

EVANGELISM TODAY - EFFECTIVELY SHARING THE GOSPEL  
IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

A Book Review

Submitted to Dr. Bill Day

of the

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EVAN6351 Contemporary Trends in Growing an Evangelistic Church

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Dawson, Scott, and Scott Lenning. *Evangelism Today: Effectively Sharing the Gospel in a Rapidly Changing World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009.

### **Biographical Information**

In *Evangelism Today – Effectively Sharing the Gospel in a Rapidly Changing World*, Scott Dawson, with the research assistance of Scott Lenning, addresses the future of evangelism in light of its context. Scott Dawson is the founder of Scott Dawson Evangelistic Association, which focuses on fulfilling and equipping others to fulfill the Great Commission from Matthew 28:19-20. He is a graduate of Samford University and Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, which also serves as the location of the headquarters of his ministry.

### **Book Summary**

According to the author, this book was written to "make the reader aware of three things in *their* society." The first of those three things was the desire for the reader to recognize that the "gospel is still relevant to society." The second thing was that fact that reader must see how "the church is at a crossroad of belief" in regards to its enthusiasm and desire for evangelism. Lastly, Dawson wants his readers to see that "God is still working around *them*."<sup>1</sup> In seeking to inform the readers of these three things, Dawson and his team performed interview-based research<sup>2</sup> with hundreds of people throughout professing Christianity. The result of their research was the identification of trends that were uniquely but principally being employed in different settings. Those trends are explored in subsequent chapters.

In chapter one, Dawson addresses the need for a better understanding of and obedience to the Great Commission. He contends that many have failed to recognize that the goal of the church is the fulfillment of the Great Commission and that in order for evangelism to be

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<sup>1</sup> See pg. 19 for a more thorough listing of these three things

<sup>2</sup> Dawson admits on pg. 17 that he and his team are not a formal research institution like Gallup or Barna, but that their concept was simply to interview as many people from as many different walks of life that they could and see what they might find.

recovered, one must revive a biblical understanding of the Great Commission and its place in the mission of the church.

In chapter two, Dawson addresses the need for integrity, not just for the work of evangelism, but just as a basic fruit of obedience and submission to Christ. As the book will later reveal, Dawson's understanding of and need for integrity is rooted in his understanding of the gospel and its power to both justify the sinner and cleanse the believer from sinful ways. In relationship to this, Dawson attempts to show how the integrity of Christians adorns the message of the Gospel, which answers many of the complaints raised by unbelievers regarding hypocrisy in the church. According to Dawson, Christians need to be open and honest about their sin while clinging to the work of Christ for forgiveness and acceptance.

In chapter three, the author stresses the importance of truly listening to those who have questions or concerns regarding their salvation. Specifically, Dawson encourages his readers to be the type of person that listens to the unbelievers and instead of simply saying something is right or wrong, but actually helping the unbeliever find the answers in God's Word. By doing this, there is an authenticity that is established in the relationship between the believer and the unbeliever, which is largely lacking in the transactional approach of evangelism from yesteryear.

In chapter four, Dawson continues by stirring up his readers to consider their own motives in the work of evangelism. Dawson believes that this is vitally important since one of the shifts in ministry-thinking over the years has been to "service evangelism"<sup>3</sup> that is focused on meeting the needs of the people to whom the Christian is sharing the gospel. The need for motive evaluation is especially considered to be important at this point because it is easy to confuse physical service with the most important service, which is the spiritual service of conveying the message of eternal life to unbelievers.

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<sup>3</sup> Pg. 69

In chapter five, Dawson considers prayer under the title, "The Nonnegotiable," which is rather telling. For Dawson and many others who were interviewed, evangelism that has been soaked in prayer is the only evangelism that is going to have power. Specifically, the author encourages his readers to be exceedingly intentional in their prayer efforts for others by actually making a list of people that one wants to see saved and then committing to praying to that end in relationship to their own personal evangelism efforts and more corporate oriented efforts.

