

President's Convocation
Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention
Dr. Jeff Iorg, President
August 29, 2019

Life Depends on It

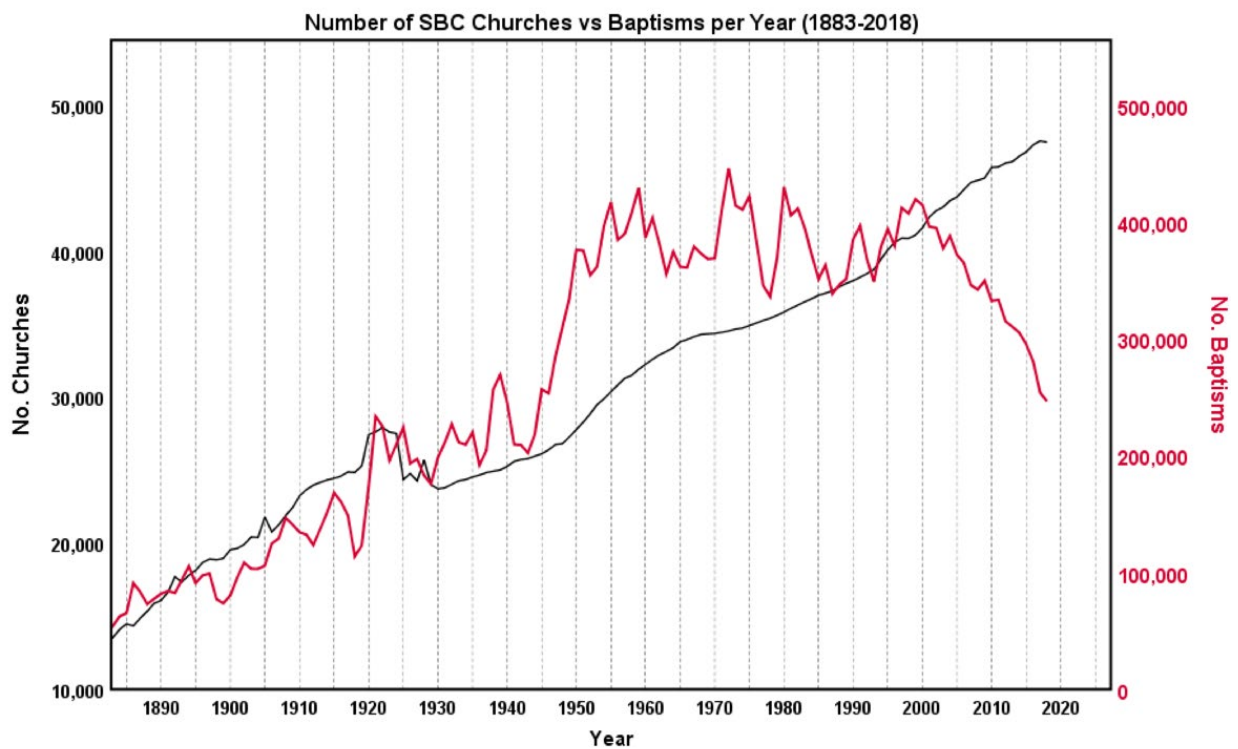
As we begin my 16th year as President, it falls to me once again to launch another academic year by calling us to fulfill our mission - shaping leaders who advance God's kingdom around the world. The gravity of this opportunity calls for careful preparation and presentation – hence, my delivery from a manuscript which will be available for those who may find it helpful.

In many ways, Southern Baptists are stronger than at any time in our history. For example, we have record enrollment across our six seminary system. Our efforts over the past decades have produced the most well-educated clergy in Christian history. Our six seminaries now have the largest endowments and most highly-credentialed faculty in their histories, along with unrivaled global delivery systems.

Our Southern Baptist mission efforts are also extensive and effective. Despite the force reduction a few years ago, we still have more than 3,600 international missionaries and are once again appointing more to new positions around the world. Our domestic missions program includes planting about 1,000 new churches annually, as well as operating various need meeting ministries like one of the largest disaster relief networks in the United States. We own the largest Christian publishing house and the largest minister's retirement program in the world. Our voice in public affairs is strong and, with rare exceptions, our denominational administration models competence and integrity. We have a new generation of leaders – five new SBC entity Presidents this year – who represent the promise of future progress.

