



Evangelism As Blessing

*Extending an Invitation
to Know God's Love*

**P. Douglas Small
Project Pray Publications**



EVANGELISM AS BLESSING

EXTENDING AN INVITATION
TO KNOW GOD'S LOVE

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Table of Contents

Preface	vii
Chapter 1: <i>Introducing the BLESS Prayer</i>	1
Chapter 2: <i>Evangelism as Blessing</i>	9
Chapter 3: <i>A God that Blesses</i>	19
Chapter 4: <i>The Relentless Love of God</i>	35
Chapter 5: <i>Navigating the Rapids of Life</i>	47
Chapter 6: <i>The Nature of Jesus – To Bless</i>	57
Chapter 7: <i>Living a Life of Blessing</i>	69
Chapter 8: <i>The Way of Blessing</i>	79
Chapter 9: <i>The Way: The Wise Tongue</i>	89
Chapter 10: <i>The Way: Speaking the Language of Life</i>	107
Chapter 11: <i>The Mission: To Bless</i>	125
Chapter 12: <i>Being the Good News</i>	139
Chapter 13: <i>Integrity</i>	149
Chapter 14: <i>A New Approach to Evangelism</i>	159
Chapter 15: <i>The Language of Love</i>	167
Chapter 16: <i>Belonging – Being Loved</i>	177
Chapter 17: <i>The Evangelism Style of the Celts</i>	189
Chapter 18: <i>Being the Good News</i>	199



Chapter 19: <i>Relational Evangelism</i>	207
Chapter 20: <i>Honest Answers</i>	225
Chapter 21: <i>Loving Apologists</i>	233
Chapter 22: <i>Leave the Door Open</i>	241
Chapter 23: <i>One Man's Unlikely Journey</i>	251
Chapter 24: <i>When God Breaks In</i>	261
Chapter 25: <i>Larry Lane's Story</i>	271
Chapter 26: <i>The Final Lesson</i>	279



Preface

This book has been produced to support the One Million Souls Campaign. One Million Christians praying for One Million Souls. It is recommended as reading for “Evangelism as Blessing” training.

Reading a chapter daily for six days weekly, plus two additional chapters, allows the book to serve as a training guide for a month. It is recommended that you read, reflect, but also practice these principles. At the end of every chapter are action steps. These are critical. Without application, training is only theory.

As you read the book, you will encounter the assertion that intellectual apprehension is not adequate. You must behave your new beliefs. You must not only ‘believe’ them, but ‘receive,’ welcoming them into your life. And you will further discover that you will accomplish this best in a group, by belonging to a study team committed to practice *Evangelism as Blessing*.

We recommend a four-week training experience in which you review and practice these principles, training gatherings weekly, as read and practice the material here.



Recommended Materials

Evangelism As Blessing - Companion Review Guide

50 Day Prayer Guide

The SALTY Guide

OPERATION ANDREW Guide

Disciple Making Materials

Ambassador Training Materials



To Access These Free Downloadable Resources,

Visit:

<https://go.projectpray.org/Project2026Resources>





Chapter 1

Introducing the BLESS Prayer

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. Neighborhood Bible Studies, Christmas gatherings, summer block parties as a means of evangelism.
2. Taking Christ to work – using small evangelism prayer groups, SALTY groups (Supplicants, Anointed and Agreeing to be Love and Light, Talking of Christ and Taking him to their work associates as appropriate, Yielding to the Holy Spirit: SALTY).
3. Three different types of authority are to be considered: jurisdictional authority (positional), the authority of influence (relational), and spiritual authority (the royal priesthood).
4. Make use of the BLESS prayer. Memorize its basic outline. Be familiar enough with it to use it as a prayer guide for those outside a relationship with Christ and his church.



Evangelism As Blessing

Synopsis:

We must find ways to get outside the church, away from the campus, and interface with both neighbors and work associates. When we have jurisdictional authority, we should consider it a gift from God to be in such a leadership position. We cannot, in such a case, divorce our faith life, from our work life. We are missionaries cleverly disguised as doctors or lawyers, politicians or social workers, salespersons or bankers, teachers or television-radio-media professionals. This is God's way of sowing a missionary force into every sector of the culture. Sadly, one that is unengaged, leaving too much to the institutional church and to professional pastors. Where we do not have jurisdictional authority (position), we have the power of influence (relational authority). And when we lack both, we have spiritual authority. We must be salt and light. Silence is no longer appropriate. We have both the power, privilege and the responsibility to bless others. It is not an option.

NEIGHBORHOOD EVANGELISM

In the 1990's a neighborhood evangelism model was introduced into the USA. I served as one of the trainers. In one area, we discovered a church of several hundred that grew out of a neighborhood Bible study. In another example, one couple used Christmas as an opportunity to host neighbors for light refreshments and sharing, neighbors who lived next to one another but barely knew each other. The festive informal gathering featured a closing moment in which each neighbor introduced themselves to one another and shared stories of their most meaningful Christmas. Without the host prompting, inevitably, one or more of those stories involved the Christ of Christmas.



