

Becoming An Evangelistic People

Today as our Lord Jesus is preparing us for a visitation of his Spirit and the ultimate restoration of his church, he is re-emphasizing the primacy of authentic New Testament evangelism.



PHOTO BY RITA HOOVER

A survey taken awhile ago revealed that nearly 90% of all church members have never led anyone to Christ. Some years ago, Carl Lundquist, former president of Bethel College and Seminary, took a six-month sabbatical to visit forty-three diverse fellowships throughout the world recognized as "centers of Christian renewal." He called it an "in-depth experience of what God is doing... professionally broadening...spiritually exhilarating." Yet among all the positive values he cited, he expressed one major personal concern: "A lack of urgency about evangelism." In his own words, "The Christian world will have to be more aggressive if it is to reach our exploding population for Jesus Christ."

Speaking this summer at a conference of three thousand people, I asked those in the audience to stand who have ever been proselytized by a Mormon or Jehovah's Witness. Ninety-five percent arose. When I then asked those who had been personally contacted during their lifetime by a Christian who was not an acquaintance, about seventy people stood to their feet.

Seated at a recent meeting in England of apostolic and prophetic men involved in church planting throughout England, France, Holland, Italy and India, I heard a major concern repeatedly expressed by the men: the necessity of responding to the current

by Larry Tomczak

word of the Lord to become an evangelistic people.

Today as our Lord Jesus is preparing us for a visitation of his Spirit and the ultimate restoration of his Church (Acts 3:21), he is re-emphasizing the primacy of authentic New Testament evangelism. In the words of the Lausanne Covenant—a



solemn agreement by Christian leaders world-wide to take the gospel to all nations:

We need to acknowledge that of all the tragic needs of human beings, none is greater than their alienation from their Creator and the terrible reality of eternal death for those who refuse to repent and believe. Rather than be guilty of an inexcusable lack of human compassion, we are privileged to commit ourselves with urgency to this task of evangelism.

But how? Where does one begin?

How can a church that admits it has relaxed into a "holy, New Testament huddle" over the vision of the church get motivated in the realm of evangelism?

How can we as the prophetic people of God develop a genuine evangelistic lifestyle where evangelism is not simply a "theme" for a month or two, but a total way of life?

TEN REASONS WHY SOME ARE NOT EVANGELIZING

We must begin by examining some of the reasons many Christians aren't sharing their faith in any consistent way. Before we can "plant" a word from God, we often have to "pluck up" what is already there (Jer. 1:10).

(1) Procrastination—that is, "putting off until tomorrow what one has already

The Great Commission is not the Great Suggestion.

put off until today." Jesus nailed his disciples on this one with the stinging rebuke, "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months and then comes the harvest?' Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are already white for harvest" (John 4:35).

(2) Some are discouraged by shallow results from past evangelistic endeavors. "Making decisions" instead of "making disciples" and a watered-down gospel presentation have taken their toll. Much effort with little visible fruit has left many lacking the belief needed for successful evangelism.

(3) Others have developed a spectator mentality, falsely believing that evangelists and other "called" people will do the job. While it is correct that we are called to be witnesses rather than do witnessing, scripture makes it clear that this is never removed from verbal proclamation. There is no "silent witness" or "secret agent" in the kingdom of God.

Two men worked on the same job for years and then one became a Christian. Upon telling his co-laborer the good news, the man replied, "Oh, I've been a Christian for years. Didn't you know?" The new believer responded, "You're the main reason I haven't become a Christian. I thought, 'He's so good; why does a person need God?'"

(4) Another reason many Christians aren't evangelizing is they come from a church background where evangelism was the only topic preached at every service (instead of the preacher "equipping the saints"). The result? Scores of Christians have simply grown "dull of hearing" when it comes to evangelism.

(5) Many Christians at one time were involved in frenzied evangelistic activity (dropping "gospel bombs" as "tract stars" for Jesus) and subsequently burned out in the process. Unfortunately, they have now swung over into passivity and need to recover their zeal.

