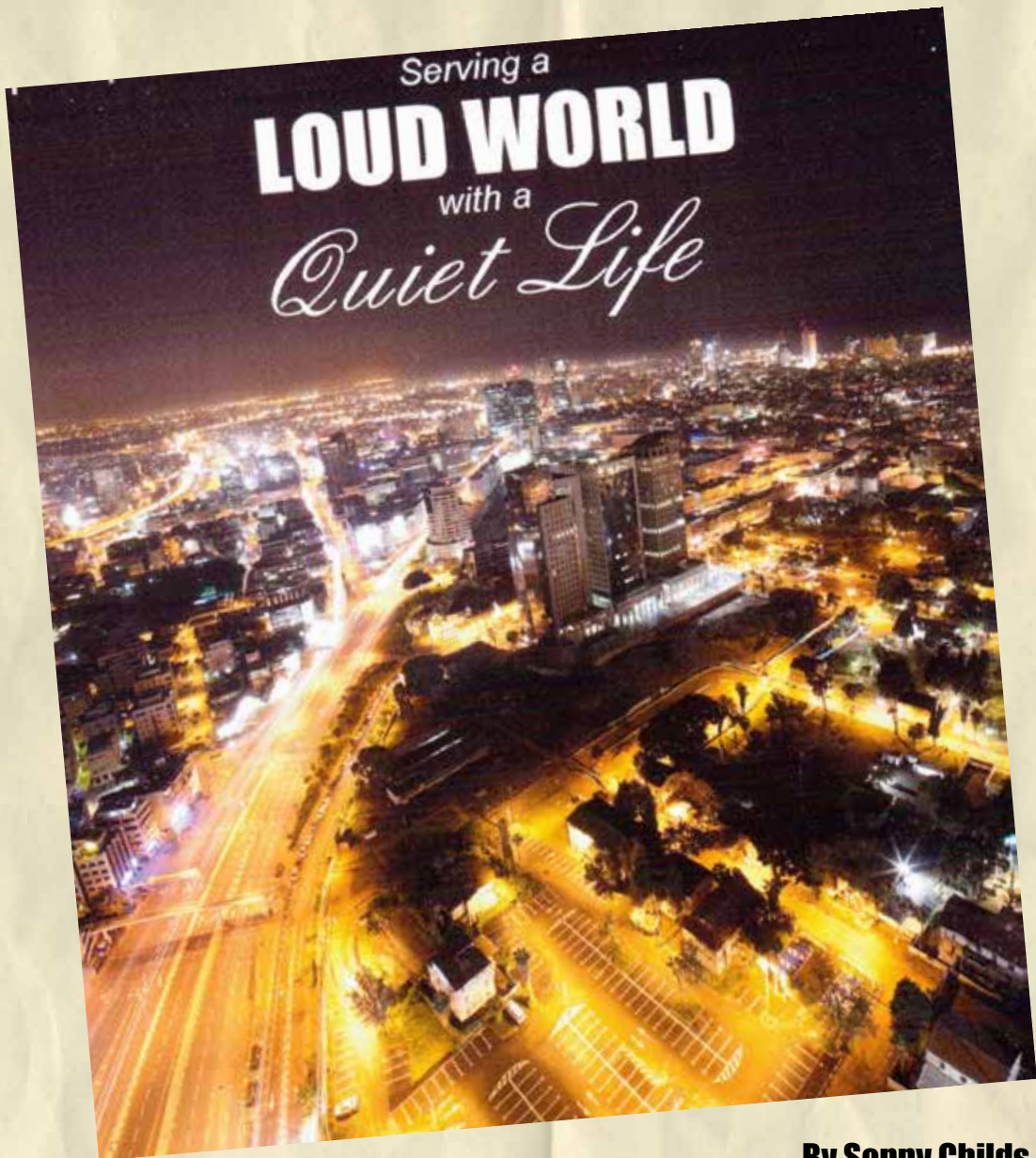


Serving a
LOUD WORLD
with a
Quiet Life



By Sonny Childs

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All Bible references are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

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Introduction

I was hungry and the church formed a committee to discuss my hunger.
 I am still hungry.

I was sick and the church put my name in the bulletin.
 I am still sick.

I was naked and the church gave me their discarded outfits.
 I am still naked.

I was stranded and the church gave me money for a meal and motel.
 I am still stranded.

I was discouraged and the church mailed me a brochure on discouragement.
 I am still discouraged.

I was broken and the church told me to come forward and sit on the front pew.
 I am still broken.

