

THE CHURCH GROWS WHEN IT SHARES THE MESSAGE

By Bob Young

For 20+ years I preached for two churches. (I never wanted to be “the minister,” I was preacher and evangelist.) God blessed those efforts with hundreds of baptisms. The churches grew—one tripled and the other doubled. During those years, I taught evangelism seminars in several other churches. Where the local churches shared the gospel, souls were baptized and the churches grew. In the university, I taught a Personal Evangelism class. The first semester the course was offered the students in the class baptized nine persons. I ministered with a church between my university tenures—we had 34 baptisms in 21 months. The church grew in attendance and in spirit. I know from experience that the church can grow when the gospel is shared.

Now I spend a lot of time in Latin America. I work with lots of churches at different stages of development.

- Some are just starting—I was recently with a church that is 1 ½ years old with an attendance of 15-20. The local church is virtually self-sustaining except for the salary of the missionary couple. The church rents its own facility near the center of town, the members are sharing the gospel. I shared some hints for evangelism and they had two baptisms immediately afterward by using what they learned.
- A church that is 10 years old has had 130 baptisms this year and attendance is near 550.
- A church of about 150 now has elders. The church does not have a local minister—the preaching task is shared by the elders, deacons, and evangelists and the focus is primarily outward. They have had 25-30 baptisms this year. They are growing, and outgrowing their building.
- A recent gospel campaign in El Salvador resulted in 61 baptisms.
- A church that is almost 5 years old has around 100 adults present every Sunday—they have had 25+ baptisms this year. When I was there, I set up an evangelistic Bible study and three were baptized.
- Two recent church plants have blossomed to attendances of near 20 adults in only a few months. The curriculum in both of those churches is focused on building faith by hearing the Good News.
- A church that is seven years old has built its own building (without US \$\$). They have 50 members. Five different members had five evangelistic Bible studies in progress when I was there; there were three baptisms the week I was there. They wanted me to talk about evangelism!
- Where the churches are sharing the gospel, I see that the churches are growing in number, are planting new churches, and are maturing and developing leaders. The church grows by sharing the gospel!

The common thread that runs through these stories is this: **when the gospel is shared, the church grows!** One thing that worries me about the U.S. church and its leaders is that I see less and less focus on the gospel message. I see less and less emphasis on salvation. The church does lots of good things, but many of the programs, sermons, classes, and small groups have little to do with evangelism. Too many mission efforts are not bringing people to Christ in large numbers and few seem to notice or care. Not many mission reports mention the number of baptisms and the growth of the local churches. Some mission works have been supported for years and have not yet developed a healthy, mature local congregation. Why?

The lack of evangelistic focus in many U.S. churches may simply be the church reflecting our current culture. Perhaps the church will eventually find new footholds and will begin to evangelize again. For the present, I share a concern that Tim Archer recently wrote about:

“I know many church leaders who aren’t really concerned about helping people hear about Jesus. Let’s clothe them, feed them, provide housing, and send them on their way. That’s a bit of an exaggeration, but if we look closely, we have to admit that many church leaders are uncomfortable with the idea that non-believers need salvation.”

I too know too many preachers who do not have an evangelistic Bible study going on right now. I know too many elders who are not actively sharing the gospel. I know too many benevolent programs that help with physical needs but do not aggressively seek to help with the greatest need.

The church grows when the gospel is shared! I suggest we pray about it, beginning in our own lives.