

who are young in their faith need to grow and experience discipleship. Those who are mature in the Lord need constant encouragement to continue strong in Him. In addition, these individuals should serve as godly examples for the others. On the other hand, one should keep in mind that, although spiritual needs in general can be identified, in reality such needs are likely to be more specific. Every person has a different story with different pasts and struggles. This is why one-on-one gospel sharing and discipleship that extends from a friendship is one of the most powerful ways to point someone to Jesus, and it is also why every one of us can be a missionary where we are.

Pharmacy School Missions

What does it look like to do missions work in pharmacy school or where you work? First, it does not have to be formal because as previously mentioned, friendships are great platforms on which one can minister to another. It is in the context of friendships that people are most themselves and open about what goes on in their lives. During pharmacy school I have shared Christ with unsaved friends on numerous occasions. It was usually unforeseen and happened when we got together to study or work on a project. For this reason it is important that one be prepared at all times (1 Peter 3:15). Also, even though such opportunities often came unexpectedly, the conversations did not occur by accident. Initiating the topic was always required. Sometimes the discomfort of not knowing what the other person might think or say causes one to remain quiet or even change the subject. In these moments, however, one can choose to be courageous by planting a seed that may end up flourishing down the road for the glory of God. On a different note, sometimes out of a friendship came a more structured time of prayer and encouragement. I have been on the giving and the receiving end of this scenario. What a blessing it is to have a circle of friends who love the Lord, for today I may encourage someone but tomorrow I may need to be encouraged in a similar way.

Another way missions work can be done in pharmacy school is through ministries, such as CPFI student chapters. Getting together for a Bible study is a great way for students and faculty members to minister to one another in a small group setting. Such groups can also reach out to the rest of the school. When students get together during the CPFI annual meeting, it is always exciting to hear about the different things chapters are doing on their campuses to love on the student body. One thing the chapter at my school has done is initiate an encouragement email program. Anyone who wants to receive these weekly emails, which are all written by students, can sign up for them. After two years, I believe seeds have been planted in many hearts. The gospel has been shared numerous times and good feedback has been received, both from those who have been blessed by the encouraging words and from inquirers who desire to know more.

God can open some of the most unique doors of opportunity for ministry, whether it is through writing, service projects, Bible studies, presentations to large groups, or anything in between. The mission has to first be recognized. If the biblical concept of what it means to be on mission is upheld, one's attitude towards pharmacy school and workplace as a mission field should not be different from any other mission field. Being on mission is a lifestyle. God does not require one to know all the answers or have it all together. On the contrary, if in our often messy lives we daily seek to be restored by Him and have a heart that is intentional about loving others, He will give us a part in His work of reconciling fellow pharmacy students and colleagues to Himself. †

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Applying the Stages of Change to Evangelism by Rebecca Widder

James Prochaska and Carlo Di Clemente introduced us to their Transtheoretical Model of change in 1982.¹ Originally formulated to describe the psychological underpinnings of smoking cessation, it has since been applied to other forms of addiction, and eventually, health behavior change in general.² We know that a patient's response depends on their present stage of change. Our goal is always to move them a little closer to change (versus moving them further away) – and these same principles can be applied to our evangelistic endeavors as well.

Stages of Spiritual Change

Deciding to follow Christ means not just a lifestyle change, but a complete life change. The Bible refers to life before and after Christ in rather dichotomous terms: lost and found (all 3 parables in Luke 15), blindness and sight (John 9), light and dark (John 3:19, Eph 5:11-13), death and life (Eph 2:4-5, Col 2:13). Once we are following Christ, it involves a continuous process of change that we call sanctification. Couldn't this change also be described by Prochaska and Di Clemente's Transtheoretical Model?³ And if we

can apply the Transtheoretical Model – wouldn't it make sense to also use the same techniques we use in approaching patients who need to make a lifestyle change to approach those who we hope to show their need for a spiritual change? In fact, there's Biblical support for people being in these stages of change, and how to interact with them:

Pre-contemplative

Perhaps the most obvious example of people who just weren't ready for spiritual change would be the Pharisees. In John 9, Christ talks about their

spiritual blindness, and their responses to His actions throughout the gospels show a great deal of resistance to a spiritual change. However, there are other examples as well. Matthew 19:16-30 tells the story of the rich young ruler. *“And behold, a man came up to him, saying ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And He said to him, ‘Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.’”* Matthew 19:16-18, ESV *“The young man said to him, ‘All these I have kept. What do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”* Matthew 19: 20-22, ESV At first glance, he seems ready for change, asking Christ about what he has to do for eternal life. However, as the conversation continues and Jesus narrows in on his heart, it becomes clear that he is not truly ready for the life change God demands – and walks away. Likewise, we, on our own, are not able to talk someone out of the pre-contemplative stage.