(6) Some falsely assume God is so emphasizing personal care and building the church that one cannot evangelize until we are "mature enough." Not wanting to upset the apple cart ("We just got our homegroups all in order!") becomes an escape from our responsibility to lost humanity. While Spirit-led planning,

discipling and leadership development are priorities, we must also move ahead with equal commitment to evangelism.

(7) Some Christians have been turned off by gimmicks ("Bring a Bunch" night), slick P.R. campaigns, carnal incentives, and mechanical formulas that lack spiritual power and reality.

(8) Many smugly view evangelism as "elementary"—something primarily for young believers. In a quest for the "deep things of God," they rationalize their disobedience and neglect those for whom God sent his Son.

(9) Unfortunately, many believers have not been properly trained by the Ephesians 4:11 gift ministries in areas relative to evangelism and have developed spiritual lockjaw, shrinking back from stepping out into an unfamiliar realm.

(10) Some believers have simply never truly experienced the baptism of the Spirit intended to empower them as witnesses.

If we are honest before God and repent where we have gone astray in our attitudes and perceptions about evangelism, we then are in a position to truly hear and respond to what the Spirit is presently saying about becoming an evangelistic people.



THE MANDATE OF EVANGELISM

As a church we are awakening to the fact that evangelism is not an option. The same one who said, "Come unto me" also said, "Go into all the world." Yet our God never commands us to do anything he doesn't equip us with his grace to do.

God's initial command in scripture is "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). He has never altered this charge. The Great Commission is not the Great Suggestion. How else will we, as Abraham's children, see the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God spoken to his servant: "I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore" (Gen. 22:17).

All three synoptic gospels end with the central theme of evangelism. Matthew closes with "Go ("going" in the literal Greek, as our Lord assumes all who love him will be going) and make disciples of all the nations..." (Matt. 28:19). Mark records, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15).



Luke 24:47 states, "That repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations..."

Our Lord commands his disciples "Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men." As Dawson Trotman, the Navigators' founder, once said, "No one ever followed Jesus who didn't become a fisher of men. If you're not fishing, it's questionable how closely you're following!"

The book of Acts begins where the gospels conclude: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). It's significant to note that Jesus said the real evidence of a person being baptized in the Spirit is not speaking in tongues—as important as that is—but receiving power to be his witness.

"But can't the Holy Spirit do it himself?"

He could, but instead he has chosen to use each one of us. He could have taken the stars and spelled "Jesus Saves" in the heavens, but instead he has chosen to help us reveal Jesus with our lips and our lives.

"But I'm more prophetic!"

What does it mean to be prophetic? It means one is tuned in to what God is presently feeling, thinking and desiring. His current heartbeat is to bring a genuine visitation of his Spirit and reach the masses of broken people outside his benevolent reign.

In 1 Timothy 1:15, we find a clear statement of why our Lord Jesus came into the world. "The saying is sure and *worthy of full* [not casual] *acceptance*. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (RSV). Even this is simply a reiteration of the Master's own declaration, "The Son of

We must ask our heavenly Father to impart his heart to us, so we feel what he feels and experience the hurt and pain he does over the state of fallen humanity.

Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). It is interesting that he did not just say, "Save the lost." Jesus said "seek," which speaks of taking initiative, instigating action.

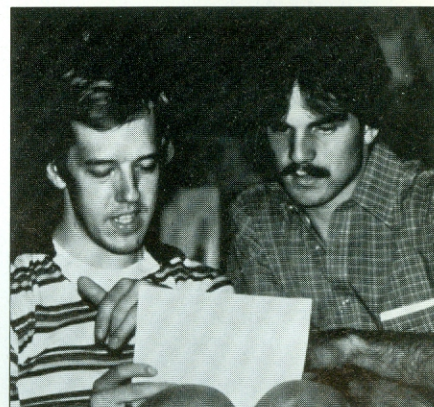


PHOTO BY DICK MOORE

Romans 1 tells us, "No one seeks for God." Rather, God *seeks* after fallen man. Jesus did. He then equipped his disciples to go out and reach the lost. The early church "went out and preached everywhere [they did their part] while the Lord worked with them [he did his part] and confirmed the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20).