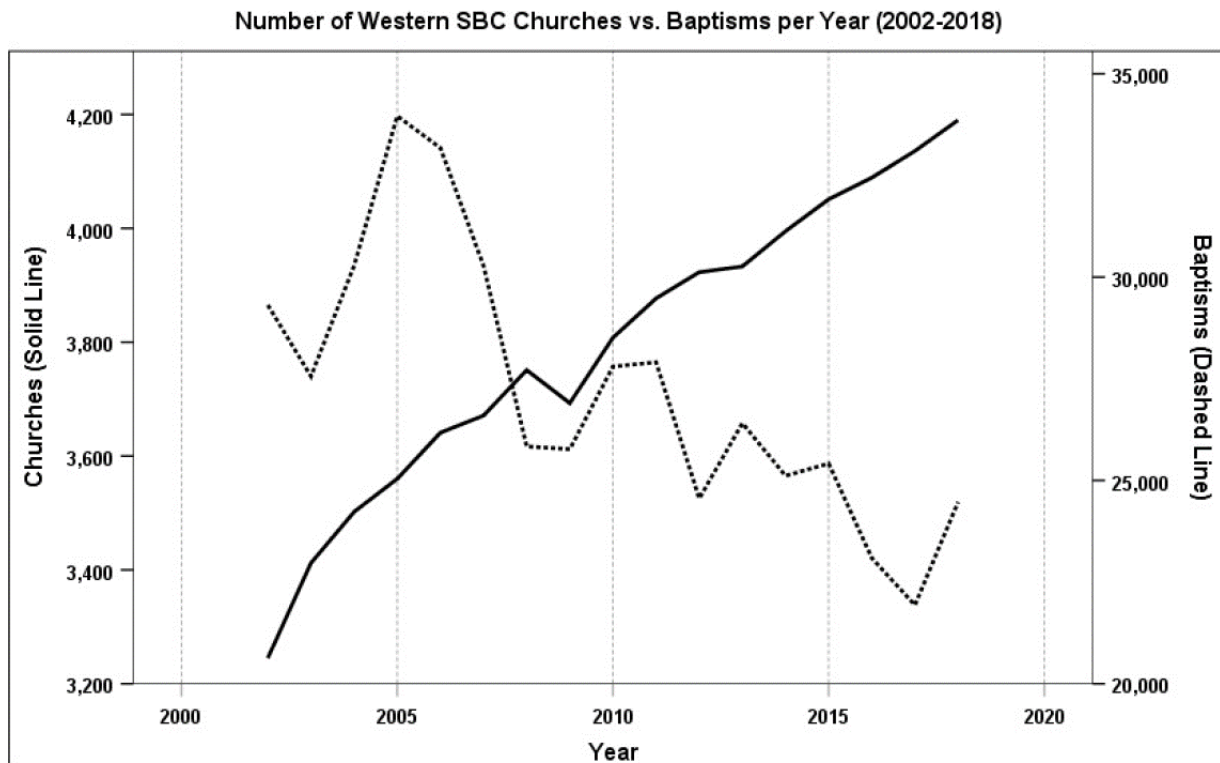
In addition, state conventions, associations, and about 48,000 churches are doing more ministry than can be quantified this side of heaven. All things considered, we celebrate many positive aspects of Southern Baptist life today. Yet, in the midst of these successes, there is a glaring problem which – unless corrected – is a certain-predictor of the coming closure of both churches and denominational entities and, ultimately, the demise of the movement called Southern Baptists. In short, our life depends on addressing this issue.

The problem is this: Southern Baptists have a declining effectiveness in sharing the gospel with non-Christians and leading them to profess faith in Jesus. Since baptism is the first act of public obedience for a new believer, baptismal rates are one important measure of evangelistic effectiveness. By that key indicator, our effectiveness in leading people to faith in Jesus is in steep decline.



