

Three Simple Questions

Introduction. With a lot of congregations in the last few decades, a couple of questions always come up: “What will it take for our congregation to turn the corner? How can we convert people in our community?”

As you listen to exasperated and discouraged preachers or elders, they often discuss various efforts they have made, prayers they have offered, money they have spent, and programs they have implemented. The result is often the same: very little kingdom fruit. They are passionate about the gospel, but something has gone wrong.

There are three critical pieces of the evangelism puzzle, pieces that must be in place in a congregation for it to turn the corner. If we can say an enthusiastic and honest yes to three questions, we can be very effective in Lufkin. If we answer an honest no to any of these three questions, it will be difficult to develop a culture of soul-saving teaching in our congregation.

I. Do We Follow The Bible’s Teaching?

- A. The truth and authority of the Bible are the church’s backbone. If a congregation has forsaken the Bible and does not believe what the scriptures teach about sin, Heaven, Hell, and the saving power of Christ, there is little chance they will ever have an effective desire to teach. Teaching will not be a consuming passion.
- B. A dying congregation might make a desperate effort to keep from shutting its doors, but wanting to not die is not enough. Only a desire to see people repent of sin, enter a life-giving relationship with Jesus, and be born again through His sacrificial death on the cross and obedience to His gospel will lead to lasting evangelistic desire in a congregation. A love of self-preservation will not cut it.
- C. A congregation will follow what God says — even when it is difficult — as long as its members know that God’s word clearly calls them to reach out to the lost, to sacrifice their time and resources, and to share the gospel’s message with others (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21-23).

II. Do We Love And Long For People To Know Jesus?

- A. When we truly love others, that love drives us outward (2 Chronicles 30:1-6). When we love people so much that we hurt over their lost condition (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9), we will do more for those we love to experience the compassion of God and taste the goodness of the gospel (Matthew 9:36-38; Hebrews 6:4-5).
- B. As the members of our congregation listen to the voice of Jesus saying, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39), we will be compelled to look beyond the walls of the church building and the circle of our members. Love, inspired by the Spirit of God, propels us out of our comfort zones and into the world (Romans 10:14-15). This is vital area where we have to be willing to take up our crosses, deny ourselves, and follow Jesus into an unsaved world (Luke 9:23).

III. Are We Willing To Joyfully Embrace Change?

- A. Usually when someone mentions the word “change,” members can become very uncomfortable. Many congregations can confidently say, “We believe the gospel,

love people, and want to try to teach them.” But when it comes to the idea of changing, people seem to hit a brick wall.

1. This point is not advocating doctrinal change. The wisdom of men long ago decided to change worship to make it more appealing and contemporary.
 2. People dedicated to following scripture will not change the principles of worshiping “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).
- B. Cultivating a culture of evangelism in our congregation requires making strategic changes to orient ourselves around the great commission. Teaching cannot be only the work of a few or just a weekly emphasis a couple of times a year during gospel meetings. It is not enough to give money to preachers who travel the world and pray for others to teach the world.
- C. There are two important areas of focus and change for a congregation:
1. A congregation has to find the way to do everything related to their assembly with excellence. When we value excellence, as Solomon did (2 Chronicles 2:5, 9), it says something to the public about the kind of God we worship. It says that He really means something to us and nothing is too good for Him (cp. Malachi 1:6-10). Paying attention to the following areas is crucial:
 - a) Greeting visitors.
 - b) Reading scripture.
 - c) Leading singing.
 - d) Leading prayer.
 - e) Observing the Lord’s Supper.
 - f) Delivering the sermon.
 - g) Listening well.
 - h) Teaching Bible classes.
 - i) Advertising the congregation.
 - j) Maintaining the property.
 2. A congregation making itself what it needs to be and inviting others (cp. John 1:44-46) is crucial to growing in number. However, most people are converted from simply asking them to study and then following through with it (Acts 8:5-6, 35-36). If we can change how aggressively we ask people to study, we can baptize more into Christ.

Conclusion. People love it when you can give them steps to success, and most people think that is what these questions are, and I wish it were that simple. Sadly, there are not three simple steps to effective evangelism. Instead, these are three building blocks that help cultivate a culture that invites evangelistic concern.

Evangelism must be woven into the culture of a congregation, into every aspect of its life and work. Only when this evangelistic passion is present will teaching become more than just another program or worse, a chore. But this will not happen if we are content for everything to stay the same. Evangelism demands change. Change requires sacrifice. Sacrifice means we must be more like Jesus!