

Preaching with a difference

One-on-one evangelism is not everyone's cup of tea. Some of us find it difficult to converse with people we've never met let alone tell them about Jesus. Yes, as Christians we know that we are supposed to evangelise and therefore we try occasionally, but in the main we let the evangelists do the work. Surely God calls particular people to be evangelists doesn't he?

This was my rationale for the first twenty years of ministry. After all, I reasoned, God called me to be a Bible teacher not an evangelist; and though I never mentioned it, I felt decidedly uncomfortable *trying* to persuade strangers or even friends to accept Jesus as Lord. There was one very embarrassing afternoon in the summer of '81 after I had just received my degree in theology and was with a Youth for Christ team on the streets of Bristol. I finally worked up the boldness to speak to some people, but no one responded. It made me feel depressed, and I decided I would not do that again. If God wanted me to win people to the Lord, He would have to put them in front of me and keep them there while He inspired me to speak.

Ten years later as ministry opportunities opened up in Eastern Europe and then Asia my perception of evangelism began to change. Though I was primarily involved with Bible teaching, the opportunity would occasionally arise to make a call for repentance which I would do based on my personal testimony, and most of the unsaved would come forward. Nevertheless it was not something I particularly enjoyed because I was never sure whether people would respond or not and was always slightly surprised when they did. Probably three or four hundred souls were saved over the next few years in this manner, but I still did not consider my role as anything more than a Bible teacher.

Then in August of 1995 something rather amazing happened. I had been asked to develop a syllabus for a missionary training school in Siberia and had completed all the teaching outlines except the part on evangelism. As I walked in the fields behind my home early one morning, I asked God what I should do about this segment of the syllabus. I told Him I would make my own outline or use any other one He might recommend. He did not answer in words, rather He showed me why He loved Jim Kennedy.

I had known Dr. D. James Kennedy and Evangelism Explosion since becoming a Christian almost twenty years earlier because Jim is my brother's pastor (back in Florida). But I had never been interested in the EE concept and had therefore not considered it for the mission school syllabus. So this rather amazing revelation of God's love for Jim Kennedy was completely unexpected. Nevertheless, as I meditated on God's response I knew EE was the course He wanted me to use, so I signed up for the next available 6-day Leader's Training Course. On completion of that course the emphasis in my ministry began to change as God's hand gently led me in a new and very rewarding direction.

My next trip abroad was early in the following year to the Philippines where I had been invited to teach at a Pastor's Training School in Manila. The morning after we arrived I was asked to speak in a Sunday service. There was a group of about ten young people sitting apart

from the rest, and for some reason I felt inspired to make a call for repentance. The entire group came forward. The pastor said they had never been in the church before. After the service he asked if I would go into a squatters village and tell people about Jesus. I did not want to do that, but he was my host so I said, yes. We went later that week and I spoke about the Lord to those who cared to listen. Twenty-five people came forward for salvation. The following week I spoke in that village again and another forty-five received Jesus including an entire drug gang. It was an exhilarating experience!

Shortly thereafter I went back to Siberia to do some teaching. While there I was asked to speak in the community hall of a village where my host had been struggling to start a church. I gave a short message, made a call for repentance and everybody came forward. It surprised and really encouraged me.

The following Autumn we returned to Siberia and conducted the missionary training programme which I had been preparing when God revealed to me His love for Jim Kennedy. Because of the complexity of the language I decided to bring in an EE trainer from Uzbekistan. It was a great success and we saw a number of souls saved and two new churches planted. Evangelism was beginning to excite me, EE seemed to be effective in every situation.

It was about this time that I began to hear God *urging* me to preach the gospel to the poor. I had always wanted to preach the gospel to the rich, so this is not what I was eager to hear. Nevertheless as I looked back over the past twenty years I realised that preaching the gospel to the poor had been God's direction for my ministry from the very beginning, but now I was experiencing something new. A compassion I had never felt was being birthed deep in my heart for this forgotten majority which comprises about 60% of the world's population...

Nevertheless I felt it necessary to test the vision, so I put together some teaching notes and organised a couple of three-day Pastors' seminars early the next year entitled 'Ministry To The Poor'.

The first of these was held in Manila with thirty pastors in attendance. We only had time for a single crusade after the seminar, so we decided on one of one of the worst and most dangerous of the squatters' villages and held an impromptu meeting right in the very heart of it. One hundred-forty people including forty children came to the Lord! My host said later, *'You are more than a teacher, you are an evangelist and should be holding big crusades. The message you gave tonight contained everything necessary for people to understand their need for Jesus.*' When I told him that I had simply used the EE method he and many of the other pastors wanted to attend a Leaders' Training Course, but unfortunately they could not afford the cost. A week later I held the second seminar in another area followed by crusades and two hundred more souls were saved. Again the pastors were very impressed by the EE method but could not afford the cost of the course. Now, with Dr Kennedy's permission, the EE presentation is incorporated in the Pastor's Manual, which we distribute without charge to those who attend.

I returned to the Philippines early the following year (1998) and spent several months conducting 3-day Pastor's Seminars which were attended by over 200 pastors. We held twenty three crusades and 2,500 people received Jesus. Two of these crusades were held in the squatters villages which we had previously visited. In the first village there are now over 300 Christians and the second has more than 500! About half of these are children.

I came back to England after three months, but the Filipino pastors that we trained began to hold their own seminars using our Pastor's Manual which they photocopy and give away. At the time of writing this another 500 persons (not including children) have come to the Lord in a dozen crusades; and more seminars and crusades are planned for early 1999.

Did the EE course which I attended in 1995 have an appreciable effect on my ministry...and on my life? The simple answer is, yes, most assuredly! In fact whenever I am invited to speak at non-Christian and even Christian functions I generally conclude with the EE presentation and the unsaved come forward. Since attending that course, almost 4,000 people have come to the Lord through this ministry, which is an average of one thousand souls a year (almost three a day); and the figures are rising. Because many of the pastors we initially trained are continuing to bring people to the Lord, revival is beginning to break out in some of the areas we pioneered! Now I am praying for more doors to open in other nations of the world.

I'm still just a Bible teacher, but I've got an anointed tool that really gets the attention of the lost. It's called EE and it really makes a difference.

Alex Forbes (BD)

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