He told us, "Go into the *highways* [where people are easier to reach; those along life's way] and *hedges* [individuals harder to reach; those we must seek out] and compel them to come in" (Luke 14:23 KJV).

He also stated, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32).

Evangelists are set in the church not only to declare the gospel with signs following, but to equip all of us for the "work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12 KJV). What is this ministry? It's called the "ministry of reconciliation... we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us (2 Cor. 5:18, 20). We may not all be the

"...I NEVER KNEW A CHRISTIAN THAT DIDN'T WITNESS!!"

Dr. James Kennedy, Senior Minister at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. and author and founder of "Evangelism Explosion" offers these insights on the effects of Christians failing to witness and the necessity of every believer's commitment to telling the good news.

A failure to witness clogs up our whole Christian life. We can picture each Christian as a conduit through which the "water of life" ought to flow out to irrigate the land. But if the conduit is clogged up, we cannot be a blessing to the world. If we are plugged up, the land withers and perishes because the water never reaches it...

I vividly recall a conversation I once had with Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, the Lutheran pastor from Romania who was imprisoned for his faith almost fourteen years. He showed me a picture of three men who were being sentenced to five, ten and

fifteen-year terms in Siberia for evangelizing. As I was looking at the picture I asked him, "With that kind of repression, are there many Christians behind the Iron Curtain who witness?"

I'll never forget his response. It was as if sparks flew out of his eyes as he said impassionedly, "Do many Christians witness? I never knew a Christian that didn't witness!!"

It took persecution to bring that about in Eastern Europe, and I wondered to myself, what is it going to take to get easy-going Christians in America to take the Great Commission seriously?

I don't think most Americans realize how late and how critical the hour really is. The Church must wake up and take seriously the task that has been given to it. The next five to seven years will be critical ones for our nation—times when Christians must be praying and working as never before.

(This selected excerpt originally appeared in *New Wine Magazine*, P.O. Box Z, Mobile, Alabama, 36616. ©1983. Used by permission.)

gift ministry of an evangelist as in Eph. 4:11 but we are all to do the "work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5).

During this present period of the restoration of the house of God in the earth, proper balance is essential between evangelism and community. God's heart beats two ways—for the church and for the lost. A restoration prophet, Haggai, heralded it this way: "Go up to the mountains, bring wood [evangelize] and rebuild the temple [build the church]" (Hag. 1:8).

God intends Paul's magnificent obsession with evangelism to become ours. In Romans 1:14-16, he cites three "I am's" (1) I am *under obligation*." In other words, evangelism is not for a few "gifted ones." All of us are commissioned as "ambassadors of Christ." "Woe is me if I don't preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). (2) "I am *eager to preach the gospel*." This should be our attitude (not like taking medicine). "The love of Christ controls us" (2 Cor. 5:14). (3) "I am *not ashamed of the*

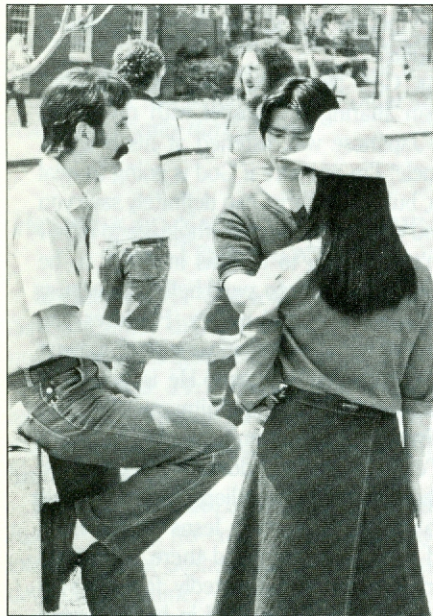


PHOTO BY RITA HOOVER

gospel." We are evangelizers, not apologizers. We refuse to be intimidated, apologetic or fearful of man. We are even willing to be perceived as out of our mind. In Acts 26, Governor Festus said to Paul, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad." Yet Paul would tell people, "If we are beside ourselves, it is for God."

