

Are You Available to Jesus? By Thailer Jimerson

We have a handful of wonderfully conscientious teenagers at this church. They want to learn and they want to effect change by sharing the message of transformation we know as the good news of Jesus Christ.

For this first quarter of 2017 I've spent my Wednesday nights teaching the high school class how to evangelize efficiently. I can only hope it's been helpful to them. My agenda was structured around the three major questions of evangelism: Are you motivated? Are you equipped? and Are you available? Each of those questions provided topics for lengthy discussion. But I want to share a question with you that was a major topic for us during those meets.

How would you answer the question Are you available? when it comes to the topic of evangelism? What does it mean to be available?

Of course, there were plenty of answers and discussions centered on our physical availability – i.e. how social you are, whether you frequent public places, leaving time where we can meet with people instead of busying ourselves, etc. – that produced much fruit for thought. It was later though that the students perceptively began to engage with the issue of being *spiritually* available. In other words, being available isn't only about the position of your body at any given time – but most often it has to do with the position of your heart, your spirit, your mind.

We shouldn't forget that being available to others also means being ready to discuss weightier issues, being approachable, exercising restraint and self-control in speech, practicing winsomeness.

Timothy Keller was invited to speak at a Veritas forum on the topic of how to create a truly pluralistic society. The outcome combatted was a society in such a state as our own where people hold wildly different opinions on a multitude of subjects and carry such a polarizing attitude that it's difficult to sustain any sort of civility. We need stand against what was called the "coddling of the American mind," by instead being open enough to take off the kid-gloves so that we can discuss frankly our opinions on issues, opinions that normally would be redacted to prevent offense to those unable to be civil or to control themselves. Instead of being able to receive these opinions with civility, promoting the right to free speech, we want to hurt the opiner or to hush the opinion.

Christians are those who naturally and frequently deal in potentially divisive issues. So how can we be available? Consider the following advice from Keller: *We need tolerance, humility and patience, but "Tolerance is not indifference. You might be appalled at the other person but you're respectful to them. Humility is not that you don't believe you're right but that you know the limits of what you can prove and you know you're always going to learn by listening. Patience is not saying I'm going to put up with evil but it's saying I'm not going to be too quick to posit motives and say you must be an evil person or you must be hostile. All that to say that all moral frameworks and points of view are narrow at one point or another, but instead it's the attitude behind them that matters."*

So, again I ask, are you available – are you approachable? If not, we're not going to do evangelism very well.