

The Divine Art of Soul-Winning

by

J. O. Sanders

Copyright @ 1937

MOODY COLPORTAGE LIBRARY 371

MOODY PRESS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

CHAPTER 6 -

OPPORTUNITY, APPROACH, AND DIAGNOSIS

I. OPPORTUNITY

All our natural endowments,
all our personal histories,
all our contrasted circumstances,
are so many opportunities for peculiar work.

ALTHOUGH THIS THEME has already been briefly mentioned in a previous study, it is deserving of more particular treatment.

In the studio of an ancient Greek sculptor stood a rather peculiar piece of work. It was a statue, the hair of whose head was thrown around to cover the face; on each foot there was a wing, and the statue was standing on its toes. The visitor asked for its name, and the sculptor said it was "Opportunity."

"Why is its face veiled?" he asked.

"Because men seldom know her when she comes to them," was the reply.

"And why does she stand upon her toes, and why the wings?"

"Because," said the sculptor, "when once she is gone, she can never be overtaken."

A great Christian worker entered a store and something said: "Speak to the clerk; speak to the clerk!" Instead of doing it he went out. But the voice kept speaking for an hour, and at last he went back and asked for the clerk. The proprietor said: "We had an awful tragedy here a few minutes ago. Immediately after you went out the clerk that waited on you went into the back room and shot a bullet through his brain. He is back there now if you wish to see him."

Thus was opportunity irretrievably lost - and with what eternal consequences. Our path is strewn with opportunities, most of which are unseen or unembraced. "While thy servant was

busy here and there, the man was gone."

1. In the Home. A friend, anxious to serve her LORD, saw in the man who came to blow out her gas meter a candidate for eternity, pressed on him the claims of CHRIST, and had the joy of leading him to her LORD. Another friend saw and seized a similar opportunity with the milkman who came weekly to collect her account, with a similar blessed result. Have you no such opportunities? And what about your own children? Have you improved the numberless opportunities you have had of definitely leading them to the feet of the SAVIOUR? In II Kings 5:1-5 we are told how a housemaid brought salvation to the home of the Syrian General. Lord Shaftesbury was led to CHRIST through one of his housemaids. Andrew brought his own brother Peter to CHRIST. The home circle has a prior claim on our witness.

2. In the Sunday School or Bible Class. It is not sufficient to put the way of salvation before the class in general. It is the teacher's privilege and duty to lovingly press the claims of CHRIST on the individual scholar, not in the presence of others, but perhaps at the teacher's home. What a joy it would be to win your whole class for CHRIST. One leader known to the writer recently began a Bible class for his schoolboys. Today thirty of them have been won for CHRIST.

3. At Afternoon Tea-parties. "I am not satisfied with our At Homes," said one lady to another. "We talk of our neighbors, the latest picture or book, but surely it is a great waste of time. Why should we not pray over our callers and then set to work to bring some better influence to bear on them." Next day, amid the rustle of silks and mingled odors of flowers, there somehow came to be felt a consciousness of GOD which made talking about Him perfectly natural. Nor was it surprising that one should have said: "We have stayed an unconscionable time today, but one seldom gets a talk like this, and one hungers for it without knowing it." Few see such openings on social occasions.

4. In the Church. An invitation from the preacher for any who desire conversation on spiritual matters to meet him in the vestry, has been a fruitful method of soul-winning. A wise and winsome inquiry as to how they enjoyed the service, by a member of the congregation, may reveal the fact that the stranger is anxious to converse on spiritual topics.

5. In Travel. Buses, trains, and boats, will each provide the zealous soul-winner with opportunities of making his Master known. Sir George Williams, founder of the YMCA, when crossing the Atlantic, made a point of speaking to every soul on board from captain to stoker, from card-player in the smoking room to emigrant in the steerage, and the remarkable thing is that he could never recollect a single instance when he received a rude or mocking retort. The writer has had many remarkable experiences and evidence of GOD's leading in conversation with fellow travelers, or with others when waiting for trains.

D. L. Moody made it the practice of his life to speak to men on the streetcars. It is related of him that in thus dealing with a man on a Detroit streetcar, he asked him the question: "Are you a Christian?" The man answered: "No, sir, but I wish I were." Mr. Moody there and then led the man to CHRIST.

6. Among your own class. A soldier can most effectively reach a soldier, or a society woman one of her own class. An invalid would have a fine point of contact with another shut-in, and a nurse with a nurse.

II. APPROACH

The soul-winner should covet and cultivate an easy manner of approach to religious subjects, for it requires tact and skill to turn the conversation from secular to sacred subjects. He must be always ready to converse about CHRIST, and a few suggestions as to how best to do this follow.

