

## The Secret of Delivering Hope

When you go back home, will you be called upon to share what you have heard and experienced here? I ask these questions because we listen and learn in differing ways, depending on our reasons for being here. My goal today is to energize you personally as an individual to consciously deliver hope to people in need. My story began many years ago. Back then, I was totally oblivious of my Christian obligation to live a life of purpose. Not that I was doing anything particularly wrong, but more importantly, I was not doing enough right. One of the prayers of my church says, 'Forgive us for what we have done and for what we have left undone.' That prayer speaks to me. It was the key to my hearing a call from God to do more, because there is much more than I have left undone.

Three years ago, I came here to visit my brother's family and to attend my niece's wedding. At that time I was introduced to Dr. James Kok and his book, **The Miracle Of Kindness**. I didn't know anything about the book other than my brother's name was on the front as the editor. Now, what was I, the younger sister to do? Obviously, I had to buy the book. Later, when the opportunity arose, I asked Dr. Kok to autograph my copy. He did that and more. He wrote an inscription. In time, what he wrote played a big part in my realizing that my God given gifts were not being used. I was puzzled by what he wrote. I kept thinking, he doesn't know me. We have just met. Why would he write such comments? I avoided showing the inscription to my family, thinking that sharing the very kind words he had written about me would be bragging.

I also thought his words were undeserved, so at first I discounted them. They were too flattering for my Midwest sensibilities, but as I reread them and reflected further, I began to believe that Dr. Kok's words were meant to wake me up. In a very short time, he had observed talents in me that I had not recognized as God-given. Plus, I had taken them for granted. Flying home after the family wedding festivities, I started reading Dr. Kok's book. What I found was a collection of stories of real people. The theme of the stories was that everyone can work miracles through kindness; in all the stories, individuals first observed someone who had a need. Then they either stepped up to help, or became a recipient of help from someone else. In other words, they shared themselves, using their God given-talents with people who needed Christian touching.

I knew the people and their stories were real because, I recognized some names, but the most moving moment, when I actually got goosebumps, occurred when I read my sister's name. Sharon spent three school terms in Taiwan, tutoring the daughter of Canadian missionaries there. Her story in Dr. Kok's book was about being caught in a surprise thunderstorm without any protection from the elements. A Chinese woman totally overwhelmed her with the offer of an umbrella. Angela . . . a perfect name for someone who could deliver such kindnesses, such a miracle of kindness this angel had provided with a simple offer of an umbrella. When I finished reading **The Miracle of Kindness**, I had a new appreciation for the biblical phrase. 'They will know we are Christians by our love.' Often in my daily routines, I was dismayed by the way people treated one another. I recalled a phrase I had heard in a college literature class (man's inhumanity to man) and I wondered, why can't humans be kind? Why don't we treat each other respectfully, with civility, with common courtesy, and why do we save our good manners for the people we know.

It occurred to me that humans aren't modeling kindness to one another. I had learned long ago that everyone is somebody's model for good or bad. That is, even though people don't know me, they still make judgments about me, based on what I say and do. People can doubt what we say, but they believe what they see, which is confirmation that actions really do speak louder than words.

There were two themes in Dr. Kok's book that stayed with me. First, I learned with relief that I can share the good news of Jesus without becoming a missionary in a far away country. I came to believe that the people I meet daily need the good news, too, and because I know that my behavior, what I say and do, speaks volumes, I can choose to live a life worthy of the name Christian by being an ambassador of kindness, here and now.

Secondly, I came to realize a calling to do something with my God-given gifts and talents. How did I know this? First, the Bible says in Isaiah that I am known and called by name. Furthermore, God speaks and nudges me through the people with whom I have contact. He has been speaking to me my entire life and I haven't been listening. God often calls us through the voices of other people. Through other people, God was preparing me for his plan for my life. How? He put me in a home full of love. He provided me with teachers who encouraged me to lead, to sing, to smile, to know right from wrong, and to pass on these positive behaviors. He put mentors in my life who demonstrated the kind of attitudes and behaviors I would need to deliver hope and encouragement to the people I meet daily. God nurtured me through my experiences, and he worked through others to get through to me.

