



YEA!
SRI LANKA

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magazine

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ROEL
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THE CHRISTIAN
AND THE MEDIA

SIN

ISSUE 03 | 2021



YEA!
SRI LANKA

A DECADE OF
HOLISTIC
DISCIPLESHIP
IN SRI LANKA

Editorial

A devastating third wave of COVID-19 infections is upon us. Once again, we are homebound. Since April, dozens of deaths have occurred every day. Also, those infected have averaged well above 2000 cases per day. Across the country, families have bid farewell to their loved ones without a goodbye. Still others have been separated for long periods of time because of infection. Bravely, healthcare workers have stepped up to the challenge but have been overwhelmed by the intensity of the crisis.

To make matters worse, a burning ship carrying tons of chemicals and hazardous material has caused an unprecedented environmental crisis off the shores of our nation. Plastic pellets, ship wreckage, chemicals and other pieces of debris have washed ashore and devastated marine life, our beaches and the livelihoods of fishermen.

Only yesterday (2nd June), Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith reflected on the situation facing our nation. He bemoaned the failure of the nation's leadership and the trajectory of governance; especially in light of the glaring failure to do justice to those affected by the Easter attacks. He, then, pondered publicly whether a curse is upon our nation and mother nature herself has turned on our land.

How do we understand all this? Perhaps, our lives and those of our families have been largely untouched and unharmed through all this. For many, however, that is not the case. People have had to deal with not just the loss of livelihoods and incomes but also their loved ones. At the same time, along with the virus, frustration with those making decisions and in positions of power has spread fast. To those who care to look around, it is not hard to recognise the clutches of despair and uncertainty that has gripped our nation.



image source: Dailynews



image source: WHO

image source: Dailymirror

Preparations for oil spill scenario

● Fire waning slightly: SLP ● Wattala-Negombo shoreline polluted: Environmental org. ● Police to nab debris seekers

image source: themorning.lk

the 3rd wave

The Bible speaks loudly in times like these. It is not only a source of hope but also a fountain of joy and certainty. To those struggling, God's word infuses a sense of calmness. We can lean on it to find comfort for survival and direction to be agents of change it is most needed. Curse or no curse, the part we need to play is to hold God to His word which says that He is an ever-present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1). In fact, in Scripture, we see a God who is inclined to help and a sovereign who is quick to save.

SOS God. Save our nation and our people. Use us to do your saving and help us LORD, your people, to find a footing in your word. Tame, LORD, the savageness of nature and make gentle life on this land. Could this be our prayer?

image source: France24

image source: www.icj.org



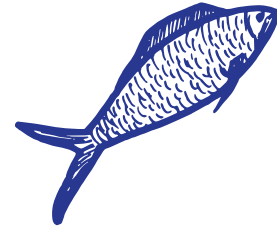
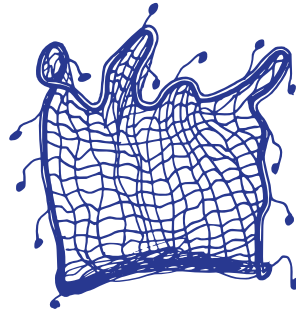
Ethics and evangelism



By Mike Gabriel

Evangelism lies at the heart of Christian missions and is typically understood as proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. However, as seen in the Bible, there is more to Christian mission than evangelism. While we are called to share the gospel, Christians are also called to show in action the good news of the gospel.

As Christians, we believe in sharing the gospel with all who are lost. This means exploring every opportunity that comes our way to share the good news with those around us. However, obedience to the Great Commission also requires obedience to Jesus' ethical teaching as seen elsewhere in Scripture. Simply put, anything does not go when it comes to evangelism!



