

Q. How many had you of bringing someone to Christ during first few years you were a Christian?
How many have brought someone to Christ in the last 2 yrs?

WOMEN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART
HEART FAILURES
HEARTS AFLAME

Intro:

Today we want to spend our time thinking about what it means to be a woman after God's own heart, women whose hearts are aflame for God. Being pilgrims and strangers here on the earth, the journey we are taking is not on our feet, but in our heart. Satan, however, has many devices to slow down our journey and keep us in a condition of heart failure. This morning we'll be looking at some of these devices and their remedies.

We want to begin this morning by going back to the early church. These were people with hearts aflame for God. Their culture and our culture today have many similarities. Many of the obstacles we have in our lives today are no different either, and yet they were extremely successful. What was it about that church that made such an impression on so many to become Christians?

Satan was just as alive and well in those days as he is today with his goal of keeping people from being transferred from his domain of darkness into the God's kingdom of light. One way he does this is by keeping those already transferred into the kingdom of light from being transformed into conformity with Christ. There seems to be a link between the quality of our life (our sanctification) and our ability to reach others for Christ. This link was given great prominence in the NT and the early church.

Peter connects these two concepts in I Peter 3:15. We're very familiar with the last half of this verse, but notice how he prefaces his appeal to evangelize - "But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord (sanctification). Always be prepared to give the reason for the hope that you have...(evangelism)

I. What was the culture like during the time of the expansion of the early church?

A) Positive:

People were searching, looking for answers to life's ultimate questions. It was no different from today in the vast array of cults that attracted so many. But instead of viewing this as a threat, the early church viewed this as an opportunity.

Today, along with the growth of the New Age movement, there is the potential of a parallel spurt in growth of evangelical Christianity. People are searching, looking for answers to ultimate questions and taking steps to meet the needs they are feeling. The unprecedented interest in spiritual phenomena should be a megaphone that awakens us to the realization that people are now open to talk about the supernatural.

B) Negative:

Christians were viewed as being misfits in society.

1. Roman society had fallen from her virtuous days and was now exceedingly depraved. In every social strata there was prostitution, adultery, homosexuality, child exposure, concern only for "bread and circuses", for gladiatorial shows and wild beast fights, for money, and for power over others at any price. Members of the cults participated in all of these activities and didn't demand a radically different life style of their members like the Christians did.

WOMEN WITH GOD'S OWN HEART
HEART FAILURE
HEARTS AND MIND

1000000

Today we want to speak to you about the heart. We want to speak to you about the heart because the heart is the center of our being. It is the heart that pumps the blood through our veins and arteries, and it is the heart that pumps the life-giving spirit into our lungs. Without a heart, we would be dead. So, we want to speak to you about the heart because it is so important to our health and well-being.

We want to begin this morning by going back to the early church. These were people who were living in a world that was very different from the world we live in today. They were people who were living in a world that was very different from the world we live in today. They were people who were living in a world that was very different from the world we live in today.

There was just as alive and well in those days as he is today with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us the power to live in a world that is very different from the world we live in today. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us the power to live in a world that is very different from the world we live in today.

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What was the culture like during the time of the expansion of the early church? At that time, people were searching for answers to life's ultimate questions. They were looking for answers to the vast array of questions that surrounded them. They were looking for answers to the questions that surrounded them.

Today, along with the growth of the new age movement, there is a potential of a parallel spirit in growth of evangelical Christianity. People are searching for answers to life's ultimate questions and they are searching for answers to the questions that surrounded them. They are searching for answers to the questions that surrounded them.

Directions will be viewed as being difficult in society. In our society, we are living in a world that is very different from the world we live in today. We are living in a world that is very different from the world we live in today. We are living in a world that is very different from the world we live in today.

The change in life and values of a Christian had an attraction, but it was also an obstacle especially to those who as Paul says, "not only commit these evil things, but have pleasure in those who do them." Most made a definite break with the past once they became a Christian, but the very magnitude of the change was a formidable obstacle.

