The making of an evangelist

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Right at the beginning of it all, way back in eternity the evangelistic idea was deep in the heart and mind of God, whose desire was to save the people of the earth.

The working out of that idea was seen when God not only promised to save his created people (see Genesis 3:15) but fulfilled that promise by the sending of His Son - who came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

I have found as an itinerant evangelist, and as a Pastor who did the work of an evangelist before that, that one of the great problems of these days in doing concentrated evangelistic effort is the need to show the church or group the 'why' of evangelism. Other evangelist friends I have have the same problem to face. This should not really be necessary.

This chapter 'The why of it all', seeks to meet objections raised and on a more positive note seeks to show that a concerted effort in evangelism is not only a good idea but an urgent and essential one.

Some of my own heart burdens for concerted outreach is set out below.

•A definition of world evangelism and its rootsœ

The great commission of Matthew 28:18-20 says two great things. To paraphrase it, verse 18 says that on the authority given to the Saviour, both in heaven and on earth, we the disciples are to evangelise all nations of the earth. This does not only apply to our missionary work overseas, but to personal and local church evangelism also - 'As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you'. John 20:21 needs some deep consideration as it would seem to go for beyond the immediate audience of Jesus' day. In obedience to the various commissions, especially as the Head of the Church, Christ, has been given authority to command his Church, we must go and use whatever method under God we find effective.

There are other reasons too for concentrated efforts. Namely, they can build up the Body of Christ, and they also demonstrate that the Church is getting into God's strategy in God's time. This is very important. Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us not to lean to our own understanding, but to do what God says in His word and to trust Him to direct our paths.

God has His strategy for every age. As I wrote this in the 1991/92 period, His main strategy seems to be the breaking up of the countries where the Gospel was forbidden or frowned on for years. But now, God is getting Bibles into all these countries, in what seems to be an unprecedented way. One can only look on, pray, send Bibles, and be amazed at the wonder-working power of the Almighty.

•Why should we evangelise then?œ

1. Because we have been set an example by Jesus who was an evangelist, seeking to save the lost.
2. Because it is the plan and strategy of God.

3. Because it is God at work building His church in His own way, and in opposition to the onslaught of evil every day.

Because it is God's method of building the church with everything in its correct order. The New Testament order of the book shows clearly the proper method of outreach.

1. The Gospels = tracts on the Saviour, salvation and the way to be saved.

2. The Acts = How we should start acting when we are saved.

3. The Epistles = Tracts which tell us how to behave when we have become Christians.

4. The Pastoral Epistles show us the structure of Church leadership.

5. The Book of Revelation tells of the future hope, judgment and other matters.

Too often the order is 3, 1, 2, 4, 5 and people are taught as though they are Christian, but have not experienced the 'new birth'. I'm sure that God guided the Christians responsible for setting up the New Testament to place the books in the order numbers 1-5. It seems necessary at this point to consider the question.

• What type of special effort should a church have?

The short answer is any type that is Spirit directed and works for the furthering of God's strategy.

Some people object to special efforts but I like evangelist D.L. Moody's answer to the objection of one man who said to Moody, 'Mr Moody, I don't like the way you are doing your evangelism'. D.L. Moody replied, 'I like the way I'm doing it better than the way you are not doing it'.

Special efforts are not necessarily a sign that a church is not doing its job. God placed in the church universal evangelists whom He has called to use their gifts in order to help the local church do its outreach. Certainly it is not an opposition group, nor should the Pastor feel threatened.

Ephesians 4:11-12 says 'And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ'. This puts the whole matter of leadership and the reason for varying ministry in perspective.

The special effort gives the local church members and adherents the opportunity to invite others along with some assurance that there is a possibility that they will come to one or more of the meetings. If one of those invited becomes a Christian, then the one who brought them is warmed in heart, and blessed by seeing a new person coming into the flock of God, and feeling that they had a part.
There are a number of objections used against the special efforts, especially against mass crusade evangelism, when crowds gather to hear the Gospel.

Frankly, I fail to see what difference it makes if the crowd is 10; 100; 1,000; 10,000; 100,000 - provided the meetings are Bible-based and Spirit-controlled, and well organised and prayed over.

Dr Billy Graham, at the end of 1991, using satellite technique was giving the Gospel to an estimated 70,000,000 per night. Even if he only warned them, it was a marvellous thing to do.

Some of the objections used are not valid either:

1. The church can do its own work. This is wrong both statistically and biblically. Almost without exception, any careful statistical survey reflecting church growth will going back to the value of times of special outreach of one kind or another. For example, of a group of 10 people who were full-time workers, six had been converted through crusades and four through the local church. Of another group of nine, there were eight converted in special outreach rallies, including three ministers and one deaconess. The writer of this article and his wife were both converted through special evangelistic outreach. The associate evangelist of the Reg Jarrott Evangelistic Association also came to Christ in this way.

