

Formerly Suicidal Evangelist Reaches Depressed People Using Media

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges the church has is how to reach the lost and hurting who may never step through the doors of a church.

As a full-time evangelist, I understand fully the importance of reaching people where they are. I've ministered on the streets of New Orleans, under shade trees in Africa and in stadiums around the world. Even though I am working non-stop while traveling all over the world to share a message of hope, I also know there are many more—some who were once just like me—who have not yet heard the life-changing news that Jesus is enough.

There are 16 million American adults affected by depression each year and 40 million Americans age 12 and over who meet the clinical criteria for addiction involving nicotine, alcohol or other drugs. I was one of these.

At age 21, I found myself living the life of an alcoholic skeptical of God, the church and my Christian upbringing. Unable to cope with the difficulties life had thrown at me, the only way out I saw was to end it all. I held a .22-caliber pistol to my temple, fully prepared to pull the trigger and stop my misery. Thankfully, God interrupted my plans through an unexpected visit from my roommate so He could fulfill His purpose for my life.

A while later, I heard a gospel message from an itinerant evangelist who shared his personal experience of once considering suicide, and through his transparency, I realized how my pain could be used for good.

The power of an authentic story saved and eternally impacted my life.

Since that day, I have ministered around the world. A couple of years ago, I found myself standing in New York City's Grand Central Station. While watching the masses of people scurry through the terminal, I began to wonder how many of them might be enduring the same hopelessness that suffocated me for so many years. While most people looked successful and content, I knew behind the veil of busyness in one of the world's most enticing cities, many lacked a real sense of purpose in life. My mind flooded with the question of how many were hiding behind a masquerade of pain and uncertainty.

Within months, I found myself in another influential city: Los Angeles, California. After leaving a studio, I got stuck in the quicksand of traffic on Interstate 5. Sitting in the middle of the freeway, I looked at the scores of people parked all around me. That same question I wrestled in New York began to arrest my attention. Could it be in spite of all the stars, glamour and beauty of California, multitudes were still unable to discover life's meaning? I sat wondering and wanting to find a way to offer hope.

Through these two experiences, I began to pray and search for a way to connect people with others to whom they could relate. I wanted to use the power of story to let individuals know they are not alone by witnessing first-hand the life-changing transformations of others.

It then dawned on me that perhaps the greatest mission field could be found in the graveyard.

My dad used to say "Nothing good happens after midnight." Judging by the array of programming on television between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m., or what is commonly known as the graveyard slot, it would be easy to agree.

Audience measurement systems such as Nielsen do not report the

ratings for this post-late fringe slot; therefore, many television networks do not even make an effort to fill it. Some choose to simply shut down programming during these non-peak hours.

There is no doubt the audience for this early-morning programming is small. The typical viewer is the individual who is watching at work during an overnight shift, just came in from a night of partying or is wrestling with sleepless nights and tuning in for solace. In other words, these viewers are the exact ones who need hope the most.

Sadly, the hopeless audience tuning into the graveyard slot isn't likely to find a source of comfort for their issues but rather a plethora of infomercials looking to test gadgets and quick-fix products. Yet, retail therapy is akin to putting a Band-Aid on someone bleeding internally.

While television networks may have written off this graveyard audience group as "unimportant," I believe they are the most important for the church.

I would love to see how America's suicide, depression and substance abuse rates might decline if the church started using the powerful means of television coupled with the optimal viewing time of those suffering the most to reach the hurting with a gospel message. My bet is that it would make a huge difference. {eo}

Jay Lowder is a full-time evangelist and founder of Jay Lowder Harvest Ministries, author of *Midnight in Aisle 7* and the creator of the new television show, "The Darkest Hour," airing now on national television networks during the graveyard slot. Visit [for air dates and times](#).