Years passed and I met a man.

I was still hungry, but this man took me home and taught me how to cook.
 I am no longer hungry.

I was still sick, but this man stayed by my bed until I was well.
 I am no longer sick.

I was still naked, but this man gave me the very clothes that he was wearing.
 I am no longer naked.

I was still stranded, but this man invited me home and let me sleep in his bed.
 I am no longer stranded.

I was still discouraged, but this man pulled me into his arms so we could cry.
 I am no longer discouraged.



I was still broken, but this man put his arm around my shoulder and showed me a better way.
I am no longer broken.

My heart is flooded with emotions.
No longer do I feel hungry, sick, naked, stranded, discouraged or broken.
I needed more than rhetoric, I needed a relationship.

I asked the man if he was Jesus.
He grinned from ear to ear.
“No,” he said with obvious delight, “but one day I hope to be like Him!”

Some time ago, I preached from a rather interesting text about evangelism. It challenged me because it commands almost exactly the opposite approach that many Christians are taught to use.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:12, the apostle Paul tells his readers that if they will live out this odd approach, they will actually “win the respect of outsiders”. Wow! Respect, the first and most important step to any evangelistic approach. I’m interested!

Notice the entire text:

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (NIV)
“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, [12] so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

I have to admit that this is not the approach I am used to! I thought when Jesus said, “Go into all the world”, He expected us to arm ourselves with a well rehearsed speech about salvation. I thought I was supposed to attack sin and confront the lost.

Before launching into this discussion of quiet evangelism, let me address one point that my critics are sure to bring up. Please understand that the quiet approach is not the only approach validated by Scripture. Christ certainly used an in-your-face approach when He cleared the Temple and called the Scribes and Pharisees a bunch of snakes. Peter wasn’t very quiet when he condemned Simon the sorcerer and told him that his money would perish with him. And Paul didn’t exactly avoid

confrontation when he said that he wished the false teachers would just go ahead and emasculate themselves.

So what are we to conclude? Quiet or aggressive? To which lifestyle are we called?

I would like to suggest that every Christian is called to be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16, NIV) Sometimes the direct confrontational approach is necessary. But for daily living (see the passage, verse 12), Christians are called to be quiet people with a gentle spirit. Paul says the evidence of a Christian life is dominated by the quiet fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

For most of my life, it seems the Christian community has more often opted for the bullhorn than they have the quiet life. We have grown addicted to the adrenaline rush that is brought on by confrontation and debate. Consider the results. Christianity is on the decline and our children are deserting the church at alarming numbers. Perhaps it is time for us to consider a more balanced approach. Perhaps it is time to yell a little less and live quietly a little more.

The quiet life is powerful! The quiet life is commanded by God! Why do we not hear more about this evangelistic approach? Why aren’t our Christian schools teaching it with more emphasis? Why aren’t more soul winning experts writing about it with more enthusiasm?

I don’t know the answer, but I do know that the importance of this approach has been overlooked for too long! It is time to reexamine the evangelistic power of a quiet life.

So, here we go!

From this passage (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12), we will draw three greatly under-emphasized, God-sanctioned keys to winning the world for Christ:

1. Be Quiet!
2. Mind Your Own Business!
3. Get to Work!

One: Be Quiet!

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (NIV)

“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, [12] so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

Some might be surprised to find out that this isn't the only place Christians are told to use the quiet approach to evangelism. Notice these passages as well:

1 Timothy 2:1-4 (NIV)

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone- [2] ... that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. [3] This is good, and pleases God our Savior, [4] who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

Notice the direct connection between the quiet life of verse 2 and the evangelistic results in verse 4.

1 Peter 3:1-2,4 (NIV)

“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, [2] when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. [4] ... the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.”

Notice again the direct connection between the quiet life in verse 4 and the evangelistic results of verse 1.

Quiet evangelism “pleases God our Savior” (I Timothy 2:3) and is “of great worth in God's sight”. (I Peter 3:4) If for no other reasons than these, we must learn to practice it more effectively.

The Greek word that is translated “quiet” in these verses is defined as “tranquility arising from within” by W.E. Vine in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. A tranquil life is a life born of inner peace.

Several years ago, I took a vacation with God. I rented a cabin in the woods and immersed myself in solitude. I called it my “Radical Sabbatical” because it changed my life and redefined “peace and quiet”.

Below is an excerpt from the little book I later wrote about my experience.

“As I explained earlier, I went to sleep the first night dreading the long hours of silence the next day was sure to bring.