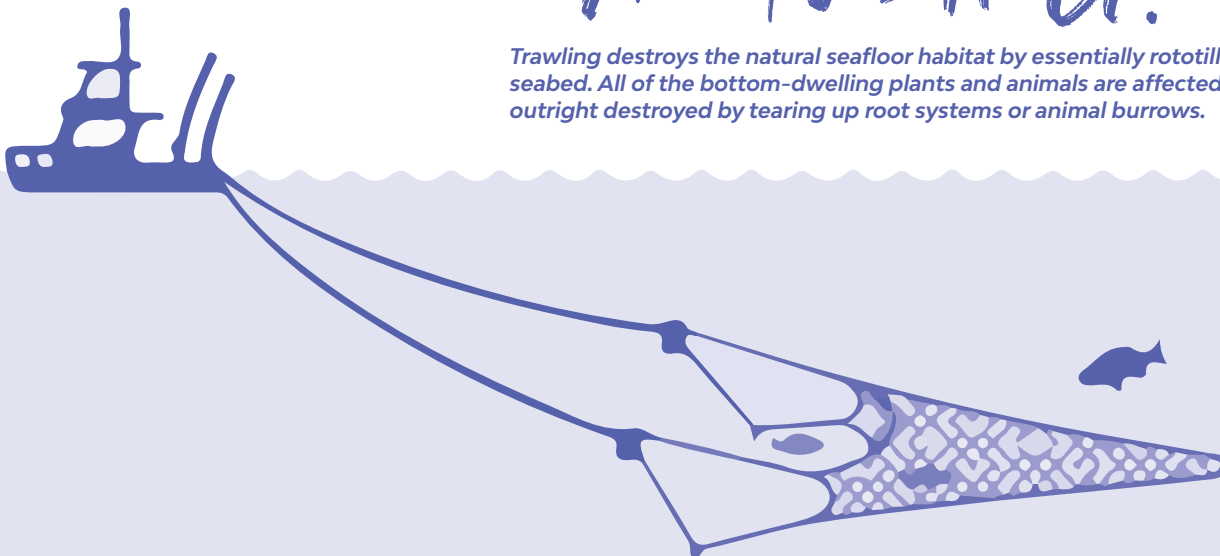
Dignity and evangelism

The dignity of human beings stems from their creation in the image of God. This means we should treat human beings as an end in themselves, and not a means to an end. How does this impact our view of evangelism? Evangelism becomes unethical when we reduce those whom we share the gospel with to the status of a pawn in the evangelistic programme of any church or religious institution. Sometimes, evangelism is lauded for its numerical value. Such an approach is fundamentally flawed too. Evangelism which does not show care for the whole person and the needs of the total person--physical, social, economic, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual--and rather focuses only on the 'soul' of the person lacks a complete understanding of the human person and perhaps even violate the dignity of the individual.

However, while we critically look at evangelism from the perspective of an individual's dignity, one should also not forget that persuading others about what we believe is very much part of our own dignity. After all, indifference is a show of disrespect to the other! On the other hand, healthy persuasion in terms of what one believes gives an opportunity to the individual to weigh their own beliefs against another and move towards the truth. In short, persuasion appeals to our thinking and promotes critical thought. Moreover, in the context of our religious beliefs, this is also a fundamental human right guaranteed in international law.

BOTTOM TRAWLING?

Trawling destroys the natural seafloor habitat by essentially rototilling the seabed. All of the bottom-dwelling plants and animals are affected, if not outright destroyed by tearing up root systems or animal burrows.



Some problems

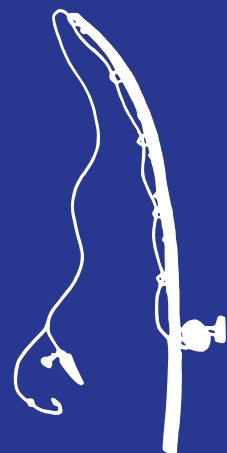
In the Christian world, evangelistic events are commonplace. However, here, it is worth carefully considering the strategies employed when carrying out such. Too often “evangelistic” events have been criticised for their overemphasis on the size of numbers or the spectacular nature of happenings. This is also then coupled with invitations and promotional campaigns for such events, which can sometimes be “over the top” or designed in a manner that convolutes its nature and purpose. While many may say that such programmes have proven to be effective over the years and have yielded much fruit for the Kingdom, yet, from an ethical perspective, there is much room for its premise to be interrogated.

When we look at Scripture, it is clear that Jesus never enticed or forced anyone to follow him. In some instances, though aggrieved, he watched young people walk away. In fact, Jesus never stopped short of enveloping his invitation to follow him with the sacrifices it demanded from those who were called to respond to his message. Moreover, Scripture is also clear that God is neither deceitful nor secretive. This means that straightforwardness should be the default stance of our ministries. In the Gospels, whenever Jesus got the impression that people were seeking to be entertained, he moved away to perform miracles in private so that public spectacles could be avoided. Such are the standards we see in the Bible. Sometimes, we have an eagerness to reach the unreached, which may, in contravention to popular Christian opinion, require some ‘tempering’ with the Biblical virtue of patience. While there is an absolute need for urgent obedience to the Great Commission by all Christians everywhere, such an urgency should not be exchanged for standards lower than those envisioned in Scripture.



