

Evangelism (Part 8)

Happy Sabbath to everyone. This week, we will be looking at the beginning of the next major section of the book *Evangelism* by Ellen White. This section, the third, is entitled “Smaller Communities and Rural Areas,” which is about reaching out to smaller groups, and may contain many principles that apply directly to the kind of evangelism that we are most likely to be capable of doing at this present time.

The first part of the “Smaller Communities” chapter is called “The Highways and The Byways,” and it is relatively short. We will begin with the first quote from that section:

[quote]

In our planning for the extension of the work, far more than the cities alone must be comprehended. In out-of-the-way places are many, many families that need to be looked after in order to learn whether they understand the work that Jesus is doing for His people.

Those in the highways are not to be neglected; neither are those in the hedges; and as we journey about from place to place and pass by house after house, we should often inquire, “Have the people who are living in these places heard the message? Has the truth of God’s Word been brought to their ears? Do they understand that the end of all things is at hand, and that the judgments of God are impending?

Do they realize that every soul has been bought with an infinite price? As I meditate upon these things, my heart goes out in deep longing to see the truth carried in its simplicity to the homes of these people along the highways and places far removed from the crowded centers of population...It is our privilege to visit them and acquaint them with God’s love for them and with His wonderful provision for the salvation of their souls.

In this work in the highways and the hedges, there are serious difficulties to be met and overcome. The worker, as he searches for souls, is not to fear nor be discouraged, for God is his helper, and will continue to be his helper; and He will open up ways before His servants.—Manuscript 15, 1909.

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There is something about this passage that speaks to me very deeply. It speaks about the universal nature of the message, and that it applies to everyone. And also, it shows that everyone outside of Yahshua’s care, whether they live in cities or villages, whether they live in luxury or poverty... they all have the same need, and can be reached by the same method – a living testimony given in love.

In previous studies, we have seen that it is the strength of the message, and not necessarily the talents of the messenger, that is the most important thing. Now, this passage demonstrates that it is not the circumstances of the soul in need that is important, it is the need itself. It is easy to “love your neighbor as you love yourself” if you realize that people are not so different after all with regard to their spiritual needs. And the message that we bear is for all of them.

[quote]

We are altogether too narrow in our plans. We need to be broader minded. God wants us to carry out in our work for Him the principles of truth and righteousness. His work is to go forward in cities and towns

and villages.... We must get away from our smallness and make larger plans. There must be a wider reaching forth to work for those who are nigh and those who are afar off.—Manuscript 87, 1907.

The field of labor is to be extended. The gospel message is to go to all parts of the world. The most unpromising fields must receive earnest, determined labor. The sons of God, earnest, true, unselfish, must use all the knowledge they possess in managing this important work.—Manuscript 141, 1899.

[/quote]

I am thinking, when I read this quote, of the miracles that this Church has been able to facilitate in the world. Larger groups, with deeper pockets, have not been able to do the things that we have, and I am thinking here only of the “coverage” of the message in terms of Internet and local ministries, and our international work. Of course, the actual quality of the Gospel as taught without compromise is beyond all comparison. But again, we cannot afford to sit back and congratulate ourselves about that... this only means that we have a greater obligation to repay, for we have been given much. As Bro. Luke was saying earlier, “immunity” to the failings of the past incarnations of the Church is an issue that we must be aware of.

[quote]

The people who live in the country places are often more easily reached than are those who dwell in the thickly populated cities. Here among the scenes of nature Christian character is more easily formed than amid the wickedness of city life. When the truth takes hold of the hearts of the simplehearted, and the Spirit of God works upon their minds, leading them to respond to the proclamation of the Word, there will be some raised up to help support the cause of God both by their means and their labors.—Manuscript 65, 1908.

[/quote]

We certainly pray to see the fulfillment of this principle. Now and then we hear promising reports of individuals who are taking notice. Sis. Barb recently shared a couple points of light. But now, it is our task to pray unceasingly for these individuals who are coming into the light, and see how we can assist in any other way. Now, in this generation in particular, rural life has its own temptations and trials. Being away from cities does not necessarily lessen one’s exposure to corrupt morals. We must be constant in prayer for those who are being reached by the Gospel of Yahshua.