Graph by Dr. Bill Day, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (May, 2019), Data: ACP of the SBC

As this graph indicates, our baptismal rate is lower than at any time since the 1940s. This is in spite of having more than twice as many churches in our denomination. Besides these aggregate numbers, in 2017 just over 30% of SBC churches did not record a single baptism – not even one. In that same year, 50% of SBC churches baptized 2 people or fewer. And, 82% of churches had fewer than 10 baptisms in 2017 – less than one per month.



A second graph shows the baptism trends in the 11 western states served most directly by Gateway are not really much different. Baptismal data – nationally and regionally - indicates we have a declining effectiveness in sharing the gospel with non-Christians and leading them to publicly profess faith in Jesus.

Another major study supports this conclusion. The book, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, reports extensive survey results about the religious practices of 2,500 active Evangelical church members – including Southern Baptists. Related to personal evangelism, 57% reported they had

not attempted share the gospel in the previous six months. Another 14% reported one attempt in six months. That means, more than 70% shared the gospel one or fewer times in the previous six months. One reason we are baptizing fewer people is we are not sharing the gospel very often in the first place.

How has this happened? What can be done about? And why does it matter? Let's consider the last question first and then address the other two. Before we do that, let me clear up one misconception about this presentation. My emphasis on personal evangelism may be mistakenly heard as advocating evangelism as the only ministry a church should do. That's not my position – not at all. A church must do many more things than evangelism. A church must maintain a robust worship ministry, sound teaching ministry, and provide interpersonal and practical ministry to both its members and its community. Evangelism is not the only ministry of the church. But, it is my contention, it is the priority ministry. That does not mean it is the only thing a church – or any individual believer – must do. But it does mean it is the first thing, the most important thing, the priority thing that must be done. Let me illustrate.

Suppose you are a first grade teacher. Your priority – your most important job is teaching first graders how to read. During the school year, you were a model teacher in many ways. You had a well-organized classroom, always responded quickly to parental concerns, worked cooperatively on faculty projects to help the entire school, helped your pupils develop social skills, and even baked great cupcakes for class parties. But, at the end of the year, suppose no one in your class could read. Your teaching career might be over. The combined weight of all the other good things cannot make up for the failure at your first priority – teaching reading.

This is how I see Southern Baptist life today. We are doing so many things well. We are giving money, sending missionaries, standing up for moral causes, demanding social justice,

writing and printing quality materials, caring for retirees, and granting record numbers of seminary degrees. We are doing so many things well. But, like an unfocused teacher, we are failing in our priority assignment. We are not sharing the gospel effectively and leading people to profess faith in Jesus.

Now, let's answer the first of the three questions – why is this so important? – with a biblical reason and a practical reason.

Why personal evangelism matters

Several doctrinal convictions underscore why personal evangelism is important. We believe in the priesthood of believers (every believer is capable of ministry), in organic church functions (every member is responsible for ministry), and personal accountability to the commissions of Jesus (repeated in all four gospels and Acts). Most Baptists agree – on some level - personal evangelism is important. But what about my contention it is our priority responsibility?

Paul taught the priority of evangelism succinctly when he told the Corinthians, “Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel For I passed on to you **as most important** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day....” (1 Cor. 15:1, 3 - CSB). Note the phrase “as most important” which the ESV translates as “of first importance.” Paul told the Corinthians his priority was sharing the gospel. Communicating the gospel to people is still “most important” and “of first importance” for us today. This priority is also underscored and illustrated by the commission passages spoken by Jesus, the example of church leaders in Acts, and instructional passages like 2 Cor. 5:20, “We plead on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.”

Besides these biblical directives, there is also a practical reason why communicating the gospel is so important. Churches die if they do not reproduce. Just like parents without progeny, churches that do not reach new converts die. Every church is just one generation from extinction. Unfortunately, this is a present reality; not a sociological scare tactic. California, for example, is littered with the dying remnants of Southern Baptist churches that were vibrant in the 1960s through the 1980s. They are closing as the previous generation enters heaven and no new believers take their place.

Personal evangelism is a biblical and practical priority. Communicating the gospel and leading people to Jesus is of first importance. Yet, despite the urgency of this matter, we still have a declining effectiveness in sharing the gospel with non-Christians and leading them to faith in Jesus. Why? How did this happen?

