

Billy Graham School of Evangelism Hits Cyberspace

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2, NIV).

A quadriplegic man—from the comfort of his own living room—learns how to craft an evangelistic message.

Meanwhile, a woman halfway around the world is confidently delivering the Gospel to some family members who do not know Christ.

In another place, a young person (not a pastor) who has never preached an evangelistic sermon presented the Gospel at his church. He saw four people come to Christ.

These examples of personal involvement in evangelism are real—and among many—thanks to the School of Evangelism (SOE) Online, a new tool accessible to almost everyone.

SOE History

Historically, the SOE was held at physical locations around the world. Students of varied ages, locations and backgrounds would gather together and, over the course of several days, learn principles of evangelism from highly qualified, seasoned teachers. In more recent years, the SOEs were hosted at The Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove.

Most of the time, these students were pastors. Over the years, 135,000 have been trained.

“My granddaddy believed that not only should pastors be equipped for evangelism, but that they needed refreshment,” remembers Will Graham, grandson of Billy Graham and Director of The Cove. “We love the SOE, and we’ve had a lot of people come over the years.”

Gary Cobb, Dean of the SOE, said there was a widespread need for training in evangelistic preaching among pastors, in general.

“A number of years ago, a pastor approached me and said he had never preached the Gospel. His church was growing, and he was preaching on various topics, but the Gospel was not one of them,” Cobb explained.

“Then he told me that when he got home, he was going to preach the Gospel at his church. I heard from him later, and several people came to Christ that first time he preached it.”

Why Make It Virtual?

The reasons for taking the SOE online are logistical as well as financial.

“We were (and are) grateful for the chance to host the traditional SOE, but it became a large expense; not just on our part, but for the participants. It proved to be very expensive the way we were doing this,” said Graham.

As a result, the traditional SOE stayed dormant for a couple years. Even still, people were requesting it, and it was obvious that evangelistic training was still one of the greatest needs among believers.

Now, the SOE has gone online to make it accessible to almost everyone.

“Instead of one location, people can do it around the world at their own pace, at the best time for them—for just a fraction of the cost,” said Graham.

A Legacy of Innovation

Innovation is nothing new for BGEA. In fact, Billy Graham was among the first in ministry to reach souls through technology. He was the first to proclaim the Gospel via satellite. And, he was among the first to use the Internet for the advancement of

the Kingdom—even though the Internet surfaced late in his life.

“Back in the mid 90’s, when AOL was just starting up, my granddaddy would invite people to his office and chat with people from around the world online, answering their questions,” recalled Graham.

Just as Billy Graham used all means possible to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ, BGEA is still in keeping with that tradition as disciples are made around the globe through distance learning.

What People Are Learning

“We want to present evangelism as something ongoing, and we really want to see a revival of Gospel preaching,” said Cobb.

Students of the SOE Online are taught how to deliver a Gospel message, but they learn much more than that. They are taught how to *prepare* a Gospel message and how to ask for a response.

Taken from video archives and manuals from past Crusades, this training allows students to learn evangelism principles from Billy Graham himself. Through these videos, participants will gain an understanding of what it means to prepare an evangelistic message and proclaim the Gospel.

One student said, “The videos of his crusades were the most effective for me because I could feel his anointing and the presence of the Holy Spirit. All was profitable and enlightening. I am seasoned in the word of God but I have learned so much, Also, this course has helped me to awaken Scripture that has been dormant.”

Students will also understand the power of prayer through the training. Like in other aspects of the training, they will learn from Billy Graham about this ever-important discipline.

“Prayer in evangelism is about the Holy Spirit in evangelism.

Billy Graham had an experience early on where he learned the importance of being Spirit-filled as an evangelist, and this hinges greatly on prayer. This changed his ministry. The students will have the chance to review that moment in his ministry.”

There is also the important aspect of preservation, or discipleship. What happens after you lead someone to Christ? Students will learn how to disciple—walk alongside—a new believer.

The greatest hope of the content is that it will stir a heaviness for those who do not yet believe.

Another student said, “It fueled my burden for those who are lost. The sermon about hell was a grim reminder to me just what all is at stake for those who are not saved and why it is so important that Christians strive to share the Gospel message everywhere we go and in everything we do.”

Looking Ahead

To date, people from more than 19 countries have completed the training. Will Graham wants to see the global reach of SOE Online continue. He hopes to see tens of of thousands of pastors and evangelists trained, especially overseas.

“Here in America, we are very blessed. We have the chance to go to wonderful churches. We have a lot of parachurch organizations that can help us. We have access to Christian schools—or at least access to Christian classes somewhere,” he explained.

“There are a lot of people around the world who don’t have the same opportunities. I want to see people engaged in evangelism training, especially those who do not have the means to travel to a specific location. I want SOE Online to be a special blessing to people around the world.”

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