[quote]

Men and women in the highways and byways are to be reached. We read of Christ’s labors: “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.” Just such a work as this is to be done in our cities and villages, in the highways and hedges. The gospel of the third angel’s message is to be carried to all classes.—Manuscript 7, 1908.

[/quote]

Here we read, as we have often read, and some among us have experienced... that the health ministry is an effective opening into communities that would otherwise be “closed” to us. People tend to stand apart

from those who merely “talk,” being suspicious – and perhaps rightly so – that those wandering preachers are trying to gain some benefit for themselves. Ecclesiastical history certainly has many examples of those in positions of religious authority taking advantage of the unwary. But those who come to establish an enduring work, and to heal sicknesses, and to reach out in a tangible way... these are much easier to trust. Of course, the most ready example that probably comes to mind here is that of Africa, but the principle is just as valid elsewhere. Healers, those that actually get results, are much more easily welcomed than others.

[quote]

Our Saviour’s work was to warn the cities and to ordain workers to go out of the cities to places where the light had never yet been given, and to lift up the standard of truth in new localities....The light is given me that we must not have special anxiety to crowd too many interests into one locality, but should look for places in out-of-the-way districts and work in new places. Thus people may be reached and converted who know nothing of the precious, testing truths for this time. The last call should be made just as important in new places in this country as in distant lands. This word was spoken concerning some localities that have not had the message brought to them. The seeds of truth are to be sown in uncultivated centers....It will cultivate a missionary spirit to work in new localities.

Selfishness in respect to keeping large companies together is not the Lord’s plan. Enter every new place possible and begin the work of educating in vicinities that have not heard the truth. Why did our Saviour labor to sow the seed in out-of-the-way places? Why did He travel slowly away from the villages which had been His places for communicating light by opening the Scriptures?

There was a world to hear, and some souls would accept the truth who had not yet heard it. Christ traveled slowly and opened the Scriptures in their simplicity to minds that would receive the truth.—Letter 318, 1908.

[/quote]

In a sense, circumstances have led to this being true for us as a matter of course. I can understand, however, why Mrs. White made these statements. The tendency of new converts is to congregate together, and there is nothing particularly wrong with this. I recall that after I accepted the truth of the Gospel, and decided to withdraw my membership from the mainstream SDA Church, my first tendency was to move to where other members were, perhaps even abandoning my studies in the process.

However, upon discussing this with pastor he counseled patience, and caution, and that has turned out to be a great blessing. So while it is certainly true that our spiritual unity tends to lead us to desire physical fellowship, this cannot be allowed to become a barrier to the evangelist spirit that actually does the work of converting souls and expanding the Kingdom.

Here is the final quote of this section:

[quote]

During the time when camp meetings can be held in this conference, two or three meetings in different places should be in progress at the same time. There is a time when these meetings cannot be held; but

during the months when we can use the tents to advantage, we are not to confine our efforts to the largest cities. We must give the warning message to the people in every place.—Manuscript 104, 1902.

[/quote]

I find this to be an interesting quote. The tendency seems to be, “Focus our attention on the locations with the largest population, because more souls are there.” However, inspiration is telling us that this is not, or at least not always, an effective strategy. Hearts may not be as open in larger, more populated spots, and therefore great amounts of effort spent in those locations (although they are certainly not to be neglected either) may not be as effective as more diffused, spread-out effort over a large area.

The Bible’s analogy for this is casting fishing nets into the ocean. The apostles labored all night in an area where they expected would contain many fish. However, it was the Savior’s word, and the following of His instructions, that actually led to their overwhelming success, even though it was in a place and time that they were not anticipating. (John 21:6)

There is much in that passage to ponder for us as well.

Next week, we will look at Yah’s instructions for the rural workers, but for now, are there any questions or comments as we close?