In the morning, I grudgingly forced myself out of bed about sunrise. You need to know that getting up that early is way outside my comfort zone. Some of my favorite passages of Scripture are those that talk about falling asleep in Christ. I like my sleep!

I willed myself out from between the covers. The floor was cold and the temperature of the room was anything but inviting.

After a quick trip to the bathroom, I settled onto the couch. That's when I noticed the small bundle of wood stacked near the fireplace.

‘Now there's an idea!’ I thought to myself. ‘What better way to hear the voice of God than by looking into a blazing fire? It worked for Moses.’ So I stacked the wood, lit the starter brick and settled back onto the couch.

Soon the overwhelming vacuum of verbal silence was replaced by the voice of God. He filled my thoughts as each glowing ember brightened, then crackled His message all around the room.

‘I am here!’ He seemed to say. ‘Be silent. Just listen.’

So I did.

Silence is an interesting dynamic. I suppose it could be described as the lack of sound, but spiritual silence is different. It's almost like another dimension entirely.

Spiritual silence is experienced from the inside out. It's like entering a realm that is governed more by the internal senses than it is by things that are seen, touched, tasted, etc. External factors can act as a gateway to this wonderful realm, but for the truly silent, the outer man is quickly overwhelmed by the inner Spirit.

As I laid there, propped up on the couch, I could see the fascinating light show God had made for me. I could hear the blazing concert of crackling music, but my thoughts were far beyond those sights and sounds. I

heard God say, 'I am the One Who makes the fire crackle. I am the One Who gives it voice. I use that which has been here since the beginning of time to make it speak. The same moisture I created on day two is the same moisture exploding with voice for you today. I am God. Be silent. Be still. Listen.'

Wow! Talk about a moment of humility. It was like God had spiritually connected me to the opening days of creation. He was using the original water of this planet to tell me that He transcends all space and time. The Creator was speaking to me and I was overwhelmed.

Deuteronomy 5:26-27 (NIV)

'For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? Go near and listen to all that the Lord our God says. Then tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you...'

That was the unfortunate response God's people gave many years ago when their Creator asked to speak to them personally. 'You go, Moses! Have God send His message through you. We are too afraid to hear Him speak to us personally!' That is what God's people said ages ago. Are we any different today?

Hearing the voice of God is overwhelming. It brings a person face-to-face with both their mortality and their eternity. It is, however, an essential part of the journey for anyone who truly seeks to know Him intimately. How interested are you?

That day, as I sat before the fire, I heard God speak more clearly in silence than I had ever heard Him speak through proper religious verbiage. The silence was deafening and the message was unmistakable,

'I am God. Be silent before Me, then you will hear.'

In order to live a life of quiet evangelism before the world, we must first live a life of quiet tranquility before the Lord (prayer, meditation, study, fasting, opening our minds to becoming a blank slate on which He can write His message). We must discipline ourselves to treasure sacred solitude.

Be holy, for He is holy. Listen to His voice through the sound of silence. Allow His quiet tranquility to shine through the way you live.

Two: Mind Your Own Business

I was approaching from all the way across the aisle and I could already hear him talking. I guess he was a vendor. He had a customer cornered between the dog food and the doggie bones. Although she was patiently listening to his sales pitch, I felt very sorry for her.

Now before I go any further, let me explain something about me and sales people. We tend to rub each other the wrong way, if you know what I mean. When they start in with their manipulative sales pitches, I'm just as apt to walk away as I am to give their product any possible consideration.

My policy is this: I want to buy, not be sold.

First of all, I'll come to you. There's no need to be intrusively coercive. If I'm interested, you'll hear from me.

Secondly, once I've come to you with interest, all you have to do is show me your product. Let me take it for a little test drive. Feel free to outline a few of its advantages but, frankly, if it can't sell itself, I'm not likely to succumb to your fancy talk. In fact, when all those pushy little phrases start invading my personal space, you might as well head to the house. I'm done. My brain has shut down and it's gonna take a complete reboot for me to ever come back online.

Now some may think that's a little closed-minded, but I bet most of you can completely relate to what I'm saying. Doesn't it frustrate you to know there are actual training seminars that teach sales people how to be pushy? I mean they actually teach people the principles of coercion and manipulation.

Back to the story.

As I approached the over-zealous dog food salesman, I noticed that he and his victim were standing directly in front of the brand I wanted to buy. "Oh great!" I thought to myself. "Are they really supposed to do this right here in Walmart?!"