‘Dignified’ Evangelism

Evangelism is a sacred, God-commanded duty of all Christians. Inevitably, this means that it should be clothed and shaped by God’s ethical standards when put into practice. Evangelism cannot go hand in hand with coercive and emotionally manipulative appeals that catch its hearers in spaces where they have no choice but respond to its message in one way or the other. In other words, evangelism should not undermine an individual’s God-given processes of cognitive reflection. Respect for an individual’s dignity demands that we use ethical means to persuade them with our beliefs. In turn, this also requires openness and transparency when it comes to our underlying purposes. Evangelism, which respects the dignity of persons is God honouring. Its fruit, in turn, is likely to be effective disciples who go deep in the faith and not shallow converts, who fall away.



Feature:

The Christian and the Media

Roel Raymond is a journalist by profession. She is the **editor-in-chief for media at Roar Global**. We sat down with Roel to talk about her journey in the field of media, passion for journalism, and her faith as it relates to her profession.



Image source : twitter @roelraymond

Q.1.

What made you select journalism as a profession?

—

Are there any individuals from whom you draw inspiration?

I can't say I actually chose journalism. I never grew up wanting to be a journalist. I just ended up in the profession through a series of events, and found I could never really leave — even though I tried multiple times. So now I believe this is truly my calling and that I am where God wants me to be!

When I began to examine the reasons why journalism resonates so much with me, though, I found some clearer answers. Journalism is primarily about truth-seeking and truth-telling. That is an ideal that means something to me. Journalism is expected to act as a watchdog, to hold the powerful to account, to seek justice and champion the underdog — these are also values and principles I grew up with, that shaped the way I think.

Journalism is expected to be independent and not submit to internal or external pressure. That resonates with who I am as a person. So on closer inspection, I see why this profession makes sense for me and why I am built for it. But that is exactly how it is, is it not? God puts in you just what you need to be the person you are, and do the job you must do. So I feel I am very much in the right place, doing exactly what I am supposed to do.



Image source : twitter @roelraymond

The Debrief w/ Roel Raymond

A series of incisive, in-depth interviews with key personalities, conducted by Roel Raymond.

WATCH MORE

Q.2.

With allegations of being biased and having political agendas, the media in Sri Lanka has been the focus of a lot of criticism lately.

As a journalist, what is your view of the media landscape today?

There are a number of reasons for this, but for clarity's sake, I'd like to first separate the industry from the professionals. In my experience — and I have been a journalist for over ten years now — journalists themselves come into the industry wanting to make a difference; they want to champion the underdog, be a voice for the voiceless, hold the powerful to account and to shed light on abuses. But media ownership and agenda often get in the way.

Media ownership here refers to when the person, people or entity that owns the media exerts, subtly or overtly, their own political agendas to the functions of news reporting. This skews the truth and breaks the trust people have in the media, which is why the news media has such a bad reputation today — it cannot be relied on to tell the truth.

Very few journalists can afford to strike out independently, and over time, become part of this skewed system. Some journalists do succeed in creating a name for themselves, but the pressures of financially supporting themselves while doing their jobs are not to be taken lightly, which is why only so few of them are successful. Besides, what is an industry if everyone is forced to be an independent player? So this is not the solution.

The issues are deep-rooted and can't be easily dealt with, but there are solutions. With training, support and more opportunities, the media industry can be wrested away from 'big-money' and other interests. But it requires vision and a commitment to seeing change through to the end. I dare not speculate on who will lead that change.

Q.3.

How has being a Christian impacted your work as a journalist?

