But in the Book of Acts, the “act” most talked about is evangelism – the sharing of good news – the extension of an invitation to faith in Christ Jesus. Acts tells the stories of who and how belief in the resurrected Jesus Christ spread from Jerusalem to “the ends of the earth” inside of 40 years. And in truth, Acts is a little bit heavy on the “closer role”, since we get story after story of people coming to faith in Jesus (one at a time or in thousands), and not so much on the failures of the Apostles’ witness. It is, so to speak, one continuous “highlight reel.”

Witnessing was not easy then. I don’t think it is disrespectful to the power of the Holy Spirit or the faith of the Apostles to say that much of the “groundwork” and unsuccessful efforts are omitted. But one thing the book does tell us is that nothing is gained for the kingdom of God if followers of Christ do not speak up. And it also emphasizes that evangelism is a team effort – some play different roles

in the process. As an example, in Acts 6 the role of Deacon is created to do acts of mercy so that the Apostles “can focus on the ministry of the Word.”

Sharing faith is unnatural for most people. Some people are simply unreceptive to faith conversations ... some skeptical ... some open but hesitant ... and a few just ready and eager for the gospel. In sharing faith, I have always been guided by the passage from I Corinthians 3:6, what I call the wonderful “division of labor” of witnessing, with the “closer” always God through the Holy Spirit. At a recent workshop on “Spiritual Conversations in a Digital Age”, I and several members of our Evangelism and Outreach Team heard about something called “The Spiritual Conversation Curve” and I want to briefly lay it out for you.

For folks who you think may be in the category of “unreceptive” but with whom you'd like to bring up the topic of God and faith, the emphasis is on “chatting about life that can build trust”, followed by “relating your life’s struggles and joys to theirs.” That may be a phase called “preparing the ground”. To those whom you discern may be receptive to such a faith conversation, talking about how Jesus is a part of your life affirms His relevance to daily life – not just your Sunday morning worship habits.” That may lead to an opportunity to connect Jesus to life in a way that allows you to bring the actual “good news” or gospel to them. That may be a “planting” exercise.

And for folks whom you may discern are truly seeking a relationship or renewing one with God, you may actually explore deep(er) faith questions with them or clarify the costs and rewards of a life lived in trust and obedience to Christ. That may be some “watering” you are doing. But remember, no matter the “phase” it is always ... always ... always God who gives the growth. And no matter if you are the “closer” or the planter, you are (or can be) a part of the most important decision or experience in someone’s life.

To God be the Glory.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Nelson", written in a cursive style.

Pastor Ken