Factors contributing to a decline in personal evangelism

As we search for answers, my message may disappoint you because of this observation: There is no single reason for the decline in personal evangelism by Southern Baptists. To claim otherwise ignores the complexity of our denomination and the variety of perspectives among SBC churches. Simplistic solutions are not helpful. So, rather than propose a single cause, let me outline ten factors contributing to the problem followed by a series of steps forward.

Before doing so, let me also offer a disclaimer. For the most part, the reasons for the decline in evangelistic effectiveness are rooted in positive aspects of church or denominational life. The factors undermining personal evangelism have often resulted from a positive theological conviction, ministerial practice, or leadership perspective taken to an extreme or applied in an unbalanced way. As you will hear in last part of my presentation, my correctives

are not based on abandoning current beliefs or practices – but on bringing them into better balance and putting them in line behind the priority of sharing the gospel.

Here then are ten factors which undermine personal evangelism and need correction – urgent and immediate correction – to renew our effectiveness in sharing the gospel with non-Christians and leading them to faith in Jesus.

1. Truncated definitions of discipleship

There is a renewed emphasis today on “making disciples” as the defining work of the church. Prioritizing discipleship, for advocates of this renewal, usually means developing serious Bible-teaching and personal mentoring programs to produce theological depth among believers. This sounds good, but it rests on a truncated (and therefore faulty) definition of discipleship which – if successfully fulfilled – will result in the death of every local church. This flawed definition is “discipleship is turning weaker Christians into stronger Christians.” That is not biblical discipleship.

Discipleship is better defined as “turning non-Christians into growing Christians.” Biblical discipleship starts with leading a person to faith in Jesus. Making disciples begins with evangelism. If you prefer the previous definition, consider the logical results.

Suppose you become the pastor of a 100-member church. You train every one of them to be a “super-Christian.” You succeed spectacularly! What happens in 50 years? All your members go to heaven and your church closes. That’s the result of defining “making disciples” as “turning weaker Christians into stronger Christians.” While teaching ministries in the church are vital, they must rest on the foundation of personal evangelism which provides an ever-present source of new believers who can be shaped into growing Christians.

2. Preoccupation with theological debate

Another issue related to the teaching ministry of the church is our current preoccupation with theological debate about the gospel. We are spending countless hours reading books, going to conferences, reading and writing blogs, gathering in coffee shops, and otherwise discussing gospel minutiae and nuances. Yes, sound theology matters! But beyond striving for “sound theology,” we are determined to argue, debate, confront, criticize, and separate from believers who – while they agree with the broad-stroke fundamentals of our position – do not agree with the fine-point brush work we use to finish the painting.

We mistakenly think our primary mission is defining and defending the gospel. That apologetic task is important - when directed toward the proper audience. We must define and defend the gospel against heretics who deny it – not against fellow believers who understand some aspect of it differently than us. We should debate the “fine brush work” of theology in doctoral classrooms and academic colloquia, but not allow those discussions to thwart missional unity around doctrinal essentials.

Apologetics supports evangelism, no doubt. But our message must be more about declaring the gospel than defending it. Despite our differences, most Southern Baptists believe enough “gospel orthodoxy” to be saved and tell another person how to be saved. What we believe – in common - is sufficient for the salvation of unbelievers. Genuine Christianity is establishing a relationship with God, not believing facts about him. Christianity is about establishing a relationship, not adopting religious theories.

This is not a new challenge. Charles Spurgeon, in an 1886 sermon entitled “Christ and His Co-Workers” said, “Suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they had to defend a lion, full-grown king of beasts! There he is in the cage, and here come all the

soldiers of the army to fight for him. Well, I should suggest...that they should kindly stand back, and open the door, and let the lion out! I believe that would be the best way of defending him, for he would take care of himself; and the best 'apology' for the gospel is to let the gospel out.”