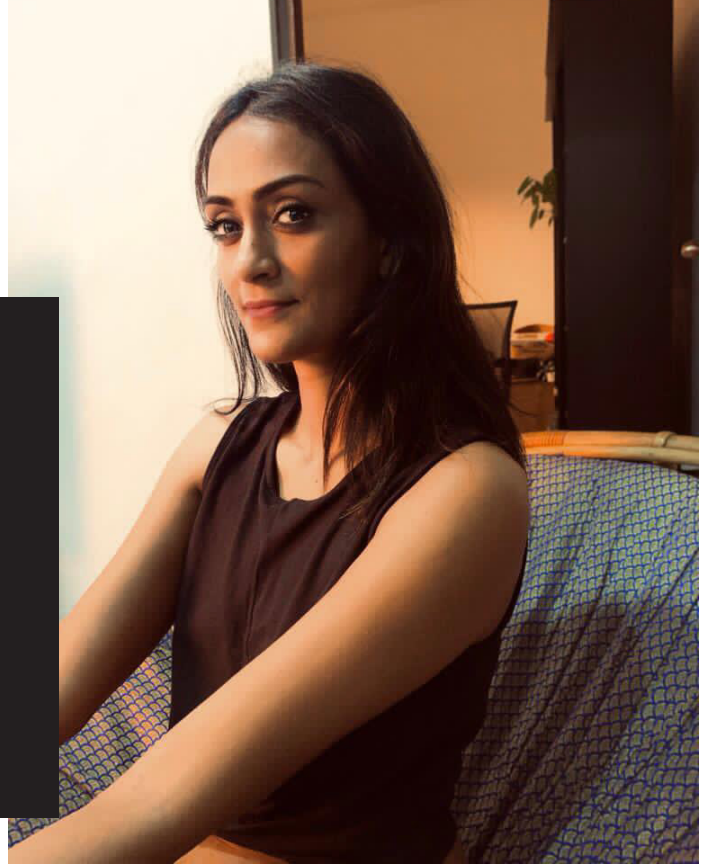


Image source : [twitter @roelraymond](#)

Greatly. It is the one and only thing that makes any difference.

I referred earlier to how the values and principles of journalism resonate with the values and principles I grew up with. I was brought up a Christian, and attended an Anglican Christian school. My family has been Christian for generations. There's so much I took for granted growing up, but on reflection, as an adult today, I am aware of how these values and principles keep me buoyant, and I am so grateful for them.

It is when you move out of the comfort of the world you were brought up in, and are confronted by and must contend with people who have values and principles that are different from yours — people who will put forth persistent and persuasive argument in favour of their thinking — that you have to dig in to know who you are, what you believe in and why you believe it.

It is at times like these, when it has become abundantly clear that the consequences for wrongdoing are minimal and rules can be bent if you are smart and powerful enough, that you learn just how much these values and principles mean to you; because there is no tangible or material gain to be derived from sticking to your values. The only thing that is appeased is your moral conscience. That is faith right there.

I was not a very good Christian in my early years. I was very rebellious and did things my way (and ended up in a lot of trouble). But I have learned with time to 'walk with God' and seek His daily presence and direction in my life. I always tell my friends, 'I worship a living God, not some figment of my imagination in the sky!'. How wonderful that we can go to Him for direction, especially when things get confusing or you don't know what to do?

So yes, my work, and my life, are greatly impacted by my faith in Christ - my faith that 'He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.'

Q.4.

What is it that you most enjoy about being a journalist?

I like the fact that it demands so much. I love the fact that news journalism is a 24 x 7 job, especially for someone who deals with breaking news, as I do. I like that it requires you to be on your feet, aware of what is happening at all times. That it pushes my boundaries mentally and physically. That it is exhilarating and exhausting. I am so blessed to have a job I love and enjoy.

Q.5.

Journalism can be tough work. What have been some of the challenges or discouragements that you may have faced in your line of work, especially when looking at from a faith perspective?

God has truly been good to me. I have not had any serious challenges or discouragements in my line of work. Perhaps this is because — as I explained before — journalism itself aspires to higher ideals that are congruent with my faith.

Q.6.

What would be your advice to Christian youth who are contemplating entering the media field?

My advice is simple. Know who you are in Christ first, because that is what you take to your work, no matter where you are or what you do. If you know who you are in Christ, nothing else will matter. Your eyes will be on God and He will take you where He wants to take you. Ultimately, it is between you and Him, not you and the rest of the world.





Are All Sins Really Equal?

By Moses Hoole

Growing up in the evangelical church, I felt the weight of being under the microscope with which my sins were magnified at the expense of others'. I am very familiar with the crippling effects of being told that my sins were more grievous, when it was obvious that the individual bringing them up to me had many struggles of their own. Ironically, later on in life, I developed a sense of self-righteousness with which I looked down upon the sins of others until I was confronted by the Word of God. Reading the book of James in the New Testament, I was astonished when the author points out that "whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (James 2:10). This put a stop to my sense of moral superiority. By the grace of God, I came to grips with the sinfulness of sin, that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God", and that there is "no one righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3: 23, 10b). The indictment rang so clear: by nature, every human being lives in open rebellion against their Maker, and is in need of a Saviour.

