

Beloved

The Pastoral Letter of Dr. T.J. Gentry – October 22, A.D. 2008

Evangelism 15: Structuring an Evangelistic Lifestyle

Grace to you and peace, beloved. May the Lord be with you in all His fullness!

As a follow-up to the previous installment on personal and practical hindrances to evangelism, which was more or less a critical assessment of particular practices by individuals and churches, I would like to offer by way of positive recommendation several suggestions for structuring an evangelistic lifestyle. My method will be to first pose several related questions to individuals, followed by several related questions to churches. The intent of these questions is to prompt simple and effective steps toward evangelism becoming second-nature in our individual lives and in our churches. Read them with an open mind and heart and don't yield to the temptation to defend or condemn yourself or your church. *Just make appropriate changes.*

Questions for Individuals

1. Do I have a written list of non-Christians for which I pray daily and fast at least monthly, beseeching God to bring them to salvation?
2. Am I praying daily for an opportunity to share the gospel, especially with those on my list of non-Christians who are in my immediate sphere of influence?
3. Am I praying daily for other Christians to share the gospel, especially with those on my list of non-Christians?
4. Am I reading evangelistic books and listening to or watching other evangelistic media on a regular basis (at least monthly)?
5. Have I committed to memory a basic gospel presentation from the Scriptures (practicing it at least once per week), and have I committed to memory my personal testimony concerning Jesus, and have I shared it with my church and family?
6. Do I have a supply of evangelistic literature and Bibles to give away as I take advantage of evangelistic opportunities that come my way?
7. Do I have any conversation starter items, such as a lapel pin or a bracelet or a book or a t-shirt that might lead to further conversation with others?
8. Am I pursuing conversations with the express intention of building a relationship and sharing the gospel?
9. Am I praying for sensitivity to "segue moments" in my conversation with others (i.e. moments in the conversation when I could easily transition to spiritual concerns) and seizing them when they arise?
10. Am I familiar with common objections to the gospel (e.g. "You can't trust the Bible." or "There is no such thing as ultimate truth." or "I'm a good person." or "I'll focus on my faith when I'm older.") and how to answer them simply and with kindness?

Questions for Churches

1. Do we believe that evangelism is the primary means by which our church should grow?
2. Do we believe that growth is ordinary and to be expected (i.e. it is a theological conviction), and that when it doesn't happen it is probably related to something wrong in the church?
3. Do we know the demographics of our community, and is our evangelistic strategy reflective of this information?
4. Have we eliminated as many unnecessary obstacles to our growth by evangelism, so that the primary offense we give is only related to the gospel? (e.g. Is our worship as accessible as possible, given our liturgical convictions? Is our facility inviting and comfortable for visitors and guests? Are we known for extreme positions on most issues? Are we genuinely friendly and concerned for others without coming off toward visitors and guests like a starving man who just found food?)
5. Do we have a systematic, measurable means for evangelistic prayer at both the congregational level and the small group level?
6. Do we have a systematic, measurable means for sharing the gospel with our community (to include follow-up visits, evangelistic blitzes, community based events, targeted outreaches to men, etc.)?
7. Are we working with other evangelical churches to promote evangelism in our community, seeking to establish as much shared outreach as possible, without compromising our distinctives?
8. Are we regularly praying for and financially supporting missionary activity (especially church planting)?
9. Do we have ongoing evangelistic training opportunities for members of our congregation, and is it expected that all will participate?
10. Do we provide relevant evangelistic tools (e.g. gospel tracts, felt-needs tracts (e.g. How to Overcome Anxiety), audio and/or video introductions to our church and the gospel, etc.)?

To be sure, these are not the only questions to consider in cultivating an evangelistic lifestyle as individuals and church but I believe they are the primary ones. I recommend reviewing them regularly as a quick check-up and reminder. If you are a church leader, these questions might serve as a catalyst for home visits with each member. Provide them ahead of time and ask for their thoughtful and honest input, then accumulate the responses and present the information to your church as a basis for congregational action and revitalization. This takes courage and willingness to change but the first time a convert joins your church as a result of your evangelism it will all be worthwhile.