Biblically, it cannot be substantiated that the church can do all of its own evangelising alone. The Acts of the Apostles shows this. There are evangelists gifted by the Holy Spirit who are to help the church (Ephesians 4:11). There was also Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8) and others in the early church.

A Tasmanian pastor wrote (speaking of blessings received), 'It seems that as a result of the number of baptisms and additions to membership that followed, together with quite a number who are preparing at the present time, we will experience the largest numerical growth in the history of this church. Praise the Lord! Evangelism pays if a Church gets busy and prays (from a church report). 'We have 87 members and there were 91 first time decisions and 150 other responses.

They must have worked hard to get so many people to respond. 1. So after a five night crusade in an Indonesian church, both the building and the church membership doubled in size. After three months counselling the writer was sent a photo album full of pictures of baptisms from front to back. These were mainly Moslems.

2. It costs too much.

(a) The writer once made a survey of the cost of the large crusade. Costing $140,000. To get the same results in one denomination alone it cost something like $8,200,000, and this over a very long period of time.

A local church crusade may cost a few hundred dollars but how much does it cost to win some people on the normal program, when totalling up the money spent in the Sunday school, youth groups, services and other activities?
Someone pointed out that it worked out at something like $5.50 per person responding in the year 1979 through the outreach work of the Reg. Jarrott Evangelistic Association.

3. It is wrong to appeal to fear as some evangelists do. This is not thought to be invalid in the everyday world. 'Fear' is appealed to when we say to a child, 'Don't go near that fire or that river'. Authorities appeal to fear as a motive in speaking against lung cancer in advertisements, or in road safety films. God appeals to fear, 'In the day ye eat of it ye will die', etc.

Besides, in evangelism there are appeals to emotions other than fear and also to the mind and will.

4. It is wrong to expect people to make decisions openly. The marriage ceremony is an open declaration of love and the wearing of a soldier's uniform is an open declaration of allegiance. Jesus was baptised openly as a witness, as were others. Our love and allegiance to God demands openness. William James the psychologist said, 'Impression without expression leads to depression'.

5. Too much pressure is used to make a decision 'on the spot'. A salesman, after presenting an argument, seeks an 'on the spot' decision, particularly if not able to come back again.

The fisherman who casts a line or net expects to draw in a fish that day. We have to catch 'fish' when they are there.

The farmer has a day, an hour, a moment, when he reaps. Because Jesus said the Harvest is standing now - this is the time to reap. Jesus Himself said (on the spot), 'Come, follow me'.

6. The converts don't last. It's true some don't, but many do, and those who don't may have been awakened but not converted.

In any case, not all of Jesus' followers kept going on and Paul had 'those in Asia who forsook him and fled'. On the other hand, across the years, there is a large drop-out in churches, Sunday schools, youth groups, women's meetings, etc. Jesus warned in the parable of the sower of the four different forms of response (Matthew 13:1-23). It needs to be pointed out that Peter and the others had 3,000 responses but Paul preached in the synagogue in Thessalonica and the reaction was violent, with no visible response for Christ. On Mars Hill, only a few believed even though there was both interest and curiosity evidenced. Responses can be varied, and this pattern has applied across the centuries. Besides, preaching of this kind is both to warn and/or to win.

7. 'Why do we need 'outsiders'? Our church can do its own job.' Of course, in the Holy Spirit's view the evangelist is not an 'outsider' but a servant of many churches. He and the Pastor are not working in opposition, but together as a team in order to reap the harvest there as a result of the church's faithful sowing.

Please note that true evangelists usually do not call those who have made decisions 'converts'. They are 'inquirers' who have been awakened by the Spirit of God and need careful counselling, personal follow-up by church members, needing to experience church warmth and a caring spirit. They also need to grow on Bible based messages, and be given a part to
play in the church program, even if it is only some small part. Actually, there are no 'small tasks' in the Master's plan - working for God, wherever, is a great task, even though it is a simple duty.

These inquirers need to know:

(a) How to pray.
(b) How to read the Bible.
(c) How to grow into a mature Christian.
(d) How to witness.
(e) How to choose some suitable books to help in this growth of Bible study and witnessing, etc.

It is a good idea to have a mature Christian to work alongside the inquirer to help him or her over the rough places, and to help them become true converts for Christ.

The evangelist in a crusade helps a person towards spiritual birth. The church is the post-natal care expert.

Please note also: There are some people who come out to the front a number of times, and these are almost 'written off' as just emotionalists. This may not be so. I have been given to understand that one of the leaders of the Salvation Army came to the 'penitent form' 49 times and in the fiftieth time was soundly converted to Christ. Each time he was sincere as he came but somehow could not find the answer to his need.

Sometimes it is like this. Either because we don't understand even though we have been told and we lack assurance or perhaps in some instances the counselling has not been effective in other ways. These all need our prayer and kind and spiritual understanding.

• God's blue-print for soul winning

Any study of evangelism should always be based on the Bible, for here its roots are found.

