

How many ads do you think the average American sees every day? By a show of hands do you think it might be: 100? 500? 1,000? 2,000? 3,000? Fact is, we are now bombarded by over 4,000-10,000 ads per day! Often times we encounter them without even realizing it, especially with ambient advertising being so prevalent in our society these days! Marketing and publicity has become quite pervasive, and even if we aren't always aware of it, we are sounded by ads in all kinds of ways! Especially now that companies have discovered how to use ambient advertising to promote their products and services.

So what is it? According to the website creativeguerillamarketing.com "Ambient advertising is about placing ads on unusual items, or in unusual places, you wouldn't normally think to see an ad. An ambient ad doesn't even need to be placed outside, for it can be found anywhere and everywhere." For about \$20,000, a company can get a half-mile ad up and down the beach every day for a month. The ad might not last long, but it's bound to make an impression on the sun worshipers who are gazing out over the sky, the surf and the sand ... sand that is imprinted with as much as 660,000 square feet of pitches for Skippy peanut butter or Snapple iced tea.

Even if you don't plan to hit the beach this summer, you can't escape the long arm of ambient advertising. You'll find ads at gas pumps, on stickers plastered to apples and bananas, on sidewalks and on rooftops. You'll be subjected to full-color, full-sound videos the moment you begin filling up your car at the gas pump. Ads are on the doors of public bathroom stalls. They're mounted on slim, billboard-carrying trucks. These days, conventional mass media is being snubbed in an effort to reach consumers where they shop, and where they work, and where they least expect it

They're everywhere. Inescapable. Unexpected. Sometimes even annoying. But here's the point: God would love for us to be his ambient advertising to the

world. Our assignment, each and every day, is to be an ad for God. Not to be overwhelming or offensive, like a noisy radio ad coming out of a gas pump, but ambient. That means all-surrounding, pervasive, in every dimension of life.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul says that we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. We boast, like the advertisers of a "new and improved" detergent, about the quality of the item we want to share with the world. Not that what we are "selling" is "new and improved." What is it about things that are "new and improved," anyway? If a detergent has been improved over 90 times in 55 years -- as one famous brand has been -- how BAD was the product to begin with?

What we present to the world really needs no improvement ... just amplification. According to the Apostle Paul, we can boast about: Our peace, which we have with God through our faith in Jesus. About God's grace, which has brought us new life. About the glory of God, which we hope to share. We can boast about our trials and adversities, which can produce endurance, character, and hope. About the love of God, given to us through the Holy Spirit. The sacrifice of Christ, made to save us while we still were sinners. We can boast about the unexpected gifts of justification, salvation and reconciliation our faith points to. And even our Friendship with God, made possible by our Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm sure we can agree that promoting that kind of advertisement is not bad, not bad at all. Not like the annoying Noid Commercial's Dominos put out years ago, or the weird Skittle's Taste the Rainbow ads you may have seen on TV, and although the Geico Gecko can be funny, I feel like perhaps he has overstayed his welcome. Thankfully, Paul captures in 11 catchy verses a great deal about who God is and what God has done for us. Our challenge is to take this message into the streets and to walk around as ambient ads that boast about peace and hope and trials and divine love and salvation and friendship with God.

In advertising lingo, this street-level approach is called "guerrilla marketing." It's somewhat new, experimental, and it's designed to reach people who tend to tune out traditional advertising. Agency dRush in New York has slapped stickers on everything from fire hydrants to building materials -- the stickers simply state "This is an ad for Jack Spade" in an unadorned attempt to pitch the men's fashion company. It has also left "Esc" keys from PC keyboards on trains and buses to urge consumers to "escape."

Does this mean that we are called to cover fire hydrants with stickers that scream "John 3:16" or leave wooden crosses on the different forms of the public transportation we utilize? Not exactly. When we hit the streets, our job is to show the love of our Lord in whatever way we can, using deeds and words and attitudes that carry the surprisingly good news of what God has done for us through Jesus. The core message is this: "While we still were sinners Christ died for us." It's simple. Elegant. Kind of shocking. Rather profound.

The clear message of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is that while God goes to extremes seeking the lost, our neglect of his gift hardens our hearts and places us at the furthest point from God's attempt to rescue us. It's not that God doesn't want to; it's that we hate to admit we're lost. So, we ignore the offer of rescue. Or perhaps we feel that there is always plenty of time before we need to call on God to get us out of the fix we're in. Whatever our excuse, God is still eager to rescue us.

Theologian and teacher, Kenneth E. Bailey, brings this into focus in an observation about the Prodigal Son. He says that the father, who runs down the road to greet his returning son, is doing something rather humiliating for a wealthy Middle Easterner - a rich patriarch just didn't go sprinting down the sidewalk when someone was on the horizon. Yet, for his son, the father did just that, not considering what the neighbors might think. And, for his sons and daughters - his

children far removed from his circle - God, in the person of Jesus Christ, dashed into our world, and moved, deliberately, carefully, toward a date with death, to rescue us from the eternal consequences of our sins. The only time God is in a hurry is when we are in need of rescue.

While we still were weak and wandering, Paul proclaims, while we still were self-centered and sinful, Christ sacrificed himself to connect us with God. While we were on an elevator ride to the bottom floor, hurtling quickly downward through levels of greed, and dishonesty, and cruelty, and self-abuse, God sent us a message, and it wasn't a 45-second video message containing weather, news, traffic reports and commercials, a message which actually appears on some elevators today depending on the city or the building.

Instead, God's message is one of acceptance, forgiveness, and love. It tells us that God has made us his friends through the death of his Son. It's a gracious gift, completely undeserved -- the very thing that a hurting humanity most needs to hear. Which begs the question, so how do we pitch it? How do we go out into the world as ambient ads for this fantastic free offer that God graciously offers to all people everywhere? What is it, in us, that will enable others to see this gift of God?

We aren't going to get it done through program-length "infomercials" that masquerade as news programs. We aren't going to do it by coating a city bus with religious messages. And we sure aren't going to shoot laser commercials into the sky. We're going to do it, instead, with the lives we lead.

This means choosing forgiveness instead of revenge when a neighbor hurts us terribly. It means being sacrificial, instead of self-serving, with our time and ability and money. It means reaching out in friendship to people of different races or nationalities or gender or sexual orientation, instead of ignoring them or seeing them as intruders. It means striving to show the unusual, unconditional love of Jesus Christ, instead of the commonplace, conditional acceptance of contemporary

American culture. It means speaking clearly -- even boldly -- about what God has done for us through Jesus and sharing with the world that this wonderful gift is available to all who need forgiveness and new life.

In all of these things we are to "boast" -- but not in the bad sense of high-octane advertising hype. Instead, our boasting is a triumphant, rejoicing, celebratory confidence in the goodness of the Lord. Because we have been accepted, forgiven and renewed by God, we can "boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God," "boast in our sufferings," and "boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." Our confidence comes from God, not from anything human, and our enthusiasm arises out of God's wonderful willingness to receive us and be in relationship with us, now and always.

Is this too good to be true? No, and thankfully as we read in Scripture, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we understand it's both good and true. In addition, God's acceptance is ambient -- it's all-surrounding, pervasive and in every dimension of life. So...the least we can do is hit the streets as guerrillas of grace. So let us all try our best to go out into the world as walking advertisements of our Lord Jesus' unconditional, sacrificial, and inclusive love for the world. Amen.