

'I will preach until I can't preach anymore': First MS evangelist inducted into Hall of Faith

By Lindsey Williams
Writing Specialist

In his 45th year of evangelical ministry, Mississippi evangelist Gary Bowlin was elected and inducted into the Southern Baptist Evangelists Hall of Faith on June 10 during the convention in Indianapolis.

As the first evangelist elected from Mississippi, Bowlin was "surprised, humbled, and honored" to be a part of such a great legacy of men who have faithfully served the Lord. Although a few names in the Hall of Faith, such as Billy Graham, are recognizable, "most of the men," said Bowlin, "are guys like me, not internationally known, but they have been faithful to the Lord and honored with the vote of their fellow evangelists to enter the Hall of Faith."

"My call to ministry was very dramatic," Bowlin admitted. "I was a CPA for five years after I finished college, and for years I ran from God's call to preach. In June of 1973, however, I surrendered to His will, and I have been preaching now for 51 years. In revivals, I share my testimony, which was as dramatic as Paul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus, so I have never doubted for a second that God called me to preach."

Immediately after his surrender to God's call, Bowlin attended New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, received his master's degree, and began pastoring while in seminary. Five years into his pastorship, he became a full-time evangelist in

January 1980, and has ministered to about 1,200 churches and led over 50 mission trips to Romania, South Korea, Peru, and China since then.

In the 1980s and 1990s, what Bowlin refers to as the “heyday of revivals and evangelism,” most churches hosted two revivals a year and a weekend youth revival. As the 1990s stepped into the 2000s, however, revivals gradually faded out of the church picture. “People began to see revivals as old-fashioned and ineffective,” Bowlin addressed, “which was a lie from the enemy, because revivals, when well prepared for, are just as effective now as ever. It seems a larger percentage of our pastors grew up without revivals themselves, so they don’t consider having them, which is heartbreaking. Every time I pick up a publication or read an article, I find something about people lamenting about our baptisms suffering. One of the big reasons, not the only reason, but one of the reasons is that we don’t have revivals anymore, and our churches do not utilize the full-time evangelists whom God has called and gifted to preach evangelistic messages and draw the net.



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Gary Bowlin and his wife, Norma, at the induction ceremonyft
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“I have been in evangelism a long time,” Bowlin commented. “I have watched many evangelists in our state come and go, and almost never due to their own fault. They were great people and great ministers, but they did not have much opportunity because we as the church neglect the gift of the evangelists, and we are paying the price for it.

“I will tell any pastor that I’m not supposed to be in every church with my specific preaching and abilities, but that does not mean they should not use evangelists in their church any more than they should not hear from a different pastor from time to time. A lot of churches used to use a pastor for one revival and an evangelist for the next, which was a valuable strategy because a pastor is typically going to preach more to

the believer, while an evangelist's message will center on inviting lost people to be saved."

For 45 years, Bowlin has done exactly that: casting nets and drawing men toward Christ. With humility, he commented on his induction into the Hall of Faith, "God knows my heart; I feel very undeserving of it. I'm blessed and thankful to be a part of such a great group. I love what I do, and I am personally still seeing as many people saved in revivals as I have ever seen. The problem is, I and other evangelists are not invited to as many revivals as we have historically, and the bottom line is, people are going to spend an eternity in hell because the gift of the evangelists that God gave to the church was not utilized as it should be.

"We desperately need revival. We need to reach lost people. We have just not done a good job. I am going to die an evangelist; that is who I am. That is who God made me and called me to be, and I will preach until I can't preach anymore."

Urging the church to pray for evangelists and revivals, Bowlin concluded, "Pray for open doors for our evangelists, and for God's protection and anointing upon their lives and their families. In the earlier days, I spent about 20 years on the road by myself. My wife was home raising the kids. I tell you what, it was a hard thing to leave my family and go out week after week after week, and for my family to be left. I never will forget one Sunday morning before I left for a revival, I went to kiss my daughter and son goodbye as was my custom, and my son – with big tears in his eyes – said, 'Daddy, don't go. Daddy, please don't go.' But I had to go, because God called me to this work. It was a sacrifice for all of us, and I would not have done that for anybody but Jesus."

For more information on Gary Bowlin and his ministry, visit garybowlin.com or call 601-810-0810.