With these realizations, I found at high time for me to act with purpose daily, being hospitable, increasing civility, spreading care and kindness in my world, and I would soon discover that my opportunities were everywhere. Back in Indiana, I shared my new enthusiasm with a dear friend. I must have stirred up some excitement in her, also, because she asked me to lead an all-day retreat in our community. This retreat became the first of many opportunities for me to share my newly discovered kindness mission. At the retreat, I devised an activity to get the women to think about their gifts and talents. From there, we were going to list ways we could put our talents and lives to work in service to others.

Each woman was to identify her talents and write them on a piece of paper. Naively, I thought this would be easy. I was dumbfounded when one woman could not think of any talent she possessed. Her piece of paper was blank. Now, because I believe the phrase about God never making any junk, and that there are no spare parts or leftovers, this dilemma made no sense to me at all. Fortunately, the other women around her spoke up, reminding her of her talent with food, cooking, and generously sharing whatever she had with others. She always brought more than was asked to a potluck or reception. In time, from this experience and others, I learned that it is common for people to be unaware of their God-given gifts.

Flash back in time in your mind to your childhood. Remember the excitement you felt when there were presents to open? Maybe you get the same thrill today. Watch children on birthdays or at Christmas, they can hardly contain themselves. The paper is ripped off and cards are nearly ignored as the child races toward whatever is hidden in the wrappings. Can you imagine receiving a present and not opening it? This concept has been called the tragedy of the unopened gift. Our unopened gifts can also be called our unrealized potential. Do you have unopened gifts? Unrecognized talents? Unrealized potential?

God asks, what will you do with the gifts I have given you? In 1st Peter 4:10, I read, "Each has received a gift. Be generous with the different things God gave you. Pass them around, so all get in on it." Now that is a clear call to Christian duty.

Do you recognize your gifts? Do you acknowledge your duty to share them? God calls us all. He has equipped us and expects us to contribute to the wellbeing of our fellow humans. Our mission is to take the love God gives us, and in concrete ways, share it with others. He wants us to look daily for opportunities to make the world less difficult for each other by being the hands and feet of Jesus. Serving our neighbors is what God is calling us to do. It's why we are here. There is proof for us in Galatians 6:10. Right now, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith.

Before I could be called an ambassador of kindness, I needed to inventory my gifts. I discovered that Dr. Kok had already identified them in his inscription to me in my copy of his book, **The Miracle Of Kindness**. He wrote, “Judy, your laughter, your singing, your spirit brightens the world.”

Laughter, singing, spirit, brightness; in my mind I heard the phrases from songs I learned as a child:

Brighten the corner where you are; brighten the corner where you are.

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.

Jesus wants me for a sunbeam to shine for him each day. In every way, try to please him, at home, at school, at play.

The theme of these familiar Sunday school songs, which speak of light, brightness, truth, knowledge, and duty, called me to brighten the world where I am.

In my work life, I served as a human resource manager for a retail store. Among my duties, I hired, and then trained the new hires. One day, I learned at my yearly review with the store manager, that I was responsible for the morale of the store. I had not thought of that as part of my job description, and so, when I trained a new person, I began to emphasize sales skills that included smiles and a positive attitude. Once again, I had found a connection to the words of Dr. Kok’s inscription in the Kindness book. I was to be a teacher, an encourager, a cheerleader, because these are my gifts.

A friend of mine, another person who thought she had no gifts, told me recently that she liked to encourage others who had gifts—that she was just a clapper. I thought that phrase was wonderful, and I told her so. She had an extremely worthy gift. When an audience claps, the action is a compliment, a show of appreciation of their talents. Clapping encourages and cheers the performer, The compliment of clapping nourishes the soul.

If you have not identified your talents or gifts, I challenge you to seriously examine yourself. Notice your aptitudes and abilities. Ask yourself, what do I do well? What am I complimented on? What am I already trained to do? Maybe I need only cultivate and start to use these talents. Consider that you will be happiest if you develop the talents you already possess, rather than try to overcome your weaknesses in an attempt to become good at things for which you just don’t have the aptitude. Believe that you, like everyone else, has God-given gifts, and nourish and nurture them. If you are a leader, you will be training others when you go back to your group. Don’t be surprised when someone thinks he or she has no gift. Help them look deeper, encourage them’ people are hungry for encouragement. If talents are already recognized, your goal might be to help them find ways to use their gifts on purpose. Note that I said on purpose. The phrase ‘random acts of kindness’ has gained much popularity, but the real goal is to plan and carry out our good intentions to those we meet, and to do so beyond our circle of family and friends. Listen to the voices of those around you and hear their needs. In Matthew 5:47, I read, “If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal?”

