

Looking Back

We enjoyed some excellent sessions with Trevor Rowe over the course of our special **Outreach Weekend** last month, especially on the Saturday Night at our *Evening of Family Entertainment* and on Sunday Morning at our *All-age Service*. Trevor not only entertained us with his magic tricks, puppet shows, and ventriloquism. He also presented some very clear Gospel messages using his sketch board.

- ⇒ It was good to see a new boy at our *Friday Club* that weekend and three new girls at our *Rock Solid Club*, some of whom have returned since. A total of 10 children and 20 young people have attended these clubs so far this term.
- ⇒ It was encouraging to see our entire under-14's five-a-side football squad out for the *Saturday night event*, plus five or six other children and young people from our clubs, who don't normally attend our Sunday services.
- ⇒ On *Sunday morning*, 48 were present for our all-age service, the highest number at a morning service during my time in the church.
- ⇒ With 37 present for the *Evening Service*, a total of 67 different people worshipped with us that Sunday.

So there was much to be pleased about as far as the weekend was concerned, and we give God all the glory for what he was pleased to accomplish amongst us.

Learning Lessons

However, the weekend was not without its disappointments. We had looked forward to it being our major outreach event of the year. We had spent several months planning for it. We had prayed for it fervently during our Week of Prayer in September; and we had put out a lot of publicity for it.

- ⇒ The *Film Night* that preceded the weekend was reasonably well attended by people from within the Church (about 25), but there was a noticeable lack of outsiders. None of the non-church children or young people from our clubs turned up (let alone their parents), and there was only one non-church adult present.
- ⇒ It was disappointing to notice that some of our church members didn't attend any of the events over the Outreach Weekend, despite the fact that all the events had been well flagged up in advance.
- ⇒ It was also disappointing to notice that there was only one non-church adult present at any of the events over the course of the weekend.

Questions to Ponder

Our lack of success in attracting unchurched adults to any of the events over the course of our Outreach Weekend causes me to ask a number of searching questions as to where we are at as a Church (and I include myself in these questions).

- *How many non-Christians do we each know?* We may have contacts through our place of work, or amongst our neighbours, or through friends we know socially.
- *How well do we know our non-Christian contacts?* Do we know what makes them tick, and what interests them?
- *How often have we spoken about our faith with them?* Have we ever told them we are a Christian?
- *Have we developed relationships with our non-Christian contacts to the point where we feel ready to invite them to a Christian event* – even a 'low key' one, such as a Games Night, a Film Night, or an Evening of Family Entertainment?
- *How many of our non-Christian contacts did we invite to the special events we laid on over the course of our Outreach Weekend?* What was their response? Why did they decline our invitations? What can we learn from their response?
- *Why is it so hard to reach the parents of the children and young people we have contact with through our Clubs?* What can we do to build meaningful contact with them?
- *How burdened are we for those without Christ?* Does it bother us that so many in our society are without salvation? Have we given up trying to reach them with the Gospel, because it's so hard, and our efforts so often bear so little fruit?

Feedback Please

Please feel free to share your thoughts with me on these matters. I often receive feedback from those outside the church, to whom I e-mail these Newsletters. But rarely is there any feedback from people within the church. In fact, when someone asked me a question about something I had written in my last Newsletter, I said, "*That's the first time anyone has ever passed a comment on anything I have written in these monthly Newsletters!*" Durham Road Baptist Church is not alone in this regard. In 15 years of writing editorials for Church magazines up in Scotland, I can't remember anyone talking to me about anything I had written in them! I am sometimes tempted to write something really outrageous – just to see if anyone notices!

Being like Jesus

At a Sunday evening service recently, we were considering again the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15.8-10). Jesus told the three parables of Luke 15 to defend his ministry against unwelcome criticism. There were some who murmured at him spending so much time with the 'unchurched' people of his day. But such people were his priority. ***The lost need to be found!***

To that end, the first two parables in the chapter are designed to show us how ***Jesus took the initiative in searching out the lost.*** He didn't expect everyone to be like the lost son, who made his own way back home to his father. Some people, like the lost sheep, don't know the way back to God. And some people, like the lost coin, are incapable of making their own way back to God. They need to be found by those with a heart to restore them to their rightful owner.

There is much we can learn from the woman in the story of the lost coin, from the way she went about finding it.

- (a) ***She lit a lamp so she could see clearly.*** Her house would have been dark, even in daylight. So she brought in an extra source of light to help her see more clearly. Similarly, when we go in search of the lost, we need to see the society in which they are to be found as clearly as possible. We need to understand what forces are at work in our society, keeping people back from God (2 Cor 4.4). We need to grasp what is putting people off from coming into a living relationship with God, or even entering a church building to attend a church event.
- (b) ***She swept her house*** from top to bottom. The woman went about her task systematically and comprehensively, room by room. Some lost people will be reached through our personal contact with them. But others don't have any Christian contacts. They will be 'found' only through us undertaking a systematic 'sweep' of our local area, through door-to-door work of one kind or another (such as distributing the *Jesus* video; or going carol singing around the doors; doing a leaflet drop for people in new housing schemes; distributing leaflets in the town centre for our International Drop-in).
- (c) ***She searched carefully.*** Hers wasn't a casual glance around the house. It was thorough and discerning. Similarly with our efforts to reach the lost. We mustn't be content with a superficial 'sweep' of the area ("*We've done this street*" – like some Americans talk of 'doing' Europe, without even visiting the Northeast!). We need to

look carefully for those who will be responsive to Christ's call on their lives.

- (d) ***She persevered until she had found what she was looking for.*** Perhaps sometimes our evangelistic efforts fail because we give up too easily. We have to understand that finding the lost and restoring them to fellowship with God takes time – often years, rather than weeks or months.

Above all, the parables of Luke 15 teach us that we must have ***a passion for the lost, a heart like God's.***

Looking ahead

We have an opportunity to rectify the disappointments of our recent Outreach Weekend as Christmas approaches. Plenty of events have been planned to which we can bring our non-Christian contacts; and we are also planning to venture out into our local community for carol singing!

- ***International Cuisine Evening*** – new ideas for Christmas, Tuesday 9th November, 7.00-8.30pm.
- ***Christmas Coffee Shop***, Saturday 4th December, 10.30am–12 noon.
- ***Carol Singing around the streets***, visiting some of the new houses that have recently been built. Dates to be arranged – see Val Hill.
- ***Christmas Special*** – part of our *Fun and Food for all the Family* programme, Tuesday 14th December, 7.00-8.30pm. Musical items, games, quizzes, and a video of the Christmas story.
- ***All-age Christmas Service***, Sunday morning 19th December, 11.00am-12 noon.
- ***Christmas Carol Service***, Sunday Evening 19th December, 6.30-7.45pm.
- ***Boxing Day All-age Special***, Sunday morning 26th December, 11.00am-12 noon. At our Church Meeting last month, it was decided not to hold an evening service on 26th December, unless there is overwhelming demand for one. Let me know your preference.

Important decisions

At our half-AGM last month, we took the decision to go ahead with our building refurbishment work early in the New Year, as we are now within sight of attaining our targets. We require an additional £4,770 for the ramp work (a figure which includes £2,343 by way of a contingency reserve) and £3,587 for the urgent roof repairs. Please join me in praying that the Lord will supply these remaining needs out of his abundant resources!

David Hunt