

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
Fearless – Episode 83 – Has the Church Become Too Much of a Show and Not Enough Truth?

Cissie Graham Lynch:

00:00:00 Has the church become more about a production for you and less about evangelism and discipleship? That is what we're going to discuss on today's first episode in the series Elephant in the Room.

Hi, I'm Cissie Graham Lynch. Welcome to Fearless, helping you have a fearless faith in a compromising culture.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Cissie Graham Lynch:

00:00:33 Welcome back to Fearless. I am here in my office at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. I always love being back in the office here in Charlotte, North Carolina. For this series of "Elephant in the Room," kicking off this series as I introduced in the last episode, we're going to talk about what should church look like. Has church become more of a huge Sunday production?

And have we taken our eyes off of what God has called us to be? And it was after the pandemic that I had a colleague talk to me that he and his family were trying to reevaluate what does church look like for them. They had gone to a huge church, a mega church, and was that what was best for their family after the pandemic and wanting a smaller community of believers and more kind of a Bible study setting. But I think, of course, we could all agree the last few years has revealed a lot about the church here in America. That we have had great division over different issues such as race, social justice versus a biblical justice, Critical Race Theory, LGBTQ issues, politics. And those are issues that are not new here to Fearless. We have talked about some of those issues. But as a church as a whole, and I think this summer is what broke my heart the most. Um, when the Supreme Court announced that Roe vs Wade would be overturned. I was watching the news in Alaska. It was the only day I turned on the news this summer in Alaska. And just tears came to my eyes of the celebration of something we worked for for 50 years. And the celebration that our nation finally did what was right. The Supreme Court had made a ... a bold decision. A hard decision. And it was the silence of the church that truly shocked me. More than what's kind of shocked me in anything in the last few years. And so, I started going through all these pastors' feeds. And I follow a lot of them because I always want to see. A lot of them will have outcries on different social issues.

Um, they were very outspoken on, you know, back in 2020 with the summer of Black Lives Matter. Some of these pastors did the black square on that Tuesday. Um, many of them were out there protesting with signs and dressed in all black. And ... then, when it comes to LGBT issues, they're kind of more just love, love, love. And there's not a lot of truth. But I think the most shocking thing was the silence on Roe vs Wade. I even saw one pastor here locally – he said that this is not a time that the church and Christians should be beating their chest and celebrating. Well, first off, I don't know anybody that's beating their chest and celebrating. But, yes, we are celebrating a victory when we get

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to save lives. That ever day lives are being saved now because Roe vs Wade has been overturned. It's been such a, um, tremendous bloodshed on this nation that we've reversed and done what was right. That is a celebration. I look at the Israelites. They would celebrate when they had victory. David would celebrate when he had military victories. So, just shocked that, you know, we can't celebrate anything because we don't want to offend those that might be suffering. And yes, there are ways to handle this. This doesn't mean the church stops serving with grace and serving those vulnerable women and those families that are in need and those families that might have medical conditions. And that young teenage girl. But we do celebrate how God answered our prayers over 50 years here in this nation.

I still can't believe our Supreme Court reversed Roe vs Wade. But as I look at the church as a whole and I look at the social media of pastors and what has it really become? Have pastors become more of a self-help? Giving self-help tips of a healthy marriage and healthy lifestyle or things that will make you happy. What's the best for you? Um, because I see a lack, even on their social media. And social media, Instagram will reveal a lot about somebody. And I can always pick up on things. But have they ... they've missed teaching biblical truth, the biblical Scriptures that would help our congregations, that would help the church as a whole navigate through this shifting culture when we have these tough cultural subjects that come up. So when they sit silent and they pick and choose what cultural issue they're going to, um, speak on. What does that result in? And I think a lot of us who attend church regularly, who've maybe grown up in Sunday School, gone to church camp, and all of that, there's certain things about the Bible we know. We can know the 10 Commandments. We'll know John 3:16. Most of us, maybe even non-believers and non-Christians would know John 3:16. However, I do remember the story of, uh, Tim Tebow when he was in college and wore John 3:16 the first time on his cheeks. They said it was, um, the biggest Google search that night was what was John 3:16. So, maybe the world, of course, might not know it. But as Christians growing up in the church, there's certain basic truths that we know. You would think most of us would know what the Great Commission is. Jesus' last words and His instructions, um, to His disciples. But that's not true. I just ... a colleague read this statistic to me that blew me away. And it was only 17% actually know about the Great Commission and where it occurs in Scripture. About 25% say they're familiar with it, but they're not exactly sure what it is.

