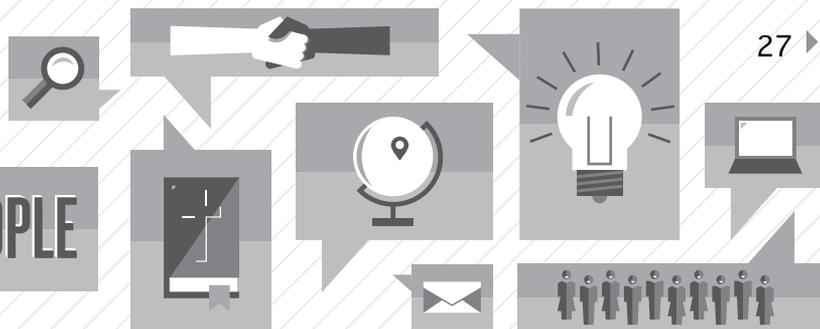


# FINDING GOD-PREPARED PEOPLE



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## FINDING ABNORMAL PEOPLE

The next day I told my colleagues, “Everything you shared yesterday is true. You serve in tough places. Normally it is just like you described it. But we’re not looking for NORMAL people. We’re looking for ABNORMAL people!”

Abnormal is defined as: “deviating from the normal, average or expected; extremely or excessively large.”<sup>1</sup> That’s what the responses of the Samaritan woman and those in Sychar were like.

This was the beginning of a paradigm shift for many of our missionaries. We were honest to acknowledge that some fields are tougher than others, but none are unharvestable. Perhaps the normal response we find is lack of interest or faith. But we are looking for abnormal responses – the people prepared ahead of time by the Spirit of God. Now, rather than just spending all our time trying to convince the normal ones, we spend a lot more time looking for the abnormal ones.

The search for norm-breakers was a biblical pattern in the Gospels and Acts. I believe that the Gospels and Acts are like a sports highlights recap. When you watch the highlights, what do you see? The dribbles? The huddles? No! You see the abnormal ten percent of the game – the goals, the touchdowns, the remarkable catches and the slam-dunks. In the Bible we most often see the abnormal people, not the 80-90% that may not have responded. Jesus was constantly looking for such people. It’s a biblical pattern for today in which...

After sharing with a group of missionaries about God’s vision of a Church-Planting Movement (CPM) in their contexts, I paused to ask them how their work was going. I was blind-sided by their responses:

- “In our culture, it normally takes four years for the average Buddhist to believe after first hearing the gospel.”
- “In our country, it normally takes 15-20 hearings of the good news before someone will make a firm commitment to Christ.”
- “Normally in our context people won’t believe if we don’t have the perfect worldview bridge.”
- “Normally in our city it takes two years just to get into a spiritual conversation with a person.”
- (My favorite came a few months later in Europe) “Normally the gospel is no longer good news for Europeans.”

With each statement I grew more discouraged. That evening I prayed for discernment, searching the Word for answers.

## THE ABNORMAL WOMAN AT THE WELL

The Lord took me to John 4. What struck me was that nothing was normal about the Samaritan woman

at the well. Everything about Jesus’ encounter with that woman was abnormal:

- **Culture:** A Jew talking with a Samaritan
- **Norms:** A man talking with a strange woman
- **Time to Transition into a Spiritual Conversation:** Jesus second statement was the beginning of a spiritual conversation (4:10)
- **Worldview:** Jesus went straight to the heart despite religious worldview differences (4:20ff)
- **Social Mores:** Jesus skipped small talk and discussed deep, personal issues immediately—call your “husband” (4:16)
- **Time to Believe:** Within the course of one conversation, with a person from a “hard” people group, the woman believed (4:28-29)
- **How Far and Quickly the Gospel Spread:** Within two days an entire town (Sychar) was reached with the gospel (4:39-42)

This woman was prepared by God to defy the norms for Samaritans. She believed in one hearing and was the key to a whole town’s response.

- Often normal people take years but God-prepared people take only days or weeks to believe.
- Often normal people need to hear the good news 15-20 times, but God-prepared people only need to hear it once or twice.

We are surprised to find norm-breakers because the normal response to our evangelism or discipleship is the opposite. And that normalcy tempts us to label our community, country or people group as difficult and we stop expecting miraculous responses. We get dulled by the normal into no longer expecting the abnormal.