Those words of Matthew certainly chastised me when I thought I was already doing my part to cheer up the world. Those verses continue to challenge me to get out of my comfort zone, to dare to truly witness with my care and concern to the downtrodden, because if I don’t care, I am careless. If I am not thoughtful, I’m thoughtless. If I can’t offer encouragement, a word of hope, I have left the stranger hopeless, the same mental state as when I noticed him. So pay attention to your experiences in the events and problems around you. Use whatever talents you possess. It doesn’t take money or other resources you

don't have—only the gifts you do have. All you need to do is observe, and then act. With God's grace and help, you can do good work.

Last October, as I saw and watched California burning on TV, and saw and heard the stories of those taking refuge in San Diego's Qualcomm football stadium, I was encouraged by the people who shared themselves with strangers. People came from all around, bringing water, food, diapers, toys, games, anything and everything they could think of. The offering of these common supplies delivered hope to the people there. Like me back in my human resource position, they were keeping up morale by encouraging families in a time of crisis.

Another definition of the title 'ambassador' is someone who is called and sent out. We've covered the concept of being called. Now we'll deal with being sent out to share the good news. We should also practice the art of being a diplomat by making sure our body language is consistent with what we say. For this mission, we first need to prepare by dispensing with the fear of leaving our comfort zone, and more importantly, making a plan. We also need to prepare our face and voice. Why? Because too many of us are frowning, and we don't even know it. Imagine standing up here with me and looking out into a room full of frowning people. Are you aware that an overly-relaxed face appears downcast and to be a frown? A frown is a statement of disapproval. Does the expression on your face right now appear to be a frown? You can check this out at home in front of a mirror. You will see what I'm talking about. Also, when you use the phone, can you put a smile on your face, and in your voice? A frown can be heard. Kind words can be mistaken for sarcasm if accompanied by a deadpan face or non-smiling voice. For example, I hope you have a good day. Or I hope you have a good day.

My mother kept a journal, a poem, some of her own, along with newspaper clippings of interest to her. What she saved in that blue loose-leaf binder reveals to me more of her character and values. Every time I read it, one quotation stands out. 'If you're happy, notify your face.' We would do well to practice being happier. In the book of Matthew, we are told to be of good cheer. Charles Dickens wrote, "Cheerfulness and contentment are great, beautifiers and are famous preservers of good looks." Another thought in this vein: how have you reacted to the advertisement on TV that says parentheses have a place, but not on your face? I am appalled at that thought, and I have been known to shout at the TV. I earned my parentheses, and I am proud of them, because they come from smiling.

Did you know that our happiness can be affected by the kind of home environment we live in? What kind of a house do you maintain? Is it full of light, or darkness? Is it cheerful, or gloomy? Recently, my husband and I were traveling out of state and happened to visit friends in two different homes. One house had lots of light in it. The home was filled with spirit and laughter, and I felt the attitudes of our friends were positive, in spite of the burdens of their daily life . . . and they did have burdens. The care of my friend's 95-year-old mother, the responsibility for the comfort of a bed-ridden 30-year-old son, who had suffered brain damage as an infant, who could not speak, who had to be fed through a stomach tube, must be lifted and bathed daily, and the only movement he had any control of was his eyes. Then add to that the five-day-a-week day care for their two bright-eyed, cheery, preschool granddaughters, and finally, their dog was suffering and dying, and they had to soon pick a time to have her put to sleep. I wondered how they could remain so hopeful in spite of such stress on themselves. They would say to me, "*Life is good.*"

Could there be a connection between the physical light and brightness of their home that affected their attitude? In stark contrast, the second home we visited was physically dark and gloomy. The house had too much shade, too few light bulbs, and the lamp shades were not helpful. Similarly, these people also had burdens. In this case, an adult never-married daughter, whose medical problems and depression caused her to no longer be able to work. Because of the severity of this daughter's situation, her parents

chose to be responsible for her. This well-educated woman, who was previously employed in a medical profession, could no longer take care of her own daily needs. Her depression was so severe, she could not remember to eat, let alone prepare food. The financial responsibility continues to postpone the retirement of her mother. I found the atmosphere of this home sad and depressing. Additionally, these friends had become negative and distrustful in many ways about most subjects. Both of these families dealt daily with a serious health problems of their children, yet one house was alive and the other was not. One house saw their lives as half full, while the other thought theirs to be half empty.

