

Getting Decisions for Baptisms On a One to One Basis

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Mark Twain's Sermon for the Salesman:

“The famous humorist went to church one Sunday and heard a missionary speak. In his presentation, he makes a convincing emphasis on the importance of knowing when to stop. “He was the most eloquent speaker I had ever heard,” wrote Mark Twain. “He made the dark condition of a pagan so easy to understand that it awoke in me the most deepest passion. I decided to break a lifetime habit and donate one dollar in the proclamation of the gospel to my brothers in darkness. While the missionary spoke, I decided to give \$5.00 and then \$10.00. Finally, I knew that it was my duty to the cause to give all of the money I had with me--\$20.00.

“The speaker's appeal worked in me even more and not only did I decide to give all that I had, but borrow another \$20.00 from a friend who was sitting next to me. Although now was the opportune time to pick up the offerings, the missionary continued to speak, and I fell asleep. When the usher woke me up and held the offering plate in his hand, I refused to give; and I am ashamed to say that I even stole \$0.15 cents from the offering plate.”

1. Even though this principle of decision-making is for a salesman, we can apply it to lay evangelism as well.

A. The main point in this story is that you need to ask for the decision.

I. You need to take people to action upon their convictions.

B. The Bible shows two types of people:

I. Those who take the initiative in requesting baptism. “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Acts. 8:36. *This example represents the minority of people.*

II. Those who need help in deciding for baptism. “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Acts 22:16. *This example represents the majority of people.*

III. Surveys have shown that most people fall in the second category—they need help deciding for baptism.

2. Let us consider the following quotations:

“Many times minds are impressed with tenfold more force by personal appeals than by any other kind of labor.” Letter 95, 1896

“The secret of our success and power as a people advocating advanced truth will be found in making direct, personal appeals to those who are interested.” Review & Herald, August 30, 1892

“We present general invitations, but never enough definite and personal invitations. If more personal calls were made, more people would decide to follow Christ.” (Translated. Review and Herald, August 15, 1892.

A. The main reason these quotations prove to be true is that in public appeals one cannot address the specific fears, problems and challenges that one can address on an individual basis.

B. Let us look at the following factors that can prevent a person from making a decision for baptism.

I. World Interests

- a. Fear of losing the job as result of keeping the Sabbath.
- b. Lack of faith to begin tithing.
- c. Bad habits like drinking or smoking.

II. Family ties

a. Opposition from a loved one.

b. Fear of dividing the family.

c. The church and social ties.

1. The prestige of belonging to a popular church.

2. Sentimental ties to the family church.

3. Fear of losing friends.

4. Fear of being ridiculed.

5. Opposition from their local pastor.

C. In my public evangelism, I still make public calls for baptism.

I. But by the time I make my first public call, I already have in the audience a good number of people who have made their decision to be baptized.

II. This decision was made in the personal visitation.

3. The logical result of a good series of Bible studies is the decision for baptism.

- A. In some cases, a mistake that many of us make is that we talk for too long and tell too much.
 - I. Many of us think that the more we talk, the better it will be to get a decision for baptism; this is erroneous thinking.
 - II. We must be clear and to the point in the appeal.
- B. You need to take for granted that they will decide for the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - I. If you find it difficult to take a person to the decision for baptism, perhaps it is because you are making it difficult.
 - II. In many cases, most doubts that enter a person's mind are those you put there by your own uncertainty.
 - III. Remember, you transmit your state of mind; therefore you need to be relaxed and confident, trusting in God that as you make the appeal the person will respond positively.

C. Through the years, I have learned a lesson in evangelism: if a person is not attending church, very seldom will he/she make the decision for baptism.

I. As soon as you win their confidence, invite your seminar guests to attend church with you.

II. Plan a special program at church for them.

III. Prepare a special meal after church for your guests.

IV. Create an atmosphere at church where your guests can feel comfortable and welcome.

4. Why would you hesitate to invite a person to make a decision for baptism?

A. There may be many reasons why one hesitates to invite someone to make a decision for baptism, but through the years, I have discovered two main reasons:

I. Fear of rejection

a. Some people take rejection personally.

b. Remember, you are only a messenger with a message and if someone decides against the truth, it is not you they reject but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

- c. “For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ our Lord”. 2 Corinthians 4:5
 - II. Lack of knowledge of proper techniques and steps to follow.

- 5. Before you invite a person to make the decision for baptism, you need to make it a matter of prayer.**
 - A. There is power in prayer.
 - B. “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” 1 John 5:14
 - C. “Prayer and faith will do what no power on earth can accomplish”. Ministry of Healing, page 509

- 6. Make sure they understand the plan of salvation.**
 - A. If this is not clear for the student, it will be very difficult for him/her to decide for baptism.
 - B. You have made calls for decisions on every subject that you have covered and now you are ready to make the appeal for baptism.

- I. **Example:** “Mary, you have been attending the New Beginnings by His Word Seminar; have you enjoyed the presentations? In most cases, the answer is yes. At this point I proceed by asking, “Mary, are there any questions about any of the subjects we have covered?” If the answer is yes, I address those questions. In most cases, the answer is no. At this point, I say, “Mary, let me read you the commission Jesus gave to the church. Matthew 28:18-20—“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen
 - a. Preach the gospel.
 - b. Baptize.
 - c. Continue teaching (nurturing).