And 51% of Christians say they don't know what the Great Commission is. And that shocked me. And so, I went straight to my kids right away. My kids are eight and six. And I've mentioned here on Fearless before that I use my car ride as my mission field with my children. So, on the way to school, I turned on a song, and it's called "The Commission" by the Christian band Kane. And I said, "Listen to the words of this song. And let me know if you know what it's talking about." My daughter, she's so smart. She figured it out right away that it was about Jesus. And I made them relisten to it. Okay, relisten now that you know who it's trying to speak in the words of Jesus. What is He telling you to do? And she said, "To tell people about Him." And so, now, that song has been on repeat every morning this past week in my car. But if you're somewhere in that

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category of those percentages that I read of not knowing it, I'm not here to shame anybody or to make anybody feel guilty for not knowing it. But I want to encourage people that that's kind of the struggle that we are here in this nation is becoming biblically illiterate, not knowing the Scriptures. That the Great Commission is the final set of instructions that Jesus left for us before he ascended into heaven and you can find it, um, in the book of Matthew chapter 28. And Jesus came up and spoke to them saying, "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy spirit. Teaching them to follow all that I commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age."

And even in the last part, it says, "Teaching them to follow all that I commanded you." And why is this important for believers to know these words of Jesus? Because it's the purpose. That's the objective ... as believers and as Christians. It's kind of what I mentioned on the last podcast about keeping our eyes focused on the cross. When we know what God's purpose is here for us on Earth, that changes our focus. And I had that conversation with my kids that day in the car. And I said, "Look, wherever God takes you, whatever job, whatever career, whoever you marry, how many children you have, whether life is hard – and I tell my kids all the time life is going to be so hard. There are going to be difficult days. You might lose somebody you love. You might one day lose a job. Right now, you might do really bad in school. But no matter what that God is good. And He's given you all those opportunities. And no matter through the good or bad times, we are to tell people about Him." And those are the conversations I'm having with my children. But according to research, half of the Christians don't even know that. That is not their focus. That's not their objective. So, is the elephant in the room that people don't know the great commission? No. That... that's not the elephant. But not knowing the last words of Jesus and what it means is just a symptom of a bigger issue in churches today. That churches aren't teaching the basic truths of Scripture. And that's, um, if you've followed along with me here on Fearless, you know that one of my favorite Bible verses is, "Those who know their God will be able to stand in strength and take action." That's how we have to intimately know Him. We have to know His Word. We have to know His characteristics, His attributes.

So when these difficult days come, that we can stand strong and not just be able to stand but also to take action. And that churches aren't discipling. They're not evangelizing their congregation. Instead, we've become focused on making church so popular. We've become so focused on making it a big production and making it an experience for people. That I've, um, talked to somebody that had worked at this mega church. And it was kind of in the time, you know, years ago where these mega churches were growing. And this is a church that had, um, they had conferences. They had resources. They had materials for other churches to use of how to grow like that. How to drive such growth. And they had these innovative approaches that were new at the time. But, you know, being invitational, having people come to your church is not the same as discipling your flock. Not discipling your congregation. So, at the same time, the staff knew kind of behind the scenes that this model was not working for them.

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Although they were selling it of other churches to use, it wasn't working for them. Because they realized although they got people in the doors. That they heard about God. They learned about God, but they weren't being disciplined. And that they were actually losing congregates. And people were leaving the church. And being introduced to who God is, that's a fantastic thing. I'm not bashing all mega churches here. I actually like a big church. Hey, I'm a fan of the smoke machine. I'm not against a smoke machine here. I like going to a church and having really good coffee. Those things are not bad. Those are just instruments that God uses as kind of like we're a fisher of men.

We use different fishing lures to attract different fish. So, please understand that I'm not sitting here bashing. But when I look is the heart of a church. Has that changed here in this country? And I look at some of these pastors and their heart is ... they become so focused on numbers they don't want to offend anybody. And it's like I keep kind of maybe reminding through this series is that the cross ... when Jesus went to the cross, that was offensive. When you talk about the Gospel and the Good News, the world would be offended. And we're having pastors now who don't want to offend anybody. So, they're not telling them the truth. So, while we're being entertained at these churches, once again, I like the entertainment. Right now, I actually go to a smaller church, um, just because of the town I live in. I got to a Calvary Chapel. But my husband and I are quite used to going to a larger Calvary Chapel. But here's the problem that I've seen. And the first one is that we have forgotten about evangelism. Very few people are being taught how to share how they got saved, how God redeemed and changed their lives, and to go out and to be challenged like the Great Commission and to tell people about it. Second one was we're forgetting importance of discipleship. We might teach them that Jesus loves them. He died on the cross for them. But how do we grow in that faith? How do we read the Scriptures? How do we apply those Scriptures to our life and to know that He's a holy God that has given us these laws and rules to live by because He loves us. To protect us not to keep us, um, from having any fun. But we're forgetting that importance of discipleship. And here at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association we have these three Ps. Now, that's a lot of alliteration. I don't ever do alliteration when I ... When I go speak at churches, I'm not an alliteration person. That takes too much creativity and tongue twisters for me.

