

The Gift and Call of Evangelism

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Dear lover of Jesus and of lost souls, who has been moved by the Spirit to be more involved in evangelism. We want to share a few things with you before you dive in, both encouragements and sober realities, so that you'll be a little more prepared for what you face. Street evangelism is such a wonderful blessing for the one who is called to do it, but like any other calling, there are challenges as well. Questions or doubts will arise from people as they see you devote time and energy to sharing the gospel away from the four walls of the church, whether it's preaching, one on one evangelism or passing out tracts:

- 1) How does evangelism fit with the rest of the ministries of the church?
- 2) Is street evangelism more or less effective than other forms of evangelism such as evangelism from the pulpit or prison ministry or friendship evangelism?
- 3) Why can't you get more involved in church?

When we've preached out by the bars on a Friday night, it's not unusual for a person claiming to be a Christian to come up and say something like, "you're turning people off" or "that's not effective." (Sometimes we smell alcohol on their breath!) Even people in church can be misguided about evangelism. What does the Bible say about these issues?

The Call of the Evangelist

what is the overall purpose of the gift of evangelism? "He Himself gave some to be...evangelists... for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (*Eph 4:11*). Thus we can see practically how the evangelist fulfills his/her part in this equation. My evangelist friend Randy once commented about the difference between evangelism and discipleship: "We catch the fish, they clean them." The evangelist will also likely be involved in equipping other believers to evangelize as well- we're all called to "preach the gospel to every creature." (*Mark 16:15*).

One woman at church came up to me and said, "I'm glad you're sharing the gospel with people out there on the streets, because I could never do that." I hope she is actively praying about and seeking to "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you..." (*1 Pet 3:15*) If she needs some encouragement and help in learning how to share the gospel, evangelists can show her how through teaching, by example and by leading her by the hand as she practices side by side with them on the streets, so that she can apply what she has learned to the area that God has assigned to her to be a witness.

Street Evangelism is Effective if Done Biblically

many complain that street evangelism is ineffective. How do you measure effectiveness? Paul said, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." (*1 Cor 3:6*) Thus, we measure God's effectiveness in growth (not the evangelist's effectiveness).

How do we measure Paul and Apollos? By their faithfulness in planting and watering the seed as God called them! How often we've been quizzed regarding effectiveness:

- 1) How many of the people that you shared the gospel with got saved? (Who can know that but God? Isn't that His job to worry about? David was severely judged for counting his soldiers (*1 Chronicles 21:1-8*). Numbers are God's responsibility, not ours!
- 2) How many of them are going to church?

Street evangelism is reaching a wider audience than one local church. To put it in perspective, I share with a stranger, Freddy, and Freddy begins to recognize he's a sinner that needs to repent and follow Christ. Freddy ends up going to church with his friend and gets saved. Later, Freddy, in gratitude over what Jesus Christ has done for him, shares the gospel with a stranger on the streets and they end up getting saved and they end up going to yet another church that their friend goes to.

We must have the faith to believe God's promises about sowing seed, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." (*Mark 4:26-29*). My friend Dan, an evangelist, preaches every year at the Indy 500. People walk by, and not many stop and talk. Some mock. One might wonder if his ministry is effective. One year a guy came up to him and said, "I mocked you last year I came, but I want you to know that I've become a Christian! Keep up the good work!" Could it be we hardly see the tip of the iceberg of what God is doing? Have faith in God's promises! "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (*Heb 11:13*)

Jesus thought street evangelism was effective! In a parable, He spoke of His servants inviting people to a wedding feast, "Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." (*Matthew 22:9*) You will hear complaints about street evangelism from others, and Satan will even whisper them to you in your ear at unguarded moments, "It's not effective" or "It's too impersonal" or "you have to develop a relationship with someone before talking about such intimate issues." If that's the case, then we should throw out the New Testament. In the book of Acts, there were 32 times that the gospel was shared with unbelievers, and each time it was with strangers out in public. Likewise, many come to Christ through relationships with Christians as they see the light of Christ in their lives. We must learn to grow in both friendship evangelism and evangelism with strangers- with "every creature".

The Power of the Gospel Message

What saves a person? Do we save a person? Is not the gospel "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes?" (*Romans 1:16*) You and I aren't the power of God- not our looks, our winsome personality our friendliness or anything else about us. As far as evangelism is concerned, "us" needs to get out of the way so people can see Jesus

Christ (*John 3:30, 1 Cor 9:27*). It is the gospel that is the power of God for salvation. We're to share the gospel with people and believe what God says about its' power and pray- the Holy Spirit will accomplish His purposes in concert with our witness: "When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment." (*John 16:8*). Thus we cooperate with Him by sharing about sin, righteousness and judgment as well. Look down at your feet for a moment: are they beautiful feet? They are if they're busy sharing the gospel, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (*Romans 10:15*)

Unity in Our Perspectives About Evangelism

There are many places and ministries that can be used to share the gospel. No one can say that one is "more effective" than another. What has God called you to do? If you're doing what God has called you to do with all your heart, then you are effective (*Matt 25:15-28*). God wants your obedience to His call for you more than succumbing to the pressures of the latest cry for help from the church bulletin that may be the opposite of what He has called you to do. Scripture admonishes against immature attitudes regarding spiritual gifts, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (*1 Cor 12:4-7*). Applying this to street evangelism: there is nothing to indicate this gift is more or less important or effective than any other gift! And where and to whom do we evangelize? The same thing can be said about that. If God has called you to street evangelism, then do it. If He's called you elsewhere to share the gospel, then do that.

Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, did a survey and found that 2% of those who call themselves Christians regularly share their faith. Let us keep in mind that while several people can be reached through inviting people to church, each of us should learn to share the gospel with friends and family. In addition, a large number of people (like myself when I was unsaved) won't even go near the doors of a church because of conviction of sin, for the same reason a criminal won't go to a prison if invited. Check your history, from Pentecost to Samaria to the Great Awakenings in past centuries to see revivals that happened out on the streets! I'm so glad that the disciples on Pentecost didn't wait in the upper room for sinners to come to them, but instead went into all the world and preached the gospel. Some churches gear their entire energy towards evangelism on Sunday mornings in what they call "seeker-friendly" services. Is not the primary purpose of the church to "prepare God's people for works of service"? If most of the energy that was focused on seeker-sensitive services was diverted to building up the body and preparing her for evangelism, then the result would be solid church growth and mature believers.

Philip the Evangelist

Only one person in the New Testament is actually called an evangelist (Philip, Acts 21:8) and we are privileged to see him in action. Jesus commanded His disciples to share the gospel in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. There was one problem after Pentecost that still exists today: they weren't obeying the Lord's Great

Commission except in Jerusalem- probably because they were stuck in their comfort zone. So God used Saul to shake up the church through persecution, “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” (*Acts 8:1*)

It was a wake up call that had tremendous results, “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” (*Acts 8:4*) Notice that it was everyone, not just the evangelists, that were preaching the word! When lost people are dying and going to hell, and we’ve realized what He’s saved us from, the love of Christ in us for the lost and the anointing of the Spirit will overcome fears.

“Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there...So there was great joy there...when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” (*Acts 8:5,8,12*)

Shortly after that the apostles arrived. Philip didn’t stay around town, instead, “an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road- the desert road- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’” (*Acts 8:26*) This may not have made much sense to Philip, after all, a great revival had just broken out in Samaria and many souls had just been saved, and certainly there weren’t enough mature believers to meet all the needs of these newborn babes in Christ, yet God called Philip elsewhere. Philip was directed by the Spirit out into the middle of the desert where God had a special appointment with a eunuch on the road to Ethiopia, and he was saved as Philip shared the gospel with him. After the eunuch was baptized, the “Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.” (*Acts 8:39-40*)

We can notice several things:

- 1) Philip was alone- that didn’t make him outside of God’s will. The evangelist may at times be alone- that doesn’t make him/her a “lone ranger”. Like everyone else, he/she has accountability partners in ministry and fellowship in a church, though he/she isn’t seen as much in the church as those more visible parts of the body (preachers and teachers).
- 2) Philip was gifted to evangelize, not to disciple.
- 3) Philip was all over the place, as led by the Spirit.
- 4) The people that were saved by Philip’s ministries would end up in many different churches in many different towns. God would send others to meet their needs.
- 5) Philip’s ministry was outside the church and the rest of the church understood and supported him in it.
- 6) Philip’s ministry is portrayed as a ministry anointed by God.

Evangelists and Other Church Ministries

Unlike discipleship or service, evangelists are most active outside the church and not involved as much in ministry within the four walls of the church. Evangelists have opportunities to serve the church within the four walls, often in ways that relate to our

calling as evangelists, such as teaching, encouraging and exhorting the flock about evangelism. Don't be discouraged if there are some in the congregation that aren't in tune with what the Holy Spirit is doing through your evangelism ministry because their ministry is focused elsewhere. "In fact the body is not one member but many...if the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? ...but God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased....And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you' ... there should be no schism in the body." (*1 Cor 12:14-25*) It can be easy for us to judge the ministries and giftings of others that are so different than us. We must not pass judgment on one another's callings. What seems to the eye to be so important may not seem so pressing to the ear. The Head, Jesus Christ, "has arranged the parts in the body just as He wanted them to be." (*1 Cor 12:18*) Paul also warned, "Who are you to judge another's servant? To His own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand...therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way." (*Romans 14:4,13*)

My friend if you are sensing that possibly God is calling you to street evangelism, heed this: every evangelist I know quotes this scripture when we're wondering why there aren't more people sharing the gospel out on the streets: "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field." Take it to the Lord in prayer and step out in faith in His calling. There's never a shortage of work for evangelism! "Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (*John 4:35*)

In Christ's Love,
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