



# EQUIPPER

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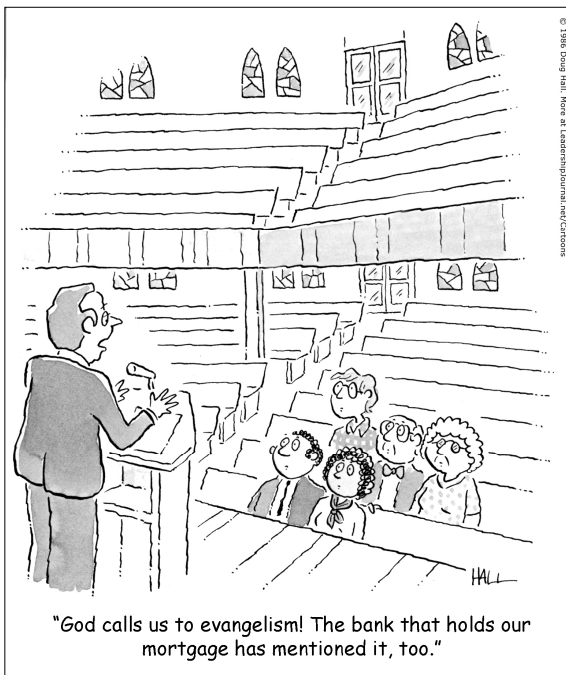
Dear ministers on mission with Jesus:

Last month we enjoyed one of our 2014 U.S. regional conferences, held in Lexington, Kentucky. We have two more to go in this round: Dallas in July and Orlando in August. If you have not attended a 2014 conference, I hope you'll join us in either Dallas or Orlando.

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An inspiring feature of this year's conferences is hearing from pastors and other church leaders as they share stories concerning what they are witnessing God doing in and through their congregation. These stories give powerful testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. It's a work with many aspects, but a common theme is what the Spirit is doing to lead us to reach out to those who do not know Jesus and to believers who have become disconnected from Christian community.



This work of outreach is the *evangelism* component of a balanced disciple-making ministry. It's encouraging to me to see how many of our congregations are actively sharing with Jesus in this vital part of his continuing ministry.

For many, evangelism seems unachievable, even objectionable (like the cartoon at left). Perhaps this is because it's seen as what crusade evangelists like Billy Graham do in stadiums full of seekers where thousands come forward. Or perhaps their conception of evangelism is about intruding into the lives of total strangers by handing out tracts at the mall, calling door-to-door, or phoning a list of names.

But the stories we're hearing at our conferences are not about those types of evangelism (though they do have their place). Instead, we're hearing about churches connecting with people in need, about meeting those needs in creative ways, then developing relationships that lead naturally (actually, *supernaturally*) to opportunities to share our stories about the difference that Jesus is making in our lives. That's a type of evangelism that we all can share in.

Note how this approach combines *service* with *proclamation*. Sadly, it's common to emphasize one of these to the exclusion of the other. But the Spirit is helping us see that it's not *either-or*—rather, it's *both service and proclamation*. On page two, we've included an article that addresses this connection. I hope you find it helpful. Perhaps you could read and discuss it in a leadership meeting in which you address your congregation's calling to share in the work of evangelism that Jesus, through the Spirit, is doing in our world.

May we all hear the Spirit loud and clear, and then move in his power!

Greg Williams, CAD associate director

*Outfitting GCI churches and ministries for a mission-focused journey with Jesus.*

## Connecting Service and Proclamation

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My church is big on service. So big, in fact, that we cancel every fourth Sunday gathering and spend the morning serving the community. We paint houses, rake leaves, serve the homeless, finish basements—you name it.

Our efforts have borne fruit. We've built ties to the refugee community, established a partnership with the elementary school where we meet, and helped our neediest neighbors. Dozens of students from a local Christian college have also joined us, drawn by our emphasis on service. But there's one crucial thing our service hasn't done: led people to faith in Jesus.

Recently our pastor lauded our service efforts but lamented our failure to [verbally] evangelize. "We haven't baptized anyone in more than two years!" he said, before issuing a challenge for us to share the gospel with words as well as actions.

### Avoiding Opposite Errors

I don't want to be too hard on my church. Other congregations also struggle to strike a balance between proclaiming the gospel and demonstrating it. For many the pendulum seems stuck in the opposite direction. They're more apt to focus on evangelism while doing little to meet their community's physical needs. Some even deride social action as a futile enterprise, just "straightening deck chairs on the Titanic." Why this polarization? How do we combine compassionate action and evangelism? To understand the current landscape, it's worth glancing in the rearview mirror.

Early evangelicals such as William Wilberforce, D.L. Moody, and William Booth were tireless activists. But in the late 19th century, liberal theologians introduced the idea of a "social gospel," emphasizing the need to meet physical needs but denying the gospel's supernatural elements. Conservatives rightly objected to the erosion of the authority of Scripture. Unfortunately the kneejerk reaction of many was also to abandon social activism. "If liberals want to save the world, we'll stick to saving souls," they decided. This dichotomy has at times left the body of Christ looking disfigured—all mouth, but no hands and feet. Or all action but no voice.

In recent years, we've begun to rediscover the biblical basis of social justice, and many evangelicals have begun serving with the zeal of the newly converted. But others have hung back, wary of what they see as an undue emphasis on social action.

### Finding the Balance

The answer for both camps, I believe, is to strive for what veteran pastor and community activist Clark Blakeman calls "biblical symmetry." "We have to remind ourselves that just 'doing' isn't sufficient," Blakeman says. "Still, the more common problem is for people to fear that the doing is empty, just padding people for a more comfortable journey to hell. For them, we work to show that proclamation is insufficient apart from the demonstration of the gospel. We're pushing both sides toward biblical symmetry." To achieve this biblical symmetry some congregations (like mine) need to be challenged to open their mouths and share the gospel verbally. Others need to be challenged to extend a hand of compassion. All need to do both.

### Connecting Service and Evangelism

One of history's riddles is the explosive growth of the early church. Scholars still puzzle over how an obscure Jewish sect grew to comprise more than half the Roman Empire within a relatively short time. Part of the answer lies in the fact that while fearlessly sharing the gospel, even under persecution, the early Christians also demonstrated radical compassion for their neighbors. Such behavior caused the pagan emperor, Julian, to rail against "the hated Galileans" who "not only feed their own poor, but also ours, welcoming them into their agape."

May we recapture this vision to serve and proclaim.