

Stairstepping Your Friends to Christ!

What a wonderful scene! Christ healing the maniac of the Gadarenes is a tremendous story of Christ's power, mercy and grace. Let's look at this story. We see:

PERSONAL DESIRE: (Mark 5:1-20; (v. 18); Luke 8:26-37, 38, 39)

If we had been saved out of the horrible life this man of the Gadarenes experienced, we would rather stay close to Christ, probably, as this man desired -- *perhaps out of great fears, demon activity, etc.* If we were there, our concerns would be the same. Perhaps he was fearful he would fall back into his former condition. Or fearful no one would want to listen to him, or have anything to even do with him. He could have been fearful to be alone, would it not be great joy to be with this ONE who healed him? Possibly he will be harassed. The crowds seem to love Christ -- there were those who followed him and stayed with Him, and so why not me also? Maybe he desired to stay with Christ Jesus for instruction, for fellowship, for love's sake or perhaps also for food or attraction. It is natural to cling to his deliverer. Without doubt he had been alone, lonely, forsaken by his family.

PRACTICAL ADMONITION: (Mark. 5:19)

Christ had been asked to leave for the people did want Him to stay there. Christ could use this formerly demon possessed man. He could impact many hearts for the Savior. Christ knew many would come to know Him because of this man's ministry. He must GO HOME, and TELL **what great things** Christ had done for him. Others would be invited to thus believe and receive Christ as theirs. He must go and tell of Christ's great compassion -- His love and His work in him and for him. So we are to go and tell of Christ's great work in us and for us. Consider: A fireman rushes to scene of a blaze, only to find scores of people already there alas, only to observe... not participate. How like many Christians today.

PRACTICAL OUTCOME -- POWERFUL (Mark 5:20)

He tells his friends. What meetings these must have been. Can you not picture it. How could this be the same person in such terrible condition? Could he now be so different? The crowd was probably half believing and half fearful. He told of marvelous love, mercy, salvation, and commended them to Christ. Men marveled as his message was successful. He did as Christ spoke and commanded. Decapolis was a Greek area with 10 cities. The harvest was local -- the conquest for Christ was local. He was sent to those who knew him, sent to those who would be dramatically impacted by what God had done for him. The people doubtless were moved from being non-receptive to being receptive to the message.

PERSONAL APPLICATION TO OUR LIVES!

Please allow me to use a term -- *stair stepping people to Christ.* Stair stepping is using the natural relationships of friendship to influence a friend toward salvation and to Christ. Being a friend and talking about your faith over a period of time can take them up the steps closer to Christ, closer, closer, ever closer until they too come to salvation in Him.

- > We share Christ and salvation openly, lovingly confronting!
- > They see Christ in us, see our love - His love to us!
- > We are honest about our struggles, open, yet enthusiastic about Christ.

- > We gradually share our testimony in Christ as opportunity is there.
- > We are transparent- friendly with them; they see a difference.
- > They are indifference/ ignorant/ maybe even rebellious.

You and I can positively influence friends for Christ, without arm-twisting or pressuring them. God would use us if we would just DO what this man did. When you stairstep someone to salvation, they move first from a negative rejection to Christ to a neutral position, then they move to a positive belief *about* Christ (mental acceptance) -- for they must move from a God-rejector position (or indifference) toward acceptance. Lastly, they must move to acceptance of Christ's finished work on the Cross.

There are reasons why we do not work at stair stepping people to Christ: Some may be afraid because of bitter hostilities when they tried to witness; such as being cursed. Some may think they would never have results, so why try. Witnessing should be natural, it happens like when **two friends have coffee** together -- the Christian talks about his salvation and shares what Christ means to him. Witnessing ought to take place in the flow of life where we are -- where God has put us! The credibility of the Christian is reinforced because his friend knows what used to defeat him, what he used to live. Even if you don't try to win that friend right then to Christ, you can move him closer to that decision.

We must build a network -- like a spider's web --

- incorporate your friend into your struggles;
- they need to see Christ in your life and the lives of others they come to know;
- they must see genuineness;
- sermons may roll off them or they will not even come to hear one;
- they need to see what grace/conversion means to us;
- Why CHRIST IS REAL!
- If we can, we need to build a network of other friends who will help in reaching the person.

Other reasons why we don't stair step people to Christ! We are so concerned about getting our friends to bow their heads and come to Christ, that we don't *first work to prepare their hearts*.

- We put the *emphasis upon immediate results*, rather than on the **conditions that will lead** to the results.
- We so **readily push them** to a decision prior to their being ready for that decision.
- If our friends **refuse** -- *then we have destroyed the relationship* we had with them because of our pressure.

We shy away from trying to witness to our friends because --

- we think that witnessing is getting them to sign on the bottom line --
- they are uncomfortable with *our pressing for a decision*, so we don't try at all.
- Witnessing is sharing our faith with our friends -- but does not necessarily include leading them through the plan of salvation, that takes place when they are ready for the decision, or at least willing to listen.

Witnessing is putting salt on their tongues -- making them thirsty for Christ and salvation. Making them thirsty for the water of life -- hungry for the bread of life. Often we must first win them to ourselves -- first in friendship then to Christ -- **often it is 3 steps:** To ourselves; to the

church, then to Christ. Because friends share with friends -- sharing your faith ought to be a natural thing and this is pre-conversion witnessing. There must be loving confrontation but preparation first of their heart.

We think evangelism should primarily focus on strangers and not on our friends. Your most effective influence is with your friends, not the stranger. While we ought to witness to many around us, it is the people God places in our lives naturally, daily, to whom we ought to give our witness. The majority of New Testament witnessing centered on witnessing to friends and relatives. **We ought to be motivated by love and not guilt.** (I Jh 4; Rom. 5:5; II Cor. 5:14; Rom. 10:1; 9:1) Allow the Holy Spirit to use you!!