Trying not to get involved, I reached behind them and began dragging my bag of dog food onto the cart. That's when I heard the vendor actually reference me in his

sales pitch. Yes! Me, a total stranger. A man totally uninvolved and uninterested in his conversation. "Now this guy for example," He said to the woman. "If I had my way, I'd much rather sell him this brand of dog food than the one he is choosing!"

I couldn't believe it! I didn't ask for his advice. I didn't need his advice. I didn't want his advice. Yet, somehow this dog food guy had actually drawn me into his manipulating scheme to sell his product.

I wasn't pleased!

Without even looking up, I continued to pull MY selection of dog food onto the cart. "Oh really?! Well I think I'll just take this one anyway!" I said with certain emphasis. Then, mustering up all the Christian discipline I could find, I clamped my mouth shut and walked away.

Have you ever had this kind of thing happen to you? How did it make you feel? What kind of response did it prompt in your life?

For a moment I would like for you to compare my dog food story with the approach some Christians take toward evangelism.

There are at least two ways to sell something:

1. Intrusive coercion - This approach invades another's space and manipulates the context in order to bring about the salesman's desired effect. People "converted" in this way often fall away as soon as the salesman leaves. The problem with this type of sale is that conviction was not born of their own careful processing, but rather, thrust upon them by the will of another.

2. Impressive Demonstration - This approach elevates a proven example over rhetoric. It doesn't replace a convincing testimony, but it does open the door for personal experience and patient processing. Conviction born of this approach almost always takes root.

The discussion of our eternal soul is the most intimate discussion we can ever have with another person. To effectively engage in this conversation, a person must, to some degree, invite us into their space. Yes, Hell is a very real place and the urgency to warn our friends about it is also very real. But if our approach turns them off before we ever get started, what have we gained?

We must be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16, NIV) When God opens the door, we must be there to rush through. Until He does, it is not our place to be intrusive or coercive. It is our job to stand ready with a living example of hope. (1 Peter 3:15)

A loving example is always more convincing than a pushy sales pitch. Live a life that screams the advantages of Christ. Make it real!

Three: Get to Work!

Every month, L.C. and his wife, Rosie, go to a post office in southern Louisiana and pick up nine federal welfare checks totaling \$3,893. This totals \$46,716 in tax-free income per year. Few working families in this bleak, impoverished Mississippi River backwater earn more. Except that L.C. and Rosie do not earn it. L.C., age 56, gets \$343.50 each month because of obesity (he weighed 386 pounds when he qualified for payments). Rosie, his common law wife, receives the same amount monthly in government disability payments because she was found by the Social Security law judge to be too stressed out to work.

A visitor to their small bungalow would be hard pressed to find any sign of high living, however. The screen door hangs open. Soaps blare from the television. Roaches crawl on the walls in the living room; the kitchen is caked with dirt. The house lacks even a telephone, but they do have a police scanner to monitor police calls. "That's so I know what's going on," Rosie explains.

The couple has seven children, ages 13 to 22. All of them have lagged behind in school and at various times scored poorly in psychological tests. Under the government's rules, this translated into a failure to demonstrate "age-appropriate behavior" and qualified them to each get \$458 monthly. Welfare payments such as these are so widespread in communities like this around the nation that they are popularly known as "crazy checks". (Condensed from "Baltimore Sun", John B. O'Donnell and Jim Haner, published in "Readers Digest".)

Although this last key to evangelism, "work with your hands", may seem to be the oddest of all, it must be understood that hard work has many evangelistic advantages. Notice just two of them:

1. Work makes a person feel good about themselves. On the other hand, a constant search for free handouts breeds misery. When a person does not provide for his own, he often feels frustrated, unfulfilled and without value. Work builds contentment and gives strength to a happy life. A happy life is like a walking billboard that advertises Christianity, which leads us to the second evangelistic advantage to hard work.

2. Hard work is impressive. Remember the words of our text, "so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders". (1 Thessalonians 4:12, NIV) Winning the respect of others is the first and most important element of evangelism. Until you impress upon them the impressive nature of your values, they are not likely to adopt them as their own.

Notice also the final phrase of our text, "so that you will not be dependent on anybody." (1 Thessalonians 4:12, NIV) Lazy people tend to leach off of those around them. They are dependent. They are users and users tend not to be very attractive to others.

It may seem like an odd key to evangelism, but Paul says if we work hard, our character will free us from dependence and will appeal to those who are watching our quiet life. The world will be drawn to us.

