

Editorial: What if all we had was evangelism?

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What would Christians do if all we had left was evangelism?

It's possible we would argue and fight less.

I phrase the question with "had left," because we have far more than evangelism. But let's continue with the thought experiment.

What if we didn't have all the accoutrements of Christianity as we know it in the United States?

No churches

What if we didn't have church buildings?

I can hear it now: "Where would we meet?"

There are Christians in the world today who meet under trees, in homes, apartments, movie theaters, parks, coffee shops and bars. We were fine up until that last one. I would circle back to my first question and the following sentence about arguing and fighting less, but I'm going to move on.

What if we didn't have church staff? I just felt a bunch of people get nervous.

What if we didn't have pastors and other ministry staff? What if we didn't have preaching, Bible studies, music ministry or any of the other organized ministries of the church?

Plenty of churches have only a pastor, no other staff. Plenty of those

pastors are bivocational—often earning their income outside the church. There also are churches who have a pastor only part of the time, sharing that pastor with other churches.

If we didn't have church buildings, where would we invite people to come to hear the gospel? If we didn't have paid ministers, who would communicate the gospel? Would we even still gather, and what would we do when we're together?

These seem like silly questions.

No education

What if the only book Christians published and owned was the Bible? Because if all we had left was evangelism, we'd need at least the Gospels, wouldn't we?

Imagine not having any Christian living or devotional books, no Bible commentaries or theology books, no Christian fiction. And no discipleship curriculum.

There are Christians in the world today whose only book is the Bible. There also are Christians in the world who don't even have a Bible.

What if there were no Christian media? No Christian news outlets, music, radio, TV channels, movies, social media. Would it be possible to communicate the gospel at all in our world if we didn't have these things?

What if we didn't have Christian schools—private or homeschool, primary, secondary, college or seminary? I just felt a different bunch of people get nervous.

Just as there are Christians who only have the Bible, if they have the Bible at all, there are Christians who don't have any kind of Christian media or

education.

If we don't have any of these things, how do we disciple new Christians? Without these things, how do we go about spiritual formation? How do we prepare Christian children, youth and young people to be Christians out in the world?

These seem like ridiculous questions.

No broader concerns

So many Christians in the world don't have what we have in the United States. It doesn't make them lesser Christians.

What if we didn't have Christian hospitals, children's homes, adoption agencies or other human welfare organizations? Or Christian advocacy organizations? Or Christian camps?

What if we didn't have mission sending agencies? Or conventions, associations, meetings, constitutions, bylaws, budgets ...?

It's getting hard to take this thought experiment seriously.

Even so, what if all Christians really had left was evangelism? What would we do?

What if all Christians ever had was evangelism? Where would we be now?

Core of Christianity

The fact is, Christianity started with evangelism—Jesus communicating God's good news directly to us by becoming human, living among us, dying for our sin and rising from the dead to give us eternal life. And Christianity grew out of evangelism. Every Christian organization has—or

had—evangelism at its core, however far removed from evangelism it became.

Evangelism—while not all Christians are to be about—is central to being a Christian, and yet, so few Christians evangelize. Most of us leave evangelism to the “professionals.” What if we didn’t because it’s all we had?

Remember a baptism in your church. How did you and your church respond to it? If it’s been a while, what do you feel when you hear about baptisms in other churches?

My educated guess is you and your church celebrated that baptism. I’m also certain, if it’s been a while since a baptism happened in your church, you feel a longing to celebrate one.

If we just look at a single Sunday morning worship service, we know there is disagreement in the room over the song selection, style of music, announcements, the sermon, the people on the platform—any number of things.

But a baptism. The sleepy wake up. The bored brighten. People smile. There are cheers, applause, “amens,” “yeahs” and sometimes whooping or whistling.

Why? Well, for Baptists anyway, baptism signifies a person giving their life to Jesus. Baptism signifies the power of the gospel, the success of evangelism. What if that’s all we had left?

Challenge

Christians in the United States have so much more than evangelism, and all that other stuff has put us at a remove from the one thing we celebrate without much disagreement—people giving their lives to Jesus.

All that other has become the necessary business of Christianity for us. Honestly, I'm not sure how to make disciples—followers of Jesus—of all people without much of all that other, nor am I sure how to love God with all I have and my neighbor as myself without at least some of that other.

I'm not advocating for getting rid of all of it, but I am advocating for keeping all of it in perspective. We're going to disagree about a lot of things related to all that other stuff. We *have* disagreed about a lot of things related to all that other stuff, and the world has witnessed our disagreement.

In light of that, it's not such a silly question to ask, "What if all we had was evangelism?"

What would we do? How would we be different?

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