“For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?”
2 Corinthians 2:15-16, ESV

If something smells like death, it is human nature to move further away from it rather than closer. In the same way, those who have not yet had their eyes opened by the Spirit will be resistant to the things of God. In this case, it is likely more effective to make a few “brief interventions” over time to continue to assess their readiness for change while focusing more on building trust and establishing a relationship with them than proselytizing. After all, as a pharmacist, when was the last time you were able to argue someone into a lasting lifestyle change?

Contemplative

Acts 17:16 begins the account of Paul’s interaction with the people of Athens: *“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said ‘What does this babbler wish to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’ – because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.’”*

“So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

“Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’ ... But some men joined him and believed”
Acts 17:16-20, 22-23, 32, 34

While conversing in the market with the people of the town (building relationships!), several became curious about what he had to say, and asked for more information. So, at this point, Paul took an educational approach in his address at the Areopagus. He was able to use what he had observed in their town and gathered in his conversations to make a connection between what they knew and what he had to share. Paul then presented the gospel (education), and some of the audience mocked him (still in the pre-contemplative stage), but others were willing to hear more. From this, several of the townspeople ended up joining him, and Scripture indicates they

decided to follow Christ. By building relationships, and taking advantage of their receptiveness to education, Paul was God’s catalyst in changing these people’s lives.

John 3:1-21 recounts the story of Nicodemous, a “man of the Pharisees,” who was curious about who exactly Christ was. Not yet ready to make a commitment, he came to Jesus under the cover of night to ask Him a few questions. Christ responded by answering his questions, and giving one of the most succinct gospel presentations in verses 16-21. Christ also took an educational approach with him, a man contemplating who Jesus was, but not yet at the point of changing his life.

Preparation/Action

There are several examples of people with whom Christ took a more behavioral approach. This group of people seemed to be more ready to make an immediate change. We begin with the disciples:

“And He said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.”
Matthew 4:19-20 While we don’t know much about Simon Peter and Andrew before they became disciples, it’s clear they were ready to follow Christ through the immediacy of their response. For someone who is in the preparation or action stages of change, we as practitioners take a behavioral response – just as Christ did here. He commanded them to follow Him, promising to teach them a new kind of fishing – and they did. However, this is just the first example of Christ using the behavioral approach in someone ready for change.

Another example of someone ready to follow Christ was Zacchaeus: *“And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was...and when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for*

I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully...And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.'" Luke 19:2-3,5-6

While it's not clear what transpired between him and Christ between the Lord's command for him to come down and Zacchaeus's proclamation about his material possessions, it is clear that there had been a massive behavioral change. Someone who made his living by extorting money from the people around him vowed to return what he had swindled, with interest. When Christ came, Zacchaeus went from ready for change to making a huge behavioral shift.

Yet another example of Christ targeting the behavior of someone ready to change is the account of the Samaritan woman at the well: *"Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.'"* John 4:16-18

"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him" John 4:23 In this case, Christ directly approached her sin and then began to talk about how His coming changed the manner in which worship would be conducted. By the end of this encounter, the Samaritan woman went back to her town, brimming with the good news of Jesus, and becoming the catalyst for change in her town.

Maintenance

Once we have decided to follow Christ, we reach the maintenance stage. In this stage, the focus is on continued spiritual growth, discipleship, and sanctification. While the major change has already occurred, a series of smaller

changes now takes place, each one also involving the stages of change. The Holy Spirit continues to play a role in showing us areas we have not fully surrendered, and fellow believers also help move us towards changes that make us more like Christ.

Our Response

So, with Biblical precedent for applying the Transtheoretical Model to evangelism and salvation, how does this affect the way we interact with those around us? Perhaps the most important thing to remember when sharing the gospel is that the final outcome is not in our hands. People are not won over by our eloquence or perfection –they are won over by Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Like anything else, the stages of change is not an end-all, be-all, money-back guaranteed method for winning souls. But it can help us more effectively navigate the waters of witnessing. For example, if you meet someone resistant to the idea of God or salvation, take the time to build a relationship with that person. Show that you care about them, get to know them, and listen – really listen – to their story. Sometimes that resistance is because they've been hurt by the church. In that case, beating them over the head with Bible verses is likely to do more harm than good. If someone seems curious, even if not yet ready to follow Christ, educate them with your words and with your life. Teach them about God, about the gospel, about Kingdom living – and show them how it's made a difference in your life. And if someone is ready for change? Then it's time for a more direct, behavioral approach. However, no matter what stage someone is in, we can always saturate that relationship and every interaction with prayer. After all, someone deciding to follow Christ is entirely dependent on the Spirit opening their eyes and working in them.

Just like in patient counseling, learning how to witness takes both time and practice. Remembering my first attempts at both explaining how

a medication works, and in trying to argue someone into salvation make me cringe. But the more I do it, the better I get. I'm excited to apply this in my interactions with those around me, no matter where they are on their spiritual journey. †

References

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