### THE KEYS TO A SOCIETY: GOD-PREPARED PEOPLE

Until you find the abnormal people, CPMs will not start. In the last issue of *Mission Frontiers* I explained the essentials for a CPM on a napkin. Finding God-prepared people is one of the first steps (field one). Many people declare their communities hard or unreachable with a CPM when the reality is they have not found the key person(s) for unlocking their community. Jesus called them persons of peace and they were the entry points He instructed His seventy disciples to find (Luke 10:2-12). When we as strangers witness to a “normal” person, he may not respond. But winning the person of peace may result in this “normal” person’s salvation because he trusts the person of peace.

Jesus declared the nation of Israel in His day as a “plentiful harvest” (Luke 10:2) while Paul described them as a “hardened” nation (Rom. 11:25). Both characteristics were true. Hard nations contain harvestable individuals. And harvestable individuals are the key to harvesting nations. There is no context in which God cannot begin a movement because His Spirit prepares

people in each of them. In some places one out of ten persons might be the God-prepared person. In other places one out of a hundred or a thousand. You just have to work harder to find them.

No CPM method will bear fruit until you find the right people. Conversely sometimes it seems you stumble through your gospel presentation and yet the God-prepared person gets radically saved. The Spirit’s just working in them in abnormal ways.

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At the same time, we may miss the full potential of a harvest if we don’t follow up effectively with the abnormal person. Expecting the normal, we follow-up in our normal ways and miss the plentiful harvest. Again, we get dulled by the normal into no longer expecting the abnormal.

### FINDING ABNORMAL PEOPLE—3 F’S

In all likelihood, as the disciples took the road into Sychar this woman passed them on the way to the well. Twelve missed her but One found

her. Why? Perhaps they were so accustomed to the normal rejection of Samaritans that they expected nothing out of the ordinary.

But Jesus’ lifestyle was one of constantly sifting through society to find where the Father was preparing people (John 5:17, 19). Though tired He found the abnormal response that day. Why did He find her but the twelve missed her?

### FULL OF THE SPIRIT

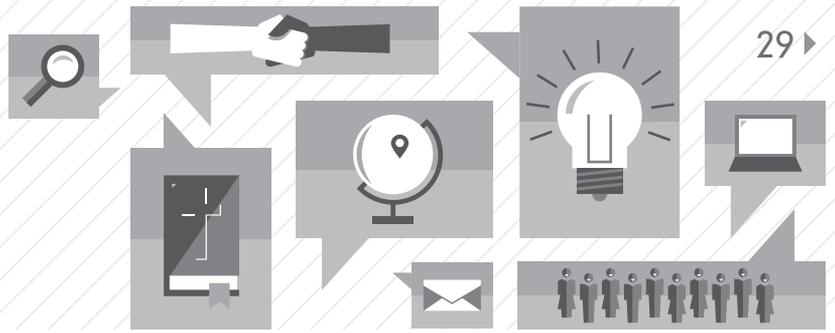
One major difference between Jesus and the Twelve was that He was full of the Spirit (Luke 4:1) and they had not yet been filled with the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus limited His divine abilities so that He lived in faith by the Spirit just as we must. Through the Spirit He had the discernment to see opportunities before Him and to expect results that broke the norm.

The day was coming for the apostles, however. They may have missed the abnormal person in Sychar but Peter and John didn’t miss the one at the beautiful gate. Full of the Spirit after Pentecost they finally “saw” a man they had probably passed many times – the lame man. This time they called for an abnormal response: “Rise up and walk!” (Acts 3:6) What resulted was the beginning of a fresh movement in Jerusalem.

**Application:** Unless you cultivate being filled with and walking in the Spirit continually, you will likely miss the people who will break the norms. Will you daily surrender yourself to the Spirit of Jesus so that you have the eyes of faith He had?

### FISH FOR ABNORMAL PEOPLE—GOING FOR BROKE

After sharing this with some national church planters in the Philippines, our missionary leader pulled me



aside. “Steve, that’s our problem! We are fishing for normal people not for abnormal ones.”

Jesus fished for abnormal people not normal ones. In one conversation He went to the heart of the issue with the Samaritan woman and she responded in faith. He looked for people willing to break the norms and called them to respond abnormally. He told the rich young ruler to sell everything, most likely disappointed that he didn’t (Mark 10:21ff). An abnormal invitation but a normal response. But two other rich men, Levi and Zacchaeus, responded abnormally, giving up their possessions. Jesus fished for norm-breakers.

Jesus could have fished for normal people not daring to challenge them to radical commitment to the King. But to do that, He would have missed the abnormal people that God uses to launch movements. Instead, He went for broke so much of the time: sell everything, come follow Me, don’t say goodbye to your parents, don’t sin anymore, go tell your family the great things God has done for you.

