

The Gift of the Evangelist:

Ephesians 4:11

As I travel around the country as a vocational evangelist, the same questions are posed to me time and time again. What exactly is an evangelist? Why should I, a pastor, have an evangelist in my church? What can an evangelist do for me and for my church? What is the life of an evangelist like?

I hope to shed some light on the office of the evangelist, answer some questions about the work of an evangelist, and clear up a few misunderstandings that seem to accompany the term "evangelist". Having served two terms as president of my state conference of evangelist and vice president and president of the national Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelist (COSBE), I have been consumed with numerous issues concerning the full-time vocational evangelists. Consequently, I believe the office of the evangelist is the most misunderstood ministry in the church today.

What is an evangelist? What is the life of an evangelist like?

Let me start by saying that evangelists have many types of personalities and styles of ministry. Each evangelist is unique and wonderfully gifted. The evangelist is a gift to the church as stated in Ephesians 4:11. He is gifted by God to share and proclaim God's message to the world. However, an evangelist does not

magically pull revival or renewal of the church out of his pocket. Billy Graham states that in order to maximize the use of an evangelist for a revival or special event, a church must understand that only 10% of the effectiveness of a meeting comes from proclamation or presentation, 45% comes from advanced preparation (prayer, inviting the lost, promoting the event, etc.), and 45% comes from preservation (follow-up, baptizing, connecting new believers with small group ministries and Bible study). Make no mistake about it, preparation and preservation are key and must be done by the leadership and laity of the church. This requires hard work, effort, time, energy, and money. Results don't just happen. There is both a practical and spiritual aspect for revival. Praying to the Lord of the harvest for the anointing and praying for His presence are critical, as well as the practical element of rolling up the sleeves and doing the hard work of preparation, training counselors, planning and preparing meals, knocking on doors, etc.

I would like to debunk the myth that evangelists are not team players, that they are rebellious loose canons with self serving attitudes. Most of the evangelists I know are hard working, selfless team players that constantly walk on faith, going week in week out to an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people with an unknown outcome. Evangelists are hard working ministers

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of the gospel that are keenly aware of their noble and high calling.

Many times evangelists are thought of as celebrity types with rock-star attitudes, but this is simply not so. They are forced by the nature of the work, as referred to by veteran evangelist, to be on the road, live out of suitcases, and be away from their families for weeks at a time. Evangelists hesitate to share and describe the hardships of the work for fear that they will be viewed as beggars, whiners, or unappreciative people. Understand that the life of the vocational evangelist is not easy. His life is a constant emotional rollercoaster that is filled with many challenges such as last minute cancellations, financial pressures, and travel concerns. The life of the evangelist is living life in constant motion, seeming never to have routine, which explains why many that God called to this work are wide-eyed, daring, resilient, and rugged personalities. The vocational evangelist loves this wonderful and incredible journey to which God calls him. He realizes many souls hang in the balance. I have a personal goal in my ministry that many evangelists share. I pray God would use me to accomplish three things during my time of visitation at a church: (1) to see people saved, (2) to see the church revived, and (3) to see the pastor encouraged. Many times a pastor is under the heavy weight of the ministry and is "tired in the work, but not tired of the work" as my friend Dr. Johnny Hunt would say. Under these exhausting circumstances, the visiting evangelist can come along side that tired and weary pastor and be a sounding board, listening ear, friend, and hopefully a great encouragement to him and his ministry.

Why should I (the pastor) use an evangelist in my church? What can he do for me (and my church)?

The reason a pastor should use an evangelist is simple... to be obedient to God's plan for the church. The gift of the evangelist is appropriately named beside the office of pastor in Ephesians 4:11. The office of the pastor and the office of the evangelist compliment each other and yield much fruit for the Kingdom when they effectively work together according to God's plan. Evangelists are different from pastors. The evangelist is focused on the harvest. Their ministry may include training, sowing, or reaping, but they are all focused on the harvest. A pastor is called to do the work of the evangelist as part of his ministry, but the pastorate, as you well know, is full of many other responsibilities... marrying, burying, counseling, teaching, etc. The evangelist can be used to help the church refocus on the harvest in their community. Often times, pastors ask why should I use an evangelist instead of a denominational leader or pastor friend to do my revival or harvest focused event? The answer is that an evangelist has a special calling and anointing placed on his life to reach people for Christ.

Many times evangelists are perceived as being self-promoters, but there is a difference between a self-promoter and making yourself available. The main reason evangelists have websites, brochures, and other ministry tools is for the benefit of the pastor, to answer his questions concerning the type of ministry, ministry requirements, and to provide an easy means of contact. Evangelist