

Outreach and Evangelism: What is working today?

By Bob Young

The church faces numerous challenges in the contemporary culture: the pressure of political correctness, postmodern relativism, religious pluralism. Society is full of unchurched people, many of whom do not know the basic teachings of Christianity or the redemptive story of Christ. Christianity has a poor reputation among some non-Christians. Distorted views of Jesus, the gospel, and Christian faith abound. Starting spiritual conversations is not as easy as in times past.

Even more alarming, the ability to engage the culture is hampered by internal factors. More and more Christians question the need for evangelism, accept alternate faith systems, reject traditional outreach efforts, and are reluctant to share the gospel, either because “evangelism isn’t their gift” or because they fear potential rejection.

In light of these challenges, how can the churches share the Good News of Jesus Christ in a world that desperately needs it? What is working? What is needed? A good place to begin would be to renew our commitment to **PASSION, PRESENCE, PEOPLE, PROCLAMATION, and PRAYER.**

First, we need a renewal of our **PASSION for the lost.**

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He viewed the lost multitudes with compassion, as sheep without a shepherd. In many places, the church has lost its passion. The church has lost confidence in the gospel. Renewal is needed. Renew the passion. Renew the conviction that the Good News is truly good news. Renew the conviction that God wants the message to be shared. Be confident in the power of the gospel. Overcome fear with confidence in God’s presence and help. Nothing will work as long as we are convinced it will not work. We will not be very active or aggressive in evangelism until we restore the passion for Jesus in our lives.

Second, we must learn how to be **PRESENT as God’s heralds with God’s message.**

The church has four tasks—teach people how to be present, teach people how to be present for God, teach people how to be present “on God’s mission,” and support those who are “on God’s mission.”

→**Teach people to be present.** Our members already interact with people every week. They are already present. Our members must learn spiritual awareness, to think souls, to be sensitive to others. Let us encourage members to eat with and pray for their neighbors, to see with spiritual eyes, to look for what God is already doing, to seek receptive hearts, and to seek openings for the message.

→**Teach people to be present for God.** It is one thing to be present; it is another thing to be present for God. To be present for God expands our vision and our focus. God’s people are compassionate and concerned about the ills of society, but are even more concerned about being present as God’s representatives—ambassadors with a message. Being present for God means seeing the lost with God’s eyes, being messengers who seek to deliver God’s message so it will be heard.

→**Teach members how to be present in their world while being “on mission” for God.** When we interact with people every day we have the opportunity to be “on mission.” Our task is to respond to the realities of our world with the attitude of Jesus and in the name of Jesus, sharing his message. We must teach our members how to be present, how to be present for God, and how to be present “on mission.” It is possible to be present in this world without being present for God and for his mission. This is especially obvious in much of our “mission work.” Churches make mission trips that do not have much to do with God’s mission and message. Those who are sent fail to focus primarily on spiritual needs. A lot of what is done in the name of missions does not do much to spread the gospel. It is imperative that what is identified as mission work is genuinely focused on the mission.

→**Support Christians who are truly “on mission”** in their lives. Support Christians who are “on mission” in new areas where the gospel must be shared, new churches strengthened, and disciples matured with training, equipping, empowerment, and support.

Individual Christians who are seriously committed to being present must keep five things in mind—be personal, be genuine, be relational, be responsive, stay “on mission.”

→**Be personal.** What is working to advance the gospel today is personal engagement rather than ministries, programs, and events. We are moving away from traditional evangelism models that begin and end with impersonal campaigns. We are learning the power of the personal touch. We are moving away from “evangelistic” programs and events to activities that say “come and see,” activities that open doors for personal contacts. The caveat regarding such events is that they must authentically show the body in action, and not employ “bait and switch” tactics.

→**Genuinely be present** in your community. Within your circle of influence, use the opportunities God provides to be the presence of Christ. Presence is made more powerful when accompanied by a “blessing strategy.” Prayer is often the first point of contact with a person seeking Christ.

→**Be relational** so you will know when the opportunities come to serve and to show God’s love. People are hungry for relationships. Build relationships.

→**Be responsive to God’s commands and guidance.** No Christian is exempt from Jesus’ command to go into the world. When every member enters the world weekly as God’s ambassador, this is the maximum use of the greatest asset in our churches—the members who go forth as disciples, ambassadors, and missionaries.

→**Stay “on mission” every day.** Every day as you join God’s mission in progress in your little corner of the world, sow seeds of local outreach. Pray about and develop a vision for God’s mission in your daily life.

Third, apply Jesus’ promise to PEOPLE: “Seek and you will find.”

Go to the broken places of emotional, relational, and spiritual hurts. The gospel often finds greatest response among those who are hurting, oppressed, or broken. Seek those spaces where it is easiest to develop interest. Learn how to develop spiritual interest.

Fourth, effective PROCLAMATION invites people into the gospel story.

Three aspects of the story must be shared.

→God’s plan. Be sure to include this dimension in the story you share.

→Jesus’ story. When we think of the scope of the gospel, to bring all things under the Lordship of Jesus in his reign, that is the story to tell; it is the story worth sharing.

→Your story. Be authentic, tell gospel in ways the culture can understand, not a canned presentation. Learn how to share the story in ways that are personal, guided by and focused on others. Be transparent. Remember that you are telling your story by your life, words (including social media), and actions. Share what God has done for you. To be personal, one must first know and experience God in authentic discipleship. Share your story unashamedly.

I am thankful that we are rethinking how to share the story and that we are learning new approaches to evangelism.

→Focus on learning more than telling; learn the art of the inductive over the deductive

→Intentionally initiate conversations; learn to ask questions

→Make the story accessible so that everyone can see, understand, and participate

→Learn a style that is inviting, personal, participative, relevant; learn to use personal illustrations

→Invite responses; we cannot declare the gospel without using words; we must do more than demonstrate Christianity with our presence—we must proclaim and persuade.

→Be bold in asking for response and commitment to confirm the desire to follow Jesus.

→People are receptive—given the right introduction and opportunity

Finally, depend on God.

Pray. We know this, but we do not do it often enough. The more we pray, the more opportunities, people, and power God gives. Pray about the ideas above. Pray about passion, presence, people, and proclamation.