

We're Not All Evangelists

READING
Matthew 28
Romans 12
1 Corinthians 12
Ephesians 4

The attractional church model puts a lot of pressure on everyone to become evangelists and feeds our guilt if we're not one.

There seems to be a trend among Western churches to convince us that we all need to become evangelists.

That really annoys me for two reasons.

#1 because I'm not an evangelist and I don't want to become one. (Please read below before you disown me).

#2 because that is not God's biblical model for the church. And this modern push seems to me to be coming from a wrong model of church.

We are not all evangelists.
And we're not supposed to be.

For sure, the church should be missional. For sure, as a church, we should be focused on evangelism.
But that is very different to us **all** becoming evangelists.

Very few evangelists are good at helping out with practical things, like the kitchen, or with building maintenance.

Very few evangelists are good at counselling Christians who are struggling with illness or suffering or sin.

Very few evangelists are good teachers of deep spiritual truth.

I haven't seen many evangelists who are great intercessors, but they do seem good at praying for non-Christians.

And somehow, they always seem to know exactly what to say to each individual to reach their heart with the message of Yeshua. They know when to be bold, when to wait, when to question... it's an amazing thing to watch a gifted evangelist at work.

If you want to turn someone from being a non-Christian into being a Christian, then an evangelist is perfect for the job.

But Yeshua didn't say, "Go and make believers of all nations...". He said, "Go and make disciples".

After they become Christians, they don't need evangelists any more.
Then they need teachers, pastors, helpers, counsellors, healers, administrators, ... there are whole lists like this in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.

The church is a body and we are its parts. And just like a body we are all different, we all have different gifts, but we all work together to build each other up and prepare each other for doing God's work.

In their great little book "Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness", Cook and Baldwin have a chapter about two church models.

They call the first model "church as a field". It's what is currently termed "attractional". It assumes that the work of God is done on the church premises, (the field), and so what is required is that non-Christians are attracted to the church so they will come to us and then they can then be saved.

In this model they build big churches in prominent places. They have professional standard music teams. They broadcast their services on TV and podcast. They have big budgets and they do a lot of PR and marketing of their church in the community. What this model needs is evangelists. It's all about getting them saved once they're in the door. But once it's up and rolling, the evangelists can't keep up with the huge number of people coming in.

I think we also realised that everyone's story about how they became a Christian is different, so evangelism usually works better if its individually tailored rather than mass marketed to a crowd, (although really gifted evangelists seem to be able to "convert" large numbers of people with one message). But the successful attractional church needs more and more evangelists.

I think this is where the push is coming from. They say that everyone is valued, but I think it's pretty clear that in this model the evangelists are valued more than others. And I also think that this model reinforces the dichotomy between the "professionals" who stand at the front and do all the work for God, and the "attenders" who just come along and watch every week.

Cook and Baldwin call their second model "church as a force". It's what we currently term "missional". It assumes that the work of God is done everywhere. It's about us going to where the non-Christians are and exposing them to God in some way so he works in them to be saved.

This model isn't about buildings, or marketing, or "perceived success". It's all about building up new Christians, training and equipping them, and then releasing them to be and do who they are for God.

Some can be evangelists, but we need some to be teachers. Some to be pastors. Some to be helpers. Etc...

The church becomes a living organism of Christians working together, supporting and encouraging each other as we reach the lost together.

On the outside both models seem to be focused on evangelism and the gospel. But they are very different on the inside. One is controlled and focused on numbers, (because it has to keep growing to remain attractive and financially viable). The other feels "out of control", (but really, it's just out of our control), and is focused on people and their needs, and how we can build them up for serving God. In the second model, everyone is valued, everyone is accepted. There are no heroes. There are very few professionals, and even more importantly, there are very few "attenders" because everyone becomes involved. Everyone has a role to play. Everyone is "in ministry" to the extent that they have grown into it.

And their meetings are different.

One model "does" church in a way that attracts non-Christians. They call it "seeker friendly". The sermons are almost always gospel messages. They are sweet and nice and not confrontational.

But church is for Christians. (By definition – church is the body of believers. A non-Christian cannot be part of a church). Why have we made it for non-Christians? And how are the Christians going to grow if they are fed the milk of the gospel over and over every week?

The other model does church in a way that builds up the Christians. It's about depth. The sermons are challenging and sometimes even uncomfortable. But they help us grow. Non-Christians are welcome, but the meeting is not about them, and it's not specifically for them.

I love evangelists. But I'm not one, and I'm very happy to stay that way. In over 40 years of being a Christian I've only helped a couple of people become Christians. But I fully believe that I have done the work God intended for me.

The attractional church model puts a lot of pressure on everyone to become evangelists and feeds our guilt if we're not one.

But that model is flawed in many ways, and the missional, "body of Christ" model will liberate us to be who we are meant to be in Yeshua, and it will transform the church back into the real "hands and feet of Christ" that it was when it began 2,000 years ago.