2. Many crimes were associated with the Christian cause.

Their early press was uniformly bad.

a) Accused of atheism because they did not honor the customary gods.

b) Accused of incest & cannibalism because they met in secret, used language about feeding on Christ in communion, and they spoke of loving fellow Christians whom they called brothers/sisters in Christ.

Unfortunately at times there was some justification for slander because of the incest and immorality like what occurred in the Corinthian church.

3. Christians were viewed as intellectually ridiculous.

To proclaim that the wisdom of God was exhibited in the cross of Jesus was utterly laughable. Christianity was viewed as a superstition that belonged to the dregs of society.

Evangelism in the early church was a task involving social contempt, political danger, insinuation of horrible crimes and a calculated opposition from a combination of sources more powerful, perhaps, than at any time since.

II. In spite of all the opposition, the thing that made the greatest impression on the culture around them was the example of their lives.

A. What they professed they consistently lived out.

1. They went around claiming:

- that one God, good, loving, and righteous was creator of whole world
- that this God had revealed himself personally in Jesus of Nazareth
- that through the death and resurrection of this Jesus, a new relationship with God was available for all those who wished to have it
- that his Spirit was available to enter human lives and morally transform them from within while at the same time binding them together in a loving fellowship to which there was no parallel.
- that it was the task of every member of this fellowship to do all in his power to spread this gospel to others.

2. Therefore, with claims like these, the lives of the Christians came under close scrutiny. The truth of their claims was assessed to a very large degree by the consistency of their lives with what they professed. Just like Peter had connected the necessity of sanctification with successful evangelism, so Paul does the same thing in 2 Cor. 4:1-4: There he says that when reflecting on the power of the gospel to open eyes that were once blind to the truth and to bring men into the light, there are two conditions: 1) There must be clear proclamation of Jesus as Messiah and Lord; and 2) it must be backed up by the lives of people who are not self-centered in their approach, but are willing to be entirely at the service of the Corinthians, with their lives open to inspection at every point.

III. Now we want to look a little deeper at the quality of their lives, at 5 areas of their lives that gave evidence that these early evangelists had hearts that were aflame with the love of God? Then we also want to discover some of the devices Satan uses in our lives to prevent that same flame from burning and to keep us in a state of heart failure?

A. Quality of their Fellowship/Unity

The fellowship which the Church offered, transcending barriers of race, sex, class and education was an enormous attraction.

1. This unity was evidenced in the Antioch church by their generosity in supporting the Jerusalem church in its time of need and by being willing to send out from their midst Paul and Barnabus, two of their most prominent teachers.

2. But Satan's device to destroy this unity has always been to divide and cause us to "bite and devour one another" (Gal. 5:15) He attacked the early church relentlessly. There was greed and arrogance about spiritual gifts that threatened the fellowship at Corinth. There was disunity at Philippi and at Rome and James had to deal with snobbery.

Since unity is the best bond of safety in the church, our remedy against Satan's device, wouldn't the enemy try to get us to focus our attention on our weaknesses rather than our strengths?

The early church leaders dealt quickly with disunity because they were convinced that the extent and power of their Christian outreach depended on the quality of their unity and fellowship.

Unity is the evidence of hearts aflame, biting and devouring evidence of heart failure.

B. Their Transformed Characters

The transformation of John, that Son of Thunder into the Apostle of Love, of the hothead Peter into a man of rock was an essential part of the logic of the gospel. This is what contact with Christ does for a person.

1. But Satan has many devices to bring on heart failure that would prevent or slow down that transformation.

FILLING OUR LIVES WITH THINGS

One of the ways Satan has been most effective in our culture is to catch us in his trap of filling our lives with things as opposed to filling our hearts with the love of God. The means he uses to accomplish this is working through the greed of our flesh.