3. Theological extremes that undermine evangelism

While too much time devoted to arguing theology is problematic, some of the positions being advocated also undermine evangelism. Let me mention two examples. The first is understanding the doctrine of election in a way that inhibits responsibility for sharing the gospel and persuading people to receive the gospel. The Bible makes two paradoxical statements. First, salvation is entirely by God’s grace and extends only to those he chooses. Second, salvation occurs only when a person repents of sin, places faith in Jesus, and receives God’s grace. Some bridge this paradox by settling on one statement and allowing it to define the other. The better response is to find orthodoxy in the tension between these statements.

One friend put it this way. “God only saves the elect, but since I have no idea who they are, my job is share the gospel with everyone and let God sort it out.” Another friend, Dr. Danny Akin wrote, “We dare not be seduced into living in a theological ghetto that may espouse a nice, neat doctrinal system, but that does so at the expense of a wholesome and comprehensive theology.” And then he added, “Any theology that does not result in a ‘hot heart’ for the souls of lost persons is a theology not worth having.” While affirming doctrinal convictions is vital, keeping them in balance is essential to biblical orthodoxy and spiritual vitality.

The second doctrinal concern is practical universalism that grows out of an over-emphasis on God’s love. God is loving, but he is also holy. God loves every person, but he also holds every person accountable for their sin. Again, these realities – love and holiness – must be

held in dynamic tension. Emphasizing God's holiness without love leads to legalism.

Embracing God's love without holiness leads to universalism – meaning God loves us all, accepts us as we are, and will overlook any deficiencies to welcome us to heaven.

God loves us but demands we acknowledge and repent from our sin. Delivering this message is at the heart of personal evangelism. The resulting interpersonal tension is a reason some believers do not share their faith. They would rather affirm God's love for everyone and hope for an eternal best than engage in a potentially stressful conversation about sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. Practical universalism resulting from an out-of-balance understanding of God's love undermines personal evangelism.

4. Aversion to persuasion on religious issues

Considering these two theological positions leads us to another factor undermining gospel sharing: an aversion to persuasion as part of personal evangelism. Paul wrote these phrases describing his evangelistic efforts – “since we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade people...the love of Christ compels us...we plead on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:11, 14, 20). God's love compels us to plead persuasively with unbelievers to receive the gospel.

An aversion to persuasion is rooted in both cultural proclivities and legitimate concerns. Our culture values tolerance, now defined as validating all opinions and behaviors equally. Not doing this leads to being labeled intolerant – one of the worst shaming-words in our current vocabulary. Our culture also values individualism, now defined as laissez-faire acceptance of whoever a person claims to be or however they choose to define themselves. Both of these cultural values mitigate against persuasion.

An aversion to persuasion also emerges from a legitimate concern. A few Christian leaders are charlatans, more concerned about padding statistics and amassing wealth than genuine spiritual commitments. They use manipulation and emotionalism to get results. While these are occasional problems, they are not common among Southern Baptists. Yet, the abuses of a few – salaciously reported - have cowed the rest of us into avoiding persuasion lest we be lumped in with these hucksters.

Personal evangelism cannot be abandoned because of cultural pressures about tolerance and individualism. Likewise, we cannot allow deceptive practices by some Christians to dampen our enthusiasm or lessen our passion. We are compelled by love to plead with unbelievers about their salvation. With right motives and appropriate means, we can share the gospel in persuasive ways without compromising its legitimacy.

5. Lack of commitment to training personal evangelists

Three decades ago, many Southern Baptist churches had an organized program (supported by denominational resources) to train people as personal evangelists. Churches with those programs are rare today. The failure to sustain evangelism training is another reason for our declining effectiveness in sharing the gospel.

As a young pastor, my evangelism strategy was two-fold: personally witness to as many people as possible and preach harsh sermons “motivating” church members to share the gospel. After one particularly abusive sermon, Keith confronted me. He was one of my best church members and supportive friends, so his words stung deeply. Keith said, “Don’t ever do that to me again. Don’t preach at me about something you have never trained me to do.”

After a few days of reflection, I revised my strategy. Over the next few months, I implemented one of the personal evangelism training programs supported by the SBC. It was a 13-week process that involved memorizing Scriptures and a gospel presentation, learning pertinent illustrations, role playing, and weekly evangelistic visits. Keith and another member, Tammy, were my first trainees. After the first semester, all three of us recruited two people to train the following semester. And so it went for the next three years.