But does the popular evangelical truism that all sins are equal pass the test of Scripture? Or is it a result of our desire to sound spiritual at the cost of trivialising the heinous degrees of human sin against an infinitely Holy God? The aim of this article is to serve as a concise introduction to a broader, yet much neglected Christian teaching on human sin.



Sin: A Definition

Sin is never an arbitrary matter, merely a whimsical displeasure of a jealous God. Sin is knowingly breaking God's command and flows from a heart that rebels against God, thus directed principally against God (Bavinck).

Therefore the New Testament terms for sin are mainly negative: transgression, disobedience, lawlessness, lovelessness, unrighteousness, godlessness. **The consequences of sin are guilt, broken relationships with God and others, death, and condemnation.** Since it is a choice directed against the living God, it is a choice for death. All humanity is implicated in guilt from the first sin of Adam and the consequence of the guilt of sin is a corrupt nature, inherited through the generations (Letham).

While all sins are equal in that they receive righteous condemnation because they are committed against an infinitely Holy God, they are not equal in their degrees. Slapping one's neighbour is a sin without question because every human being is created in the image of God, but it is certainly not as heinous as murdering them. In other words, although all sins lead to condemnation, there is a clear distinction between lesser and greater sins.



DEATH
GUILT
CONDEMNATION
BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Greater and Lesser Sins

During His incarnation, Jesus spoke of the Pharisees who “strain out a gnat” and yet “swallow a camel” (Matt 23:24), and differentiated between “a plank” and “a speck” in one’s eye (Matt 7:3). Speaking before his crucifixion, Jesus subordinates the sin of Pilate to the one who delivered him to Pilate (John 19:11). The Apostle John distinguishes “sin that leads to death” from other sins (1 John 5:16–17). While space would limit an extensive look at the degrees of sin, the following principles are helpful starters:

The Person Sinning: The greater revelation we have about God, the more responsible we are to God. “Everyone to whom much is given, of him much will be required” (Luke 12:47-48). This principle also applies to gifts (Jeremiah 5:4-5, 2 Samuel 12: 7-9, Ezekiel 8:11-12, Romans 2:17-24), eminence in the church (James 3:1), and age (Ecc 4:13).

The Person Sinned Against: Although all sins have vertical (as it relates to God) and horizontal (as it relates to people) dimensions, violation of the greatest commandment – the failure to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt 22:37) – is greater than the violation of the second greatest commandment to love your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22:38). The unpardonable sin, namely blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, is to actively attribute God’s works to Satan and constantly reject Jesus Christ even though the Holy Spirit has given every evidence to you that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt 12:22-32; Luke 12:10).

The Nature of the Sin: The more we intend to sin, the more serious the offense. The clearer the command sinned against, the greater the sin. Deliberate, willful, presumptuous, bold, and repetitive sins are worse than sins committed in ignorance (1 Tim 1:12-14). The Old Testament law made provision for different kinds of sins, such as “unintentional” versus “high-handed” sins (Num. 15:22–31).

Circumstances: Sinning in public where it may encourage others to stumble is “very great” (1 Sam 2: 12-25, 2 Sam 16:22), and sinning repeatedly after having been chastised by God is worse (Ezra 9:13-14).

God’s justice demands that the punishment fits the crime. While all sins condemn us before God, the Bible also speaks about varying degrees of judgment for varying gravity of sin (Matt 11:22,24, Luke 12:47-48; Heb 10:29). While faith alone in the finished works of Christ alone merits eternal life, our good works do earn us varying degrees of rewards in heaven (Matt 16:27; 25:14-30; Luke 19:17).



GRACE GRACE GRACE

Grace that is Greater

Young men and women who struggle with lust and pornography often buy into the equalising argument that adultery is not much worse. While lust and addiction to pornography are serious sins that need to be weeded out of the Christian's life, the spiritual and physical ramifications of adultery are much greater.

