

Evangelism: Christians' Most Neglected Task

By Rick Warren

A  finishing the task White Paper

Anyone who studies the scripture eventually discovers that God has given his children five tasks on Earth: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and missions. You practice these things on Earth to prepare for doing them in heaven. We are called to these five tasks—or five purposes, five functions, five callings. Let's take a look at each of them.

Number one, we are to love Christ. That's worship. Worship is expressing your love to God, whether you're by yourself, in a small group, or with 500 people. Loving Christ is our number one goal.

Number two, we are to belong to Christ's family. That's fellowship. We're not just believers, but we are belongers; we're baptized into the body of Christ.

Number three, we're to grow in Christ. That's discipleship. We love Christ, we belong to his family, and we grow in him.

Number four, we're called to serve Christ. That's ministry. Here on Earth, we serve Christ by serving others. The Bible says that when you give a cup of cold water in Christ's name, that counts as ministry.

Number five, we're to share Christ. That's missions or evangelism. Sharing Christ is the only one of the five tasks you can't do in heaven—because everybody in heaven is saved. Sharing Christ with unbelievers is called evangelism or witnessing.

You see these tasks throughout the New Testament. They're explained by Paul in Ephesians 4. They are modeled by the first church in Acts 2:42-47. In John 17—Jesus' last prayer on the night before he goes to the cross—Jesus reports them to his Father as a progress report on how he disciplined the disciples. These five callings are summarized by Jesus in the five verbs of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

One day, a man approaches Jesus and asks, "What's the greatest commandment?" Jesus replies, "Oh, that's easy. I could summarize the entire Bible—all the law and all the prophets—in two sentences: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, with all your strength.' And the second is like it, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' By the way, there's no commandment greater than these." You can find the whole story in Matthew 22.

We get two of our tasks in life from those two commands:

"Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" is the same as **worship**. And "love your neighbor as yourself" is **ministry**. We celebrate God's presence in worship, and we demonstrate God's love in service, or ministry.

After the resurrection, Jesus gave the Great Commission, his final assignment to those of us who follow him. You'll find it in Matthew 28:18-20. It starts by saying, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'" (Matthew 28:18 NIV). So he's saying that he has the authority to give his followers the instructions he's about to share. Then he continues with three instructions:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV).

And then he gives a promise: *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20 NIV).

So, these are the other three tasks of life:

"Go and make disciples of all nations." That's our witness; that's **evangelism**.

"Baptizing them [into the body of Christ] in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." When we're baptized into Christ's body, we're brought into the fellowship of Christians.

"Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." That's **discipleship**.

Here's a great slogan we use for Finishing the Task—and a great slogan for your life. A great commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a great church. A great commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a great Christian. A great commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a great country, a great corporation, a great community.

If you only get these five tasks—which were modeled by the first church, explained by Paul, prayed by Jesus, and found in the Great Commandment and Great Commission—you're going to make it, because those are the things God put us here on Earth to practice before we go to heaven.

Evangelism: Christians' Most Neglected Task

Now, here's the problem. Of Christians' five tasks—worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism—do you know which one is the most neglected by Christians? It's evangelism, sharing the Good News with unbelievers.

And the truth is that evangelism is why God leaves his followers here on Earth after they're saved. You can worship, fellowship, grow as a disciple, and serve God in heaven; you can even sing, relax, eat, and have fun in heaven. But you can only witness to non-believers here on Earth.

Evangelism, though, is the purpose that gets the least emphasis in most churches, seminaries, Bible schools, and Bible studies. In fact, the sad fact is that most Christians have never brought anybody else to Christ. I often ask people, "Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you?" Bringing somebody to heaven with you is the greatest thing you can do.

Most Christians have never been equipped to share the Good News. They're uncomfortable and even fearful about witnessing. One thing that Christians and non-Christians have in common is that they both hate evangelism—because they've been taught a wrong approach that feels unnatural and more like a sales pitch.

Here's the real problem. Most churches have no plans, programs, or goals for evangelism; they have no mission program beyond their own community. And that's sad. Because the fact is, Satan doesn't mind at all if we Christians hunker in a bunker worshiping and fellowshiping, as long as we don't bring others to Jesus.

