

There are few things in this world that are 100% sure and complete. Basketball players don't make every shot they take. Golfers don't sink every putt they attempt. Baseball pitchers don't pitch no-hitters every game. Musicians don't hit every note perfectly. Preachers don't hit a home run with their sermons every single Sunday. Did I hear an "amen" in the back? Shame on you! There is a big difference in "all the time" and "some of the time". Let's face it, "some of the time" is very often the best we can hope for, and compared to nothing at all, some is better than all. We would like to have all the people of Mexia in church on Sundays, but that's just not the case. We would like to have all families together and functioning somewhat normally, but that's not the case either. We would like all of our schools to be graded "exemplary" and for all of our children to receive the best education possible, but you know as well as I that's not realistic. Sometimes "some" is the best we can do.

Have you ever gone to the grocery store to pick up one or two items and end up with whole buggy full of groceries by the time you get to the checkout? I'm really bad about this kind of thing. The other day I went to the grocery store to pick up some milk. No problem. It's really simple, walk into the store, grab a carton of milk, pay for the milk, get in the car, and drive home. Here's what I did. Walk into the store – run into a friend and start talking – find myself in the produce section – decide to buy ingredients for homemade salsa – find myself in the chip aisle – find myself looking for marshmallows – still can't find marshmallows – look for someone to help me find the marshmallows – find marshmallows – proceed to checkout – drive home and answer this question from my wife, "Did you get the milk?" "Not exactly, but I did find out where they stock the marshmallows!" I got back in the car to go back to the store to buy the milk I originally set out to buy. I didn't get it all, but I got some.

In this passage from Paul's letter to the church at Corinth he said, "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save **some**." The key word is "some". Paul was realistic enough to know that even when giving it his all, the possibility existed that not everyone would respond favorably to the gospel message. Paul was a master at adjusting to different situations and different people. He knew his audience and how to relate to just about anyone. In particular, when we are sharing our faith, it's important to know who we are talking to and how to approach him or her.

February 11, 2006

On Tuesday mornings we have chapel with the Preschool children. I meet the kids over in the chapel, and we spend about fifteen minutes singing songs and listening to me rattle off about one thing or another. I'll admit up front that speaking to a group of two, three, and four year-olds is much more difficult for me than speaking on a Sunday morning. To say that I struggle at times is an understatement. As you can imagine, with children that age I have a very short window of opportunity to say what I want to say and sit down. I have learned in my short time doing the chapel services that open-ended questions are not necessarily the best way to go with this age group. A couple of weeks before Christmas I asked the group, "Are you excited about Santa coming to town?" Now think about that for a second. What should I expect them to say? "No, we are not excited about Santa?" Of course not! It was a dumb question posed at the wrong time to the wrong group. They went wild! Then last week I was talking about how God created everything, including our pets. You guessed it; I asked the wrong question again: "Do any of you have pets?" I should have known better!

Paul knew his audience. Whether he was defending himself before a council in a coliseum or talking one on one with a stranger on the side of the street, Paul understood the importance of making connections with others. He knew how to relate to others, but what made Paul so effective was that he could relate to others without giving up himself and being somebody he wasn't. I think the people who relate well to others have a strong sense of who they are.

In New York City a taxi driver named Osman had an interesting day at the office. He was driving his taxi like he does everyday when a woman flagged him down. He picked her up and drove her to her destination. Things got interesting when Osman noticed the woman had left a black bag in the cab. He opened the bag and found 31 diamond rings! These were not fake diamond rings either. This is where the story takes a twist. You might have expected Osman to have taken the rings to a pawn shop and cash in, but he did the opposite. He spent the rest of the day tracking down the woman who left the diamond rings. The woman, who said she was a jeweler, offered a \$100 reward, which Osman accepted to cover the fares he lost while driving around trying to track her down. The most ironic part of the story for me is the fact that she left a 30 cent tip for the cab ride! I don't know Osman but I like him. I like him, not only because he disregarded a low tip and returned 31 diamond rings, but because he obviously has

February 11, 2006

character and stuck by his principles. He said, “When I find something left in my cab, and I can return it to the owner, I feel very happy. I feel proud.”

Alleen Womack gave me a book entitled, “The Golfer’s Book of Wisdom.” I have really enjoyed reading some of the quotes in the book. Listen to some of these quotes regarding character: “Golf is like solitaire. When you cheat, you only cheat yourself.” “To find a man’s character, play golf with him.” “Eighteen holes of golf will teach you more about a person than eighteen years of dealing with him or her across a desk.”