Billy Graham has said, "We need to represent Christ with such zeal and fervor that we put all other worldly enthusiasts to shame!"

Yonggi Cho, who leads a Korean church of almost three hundred thousand people—the largest church in the world and in the history of Christendom—has

often stated his secret. He and his people are not merely "open" to evangelism and growth, they are *committed* to it! They not

“No one ever followed Jesus who didn't become a fisher of men. If you're not fishing, it's questionable how closely you're following!”

—Dawson Trotman

only are awaiting opportunities to share their faith, they are aggressively looking to create opportunities.

In this critical hour of history, we must embrace our mandate and reject Satan's lie that people aren't interested. As conditions rapidly deteriorate in society, more and more people are becoming receptive to the message we demonstrate and declare. They don't want mere religion. They want reality. It is obvious our day is seeing a whole new atmosphere of openness to the gospel.

How then can we become an evangelistic people in response to this clear word from God?

PRACTICAL STEPS TO BECOMING AN EVANGELISTIC PEOPLE

■ We must be honest with ourselves and God. We should take inventory and repent where we've rationalized and excused ourselves from our biblical responsibility. As Christian leader and author Stephen Olford has said, "It is characteristic of our natural sluggishness and laziness to put off the work of evangelism. By cunning calculations and clever rationalizations, we talk ourselves out of the urgency of the task and the demand upon our time, talents, and treasures. How we need to ask the Holy Spirit to rid us of all unbelief, indifference, prejudice and hard-heartedness."

■ We need to seek the Lord for purity of motive and an impartation of his compassionate heart. Paul expressed his motivation in sharing the gospel, "Not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts" (1 Thess. 2:4). Our motive is to please God and bring delight to his heart (Luke 15:7), not to alleviate guilt, please leaders, or bring recognition to self.

We must ask our heavenly Father to impart his heart to us, so we feel what he feels

and experience the hurt and pain he does over the state of fallen humanity. Jesus wept over the Jewish people of his day. Paul was willing to exchange his salvation so his people could be saved. Moses pleaded for his name to be blotted out for the sake of God's mercy on his people. As we pray we'll begin to see the lost as people, not pagans; as lonely, confused human beings, not potential victims or statistics.

■ We need to humble ourselves and admit our need to be equipped. Churches can seek out proven, extra-local ministries that can impart outreach vision and provide training for their people. Over the years our fellowship has released men in apostolic and evangelistic ministry to conduct various evangelism training schools in a number of churches. Subjects covered include, "Handling Common Objections When Sharing Your Faith" (apologetics) and "Overcoming Fear in Personal Witnessing." In line with the proverb, "I hear—I forget. I see—I remember. I do—I understand," the training consists of "on-the-job" experience such as street corner witnessing following the practical instruction. Drawing upon gifted leaders for envisioning and training can prove very fruitful in motivating and building confidence in the people of God.

■ We need to make evangelism a top priority in our life to become the evangelistic people God is calling us to be. This means our intentions are daily translated into action as we seize opportunities to practically and creatively love the lost and communicate the good news via testimony or tract. As churches, we need to collectively commit ourselves not merely to be "open" but committed to evangelism and growth.

■ As Christian leaders in a church, we need to change any financial patterns which simply perpetuate a localized vision. Upon seeking God for his unique strategy for our church, we must put our money where our mouth is to underwrite evangelistic ventures and support the establishment of New Testament churches.

In this hour of preparation for a visitation of the Holy Spirit and a final in-gathering of souls unprecedented in all of human history, God is awakening *each* of us to our personal responsibility in reaching the two and one-half billion people who have never even heard his name.

Our responsibility does not begin with continents or nations, but with each of us faithfully reaching our family, friends, and neighbors with the simple message that brought us to the life and truth we've found in Jesus Christ. □