

Outreach & Serving

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I don't know if your experience has been the same as mine but, years ago, any time a congregational leader would urge me to participate in outreach, it meant handing out tracts on the street or going door to door in a neighborhood. I never liked doing either of them, and I concluded that outreach just wasn't my thing.

Yet, Marie and I served at soup kitchens, volunteered at homeless shelters, studied counseling to be able to counsel people in need, and our home was known as a place where people were welcome. We also prayed for the people we served but, in my mind, we weren't doing "outreach," and I felt guilty about it.

One day as I was reading my Bible, I came across these verses in James 2:14-17:

"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

Now that resonated with me and gave me comfort because I realized that I was doing the kinds of works the Scriptures were speaking of. Still, my leaders were constantly urging me to do outreach – to pass out leaflets – to preach in parks – to confront strangers on the street. Although I wasn't happy about it, I dutifully did it because I was aware, from Mark 16, that Yeshua told his disciples:

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16:15-17)

And at another time, Yeshua instructed His disciples:

"But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. (Matthew 10:6-8)

Although I was obedient in doing the street witnessing and in go door to door, I didn't like it and tried to avoid it whenever I could. I also felt bad because I believed I was letting God down and my leaders down.

But one day another Scripture came to my attention; Matthew 22:35-39:

“Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Yeshua said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

It was that second commandment that caught my attention. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” For the first time, I connected things and saw that loving my neighbor (which was what I was trying to do) WAS outreach because I was reaching out to do it even though it wasn’t a confronting style ministry. And then, for the first time, I remembered that many of the times I served others through physical helps and counseling, those situations of service enabled me to have conversations where I was able to share my faith in Yeshua. And in cases where I could not share my faith through words, I did so through my deeds because the people around me knew I was a believer, and that I was giving service in the name of Yeshua.

So why did it take me so long to see that serving others was outreach? I think because those who taught me viewed outreach only as “in your face” preaching. They made clear categories for things and outreach was categorized as proclaiming the Gospel and nothing more. Serving others was not considered outreach, it was works. And praying for others was not considered outreach, it was intercession. Each activity was viewed as separate and distinct, requiring different gifts.

Well, I don’t think of it that way anymore, as I have come to see that while outreach includes evangelism – that is, proclaiming the Good News – it has many facets and can be conducted in many ways.

Ephesians 4:11-13 teaches us:

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Messiah, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Messiah;”

Scripture tells us that Philip **was** an evangelist, but Timothy was told to “do the work of an evangelist,” – to proclaim the Good News – and we have seen that Scripture requires the same of us. But let’s not be like I used to be, thinking that everyone must approach outreach in the same way. Some of us may be gifted in being public and confrontational, while others of us may be specially gifted and motivated in hospitality, or in making friends, or visiting the sick, or collecting clothing for the poor. All of these activities qualify as evangelistic outreach if they are conducted with the expectation that, through them, God will provide opportunities for us to share about Yeshua, and we are willing to share when those opportunities occur. So evangelistic outreach need not be part of a congregational program or ANY program. It can be entirely private. But we are all called by God to do it.

Now let’s look at some of the things we must do in order to be effective in personal outreach, and let’s look at some of the things that sometimes keep us from doing it. I hope I have already convinced you that we need not all be pamphleteers, or radio preachers like Sid Roth. But one

thing we must be willing to do is share the Gospel when God presents us with the opportunity. And while doing this, we must be receptive to the Holy Spirit for His wisdom and direction.

The first thing we must do is be prepared. From the time we get up in the morning, we must be aware that God could call us to His service at any time, and that the time God chooses may not be convenient. In fact, it is a good thing to heighten our readiness by speaking to God, bright and early in the morning; for example, we might say to Him:

“Father, thank you for this new day and for being my God. I look forward to serving you today in any way that you ask. If there is something you need done or someone you need ministered to, here I am. Send me! Make me alert to the opportunities you put in my path, and help me be tuned to the Holy Spirit for instruction and wisdom, and the boldness to do what you ask of me.”

This prayer reminds me of Isaiah 50:4 where he describes his morning time with the Lord:

“The Lord GOD has given Me The tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.”

The Scriptures give us considerable instruction on how we are to serve others, and I would like to pass some of them along to you:

1. The Scriptures tell us that our service must not only contain our good works, but must also be a godly witness:

Matthew 5:16: *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

2. The Scriptures tell us that our service to others must be with the ability that God has given us so that He may have the glory:

1 Peter 4:11: *“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Messiah Yeshua, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

3. The Scriptures tell us that bringing the Gospel to Jewish people must be primary but not exclusive:

Romans 1:16: *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Messiah, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”*

4. The Scriptures tell us that we must be steadfast in our service and not waiver:

1 Corinthians 15:58: *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*

5. The Scriptures remind us that the Lord will be working alongside us as we serve:

Mark 16:20: *“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.”*

6. The Scriptures encourage us to not only impart the Gospel, but establish loving relationships:

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8: *“But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.”*

7. The Scriptures warn us that serving the Lord will not be easy and will involve personal sacrifice:

Romans 12:1: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”*

8. The Scriptures tell us that godly service is achieved through humility and sacrifice – not by pursuing greatness.

Matthew 20:26-28: *“... but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

9. Finally, Scripture reminds us that under-girding all godly service is love.

Galatians 5:13-14: *“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

God wants Ohev Yisrael members to be outreaching people, and Ohev an outreaching congregation. Not having a reputation of being annoying for pushing the Gospel on unwilling ears, but a reputation of being loving and helpful. A place of safety, of friendship, and a place where you can hear the Gospel of Yeshua preached with clarity and conviction but not feel coerced to believe, or rejected if you do not. A place that is Jewish, yet thoroughly New Covenant. A place of refuge from worldly things. A place where Scripture is taught and believed, and where shalom and trust pervade among the *chavurim*. A place where a Jew can find the kind of Jewish experience that warms his heart, and a place that a Gentile can raise his family, serve, and find acceptance as an equal within a Messianic Jewish community. And finally and most important, a place where Yeshua is proclaimed to all, and a place that God lives.

Last Thursday evening, eight Ohev members met and committed to re-starting Ohev’s outreach. Ideas were proposed for ministering to the immediate neighborhood, to the inner city, to the

Jewish community, to the Gentile nations, to the Christian Church, to intermarried couples, and to Jewish relatives. The group that was started calls itself the Outreach Planning Group; it will meet again in two weeks and hopefully, some others of you in this room will join it. Please let an elder know if you are interested.

Be in prayer about what you have heard me say today because outreach of service to others is about the Gospel, and is the Gospel. Outreach is natural to a believer because it is part of what a believer is from the inside out. It is fulfilling and exciting, and is not scary. It occurs automatically where there is a willingness to bless others and share our faith as the Spirit leads. It is what Yeshua reminded us of – loving our neighbor as ourself.

Lord, please receive this message as our prayer to place ourselves and our congregation in your hands. To mold us into an outreaching family to serve both those who are of Israel and those who are of the nations. To give us wisdom and boldness in proclaiming the Gospel of Yeshua to all – “first to the Jew and then to the Greek.”