For health and happiness, you can make changes in your life in order to be a more positive person. Many people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder. The acronym is S-A-D. Sad. These people experience depression, caused by the dreariness of fall and winter, when there is less daily sunlight. Even if you do not suffer from this affliction, we all need more light in our lives, both literally and figuratively. Seasonal Affective Disorder might be one of the reasons people become snowbirds and relocate to warmer climes in the winter. I have become a snowbird myself. There is more sunshine in my life in the winter when I am in Florida, known as the Sunshine State, than when I feel cooped up in my home in snowy, cold Indiana.

If you can't travel, there are changes that can be made at home. Help yourself to improve your outlook. Turn on the lights, investigate full-spectrum light bulbs, lift the shades, draw back the curtains, let more light into your life. You can also remove clutter. Simplify your surroundings, and get out of the house. Try to be more positive, even when you have adversity. It doesn't hurt, either, to look for the bright side of life, or to temper negative reactions to disappointments, but remember: your face tells your emotions. It can be readily seen in a snapshot when you think you're not in the picture. And since we look different when we feel different, we need to learn to sing and dance in spirit in all we do.

Another idea: develop a sense of humor and laugh often. Laughter is contagious. I learned from a TV commercial that laughter will add eight years to my life, and as Mark Twain wrote, humor softens the rough edges.

What else can I do, we do, to get ready for our new mission of delivering hope? I encourage you to practice and improve your eye contact. Again with a mirror at home, do over your face so that only your eyes are showing. Behind this covering, look at your eyes, first smiling, and then when frowning—there's a difference. Eyes sparkle when you smile. I read a study that declares that words carry about 7% of our emotion. Our voice reveals about 38%, but it is our facial expression that tells the most about our feelings, revealing a whopping 55% of how we feel. What emotion are you wearing regularly on your face? Are you putting your best face forward? Is this what you want the world to see in you? One need not be wearing a phony smile, but one could practice a more neutral look.

My point is that it's not what we say, but how we say it, and what others see in us while we are speaking, that will affect how they judge what we say and do, and whether they will trust us when we offer encouragement. So I remind you that we need to practice our new vocation of delivering hope, so that our words and actions are received in the way intended, so that we can help, not add to someone's hurt.

What are some more ways to prepare for this outreach endeavor? I think a good activity to help prepare might be several excursions into your community for the purpose of people-watching—so you can hone your observation skills. Look for inspiration everywhere, notice and be attentive to how others live their lives, and how they ministered to you by teaching, motivating, supporting, and honoring your call. Notice the beauty of the people you know, and what God is saying through their lives and words. Where to go? Where do you usually go? A walk, the gas station, the gym, the church, a bank, standing in line somewhere. Look for clues to a person's disposition. Be sure to look at people. Look into their eyes. Most

people wear on their faces what's going on inside of them. While standing in line, practice saying hello to someone you don't know. Be sure to smile at the same time.

I always enjoy a person's reaction when I do this. Some respond in kind, smiling back and speaking to me. Others look quizzical, their eyebrows furrowed, as if trying to figure out if they should know me. Watch to see if their body language confirms or betrays what you see and hear. I place more trust in what I see. Are you approachable when standing in line? I got a compliment the other day; a person passed by me as I was standing in a line, and said to me, regarding my clothes, "*That's such a good color on you.*" The words of a stranger lifted me. Compliments do that. Your eyes brighten and you feel good about yourself. Best of all, I was receiving what I advocate—to be bold enough to touch another person's life, even that of a stranger,

Another skill to polish: what to say. Find ways to start a conversation, such as a compliment or thank you. Be Inquisitive, ask questions. In the Midwest, the weather is always a good icebreaker, and talk about ideas, not people. Be brave enough to be the one to speak first, and do so with a smile on your face and in your voice. What to say is challenging, but there are so many opportunities to practice the appropriate words. For example, as I have gotten older, so have my friends . . . some of them are experiencing health problems. I am thankful when they are returned to good health, but some don't recover. They die.

