

Time and Consistency

"All good things take time," the old saying goes. It takes time to develop good friendships, good families, and good marriages. It takes time to finish a quality education, advance in skills, compete for promotions, save and plan for retirement. It takes time to plant a garden, raise a crop, and prepare a memorable meal. It takes time to patiently sow the seed of the word (Luke 8:11), seek out the good ground, nurture, cultivate, plant and water (1 Corinthians 3:6-8) so God can give the increase. It takes time to evangelize a community.

One of the greatest hindrances to evangelism is the time that it often takes before "visible results" are seen. Lack of patience has ruined many a promising garden. Jesus and his apostles often relied upon the analogy of sowing, growing and reaping, all of which as any farmer or gardener can tell us, take much time and patience. Perhaps in this sense some of us may be victims of our culture: When we want vegetables, we go to the market and "presto," there are the visible results! But, evangelism is never illustrated in this manner. Rather, it is pictured as a field, prepared, cultivated, sown, watered and watched in the warm glow of the sun, until the labor and the joy of the harvest! Effective, fruitful evangelism does not result from unplanned, poorly prepared, impatient and inconsistent planting. Nor does it bear the best and ripest fruit in forced growth and early harvest. Christ has given us the best seed in endless supply, but we must make and take the needed time, and have the patience to use it well!

Consistency is another crucial element of effective evangelism. Fruitful efforts cannot rise like a rain swollen springtime stream, and then dwindle away to a dry summer stream bed. Good evangelism cannot blow hot and cold like an unpredictable wind and bring any fruit to perfection. We must be willing to not only take time to evangelize, but we must also endeavor to be consistent, dependable and reliable in it! Personally speaking, I have had good, promising Bibles studies with individuals which were interrupted for only a short time, and have returned to find everything previously accomplished now undone. Inconsistency, for whatever reason, is always counterproductive. Each of us must strive to develop consistency in our personal and congregational evangelistic efforts. We cannot allow ourselves to fall prey to the growth stifling cynicism and skepticism that has choked many congregations completely out of existence. There is seed to sow. There are people who will hear and respond. Time is on our side, but we must learn to manage it wisely (Ephesians 5:15-17). All good things take time (James 5:7-12)

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