

Knocking Over Dominos

Finding the person of peace

A university student came to Christ. When he was a child he had been in a traffic accident, and since then had been bound up by a fear of dying. Straight after he came to faith, he began to share with his friends and family about the existence of God, about God's love, and about the promise of eternal life. His testimony wasn't particularly well-polished, but out of all of the people who heard his story of meeting Christ, about one hundred people came to faith in a year.

This student was like the "person of peace" that Luke 10:6 talks about. You could say that the "person of peace" is the first domino to fall, someone who is at the center of the social network or community to which they belong. The important job for a worker coming in from outside is to touch that first domino to start the other dominos falling.

So how can we distinguish a person of peace? The person of peace will have three characteristics: they'll be like an OWL: O is for openness; W is for willingness; L is for leadership.

Upward, Outward, Inward

First, the person of peace will be open-hearted, showing concern for our work and being enthusiastic and willing to listen to teaching. But not all open people are people of peace. Those people with whom we come into contact with are not necessarily thirsty for truth. There are people who are just looking out for their own comfort and convenience. They do not want to apply the truth to their own lives and follow Jesus, and they are not willing to give up anything to gain eternal treasure; in other words, they want to use God in order to fulfill their own desires. “When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, immediately they fall away.” (Matthew 13:20-21)

Second, the person of peace will be thirsty for the truth and willing to changing their life. But then, there are people who are thirsty for the truth but who are not concerned about the other people in their community. They are generally very busy with their own affairs and don't have enough in their hearts left over to have a good influence on their neighbours; their concern is self-centered, and they are more interested in self-fulfillment and solving their own problems than the spread of the Gospel or discipling or community building. They are people who “hear the word, but worldly cares and the seductiveness of wealth choke the word, so it produces nothing.” (v. 22)

Thirdly, the person of peace is a leader who, at the urging of those outside their group, will shoulder the responsibility for mission inside the group. They perceive and appreciate the heart of God to make their friends and family into disciple-makers. They are the sort of person “who hears the word and understands. He bears fruit, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.” (v. 23) The person of peace can activate the influence that they already possess within a community for the sake of the Gospel. The worker coming from outside the community has the responsibility of teaching the person of peace not just to

Knocking Over Dominos

make disciples, but to make disciples who make disciples.
(See 2 Timothy 2:2)

It is the person of peace, and those around them, who are the real starting points of discipleship movements.

Is it the planter or the soil?

As you can see, the Bible talks about different kinds of soil which do not produce fruit. Do not be disappointed or feel supremely responsible if the person you thought was the person of peace suddenly goes away, or does not become outward-focused even though you've paid them a lot of attention. In many cases, the problem is not with the planter but with the soil.

Knowing this is a huge comfort to me. The average Christian life span for people in churches in Tokyo is three years; what I mean is that, after they get baptised, the average person stops coming to church after about three years. In the church I was part of, the rate of people coming in wasn't too bad but whenever someone stopped coming, I used to beat myself up about it. But look carefully at the parable of the sower. It doesn't say that the ground wasn't bearing fruit because the sower was sowing badly. In the parable, the skill or the nature of the sower wasn't considered a problem at all. What it was dealing with was the type of soil that the seed fell into.

It's difficult to understand the meaning of this parable if you're imagining a well-organised gardener who regularly plants nursery-grown seedlings into a well-irrigated field. But in the Middle East during Jesus's time, people would normally plant seeds *before* plowing a field, so people hearing this parable would clearly understand that the growth of the plant depended on the type of soil that the seed fell into, not on the skill of the sower.

Upward, Outward, Inward

I'm not defending myself, but seeing many people falling away really reminded me of that passage of Scripture again. Of course I recognise that there's room for the sower to develop their skills and giftings and become proficient, but the essential thing is to ensure that the seed sown in good soil grows well.

Out of the four types of soil, three did not bear fruit. But the encouraging thing is that in each community God has prepared some good soil, men and women of peace, for us. These are the people who will bear fruit, and the people who will open up future possibilities.

Cockroaches and moths

Out of the three types of soil which don't bear fruit, the seed which fell on the wayside got eaten by the birds and the seed on rocky ground was scorched by the sun, and both disappeared from sight. We can easily get discouraged and want to give up when we see these kinds of people going away from us. But the other kind of soil can be even more of a trap to us if we're not prepared for it.

The story tells how "other seeds fell among the thorns, and they grew up and choked them." (Matthew 13:7) In other words, the seeds aren't bearing fruit but they're still alive there under the thorns. This kind of people are always held back by "worldly cares and the seductiveness of wealth" (Matthew 13:22) and have no desire to follow the Word. Since they are not prepared to participate in the sufferings of Christ, even if they see that one problem they have has been solved, the next problem bubbles up and they just keep treading water.

But these people are not our enemies. God has brought the seed to their soil so that they may be saved. On the other hand, we do need to keep things in order of importance, as the number of workers is limited. Do not

Knocking Over Dominos

let other people spin you around with their problems, as you will end up burnt out and those who would “hear the word and understand” will be kept waiting.

Someone has compared the men and women of peace to “moths” and everyone else to “cockroaches.”¹ Cockroaches scuttle away from the light, whereas moths are attracted to it. If you focus on trying to catch moths instead of cockroaches, you can expect great things from God as entire families, networks of friends, companies, schools and areas come to Christ. If you find the person of peace and help them to function as the person of peace, it’s possible that between 30% and 100% of their whole group may fall into the Kingdom.

Approaching the person of peace

So how should we approach the person of peace? We’ll explain it in Upward, Outward and Inward dynamics.

The Upward elements are blessing and prophecy. We are commanded “whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘may peace be on this house!’” (Luke 10:5) If a person of peace is there, your peace will rest upon them. The passage also tells us that when we meet a person of peace, we are not to go from house to house but to stay in the house of peace.

When Jesus sent out his disciples, he didn’t tell them exactly what to say, since they would “be given the message when [they] begin to speak.” (Ephesians 6:19) We can assume that the disciples were to carry on the conversation prophetically as they were lead by the “Spirit of their Father.” (See Matthew 10:20)

1 Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005. p. 179

Upward, Outward, Inward

The Outward elements are service and evangelism. When Jewish people arrived in a town, the synagogue leaders would arrange for them to stay somewhere and they would be given food and lodging for two days. After the third day, the disciples would have to work around the house, serving the person of peace. One of the reasons that the disciples were forbidden from taking anything with them is so that they would have to do this and spend time with the person of peace. So as the disciples were working with and eating with the person of peace they would probably explain who had sent them to that town. They would testify that “the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news proclaimed to them” (Matthew 11:5) and they themselves would show God’s power through healing the sick.

Finally, the Inward elements are repentance and fellowship. After Zacchaeus had invited Jesus into his house, he made this confession: “Look, Lord, half of my possessions I now give to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone of anything, I am paying back four times as much!” (Luke 19:8) In the same way, the person of peace would be convicted by the presence of God with the disciples and recognise that “the Kingdom of God has come” (Luke 10:9) and be prompted to change their lifestyle. Further, by being prepared to “eat what is set before you,” (Luke 10:8) the disciples would express their humility and acceptance. Those who are coming from outside a community to share the Gospel must be careful that they do not take into that culture anything other than Christ himself.

Jesus declared that the harvest is plentiful. In other words, there are many people of peace all around us whom God has already prepared for us. God will use the person of peace to turn their community into a missionary people as those in the community are saved.

Knocking Over Dominos

Bless the “person of peace” who hears and understands the Gospel, prophesy to them, heal them, serve them, have close fellowship with them and lead them to repentance, and soon you’ll be knocking over dominos...