

Evangelism and the Missional Church
by Bob Young
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A survey of preachers who have left the ministry revealed an interesting and generally “out of sight” factor. When ministers were asked to identify all of the factors involved in their decision to leave ministry (as opposed to choosing only one factor, or putting listed items in order), *almost 50% mentioned the inability to do in ministry the thing that had caused them to want to be a minister in the first place—reach out with the gospel of Jesus*. Ministers, church leaders, and members want to be part of evangelistic congregations. Preachers want to be evangelistic preachers. Yet evangelism is in big trouble in many churches. Perhaps we should ask “Why?”

We have made evangelism an action without soul. We have disconnected evangelism from Christian identity. We have defined evangelism by methods and mechanics. We have eliminated heart, relationships, and love. We have programmed evangelism. We implement new evangelistic methods because they worked in XYZ church. We are constantly in search of a new tool, gizmo, or gadget. We hire our evangelism done—energetic, enterprising evangelists. If you don’t believe that, just read the “Minister Wanted” ads in major Christian publications. We start with high emotion and expectation, excitement mounts. We are finally going to be evangelistic! But the effort fades, grinds to a halt. We start again. We repeat the process. Eventually, discouragement and disillusion set in.

What is the solution? When we decide God is serious about inviting us to participate with him in his purpose and his mission, when we decide that the mission of the church is defined by the mission of God, when we hear the mandate to be the people of God wherever we go, when we recover our sense of “sent-ness”, we will be able to participate in what God is doing in our world. The beginning point is in who we are, our identity. We must BE before we DO. We must decentralize the focus, so that evangelism is about bringing people to God more than about bringing people to the building.

Al Maxey recently reminded me of an editorial by Jack Carter which appeared in the “Rocky Mountain Christian” in 1986. The title, “Don’t Evangelize!” caught attention, even caused some stir. Carter argued that the first priority of disciples is spiritual growth and maturity, and that sharing the good news that causes our excitement logically follows. Unless we first come to know Jesus and the joy of Jesus within us, unless we first come to understand the love and purpose of God, we will not be truly evangelistic. How can we share what we do not have?

We long for the kind of results we read about in the New Testament, but we fail to understand the reason for those results. “So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily” (Acts 16:5). God causes growth (1 Cor. 3:7). When believers live by faith, serving as examples of devoted disciples and participating with God in his mission in this world, dynamic and powerful things happen, not by human power but by God’s power.

At the heart of becoming missional is that we are becoming like Jesus. The key to growth is not more evangelism programs, but an attitude and participation in the purpose of God. When I am what I am called to be, I do what God enables me to do! It is for this reason that I have been sent!