

TOOLBOX

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LANDMINES *in Evangelism*

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If you are determined to share the gospel with others, expect opposition from Satan. He does not easily give up his territory and will do everything in his power to destroy your witness.

There are distinct strategies, which may be called “landmines,” that Satan uses to attack the influence of believers.

Just as there are physical landmines used in war, there are also spiritual landmines in spiritual warfare that can keep us from moving forward in evangelism.

In this edition of the Toolbox, we'll address landmines harmful to our witness. Ones that are not only detrimental to individuals, but to entire churches as well.

Physical and spiritual landmines have four things in common:

1. A LANDMINE IS HIDDEN BENEATH THE SURFACE. It's an explosive device designed to harm or kill the enemy, unseen until too late.

2. LANDMINES DON'T DISCRIMINATE. It doesn't matter your rank—whether a private or a general, a new believer or a seasoned pastor—if you step on it, the damage is done.

3. LANDMINES CAN GO OFF AT ANY TIME. It could occur at a low point, or even after your greatest victory.

4. LANDMINES DAMAGE NOT ONLY THE PERSON WHO TRIGGERED IT, BUT ALSO YOUR ENTIRE CHURCH. They distract from and even derail your collective outreach.

Scripture gives us the fundamental key to avoiding landmines: “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16).

As we follow Jesus, remember this: be sober, be diligent, and be dependent on Him to provide the wisdom we need to effectively reach our world with the gospel.

ELIJAH AND THE LANDMINE OF DISCOURAGEMENT

Elijah is one of the greatest examples in the Bible of boldness in the face of adversity. He proclaimed God's message at a time when the northern kingdom of Israel had turned its back on the Lord to worship foreign gods. He wasn't, however, immune to discouragement.

After Elijah's victory at Mount Carmel, when Israel appeared to turn back to the LORD, Queen Jezebel tried to kill him. In response, Elijah ran and *"went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"* (1 Kings 19:4).

As Elijah's life illustrates, discouragement often results in a loss of confidence and can lead to fatigue, frustration, and fear.

What can we learn from the example of this mighty prophet for our own evangelism efforts?

1. RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE A PART OF A GREATER WORK. Elijah thought that he stood alone in God's plan: *"I alone am left; and they seek to take my life"* (1 Kings 19:14). This caused him great anxiety and distress. God graciously reminded him that He had "reserved seven thousand in Israel" who were faithful to Him. Sometimes it is easy to

think we are all alone in our outreach efforts and that the sole responsibility falls on us. Evangelism is a team effort, and we need to surround ourselves with like-minded believers for encouragement.

2. FOCUS ON OBEDIENCE, NOT OUTCOMES.

After the victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah thought that the tide would turn and that all of Israel would repent. Little did Elijah know that a short time later he would be running for his life. It is very tempting in evangelism to measure our success by results, particularly the results we visualize beforehand (someone trusting Christ immediately, revival breaking out, etc.). While those things are possible, they should not be our measuring stick. Our sole goal should be to obey Him. The results, whether positive or negative, are in His hands.

3. WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH, SEEK GOD'S FACE.

When Elijah was exhausted, afraid, and discouraged, the Lord refreshed Elijah with His own presence. When we feel the same in evangelism, nothing will revive and restore us more than the presence of the Lord. God can provide us with counsel, encouragement, direction, and strength when we draw close to Him. He is sufficient.

AVOIDING THE LANDMINE OF PRIDE

Someone has said that pride “is the pleasure we glean from thinking too highly of ourselves and an inflated sense of one's personal status or accomplishments.” Pride is sometimes called, “the stealth sin” because it is so hard to detect in ourselves.

It can also hinder our evangelism efforts. When we become prideful in or about our outreach efforts, our fruitfulness and effectiveness usually suffer.

Why is pride a problem?

- **Pride is one of the things the Lord hates.** Evangelism should be all about God, where He gets the credit and glory. Pride is when it is all about me, my success, my ability, my glory. God will not share His glory with anyone (Prov. 6:16–17; James 4:6).
- **Pride hinders our outreach.** When we are prideful, we move from being concerned about the person to concerned about being right or winning the argument.
- **Pride destroys our unity as believers.** Consider some of the arguments, debates, and church splits that have occurred in churches. Many of those disagreements are rooted in pride and damage our witness to the outside world.
- **Pride destroys our dependence on God.** This is particularly true for those who are naturally gifted communicators or “people persons” with the gift of gab or persuasion. We are tempted to see ourselves as the power instead of the instrument.
- **Pride keeps us from stepping out in faith.** There are certain fears we have that are actually rooted in pride, including the fear of looking foolish and the fear of rejection, etc.

How do we avoid the landmine of pride?

- **Recognize that pride is extremely hard to detect in ourselves.** Pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick except the person who has it. Ask God to awaken you to any conceit that manifests in your heart.
- **Stay in the word. James compares the word of God to a mirror.** It reveals who we really are, including our own vanity.
- **Be accountable.** Is there someone in your life who tells you what you need to hear rather than what you want to hear?
- **Pursue humility.** The late Billy Graham has said that every morning he focused on how big God is, and how small he was in comparison.

Don't let pride destroy your witness. Deal with your pride before your pride deals with you:
“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:10).

DEVIIOUS DISTRACTIONS: *SELFISHNESS AND MATERIALISM*

There are times when Satan uses landmines to attack, but there are other times when he uses them to distract. Selfishness is when we seek or concentrate on our own pleasure or well-being without regard for others. A chief form of selfishness is materialism, which is a preoccupation with material possessions rather than spiritual things.

WHY ARE SELFISHNESS AND MATERIALISM A PROBLEM?

- 1.** They cause us to focus on our agenda, **not God's agenda.** Selfishness and materialism put blinders on us that cause us to miss God given outreach opportunities from the Lord. Philippians 2:21 reminds us that some "seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."
- 2.** They cause us to focus on **ourselves, not others.** How we are doing or how much we have become more important than other people.
- 3.** They cause us to focus on things that don't matter in the long **run.** Things will go up in smoke. People will live forever. The question is where?

HOW DO WE AVOID SELFISHNESS AND MATERIALISM?

FOCUS ON THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (John 6:38)

Christ had every right to focus on Himself. He is the King of the Universe. Yet He chose to submit to the will of His Father rather than His own will, well-being, or net worth.

FOCUS ON THE MISSION OF CHRIST.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Make foremost on your mind what was foremost on His—people who don't know the Lord.

SEE YOURSELF AS THE MANAGER, NOT THE OWNER, OF EVERYTHING YOU HAVE.

"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10)

Properly managing what you have, whether a spiritual or material blessing, involves using it to impact others.

USE WHAT YOU HAVE TO IMPACT WHO YOU KNOW.

"Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share." (1 Timothy 6:18)

God has given you what you have to share—not to store.

EVALUATE YOUR PRIORITIES.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33)

As you prioritize your time and life, think of the word "JOY." It stands for "Jesus first, others second, yourself third." While you may be tempted to say, "What about me?," remember: as you take care of God's business, He will take care of yours.