Be natural in manner and in tone of voice. Let it be seen that your religion forms a joyous part of your everyday life. Some onlookers at an open-air service a few days ago remarked: "They don't seem to get very much kick out of it." Let us show by our manner that we enjoy CHRIST.

Study the art of diverting conversation to spiritual topics as did JESUS with the woman of Samaria. A few days ago a student was taking a photograph of the "Lurline" as she lay alongside the wharf. A youth standing near volunteered the statement, "I suppose she's as safe as Hell." The student immediately asked him if he considered Hell safe, diverted the conversation into spiritual channels, and led him to CHRIST.

A man was endeavoring to sell a stain-remover to a Christian housewife. After buying it (an important element in the approach), she said: "I know something which will remove stains too." "What is that?" he inquired. The door was now open and she replied, "The blood of JESUS CHRIST."

Have something to offer, whether it be a tract, an invitation to a service, or a Gospel. Supposing the tract were "*GOD's Way of Salvation*," the person could be approached thus: "Would you mind accepting a little booklet to read?" spoken with a cherry smile. "It tells GOD's way of salvation. Do you know GOD's way of salvation?" "I'm not sure if I do." "Would you mind if I told you?" If the tract were "The Reason Why," the worker could say: "This little booklet tells the reason why no one can afford to be without CHRIST. I wonder if you know CHRIST as your personal SAVIOUR. Do you?" In this way it is easy to enter on a conversation which may lead to the salvation of a soul.

It is often helpful to put the person under some obligation to you, such as by lending your newspaper on the train, or doing some other little service which will create a spirit of comradeship.

Sometimes the direct question, "Are you a Christian?" leads to a successful conversation. This was the usual method adopted by Uncle John Vassar, a wonderful soul-winner who was a member of Dr. A. J. Gordon's church in Boston. On one occasion he addressed this question to two ladies. "Certainly," they replied.

"Have you been born again?" he asked.

"This is Boston," said the ladies, "and you know we don't believe in that doctrine here."

He immediately produced his Bible and showed what GOD has to say on the subject. In a short time they were on their knees. That evening one of the ladies told her husband of her encounter with Uncle John Vassar.

"I wish I had been there," said the man. "What would you have done?" asked his wife. "I would have told him to go about his business."

"But if you had been there, you would have said he was about his business."

III. DIAGNOSIS

The first task of the physician is to correctly diagnose the case, or his prescription will be at random.

So with the soul-physician. The doctor asks questions so couched as to reveal the inward condition, and the doctor of souls must do the same.

The questions at first may be general, but must proceed to the particular.

- Is he a backslider?
- Is he a nonwitnessing Christian?
- Is he ignorant of the simple plan of salvation?
- Is he ensnared by some cult?
- Is he clinging to some sin, skeptical, or hindered by some honest difficulties?

This can be found out only by careful questioning.

Commence by saying: "Have you ever made a decision for CHRIST?" If the answer is in the affirmative, next ascertain whether he was really born again. If the answer is again in the affirmative, inquire what has led to his present unsatisfactory condition. But if, on the other hand, it has been merely a "decision," deal as though the person was unconverted, and lead him to CHRIST. In subsequent chapters, instruction will be given as to how to deal with those who have been ensnared in cults, have honest difficulties, or make dishonest excuses.

The following story related by Howard W. Pope shows the importance of correct diagnosis. Let me give it in his words. "I was asked to speak to a certain man in an inquiry meeting in Northfield. Before I reached him, another worker began to talk to him, and I turned to others. Later I saw the other worker leaving him, and approaching him I said:

'Have you settled the great question?'

'No,' said the other worker, 'he is going away unsaved because he will not give his heart to GOD.'

'What is the trouble?' Inquired. I soon surmised that it was not a case of stubborn unwillingness to yield to CHRIST, but rather a lack of confidence in his ability to make the surrender real. I told him that if he would surrender, CHRIST would enable him to make the surrender good. I then suggested that we kneel, and that he follow me sentence by sentence while I led in prayer. He said he did not know whether he could honestly do it.

'Follow me as far as you can and then stop,' I replied.

He consented, and we knelt down together and I led him in a committal to CHRIST as strong and complete as I knew how to make it, going cautiously, of course, at first, but making it stronger as I saw his willingness to follow. When we arose, he told the first person he met that he had accepted CHRIST as his SAVIOUR."

The first worker failed because he had made a false diagnosis, mistaking the man's lack of confidence for stubborn willfulness.

The diagnosis, of course, must be followed by the prescribing of the appropriate remedy, which subject will engage us in the next chapter.

~ end of chapter 6 ~
