

A Life-Changing Shade Tree Church

Jim packs a bag of snacks early on Sunday morning and heads out to an empty lot near a large multihousing complex. At the usual time a couple of older children show up for the ministry time he leads there. They discuss some who aren't present and the two boys offer input about one being with his dad that weekend, but they go "knocking" for a couple of others. Within minutes there are 3 kids, a young teenage boy, 2 moms, and an old retired "hermit" either eating donuts or making small talk with Jim.

Group time begins with Jim clapping his hands and gathering everyone a little closer, on a curb, under a tree. He asks each person about events in his or her week then asks for prayer requests. They know Jim really prays about their needs and with no hesitation they share... "My mother was crying about her job this week"... "I have to pass a science test Monday or go to summer school"... "I'm worried about my husband's heart tests." Just before praying, Jim points them to the offering "sack" and reminds them that anything and everything they give is sent to help missionaries all over the world... he always knows the name of a missionary with a birthday that day. They listen to a taped song about Jesus' love and care. The teenage boy passes out copies of the Bible passage and Jim discusses with them what God's Word says regarding "Talking to God About Problems." They often ask him a question during the Bible time, but Jim doesn't mind because he also stops to ask what they think God's Word is saying to them. He feels more comfortable and effective with this kind of informal "discussion sermon." He ends with a prayer and invites anyone to stick around and talk with him, especially if Jesus doesn't seem real in their lives.

It's not surprising that over a period of months Jim has been able to share Christlike help and good news with an almost unnoticed "pocket" of people in his community. He made sure one had the right school supplies for fourth grade. He was there with a casserole when one of the mothers came home from surgery. The teenage boy was baptized a year earlier after Jim explained John 3:16 and he trusted Christ!

*This simple small gathering IS a church!
They are doing all the things a church is supposed to do:
worship, discipleship, meeting needs, evangelism, and true friendship.*

Underline the phrases where one of these church functions is occurring.