

Knowing Where to Look

By adminlen On November 6, 2013 · Add Comment

I went hunting for elk the other day. It was my first time. Since I had no idea of where to go, I asked some friends around here where they would recommend. One of them was going to go with me, but couldn't go when I could, so I asked a couple of other guys if they'd come along. I had an injured shoulder, so would need help carting out all my meat! Neither of them had been elk hunting either, so none of us really knew what we were doing beyond knowing what our target looked like and which end of the gun the bullet comes out of. We didn't have any elk calls, so we were hoping that one of the dumber members of the elk clan would wander across our path. So it will come as no surprise to you when I say that we never saw anything, never took a shot, and so didn't fill our tags this year.



I have to tell you that the place we went was beautiful. It also showed signs of being a place elk liked to be in, just considerably earlier in the season. There was a good field of fire, and lots of cover. There was every reason to expect that we would bag an elk that morning, except one: the elk weren't there. As beautiful as the place was, I have to say it was really frustrating to hear numerous shots off in the distance all around us, knowing that our elk had inexplicably wandered into some other area. The nerve of them. We did move off the mountain to another spot, but by then it was getting late in the morning when nothing moves around much except for empty-handed hunters. I am hoping for better success with deer before the season is over. We shall see.

As I think about this little episode, it occurs to me that it holds a lot of parallels with church planting. We want to grow as congregations, and as a denomination, too. It's a noble goal. We have desire, we have God's Word, and we have friends to help along the way. We know what the lost look like, in general, anyway, and through consulting with more experienced friends, we have some ideas of where to begin our search for souls. We have some knowledge of techniques, and a fairly extensive knowledge of our theology.

But we have some obstacles. We may not be as fit spiritually and otherwise as we could be, so that when the demands of the work ramp up we can run out of gas or simply not be able to follow through on all that the work requires of us. Think about John Mark's immature abandoning of the ministry due to the challenges he faced in company with Barnabas and Paul ([Acts 15:37, 38](#)). We sometimes don't take advantage of the experience and guidance of others properly, or just think that we know better than others who have walked the path before, and so make mistakes that get in the way of our effectiveness. We may look at a potential place of service or venue of activity from an external point of view, find it attractive and settle in, only to discover that the game has either been taken already or moved on. Sitting up there enjoying the beauty may feel like "hunting," but in reality it's just sitting, and the real action is somewhere else. And, while we may have some good tools, we may not have everything that we need to issue the call to the lost. It's fine to say that we're just trusting the Lord to bring folks our way, but He gives us tools and means to use, too. Neglecting some tools in favor of others that we're more familiar with (even if they are not that effective) doesn't make much sense. And if we need to put out extra effort and sacrifice to obtain those tools, so be it. For example, clearly the preaching of the Word on the Lord's Day is of paramount importance, but ignoring fellowship, cheapening worship (or turning it into a Pharisaical exercise), marginalizing the sacraments, avoiding prayer, neglecting to engage the community at every opportunity, or even discounting the technological tools available to us (internet blogging, etc.) that help in spreading the Word far and wide is a wrong-headed approach that results in never really connecting with the lost world around us. The practice of the early Church described in the closing verses of Acts 2 comes to mind. Of course, using tools God hasn't prescribed (entertainment, social gospel, false doctrine, unbiblical ecumenicity, and so on) is just sinful and will not know the Lord's blessing.

And then there's the matter of timing. We did the right thing by being there at the right part of the day. But our elk hunt was later in the season. I'm confident that had we been at that spot in the early days of the season we would have seen something. But now the quarry was more wary, and had moved into more remote areas. We needed to know where to look. It's a little like thinking that all we have to do to start and build a church is to do something on

Sundays, at the usual times, when it really takes much more of a gathering mindset of daily going out into the highways and byways and compelling them to come in ([Luke 14:23](#)).

I hope that the lessons I've learned this year about elk hunting will stand me in good stead next season. Unlike a hunt, where you've only got a short window of time in which to go out and fill your tag, the harvest fields of the world are wide open, ripe unto harvest, and the time is now. The "season" is open until the Lord's return, and souls are out there to be won. Let's get into the field, seek the lost wisely and with determination, and trust the Spirit of God to do His work while He enables us to do ours. *Soli Deo gloria.*