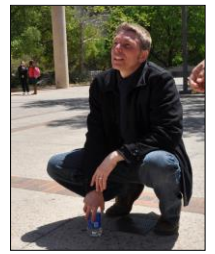


Afraid to Talk to People? Try Body Building.



STEPHEN WAGNER'S MONTHLY UPDATE

MAY 2013

Dear Friend,

There we were, basking in the cool air as the sun began to set. We were in the last stages of a meal at a burger joint called Beefy's on the Green just north of San Antonio, Texas. My colleagues John, Tim, Daryl, Colleen, and I were discussing intricate questions of what one must believe or not believe to be saved, who God is, and which views are orthodox. After two hours, I literally threw up my hands, not meaning to give up on the conversation, but out of passion:

I can't help but think that we're sitting here debating theology while there's a whole bunch of people in that restaurant back there who are going to Hell. I think we should go talk to some of them.

I got up, took my water cup, and turned towards the restaurant. I had committed myself. Now what was I going to do?

I walked into the restaurant, refilled my water cup, and started back. I saw people at each step. People I had proclaimed might be going to Hell. Did I care enough to do the uncomfortable work of starting a conversation? Would I risk offending someone's sensibilities in hopes that some might be saved?

I looked out the glass doors. My friend John, somewhat more gregarious and daring than I, appeared to be mixing it up with people on the patio. I opened the door and asked him what was happening. As he started to explain, a young man walked out the doors after me, and John immediately brought him up to speed:

"I was just talking with your friends here about who God is. Do you want to weigh in?"

The man's name was Luke. A thirty-minute conversation ensued...while Luke's food began to get cold.

John's account of the story includes details of the conversations we had that night at Beefy's, and Tim's account includes some sobering lessons for all of us as ambassadors for Christ. I encourage you to read both. You can find them at www.jfaweb.org/Beefy. For now, I want to tell you about one of the things I learned that night – something that gives me both peace about my own fears of talking to people, and a next step to compensate for them.

How did the outreach happen that night at Beefy's? I don't know that it would have happened if we hadn't



Once I'm in the conversation, I'm evidently right at home. It's starting the conversation that's hardest for me. Instead of giving up on ever having conversations, though, I work together with others who are more comfortable with starting them. During campus outreach, Justice For All dialogue tools help, too.

To see what's animating me in this conversation, see the last section of the paper I recently posted at www.jfaweb.org/DFG.



spent time talking theology, orthodoxy, and soteriology. I don't know that it would have happened if the people in our group hadn't been passionate about those things. The pressure wouldn't have built up in all of us to do something with the great truths we were discussing.

I don't know that the outreach time would have happened either if I hadn't gotten passionate enough to throw my hands in the air and get out of my chair. And if John hadn't followed right after me and started asking people what they thought about the topics we had been discussing, I might never have had the nerve. This was what I had said I wanted to do, but I didn't know how. In fact, I was scared stiff to start the conversation with any of those people.

Once I'm in the conversation, I'm right at home. Before it begins, though, I fear I'll be interrupting something. Doesn't talking about abortion or Jesus always interrupt something? So I hesitate. I ponder the first question I'll ask. I try to judge from appearances who might welcome the conversation. I'll do *anything* to avoid breaking the ice and starting the conversation.

That's the beauty of this time at Beefy's, though. I could beat myself up for being afraid to start the conversation and needing John to play that role. But I won't. God made the Body of Christ to function in *just* this way.

So, I suggest you stop beating yourself up if you are afraid to accomplish any one part of the conversation. Instead, find at least one brother or sister in your church body who shares your passion for the lost. Perhaps this brother or sister will feel more comfortable starting the conversation. Perhaps you will excel at asking the right questions that help the person get closer to the truth. Another friend might play the role of praying for you during your conversations. As it happens, none of you may be adequate at sensing the relational dynamics in the conversation. You can then look to God to provide someone who has more confidence in this area.

The team here at JFA also wants to help you make that outreach conversation happen. Although not everyone on the JFA team is gregarious like John Michener is, every one of us is purposeful in starting the conversation in our outreach events. The members of JFA's staff also have strengths that can fill in where your weaknesses cripple you. So, if you need encouragement, come and spend a few days with us on a mission trip. The heart of our mission trips is the heart of our mission: training you to create those unforgettable conversations that make abortion unthinkable, one person at a time.

What's the solution, then, for those of us who are afraid to talk to people? Body building. You won't have to pump iron at a restaurant with a name that sounds like a gym, though. Build the body of Christ. Whether on a JFA mission trip or in your church community, this is the key to taking your passion for the lost and turning it into real conversations that help people find Christ. I pray that the Holy Spirit will help you see the brothers and sisters that he's placed in your midst to function with you as the Body of Christ. Perhaps in order to find them, you'll need to throw your hands up one evening over dinner and see who will follow you into an unplanned outreach event.

Looking for the next opportunity,

Stephen

Stephen Wagner

P.S. Reflections by John and Tim are linked along with mine at www.jfaweb.org/Beefy. Use the link to share the story of how our out-of-reach discussion became outreach.

Thank You for Your Support!