In February 1989, I was away from the church taking doctoral seminars. I flew home each Saturday, preached on Sunday, and flew back to seminary on Monday morning. On the four Sundays in February 1989, our church had 22 adults present themselves for baptism. All of them had been led to faith in Jesus by a church member who had completed the training program. None by me. God showed me trained people could reach more people when I was out of town than I could reach by trying to do it all on my own. By the way, Keith is here this morning. Dr. Keith Goeking is now Chairman of our Board of Trustees.

We will not invigorate personal evangelism by just preaching more about it or cajoling people to do better. Except in rare cases, most Christians do what they have been trained to do. To create more personal evangelists, we must re-establish church-based evangelism training programs.

6. Lack of public opportunities to profess faith

In the previous section, I used the phrase “present themselves for baptism” which likely puzzled some of you. In a previous generation, it was unthinkable a Baptist church would end a worship service without a public call for people to profess faith in Jesus and request baptism. This is no longer standard operating procedure for many Southern Baptist churches. It has

become so problematic, SBC leaders have designated September 8, 2019 as Baptism Sunday to once again prioritize baptism. Who would have ever imagined a denomination with Baptist in its name would need to be reminded to emphasize baptism?

Since congregational worship is a public event, it might not seem directly connected to personal evangelism. But it is, for multiple reasons. Most people who make public decisions in worship services do so after an extended period of private reflection and spiritual consideration. Public calls to profess faith in Jesus are the culminating moment of weeks, months, even years of personal work by believers. The weekly call for people to profess faith in Jesus reminds believers of their responsibility to share the gospel. It also reinforces for unbelievers the message they have heard – personally – from a Christian friend or family member. The absence of this opportunity is, regrettably, a sign of surrender for many churches. Lack of response during public invitations shames them, so they have stopped extending a public invitation. Lack of response should have the opposite effect. It should motivate us to prioritize evangelism until we once again experience visible fruit from our efforts.

7. Overdependence on attraction models of evangelism

In contrast to the decline in public invitations to receive the gospel, some churches have minimized personal evangelism by placing too much emphasis on attractional evangelism models. These approaches have reduced the outreach responsibility of church members to “invite your friend to a church service” or “bring your friend to a ministry event.” The subtle message from leaders is “you get them here; we’ll take it from there.”

While bringing people to Christian events is beneficial, the “come and hear” approach to reaching people is inadequate. News flash: most Christian events are not that attractive to

unbelievers. But you might say, “Oh you just don’t know our church. We have a fabulous worship service that everyone wants to attend.” Really? Drive around on Sunday morning and see the thousands of people on soccer fields, at the malls, going to the mountains or beaches, or gathering to watch the NFL with their friends. Most non-Christians are not attracted to anything we are doing. If they are going to hear the gospel, we are going to have to go where they are and share it with them.

This is not revolutionary news! The most effective gospel-sharing strategy has always been believers telling their friends, family members, work associates, and neighbors about Jesus. That’s God’s timeless strategy. We short-circuit God’s plan, over-estimate our leader’s capacities, and rob rank-and-file believers of the joy of sharing the gospel when we limit our evangelism strategy to attraction models.

8. Changes in evangelism terminology and definitions

Several phrases have been used by recent generations to describe believers sharing the gospel. These change as language evolves, culture shifts, and word usage changes. Older evangelism training tools refer to sharing your faith as “personal work.” This meant more than verbally telling a person about Jesus. It described the entire process of initiating a relationship with someone who needed to hear the gospel, sustaining the relationship by acts of service, continuing the witnessing dialogue over time, and praying for the person until they made a personal commitment to Jesus. During my formative years, a mentor pastor told me, “Personal work is the key to everything in a church.” While he valued preaching, administrating, and other pastoral tasks – the conviction he voiced informed how he trained and led others. For him,

personal work – leading everyday believers in the continuing task of sharing the gospel relationally – was the key to ministry success.

