

What Ronald Reagan Said About Jerry Falwell Sr. Can Inspire the Church Today

I remember Ronald Reagan said, "Jerry Falwell did more to put me in office than any other person." I saw firsthand what happened behind the scenes. It can happen again.

Jerry Falwell used television to influence the political direction of America in 1982. Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church telecast covered every metropolitan area in America. He organized his church audience into the Moral Majority to push Ronald Reagan for president. Today, we have the right message in our pulpits to reach America; what we need is the right method to reach the multitudes.

How did Jerry Falwell find the right method? It began with his commitment to win every person in America to Jesus Christ.

It continued with his commitment to preach the gospel to every available person, at every available time, using every available means.

It led to his commitment to influence every person outside the church.

"See that television camera?" Jerry would often say back in the 1970s. "With that camera, I can preach in every television set to every person in America." What method could your church use today?

By the mid-'70s Jerry had his weekly *Old Time Gospel Hour* program in all 230 television hubs cities in the United States. Jerry would often say, "I might not be able to reach every American, but I can reach 98% of them."

But is television too expensive for churches in the 2020s? Is

there a better method?

Let's go back to the late '50s to see how Falwell did it. An electrical engineer came to work for General Electric in Lynchburg, Virginia, who held a number of patents in the television industry. Dusty Rhodes, a church member, told Jerry, "If you give me \$1,000, I can buy enough equipment from catalogs of used television equipment to put you on the air right here in Lynchburg, Virginia. ... You can reach the world."

Dusty Rhodes set up a television board right next to the audio sound board in the balcony of the old Pate Chapel. Then a steel ladder took him in the attic where he built a television studio. Jerry preached powerful sermons in his home pulpit that were captured on videotape and aired the following week on Channel 13. Using a two-inch videotape, Jerry's sermons were then televised in Roanoke, Virginia, some 60 miles away. Within another month, he was preaching in Richmond, Virginia, 100 miles away. Month by month, Jerry added new stations until he had covered all 230 major television hubs in America.

But your church cannot do that—and should not do that. Television is too expensive today, and the church audience is not as big on television nor as influenced by it as in previous eras.

The Electronic Church Surge

Today in a country church a few miles outside of Lynchburg, Virginia, a Baptist church of 350 is reaching over 700 listeners each Sunday via the internet. This is done inexpensively. It is done without television cameras and television lighting and equipment.

A cell phone is attached to a small stand a few feet away from the pastor as he preaches—not an expensive phone, one just like the cell phone in your pocket or purse. The sermon is more than recorded. The message is immediately beamed by Zoom to approximately 700 worshippers from this little Baptist

church every Sunday morning.

No \$50,000 cameras, no \$10,000 speakers and no expensive television board. The cell phone is a complex computer that can do miracles with both sight and sound. This digital church of 350 connects to 700 additional worshippers in Central Virginia every Sunday morning.

Could your church do this? Would you like to preach to 1,000 people weekly?

We live in a day when the liberal media is influencing our nation away from traditional Christian values and is eroding our belief in the Declaration of Independence and the freedoms of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It began when Bible reading and prayer were thrown out of our public schools. Now it continues with destroying statues and monuments of our founders who built this nation on belief in God, our government by the people and for the people.

Can we make America great again? What can your church do?

You cannot trust the newspaper reporters to print the truth. You cannot wait for television to broadcast the truth. Your church can use the computer to double its outreach. The evangelical churches that were responsible for electing Donald Trump as our President can do it again.

I began checking around central Virginia. A church in Harrisonburg, Virginia, usually averages around 350 in the morning service, but during the virus shutdown they had over 2,000 people watching each Sunday. I asked, "Where did all the viewers come from?" Steve Wingfield, a member of the staff, said, "Our church has always had a group of people out there who are conservative in lifestyle and committed to the church and attended from time to time. But during this pandemic and rioting on a national level, average people flocked to hear the gospel message of assurance."

How did they do it? With a cell phone and Zoom.

During the pandemic of 2020, thousands of churches were forced to use Zoom, Facebook or other digital methods to reach their audiences. One Christian magazine recognized the power of the digital church, reporting, "Zoom is becoming so popular and easy for digital church attendance, that many may not return to local church attendance." That is not an argument to avoid the digital church; rather, that is motivation to make it bigger, wider and more powerful.

Pastor Jentezen Franklin of Free Chapel in Gainesville, Georgia, fills his auditorium of 3,500 twice every Sunday and seven satellite church services expand attendance to over 12,000 live worshippers each Sunday. But he says, "I get excited when I know 90,000 people watch me digitally weekly." By that, he means they attend church with him on computers, iPads or cell phones.

Chuck Pierce, pastor of Glory of Zion in Corinth, Texas, with about 1,200 worshipers weekly in his north Texas church, has over 60,000 church members around the world who worship weekly with them. These online worshippers have gone through the membership class online and even donate financially by PayPal. There are over 10,000 *home churches* where a family attends via computer or iPad. Walking through their church facilities, you see a lack of giant television equipment and no tall television tower. It is done digitally, with the internet.

The cell phone is transforming the way Americans talk to their friends, receive emails, read the newspaper and more. Your church can use the cell phone to reach America with the traditional message of "Jesus Saves," but also, with the message of "Let's Make America Great Again!" {eo}