

T-SHIRT EVANGELISM

By Steven Barry Kaplan

In 2000, I had given away my apartment, most of my belongings and only had what I could fit in my car. I was supposed to have a live in job at a half way house for men getting over their addictions. When I called the director to move in, he said, “I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is, they received the funding for my job. The bad news is, I used the money for something else!”

Technically, I was homeless. I had planned to go to my church singles retreat in Florida, and then I decided to camp out at my parents house in Tampa until the Lord showed me what to do next? My parents had a t-shirt business. They worked their way up to the front spot at two indoor flea markets selling Florida souvenir t-shirts. They wanted me to move in and take over their business, but I know the Lord had already called me to Jewish Outreach. My parents got me a space at an outdoor flea market that could be rented by the month until I figured out my next steps.

I noticed a box of decals in my parents front hall. It turned out they were Christian decals they had bid blindly on at an auction? I figured if I was breathing, I should be witnessing and took their Christian decals, put them on t-shirts and made a big display at my outdoor flea market. A busload of girl scouts from Alabama pulled up and started grabbing everything on my tables! I did twice the business my parents did!

My parents wanted to know how I made so much money? I told them by making a big display of Christian t-shirts. So both my parents made big displays of Christian t-shirts at their respective booths. Those shirts were a witness for years. My father had a t-shirt with Jesus on the cross which said, “Thank You Jesus!” which hung over the entrance/exit to his flea market. Those displays were up for at least 10 years, and they sold literally thousands of t-shirts that went all over the Caribbean and throughout the world. My father would brag to his Christian customers that his son was a “born again” Christian and they would witness to both my parents! We went to my nephew’s birthday party in New York and my uncle asked my mother how her business was doing? My mother said, “Praise the Lord, Jesus saved us!”

In 2002, my church sent me out as a faith supported missionary to the Jewish people. I prayed about a t-shirt to make and wear, and I believe the Lord told me to wear a big Jewish star which said, “Jesus Loves You” inside. As the t-shirt ministry grew and proved to be an effective witnessing tool we added more languages and designs. In the 20 years of making t-shirts, we have

equipped believers with about 40,000 evangelistic items in about 100 countries, and they are made in my garage by autistic Jewish men I have led to the Lord!

I try to wear an evangelistic t-shirt everywhere I go. One time I bounced a check and went to a branch of my bank inside the Kroger. A Jewish woman working at Kroger said she liked my t-shirt. I asked if she liked what was inside? She said she didn't have her glasses on, what did it say? I told her it said, "Jesus Loves You". She said, "Oh!" Nevertheless, her husband had just died and God sent me to minister to her. She was from New York also and actually graduated from the same high school as my father did! I think she knew everyone on the east coast of the United States! I ministered to her for many years and she eventually came to faith in Jesus!

My friend invited me to minister at an outreach she does every year at Mardi Gras. I asked if they are able to witness to Jewish people there, and she said a few. The year I went, we gave each team member a "Jesus Loves You" Jewish star t-shirt. The team was overwhelmed by the dozens of Jewish people they were able to share with as a result of wearing the t-shirts!

Fran "The Nanny" Drescher was doing a book signing in Atlanta. I made sure to wear a bright red "Jesus Loves You" Jewish star t-shirt when I met Ms. Drescher. All I said to her was, "God bless you!" She grabbed my hand and said thank you. I had opportunity to share with her Jewish entourage after they started talking about my t-shirt.

I had gone on vacation to Greece and arrived in Athens on a Friday night. I planned to visit the Orthodox synagogue, but had no luggage and was only wearing my "Jesus Loves You" Jewish star t-shirt. I prayed about it, and went to the synagogue any way. The Israeli grounds keeper was amused by my shirt. As I waited for the service to begin, the leader of the synagogue did a double take of my t-shirt. Next thing I knew, the leader and others came over to have me removed? I showed them my name in my passport and that I am most definitely Jewish. They let me stay because they needed me for the minion! All through the service people kept asking me about my beliefs because of my t-shirt!

The "Taste of Alpharetta", an annual event in the Atlanta area, allowed non-profits to have a free booth on a first come first served basis as long as they showed up and used it. The night of the event it was raining, but I set up our booth any way because I didn't want to lose our right to have the booth. As I sat there in a leaky tent in almost hurricane type weather, I questioned the Lord. Eventually, the rain stopped. There were hundreds of teenagers walking around and they were soaked! Since we were giving away dry t-shirts, they kept coming over to our booth in groups of 3 or 4 and there were always at least one Jewish person with them. We were able to share for

hours with the various teenagers who came over, and this is probably one of the most fruitful Jewish outreaches we have ever had!

The Lord sent me to Cork, Ireland to do Jewish Outreach. I had only been in Cork for about 10 minutes when a young woman saw my “Jesus Loves You” Jewish star t-shirt, grabbed my hand and led me inside to meet her other Israeli co-workers selling Dead Sea products at a mall! I was able to share with them and they gave me the number of the woman organizing the Rosh Hashanah luncheon!

