

"RE-ENVISION" COMBINED VINE

8-15-2021

- PART 1: BIBLICAL OPTIMISM

- We were sent.
 - Great Commission.
 - *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*(Matthew 28:18-20, ESV)
- We look for people of peace.
 - *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.* (Luke 10:1-12, ESV)
 - Seventy-two disciples are sent on mission to evangelize.
 - In Luke 9, it was the twelve disciples that were sent.
 - One more indication that Jesus intends those who follow him to go make disciples.
- Two signs of optimism for those who consider participating in this mission.
 - "The harvest is plentiful."
 - Jesus is confident that there are people ready to receive him as Savior.

- Given that it is Jesus who calls people to himself through the work of the Holy Spirit, we have every reason to believe this is true.
 - “A son of peace.”
 - Jesus sends them with a missional strategy based on the belief that there are people in whom God is already cultivating an openness to the gospel.
 - Jesus calls them sons of peace.
 - It doesn’t seem that every village should be expected to have one, but enough villages do.
 - Primary strategy of MK Bharti and is the reason that his organization has started churches in thousands of villages across Bihar.
 - In our society, this should mean that while we may come across people hostile to Christians, there should be plenty that will respond well to us as Christians.
- **Questions:**
 - What is the likelihood of meeting a non-Christian in your current interactions with people? What is the likelihood of adding something to your life that would expose you non-Christians or unchurched Christians?
 - Should you discover a non-Christian in your interactions, what would keep you from spending enough time with that person to find out if her or she is person of peace?
 - How confident are you that persons of peace exist in our society? What would you instinctively think is the level of receptivity of unchurched people in our community to conversations about faith?

- **PART 2: RECEPTIVITY OF AMERICANS TO CHRISTIANITY**

- Statistics drawn from four surveys by credible researchers reported in *You Found Me* by Rick Richardson.
 - The Billy Graham Center Institute and Lifeway Research surveyed three groups.
 - 2000 unchurched people.
 - 3000 congregations.
 - 1500 small churches.
 - The Barna Group.
 - One thousand practicing Christians and one thousand lapsed and non-Christians.
- Statistics regarding receptivity to Christianity.
 - Millennials left the church at high levels from 18-24, but return to church at a rate consistent with previous generations between ages 25-34.
 - Only 25% of the unchurched were never churched (that's 11% of all Americans), only 35% say that a loss of trust caused them to leave, only 5% say that a loss of trust in God caused them to leave. The main reasons for leaving were that the church was irrelevant or that they experienced life changes.
 - Only 6% of unchurched people think that church is harmful to society.
 - 42% of unchurched people think that the church is beneficial to society.
 - 79% of unchurched people do not mind others who value their faith and talk about it.
 - Over than 70% of unchurched people have never heard, or don't recall hearing, how to become a Christian.
 - Over 50% of the 2000 unchurched people surveyed are receptive to an invitation to attend church.
 - 55% of the 2000 unchurched people surveyed are receptive to an invitation from a family member.
 - 56% of unchurched people still identify as Christian, and 75% of them are open to an invitation to church.
 - One-third of unchurched Americans expect to return to church regularly in the future, which is about 47.6 million people.

- Unchurched likelihood to attend church sponsored events, if invited.
 - Worship service: 34%.
 - Small group curious about God: 26%.
 - Safety event: 62%.
 - Service project: 51%.
 - Sports program: 46%.
 - 39% of millennials expect to return, which is the highest percentage of all age groups.
 - Close to 1/3 of all “Nones” report that religion is still important to them.
- **Questions:**
- Which of these statistics do you find most valuable? Which, if any, do you consider dubious? Which do you find disappointing?
 - Does hearing these statistics make you more inclined to reach out and engage with non-Christian in conversation and/or relationship? Why? Why not?

- **PART 3: VILLAGE TO VILLAGE**

- You go to new places to meet new people.
 - *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.*
 - Jesus was itinerant, meaning he stayed on the move.
 - The disciples followed the same process.
 - Simple reality: you can't find new people to tell of Jesus if you stay in the same place.
 - The people of God going have been essential to the spread of the Kingdom of God.
 - Paul went on three different missionary journeys.
 - The church is global, but it began in the Ancient Near East.
 - It went around the world with people.
 - We don't have to go around the world to find people who are non-Christian or unchurched Christians.
- **Questions:**
 - What are practical ideas for meeting new people?
 - Which places/connection points that are already part of your routine would be good places to connect with new people, or further connections with people you have already encountered?
 - What are practical ways to build a relationship with new people?
 - How can those who are limited in their ability to leave their homes participate in this evangelistic work?