Have Gifts of the Spirit and Miracles Ceased?

Larry Tomczak

Before we explore what are three essentials to effectively evangelize a religious person, would you extend to me a few minutes to share some background as a fellow traveler who, like you, desires to reach people with the gospel? Jesus told us that a wise teacher “brings out of his treasure new and old things” (Matt.13:52).  This is not a cookie cutter, formulaic approach. I draw from what’s been my “sweet spot” for 50 years and I pray you’ll be blessed and challenged as we come out of our comfort zones.

Sixteen years ago, we entrusted our Atlanta church to our son and departed for Nashville to begin ICECAP (International Center for Evangelism, Church-planting, and Prayer).

We were convinced something needed to be done in light of chilling “stats.”

• With 400,000 churches in America, 80% are either stagnant or declining.
• Amongst the remaining 20%, most church growth (about 95%) is

 biological or transfer.
• Conversion growth is minimal.
• Stats are now more sobering with many youth departing, falling prey to “deconstructionism” (2 Tim. 4:1). The first church we planted in the DC area that grew to 3500 people was turned over to a gifted leader who not long ago departed his faith, divorced and now is a heretic.

**Go and Don’t Come Back**

Even Jesus was a nine-month baby and ventures like ICECAP take time but unfortunately it never came to delivery. As things were getting underway, the freight train of same-sex marriage came barreling down the tracks and when I took a stand on the issue, I was told it would be a “dealbreaker” and to “go and not come back.”

In spite of the experience, I continue to fan the flame of following the footsteps of Jesus who “came to seek and save the lost” (Lk. 19:10).

For 50 years, I’ve had the privilege of helping people become effective in evangelism and I pray I can do it for you!

One of my heroes was Derek Prince. He spoke two prophetic words over me when I ministered with him. He told me, “God providentially puts you in situations where you uniquely connect with people and share the gospel thereby inspiring others.” On another occasion he said, “Strike while the iron is hot!”

Whatever grace is upon my life for “divine appointments, (title of a book I wrote 25 years ago), I pray that God will bless you with an impartation not just information to be faithful and fruitful as we strike while the iron is hot in the hour of “harvest” Jesus said comes at “the end of the age” (Matt. 13:39).

**Religious Revival**

Author Tim Keller wrote an article, “American Christianity is Due for a Revival” (The Atlantic 2/5/23). I agree!

America is a religious country with Pew Research estimating 64% as “Christian.” But are they authentic or counterfeit? Some are ignorant (like I was) but others (like many politicians) are hypocrites needing a “Jesus jolt” to convict them.

“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I say?” (Lk. 6:46).

“But then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice evil’” (Matt. 7:23).

There are over 340 million Americans. Because of our heritage, the majority have religious roots but just because people periodically (or often) go to a church building doesn’t mean they are Christians.

You can cite a label, use religious talk, sing religious songs, enjoy religious programs and hang with religious people yet not be “born again” which Jesus told a religious man was essential not optional (Jn. 3:1-7).

I was baptized, confirmed, had 12 years of religious schooling and attended a church service weekly for 20 years yet I was not “born again” but a “Lost Soul” (the name of our Cleveland rock band in which I played the drums!) When people I liked took the time to share with me that Jesus was punished so I could be pardoned and that I couldn’t “earn” my salvation by “good works” but needed to repent and put my faith in Jesus and His finished work on the Cross, I did and was genuinely converted. Then I began the adventure of discovering an abundant life in Christ as I read (for the first time in my life!) the Bible and obeyed what it taught.

Consider how many people in your sphere of influence are just like me. God loves them and sent His Son to die for them so He could rescue them from the ravages of sin and eternal separation in hell. Lost people matter to God and we are His ambassadors to reach them with the gospel, bringing forgiveness and the free gift of eternal life.

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14). When my wife’s parents (devout Catholics) and the seven children who were living at home heard this “good news” they all responded and many entered full-time Christian ministry!

When I shared the true gospel with my parents, sister, girlfriend and a coach (who were all religious but uninformed like me) they were all born again!

When I wrote my conversion story “Clap Your Hands!” a quarter-million quickly sold all over America and abroad as scores identified with my journey from religion to relationship.

**Three Essentials**

1. Recommit to gospel sharing.

The Great Commission is not the Great Suggestion. Evangelism is not an elective, but a directive from Almighty God.

All four gospels end with the central theme of evangelism (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:47; Jn. 20:21) and the Book of Acts begins with Jesus directing the disciples to “receive power” to “be my witnesses… to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

God “has given to us the ministry of reconciliation… entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us. We implore you in Christ’s stead: be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Paul declared, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

Seeing people come to Christ doesn’t happen mystically. God’s calling us to repent of disobedience to the mandate of evangelism; renounce fear of man as well as bad theology (Calvinist extremes that the “elect” are saved without evangelistic efforts); and recalibrate our lives to intentionally and regularly reach out to unbelievers. There’s no impact without contact!

