

No More Spectators

Equipping everyone to fulfill the Great Commission
Jeff Klein

My good friend who's a theater director told me church should work a lot more like the theater.

He went on to support his theory.

The theater director is in charge of the entire production. The director picks the play, modifies it, and casts a vision for its presentation. It's the director who shapes the actors and even gives input about costumes and set design.

He "blocks" the actors' movements on the stage, tells them when they are delivering their lines in a way that doesn't make sense, and works with them individually to perfect their parts. He rehearses with them daily, helping the actors make the story come to life.

He is extremely *visible* when the play is in rehearsal. But on performance nights, the director becomes *invisible*.

Often, the director sits in the crowd and no one even knows. The actors take ownership; the play is in their hands. The director will meet with the actors after the performance and give them "notes" on their work for the night. He will offer his comments and suggestions. But he will never take the stage. He will never play a part. The actors will have to make the play come to life.

My friend had a point. This is the way that church is supposed to work.

Instead, it seems the church often works the other way around. In [Ephesians 4:11-12](#), Paul writes that "Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service."

This is the job description of a pastor: equipping the people, the actors, for performing their parts in the play. So, much like the director, the pastor should become invisible, especially once the play begins.

But I'm afraid in today's church Jesus himself couldn't perform most pastors' job descriptions. He probably wouldn't even take the job. It's all gotten turned around. Now the pastor is paid to direct and perform the play with a few willing volunteers while most people sit in the audience and either applaud or critique the performance.

This is backwards. And it may be why the Church is becoming less effective in its work. There are so few people who are part of the action. Too often, the only call Christians hear from the front of our churches is, "Come and get involved in a ministry here at the church." It is a meaningful and necessary call, but woefully incomplete.

It is a call that focuses all our efforts inside the local church. But what if God is more interested in having his people move beyond the church walls? What if he wants us to live as missionaries out in the areas where he has planted us? Not merely run church programs, but get involved with neighbors, friends, and co-workers to walk with them into a relationship with Jesus? In other words, what if The Great Commission was meant for everyone, not just the professionals? If we really believed that, how would that change the way we do things?

Performing or equipping?

As a pastor, it's easy for me to blame this on the people of my church. But if my job is to equip God's saints, then I have to ask myself, "If I were to receive an evaluation of my effectiveness in equipping, what grade would I get?"

For five years, I was a teaching pastor at a very large church. I preached on weekends and on Wednesday nights. A lot of people came to hear my preaching and complimented me afterwards. As a church, we desired to reach people who were disconnected from God. Our strategy: get people to invite friends to church where we could deliver the gospel message. We wanted to make it easy for people. How hard can it be to invite your friend to church and let us take it from there?

Our intentions were good, but the strategy promoted a destructive mentality. The story being played out in our church was written, directed, and acted out by the professionals. The rest of the church merely had to cheer us on.

So, in search of a better strategy, I started a "missional" church from scratch. Our strategy was to go and serve in the community so that we could demonstrate God's love. On the second Sunday of every month, we left our seats and served the world. This was our "spiritual act of worship."

As we served more and more people, we felt the need to proclaim the gospel as well as demonstrate it. So I would get up on Sundays and give my best speech urging people to share their faith, but it didn't seem to work. One Sunday, one of our members approached me after my sermon. He appreciated my passion, but said he didn't know *how* to do what I was urging him to do. He said he suspected many others did not know how to do it either.

His hunch was confirmed when one of my elders came up to me after a sermon about getting involved with the people in our lives who don't know Jesus. His comment: "I don't think I know any non-Christians."

I realized the missional model wasn't working any better. People were still just watching me and the other paid staff put on the play while they applauded or booed our efforts.

Prepare to engage

To get our people engaged in the mission of God, we have to give them rehearsal instructions—practices and behaviors that will lead to the kind of Kingdom fruit that we hope to produce.

In addition to pastoring, I work for Q Place, a ministry dedicated to equipping and empowering Christians to engage in a Great Commission lifestyle. We have several tools that are designed to help Christians move into the action. One of these tools is the *Arts of Spiritual Conversations*, a curriculum series that helps Christians engage their friends in productive spiritual conversations.

Recently I worked with a church in Detroit that felt ill-equipped for evangelism. I put on a workshop where we challenged people to form groups in order to enter into ongoing spiritual conversations with their friends, neighbors, and co-workers. The first step, though, was not to form the group. The first step involved forming just a triad (three Christians) committed to reaching unbelieving friends. This triad would study the *Arts of Spiritual Conversations* together, practice the principles in their everyday lives, and then come back to their triad and report on how they did during the week.

When I talked to them a couple months later, they were excited. The training was impacting the people in the triads. By learning ways to engage people in spiritual conversations, and then being held accountable to go out and practice, their confidence and passion for evangelism was increasing.

This seems simple, but it makes all the difference in the world. Practice, with accountability, helps Christians get beyond a knowledge-based definition of spiritual maturity into an action-based one. They come onto the stage and become part of the play.

What about your church? Are your people on stage? Or have they taken a comfortable seat in the audience where they can have a good view of the story, but never take the risk of being part of it?

God doesn't want his people only to know the story, read the story, and love the story. He wants everyone to become part of it.

Will you equip your people to join the play?