

New Roots Review

June 2024

Being the Odd-Man-Out by Fred Wilgenburg

I'm no John the Baptist, nor an Elijah, nor an Apostle Paul. While we are of the same family—of God, I have never been persecuted like those three biblical giants. However, I have felt like the “odd man out” at times, which John the Baptist experienced as one wearing camel's hair and speaking a challenging message (Mark 1:3-8), which Elijah experienced as he felt alone, fleeing King Ahab, Jezebel, and their people (1 Kings 19:1-18), and which Paul experienced as his new siblings in Christ didn't trust him, and the Jewish people wanted to kill him (Acts 9:19-31).

I am inspired by John the Baptist, Elijah, and the Apostle Paul, as well as others, who promote vital, but unpopular ideas and truths. Regarding what? I'll get to that a few paragraphs below. During 2020, the year of Covid-19, were you amazed, as I was, by the science and medical communities? Facing a daunting pandemic, and with the whole world watching, they worked together as well as possible in developing vaccines in record-breaking time. That inspired me to study and research in getting better in my field—Gospel ministry; I pursued a DMin degree.

But what would be the focus of my DMin? Unlike a PhD or ThD, which are typically more academically rigorous, which usually take longer to achieve, and which produce more professor- and research-type of people, a DMin is focused on practical outcomes for ministry, and is more project-based. My DMin, which included doing numerous surveys, reading several books, giving presentations, and interviewing people, was all geared toward answering this question: “As studies show that the influence of the Gospel is steadily declining in the US, what are the motivating factors for people, both believers and non-believers, to dialogue more at a spiritual level, including about the Gospel, and which need to be understood by Christian leaders to effectively encourage the common occurrence of Gospel conversations, therefore being cause for the Gospel to become increasingly influential?” Here is a shorter version: “What things motivate people of all backgrounds to dialogue at a spiritual level, and which should be understood by Christian leaders so they can encourage it to happen more?” To me, that is super important, based on these troubling statistics: A) The “Religious None” group, including nothing-in-particulars, atheists, and agnostics, is now the largest religious group in the US, at 26%, recently edging out Evangelical Protestants who have held steady at 25% for the past 13 years (*Pew Research*). B) Eighty percent of those who attend church one or more times a month believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith, but 61% have not told another person about how to become a Christian in the previous six months (*Lifeway Research*).

Back to the three biblical giants mentioned earlier.... John the Baptist preached about repenting of sin and seeking forgiveness. While many did and were baptized, we can imagine that the religious authorities did not appreciate this spiritual outlier. Ultimately, John called out the sin of Herod the tetrarch, and he was executed. Elijah confronted King Ahab as the nation of Israel—God's people—had fallen so far from God that there were over 850 prophets for other gods. One hundred of the Lord's prophets were hidden, or they would have been killed (1 Kings 18:13,19). The Apostle Paul was beaten, stoned, imprisoned, shipwrecked, and ultimately executed for bearing the truth of the Gospel (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). Standing on, and proclaiming truth, —>



**NEW ROOTS
MINISTRY**



Venky got his driver's license on his first try. When his wife comes from India in a few months, he wants us to help her.



(continued...) they were the odd-men-out. As I highlight those

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Saint Francis in beginning what would soon be called “the miracle of the cornfields.” Dr. Mayo’s sons, Will and Charlie, along with other Catholic sisters, who served as nurses, then took it to a whole other level as they sensed their responsibility to improve health care in the US. They did innovative things for their day—traveling extensively to learn new surgical procedures, becoming a selfless training facility, putting patients first in everything, improving medical records of patients, collaboration of physicians of different specialties, and bringing pathology laboratories next to surgery rooms to quickly learn about the malignancy of tumors during cancer surgeries. Well before retirement, the Mayo brothers, seeing they and their families had enough money to live on by then, deeded the extra they had, along with future wages, to the world-renowned, non-profit Clinic.

As New Roots Ministry encourages and empowers the 60+ new American pastors and churches we work with, whose main struggle is often being spiritually relevant to their younger generations who are teased by their new American language and culture, so I encourage each of us blessed Jesus-followers to realize that “the ball is in our court.” We have terrific news, and an even better “Lord of the harvest” (Matthew 9:38), “whose got the whole world in His hands.” As we actively, thoughtfully share our Gospel more, instead of feeling intimidated on the sidelines, we as the Church can profoundly help turn things around in the world. Like John the Baptist, Elijah, and the Apostle Paul, like the science community facing Covid-19, and like the Mayo Clinic, let’s be fulfilled as “Christ’s ambassadors” (2 Cor. 5:20), and as “God’s workmanship” (Ephes. 2:10). The world is desperate for Good News, and for the Church’s vitality.

But how? If you are in the Sioux Falls region, consider joining us for Everyday-Ambassadors Practicum—sfnewroots.com/our-ministries. (If you live elsewhere but may be interested, we’ll share our curriculum.) Consider hanging out with us, shopping in stores and visiting with the merchants who are of other faiths, which can be enlightening and fun. Consider being a volunteer driving trainer, and rub shoulders with kind, appreciative people of other faiths and backgrounds. (Or, consider starting this kind of program in your community.) If you have a few minutes, listen to podcast conversations that we put up on this webpage to get ideas for Gospel outreach—open.spotify.com/show/4WxAH1KgXGIX6Pm8nKwcXJ.

statistics mentioned earlier, I often feel like the odd-man-out. Many believers and pastors do not seem concerned, even somewhat indifferent; our daily lives are full enough, with little room for rubbing shoulders with those who may be lost, and our own congregational issues are already all-consuming. But, rearranging and reprioritizing our seemingly full “plates” will likely bring us helpful freshness and tasty spice.

I recently read *The Mayo Clinic: Faith, Hope, Science*. In Rochester, Minnesota, in 1883, Dr. William Worrall Mayo teamed up with Mother Alfred of the Sisters of

What is New Roots Ministry?

It’s “a springboard for new Americans & their churches.” This is done through workplace chaplaincy (we provide chaplaincy at Smithfield Foods & we train & place bilingual chaplains on commercial farms), through Timothy Leadership Training, through hosting special educational events, through empowering new American pastors, leaders, and their churches, through offering unique Service Opportunities—serve in, or visit, stores owned by new Americans, then hear their stories, through helping people navigate the American system and achieve their goals, like education, through driver training for new Americans, and through Everyday-Ambassadors Practicum.



It was fun sharing the pulpit at a church with Kedir & Tsegenesh, a married couple originally of Ethiopia. They were both the first Jesus-followers in their families, leaving Islam as young adults.