1) Greed is literally at the heart of our consumer society - "the one who dies with the most toys wins" Our society may parrot "In God we Trust", but the reality is "In things we trust." We keep forgetting that God did not create us to find satisfaction in things.

2) Greed is not a problem only because it twists our values; it also wastes time. Promoting God's kingdom takes a back seat because our time and money go for the deck we've always wanted or for a new car.

A SOCIETY LIKE OURS THAT HAS LOST A GENUINE BELIEF IN GOD DOESN'T BECOME GODLESS; IT DESIGNS OTHER GODS FOR ITSELF.

The result then is religious materialism with shopping its manner of worship. Shopping was not always a national pastime and a recreational activity. It was a necessity that was carried on several times a year in order to get supplies that were needed and maybe an occasional treat. But today shopping itself promotes self absorption.

I know what happens to me when I'm in a store where there's an "after Christmas sale" going on or even when I go out to Sam's Club, There is this power that takes over saying, "This is such a bargain, you better buy it." Several years ago I went to Redding, Pa. (the outlet capital of the world) with some friends. We were shopping for school clothes for the kids, and a little Christmas shopping. I was totally overwhelmed with "bargains". Where to start? As I went to the check out counter with my first group of purchases, the cashier there must have seen that glazed look in my eye and she said something to me that I'll never forget. She said, "Mam, remember, it's not a bargain unless you need it!) Those words still help me today in the inner battle I go through at sales and Sam's.

3) GREED GIVES US THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL. We want to control our lives; one way to do this is by owning things. We want to know they're ours. One woman who struggled with insecurity because of the many moves she had to make both as a child and now with her husband thought about it this way. "If I buy this lamp, it will be a physical thing I can touch and look at, and that lamp would one day be switched on somewhere even if I didn't know which continent I would be living on - it made me feel a whole lot better, it made me feel as if I was in control".

4) The remedy for this device is contentment and generosity. Remember: OUR ENEMY WANTS US TO BE FUNDAMENTALLY DISSATISFIED THE GREAT RESPONSE WHEN GREED RAISES ITS UGLY HEAD IN OUR LIVES IS TO GIVE. Giving shatters our sense that what we have is our own, that it is ours to control. Generosity flows out, greed pulls in.

C) Their joy

The joyous enthusiasm of the early Christians enhanced their claims for Jesus. If he really was the only way to God, if there was salvation in no other, then it is not surprising that they should be so excited. Sometimes this joy, even when they were under persecution, actually led to an unhealthy lust for martyrdom. Along side this unbalanced belief was the thoroughly Biblical belief that "in His presence there is fulness of joy" and that "to depart and to be with Christ is far better." Their joyful lives, and even more, their joyful deaths were major factors which attracted many to Christ.

But Satan's device to keep us in another form of heart failure is getting us to TRUST EXTERNALS TO MAKE US FEEL GOOD, a counterfeit of joy.

We believe the lie that external success will make us feel worthy and give us joy. "What do you do?" can be a dreadful question for a woman at home with small children.

When we lose perspective on who we are in Christ and that that is what makes us worthy and lovable, we have swallowed the lies of the world where worth is measured in what we do rather than who we are.

Here are a couple of questions we can ask ourselves that expose our heart failures?

Do I think a lot about the impression I am making, wondering what other people think of me?

Do I get into the "IF ONLYS"? If only I got a particular job, or had a baby, or my child got better grades, then I would feel good, have some joy and be fulfilled?

The bottom line question is AM I SUBSTITUTING "WHAT I DO" FOR GOD?
The remedy to this device IS TO FIND OURSELVES IN GOD, NOT IN OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

D) Their Endurance

The patient endurance of the early believers during scourgings, insults, and martyrdom had an incredible effect in bringing those who observed them to the faith. Peter and John didn't complain about their hardships, much less give up. They simply joined their friends, gave themselves to prayer, and then continued preaching the risen Christ.