Yet, at the heart of the Christian faith is this wonderful news: God in the Person of Jesus Christ intervened in human history; taking on human form he entered into our rebellion and sin. Jesus understands our weaknesses: He was tempted in every way and yet without sin lived a perfect life on our behalf. Jesus also died the death our little sins and our big sins deserve. When we turn from ourselves and look to Him, He declares us innocent as our sins are imputed to Him, and His righteousness is imputed to us by faith. Because of Jesus Christ, where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. Our sins are many; His mercy is more.

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GRACE

Evangelism in a Post Covid World

By Aaron Bulathsinghala

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." were the words of Jesus in Mark chapter 16. This was the Great Commission. The word "Go" was not a suggestion, it wasn't an option, it wasn't a request but a command! A command that came straight from the heart of God; a command to proclaim the good news of His love, freedom, peace, patience, grace and gift of Life. The word evangelize has been misinterpreted and misused by many Christians. This has caused many to either walk away from God or completely be disgusted by the 'gospel'. People have confused this verse as having to convert. But conversion is a matter of the heart and can never be a result of force.



There was a story of this pastor who was preaching to a group of young people. His message was turn or burn. He spoke of the wages of sin, he spoke of hell and declared that if they did not accept Jesus they would suffer in hell forever. One young girl stood up in the crowd and said "pastor, my life is a living hell, my home is broken, my life is in constant agony! I don't need to know what hell looks like because I experience it every day." Show me what heaven looks like. The word for gospel in Greek translates to good news of God. In a world filled with immense hopelessness, brokenness, torn by selfish gain and ambition, people need Jesus. This does not mean preaching health and wealth, but rather showcasing his love and peace. Proclaiming the Good News of who God is and what he has done for us is freedom to the captive, is health to the sick, is peace to the restless, and hope to the hopeless. The church today is so caught up in itself, getting fat on knowledge with little to no experience of God. Today we have access to so many sermons on evangelism, conferences, books, seminars and the list goes on. But just talking does not save lives.

So, how then do we evangelise? Evangelism has taken many different forms over the years and to each group of Christians. To some it looks like having mass gatherings and outreach meetings, to some it is street evangelism, to some it is community service, to some it is one-on-one interactions. Whatever it is or has been, there is no right or wrong method, given that it has not been forceful or come across with an ulterior motive. However, today we as a global community of Christians face a crippling health crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic. This pandemic has taken many lives, ravaged through cities, left economies in ruins, and has turned the world upside down. Amongst other barriers to sharing the good news of Jesus, the pandemic has caused a physical barrier. Many churches have closed their doors and pastors are scrambling to operate from the confines of their homes. Large movements and programs were brought to a grinding halt. Evangelism was almost an impossibility. Although Covid-19 may finally come to an end, churches reopen, and outreach programs fire up again, the world will never go back to how it was.



GOOOOO
OOOOOO
OOOOO

Adapt and Rethink



This calls the Church to adapt and rethink its methods. The early church grew through unconventional and radical methods. They met together, fellowshiped and by building relationships they spread the gospel. The early church adapted to its situation, they learned, grew and strived in giving the world they lived in an opportunity to encounter Jesus. The post Covid-19 world may actually be an ideal atmosphere for evangelism. Firstly, people are longing for human interaction, for any form of personal relationships; people's lives have slowed down greatly and now have a little more time on their hands. Secondly, we live in a digital age, communication is at our fingertips, face to face interaction can be done via a phone (of course it can never compare to an in-person interaction, but is a great step in that direction). Thirdly, with everything going on in the world people have realized that human efforts, the greatest minds, so called indestructible economies and everything else they have put their security and hope in has failed them.

Given this information what can we do? There is no cookie cutter method for evangelism. This article is not to give a 3-step guide on how to evangelize but rather help stir an urgency and highlight the possibility of how we as the church can and should reach the lost. Saying that a few areas the church can adopt is to become more relational in their efforts. Share the gospel via demonstration and meaningful relationships. Next is to invest into media and an online presence, if the church is to reach people it must operate on the space those people spend most of their time on. Finally, looking at a Macro plan with a Micro focus. What that means is focusing on equipping the church to build communities and not focusing on building a large gathering.

The Dark Side of Leadership

by Nathan Somanathan



Protestantism carries with it the identity of “protest” ever since its departure from the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. The Protestant church has continued to struggle to understand the role of its clergy and church leaders in non-Catholic and non-papal terms ever since. Several reformations that followed “the Reformation” have attempted to decentralize disproportionate power and authority from select church leadership and distribute it amongst the congregation—in some instances, breaking down barriers of race, gender and class. The “priesthood of all believers” is a Reformation product that has continued to protest against power structures whenever the church has attempted to marry interpretive and institutional power.