Here in the state of California, we have a constant water shortage; we have been plagued with both drought and massive wildfires for decades. The state government created an emergency warning system to warn residents in high-risk, rural areas that a fire is coming. They use loud sirens that are planted on posts; you can hear the sirens across valleys and mountaintops when an area is threatened by fire.

I read the other day about a recent wildfire where a lot of people in California died because the early warning system failed. They never had a chance to hear what was headed their way; they didn't know they were in danger. A report said that the early warning system had been "out of commission for a long time."

I looked up the phrase "out of commission" in the dictionary. Webster's definition says this: "not working, not in working order." Out of commission means unable to function. It means not in service. It means broken. It means unavailable for its intended purpose. It means missing in action. It means comatose. Out of commission means unusable. The opposite is available, useful, productive.

When it comes to accepting responsibility for fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, most Christians are out of commission. They're out of commission with the Great Commission.

I recently read that here in the United States, the largest evangelical denomination—the Southern Baptist Convention of 40,000 churches—this past year reported that 10,000 of their churches did not baptize a single convert. They didn't win one person to Christ. And that is a denomination that's known for evangelism. What's going on?

Why is Evangelism Declining?

Well, there are many factors causing the decline in believers sharing their faith.

One, globalism has created many "-isms," like pluralism, relativism, and secularism. There's social pressure not to speak about your faith, particularly as the only way.

At the same time, people who are afraid to talk about Jesus feel no hesitation to promote their political views on social media and elsewhere. They're not afraid of offending people with their political opinions—but they're afraid of being accused of being narrow-minded if they share the Gospel.

Another reason for the decline in evangelism is that churches have stopped training their members in how to share their faith. Very few churches have any regular program for teaching a person how to share their faith or for going out and sharing their faith together.

1 Peter 3:15 says this: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (NIV). In other words, he said you need to be prepared to share the Good News—and to do it in a natural way.

An additional reason for the decrease in evangelism is because the older a congregation becomes, the less evangelistic and the more internally focused it tends to become. The older it becomes, the more self-centered it becomes. What started out as "service" becomes "serve us." A church trying to be evangelistic and win the lost deteriorates into a place to meet the needs of the members. People forget that the number one task that Jesus gave the church is to share the Good News. An archbishop from a previous generation said that the church is the only organization that exists for the benefit of the non-members. That's the way Jesus planned it.

What we need today is a corrective reemphasis on evangelism. It's desperately needed. People don't realize how lost people are. If I had the cure for cancer I'd probably go out and shout it in the streets. The fact is we have something a lot better than that. Something greater than the cure for cancer. We've got a cure for the discouragement, the depression, the defeat, the despair that everybody experiences in their lifetime. It's a message of purpose and power. The longer you're a Christian, the more you forget how bad you felt before you came to Christ, and the more you forget how good the Good News really is. You become out of commission with the Great Commission.

Everyone is a Missionary

The Great Commission says, "Therefore go..." Everybody is to go. Everybody is a missionary. That may be a shock to you. "Oh, no! I can't go to outer Slobovia. I don't even know Pig Latin. How can I be a missionary?" Someone once said you don't become a missionary by crossing the sea, but by seeing the cross. You become a missionary when you become a Christian because all of a sudden it becomes your responsibility to share with others what's happened to you, to share the good news. It is the task of every Christian.

Jesus repeatedly emphasized this idea of sharing your faith. His very first words to his disciples were "Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men." His very first words: I'm going to teach you how to reach other people. And his very last words, Acts 1:8, were also about sharing your faith, about witnessing. He said, "You will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes into your life and you will be witnesses."

It's time for us to get off the bench and onto the field. We need to go from "out of commission" to "every member on mission." When each of us begins to take the task of evangelism seriously in our lives, the world will begin to know Jesus in a whole new way.

ARE YOU IN?

Join a coalition of thousands of believers, churches, denominations, and organizations coming together to fulfill the Great Commission. Finishing the Task is a call to mobilize all of Christ's Church, to do all Christ commands, with all people, in all places, using all of God's gifts, all for God's glory by 2033, the 2000th anniversary of the instructions given to us by Jesus.

Learn more and get started at FinishingtheTask.com.