In chapter six, the book considers the need for Christians to be committed to evangelism and take advantage of the opportunities. In many ways, the point of this chapter is to stir people to see the need and act on it. Dawson states that one of the keys to this is to be intentional in one's efforts, which naturally leads into the discussion of chapter seven. In chapter seven, Dawson addresses creativity in evangelism. Surprisingly, the emphasis is not so much on innovation, but on the improvement of things and mediums that are already in use. As such, Dawson considers how there are unchanging principles that can be expressed and practiced in a variety of methods that should and must change in certain context.

In chapter eight, Dawson seeks to embolden the reader to see past the rejection by some to the joy of seeing others embrace the gospel. Dawson makes clear that the believer does not and cannot change the heart of the unbeliever, but rather, that such a work is up to sovereign move of God. However, as Spurgeon once quipped, the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man do not need to be reconciled, because they are "old friends."<sup>4</sup> This reality, according to Dawson, should spur the believer on to share the gospel to everyone without fear knowing that they are successful because they are obeying the orders of their king.

In chapter nine, the book turns to the importance of partnership in the work of evangelism. As a model, this chapter looks toward the way that Christian groups have pulled

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<sup>4</sup> Pg. 129

together in times of crisis and have seen much fruit. The reality of such fruit should provoke some to see their respective need for each other in the work of evangelism.

In chapter ten, the author does the reader a great service by making sure that they understand what the gospel is and how it to be proclaimed to others. This is one of, if not, the most important chapter in the book since evangelism is all about the declaration of the evangel, or the good news. In chapter eleven, the author revisits some of the points from the introduction and first chapter by reposing the questions that he and his team were asking in a hopes to inspire another generation of evangelist that long to see their generation reached with the gospel. The book concludes with a selection of responses to the question, "What do we need to do to be effective in reaching the next generation?"<sup>5</sup>

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

One of the greatest strengths of this book is it readability and structure. Many times books like this focus on statistics and more formal research processes with technical language. For all the benefit that can be derived from such technical books, they are laborious to read and very rarely have any devotional value. This is not the case with *Today's Evangelism*. It is exceedingly obvious that this book was written by someone that is passionate about evangelism and seeing people won for Christ. As such, the reader is frequently inspired and encouraged to be evangelistic simply by virtue of the fact that the author communicates his own passion so well.

Another strength of this book is that it does not assume the gospel. So many books on evangelism fail to actually articulate the gospel, but not this book. It dedicates an entire chapter to the gospel, which is wonderful in light of the fact that so many people just do not know what the gospel is or how to articulate it. This is surely one of the highlights of the book.

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<sup>5</sup> Pg. 163

As for the weakness of the book, there are only a few. First, it is difficult to understand how prayer can be said to be foundational to the work of evangelism, but yet it appears in chapter five instead of at the beginning of the book. One can forgive the author for this oversight, but one certainly hopes that the book is read in its entirety before its principles are put into practice lest there be an imbalance and powerless effort in evangelism.

Another weakness of the book is related to something that was written in the introduction regarding relevance and an example of relevance used on page 56. In the introduction, the author states that gospel is still relevant, then on page 56, he states that "it" is all about being "relevant." The example of relevance is Stephen Baldwin's work in the *Living It* DVD. Sadly, the reviewer has been to an event that featured Mr. Baldwin and his BMX riders, and there was no gospel presentation. Instead, it seemed like the whole point was to see the BMX riders and hear Stephen Baldwin. Admittedly then, if the gospel as a message is relevant, one can hardly argue that there is need for such events in order to "be relevant" as the material on pages 56 and 57 seem to suggest.

### **Conclusion**

At the end of the day, this book is both commendable and worth the effort to read. The reviewer was pleasantly surprised with its quality and insight, even if some of the material was not as faithful to the overall message of the book as one would hope.