“Prince of Preachers” Charles Spurgeon said, “Soul-winning is the chief business of the Christian minister; indeed, it should be the main pursuit of every true believer.”

Billy Graham stated, “My main purpose in life is to help as many people as I can find a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”

Pastors, take heed: are your sermons regularly sprinkled with examples of your evangelism to inspire the flock?

2. Recognize the Process.

Jesus took time for individuals. He was not “Type-A looking for the shortest line to avoid conversations and get in and out of Costco settings!” Talking to the “woman at the well” led to her conversion and that of her entire town! Then adjusting his disciples for missing the potential harvest, He told them that evangelism was a process that “leads to eternal life” as “he who sows and he
who reaps may rejoice together” (John 4:34–39).

One of Satan’s biggest lies to prevent Christians from plundering hell and populating heaven is to deceive us into believing the lie that taking time to engage the lost makes little difference. Yet the Bible teaches “one plants, one waters but God gives the increase” (1Cor. 3:6–9). This takes all the pressure off believing “it all depends on me.” The “hidden hand of God” is at work in people’s lives so let’s relax and let the Holy Spirit “convict the world of righteousness, sin and judgment” (Jn. 16:8) after we’ve done our part.

Evangelism is a process just like cultivating soil, removing weeds, planting seeds, then watering to reap a harvest! Church growth studies point out that most people have about 6 to 7 contacts with the gospel before conversion! In planting seeds in hearts, you might be number one…four…finally seven as they yield their life to Christ!

In the parable of the sower and the seed Jesus said that “the seed is the Word” (Lk. 8:11). I’ve planted hundreds of thousands of gospel seeds in my evangelistic efforts through conversations, testimony tracts, speaking, literature and invitations to events. Only in eternity will I discover the results of my investment of time and money. “Make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous mammon (money) so when it fails, they will welcome you into the eternal habitation” (Lk. 16:9).

“There will be opportunities during your friendship with others to communicate bits and pieces of both the gospel itself and your own personal testimony… The temptation is to unload the entire evangelistic dump truck the first time the conversation turns to spiritual things. As a general rule, this is not a healthy pattern to follow. Gradually directing a person to Christ through seed planting is a much preferable approach.” - Joe Aldrich

In leading religious people to Christ, consider these examples of how one life makes a difference in God’s providential “chain of events” - the beautiful drawing of someone to Jesus.

• I went to a fair…guy shared at booth…car stalled & man helped, gave leaflet… I visit church…another lunch invite, try 2nd church…couple invites for meal &
revisit church, hear gospel & New Testament given…born again later in bedroom! For 5 decades I’ve continued the process, reaching hundreds of thousands for Jesus because a few folks were faithful.

• MLB star Billy Sunday left a bar…heard outreach songs…attended service & heard gospel…is born again… entered ministry…over 46 years reached 100 million, pioneered tent & radio evangelism, inspired Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, T.L. Osborne, Reinhard Bonnke, Amy McPherson, Luis Palau, Pat Robertson.

• Dave Wilkerson went to violent N.Y. gangs, shared the gospel, jolted Mau Maus head Nikki Cruz with “Jesus loves you!”…soon converted…gang members saved… Nikki entered ministry evangelizing millions globally for 60+ years…my wife’s folks & all 7 kids at home saved thru his ministry.

• Edward Kimball taught Sunday school to young boys, and prayed to win each to Jesus. He went to a shoe store where one worked, led D.L. Moody to Christ who evangelized hundreds of thousands on two continents. One convert, William Chapman, became an evangelist, preached to masses - one was Billy Sunday, who joined his team. Another convert thru Chapman was Mordecai Ham who set up evangelism services in Charlotte. A student there said he wouldn’t go but a friend persuaded him and he finally went and was converted. He went on to preach to more people than any person in history, Billy Graham!

Got honors those who faithfully plant gospel seeds like Edward Kimball who took time to intentionally reach out to young Dwight Moody.

• Karen C. sent me an email. “Years ago, I shared your book, “Clap Your Hands!” with someone I worked with. She got saved, her parents, her three brothers, her husband-to-be, his parents, his five brothers and now their families. It affected more than 100 people and that’s just two families. Isn’t this incredible?!!!”

Yes, it is and may God stir our hearts to reject Satan’s lies and embrace God’s truth that every life can shine and make a difference. “Those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars, forever and ever” (Dan.12:3).

3. Recover lifestyle evangelism and enjoy the adventure!

In our mission to honor the mandate of our Master may we once and for all turn from sledgehammer evangelism and bounty hunters with gospel six guns pressuring people to convert.

“Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade people” (2 Cor. 5:11) so let’s recover the art of Spirit-led persuasion and embrace what’s natural, relational and enjoyable. Lifestyle Evangelism: the process of living in such a way that non-Christians move one step closer to Jesus Christ as a result of our love and initiative in their lives.

We’ll pray, prepare, believe and expect “Divine Appointments”: providential, not coincidental, supernaturally orchestrated opportunities with non-Christians to help them discover new life in Jesus Christ.

