

### **Not just teaching but reaching**

I first became aware of Evangelism Explosion when I was just eleven months old as a Christian - and it has been a very real part of my life ever since. Let me tell you what it has meant to me.

I was teaching in a large secondary school and after the Easter holidays a supply teacher joined the staff for the summer term. She had just returned from Africa where she had served as a Head Teacher for some years. She was very different from me - studious, not very energetic, but despite this we found ourselves getting along in a miraculous way. She was different and this difference was primarily because she had something which I did not have. I began to question her and long discussions followed day after day. She had Jesus as her personal friend and that made all the difference to her, and it was very evident to me. She was confident and peaceful as she went about her daily life.

Then the end of term arrived and I was quite despondent about things and in particular my lack of faith. I rang her on Saturday - she drove over to my home and we went for a walk along the river where our conversation continued. She spoke gently to me about Revelation 3:20 and Jesus standing at the door knocking and then she drove me home and left me to consider this verse and its relevance to me in 1976. At 2:30am I woke and was aware of a Presence in my room. I felt warm, safe and comfortable as I opened the door of my heart and invited Jesus into my life to become my Friend and Guide.

Soon I was offering myself for baptism in the local Baptist church and it was during one of the baptismal classes that the Lord told me quite clearly that He would make me a 'fisher of men'. So it should not have been a surprise to me when one day in December 1977-on my way out from Sunday morning worship - my Minister said to me, *'I believe you ought to be one of the four trainees in our first EE programme, which begins in about 2 months time.* 'Obedient as ever, and unaware of what this would mean or how it would change me, I began the first of many programmes with which have I have been involved in my church. .

What did this mean and how did it change me? I am not a studious person, I'd far rather be up and about outside enjoying some form of physical activity – digging, playing badminton - anything rather than settling down to read and study! But this suddenly changed. If I was to become the 'fisher of men' that God had told me I was to be - then I had to learn and find my way around the Bible, a very new but exciting thing for me to embark upon. So began my time as a trainee in Gillingham Baptist Church's first EE programme.

I quickly had to learn to acknowledge God's hand upon my life and to respond to His call in obedience – something which I had found difficult. Being obedient did not come naturally - I thought that I knew best and I was in charge. But change I did and the Lord was ever loving and faithful to me throughout. At first I was complacent but the programme calls for a very disciplined approach and I soon recognised that only 100% of my time and effort would do. The way the learning is broken into 'bite-sized' chunks, plus the encouragement and care of

our trainer and fellow trainees helped me enormously. Soon I had settled down to this new discipline. I became more efficient in my use of time, and able to fit into my already full days, time to learn the material, and to study the Bible, plus times of prayer and meditation. This enabled me to grow and slowly mature in my walk of faith.

But these changes were nothing compared to the joy which accompanied them. I soon discovered that this programme was very practical – not restricted to Bible study but getting out into the homes of non-Christians in our community. My fellow trainee and I went into those homes and under the careful eye of our trainer hesitantly and nervously at first, began to 'gossip the gospel to them. We were soon able to communicate the good news in a clear and direct fashion. Many of the people we visited responded to the offer of God's gift of eternal life and accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour - that is where the joy came in. Some of the people who made commitments had been regular churchgoers for many years but, like so many (I have since discovered) had never really understood or been challenged with the need for a personal response.

So, as I learned to communicate the essential truths of the gospel of Jesus, I became a fisher of men. By the end of that first programme I realised that I had been given a wonderful tool. Now, 20 years later, that tool – polished and honed with use – is still very much part of me. It has been, and remains a joy to be able to share the life-changing message of Jesus Christ whenever and wherever the opportunity arises - not just in a programme but in my everyday life. I praise God that He has used me to lead people to Him in all manner of places and situations. This training has enabled me - a very ordinary person - to share Jesus with people - old people, young people and even children. It has allowed me to serve in partnership with Jesus, to bear fruit, fruit that will last - and what a privilege it has been!

I remember one day, sitting quietly in the Coffee Shop (part of the outreach facilities of my church) chatting to an elderly man who was a regular visitor. He was quite amazed to feel loved and cared for by the workers in the coffee shop. This enabled me to tell him how much bigger was the love of God for him. I went on to share the gospel with him, and there and then he reached out to Jesus, offered himself to Him and came to a new understanding of love and forgiveness. Life was not easy for him; he had real problems but he was able to state clearly and openly that having Jesus in his life had made such a difference to him. He understood, perhaps for the first time, that he was valued.

Another memory comes from the first programme. We visited a couple who had been to our church on occasions, but not regularly. Our trainer was not able to be with us - he had an urgent pastoral matter to deal with – so we were alone and nervous. Would we be able to manage and get things in the right place? Our God is ever faithful and at the end of the evening the angels in heaven were rejoicing as all four of us knelt down in the front room and prayed the prayer of commitment together. Twenty years on I still meet in that same room and enjoy fellowship and prayer with that couple, and the husband makes tea for us!

Obviously with people coming to faith my church has also benefited from using the EE programme. Over the years many of our people have been equipped to share their faith. In

our first programme - with just two teams -- over 30 people made professions of faith - met Jesus for the first time and were soon themselves being trained and then experiencing the joy of leading others to Jesus. The changes in people's lives were very apparent – folks wanted to come to church - no longer a duty but a pleasure to come - to learn and to grow.

In addition to the personal equipping the EE teams have enjoyed the wonderful experience of working closely with others as they have studied, learned, wept and been faithful – together. They have benefited by getting to know other members in a deep and lasting way over the twelve weeks of the learning process. They have experienced a deepening of their own faith and in their understanding of Jesus. Our church has a group of people who are equipped, trained and confident to be obedient to the call to be 'fishers of men'.

Everyone in the kingdom has a story to tell – a story which is as real today as it was when it was written – that Jesus' love is very wonderful and that eternal life is a free gift available to all. How can people believe if they have never heard? They can't! Jesus has told us to GO into all the world and make disciples - to be fishers of men, but just like his first disciples we need to be trained first. The EE programme did that for me -- it can do it for you too!

It is a programme which will benefit everyone. Jesus' first group of disciples were ordinary men - but when they were obedient and empowered by the Holy Spirit – they became extraordinary men. This is possible today for ordinary women and men - get on board, learn how to 'gossip the gospel' and experience the peace that passes understanding as you learn and serve the Man called Jesus.

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