

The DIAZ Dispatch

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THE PROUD PARENTS OF A PERSISTENT CHILD

Growing up, our third son was a very persistent child. (That's a gentle way of saying he was extremely "hard-headed.") When Ben made up his mind, you could count on the fact that he would resolutely cling to his decision despite possible obstacles and regardless of potential outcomes.

Sometimes this stubborn resolve proved to be a wonderful attribute: I'm thinking of the time he stuck out a whole summer of backbreaking work as a wrangler in East Texas. Guys who were much older and far more experienced fell by the wayside. But Ben, the youngest one there, stuck it out and became a real leader.

At other times, it was just plain frustrating: like the Sunday my fifth grader decided he no longer wanted to wear slacks and a button-down shirt to church – or anywhere else for that matter. (You have to understand that this took place in the South during the early 90's, and we attended a church that considered itself to be very dignified.) Ben's t-shirt and shorts caused quite a stir amongst the adults – while creating a whole new trend for the kids.

Ben's obstinate persistence led him into all kinds of interesting and competitive scenarios. One time he decided that he wanted to become the pogo-stick champion at the camp we were attending. He hopped up and down on that bouncy stick for over an hour,

racking up enough jumps to secure his place in pogo-stick history forever – and creating enough blisters that his feet and hands took weeks to heal!

Clearly it didn't surprise us at all when Ben decided to start a running regimen during his early twenties and was soon signing up for marathons. Nor did it astonish us when he added swimming and biking to his repertoire and completed every triathlon he ever entered – some just a few months apart.

I will concede that we didn't see the 100-mile foot-race across the mountains of Virginia coming on. However, once he signed up, the fact that he finished in plenty of time to "buckle" (the equivalent of "win a trophy") did not come as a huge shock.

When Ben left college after earning his two-year Associate's Degree, rather than bemoaning the fact that he had not completed his Bachelor's, we applauded the perseverance that had carried him that far in his academic career. That's because Ben had always hated school. As a matter of fact, my very first memory of his kindergarten year includes prying his fingers from the car door and carrying him into the classroom.

Then . . . a few years ago Ben decided he wanted to go back to school in order to attend seminary. I have to admit that this decision came as quite a shock!! When he announced that the school he wanted to attend was Dallas Theological Seminary, the same school Ed had graduated from, we were thrilled.

We knew that this would be a long, hard road with many obstacles. Ben was already thirty years old; he was married; he had a child; and he was living in New York City. (DTS is in Texas!) But somehow we knew that with God's gracious approval, his wife's loving encouragement and Ben's stubborn perseverance, he would make it!!

In early 2010, Ben and Lydia moved to Dallas, and later that fall Ben enrolled in Dallas Baptist University. In five years, he was able to complete two years of college and three years of seminary! Meanwhile, he and Lydia added Zoë and Drew to their family.

Without Lydia's love, patience, hard work and willingness to become the main breadwinner, Ben could not have succeeded. But with these added to his life-long attribute of persistence, he was able to complete all his coursework and graduate from DTS in December with his Master of Arts and Biblical Studies degree.

We could not be more proud of both Ben and Lydia!

Please pray for them as they embark on a new chapter of their lives.

IT'S AS EASY AS 1-2-3

At 71:17 we believe there are certain “fundamentals” that every believer must understand if they are going to successfully participate in lifestyle evangelism. These basics can be summarized as easily as “one-two-three.”

ONE PERSON - In Luke 15, Jesus tells three stories to make one point – that every lost person matters to God. We learn from these parables that we are to take the initiative, search diligently, and rejoice when each individual comes to Christ. It has been said that “winning the world begins with one.” We can begin the process by sharing God’s love with one neighbor, one coworker, one classmate, one friend – one person who lives in the same “world” that we do.

TWO PRINCIPLES - There are two key principles that define and summarize lifestyle evangelism:

- #1. Evangelism is a process that takes time.
- #2. God is responsible for the results.

THREE BARRIERS - There are three major barriers that can hinder seekers from accepting Christ:

#1. *The emotional barrier* – A seeker may have to overcome negative feelings that are based on past experiences with believers or organized religion.

#2. *The intellectual barrier* – A seeker may choose to disregard or reject Christ based on bad information or misconceptions. For instance, a coworker may refuse to accept Christ because he assumes the Bible is filled with errors, or because he cannot understand why a loving God would allow suffering to take place.

#3. *The volitional barrier* - A person may resist examining spiritual issues or may choose to reject Christ’s love due to independence, pride or stubbornness. He may understand the truths of Christianity but still refuse to receive Christ as his personal savior.



How NOT To Overcome The Barriers

Common Ground Insight

Love is the Key

When a person comes to Christ it is usually because a believing friend lovingly and prayerfully sought to overcome the barriers that were hindering their decision. Here are some suggestions that can help us share the message of God’s redemptive plan with our friends and coworkers.

Realize that overcoming the emotional barrier involves touching the heart:

We must be determined to share a “positive” Christianity with our friends:

Identify: Listen for caricatured expressions of religion and religious people. Ask about past or present negative religious experiences.

Prepare: Think of areas of interest that we share that don’t necessarily revolve around a “religious” context.

Plan: Set a date to get together, and schedule it on the calendar. Include other Christians who might provide a positive influence in our friend’s life.

Realize that overcoming the intellectual barrier involves reaching the mind:

We must dig for answers to the questions that are bewildering our friends.

Identify: Look for recurring questions that indicate an intellectual struggle. Ask them to explain any objections they have to placing their faith in Christ.

Prepare: Search for books or audio that others have found helpful when facing the same questions. Talk to other Christians who have unique gifts and training in helping others overcome biblical questions.

Plan: After researching and praying, look for natural opportunities to share any insights, remembering that ultimate goal is to leave the door open to share the gospel, not to win an argument.

Remember that overcoming the volitional barrier involves changing the will:

Ultimately we must depend on God to accomplish this step.

Identify: Look for excuses that continue to be made, even after the objections have been dealt with. Try to pinpoint specifics when nebulous excuses are made.

Prepare: Think of ways to involve more people in praying for a resistant friend. Remember that there is nothing directly we can (or should) do to force a decision.

Plan: Commit to pray daily for this person. Then expect that God will provide an open door at any time. We must be ready to sensitively walk through that door and invite our friend to trust Christ.

Building Common Ground

We can minister to our neighbors and coworkers without having to do something big. Small things are often more meaningful - like baking cupcakes, calling to check on them, inviting them over for coffee. The key is to build relationships through which we can share Christ – first with our lives, then with our words.

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