Clement of Alexandria records a moving story about a man whose denunciation of the apostle James had led to his arrest by Herod Agrippa. This man was so impressed by James's testimony to Christ in court that he himself became a Christian, and was led away to execution along with James. On the way he asked James for forgiveness. James looked at him for a moment and said, Peace be to you, and kissed him. So both were beheaded at the same time.

But instead of learning to endure, another device Satan uses to keep us in a state of heart failure is to GET US STUCK IN OUR DISSATISFACTION - the one word that describes this state is envy.

1. Envy is an unattractive temptation. At least greed, lust, or gluttony offer some tangible (though fleeting) pleasure before the guilt sets in.

WE ARE TEMPTED TO ENVY THOSE WHO HAVE WHAT WE SO DESPERATELY WANT.

Many times envy springs from our sense of helplessness, our sense of being a victim of circumstances. And yet I Cor. 13:4 tells us that "Love is not envious" and Gal. 5 lists envy with the deeds of the flesh.

We may not know we are envious until we find ourselves gossiping about someone. "Well, they're rolling in the cash, they can sure afford it, but you wonder where they got it, don't you?" or "Their kids seem fine now, but you can be sure that all that private schooling just breeds snobs in the end."

2. It can surface as a surprising feeling. A friend moves into a new role and I realize that I'm feeling very strange about it. When I recognize the feelings as envy then they are compounded by guilt about the envy. Envy can cause tremendous conflict between friends.

Role change often strains a friendship, and the root of this conflict is envy. We feel more comfortable if we all stay the same, if no one in the groups of friends decides to do something different, if no one starts to see new possibilities. We may feel threatened when someone we know moves into a new field or part of life, leaving us behind. This is envy.

3. Envy is also related to competition, which is central in our culture. We believe that there is only so much to go around, and if we don't get it someone else will.

BUT THIS SPIRIT OF COMPETITION IMPLIES A DIFFERENT KIND OF GOD THAN THE ONE WHO GIVES TO US SO BOUNTIFULLY.

4. Envy is a desire to overcome our limitations, to have it all. So one remedy for this device is to begin admitting our limitations. We have been encouraged to believe that we could be super-women and "have it all", that we could have fulfilling careers, wonderful families, perfect bodies, beautiful home and gardens, many friends and a great intellectual life.

When we have discovered the impossibility of doing everything, we may find ourselves envying others who have something we don't, not realizing that they are probably missing something else that we have.

During the years we had all 5 children in Christian school, and made all those payments month after month, year after year, I had to learn to recognize those twinges of envy that would surface when I'd hear about other families taking their children on some big trip. I had to learn to counter the envy with, "Yeah, that would be great, but we've made choices about the kind of family life we want, the schools we send our children to, which makes a trip like that impossible for now."

E) Their Power

We today have no conception of the sheer power that went with the proclamation of the Christian message at this particular point in time. In that society it was easy to get bored with the endless chatter of the philosophers who had little conviction about the value or truth of their various positions. Hearing people who were persuaded of the truth and relevance of their message resulted in many receiving the truth, and receiving it "not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction" I Thes.1:5

This power that was made available to them is available to us in the same way - through communication with God and dependence upon the Spirit, in other words, through prayer. The early church was a church devoted to prayer.

Another of SATAN'S DEVICE's to keep us in heart failure IS TO KEEP US IN A STATE OF PRAYERLESSNESS - especially when it comes to evangelism.

1. Prayer is the warfare. It is the battlefield upon which the spiritual war is waged. The battle is won or lost here. Before we ever step onto the battlefield of evangelism or any work for God, the outcome has already been determined on the battlefield of prayer.
Ex. 17:8-13 - Moses, Aaron & Hur praying on the mountain while Joshua is fighting down in the valley. Where was the battle decided? The victory in the valley was won by the intercession on the mountain.