However, the church as an institution and an organized body cannot escape the need for leadership. Much ink has been spilled on this subject in recent times, particularly in Evangelical circles. You can walk into any bookstore, Christian or otherwise, and feel overwhelmed at the amount of books on themes like “how to be a successful leader” or “Biblical principles for leadership.”

Furthermore, in the modern globalizing world, figures like Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and others with multi-billion dollar empires have come to epitomize successful leadership for many. Despite the gross negligence of humanitarian and ethical violations in their respective companies, these men are made heroes for their incredible wealth and their witness to what capitalism has to offer to the whole world.



This cultural phenomena of unrestrained pursuit of success in monetary and capitalistic terms, post-economic boom in the West, is not restricted to just America or the American Church. The American doctrine of Capitalism coupled with a "theology of Health and Wealth" was exported all across the world by the "Word of Faith" movement and some televangelists in the 60s and the decades following. However, this doctrine of success, the American dream, is more deep seated in the American social fabric than is expressed in fringe Pentecostal groups. It has deeply formed aspects of American Evangelicalism and through its missionary enterprise, it has influenced Christianity in other parts of the world including Sri Lanka.

One writer diagnosed the recent "fall from grace" of several high-profile leaders, outed for sexual immorality and financial impropriety, as a symptom of an "industrial complex" within Evangelicalism. The Evangelical church had conformed to a culture that prized upward mobility and individual success to the detriment of accountability, transparency and ethical responsibility within leadership. Pastors virtually became CEOs and churches became businesses.

The cautionary tale from the history of the Church and also Scripture is that whenever Christian leaders flirt with the desire for "power" and "worldly success," it usually never ends well. The downfall often begins even before the ascent, when the desire to be a leader is idolized and overrides the calling to be first a servant. The idealized version of leadership that is used as a ploy to recruit young people to "save the world" has led to a fragmented church that is only as effective as its charismatic leader.

Ironically, James uses the opposite strategy. "Not many of you should become teachers[/leaders], my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly," he says to deter inhibited interest. Jesus warns in Luke 9:25, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" He also provides a strong correction in Matt 23:11 to the two disciples to be a servant to all because they sought special leadership status in the Kingdom of God. In the Old Testament, the leader is never portrayed as the sole hero of the narrative nor are they glamorized. The OT authors in fact expose the serious weaknesses and inadequacies of their protagonists in order to point to a future messianic figure who will embody the true and complete form.

DARK SIDE

Yet the project to crack the code for “successful” Christian leadership in worldly terms staggers ahead. Something that is not explored nearly enough is the Christian preoccupation (and even infatuation) with the theme of “leadership” as if everyone is on the same page about the values and priorities when it comes to the language of leadership. Also, the “dark side” of leadership is severely under-emphasized. According to some psychologists, most leaders, if not all, are somewhere on the “narcissism” spectrum, which means that the God given mandate to lead, corrupted by the Fall, has created all kinds of tendencies towards abuse of power, manipulation and exploitation.

Recent revelations surrounding the scandals of top Evangelical leaders like Ravi Zacharais and Bill Hybels revealed that the men, to put it crudely, legitimized their exploitations as spoils of ministry. What was it about their understanding of leadership that sustained years of abuse and manipulation of those they were called to serve? Was it merely a bad philosophy of leadership, maybe they needed to read a particular book on leadership or maybe they should have had better accountability structures? I submit that the deeply entrenched **“celebrity”** and **“hero worship”** cultures in certain churches, organizations, and ministries create spaces for the flourishing of forms of leadership deeply aligned with exploitative worldly powers and in contradiction to the cruciform power of humility and dependence.



While the need for leadership is inevitable and must be welcome in church settings and otherwise, a particular leadership or single leader is not the answer to what ails the world. As a young pastor, I have had to navigate many of the potholes stated above, making many mistakes along the way. I have had to discern selfish-ambition that is often marketed in spiritual language and be attentive to the trends and cultural pressures that can try to override a truly Christian imperative for leadership.