Introducing the BLESS Prayer

In some places, such seasonal gatherings have become a highlight of the year and the occasion of neighbors connecting one with another more frequently. Some neighbors have taken such gatherings to another level with summer block parties designed to get everyone out of their backyards and into the same street to meet one another.

BLESS EVERY HOME

Now, the Bless Every Home app allows you to see your neighborhood and adopt neighbors for personal prayer. The app sends you the name and location, with reference to your home, of five neighbors daily. You simply click the link, noting that you have prayed for them, met them, or shared Christ with them. It is simple to use and churches can sign up as well to see the neighborhood prayer activity of their congregation with the goal of adopting every home in the city.

SALTY GROUPS

Another tactic has been to take Christ to work. Most of us know, or have a suspicion, that other fellow workers are Christians, often concealing their faith in the marketplace. As we go public with our faith, we gently nudge other Christians to work together to become salt and light in the workplace. Not to aggressively and annoyingly buttonhole people with a witnessing technique that is offensive. But to be discreet witnesses, and to support one another in inviting the presence of Christ into the workspace.

These believers would agree to meet, say, at lunch, for thirty minutes, weekly. They would share their concerns and pray together inviting God to come to the place where they spend forty or more hours weekly. They may not own the company or be in a position of management, so they may not have jurisdictional authority. And they may feel that they have little relational influence on the management. But there is



Evangelism As Blessing

another source of authority. Heaven has commissioned us to be kings and priests. When we have neither jurisdictional authority nor relational influence, what we do have is spiritual authority. This is no small thing. It is not merely metaphorical language. We can humbly exercise spiritual authority by inviting God's kingdom into the workplace, praying for His will to be done, and for His name to be hallowed – and for a blessing on the company and all who work there.

This is a 'salty' group. A group of believers who together, are motivating one another to be salt and light at their workplace. They are praying, **Supplicating**. They are realizing that they are **Anointed**, even at work, to represent God. They are His **Light** in what may be a dark place. They are extensions of His **Love**. Their **Talk** is wholesome and when appropriate, they are **Telling** others about the goodness of God. They are prayerfully **Yielding** their lives to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. **SALTY!**

OPERATION ANDREW

The Billy Graham Association used what was called *Operation Andrew*. Remember, Andrew brought Peter, his brother to Christ. Andrew became an apostle and impacted nations. But Peter was considered the leader among the apostles. Peter is mentioned 191 times in the New Testament. He gives us two epistles, and Mark's gospel is considered Peter's gospel. Operation Andrew encourages believers to list their family and friends, work associates and neighbors, and begin to pray for them. Separate the list into the most open, somewhat open, and closed. Concentrate on those most open. Pray for them daily. Find two other Christians who will use the Operation Andrew model and agree to meet for prayer weekly. Pray for the grace and courage to share the gospel. Pray for those most open on all three of your combined lists. The Billy Graham organization says that the overwhelming success of Billy



Introducing the BLESS Prayer

Graham's ministry was believers bringing friends. Eighty percent of the crusade conversions involved relational evangelism. Operation Andrew, believers praying for, sharing with, and bringing their friends to the crusade was the key to success.

THE BLESS PRAYER

One of the best acronyms for prayer is the 'bless' prayer, which I learned in my work with neighborhood evangelism.

Father, today, we BLESS _____.

- We pray that _____'s BODY would be blessed, healed, rested, able to fully function without pain. We ask for your touch on them physically, for special grace and strength.
- We pray for _____'s LABOR, their ability to work on the job and at home. That you would grant them strength to be fully functional. Give them mobility. Protect them from accidents. Give them a fulfilling job, one with benefits and compensation worthy of their effort. Bless them in their LABOR, and bless the place where they labor, and the people for whom they work, and with whom they work.
- We pray for _____'s EMOTIONAL well-being. For their peace. For greater levels of joy – for a fulfilled life. For healthy friends and caring relationships that leave them feeling warm and grateful. Protect them from the bruising and battering that life brings us too often. Let them know your love and grace.
- We pray for _____'s SOCIAL circle. For their family. For their children and grandchildren. For family-like friends. That they will



Evangelism As Blessing

not be alone. We pray for healthy relationships. For warmth and love. For them to live in a place where they feel secure and loved.

- We pray for _____’s SOUL. For them to know you and the power of your resurrection. For them to have a personal relationship with you that transforms them. For their lives to be directed by you, guided by you – and that any design of the enemy or malevolent evil interference would be broken. Let them experience a truly transforming, redirecting experience with Christ. We bless them, praying that they would know your goodness.

This is the BLESS prayer. It is hardly objectionable. If someone asked you, “Are you praying for me?” You can say without hesitation, “Yes!” And if they probe, “So, just what are you praying?” You can reply, “I am praying for God to BLESS you! – your body, your labor, for your inner life and emotional well-being, for your family and social circle – and for you to know how much God loves you!” Who can object to such a prayer?

The bottom line for us is this – we can no longer be silent. In Psalm 39, the consequences of silence are seen. “I was mute with silence. I held my peace even from [saying] good” (Psa. 39:2). David was intimidated in the presence of the wicked (39:1). So, he muzzled himself. As a result, he lost his joy and was overwhelmed with sorry. His heart burned within him, like a convicting fire – he knew his silence was a sin (Psa. 39:2).