The need for putting human compassion into action is never more evident than when people are suffering. So what do I say in the hospital room? How do I comfort the family at a reviewal of the body at the funeral home, or later at the church service. I can listen, and I can share my memories of their loved one. I have learned, too, that the grieving process is long, and the family will need loving and sensitive contact, far beyond the bustle of the activity around the funeral. Can we be inventive in finding ways to offer comfort and support to suffering people? I send cards. I prefer blank ones with plenty of space to share a memory, but when choosing a commercial card, take the time to write a note. There's less pressure when writing a note in a card, in the comfort of your home, than when you are at the funeral home, standing with a grieving family. In these situations, I believe I'm getting better by learning to talk less and listen more. I tried to imagine the words I would want to hear if I was the suffering person. Some of these situations are still new to me and I, too, have to prepare. My courage just bolstered by the title of another book by Dr Kok, **90% Of Helping Is Just Showing Up**. That book title makes me braver when I am venturing into a difficult situation.

There's a lady in my church who is so sour and critical of everybody and everything around her that, like Dr. Kok's postal employee, who didn't respond to his pleasantries, I've made her my project. So far, I am not very successful. She will smile and speak after I notice and speak to her first, but I don't trust her smile. I feel sorry for her. She has recently widowed, has one grown child with whom she doesn't get along, and yet she shuns the kindnesses people extend to her. Why do people behave like this? Maybe you all know someone similar, and can take on some challenging projects of your own. So far, I have outlined a number of physical attributes we can work: on the face, eye contact, greeting, complimenting and thanking, but these all need to be supported by attitude. Now, where does one go to get good attitude?

Attitude is everything. If you are suffering, you will need to work at healing yourself and your relationships first. You will also need to manage your time, taking care of yourself so that you will have the energy to give quality support to others. During this time of preparation, don't avoid contact with other people or their needs. Their needs may actually help you to focus beyond yourself. Also, surround yourself with people you want to emulate. Seek out their company and stay away from negative people—the kind who pull you down. They are depressing. Instead, seek out and nurture friendships that elevate, encourage, and challenge you. It is important for you to love yourself and your circumstances first, so that you are mentally free to help others feel better about themselves.

You might reflect, too, on who first believed in you. Recall the attitudes and behaviors of your mentors of the past. My grandmother was one of my mentors. She probably never knew that, but I admired and loved her in so many ways. Most of all, because she was one of my biggest fans. She listened and encouraged me in everything I did. We know the profound effect encouragement has on people. When I think of grandma, I remember her as my grownup friend. She would play Canasta and Chinese checkers with me, and she would let me dress up in old clothes and hats. Then she and her sisters, my great aunts, would indulge me as I put on programs for them. In Grandma's house, there was a landing on her staircase that made a wonderful stage, and in the winter she hung a heavy curtain at the landing to keep the heat from escaping up the stairs. I could dress up, enter my stage through the curtain, and entertain my very appreciative audience, and tell stories, sing, recite my Sunday school pieces, and then they would clap. What wonderful memories I have of those times. But there's more.

When my grandparents, who lived in town, would visit us on our farm, I would lead grandma to the barn, and then up the stairs to the hay mow, where I knew the farm cat, Patsy, had hidden her kittens. As a child, I never gave a thought to what physical demands I put on my grandma. Now I recall them. She was the age of a grandma. She was blind in one eye. The stairs to the hay mow were steep, uneven, and probably unsafe. And of course grandma was wearing a dress, nylons, and the common block heeled shoes. But she never said a word or ever declined my request that she come to the barn with me to find the new baby kittens, which she loved as much as I, I believe that grandma mentored me by what she did not by what she said, for I can remember very little of her words. Instead, my memories are of her warmth, her care, her generosity of time, and the love and encouragement she bestowed on me. She provided me with the tools to practice my gifts, my calling to use my voice. What were those tools? They were dress-up clothes, and a stage. Upon reflection, I realize that grandma was a teacher, although her formal schooling ended with the eighth grade.