1. The Bible makes evangelism one of the Church's major tasks.

(a) Jesus was an evangelist (Luke 19:10).
(b) The disciples were evangelists (Matthew 4:19). Andrew brought Peter (John 1:42).
(c) Wise people win souls (Proverbs 11:30).
(d) Wise people shine brightly (Daniel 12:3).
(e) True witnesses are deliverers (Proverbs 14:25).

2. The need of a corrective motive.

Also: 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because he has anointed me to preaching good tidings ...'.
(b) The servant's attitude should be like the Master's.

3. There are 'orders' of evangelists.

(a) The evangelists of Ephesians 4:11.
(b) Pastor evangelists of 2 Timothy 4:5.
4. The message of evangelism.
   (a) It is based on great historical facts (1 Corinthians 15:1-14).
   (b) Its priority is set out by Jesus (Matthew 28:19,20).

5. A matter of great urgency and passionate love.
   (a) Paul ceased not to warn and weep (Acts 20:31).
   (b) We cannot 'bless' until we 'bleed' (Romans 9:1-3). Why the concern? They are lost (Luke 15); under wrath of God (John 3:36); bound for hell (Matthew 13:49,50). See also 1 John 5:11-12).

6. There is a command to evangelists.
   (a) We need to 'go' to experience the 'lo' (Matthew 28:19-20).
   (b) We need to go to every creature (Mark 16:15).
   (c) We need to be empowered (Luke 24:46-49).
   (d) We need to have a 'world vision' (Acts 1:8).
   (e) We are commissioned in like manner as Jesus was (John 20:21; John 17:18).

7. Follow-up is essential to solid evangelism.

Not only are the Epistles and other books of the New Testament 'follow-up' material but Jesus makes it clear (John 21:15-17):
   (a) Feed (give food to) My lambs.
   (b) Feed (= shepherd) My sheep.
   (c) Feed (= give food to) My sheep.

Jesus had men with Him to prepare them. We need a spiritual 'father and son', 'mother and daughter' movement.

• Checklist (for private use)œ

1. Am I an evangelist? One of the types in the 'orders' of evangelism set out above. If not, what is stopping me?
2. Have I taken it to the Lord in prayer?
3. Am I prepared to face up to my responsibility of being a prayerful, Spirit-filled, compassionate, obedient evangelist?

If I love Christ I will do as He says. We need to decide God helping me, to will and to do of His good pleasure (see Philippians 2:13).

• Guidelines for period of special meetingsœ

In order to assist you to get the best out of the period it is essential to take the following steps:

1. Aim for the glory of God.

2. Seek for a prayerful, God-directed program.
3. (a) Seek to do the widest possible outreach to families and youth, civic leaders, community leaders and general community. Seek to penetrate into the whole district for Christ. Motto: 'Christ for our district' or, 'Our district for Christ' might be an encouragement to all. (b) Seek to reach the lost. Contact all members and groups. Contact adherents, fringe people, etc.

It is a golden opportunity to reach out widely.

4. Aim to make the meeting(s) as widely known as possible in order to reach in some depth the district church's responsibilities for witnessing.

(a) By free services in newspapers, radio spots, TV, etc.
(b) By paid advertisements and announcements in the above.

5. Have concentrated special prayer daily in the homes (both personally and in family worship) and, if possible, in the various groups of the church itself. Don't forget all the Sunday school and youth groups.

6. Make the meetings vital, interesting and powerful using dedicated talent, music, recitation, testimony, bright singing (perhaps slides or films). Perhaps use a special sheet or song book. A good song leader is essential (some talent may have to be borrowed).

7. Have counsellors and counselling materials. Decide what materials are best for you!

8. It is essential to have a careful, follow-up program of some kind. The New Testament letters underline the importance. They are really follow-up materials over a period of time in order to establish the convert.

9. Special, one minute prayer spots, in all services and groups (after having someone give prayer points). Bathe it all in prayer.

It has been said that when holding a crusade:

(a) The evangelist is the specialist doctor (obstetrician) bringing the baby to birth. 
(b) The Pastor is the specialist house doctor (paediatrician) to head up the care team. 
(c) The nurses are the follow-up team. 
(d) The relatives are the church people (and physical relatives). 
(e) The friends are the Christians who are not necessarily members.

• The task: To build up 'the baby' to reach maturity!

Special outreach meetings which have proven successful have been:

Crusade meetings for a week or more; mini crusade meetings for a weekend; coffee meetings of an evangelistic nature; a ladies luncheon; men's dinners; adults luncheon or dinners.

Note: These and other ideas will be seen in Section C, 'The Practice of Evangelism' in this book.
Don't forget to pray over these ideas in this chapter, and apply to your own life program as God guides you. There are many exhortations and ideas in this chapter which could help you in your Christian life, so take time over it all, and ask God to work out His program in and through you. God bless you!