

# Theme Park Ministry

## Don Anders

### Introduction

Scripture references note Jesus being where people were enjoying themselves such as at the seaside, beaches, and where people were gathered together to relax and enjoy themselves. Additional Biblical references which apply to ministering in such places as theme parks are Romans 5:8 — that Christ died for all persons; Acts 1:8 — that we are to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world; and 2 Corinthians 5:20 — that we are to be ambassadors for Christ.

The purpose of this article is to provide a starting point for a caring, loving outreach ministry to persons in the theme park setting. Ideas and approaches are varied.

### Types of People You will Find in a Theme Park

- Travelers
- Vacationers
- People in the area simply taking a day of leisure for themselves
- Christian people
- Lost people
- Persons who might need assistance with family situations
- Individual or family that may be injured by a fall or on one of the rides
- Theme park personnel (office personnel/ride operators/performers)

### Kinds of Needs or Problems these People might be Experiencing

- Loneliness
- Spiritual needs
- Depression
- Stress brought about by financial needs, family needs, job, etc.
- Escapism
- Family needs back home
- Personal and medical needs from injury while in the park
- Drug usage or abuse of alcohol

### Kinds of Ministries that Might be Provided

- Personal counseling
- Just being there with a presence such as a chaplaincy ministry
- Listening

- Emergency assistance in case of injury or accident
- Bible study
- Worship opportunities
- One-on-one witnessing opportunities
- Helping to host a Christians' weekend or special Christian performance in the park

## How to Begin a Theme Park Ministry

### First Step

The first step is to go to the theme park. Theme parks come in various sizes and shapes according to the particular theme the park is established on. In the beginning, needs can be surveyed by simply spending some time in the theme park with your eyes open to what you see and your ears open to what you hear. Small talk with personnel can help you determine needs also. You want to keep these things in mind as you later make contact with theme park management to discuss the possibilities of doing ministry in the park.

### Second Step

You must determine the resources that you have available to you such as people (including pastors and volunteers), the kind of time that you would have available to spend on the ministry, and the financial resources that would be available to finance such a ministry. In this, you are really discovering your capabilities for providing ministry.

### Third Step

This is the actual contact with personnel. Remember that a theme park is a profit-making business. Its priorities relate to making money through providing attractions and services for people so that they will have a good time and a safe experience in the park. The management is going to be interested in how you can help the theme park's business through services both to its clientele and to those who work in the park. Remember that you will be on the management's turf, and you will need to play by the rules and regulations of the attraction. The ministry presentation to theme park personnel should include at least the following five elements:

- 1.How can you be of assistance to the theme park and provide assistance with the problems that might arise with employees or persons attending the theme park. You may also discuss the possibilities of assistance when persons become injured or hurt in the park, and how you could provide chaplaincy type ministry in that situation. Another idea may be helping with personal problems or employees.
- 2.What you can do for them.
- 3.Providing a Christian presence within the theme park would add to the family atmosphere of the theme park and possibly have a negative affect upon the pushing of drugs and any other negative type temptations that might go on inside the theme park.
- 4.Provision of worship and Bible activities for employees who need to work during a Sunday or Wednesday night when they might not be able to attend any church activities.
- 5.Provision of chaplaincy ministry on a one-on-one assistance.

It is important to start small with your ministry and expand it, as the park personnel will allow you. It is also important that there be no surprises to the management. It is

important to always be honest about what you are going to provide so that they will be totally aware of what you are doing and what your expectations are.

#### Fourth Step

The fourth step is to set up an organized method of maintaining relationship with the management. This could be done through regularly scheduled meetings for evaluation or luncheon meetings with management personnel.

#### Fifth Step

There should be a presentation to a local church or local sponsorship of the association. An association or multi-associational group can be involved with the local church in designing and conducting ministry, but the emphasis should always be on the local church sponsoring the actual ministry program itself, if possible. If several churches or several associations are involved, it would be important that everything be handled on a 50/50 basis in terms of budget, finance and structure, and reporting.

It is most likely that the key person that you will work with in a theme park will be the personnel director. The personnel director is responsible for all personnel working within a park whether they are paid or volunteer. The personnel manager has the authority to allow you entrance into the park in an organized manner as a part of the park personnel and visitors program. It is possible for them to provide quality nameplates to identify you such as theme park chaplain, theme park volunteer, etc. The personnel director can work with the scheduling of other personnel in terms of the kinds of activities that you could be involved in through ministry.

Adapted from an article by Don Anders in the 1987 National Recreation and Resort Ministries Conference notebook. Used by permission.