

Meet the Greatest Evangelist Ever

Amid a national push to share the gospel this fall, let's remember who the *real* evangelist is

I will never be an evangelist. That was my thought the first time I tried leading someone to Christ. It was my best friend in high school, and for months we'd engaged in deep discussions about God, life and the human condition. Scott was a thinker; he loved philosophy, psychology and arguing for the sake of arguing. But somewhere between his intellectual curiosity and self-confidence, God had revealed enough of Himself that Scott sensed there was something more to life than what he understood.

My job, then, was to simply cheer him on, tell him my own story of how God changed my life and try to help him work through any lingering questions.

I bombed. OK, maybe not bombed, but I can still remember the night our talk lasted for hours and culminated in what I thought would be him committing his life to Jesus. Instead, when I asked Scott if he wanted to pray "the prayer" with me, he—after our countless dialogues—paused, thought about it more and said he wasn't quite ready. I didn't push him, yet from that point on he rarely talked about God with me.

For years I regretted not doing more that night. I thought that had I said something else or pushed the issue harder, Scott's life—and certainly his eternal fate—might be completely different. The problem with that view, however, is that it misrepresents and undervalues the true evangelist in this world, the only one who can actually penetrate hardened hearts: the Holy Spirit. Jesus, speaking of the promised Spirit, said, "When He has come, He will convict the world of

sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).

There’s not a single mention of you or me convicting hearts, and for good reason—that’s the Holy Spirit’s job. In fact, Paul talked about how he came to the Corinthians “not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:4-5). We can argue, philosophize and preach till we’re blue in the face, yet today—especially in America—it’s obvious that words themselves will do little to convince people of their need for Jesus. Most Americans have heard enough about the gospel that they see it as just another point of view, alongside Islam, Buddhism, Mormonism or any other religion. Indeed, the “god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel” (2 Cor. 4:4, NASB).

What, then, can lift those blinders and make the gospel stand out as the absolute truth in an age of relativism? Jesus answered this in Acts 1:8 when He said, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (NKJV).

It’s the Holy Spirit’s power working through us, as “witnesses,” that changes people’s hearts. Under the influence of this supernatural power, some will surrender their hearts simply by hearing the Good News (which proves the importance of traditional preaching evangelism). But as the world continues to grow darker, I believe many will remain calloused until the miraculous intervenes. One supernatural healing or divine encounter is often all it takes for the blinders to come off.

Power evangelism isn’t just a faddish John Wimber phrase. Read through Acts, or any account of the early church, and you’ll find evangelism was almost always coupled with signs, wonders

and miracles. When it came to being “witnesses” of Jesus Christ, the supernatural was natural. We must walk in the same evangelistic power and do even “greater works” as Jesus said we would (John 14:12).

This fall is prime time for the American church to rise to the call. It’s not by chance that a growing number of evangelists, including modern-day giants-of-the-faith Billy Graham and Reinhard Bonnke, have turned their focus solely to America’s salvation. The Holy Spirit is moving within the church and on unbelievers’ hearts, setting the stage for what could be a great harvest of souls.

For those who, like me, aren’t natural-born evangelists, that’s a relief—a reminder that we’re not responsible for changing hearts. We are, however, called to be “witnesses” to the unbelievers around us. It’s time we recognize that we can’t even do that without the power of the Holy Spirit.

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