

From coaching to evangelism, Rick Gage wants to bring the gospel to small towns

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When driving by Harvester Stadium the last three evenings, Pampanans have probably noticed a crowd funneling into the nearly-finished facility.

They aren't going to watch a football game as the Harvesters next home game isn't until next Friday, Sept. 25. They are going to hear the word of God in the Celebration of Hope crusade.

Since it started on Sept. 13, more than 300 people made a decision to bring God into their lives. In a crusade follow-up luncheon on Tuesday afternoon, it was reported that more than 60 spiritual salvations occurred in the first night.

The Celebration of Hope crusade was put together by more than 30 area churches and is headlined by evangelist Rick Gage.

The Pampa News had an opportunity to sit down with Gage Tuesday afternoon and ask him about himself and his crusade.

The impact of Billy Graham

on a smaller scale

Rick Gage and his ministry has been doing summer youth camps since 1989. In the summer of 1999 and 2000, they were doing camps in Glorietta, N.M.

There was a church out of Wheeler who had brought their youth to these camps.

"Our camp that week had an incredible impact on these young people," Gage said. "They came back the next summer and the pastor who had been bringing these students learned that we had a crusade ministry. He called me and he said, 'Rick would you consider coming to Wheeler, Texas?'"

After explaining where Wheeler was, Gage said he'd be honored to come to town. In March of 2001, they met at the Mitchell's restaurant in Shamrock with area pastors.



Rick Gage speaks to Harvester Stadium

Rick Gage addresses the crowd at Harvester Stadium on Monday evening. Gage has been an evangelist for 26 years after leaving a career in coaching.

In six months, a crusade was to be held at Mustang Stadium in Wheeler.

“The 9/11 happened, the crusade occurred a week after,” Gage said.

“It (the crusade) got the attention of the whole community. Of course 9/11 got the attention of the whole world. It was still so fresh on the minds of people across the country and here we were having an evangelist crusade in Wheeler County at the high school football stadium. It just brought churches and God’s people from all over that part of the Panhandle together. We had an incredible move of God that summer of 2001 at Wheeler Mustang High School Stadium. More than 600 souls gave their life Christ in that four-night crusade in Wheeler, Texas.”

The Weatherly Family, who owned custom feed lot Heritage Beef Cattle Company, had made a generous donation to this crusade and was involved in the crusade. The president of the company and current pastor at Cornerstone Baptist Church, Rodney Weatherly, called Gage into his office the morning after the final night of the crusade.

“He was just so touched and moved by what God had just done in his town he said, ‘Rick we had never seen anything like this in our town,’” Gage said.

Not long after the crusade, the Weatherly’s sold their company and Rodney and his family moved to Atlanta where Rodney served on Gage’s staff as executive director for about two years.

During that two year period, they put together the strategy called “GoTell Texas.” This strategy is to hold events in small towns such as Childress, Perryton, Dalhart, Borger, etc.

“The goal is to have a climactic campaign at Dick Bivins Stadium in Amarillo,” Gage said.

This event could happen as early as 2017.

“The Associated Press did a story on us when we were doing a crusade in Pikeville, Ky., and they kind of labeled us the ‘Billy Graham of Small Towns,’” Gage said.

Gage said there are plenty of evangelists that are hitting large towns such as Birmingham, Dallas, Atlanta, etc.

“But who’s going to the Pampas? Who’s going to the Perryton’s?” Gage asks.

“These are towns of nobody has heard of. We’ve all heard of Dallas, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, New York City and Los Angeles. We’ve heard of Houston. But who’s heard of Pampa, Whiteville, N.C., or Guntersville, Ala.”

These are areas that are as small as 5,000 people.

“It brings the body of Christ in a town like Pampa together,” Gage said.

“God has brought up lay leaders out of all of these 30-plus churches. Hundreds and hundreds of

volunteers who have been working and praying and preparing and getting ready for these days of harvests. Now you're seeing the fruit of the preparation."

Gage said the collaboration is a big reason for the spiritual impact of the crusade.

From coaching football to preaching the gospel

When asked about his coaching career, Gage had big aspirations.

"I thought I was going to be the next Tom Landry," Gage said. "I grew up in Houston, born in Dallas. I am a Dallas Cowboys fan, Houston Oilers fan, Bum Phillips, Earl Campbell, played high school football and college football. I got out of football and all I knew was football so I went into coaching."