Finally, overcome by inner conviction, he broke his silence, “Then, I spoke with my tongue” (Psa. 39:3). He searched for the reason of his intimidation and concluded that life was too short to live in disobedience to God and with a fear of man (39:5). “Every man, at his best state,” David concluded, “is but vapor.” He “walks about like a shadow” (39:5c-6a).



Introducing the BLESS Prayer

“What am I waiting for?” – he asked himself. “All hope is in God” (39:7). In the end, he discovered a sobering reality. “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry.” Then note words, “Do not be silent...” His silence had provoked the silence of God (Psa. 39:12). We dare not be silent.

Exercise 1:

1. Consider the ‘out-of-the-box’ evangelism ideas for the neighborhood and the workplace.
2. Assess where you are on the continuum of authority – jurisdictional, relational, or spiritual. Do this for the several hats that you wear. Workplace. Any club or association to which you belong. Neighborhood or neighborhood association. Church. Among friends. In your family tree. Where do you have the greatest authority or influence? What will you do with it?
3. Visit the acronym SALTY, and think about where you could begin a SALTY group? At work – that is the ideal place. Who do you know to be believers? Would they be open to praying for work associates?
4. Rehearse the acronym BLESS – and memorize that basic outline as a guide to use in prayer for your Operation Andrew list.

ACTION:

- Memorize the BLESS prayer and begin to pray it daily with five unchurched friends in mind.
- Memorize the SALTY acronym and consider where, and with whom, you might begin a SALTY group.
- Determine to humbly and gently use whatever authority



Evangelism As Blessing

you might have in various settings for God's glory. Ask God for wisdom but refuse to hide your light and to be worthless salt.

- Register at the BlessEveryHome.org website or [www.PrayerAtTheHeart.org](http://PrayerAtTheHeart.org).
- Download the SALTY GUIDE.





Chapter 2

Evangelism as Blessing

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. Consider the power of the words, “God bless you!” when spoken sincerely. Think of those words as a kind of open-eyed prayer you utter to another person, an expression of God’s love and goodness.
2. You must begin to think of yourself as a ‘priest,’ as one in the ‘middle,’ between God and others, particularly those who do not have a saving relationship with Him. The position enables you to represent God, to speak what He would say to others – a blessing, an indication of His love.
3. As you become more comfortable with the language of blessing, God will move you to be more intentional, more deliberate in blessing others. From merely *saying* a casual word of blessing, to *praying* a prayer of blessing, and then to *pronouncing* a blessing.

Evangelism As Blessing

4. We will note in this chapter, that when we invoke the sacred name of the Lord over people, God then blesses them. What a privilege.
5. We will review a template for praying a prayer of blessing.

Synopsis:

There is power in our speech, “Life and death,” we are told, “is in the power of the tongue.” To speak a blessing is to speak life and love – and that is our role as believers, as believer-priests. We stand in the critical, strategic middle, between God and lost humanity, and we get to throw out a lifeline of hope. Why do we remain silent? We are called to pray, to give the ‘gift of prayer’ to others. Instead, we use prayer selfishly, for our narrow slice of pain. Why is it so difficult to say, “God bless you!” Or to offer a prayer for someone in need or in distress – right on the spot. We are called to reach this nation and the world. That is no longer optional for true Christians. We must become a kingdom of priests, speaking God’s blessing, conveying the sense of His goodness, invoking His name over others. When we do, He then promised to use that occasion to fulfill our words and bless those who we blessed. What a privilege. We get to be the voice of God’s love and grace to others. Why are we silent? Blessing is an expression of God’s love; and of His fundamental goodness; and that awakens a sense of His presence. The goodness of God leads to repentance, redirection, life-change. At the intersection of love and truth, the power of God works to save, to regenerate, to bring change.



Evangelism As Blessing

Have you ever noticed how people react when you say, “God bless you,” or “Have a blessed day!” There are a few grinches who return a sour look, but most people smile. Some say, “Thank you!” and express gratitude. Some say in response, “God bless you too.” And occasionally, it is as if you have given someone the gift of hope.

You see, “God bless you” is a kind of prayer you say over someone else. You are invoking God’s name over them, praying that they would know His goodness and love. The Bible says, “It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance” (Romans 2:4). I am convinced that a simple and sincere, “God bless you!” opens the windows of heaven. It quickens in men and women who hear and respond positively to the blessing, a sense of God’s love and watchful care. People are starved for the love of God. And we are to be a kingdom of priests who stand on the bridge between heaven and earth, giving God visibility and audibility (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9). That’s where God wants you – in the middle, representing Him, speaking the blessing He desires for those who do not yet know Him to hear. We prefer the comfortable end, and not the middle. We prefer to be blessed with no obligation to pass on the blessing. God not only wants to bless us, but He also wants to bless others through us, from this middle position.

I know, you probably don’t feel worthy enough to bless someone else. But it isn’t your blessing. You are the actor on the stage of life reading the lines given by God. As a priest, in the middle, you get to pass on a blessing greater than your own, “May God bless you today.” This can be expanded. “May He be with you today … watch over you … guide and direct you … May you experience His love and grace, His presence.”

