

## The Most Intimate Question

“What is your greatest regret as a parent?” The question came as I was talking about parenting with a close friend. Both of us had adult children in their twenties. Tears came to my eyes as I described some of my failures and the wounds I feared I had left in my children. His encouragement was that, “love covers a multitude of sins. Your children are certain of love for them, and that means far more than your failures.” He prayed for me, and I felt encouraged and strengthened. That is how the family of God works!

I was thinking about “asking questions” as I considered the topic of evangelism. If someone were to approach me at the mall and ask me, “What is your greatest regret as a parent,” How would I respond? Would I be likely to pour out my heart to him the way I had to my friend? Would a stranger be able to soothe the ache and insecurity I feel and provide encouragement? Likely I would answer, “I should spend more time with my children.” Such an answer is safe and ordinary. Who, after all, feels like they spend too much time with their kids?

Yet this is often the scenario we think about when we consider evangelism. Asking about faith is the most intimate of questions. It's a question about what you truly believe and what it all means. We sally forth and ask this deeply personal question to total strangers and hope they will bare their soul. When it doesn't happen, we say a prayer for the “hard heart” we just encountered and move on to the next project. We try to beat down the defenses of people we don't know with a verbal battering ram.

I have, in my decades inside the church, asked the main “salvation” questions to strangers hundreds of times. Do you know where you are going when you die? Why would God let you into His heaven? In His grace, God sometimes used my efforts to bring hearts to Him. But I have a sneaky suspicion it was in spite of me, not because of me. I suspect I found fertile ground through the work of the Holy Spirit - but someone else had been busy plowing and fertilizing so I could pick the fruit. I am not suggesting that we stop sharing with strangers. The Holy Spirit leads us and uses us in His own way. But I do think that sharing with the stranger is the lesser task of evangelism.

To start, let's recognize that this is an intimate question. To answer it truthfully someone must be able to trust you. You are asking them to uncover their sinfulness, deep fear and longing for salvation. I believe that God is constantly placing people in our lives for us to love and serve in order to lead them to Christ. Hopefully Jesus is spilling out of us as we live our lives in front of the world. But we are not just called to be Johnny Appleseed trotting all over the continent spreading seeds and hoping something will grow in spite of our inattention. We are farmers and gardeners. We plant, water and harvest on the acres God has given us.

Jesus commissioned all of us in [Matthew 28:18-20](#):

*18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

We are not making converts. We aren't trying to attract fans. We aren't looking for likes and follows. We are making disciples. We share the words of life with others, bring them into the kingdom and model what it is like to be a follower of Jesus. In this series we are going to focus on loving the lost - not just winning them. It's an area where many of us feel inadequate. In fact some of us (and I'm looking in the mirror here) are more comfortable witnessing to a stranger than sharing with someone who is close to us who needs God's love. The first one can be daunting, but it costs very little beyond mild discomfort. But to share with someone you care about requires vulnerability. Let's begin by exploring how Jesus has reached out to you.