

## **First Steps toward More Evangelism in Our Churches**

**By Bob Young**

Recently on one day, I met with two different brothers in Christ from different churches and different areas of the U.S. Two times, the conversation turned to an apparent decrease in the evangelism efforts in many of our congregations. Evangelism begins with the leaders. If the preacher is not evangelistic and involved in evangelism, it is unlikely that the congregation will be. If the elders do not have hearts for evangelism and reaching souls for Jesus, it is unlikely that the congregation will have such a spirit.

I do not write to criticize but to improve. I write as a preacher who is constantly looking for ways to do what God is calling me to do in my ministry and mission work. In this spirit, I share ideas drawn from my own experience in ministry, missions, and church consultations.

### **One misperception and two basic problems**

**Evangelism is intentional, not accidental.** Somewhere along the way, the church (beginning with its leaders and ministers) has gotten the idea that evangelism just happens if we have enough contact with outsiders and non-Christians. The contemporary church has found itself involved in more and more activities that seek such contacts with less and less evangelistic results.

**Problem One:** many preachers have not been trained in evangelism. Sad but true. Even those preachers who have focused their formal studies toward ministry or preaching often lack training in personal evangelism. Such a class is not required in many degree programs.

**Problem Two:** many preachers have grown up in congregations where the ministry model they saw was internally focused. Many of our younger preachers have not grown up in congregations where the ministry example they saw was focused on evangelism. Many preachers are paid by the church to do something very different from the biblical descriptions of ministry. Ben Connelly, co-author of *A Field Guide for Everyday Mission*, remembers thinking in a seminary class, "I was really good at managing Christians and really bad at making disciples." Connelly more recently wrote, "No matter how good (or bad) I preached; no matter how large (or small) my church got; no matter how polished (or sloppy) our programs looked; and no matter how affirming (or, um, not!) our people were, there would always be more people 'out there' than there would be 'in here.'"

### **The solution—three things**

#### **The preacher has to remember and focus on his first priority.**

The preacher is first and foremost a missionary, ambassador, representative of God in the community, to a host of people and to the members. Ours is a ministry of reconciliation. Frankly, many part of the ministry role are fun. Within the church, an important identity is that of preacher or minister. But the preacher has to constantly remind the church that his role as preacher or minister within the congregation is not his primary role or identity. Christ alone is our hope and power. By His power, we share hope.

The preacher with such a spirit will infect the local church. Members will appreciate the preacher's love for the church and his desire that it grow. Such a spirit is contagious. Spiritual

leaders will support the priority, and the future leaders of the church who naturally rise to the top will be those of like spirit.

**The preacher has to pursue his priority or primary mission consistently.**

The preacher must remember his priority always. He pursues the mission of God in his personal time. He sees in his daily activities and interactions opportunities to meet people, care for people, and show interest in people—even those who cannot advance his profession. He provides a living example of what it means to love neighbors, serve the city, and make disciples outside the church. Like most of the members of a local church, that means the preacher is pursuing mission “after hours.” That means personal plans, free time, activities, relationships, and life priorities honor the not-yet-believers God places in our path daily.

The preacher who views life in this way will develop members with a like point of view. Members will see the potential in their neighbors, friends, family, and coworkers. Members will learn to see the world through Jesus’ eyes.

**The preacher has to lay aside some things.**

It is easy for preachers to get involved in every aspect of the internal workings of the church. Such a position is powerful and controlling, and often prideful. Preachers and ministers who commit to God’s eternal purpose to unite all people in Christ, to follow Jesus in seeking and saving the lost, will find that they do not have time to do a lot of other typical “ministry tasks.”

The preacher will have to humble himself and depend more on God. Jesus cares more for his church than the minister. He has made the supreme sacrifice to purchase the church and the church belongs to him. The preacher who clearly understands priorities will learn to develop leaders. A part of the process is that those who come to leadership will not do everything exactly like the minister would. It is not easy to give up control, but the preacher will more accurately reflect the spirit of Jesus who came to serve and give his life when he learns that life lesson. Internal leadership in the church will secure a better leadership and a better future for the church.

Many preachers know very few people outside of Jesus. Living out the priority of God’s mission is challenging because there are so few outsiders in our circles of friendship and influence. The problem is parallel to that of the salesman who lacks potential buyers. Without prospects, the salesman can do two things. He can do callbacks on the same dead ends again and again, or he can seek new prospects. Obviously, the only solution is to find new prospects.

Preachers, recognize your role in the mission of God. Pursue that priority. Get rid of the things that hinder so that you can actively and effectively reach out to a lost world desperately in need of Jesus. Who are the people God has sent you to, to demonstrate the gospel?