Gage's first coaching job was as an assistant at West Texas State University (now West Texas A&M) as a tight ends coach under Bill Young.

When Young went to University of Texas-El Paso after the 1981 season, Gage went to Texas Tech and coached under Jerry Moore.

"During that two-and-a-half to three year period down in Lubbock, my life drifted further from God than ever before," Gage said.

As the son of preacher/evangelist Freddie Gage, Gage admits if anyone should have been a champion of God it should have been him.

"I was brought up in a Christian home, brought up in Bible-believing churches and had a father who was a nationally known evangelist," Gage said.

"But I turned my back on God and was living a lifestyle of sin and on a highway of self-destruction."

Gage's father called one week and said that a friend of the family, James Robison, was preaching in Lubbock the upcoming Sunday. Gage slept in and missed the morning service.

"Back during those days I didn't have much of a desire to wake up and go to church," Gage said.

"But Sunday evening came around and something inside said, 'Rick get in your car and go listen to a friend of the family preach.'"

Jan. 15, 1984, Gage drove to Trinity Church in Lubbock and slipped in and sat in the back row.

"The auditorium was packed to capacity, and I heard James Robison preach that Sunday night a powerful, penetrating sermon on the subject of repentance. God used that message that night to reveal to my heart and my mind that I had never truly repented."

When the altar call was given, Gage went to the front and asked God for forgiveness.

"That night I was like a thief who had gotten caught robbing a bank, I just surrendered and the

attitude in my heart was ‘Here’s my life. I am giving you my life tonight, God.’” Gage said.

The next morning, Gage went and told the Texas Tech coaching staff about his experience. He met with the strength and conditioning coach about his experience, who then told him about a Bible study he went to.

Not long after his conversion experience, Gage went to a Bible conference in Dallas and met Arthur Blessitt, who carried a cross on every nation of the world.

“We went out witnessing that afternoon down the streets of downtown Dallas walking with him passing out gospel tracks and talking to people about the Lord,” Gage said.

“It was that afternoon, God allowed me to bring my first soul to Jesus. I had never done that before.”

Not long from there Gage resigned from his position at Texas Tech and started traveling with his father and his evangelist crusade. With a passion for coaching still burning deep inside him, Gage did return to his former job at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., in May of 1984 and coached for two more years.

“Slowly but surely God was taking that passion and ambition for coaching out of my heart,” Gage said. “He was making it clear to me that I was called on to preach the gospel.”

In January of 1986, Gage began his career in evangelism.

Small-town evangelism versus big-city evangelism

Gage believes you can make more of an impact holding events in small towns versus the big city.

“You go to a big city like Dallas or Atlanta,” Gage said.

“There are going to be a hundred other events competing with your event. There are just so many other distractions and events and activities. You go to a small town like Pampa, Texas, it’s almost like the fair has come to town.”

Gage added that this event has been promoted for several months and most of the town knows about it.

What he takes from coaching and brings to evangelism

One of the things Gage has taken from coaching is his work ethic.

“When I was in coaching, putting in 16 to 18 hour days was normal,” Gage said. “The reason why we’re not having more of these crusades like we’re having in Pampa is because it’s hard work.”

Gage said that’s also why more people are not being reached across the U.S.

“Rescuing souls from going to Hell is the hardest work in the world,” Gage said. “Because the Devil fights winning people from Jesus more than anything else.”

Gage added there is nothing glamorous being away from his wife and family roughly 30 weeks a year.

Another part of coaching Gage brings to the table is getting the most out of people.

“They say, ‘The sign of a great football coach is being able to get the most out of his players,’” Gage said. “Any kind of coach is inspiring, challenging and motivating your people.”

Gage said the same is true in ministry.

“You’re inspiring, challenging and motivating your people to live for God and to be a witness for Christ,” Gage said.

His thoughts of Pampa

Gage said he loves not just Pampa, but the Texas Panhandle.

“I believe some of the finest people in all of the world live in the Panhandle of Texas,” Gage said. “We’ve been knocking on this door for quite some time.”

For more information on Rick Gage and GoTell Ministries, visit www.gotellcrusades.com.