Do we expect people to be normal or abnormal when we share Jesus with them? Too often we expect them to be normal and therefore stop short of abnormally inviting them to wholeheartedly follow Jesus and boldly fish for men. We use methods that require them to wait weeks, months or years before we call them to respond, and then we call them to such shallow responses. Such an approach means we’ll miss the norm-breakers in all likelihood. We have a saying in our

region: “People are responsive until they prove themselves otherwise.” This transforms our expectations.

**Application:** If you tend to fish for normal people, try fishing for abnormal people also. This does not mean you have to give up the many normal relationships you have, some

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Is your discipleship approach for new believers one in which you expect them to get up and run with wholehearted surrender and bold witness to family and friends?

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of which will require years for the salvation of a friend. But in addition, begin finding ways to share the gospel lovingly, relationally and frequently, calling people to wholehearted faith and witness. Why miss the abnormal by only fishing for the normal? There will be times you are disappointed that persons only respond normally (rejection). But in due time you’ll have the joy of finding the abnormal response. If only one in a hundred in your community is the God-prepared person, how many people do you need to share the gospel with to find that one?

## FOLLOW-UP FOR ABNORMAL PEOPLE—EXPECTING AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFESTYLE

It wasn’t just that Jesus fished for abnormal people. He also followed-up (discipled) expecting them to respond with an abnormal lifestyle.

He wasn’t satisfied with an initial amazing response. Many of us would have been thrilled just to have a man with a legion of demons delivered and whole-heartedly trusting Jesus. But not the Savior! He continued to follow up with the Gerasene demoniac, instructing him to return home to the Ten Cities and proclaim the great things God had done for him. As he did so, people throughout the Ten Cities marveled (Mark 5:1-20). When you find an abnormal person, if you follow-up abnormally, a movement may result. This was a biblical pattern.

Would we have done such a thing? Or would we have told him, “Listen, you have a lot of emotional, relational and spiritual baggage. Stay here and let me disciple you for a while. When you’re ready we’ll let you take baby steps in responsibility.” Would you have trusted him to start on a ten city tour the next day proclaiming his testimony?

Once again we get dulled by the normal into no longer expecting the abnormal. We’ve seen so many normal discipleship responses that we no longer expect people to make radical commitments to Christ, to follow through with baptism immediately and to bear witness to their whole circle of influence within days. Instead, we must give God-prepared people a vision for how the Spirit will

use them to reach a whole community. Rather than say “sit and stay,” like Jesus we must say “get up and run”! We will be disappointed at times, but the alternative of never trying is unacceptable.

**Application:** Is your discipleship approach for new believers one in which you expect them to get up and run with wholehearted surrender and bold witness to family and friends?

All CPMs began in an intensive and ongoing search for God-prepared people. As in the parable of the four soils there are no labels on their foreheads identifying them as “good soil.” They look the same as everyone else. The only way we find the good soil is through dozens and hundreds of relational gospel conversations with a challenge to biblical commitment. In the process of finding many normal responses, not too different from the first three soils (hard, rocky, thorny), we will find abnormal responses that bear fruit thirty, sixty and

a hundred times. We must sift through large numbers of people in our locales to find the norm-breakers through which God will start Church-Planting Movements.

A few years ago, a missionary colleague of mine adapted his approach and began fishing widely for abnormal people.

One day, while hiking with a group of volunteers, he met a man who inquired where they were going. When my friend said, “Up to that village over there,” the man responded, “No you’re not! You’ve come to see me!” My friend recognized this as an abnormal response and set aside his agenda in order to go to the stranger’s house.

In that house he immediately went for broke and shared a simple Creation to Christ gospel presentation. That day the man believed. Immediately the man called his family and friends to his house and shared the same gospel presentation with them. As my friend discipled

him in abnormal ways, this man led his family to believe. A month later, after surviving a death threat from a witchdoctor, eighty people in his village believed.

Shortly after that, the next village invited him to share the gospel. Sixty people there believed.

The kingdom of God has continued to spread from valley to valley because a missionary found an abnormally-prepared man and discipled him in abnormal ways.

Will you and your team or church fish repeatedly to find the people God has prepared and then follow-up expecting abnormal responses? Full of the Spirit you can be an abnormal fisher of men.

In the next issue we will examine what the Bible has to say about how to follow-up in minutes and hours in abnormal ways after they believe. 

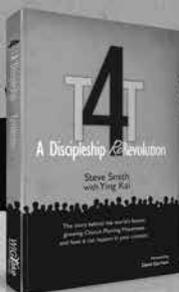
<sup>1</sup> Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/abnormal?s=t>

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