We’ll enjoy the adventure of sharing the good news with needy, confused, often religious and sometimes hopeless people outside of Christ. “We are His workmanship (Greek - masterpiece) created in Christ Jesus unto good works that God prepared in advance that we walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). No more “chance encounters”- these are supernaturally orchestrated and sovereignly arranged by Jesus who “wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

On my journey I’ve given out about 2 or 3 of my personal testimony tracts daily for almost 50 years. Most are to average folks but God has also had me “plant seeds” with famous folks like Nicole Kidman & Keith Urban, Charlton Heston, Martin Sheen, Jim Valvano, Elizabeth Taylor, Jane Seymour, Bob Dole, Janet Reno, Donald Rumsfeld, Geraldo Rivera and many more whom He loves.

**Specific Steps**

So what is the scriptural strategy of best practices to reach religious people (and all people for that matter) with the gospel? Once we’ve repented of disobedience, rededicated ourselves to be faithful, realigned our priorities to engage in the process, we “pray to the Lord of the harvest, that He will send out laborers into His harvest” (Matt. 8:38) and declare, “Here am I. Send me!” (Is. 6:8).

“Go into all the world…” (Matt. 28:18). Here is your private world!

[Please insert the Circular Illustration attached]

10 Ways to Connect

1. Pray for non-Christians and for opportunities to meet them.

2. Extend a friendly greeting.

3. Take initiative in establishing conversations.

4. Learn people’s names.

5. Take a genuine interest in people’s lives.

6. Bless people with tangible expressions of God’s love.

7. Be a servant by doing helpful good deeds for others.

8. Open your home to adults and children.

9. Look for creative and natural ways to interact with them (holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, welcome new neighbors, birth of babies).

10. Get reconciled if any conflict or offense still lingers.

**Additional Tips:**

• Remember the S.A.L.T. acrostic (Every Nation)
 Start a conversation.
 Ask questions.

 Listen attentively.

 Tell your story.
• Slow down and recognize that many opportunities for sharing Christ’s love and

 our faith come disguised as unwelcome interruptions!
• People will never care what we know until they first know how much we care.

 (When people leave our presence, they won’t remember so much what
 we said but how we made them feel! [no self-righteousness, arrogance,

 argumentativeness or condescension])
• Be winsome and establish common ground to spark conversations. Be a

 generous tipper; have some knowledge of sports, current events, weather;
 complement their baby; notice a team logo or a state on a cap or shirt.

• Avoid religious terms/jargon: “Get saved/plugged in/committed…”
• Use humor; lighten up; be natural and enjoy interacting with people! (How is

 love expressed? 2 primary ways: Accept people where they and take a genuine

 interest in their life.)

**Learn the Basics**

All people, religious or not, have three basic needs: transcendence (connecting with God); significance (finding purpose); and, relationship (community). They can project an image that “all is well” but deep inside they have basic needs.

All people want love, peace, hope, health, freedom from guilt, addictions and answers to dilemmas and problems of life. We are Christ’s ambassadors who help people find faith, forgiveness, freedom and their future after death. Investing in people is our sacred duty this side of eternity. In heaven we’ll still worship, learn, fellowship, and serve but we’ll never evangelize again.

The apostle Paul trained the Corinthians in the core message of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4) which we should memorize so we can lead religious people (and everyone!) into a personal relationship and new life in Jesus Christ.

I’ve used guides from Evangelism Explosion, Billy Graham’s “Peace, with God,” Campus Cru’s “4 Spiritual Laws,” etc. Here’s an acrostic G.O.S.P.E.L. from “Dare 2 Share” to help you gain gospel fluency.

G. God created us to be with Him.
O.  Our sins separate us from God.
S.  Sins cannot be removed by good deeds.
P.  Paying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again.
E.  Everyone who repents and trusts in Him alone has eternal life.
L.  Life with Jesus starts now, and lasts forever!

CLOSING GIFTS

I desire to leave a legacy that lasts. Let me give you five absolutely FREE gifts (with no strings attached) to bless you. Os Guinness in his book “Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion” emphasizes the urgent need to be equipped and address today’s issues. I agree wholeheartedly - take advantage of these gifts!

Go to [Larrytomczak.com](http://Larrytomczak.com)  and [Bullseyechallenge.com](http://Bullseyechallenge.com)

• Enjoy the free audiobook “Clap Your Hands!” (nostalgic, humorous, interesting story that’s a great resource and tool for reaching people, especially Catholics).

• Google free videos of “Loving Lifestyle Evangelism” and invest 20 min. for 5 days to motivate and educate yourself.

* Click the free audiobook “Divine Appointments” to further help you.
* Click free audio message “Biblical Declarations to Build Your Faith” to make you bold & confident!
* Watch 30 free Bullseye Challenge 15 min. videos to become an informed influencer and skillful conversationalist on today’s issues.

**Here’s the deal:** Jesus said, “Follow me and I’ll make you fishers of men.” If you’re not fishing - are you really following? Begin today to do something about it!