There is also another level. That is when you move from a casual passing “God bless you” to a more intentional and



Evangelism As Blessing

deliberate blessing. You never want to force yourself on others. Or embarrass them. If God is loving, a good and blessing kind of God, He cares about the atmosphere in which the blessing is conveyed and the openness of the intended recipient. The Holy Spirit will help you know when to say, “May I pray a prayer of blessing over you?” Often you will see tears. You’ll see relief on faces, a visible change. You may on occasion have a gushing of tears from the individual who has been under a terrible weight. The prayer should be simple. The Holy Spirit will give you the words. Here is an example:

“Father, *our* Father (Not ‘my,’ but ‘our,’ you are inviting them into the family), I pray for your grace.¹ For [name] to know and experience your love.² You care³ about _____, and that is why this encounter took place. It was no accident. You guide our steps,⁴ and you want to carry our load.⁵ May _____ now experience your grace, your power – the power that saves, heals and delivers – that sets us free.⁶ You want _____ to know you and call you, father.⁷ I invoke the name of Jesus over _____.⁸ And I pray for _____ to experience your presence and the purpose you have for his/her life.^{9”}

¹ Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Corinthians 12:9. Hebrews 4:16; Romans 6:14.

² Ephesians 3:19; John 3:16; Romans 8:35-39.

³ Psalm 23; 1 Peter 5:7; Isaiah 46:4; Proverbs 3:24.

⁴ Psalm 37:23-24; 119:105; Proverbs 3:5-6; 16:9; Jeremiah 29:11.

⁵ Psalm 55:22; 68:19; Matthew 11:28-30; Isaiah 41:10.

⁶ Romans 1:16; 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Corinthians 12:9.

⁷ Isaiah 63:16; Matthew 6:9; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 3:1; Romans 8:15.

⁸ Romans 10:13; Acts 2:38; Luke 10:17; Psalm 118:26; Philippians 2:9-10.

⁹ Psalm 23; Isaiah 41:10; Joshua 1:9; James 4:8; Hebrews 13:5.



Evangelism As Blessing

And then the blessing is pronounced:

*“The Lord bless you, and keep you, and smile upon you. Amen.”*¹⁰

The full Aaronic blessing follows. You may want to memorize it:

“The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD cause His face to shine on you and be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His face to you and give you peace.”

Here is the promise of God. When the priests “invoke” the sacred name of the Lord over the people, God blesses them. There is a blessing connected to uttering the sacred name of the Lord, and we argue from the New Testament perspective, from uttering the sacred and powerful name of Jesus. In the New Testament economy, the role of believers has been elevated to the status of a kingdom of priests. We are *authorized* to utter this blessing with the confidence that while *we* speak it, *God* is working quietly in the lives of those that we bless.

“So, they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and then I will bless them.”

The above is only a template. But there are several things that are not random. Take time to read the scriptures behind the prayer.

- **GOD** – FATHER. First, *God is Father*, even to the prodigal. This is a call to come home (Luke 15:11-32).
- The GROUND of **GRACE**. Second *the ground here is that of grace*. The goal is for the individual to know, to experience God’s love (Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 4:16; Romans 6:14).
- The **GUIDANCE** of GOD. There is *an affirmation of God’s care* for the individual and His sovereignty – this

¹⁰ Numbers 6:24:26; Psalm 20:4.



Evangelism As Blessing

prayer encounter was no accident. God is guiding the individual, though unaware, with the goal of making their burden light. (Psalm 23; 1 Peter 5:7; Isaiah 46:4; Proverbs 3:24; Psalm 37:23-24; 119:105; Proverbs 3:5-6; 16:9; Jeremiah 29:11).

- Enabling ***GRACE***. There is then a return to the theme of grace, *enabling grace* as the power that saves.
- ***GOD'S PRESENCE***. And finally, there is a prayer for knowing *God's presence*, followed by a more formal blessing prayer (Romans 1:16; 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Corinthians 12:9).

Here is the thesis.

Blessing wakes up in individuals a sense of God's watchful presence. The clearest indication of God's presence is His love. Awakened to God's unconditional love, we are constrained. Captivated. The atmosphere of unconditional love allows for the conviction of truth – true truth. Truth that transforms. “The goodness of God,” we are told, “leads to repentance” (Romans 2:4) At the intersection of love and truth, we experience the liberating power of the Holy Spirit.

There can be no true love without truth (Ephesians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 13:6; 1 John 3:18), otherwise love is only a wrapping for a lie. It is not authentic. Likewise, there is no truth without love since the greatest truth is that God loves us. He loves us enough to always tell us the truth about ourselves, both what we are and what we can be, by grace. Thus love, and truth that trues, taps God's saving, liberating power.



Evangelism As Blessing

We bless, as an expression of *God's love*.

In doing so, we awaken a sense of *God's goodness* and His presence.

Awareness of *His presence* quickens love – and truth applied in love,

The goodness of God leads to *repentance*,

At the *intersection of love and truth*,

The *Holy Spirit works* to convict, and convince men of righteousness, and to bring change – conversion, salvation.

