

I am a police chaplain. For the past eleven years, I've spent several hours every week riding with police officers on calls and responding to all kinds of emergencies. I'm "double badged," serving two departments among a remarkable brotherhood of dedicated professionals. Although the officer I ride with on any given occasion may not know me, I'm fully aware that he is willing to risk his life for me in an instant. The fellowship we share within the ranks of law enforcement is genuine. When my father died several years ago, one officer immediately sent me an email that read simply, "Brothers in blue are there for you too." I still treasure that message.

Yet the officer who sent that message was not a believer in Jesus Christ at the time, and I struggled about how to share the gospel with him effectively. The challenges of witnessing for Christ are especially amped up in a law enforcement environment. First, I'm invading the officer's private space the moment I climb into his car. Second, my presence as the chaplain can be especially off-putting to someone who isn't a believer and doesn't share my values. Third, our circumstances are always subject to change and apt to turn violent instantly. Nothing could be happening when the radio sounds and we are dispatched; tranquility is transformed into madness; and we find ourselves hurtling down the street with sirens blaring, adrenaline pumping.

But by far, the greatest challenge I face is how to establish a relation-

ship with the officer that will produce a witness for Christ. The majority of officers are men; they are motivated, savvy, and cautious. Many of them do not attend church, except rarely, due to the extreme hours they work. Sometimes the only church services they attend are the funerals of other officers. Given the eccentricities of law enforcement and the peculiarities under which we operate, I've found that relationship building is essential to creating opportunities for communicating the good news of Christ.

At the same time, while the law enforcement profession offers certain unique challenges for sharing the gospel, the obstacles are not so different from interacting with anyone in the general public. People are the same whether they are professionals in business or our neighbors across the fence. We need to know how to establish the kind of relationships that will enable us to speak of our faith in Christ without driving away the very people we want to reach. Two examples in Scripture have been especially helpful to me as I've explored how to build those relationships.

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman is among the most familiar of New Testament accounts. His visit was unquestionably intentional: He *had* to go through Samaria to a particular place and on time in order to meet one person (John 4:4). The Lord's approach reveals certain qualities that give us great insight about how to engage people, even when they

are complete strangers.

Jesus displayed personal interest.

Jesus' request, "Give me to drink," was unique in that Jesus was willing to go beyond the social bounds of His day to reach the Samaritan woman. His willingness to talk with her showed that He was not offended by her presence, and He treated her with respect. Similarly today, we begin to break down walls of separation when we show sincere personal interest in the welfare of others.

Jesus earned the right to be heard.

Rather than address the woman in an accusatory way, Jesus offered her something so intriguing ("living water," John 4:10) that she could not resist carrying on the conversation. Jesus' manner of talking with the woman, His pleasant demeanor, gained the woman's curiosity so that she gave Him liberty to explain Himself further. We also must earn the right to be heard, especially when meeting people for the first time. People form impressions quickly. Knowing this, we need to establish a friendly atmosphere that will serve us for future conversations. I make a point of setting officers at ease when we first meet. I let them know I am on their side, not to find fault but to help. The best compliment an officer ever gave me was to describe me as "one of us." I've earned the right to be heard.

Jesus stood for the truth without being mean spirited.

Being gracious to the Samaritan woman did not mean that Jesus had to compromise the truth or morality. Even

as Jesus stood firm in righteousness, He did not drive away the woman. I, too, must be honest and true to God's Word, but I must also declare the honest truth without being intentionally hurtful. We can surmise that Jesus accomplished this feat, because the woman did not run from Him even after He revealed her private life. She was shocked at what Jesus understood about her, but she was not offended at Him personally. That's the key. Questions and issues are bound to arise while we talk with people, but we must make the issue the Word of God, not ourselves personally. We aren't the authority. The Bible is the authority. Then, too, we must take great care to "rightly divide" the Scripture when answering questions. Jesus' detailed answer displayed both His knowledge of the Word and His sincere interest in addressing the woman's deepest spiritual needs.

Paul and the Thessalonians

The lesson I picked up the most from Paul's example is his exquisite and deep-seated compassion. "We were gentle among you," he said, "so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us" (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8). In other words, while the Thessalonians couldn't always understand Paul's message, they could see his heart. His compassion was on display, which gets to a vital point. Paul understood that being a witness for Christ meant more than simply



preaching. He had to become personally involved with the Thessalonians if he wanted them to listen to the gospel. In effect, Paul's interest and compassion earned him the right to be heard, and that's why he spoke of imparting not only the gospel (v. 8).

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Our burden as believers in Christ is to share the riches of His grace with our friends, neighbors, and coworkers. But the day has long passed when we can simply hand someone a tract and feel that we have somehow met our obligation to spread the gospel. Being a witness always requires more effort than giving out information. The question has always been where to begin, and as Jesus and Paul demonstrated, we begin by showing personal interest in people, sharing in the small things of life, and building from that simple foundation into a relationship that truly yields the opportunity to open our hearts and the gospel to others.

The police officer who shared such a

personal note with me upon my father's passing was not a believer in Christ at the time. But his note was the beginning of a true friendship that resulted in many hours in the patrol car and many opportunities for me to speak of Christ.

I still remember the officer's excitement as he told me how he had believed in Christ only a few days before this conversation. His conversion resulted from many months of relationship building, patient discussion, and much prayer. What a joy it has been to listen as that same officer has shared his testimony with others even while on patrol.

Sometimes our victories take a long time to win, but the result is worth all the effort. Our personal relationship with people can be the Lord's instrument to overcome many obstacles and bring a person to faith in Christ. And the world desperately needs our witness. ■

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