7. Ask questions that will lead to a decision.

- A. Once I read Matthew 28:18-20, I proceed by saying “Mary, according to what Jesus said, you qualify to be baptized. Is there anything that will prevent you from making this decision?”
- I. When you ask a question, wait for the person to answer it. Be still and quiet!
 - II. You must be quiet no matter how long it takes or how painful the silence may be.
 - III. By staying quiet, you control the situation.
 - IV. Your student must be the first to speak:
 1. He/she can give a positive answer.
 2. He/she can give a reason for making the decision to not be baptized.
 3. He/she may reply with an unadorned no.
 - a. Do not take offense if the answer to the first appeal is no.
 - b. Do not write them off as lost. Some may require more time and study; others may just require more time!

- B. “While working for the Arizona Conference in 1986, a project in the Phoenix Metropolitan area was begun. During a given month every church would be involved in evangelism. Most churches had a guest evangelist while others had their own pastors as the campaign speaker. Every Monday morning all the pastors and evangelists would meet at the conference office to pray together, encourage each other and report the results of the meetings.

One pastor’s turn came to give his report. He informed us that he was holding a Revelation Seminar and had 80 guests attending the meetings. I was really impressed by his report.

The weeks went by and every Monday morning meeting he kept giving the same good report—80 non-Adventists attending the meetings.

The last Monday morning meeting we had, everyone was reporting the number of baptisms that resulted in each respective meeting. I was sure that the pastor who had had 80 non-Adventists attending his meetings would report 30, 40 or even 50 baptisms! However, his report was still “80 guests attending the meetings.”

At the end of our worker’s meeting I approached and asked him, “How many did you baptize?” His answer was, “They are not ready yet. I will finish the Revelation seminar and begin a Daniel seminar.”

I said to him, “Do you mean to tell me that in the 24 lessons you covered you were not able to present Jesus as their Savior?”

At this point, he hung his head and said, “I don’t know how to get a decision from someone to accept Jesus and be baptized.” Then he asked me, “How do you do it?” I replied, “It is very simple, come to my office.”

In my office I said to him, “I open my Bible to Matthew 28:18-20 and read the commission Jesus gave to the disciples to the person I want to invite to be baptized. After I read it I say to the person, ‘According to what Jesus said, you qualify to be baptized. Is there anything that would hold you back from being baptized this coming Sabbath?’”

He answered surprised, “It’s that simple?” I answered, “Yes, it’s that simple!”

He quietly left my office. That following Wednesday morning he came to see me and said, “It works, it works!”

I asked, “What works?” He proceeded to tell me that after our conversation on Monday morning, he had gone out to visit some of those people who were attending his meetings and that between Monday and Tuesday nights he had received decisions for baptism from eight of them. He added, “I will continue visiting tonight, Thursday and Friday nights. My goal is to baptize 20 in my first baptism this Sabbath. It works!”

8. If an objection comes up, listen to it, answer it and again extend the invitation to accept Jesus through baptism.

A. There are many objections that people give. However, through the years I have heard two common ones:

I. “I am not ready for baptism yet.”

II. “I do not know enough about the Bible.”

B. Let us look at how to respond to these two objections.

I. **Example:** When a person says: “I am not ready for baptism yet”. I normally answer. “I know how you feel. Many others have felt like you, but, what makes you feel you are not ready for baptism?” Then I listen to whatever answer they may give. I follow by saying, “Let us look at what Jesus said in John 15:4, 5—“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” As you can see, Jesus is not expecting us to be ready on our own. But, if we commit our lives to Him, then we will produce fruit in our lives because we will be in Him.” Let me ask you this, “Are there any other reasons that will hold you back from making this decision?” In most cases, the person cannot think of anything else.

Then I pray with the person and confirm the date for the baptism.

- II. **Example:** “I don’t know enough about the Bible”. I normally answer, “I know how you feel. Many others have felt just like you. I have been reading the Bible for many years and I still do not know it all. Nevertheless, I am glad that salvation does not come by Bible knowledge, but rather by surrendering our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you understand the plan of salvation, you qualify to be baptized. Is there anything else that might hold you back from accepting Jesus through baptism?” In most cases the answer is no. Then I pray with the person for the decision made to accept Jesus and I confirm the date for the baptism.

9. Each one decides his/her own destiny.

- A. We cannot decide for them, but we can make it easier for them to make the decision.
 - I. “And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.” Revelation 22:17

- II. “When persons who are under conviction are not brought to make a decision at the earliest period possible, there is a danger that the conviction will gradually wear away”. Evangelism, 229

- III. “Many are convinced that we have the truth, and yet they are held as with iron bands; they dare not risk the consequences of taking their position on the side of truth...Just at this critical period Satan throws the strongest bands around the souls.” Testimonies, volume 1, page 646

10. You may use all your knowledge and abilities to make the baptism appeal, but do not forget that the only One who can transform the human heart is the Holy Spirit.

- A. As you extend the invitation to accept Jesus through baptism, believe that the Holy Spirit is present.

- B. “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” John 16:8

- C. “Without the presence of the Spirit of God, no heart will be touched, no sinner won to Christ”. Testimonies, volume 8, page 22