Evangelism is not the attempt to win the battle - it is the mopping-up operation. The physical possessions of the church, our building, structures, programs are the trucks we drive onto the field of battle to load up the spoils of the victory already won by intercession.

2. The preparation of hearts FOR salvation is part of the work OF salvation
1) Acts 8:26-40 - Ethiopian eunuch. Before Philip ever saw the Ethiopian, before the Spirit ever told him to join the man, God had been preparing the man's heart to hear about Jesus. And when the man was ready, God sent Philip to complete the task.
2) Acts 10 - Cornelius. Only after Cornelius was prepared to hear the gospel did God summon Peter. Cornelius was ready to be saved before Peter was ready to tell him how.

3. Our motivation to pray for the lost must come from the conviction that they are BOUND by the god of this world.

a) They have been "taken alive" as Satan's captives.

It seems like Satan has an unfair advantage since every person born on earth automatically is a citizen of his kingdom. People are not just under an evil influence, but they actually belong to an evil being before they accept Jesus as their Savior.

They are not just "sitting on the fence" trying to decide which leader to follow - there is no fence. The only decision to be made is to leave the kingdom of darkness and be transferred into kingdom of light.

We need to really consider the fact that no matter how upright, cultured, educated and successful people are, they are members of the same evil kingdom as those who are actively involved in the outright Satanist activities of abhorrent abuse and human sacrifice. The only difference is the percentage of involvement in the evil lifestyle of the Prince of Darkness. Everything they do is "energized" by the spirit of the devil (Eph. 2:2)

IN PRAYING FOR A LOST PERSON, WE ARE NOT FORCING THE PERSON'S WILL - WE ARE FREEING HIS WILL FROM THE BONDAGE OF SATAN.

b) Another conviction is that every lost person is BLINDED to the gospel by god of this world.

He doesn't have the capacity to see himself as a lost sinner or to understand the gospel message. (2 Cor. 4:3,4)

No amount of human power, logic or argument can penetrate the darkness of the unsaved mind. The devil doesn't have to make a drunk or a murderer of a person to keep him from being saved. He only has to keep him blind to the gospel of Christ.

It is this gospel of Christ that is the basis on which men are saved, the work of Christ on the cross. Men do not go to hell because of their sins; they go because they reject the atonement made by Christ John 3: 17,18 - He who does not believe in Him is condemned already BECAUSE HE HAS NOT BELIEVED IN THE NAME OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD. He is not condemned by what he has done, he is condemned by WHAT HE HAS NOT DONE. He has not believed.

4. Warfare praying

When we pray we are to see and to pray for things from heaven's viewpoint. Math. 18;18 - Whatever has already been bound in heaven, we may bind on earth, whatever has been loosed in heaven, we may loose on earth Col. 2:14, 15 - From heaven's viewpoint has Satan been defeated, bound? Have the slaves of Satan been loosed?

a) How do we pray freeing a person's will from the bondage of Satan?

i) First, we claim the person for Christ through the power of Christ's blood and through the authority of His name. The blood of Christ gives us the power because of WHAT Christ did, shed his blood for the forgiveness of that person's sins. The name of Jesus gives us our authority because of WHO Christ is, the LORD of the Universe, the name which is above every name.

ii) Then we must pray for God to remove the blinders Satan is keeping so securely in place and for God to bring the light of Jesus to them.

iii) Luke 8:11-12 - One of Satan's main tactics in keeping people in his kingdom is to snatch away the Word before it can take root in their hearts. So we also pray for the soil of their heart to be softened so that the enemy would not be able to snatch away the seeds of truth that are planted.

So in this journey of our heart, we must be willing to "put down our toys and pick up our swords," to be willing to do battle for those God lays on our hearts, and then to do battle against the devices of the enemy in our own lives. God has provided us with the needed remedies. If we stay alert to the devils's schemes, our transformation will leave such an impression on those around us that many still in Satan's grip will want to be transferred from his kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Why don't we "each one reach one" this year?