Another mentor in my life was a friend who taught me to keep giving when others don't. Specifically, when my husband and I were newly married, living in a new community, in a new state, attending a new church, and seeking out couples for friendship, we would invite people to our home. We would have a party. Nothing fancy, just being together. Lots of laughter. How very disappointed we were when we didn't get invitations back. We were always thanked appropriately, told what a wonderful time our guests had, complimented on the food, and so forth, but we didn't get invited to their homes. My older and wiser friend taught me that some people don't know how to entertain. That is, how to share their homes. Then she encouraged me to invite them anyway. I was not to stop entertaining, just because someone else did not reciprocate. She counseled me wisely by encouraging me to share whatever I had.

My memories of these two important women in my life remind me of the obligation I have to pass on the positive attitudes and behavior. In addition to reflecting on your own mentors, you can choose to be a mentor, now, not just for your children and grandchildren, but to those in your community who have no adult role models. In my community there is a program called hours for ours—hours, as in time, ours as in for the children of the community. Hours for ours is a program that asks for a commitment of time, and then pairs an adult, usually, with an elementary school-age child. The adult meets with the child for one hour a week, often for lunch in the school cafeteria, and then for time to do whatever: a puzzle, some homework, tell stories, share problems, just talk, and listen, so the child can get to know and trust and adult. The children in this program look forward to their weekly date with their mentor who soon becomes their friend, because some children have no adults to admire. This program attempts to give these children hope. You can change a child's life by providing him with a trusting, caring relationship. As a result of these relationships, these children may become more productive, caring adults, because someone shared himself, and gave time to them back in their formative years. You can look for similar opportunities to mentor someone in your community. Volunteers are needed. You can be the hands and feet of Jesus.

The last time I had my eyes tested for new glasses, I had a revelation about my calling to be a better observer of human behavior. The technician conducted an exam that tested my peripheral vision. What does this have to do with being a Christian and using our gifts? I believe this test was another reminder for me to look around, to be more attentive, and to compensate for my visual loss due to aging. We all need to pay more attention to life, people, and the needs of others around us. We are called to observe and serve. Albert Sweitzer affirmed this when he wrote, "The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve." Ideally, our preparation for our new mission is complete. We have identified our gifts; we recognize the need for sharing kindness in our increasingly secular world; we've checked our attitudes, faces and the sound of our voice; and we're surrounding ourselves with positive people. We are now ready to deliver hope to people whose lives need Christian touching. We want to make a difference, and we believe we can make that difference, because we care. So what is the secret of delivering hope?

The secret is to be intentional. Just do it! Not random acts of kindness, but planned, every day mission searching for need in common daily situations. Recognize the need and then respond in ways that will make life easier or more pleasant for others. Your acts of kindness will lift the spirit of your neighbor. Be a cheerleader, and remember to be present for people in good times, as well as bad. Is there a reward for this? Yes. In the process, we are lifted to; those who bring sunshine to the lives of others can not keep it from themselves.

Sometimes, when we are critical, impatient, and irritated, and attempt to respond in a non Christ-like way, we would do well to remember that unkind people probably need encouragement the most. Sometimes, when I'm waiting in the checkout line of a grocery store and getting more and more impatient, I look at the harassed clerk; and because I can remember when I used to run a cash register in a grocery store, I know she needs encouragement, especially after I overhear the rudeness and attitude of the customer ahead of me. In these situations, we should strive to be kinder than necessary, because everyone we meet is fighting some kind of battle.

Now for some bad news; you will experience failure. You will be extremely frustrated when you get little or no response from your projects, but you'll also learn that good intentions are not enough. Sometimes our efforts will go ignored or rebuffed. They will go unappreciated. The lesson I continue to learn is that we will have disappointments in our new vocation, that we must let go in order to move forward. Every day there will be new opportunities, and like me, you will learn from your mistakes and get better. Examine your progress daily. Maybe keep a journal in which you can notate your successes. Ask yourself, what did I do today to bring happiness to someone? You can reflect on what didn't go well and your ideas on how to improve and your next outing. When you pray for opportunities, pray also for the courage to act. Then find solace and knowing you are trying, and don't give up.