Important Warnings

As we draw near the close of this unique study of evangelism, it is important that I offer two warnings:

1. As was mentioned earlier, quiet evangelism is not the only approach God has sanctioned in His Holy Word. Jesus did say, "Go into all the world", and He did say, "make disciples". Both of these things are pro-active. It is a mistake to embrace one evangelistic approach at the expense of the other. We must be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

2. Christians must not confuse quiet evangelism with a life placed on auto pilot. It is very easy to convince ourselves that evangelistic inactivity is justified by saying, "I'm not good at speaking to folks directly, so I just try to set a good example." That is not the quiet evangelism as described in Scripture.

In Philippians 2:14-16, the Holy Spirit gives further

instructions about quiet evangelism. In this passage, He challenges all Christians to "become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life...".

Few things are more quietly alluring than the stars of the heavens. Yet, spend some time under a sky that is blanketed by those twinkling lights and you will quickly realize that stars have a very loud existence. They speak without words. They preach without a microphone. They quietly shout the brilliance of God's power.

In this passage, Paul says three things about the quiet evangelism that is represented by the stars.

1. Notice the condition of our star light. To be God's quiet star, our lives must scream a lifestyle that is "blameless", "pure" and "without fault". Peter said it this way, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." (1 Peter 2:12, NIV)

2. Notice the backdrop against which we must shine - "a crooked and depraved generation." We live in the perfect culture to magnify the brilliance of quiet evangelism. If ever there was a generation to rival the darkness of Sodom and Gomorrah, it is the American culture of today. Our light WILL be seen if it is truly being shown, which leads me to the most important part of this passage and our warning.

3. Notice the phrase, "as you hold out the word of life". The quiet life is anything but inactive. It is not passive or governed by the lazy excuses of a life on auto pilot. The quiet life of a Christian is designed to actively and obviously hold out the Word of God to a lost and dying world. Just as stars draw attention and prompt deeply personal moments of self-examination, the quiet life of a Christian attracts attention and prompts conviction in the world.

Peter says it this way, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander." (1 Peter 3:15-16) It is our job as Christians to present such a convincing

lifestyle of answers (verbal and non-verbal) that even when the world slanders our values they cannot escape the reality of their own shame for doing so.

The quiet life is dynamic and it is commanded by God. But the quiet life can also be mistaken for the many excuses of a life governed by silent inactivity.

Before concluding, let me give you a simple test to help you discover if your quiet life is effective or if it is an excuse. Ask yourself this question: "Does my life draw others to me?"

Every Christian is called to be an intentional teacher with intentional students. (Matthew 28:19) To gain these students, Jesus said we would have to "go". (Matthew 28:19) But He also said we would have to "shine". (Matthew 5:14) If you are not going, then it better be because you are shining so brightly that they are coming to you! The quiet life is no excuse for inactivity. Are you attracting students?

Conclusion

The words of 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 1 Timothy 2:1-4 or 1 Peter 3:1-2, 4 need to receive more attention! America's moral decline is not the result of Christians who have failed to loudly speak out against immorality. America is failing because of Christians who have failed to quietly live out their convictions while they speak. This simple little book has but one goal, to inspire Christians to live lives so impressive that words become unnecessary. That is the power of quiet evangelism.

Suggestions

Below is a list of simple things you can do to help your quiet life speak more loudly.

1. Say "God Bless" instead of "goodbye" when you finish a conversation.
2. Skip a convenience like a snack, coffee, buying new shoes, getting a manicure, etc., and give the money you save to a charity or an individual. (Example: Use the money to buy gift cards and hand them out to people in need.)
3. Fill out all suggestion cards at restaurants and other places of business. Be sure to sign it with some reference to God. (Example: "I am praying that God will give you a big blessing today. - A very thankful Christian!") Then take time to really pray for a blessing.
4. Be the best employee. Never waste time. Take initiative. Be resourceful. (Example: Make it your job to empty everyone's waste basket.)
5. Watch your body language. Focus on becoming a walking billboard that advertises the Christian advantage. (Example: A smile is the most powerful, underused facial expression a Christian has. Use it!)
6. Be content and talk about it. (Example: Brag on your spouse in front of your co-workers.)
7. Use gentle speech. (Example: Learn to control a conversation by intentionally responding in a calm, quiet volume.)
8. Experiment with random acts of kindness. (Example: Remove shopping carts from parking spaces and take them into the store with you.)
9. Pass along good news. (Example: Clip newspaper articles and mail them as encouragement.)
10. Wear Christian t-shirts with an enticing message. (Example: Have a t-shirt printed that says, "I love my wife!")