

Evangelism, Super Apostles and Mixed-Up Priorities

After visits from three evangelists in four days, I figured it out. We've neglected the heart of our mission.

Something amazing happened to me last week during a ministry trip to Texas and Oklahoma. God sent three unexpected visitors over the course of four days to confirm something He is doing in the church today.

Last Thursday when I was speaking at Christ for the Nations Institute in Dallas, my friend Sujo John called to say he wanted to drop by the campus and attend the conference with me. Sujo is a full-time evangelist who is originally from India. He surrendered to the ministry on Sept. 11, 2001, when he was buried under the rubble of the World Trade Center.

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On that horrific day as Sujo lay under the concrete and twisted metal, he wondered if he would live until nightfall. But that did not stop him from praying with about 20 people who were trapped with him. They all died before Sujo was rescued, but they stepped into eternity with faith in Christ as their Savior because Sujo led them in a sinner's prayer.

After Sujo learned that his wife, Mary, was safe (she also

worked in the World Trade Center but was late for work that day), they both left their lucrative careers in the financial industry and gave their lives to full-time evangelism. Since then Sujo has traveled all over the world sharing his testimony and warning people of the urgency of this hour.

On Friday, the second day of my meetings at Christ for the Nations, I got a text message from Scott Hinkle, a full-time evangelist from Phoenix who happened to be in Dallas. He came to the campus to attend the meeting in the main student auditorium.

Scott grew up in a rough-and-tumble New Jersey neighborhood outside New York City and became a Christian during the Jesus Movement in the 1970s. He has spent most of his adult life taking the gospel to places most Christians avoid. Every year he takes an evangelistic SWAT team to Mardi Gras celebrations in New Orleans and wins prostitutes and partygoers to Christ. He is one of the few charismatic ministers in the United States devoted to equipping believers in soul-winning.

After I left Dallas I flew to Oklahoma City to speak at a church in nearby Norman. On Sunday afternoon I got a text message from Kevin Turner, a full-time evangelist who is based near Tulsa. He wanted to come to my meeting at Riverside Church. I was thrilled because I had never met Kevin, even though we've talked on the phone many times and *Charisma* published an article about his unique ministry in 2007.

Kevin directs Strategic World Impact, a ministry that has taken him to some of the most dangerous places on the planet. He was mentored by the late Leonard Ravenhill, the radical revivalist whose writings still inspire many of us today. Kevin carries Ravenhill's sobering passion for lost souls and has shared the gospel in refugee camps, war zones and killing fields. He can't talk publicly about most of his work because it would put his colleagues in jeopardy.

It wasn't until I saw Kevin seated in front of me at Riverside that I realized this might be more than a coincidence. Three full-time evangelists in four days. Was God saying something here? Maybe it was just a fluke. But it caused me to realize how desperate we are in this hour for the ministry of the evangelist—a ministry that we have sidelined and neglected in recent years.

In the 1980s and '90s we charismatics emphasized the need for apostles and prophets. I cheered this movement because I believe we should reclaim every spiritual gift in the New Testament that has been avoided or neglected.

We need true apostles and prophets because they keep the church moving forward in our global assignment and provide heavenly direction and strategy. Yet apostles and prophets have been controversial, not only because some people reject them on theological grounds but because some self-proclaimed apostles and hyper-mystical prophets have abused and misused their gifts and authority. Today some of these people have slipped over the edge of orthodoxy—and have taken segments of the church off the cliff with them.

Some have promoted the concept that apostles are spiritual supermen who wield rigid, hierarchical control over churches and leaders, resulting in authoritarianism and abuse. Others have perverted the apostolic model to create a financial “downline” that brings loads of money to a few at the top of the food chain—ignoring the fact that the Bible says apostles should be models of humility who serve from the bottom. And some prophets have traded in their originally pure message to promote bizarre doctrines and cryptic predictions that often prove to be hokum.

Is it possible that while we were celebrating the super apostles and building fan clubs for the prophets we were ignoring the primacy of our evangelistic calling?

I know one gift is not more valuable than another. But when I read about the five-fold ministry gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11, I can't help but notice the placement of the evangelist. Paul wrote: "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, *and some as evangelists*, and some as pastors and teachers" (NASB, emphasis added). The evangelist is not more important, and God's kingdom is not a hierarchy. But evangelism is in the center because it is the very heart of God's mission.

In this turbulent season when our movement is being shaken, refined and redefined, we must return to the simplicity of our mission to reach the lost all around us. God wants to visit us with fresh evangelistic fire that will burn up our selfishness, refocus our priorities, rid us of quirky doctrinal distractions and ignite our hearts with a holy love for people who don't know Jesus.

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