One time after speaking to a group on the topic of spreading care and kindness, word got back to me that one woman had said she didn't learn a thing she didn't already know. At first, I was hurt, but I soon realized that the criticism was probably true. Nevertheless, I could observe that she had not yet learned to put into practice what she already knew. My hope today is that if I haven't said anything you don't already know, maybe I have said it in such a way that you see the hospitality idea in a new way, that the idea makes a connection this time and causes you to actively, purposefully spread the love of Jesus to everyone you meet. There's a television advertisement that exemplifies this problem of knowing what to do, yet not doing it. It's the TV ad where a man having a business lunch is choking on food in a fine restaurant. He is at a table with a group of men who chat about what should be done in a choking situation. One man describes the Heimlich maneuver at great length, while the others at the table nod in agreement. The man continues to choke during all of this. Thanks to a complete stranger from another

table, the lifesaving procedure is finally applied—the food is dislodged. The sponsor closes his ad with, “Less talk. Make it happen.”

Too often we Christians know what has to be done, but we fail to do it. The man at the next table who helped . . . he heard and saw the crisis; he was paying attention, even if subconsciously. We all need to use our eyes and ears better. Another example: at the Deli counter of a local grocery, I experienced an employee who provided an excellent example of not listening when hearing. I asked for a chunk of their oven baked Turkey breast, emphasizing chunk, and not sliced. I told her three times, not sliced, and then I watched her prepare the slicing machine. I’m sure the clerk heard me speak, but she didn’t listen to what I said. In the context of our new mission of delivering hope, we go the extra mile for people when we truly listen.

In summary, God’s plan is to have us carry out his work on earth. He works through us. We are his servant when we uplift the spirits of others, so they too will be able to help build God’s kingdom here and now. This is how we evangelize—the way we pass it on. Noticing people, showing interest, and asking questions, provide another person the opportunity to respond, to talk, and to have their lives touched by a fellow human being. Our lives are interconnected. We need each other. We all are hungry for the nourishment of care and kindness. We take turns in being the provider, and then the receiver of kindnesses. Showing this kind of mutual support pleases God.

If you want to do more and increase your opportunities for delivering hope to others, you need to do it daily. I have a gift for each of you on the welcome table, there are refrigerator magnets in the shape of a heart. You are invited to take one. When they were made, my idea was that the heart would be a daily reminder of a new vocation. The heart, in several different colors, says, “They will know we are Christians by our love.” By our love means by our behavior. We will be known and judged by what we say and do. Take one of the hearts, put it where you see it daily. Let it be a reminder for you to be intentional in noticing and serving others. Let it be Jesus that others see through you.

For many people, our lives are the only Bible some will ever read. Let me tell you a story that reveals how much our behavior matters. Several years ago, a preacher from out of state, accepted a call to a church in Houston, Texas. Some weeks after he arrived, he had an occasion to ride the bus from his home to the downtown area. When he sat down, he discovered that the driver had accidentally given him a quarter too much change. As he considered what to do, he thought to himself, “You better give the quarterback. It would be wrong to keep it.” Then he thought, oh, the bus company makes too much fair anyway, they will never miss it. Accept it as a gift from God and just keep it. When his stop came, the new minister paused momentarily at the door, and then he handed the quarter to the driver, and said, “*Here, you gave me too much change.*” The driver, with a smile, replied, “*Aren’t you the new preacher in town? I’ve been thinking a lot lately about going somewhere to worship. I just wanted to see what you would do if I gave you too much change. I’ll see you at church on Sunday.*”

When the preacher stepped off the bus, he literally grabbed the nearest light pole, held on, and said, “*Oh God, I almost sold your son for a quarter.*” This is a really scary example of how much people watch us as Christians and we’ll put us to the test. What damage might have been done had the minister kept the quarter? What damage do we do by our behavior? Always be on guard, and remember that you carry the name of Christ on your shoulders when you call yourself Christian. My ministry is to give others encouragement, and to do this in my little corner of the world. I will do my best to brighten the lives of others and put some hope, inspiration . . .

My way; make in me your temple, Lord. Shine through me each day. Take now my heart. Let me love for Thee. Fill me with your spirit, Lord; love the world through me. Take now my life, let me live for Thee.

Fill me with your power, Lord. Change the world through me, Fill me with your power, Lord. Change the world through me,