Too often we pray selfishly – about ourselves and our problems, and not about those who have never known the love of God, the 3.5 billion who have yet to hear the gospel. We seem preoccupied with our narrow slice of pain. God's arms are big enough to embrace us and those on the other side of the globe. Both His children and those who have not yet experienced His redemptive grace. The question is – are we willing to make room in our hearts and devote times in prayer for those who have never heard of Jesus, the Christ.

Intercessory prayer cannot be used only in prayer requests for each other as believers. It is the missional aspect of prayer. It calls for us to stand 'in the middle,' between God and a lost world and pray for the light to break into the darkness. We are to be a kingdom of priests, invoking the name of Jesus over our friends and the world. Speaking God's love as blessing. Using life-giving language.

Proverbs 15:4 tells us, "The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit." That's quite an assertion. We are back in Genesis at the 'tree of life.' Another translation calls this a 'wholesome' tongue. The Hebrew word



Evangelism As Blessing

is *marpe*. Amazingly, it means to heal, to cure, to impart health, to realize a remedy. This is the life-giving, wholesome speech of the believer to another. It is intended to aid one in regaining their composure in the midst of a crisis. The words of a friend bring tranquility into chaos. This is the power of presence. Language is curative. It is a medicine for the troubled soul. The word can mean to bring ‘deliverance.’ Perhaps this is why Psalm 107:20 (NASB) declares, “He sent His word and healed them, And saved *them* from their destruction.” In Colossians 4:6, Paul urges, “Let your speech always be gracious” – full of life-giving grace. Paul then pictures the one disconnected from God suddenly open and asking questions. They are at the tree of life. Our prayer for an open door – an open heart, along with our exemplary walk and talk, our soothing tongue, has led them to a place of longing for life, for God.

Exercise 2:

1. Who can you bless today? Start with members of your own family.
2. Who around you do you sense needs to know God loves them? They are prime candidates for blessing. Pray for an opportunity to speak a blessing over their life.
3. Create a list of family, friends, work associates, neighbors who need to know the love of God more fully. Review that list daily and pray for God to give you an opportunity to say, “God bless you!” – sincerely. In a way that might invite a dialogue.

ACTION:

- Determine TODAY – to break your silence and begin to say, “God bless you … He loves you … Have a blessed day!”



Evangelism As Blessing

- Look for the response in the faces of those you greet – do it with friends and complete strangers. Someone in your path may need more than a ‘God bless you!’ They may need a prayer of blessing, a taste of grace. You are now on the edge of actively becoming a priest, an agent of reconciliation. Don’t be afraid. God will guide you.
- Review the outline in this chapter and be familiar with the more deliberate prayer of blessing. God as Father; the Ground of Grace; Guidance; Enabling Grace; God’s Presence.
- Use it as a guide. Pray it to yourself, until you have a functional outline of the major points – God as Father, the ground of grace, the affirmation of God’s love and sovereign care, His enabling, liberating grace, and the sense of His presence indicated by His love. This is not rigid. There is no right and wrong. This is only a guide.
- You are dancing between love and truth that both connect with the presence and power of God. Keep your balance. Love is the bridge. Truth is the medicine. Power brings the change.





Chapter 3

A God That Blesses

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. In the first encounter between God and humans, Adam and Eve, He blessed them.
2. The word bless in Hebrew is *barak*, meaning knee, implying humility and prayer.
3. Adam sinned, but the desire of God to bless humans persisted. That blessing is designed to peel away the layers of sin that obscure the image of God from being seen in our lives.
4. Blessing is no small theme in the Bible – *it occurs hundreds of times*.
5. It is empowering, life-giving, and generational.
6. With blessing comes boundaries. They represent the discipline necessary to channel the blessing. Violating the boundaries causes a forfeiture of the fulness of the blessing. It leaves us with *common*



Evangelism As Blessing

grace, but not the *special* grace and favor of God that marks our lives with His presence.

7. Despite the failures of multiple men called to the middle to be a blessing, God has persisted in His desire to bless humanity. In the end, He wrapped Himself in flesh through the incarnation, and came to live among us as Jesus, the Christ.
8. As in the beginning, God breathed on Adam; so, in the New Testament, Jesus breathed on the disciples, imparting to them life and the power to be witnesses. At his prayer in heaven after his ascension and enthronement, and his inauguration as heaven's High Priest, the Father sent the Holy Spirit not only to be *with* us, but to be *in* us. To empower us to be a kingdom of priests who bless others.