My friends and I wore Jewish evangelistic t-shirts and met at the food court of a mall in Las Vegas. As we were eating lunch, an Israeli young man noticed our shirts and came over to talk with us. He was rather distraught because he had just spent 30 days in jail for working on a tourist visa. We invited him for dinner at my friend’s house, and we led him to the Lord!

In 2008, we started Jewish Outreach International and created a website: www.SaveTheJews.org. We advertised the t-shirts for free on the website. I figured we would give them away until it got out of control. At first, we would receive orders for about four or five t-shirts a month throughout the United States. Then we started receiving orders from Russia. I could tell by the postal codes that they were going to all the areas of Russia. People were using them to wear to the Israeli consulate. I heard that they were being advertised on television through out Russia. A Ukrainian pastor came to my church in Atlanta and told me he saw four people in Kiev wearing our shirts and sharing with Orthodox Jews!

At one point, we were \$16,000 in debt from making and mailing t-shirts, so I had to stop giving them away for free. We started selling them (or giving them away for donations) at various National Conferences of different denominations such as the Church of God, Southern Baptist, National Baptist and Promise Keepers. I loved selling them at Church of God because we would sell dozens of them to people from almost 100 different countries around the world!

I contacted the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America about selling t-shirts at their conferences. The first available conference was in Orlando, Florida where the market place was closed on Shabbat and they had the strictest rules about selling various items. They told me no Jesus, no cross and no Christ? I thought, “NO WAY!” God had a different plan and we started selling Hebrew “Jesus Loves You” t-shirts, “I Love Israel” and “Yeshua Loves You” in a Jewish star. A messianic rabbi walked by my table and was intrigued by the Hebrew “Jesus Loves You” t-shirt. He looked at me, looked at the t-shirt, looked at me and looked at the t-shirt and bought one. Two months later his wife called me and said, “My husband said it was the best witnessing t-shirt he

ever wore! Can you send us 200 of them?” They started using our t-shirts for their outreach and so did their sister congregations. In all, they have purchased over 1,000 t-shirts so far!

We had also made the t-shirts in Russian and donated some to an orphanage in Belarus. I was told a Jewish young man showed up at the orphanage with only the clothes on his back, and they gave him a Russian “Jesus Loves You” t-shirt. As a result, he accepted the Lord!

I was selling t-shirts at the MJAA conference in Irvine, California. A Jewish man, who had been staying at the hotel, happened to come into the marketplace and bought a t-shirt from me? The next day I ran into this man, who was the son of Holocaust survivors and lives in Tucson, and asked why he bought a t-shirt? He told me his friends had been telling him about Jesus and he wanted to give them a present. When I ran into this same man on the third day, we agreed to have lunch when I just happened to be in Tucson two weeks later. This Jewish man accepted his Messiah!

I love to wear evangelistic t-shirts to trade shows because many of the sellers and buyers are Jewish. I often get stopped to answer questions and to pose for a picture of the t-shirt! There is one trade show that has so many Jewish people, they set up a kosher eatery at the show. We usually have a team that spends several days walking around and sharing with people at this show.

My Jewish fraternity brother, Bobby, who I am in contact with after running into him during an outreach in Atlanta many years ago, organized a fraternity reunion at the University of Miami. Bobby was somewhat upset because his fraternity big brother, wasn't going to be at the reunion. I prayed about wearing a t-shirt or not to the reunion, but decided to just in case one person could be touched. As I walked around the hotel as the reunion started, several people complimented my t-shirt. There was an Italian family from New York at the hotel for the son's wedding. The parents absolutely loved my “Jesus Loves You” Jewish star t-shirt and made a big fuss! As I spoke to the father, he told me his brother, who couldn't make it to the wedding, had actually attended school at UM and was in a fraternity. I asked who his brother is, and it turned out his brother is Ray, Bobby's big brother in the fraternity!!! Just as we were discussing it, Bobby just happened to walk by and I introduced him to Ray's big brother. Bobby was absolutely dumbfounded to meet Ray's brother. Bobby asked how we figured out that it was Ray's brother and we told him it was because of my t-shirt. Bobby went from being upset to completely happy and told everyone he got to meet Ray's brother because of Steve's t-shirt!

Over the years our t-shirts have gotten a lot of media attention. The Jerusalem Post did a story on Eddie and Lura Beckford and they have been mistreated by the Orthodox and had a picture of them

wearing a “Jesus Loves You” Jewish star t-shirt in the post! Another time a Christian Palestinian went to a pro Israel rally holding a sign saying he is a Christian Palestinian who loves Israel and the Jewish people while wearing a “Yeshua Loves You” Jewish star t-shirt! That picture was also in the post, all over the Internet and the Israeli news. Someone wore our shirt while distributing Gospel tracts at the Capitol building in Washington, DC and was on Fox News. Someone wore our shirt to a Christian Conference in Ireland and was pictured in a local Irish newspaper.