

Pastor-only Evangelism?

Steve Burchett

In the beginning days of the first church I pastored, I discovered that the majority of the people thought evangelism happened at the close of a sermon as either “Just As I Am” or “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” played softly in the background. In their minds, calling people to faith in Christ was solely the pastor’s responsibility.

Were they right? Consider what happened in Acts 11:19-21.

So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

It was ordinary believers at this point, not the apostles, who went out into the world proclaiming the gospel. The apostles remained in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). This does not mean that the apostles didn’t evangelize, but the picture is of all the Christians freely and joyfully speaking out about Jesus. They simply couldn’t remain silent about their Savior. The same should be true today, whether a person is a pastor or not.



“But I’m not very articulate.”

You don’t have to be. Though there is objective content about Christ (“the word,” which in Acts 11:19 is “the gospel” or “the message”) that must be communicated if a person is going to be saved, sometimes even a single statement might be used of the Lord to ultimately send a person to Christ. Evangelism is more like “sowing the seed” than it is “an amazing presentation of the glories of Christ.” I’ve known many people (myself included) who came to Christ through a very simple presentation of the truth.

Even if you don’t feel as though you know much, tell the lost person what you *do* know. Give him a resource that faithfully presents the gospel. Do something, even if it seems insignificant at the time. Remember, that unbeliever will spend eternity in hell without Christ. Charles Spurgeon once said, “If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay.”

“But I don’t have any opportunities to talk about Jesus.”

Really? What about your unsaved children or grandchildren? We should tell them the good news every day. And do you have any unbelieving co-workers, neighbors, or relatives? What about the clerks at the stores you frequent? How about your doctors?

“But I’m not very good at getting people to believe in Christ.”

You are not responsible to get them to believe. In Antioch, the gospel was received not just because it was spoken, but because the Lord’s power was at work through the proclamation. “The hand of the Lord was with them” (Acts 11:21). For a person to come to Christ, not only is it necessary for the gospel to be proclaimed, but the Holy Spirit must be present giving life to the dead soul and granting eyes to see the glory of Christ.

This is actually quite comforting. Our task is just to speak up. Sometimes this will mean a long conversation (or several). Other times we’ll only get in a sentence or two. Oftentimes we will wish we would have said some things more clearly. But if the gospel is shared, God may save—that’s His prerogative

“Now what?”

At least four things:

First, pray for opportunities to evangelize, and the boldness to speak up. They will come, and God will help you.

Second, tell your pastor(s) what you’ve learned from the example in Acts 11. He will be thrilled!

Third, plan to share the gospel, and then do it. Have good resources accessible to give away (See www.CCWtoday.org for useful tools.).

Fourth, tell other believers about your evangelism experiences (both successes and failed efforts). You may inspire others to join you. A church that talks and prays regularly about evangelism will be more evangelistic.

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