It’s important to know who we are. What do you stand for? What are some of your core values? If we are going to follow Paul’s model for reaching others, we need to understand who we are, but at the same time be adaptable enough to carry on conversations with others. The best way to do that is to take an interest in others and what might interest them. For example, let’s say we meet someone who is a rabid NASCAR fan. This person lives and breathes NASCAR. In the first couple of minutes of conversation we learn that he is a fan. How do we carry on a conversation with this person even though we could care less about racing? Obviously, we don’t know much about NASCAR besides the headline stuff, so the best way to involve this person in a conversation is to ask questions. Who do you think will win the Daytona 500 next week? Who is your favorite driver? Have you ever been to a NASCAR race? What’s your favorite track? Questions lead to all kinds of discussions and open the way to friendship.

I firmly believe the best way to share our faith is through friendships. If we make friends with others and develop relationships, then we will be much more effective in sharing our faith. But we have to know who we are talking to, and we certainly don’t want to seem like we are talking above someone’s head or down to someone.

We are updating our church office. As I said a few weeks ago I have taken on the task of painting my office. Thankfully, I have had some help, and my office is almost finished. Besides painting we have added a phone line in the main office area so that when volunteers come in to help fold bulletins and such, they can help with the phones as well. The only problem with the additional phone is that it rings every time there is a call at the Preschool, and Mary and I don’t know when it is for us or not. So Mary called the phone system technician and asked how we could correct the

February 11, 2006

problem. After speaking with him on the phone she said, “He knows it so well he can’t tell me how to do it!” Finally, after more discussions with the tech we fixed the phone! Have you experienced this kind of thing? Someone tries to tell you how to do something and they know how to do it so well and naturally, that they can’t tell you how to do it. That’s the reason you see so many great athletes fail as coaches. Just because they can play the game at a high level, doesn’t mean they can coach.

Good teachers know that it doesn’t matter how much they know. What matters is whether or not they can relay the information to the students so that they can know for themselves. Good teachers also know that different students learn in different ways. Some learn better through writing and reading, while others are more artistic and visual. God created each of us differently and we all respond in different ways. Paul said, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law so that I might win those under the law...To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I might share in its blessings.”

It’s important to remember why Paul did what he did in reaching out to others. He did it, in his words, “For the sake of the gospel.” Telling others about the crucified and risen Christ was important enough for Paul that he would become weak and a slave to all if need be. In other words, from the moment Paul accepted Jesus as his Lord he denied himself for the sake of the gospel. Learning how to deny ourselves and surrender to God’s will is one of the greatest blessings in life. I think when we are truly the happiest and most human are those times when we are serving others in the name of Jesus. It might sound crazy but it’s true.

At the end of our reading for today Paul made the comment that in a race all runners compete and that we should run in such a way that we win it. There is nothing wrong with winning. All of us want to be considered “winners”.

It’s almost baseball season and that means Spring Training is just around the corner. It’s that magical time in the baseball world where every team thinks they have a realistic shot at the World Series. It’s that time of year when we hear this from the Texas Rangers: “We’ve really improved our pitching this off-season and think we can make a run.” We’ve heard that before only to look up at the All-Star break in last place! But think about it.

February 11, 2006

What would you want your team to say at the beginning of the year? Would you want them to say, "We really aren't interested in winning this year and there is no way we are going to make the playoffs, let alone the World Series. In fact, by the All-Star break we hope that our pitching staff has a combined E.R.A. of 10." Even if it's true we don't want to hear it! We want the teams we pull for to talk and act like winners. But what does it mean to be a winner? For some people running and winning the race of life means accumulating as much stuff as we can and looking out for number one along the way. Jesus offers us a different way. Winning, according to Jesus, is the way of self-sacrifice for a larger purpose. At the end of the day, that's the definition of a winner in God's book -- giving unconditionally for others on behalf of the gospel.

Every Tuesday we have a program here at the church called "God's Gang". God's Gang is an after-school program for elementary age children. I am amazed at the dedication of the volunteers who come week after week to spend time with these children. There is such a good spirit in the church when this group meets. The kids arrive after school and have some time to play. Then they gather in the fellowship hall to have a snack. After their snack they have time to work on homework in a loving environment with adults who have no other reason to be there other than unconditional love for children.

Last week I had the privilege of spending time with the God's Gang crew. We visited about the day, ate popcorn together, and talked with the kids. As we were visiting I noticed there was an older boy in the room helping some of the younger kids with their homework. He had such a pleasant smile and presence about him. I asked who he was and one of our volunteers said, "Oh, that's John. John is in the eighth grade now, but he started out here in God's Gang when he was in the first grade. He feels at home here and likes to come back and help with the younger children."

If you come to God's Gang and see John you can call him John, or if you don't want to call him John, maybe you can call by what he really is: a Winner.