Um, I always say Skip Heitzig is the best pastor at all the alliteration. But we have these three Ps. The first one is Preparation. And that's training people to share the gospel. Training them on how they share their story. How do they share their testimony? Invite people to an event. Then, we have the Proclamation. And that is giving of the Gospel when we proclaim the Good News. When my grandfather gets up and he proclaims the simple Gospel. When my dad gets up, when my brother gets up, that's the proclamation. And then, we have the Preservation. And that's the discipleship. And it doesn't matter what project that falls under my dad whether that's here at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association or any project at Samaritan's Purse, it's all about the follow up. Are numbers important? Sometimes. Yes, we can celebrate those numbers. We can celebrate God's goodness. Once again, those things are not bad. It's when that becomes our focus. When that becomes our heart. But we should be focused on the

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discipleship. We follow up with everyone that's given their life to Christ trying to get them plugged into a church. Getting them plugged into, uh, reading God's Word. Um, you've heard me talk about Operation Heal Our Patriots, a project of Samaritan's Purse. We follow up with them year-round. We're there on call for these couples. When they need somebody, we go. We're following up with them. So, the discipleship is so important. And I think we're missing that. And another problem is I actually already said it. It's become a numbers game. That has become the focus of so many churches. Pastors, their numbers on social media and in their engagement. All of that has played a part and... It's not, once again, all bad, but that has become the focus. And a big one... is... I think this is the greatest stumbling block in the church today.

And that is that we have sacrificed the gospel in the name of love. We use the second greatest commandment. First, Jesus said the greatest commandment of all, when He was asked, is "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments." So, that second greatest commandment "love thy neighbor as yourself," I think, has become the biggest stumbling block for the church today because, well, we just want to love. We want to love, love, love. We don't want to offend. That would offend them. It's just our job to love them. Well, if you love somebody, you are going to tell them the truth that saves their soul. You are going to tell them that sin is keeping them away from a holy God that loves them. That will redeem them. That God loves them. So, I think that is one of the biggest problems in the church today. That could almost be a whole podcast. I might have to revisit that one. But I think that's become the biggest stumbling block is that we love as the excuse to not share truth. And I think another problem is, which I kind of talked ... well, I did talk on the last podcast was taking our eyes off the cross. And once again, when we keep our eyes on the cross, that takes long obedience, a lifetime of obedience ... of walking straight toward where God has called us. So, when the church fails to act as an evangelistic body, I think we have lost that responsibility to reach others for Jesus. That we are, um, not being diligent in teaching people about Him. Only 24% of Americans today believe that the Bible is God's Word. So, we live in a time that there's no absolute truth. Truth is all relative to the individual. And that's even changing inside the church now. My daughter, I went to go speak to, um, her head of school. My daughter goes to a Christian school. And she said the hardest thing we're having now is not really opposition from the outside like families that are coming from the outside. It's that we're having trouble with the families on the inside because now the church disagrees on so many issues. So, that is so important that we know God's Word. That we, um, are teaching God's Word. That pastors are teaching their congregation, discipling them to know what they believe and why they believe it. But I always think of the children's song you learn in Sunday School that I still sing with my kids about the, um, the foolish man built his house upon the sand.

And the wise man built his house upon the rock. And asking my children what is that rock you stand on. And just something so basic of that with my six year old is God's

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truth mom. Matthew says, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain, and their teachings are merely human rules.” And of course, Jesus was talking about the religious leaders of that time, but this generation is doing the same thing. It might be looking a little bit different. I think a lot of times these churches they’re just teaching merely human rules to live by. What leads to happiness. What will self-help you? I don’t need one more Instagram 60-second video of some pastor giving me some self-help tip. I want God’s Word. Because God’s Word is the only solid rock that will get me through the tough times in life. That will get me through the storms because the storms are coming for all of us. And we have to be prepared. And we have to be ready because we’re standing on God’s holy Word, on His solid rock when the storms come. I think it just has come back to a popularity contest, and it comes back to numbers. And there’s nothing wrong in celebrating numbers. As I’ve said, we do that here in ministry. But my dad has always taught me by example of something called the “God margin.” Anytime that he has ever had a good report that’s come in in a vice president meeting or it’s a board meeting and we read a great report, whatever it is, he stops and says, “We didn’t do that. Only God did it. To God be all the glory.” And he’ll stop whatever he’s doing, and we pray as a staff thanking God for His goodness. Because when we give God the glory, when we thank Him for His goodness and His provision, we realize that it was not on our own accord. That only God could do it. It wasn’t our marketing scheme. It wasn’t some strategic plan that our team came up with. Yes, all of those are beneficial. I am not taking away ... those are tools that we need to be using in our churches and our communities. But ultimately, God gets all the glory for it when we look at these numbers, when we look at celebration of numbers. And it makes me think about, um, the command that King David had from God when it was not to count his troops.

