

Is the Office of the Evangelist Dying Today?

You may have seen signs such as “Emergency Liquidation,” “Going out of Business” and “Fire Sale” hung on the doors of local businesses on life support. They are preparing to either close up shop or make “Custer’s Last Stand” to keep the doors open. Casualties are due to a number of factors, from bad locations or wrong timing to being pushed around by the big-box stores or simply offering the wrong products or services. However, it’s not just businesses that are barely afloat and gasping for air, but also one of the most important and strategic offices in the world—the office of the evangelist.

Although I grew up listening to countless sermons delivered by a pastor-teacher, I met Christ under the preaching of an evangelist. Some of the greatest leaders in history echo a similar story of conversion, including past presidents, mobsters, entertainers, business moguls, movers, shakers and even the man who has given me the greatest inspiration, the late Billy Graham. Millions have been brought to Christ through evangelists, not because these evangelists were more articulate, dynamic or educated than a local pastor, but rather because of the tailored gifting they possess.

A Special Gift to the Church

Ephesians 4:11-12 makes it diamond clear that the office of the evangelist was a gift given to the church to equip believers for the work of ministry to build up the body of Christ. An evangelist is a person with a unique ability and commission to share the gospel with those who do not have a relationship with Christ and to inspire and train others to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5).

Gallup research released in April 2019, “U.S. Church

Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” shows the church steadily declining and quickly losing ground. The Southern Baptist Convention, known as one of the most evangelistic denominations in the world, reported in 2018 in its Annual Church Profile that both baptisms and church membership have been continually dropping for several years.

But how can the church be in decline when the ills of society continue to escalate?

The world is trapped in the razor-sharp claws of fear, division, anger and strife. Mental health issues, such as depression, are ravaging millions. The opportunity has never been greater to reach a generation on the quest to find hope, peace and truth. Proverbs 10:5 speaks directly to today’s church and the accountability it will one day face: “He who gathers in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps in the harvest is a son who causes shame.”

The harvest is now, and many churches are snoozing.

Equally tragic, Barna’s *The State of the Church 2016* report sadly indicates only 10% of professing Christians actively look for opportunities to tell unbelievers about Christ, and a large percentage of Christian Millennials now believe it is wrong to share their faith. How can anyone who claims to have a relationship with Jesus be so indifferent to their biblical mandate to be a witness for Christ and to be broken for the unsaved? In many cases, the answer lies in the cold facts of never being taught, challenged or inspired to do so from the pulpit.

An Answer to Spiritual Decline

This is why the office of the evangelist is so vital. According to God’s Word, this office is one of the answers to the church’s spiritual decline and also one of the primary means of challenging and equipping believers to share their faith. A God-called evangelist not only exposes believers to a

different gift and the urgency of mission, but also issues a unique call to take a bold and public stand for Jesus. Strategic, well-orchestrated evangelistic outreaches led by a full-time evangelist combined with urgent biblical preaching, prayer and preparation often draw a segment of the population who might not otherwise attend a church service. Anytime God gives a gift to the church and leadership doesn't utilize it, they sell themselves and their congregations short. Gifts are meant to be used.

Some of the most impactful events in Christian history were launched through outreaches led by God-called evangelists. Have we forgotten the combustive impact of George Whitefield, D.L. Moody, Charles Finney, Billy Sunday, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and most significantly, the master evangelist, Jesus Christ? Was it not Phillip the evangelist whom God sent to the unsaved Ethiopian who was searching for truth in Acts 8?

Twenty years ago, I called a seasoned evangelist named Freddie Gage to inquire as to how I should pursue my calling as a full-time evangelist. I have never forgotten his response.

"Whatever you do, do not go into evangelism," he said. "You will never make it because churches no longer use evangelists. They talk about evangelism without ever doing it. Your wife and three kids will starve to death!"

I was crushed but knew my mission, and my wife and I decided we would rather starve than vacate our purpose. Years later, Gage confessed his dire statement was only meant to weed me out, as he knew if I wasn't truly committed and called, I would bail.

For the almost two decades I have been privileged to travel the world doing nothing but preaching the greatest news known to mankind—the gospel. My team of seven full-time staff has seen countless lives transformed all around the world. From

preaching in megachurches in the thousands to congregations of less than 200, we have used every opportunity to sow seeds for a harvest. However, every year, it is a major battle to pursue the call because many pastors do not invite an evangelist to sound the trumpet from their pulpits.

There are few of us left, and just as Gage told me, the majority has been starved out.

But a determined minority, like me, gifted and called, will never quit. We would rather die than forsake God's purpose. For us, the office of the evangelist will never die. {eoa}

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