Synopsis:

The first word of God, the Father, the Creator, to humanity, to Adam and Eve, was that of blessing. The last word of Jesus, as he ascended was that of blessing. The testaments then are framed with the action of God blessing humanity. Genesis begins with it; and the life of Jesus on the earth ends with it. God's relationship with humanity, from the beginning to the end is that of blessing! How have we developed such a warped view of God in some quarters? The concept of blessing is tied to humility and prayer, to deep dependence on God, and that rising out of our trust in Him. Our problem is not a lack of faith in God's existence or His power. It is rooted, as it was in Genesis 3, in our lack of faith in His character. Living in a fallen world, sometimes it is hard to see the goodness of God amidst the rubble. Redemption is the process by which God consistently reveals His goodness to us



A God That Blesses

as He peels away the layers of sin that prevent us from reflecting His image. The Bible is replete with hundreds of references to God's desire to bless, His pronouncements of blessing, and His acts of goodness. His word of blessing is more powerful than any curse spoken against us, any crippling language that has wounded us. He is our true Father. Be empowered by this blessing. It is lifegiving, and it overflows to our children and their children. It is like an unstoppable river flowing from inside our Spirit-filled hearts. It does require boundaries. Trampling on those boundaries, living an undisciplined spiritual life, causes one to forfeit the full impact of the blessing. Instead of living in peace (Salem), we end up being residents of Babel (confusion). God must be the center of our lives. So close that we can feel, from time to time, His breath. Have you received the blessing? Are you walking in the blessing?

Did you ever notice the first encounter of God with a human? (Gen. 1:28). Theologians call this ‘the law of the first mention.’ *First mentions* seem to set a trajectory for the rest of the Bible – that’s why Genesis is so important to us. Let’s take a closer look. In most of our encounters with God, we do the talking, asking God for things. In this first encounter, Adam, the first human, said nothing. Eve was present as well. But God did all the talking. Perhaps we have misunderstood prayer. What if the goal of prayer was not for God to hear us, but for us to hear God?

What did God say to Adam? That’s very important! God *blessed* them, Adam and Eve together. The word *bless* in Hebrew is *barak* meaning knee. That seems to connect prayer and humility to the blessing of God. Prayer is an attitude as much as it is language and it is demonstrated by our humble and reverent



Evangelism As Blessing

posture before God. In humble prayer, we put ourselves in a position that invites God's blessing. Sadly, too often, we place ourselves in charge of the encounter, giving God a list of 'to-do' items. Directing God as if we knew best. We take the dominant position and attempt to place God in the role of our servant. That view of prayer is upside down.

The word *bless* in variant forms litters the pages of the Bible. The Bible is a veritable book of blessing, of God's relentless desire to build a bridge to humanity. He wants to connect with fallen humans. Though our sin and rebellion are an affront to His holiness, He still searches for the man, the woman, the family, for a people He can bless and through whom He can bless others. Underneath the sin in our lives is the image of God. He longs to bless us, to peel away the layers of sin and their damage and restore the reflection of grace, love and life.

Permit a brief journey into the weeds. The word *bless* or a derivative shows up 378 times in the NKJV of the Old Testament. It appears 98 times in the psalms since the psalms are a collection for worship and an inspirational source for life itself. It appears 70 times in Genesis, the book of beginnings, which sets the trajectory for the rest of the Bible. And some might be surprised that it shows up 48 times in the book of Deuteronomy, the book of law. Blessing and right-living are then bound together. As in Genesis, God speaks a blessing, and then He established a boundary which if ignored, diminished the blessing. The great commandment, as Jesus called it, was the blessing of love. It was at the head of all other laws. James called love the 'royal law' (James 2:8). Paul asserted that "the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14), and that "love fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8). The ultimate discipline in one's life is the ability to love and bless your enemies.



A God That Blesses

The specific term *bless* appears approximately 127 times in the Bible. The word *blessed* occurs about 302 times. In the NKJV, *bless* and *blessed* are found 495 times. *Blessest* is used 3 times in the KJV, “[H]e whom thou *blessest* is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed” (Numbers 22:6). The old Elizabethan King James language is simplified, for example, in the NIV, “For I know that whoever you bless is blessed.”

The blessing of God triumphs over all other words spoken to us, against us or over us. You and I are blessed because of God’s disposition toward us and His declaration over us. I am sure you want God’s blessing. And that seems to be connected to both humility and prayer. Altogether, there are more than 600 blessings in the Old Testament alone. The Bible is, indeed, the book of blessing. God longs to bless you and bless others through you.

The blessing of God is a reflection of His character, His goodness. It is His goodness that Adam and Eve missed. Consistently, in Genesis 1, God sows His goodness into creation. “And God saw that it was *good*... God saw everything that He had made, and indeed, it was *very good*” (Gen. 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Here is Creation brimming with the goodness of a good God. More fundamental than faith in the *ability* of God or in His *willingness* is faith in the *character* of God. The absence of confidence in God’s goodness is deadly.

In a well-worn passage from Hebrews, the author declares that “without faith it is impossible to please God!” (Hebrews 11:6). “He that comes to God,” that is essentially prayer, whether to make a request, to intercede, to offer thanks, or to worship. We are standing before His presence. When we come to God, we “must believe.” But what must we believe?

First, “that God is,” that is, that He exists. We are not talking to the walls when we pray. This is explicit in the text. Implicit



Evangelism As Blessing

is another factor. We must not only believe in His existence, but in His ability. Otherwise, why would we pray? Why would we come to God? Beyond faith in the existence and ability of God there is another hurdle. “We must believe” that God “is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Let’s note two things. First, the presentation of God as a ‘rewarder’ indicates His nature, His character. He is an open-handed God. He is benevolent. He is good. This goodness is seen by those who do not merely seek answers. They seek the *God* who answers. They seek *Him*. This is a focus beyond the existence or ability of God to which we appeal. It is a desire for His presence.