Another older description of sharing the gospel which has passed out of vogue is “soul winning.” That phrase comes from the proverb: “He that winneth souls is wise” (Pro. 11:30, KJV). The concept of “soul winning” carries with it the idea of persuasion, which as we have already considered, has negative implications for some believers. For many people, it is considered religiously intolerant or spiritually oppressive to try to “win” someone to religious faith. Even though the Bible contradicts this conclusion, many believers still resist the idea of persuading another person to commit themselves to Jesus. Because of these negative stereotypes, Christians who share the gospel are seldom called “soul winners” much anymore.

Contemporary leaders have coined new ways to describe sharing the gospel. One of these is “lifestyle evangelism.” This phrase emphasizes sharing the gospel in daily life – at work, at the gym, in a coffee shop, on a kids’ playdate, or on the golf course. Lifestyle evangelism emphasizes taking the gospel everywhere and reflects the biblical pattern of gospel sharing. If believers did this today, the gospel would penetrate every social and cultural nook and cranny. What is sometimes missing in this approach, however, is enough emphasis on the second word - “evangelism.” Living as a polite, faithful, caring Christian in the midst of unbelievers is not sufficient for communicating the gospel to them.

Some dispute this conclusion and claim the gospel can be communicated “without words.” They quote Jesus, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love on another” (John 13:35 - CSB). How does this verse relate to gospel sharing? Jesus said unbelievers will know we are Christians by how we treat one another. Jesus did not say they will spontaneously conclude how to become a Christian by watching us. Lifestyle evangelism is a

healthy way to describe sharing your faith – as long as the gospel message is communicated, not just modeled. How you live demonstrates gospel-authenticity among brothers and sisters. What you say tells an unbeliever how to become part of the family.

Another popular contemporary phrase is “gospel conversations.” This is another helpful way to describe sharing our faith as long as “conversations” leads to “presentations.” Gospel conversations must include more than spiritual discussions, theoretical questions, or invitations to church events. They must include presenting the gospel and asking a person to profess faith in Jesus. Just like “lifestyle evangelism,” the phrase “gospel conversations” is a good way to understand personal witnessing as long as the ultimate goal is presenting the gospel, not just having polite religious chats. Conversations must imply and include – maybe after several conversations – a presentation of the gospel.

While the terminology has changed over the years, a better way to saturate our world with the gospel will never be invented. Changing terminology reflects how every generation has tried to find fresh ways to verbalize its responsibility and privilege of sharing their faith. Whether you are an old school Christian who does personal work through soul winning or a contemporary believer who has gospel conversations while doing relational evangelism, your personal involvement is God’s plan for sharing the gospel.

9. Loss of denominational focus and support

Southern Baptist denominational entities once prioritized evangelism in significant ways. Each state convention sponsored an annual Evangelism Conference which functioned like a regional revival meeting about gospel-sharing. These events were often the largest events – even larger than convention meetings – in each state each year. That is seldom the case these days.

The Home Mission Board once had a robust Evangelism Department led by a vice-president. After the HMB was reorganized into NAMB, that was not always the case. In the past year, that has changed with Dr. Johnny Hunt being named Vice-president for Evangelism and Leadership Development. There were once four major denominationally-supported personal evangelism training programs available to churches. The options are more limited today, although NAMB is now aggressively providing new evangelism training and tools.

Besides these organizational changes, two other denominational trends have lessened our focus on personal evangelism. The first is prioritizing theological debate over discussing evangelistic effectiveness, particularly in auxiliary but influential meetings held by various groups in conjunction with the national convention. Second, significant energy is devoted at the SBC convention meeting to political issues and social policy, rather than focusing on reaching more people with the gospel.

Denominational leaders cannot control individual Baptists or mandate actions by Baptist churches or entities. We do, however, have the bully pulpit – the opportunity to talk about, write about, and model what needs to happen to assure church effectiveness. With so many other themes I could have chosen today, my focus on personal evangelism is an attempt to do just that – call us to action on this vital issue.

10. Preoccupation with social justice issues

When I call personal evangelism “the vital issue,” some disagree and substitute a pressing social justice concern instead. Social justice is the rallying cry for many believers who are frustrated with the human condition. They believe our mission is making a tangible difference in our communities – both local and global. They are passionate about racism, global-warming,

abortion, gender identity, nationalism, marriage equality, economic disparities, homelessness, environmentalism, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, hate crimes, immigration, hunger relief, healthcare accessibility, education, drug abuse, war, terrorism, and prison reform – just to name 20 current topics!