And David does it anyway. And then, he was immediately stricken with the guilt, that he had lost sight of God as his strength, a God of his source, and a God of his victory. And so, we need to be careful as churches whether you’re a part of or other ones you visit that we’re not so much focused on the numbers, but we’re focused on the heart of our church, discipling, and evangelizing. So with all of that said, why do you think churches and pastors are not talking about this? I’ve already mentioned some of them. Many of the modern churches have become extremely event and production focused, which can all be wonderful tools. But that’s become the focus. Um, another reason is I think we live in a time where persuasive communicators have been placed as pastors. They can communicate beautifully, but they might not have the heart as a pastor. And I think we’re living in a time where that we’re looking at communicators instead of the heart for a pastor. Another problem is they lack the courage to talk about these unpopular topics which we’ve already discussed. I don’t want to put all the blame here on pastors. I think some of it comes to our own individual hearts. What are we seeking? Are we seeking somebody that’s going to give us a pep talk? Are we seeking just encouragement, that’s going to help me, me, me? Or is it really gonna confront me? Am I going to be disciplined enough in what I’m searching for in a pastor? And of course, I think social media plays a big role in it. Pastors have become so concerned in their popularity on social media or their book sales or their ... all of this that they’ve got to get the numbers

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and they've got to keep them up. And so, they just are so more concerned with saying a really quick Instagram clip that's really catchy and phrasey and a great communicator. Um, and we've lost the focus.

So, what can you do? What are some red flags? For me, when I walk into a church, I can always have these little red flags. There might be some better red flags you could look for, but these are my personal ones. Does your pastor read directly from the Bible? If not, that's a red flag. I've been to churches where I'll be visiting and the pastor doesn't even take a Bible up to the pulpit. That would be a huge red flag if he's not looking to God's Word, His authoritative Word. And kind of on the same thing, does ... look at the congregation. Does the congregation carry a Bible with them to church? The church I attend, everybody like carries a Bible. And if they don't, they place a Bible in the hands because they want people to open up God's Word. Because we live in a time where a lot of times they'll put the Scripture up on the screen, which is great. We have it all on our cell phones now. There's a time and place for this. Not saying that using it on your phone or iPad is bad. There is something about opening up God's Word, having the page in your hand, and learning to read it and study it, to look at the words in between, and, um, how do you apply it to your life. But I did visit a church recently. And I counted. My husband goes, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm just looking to see how many Bibles I see." Literally, I saw three or four people carrying a Bible. One of them was me. So, I think that's always a red flag because that means they're not getting the leadership from the pastor.

Another one is does the pastor actively talk about the Bible being the authoritative Word of God? If not, that's a red flag to me. Does he say that there's errors in the Bible? I've heard pastors say that. That would be a big red flag. Um, I don't have to understand everything in the Bible, but I live by faith. I know my dad doesn't understand everything. My grandfather for sure didn't understand everything in the Bible. Nobody does. That's why we're still arguing about it and debating all kinds of theology. But I believe by faith that God does not change. That is His holy Word. When I look at pastors in places I might visit, I do look at their social media. I think social media reveals a lot about somebody. It reveals a lot about their life. When you look through their social media, is it more of the self-help kind of style or is it really studying God's Scripture? Now, social media is also made for fun and have fun. I do for sure on it. It doesn't always have to be serious. But we're smart enough to discern and read between the lines when we see certain posts. So, there's a lot more red flags out there. Those are just some that I thought of when I walk into a church that might just be really quick kind of sensors. And I try not to be judgmental. Let me be clear not one church is perfect. No church will be. Not one pastor is perfect. Our pastors carry a huge burden to teach God's Word every Sunday to make sure the finances and their team and the spiritual aspect of it. It is a huge burden.

Anybody that's called to be a pastor better know that they are fully called by God. And um, it's hard. So, we should be praying for our pastors, encouraging them, sending them emails and challenging them. Don't ever be afraid if your pastor does something

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or says something that you don't agree with go in a Godly way as Scripture says, um, talk about it and present it to them. So, I want to challenge you just to evaluate. What church are you going to? What does that look like for you and your family? And that might be changing in different seasons of your life. Like I mentioned of a colleague who they had found themselves in a different season of life after the pandemic and searching for something different. Right now, my family, we go to a smaller church. And we need some things that are provided more for our children. And so, we're kind of praying about that. So, it goes through seasons. But make sure that what church you go to that they are teaching, they are discipling, they are evangelizing, sending people out for the great commission so people will know God. To know who He is so that they can stand boldly. They can stand fearless in a forever compromising culture.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Cissie Graham Lynch:

00:26:02 Thank you for joining me here on Fearless. As always, I encourage you to follow me on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Also, if you've missed any old episodes and would like to get caught up, you can check them out on CissieGrahamLynch.com.

CLOSING MUSIC

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