The Sri Lankan church must recover the relational and second-tier terms like father (and mother), undershepherd, co-labourer, and servant used by Scripture as opposed to militant and CEO-like images to describe the role of the Christian leader. As mentioned above, the Evangelical church must define leadership in the cross-pressure between its Protestant identity and its place in the fast globalizing modern world. What is the narrative that will govern this negotiation? Christ and him crucified alongside the dark side of leadership must be the central themes of this narrative in order to preserve perpetual humility and dependence on God and fellow constituents in God's kingdom.

It would do us well to heed to Peter's exhortation to elders/leaders in 1 Peter 5:2-4: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.



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Sporting Lessons for the Believer

by Jerome Rasiah

Sports have always been something I have loved and enjoyed! I believe sports teaches us more about life than any educational qualification. This must be hard for academics to hear but many might even agree with me. Sports requires a lot of activity, both physically and mentally – it requires strategic thinking and carefully thought-out decisions. It reveals the supernatural creativity of God, in designing such ability for cohesion between both the body and spirit. However, as I write this article, I also acknowledge that modern sports are not always perceived in a positive light. As much as it unites people and brings the best out of a human body, today, sport is also a money machine and a platform to further one's political agendas. These events have made us fall out of love with the sports that made us the men and women we are today.

Some might ask, how could sports help one's spiritual life? If you are a typical church going religious person, shouldn't you be spending time building the 'kingdom of God'? Let me share with you four key Christian values sports teach us that can help us be better kingdom citizens.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9: 24 -27).

In the above scripture we see Paul telling the people of Corinth to run so as to win. Here, Paul uses the discipline and the value needed to win races, the sacrifices required to be good at your sport, the importance of balance in training, exercise, diet, and sleep all which are quintessential to excel in sports. Paul uses this analogy to emphasise that Christians ought to put aside desires of the flesh to be the Children of God. Additionally, in the world we live in temptations and distractions are at our fingertips and it requires great self-discipline to say NO! However the art of saying no is a habit we as believers learn over time. Just as Paul says here, we need to run this race to win and to win we need to cultivate discipline.

Authority

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose... If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:29, 31-32).

One of the key values sports instill in us is the respect for authority. The most challenging part to a human is to place their trust on someone to make the right decisions. This is because we always like to have control over our life. However, an athlete must have complete confidence that his/her coach's decisions are right, even when they don't understand it at that moment. They need to realise the coach sees the bigger picture. In the same way, we also need to trust our Father in heaven that his plans are always good for us, especially when we know that He has given us the greatest gift of all: life in Jesus Christ! Even though we might not understand Him and sometimes question if He's on our side, we must place our complete confidence in Him because He has the greater good in mind.



Image source: ESPNerinfo

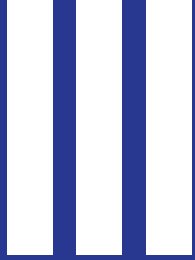
THE FIGHT

Perseverance

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Tim 4:7).

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jude 24,25).

How could anyone have such confidence to say that they have finished the race well? Doesn't that sound like self-accolade? But, we see in the New Testament that although Paul suffered so much for the Gospel, he joyously claims to have fought the good fight. Likewise, we also see in the world of sports, many coming from difficult backgrounds and making it to the hall of fame. How did they do it? Didn't they fail? Was it handed in a platter to all of them? They persevered! Every time they failed they got back up, set goals, and had the right attitude. So Christians should also persevere to join Paul in saying the same words, because unlike others, they are strengthened by God Himself to run their race without stumbling.



TEAM TEAM TEAM

Teamwork

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Eph 4:15,16).

Living in a globalized world, we are more divided than ever before. We are at the height of disunity and disengagement. If only we come together we can see the power of change. Interestingly, that is the power of sports. You cannot win alone! You might be the best player but at one point you need that pass from your team mate.

Babe Ruth, a major league baseball player says that "the way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime." It is important that we understand that we are pursuing a common goal with a host of players, coaches, managers, and community members that help us build a collective team synergy for the best way to solve problems - for victory! Who are you playing with? Are you teaming up or going as a one man army and getting exhausted?

We cannot do our mission on this Earth alone. We need to speak the truth in love and work together, building each other up towards the common goal we have. Just as the different parts of the body work together in union with the head, we too must function together under the leadership of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, as we have seen, there are many lessons to be learned from sports that are beneficial to the Christian life. Ironically, however, the success of applying these principles does not look like the success that sports bring. As Christians, we do not strive for temporary earthly trophies. We strive for eternal rewards, especially our highest reward: Jesus Christ Himself.





#MINORMATTERS



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