Such people receive more than answers – they receive *rewards*. Answers and rewards are two different things. Answers are our prescriptions for our troubles; rewards are those things that come from God. Rewards were not even on our radar screens. Someone has counted, noting 650 prayer requests in the Bible, and 450 times God answered. God hears and responds to us when we pray. But, the most powerful outcome is not an *answer*, not something what we get from seeking the *hand* of God that we have prescribed for ourselves. The most powerful outcome is a *reward*. That’s what we get from seeking the *face* of God. Faith in the character of God is fundamental to a balanced, healthy Christian life. From His character, out of His goodness – He blesses.

In Genesis, the Hebrew word, *barak*, is the picture of Adam and Eve on their knees before God, receiving His blessing, and what a blessing! It is the closest thing in Scripture to their wedding ceremony. It was *empowering*, “Be fruitful … fill up the earth … manage it.” The globe! He put them in a *garden*, but He had the *globe* in mind. Managing the *garden* they would have proved themselves worthy of managing the *globe*.

The blessing was also *lifegiving* – God breathed on man,



A God That Blesses

animating him with His own life. It was *generational*, not only for Adam and Eve, but also for their sons and daughters. Being fruitful was within their power, but multiplication was God's blessing on their children and the generations that would follow. Caring for the whole earth would have required an army of humans. This was the blessing of God on the family, to serve as agents of God's kingdom. It was the language of *empowerment*, not victimhood.

In Genesis 2, God set *boundaries* to preserve the blessing. When the couple violated the boundary and ate the forbidden fruit, they immediately felt the consequences of their sin. It changed the nature of their relationship with God and with one another. They had failed to trust God's goodness – His character. Yet God, because He is good, acted redemptively. He called them. He came looking for them. This is the nature of our God. He acted to keep, in a measure, the blessing in place.

When humanity irreverently tramples on God's boundaries, they forfeit the fullness of God's blessing. They are left with *common grace*, God's goodness to all humanity. To tap the *special grace* that unlocks redemptive power, there must be movement toward God. That act of obedience and surrender enables the grace empowered redirection of our lives. In the absence of repentance and reconciliation with God, sin and rebellion multiplied in Adam's children, demanding a correction by God's punitive action.

Their authority, their responsibility had been the globe, in which they were to be the agents of blessing. But they failed in their mission. As a consequence, they lost both the garden and their influence over the globe. Thus, instead a *global blessing* flowing through godly, obedient and righteous priestly representatives of God, a *global flood* would be triggered by the wholesale



Evangelism As Blessing

human rejection of God. This is the macro end of the micro deviation that began in the garden. It is the end of little sins, amplified, incrementally intensified from one generation to another, until the transgressions are no longer tolerable. The loss of the garden by Adam and Eve may seem a small thing to us in the overall scope of things. However, it is the root of the global disaster that followed in Noah's day. The flood was small incremental deviations written large.

But God, in His grace, spared Noah and kept the blessing alive. "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD... Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:8-9). In the same context, the Bible mentions Noah's 'generations.' The grace he found was an inheritance for his children. The grace that spared him, spared them. He was to be the new channel of global blessing, the role for which Adam had been created and commissioned. Sadly, Noah failed, as Adam had failed.

This failure to receive and hold God's blessing inside His boundaries, and to be an instrument of blessing reached another epic point in the building of the ziggurat at Babel. This tower was an astrological worship center, thoroughly pagan in nature. Humanity had rejected God and His blessing again. Babel means confusion. That's what turning away from the goodness and blessing of God brings – confusion. This repeated pattern of resistance to God, of excluding God, is characteristic of living in a fallen world. Humans are no longer the noble creatures they were created to be. Yet, instead of another act of global judgement, God broke the power of evil by the first miracle of tongues. At Babel, men could no longer communicate with one another and consequently, their mission was halted, and the power of their unity was broken.

Today, language is still a barrier, but not a formidable one.



A God That Blesses

Now, evil is again uniting around a defiant global purpose that excludes God as did Babel. It is again one driven by pagan values. In Revelation, Babel reappears (Revelation 17:5-18; 16:19; 18:2). Without God at the center, we discover the future Babylon to be home to the demonic. In that way it resembles Babel, the astrological and pagan worship center of the post-flood world.

We should note, there are only two cities – Babel, where God is a visitor (Genesis 11:5), not an honored resident; and Jerusalem, the fortress of peace (Psalm 122:6-8; Zechariah 8:7-8). Jerusalem is where the temple was built as a symbol of the presence of God. God then is at the center of Jerusalem, honored and worshipped. There, God's presence invites His peace. That is the essence of the name *salem*. It is a derivative of the word *shalom*.

The opposite of *shalom* is separation, corruption, division, and brokenness, a lack of integrity or wholeness. It is the absence of peace with God or others. Sin always leaves rubble – the rubble of the flood, or that of the abandoned tower at Babel resulting from the scattering of humans. There was also the rubble of Jerusalem during the time of Judah's exile, and again, with Rome's destruction of the city and its temple in 70 AD.

