

Pastor: God Is Out, Ghosts Are In

One percent of people in Norway attend church on a given Sunday. Only forty-three percent say they believe in God. Does this mean that Norwegians are not spiritual? Not at all.

In fact, interest in ghosts and other spiritual phenomena is booming. Even Norway's royal family, required by law to belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, is interested in ghosts. A princess now coaches people on reaching out to spirits. "God is out but ghosts and spirits are filling the vacuum," one Norwegian pastor explains.

A television series called *The Power of Spirits* is now in its 10th season. Next month, Oslo will host "Alternative Expo," which *The New York Times* describes as "a jamboree of the occult featuring Tibetan eye-readers, New Age crystal collectors and hundreds of other practitioners of alternative faiths."

On the positive side, the Bible has become the best-selling book in Norway, even beating out *Fifty Shades of Grey*. There is indeed a "God-shaped emptiness" in us all.

How do we help people fill that emptiness with Him?

Recently I noted that every Christian has a kingdom assignment, a calling to join God in advancing the gospel around the world. Today we note the importance of preparation to fulfill our calling.

Paul was called to be God's "missionary to the Gentiles" (Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:7). In one sense, no one was less likely a candidate for such a vocation. While he was born in Tarsus, a predominantly Gentile city, Paul was raised in Jerusalem and "educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict

manner of the law of our fathers” (Acts 22:3).

This “strict manner” would have insulated Paul from all Gentile influences. He became a member of the Pharisees (the name means “separated ones”), the most zealous legalists in the nation. It’s hard to imagine that he spent time with Gentile customs and culture.

Yet in Acts 17 we find Paul able to dialogue with the leading Greek intellectuals of his day. Rather than cite the Hebrew Bible (which he knew they would dismiss), he quoted their own poets, specifically Epimenides and Aratus. As a result, Dionysius the Areopagite became a follower of Jesus. According to ancient tradition, Dionysius then founded the Greek Orthodox Church, a communion of more than 20 million today.

Paul learned the ways and customs of a society that had been completely foreign to him just a few years earlier. And he was able to take the gospel to that culture so effectively that the “West” would become synonymous with Christendom for centuries.

Years ago I heard a wise mentor state, “The Holy Spirit has a strange affinity for the trained mind.” The more prepared we are, the more usable we are.

What is your kingdom assignment? In other words, where do you have influence today? With whom do you have the relational capital and personal credibility necessary to help people follow Jesus?

What do you know about those you are called to serve? Do you know their needs, wants and challenges? Their interests and passions?

Paul’s strategy was simple: “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 This I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might partake of it with you” (1 Cor. 9:22-23). How will you prepare today to reach someone

tomorrow?