All of these issues are important, on some level. As Christians, we promote justice and want everyone to be treated respectfully. We want our world to be a better place because of our influence. But suppose we are completely successful at implementing a perfectly just social order – solving every one of these problems so every person in the world is treated fairly and enjoys a high quality of life. What would be the result? Very happy people will eventually die and be devastated when they discover their eternal destiny. Preoccupation with social justice denies the eternal reality of human existence. People live forever – not just a few short years dealing with earthly injustice – but forever in either heavenly bliss or hellish turmoil.

Keep in mind my earlier disclaimer. Sharing the gospel is “of first importance” but not of only importance. It is our first priority, not our only responsibility. We must advocate for justice. We must use our voices, ballots, protests, and media access to work for justice. But we must keep these efforts in proper perspective. Paul wrote, “For I passed on to you **as most important** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day....” (1 Cor. 15:1, 3 - CSB). He did not write, “I passed on to you **as most important** that we end racism, stop sexual abuse, eliminate abortion, preserve biblical marriage, or any of the other items on the previous list.”

Dr. J. D. Greear, the President of the Southern Baptist Convention, made this point courageously when – in the face of enormous cultural pressure – he established “Gospel Above All” as the theme of the 2019 SBC annual meeting. He has recently announced the theme for

2020 is “Gospel Above All. Always.” Those simple words communicate the essence of this address. The gospel is not our only message, but it is our first message. The gospel is not all we communicate, but it is the first thing we must communicate. We will give many issues some importance, but we will make sharing the gospel the most important thing we do - always.

Suggestions for Moving Forward

We have addressed why personal evangelism matters and factors which have contributed to its decline. Now let’s consider the final question, what can be done about the problem? Here are seven suggestions for future action.

- 1. Change your mind.** Some of you may not have previously agreed with my premise or conclusions. Perhaps you are convinced today to change your thinking. Do it. Adopt a new conviction about the priority of gospel sharing through personal evangelism.
- 2. Warm your heart.** Ask God for a fresh burden for lost people, a renewed passion for the gospel, and fresh sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s power and prompting for witnessing. Prayer and spiritual devotion are not all we need to reinvigorate personal evangelism, but they are foundational to any lasting change.
- 3. Diagnose your situation.** Consider which of the ten factors listed above are issues for you personally and for your church or ministry organization. List other problematic factors in your situation. Be honest and make a frank appraisal.
- 4. Find new influencers.** There are pastors and churches achieving remarkable results in personal evangelism. There are denominational resources available through NAMB and your state convention. There are professors who are writing on these

- issues. You may need to change the blogs you read, the media you consume, the people you follow, and the Christians you hang out with. Be courageous in finding new resources, role models, and fellow believers who promote personal evangelism.
5. **Develop a plan.** Once you know what is undermining personal evangelism in your situation, lay out a strategy for change. Draw on new resources and new mentors to break new ground. Be realistic, but bold in establishing a new direction.
 6. **Work the plan.** To restore personal evangelism to its priority role will require concentrated effort over time. Old patterns will be hard to break. New grooves challenging to cut. Be patient, but also determined.
 7. **Expect resistance.** You may face resistance from well-meaning believers who have a different perspective, over-burdened church and organizational leaders reluctant to take on a new challenge, and spiritual forces determined to suppress gospel-sharing and preserve their damnable kingdom. The stakes are high. Be persistent!

Thank you for being part of the Gateway community. Thank you for giving your life to shape leaders who expand God's kingdom around the world. Kingdom expansion rests on gospel communication and gospel communication is best done by personal evangelism – believers telling people the good news about Jesus.

Lives hang in the balance of implementing the insights in this message. Certainly, the lives of churches and our denomination are at stake. But, more importantly – much more importantly, the lives of people – broken, hurting, frustrated, sometimes evil, always lost – are in the balance. May God give us the grace to share the gospel with new intentionality, fervor, and effectiveness.