Our lives, likewise, are left in rubble when we violate God's boundaries – marriages collapse, parenting becomes confusing, finances decline, joy becomes elusive, peace evaporates. Everything seems broken. We long for love, to again belong. We are sometimes like the first exiles who returned to Jerusalem from captivity, lacking both the will and resources, they became accustomed to living in the rubble (Neh. 4:10; Isa. 58:12; Isa. 61:1-6). Even the temple, the place of God's presence, the place they believed to be invincible, was destroyed (Jer. 7:4; 1 Kings 9:8-9; Lam. 2:2-22; Psa. 79:1)



Evangelism As Blessing

Of course, God no longer desires to dwell in man-made temples made with human hands. He longs, as He did with the first human, to be so close to us that he *breathes* on us and lives inside our hearts (Acts 17:24; 7:48-50; 2 Chronicles 2:6; Isaiah 40:21-22). We were created to give Him visibility. We were made in His image, designed to reflect Him to all Creation. After the resurrection, Jesus *breathed* on the disciples and told them to receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). He would again live inside of the human heart. We are then the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

This was His plan, to “conform us to the image of His dear Son” (Rom. 8:29). To make us like Christ, who is “the visible likeness of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), the first-born Son. To restore in us the image of God (Gen. 1:27) that had been marred by sin. When Jesus left the earth, he *blessed* the disciples that followed him to the Mount of Olives – almost 500 (Luke 24:50). It was his last and enduring act – *to pronounce a blessing*. As we have noted, the appearance of man in the Creation story begins with the blessing of God pronounced on Adam and Eve, the first human couple. Blessing is then the Father’s first word, and blessing, as we have seen, is the Son’s last word. Thus, creation and redemption, the beginning of all things with God the Father, and the end of the life of Jesus, the Christ, on the earth, are framed with blessing. It is God’s first and last word. That means that the whole of revelation is framed with blessing.

The blessing extended by Jesus was the renewal of the first blessing on Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:28), one that they could have passed on to their children’s children and to all of Creation had they not sinned. This blessing was renewed by the last Adam, Jesus, the Christ (1 Cor. 15:45), who passed the test of sin through his exemplary life, his sacrificial crucifixion and his triumphant resurrection. He blessed a new creation, identifying a new race of men, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy



A God That Blesses

nation, a people for his own possession... [who] proclaim the excellencies of him [God, in Christ] who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9, ESV).

This is a revolution. It is not the new birth as a religious moment that nudges one to be nicer to earn a ticket to heaven. This is a new identify for those who are born from above. They would be a nation among the nations, a priesthood for all humanity, a distinct group, chosen by God. They needed not only to hear the blessing, but to experience it. Jesus sent them to the Upper Room where the Holy Spirit descended like fire and wind. He had promised to "pray the Father to send the Spirit."

As they were filled with the Spirit and empowered to be witnesses of Christ's life, and his resurrection, they also knew that the coming of the Spirit was the confirmation that he had been received into heaven. There, he was accepted, inaugurated as the high priest of heaven's tabernacle and enthroned with his Father (Acts 2:29-36). Millions, indeed, billions of believer-priests would serve from heaven, a veritable kingdom of priests, an extension of his priestly ministry. Though on the earth, their home was heaven, their heart with the Lord.

Filled with the Spirit, they were now the visible agents of the invisible, resurrected Christ. His body on earth (Eph. 4). His family (Eph. 3:14-16; 2:19-22), a status of belonging. His temple (Eph. 2:21-22), hosting his presence. His bride (Eph. 5), in a covenant of love. His warrior people (Eph. 6), standing in the face of darkness, contending with the powers of evil. All of these are metaphors of the church, its different faces, from the book of Ephesians.

Have you received the *blessing* Jesus meant for you? Have you drawn so close to Him that you have heard his whisper and felt His nearness? Psalm 145:18 says, "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." Do you have a



Evangelism As Blessing

boldness that rises from an inner confidence that Jesus is alive, and sharing the throne in heaven with the Father? Do you believe that you are a part of glorious revolution for good in the earth, ‘a royal priest,’ a part of a new and ‘holy nation?’ You are blessed beyond your capacity to understand the enormity of what God has done for you and what He desires you to be and do!

Ezekiel pictured the rebuilt temple as the source of a mighty river. He saw water coming from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (the temple faced east). The water flowed on the south side of the altar (Ez. 47:1). On the outside of the temple, “the water was trickling from the south side” (v. 2). This trickle intensified. Like the single river flowing into the garden of Eden, flowing out, it was four rivers. In the garden, it had multiplied to replenish, not merely the garden, but the earth (Gen. 2:10-14). So here, the temple is the new garden. On its east side, a thousand cubits¹¹ from the temple, the water was no longer a tickle. It was ankle deep (v. 3). A thousand cubits further, and the water was knee-deep. Another thousand (now three-thousand cubits from the temple), and the water was waist deep and still intensifying (v. 4). Yet, another thousand cubits (now four thousand cubits: 6000 feet, 2000 yards; the length of 20 American football fields or 1.1 miles), and “it was a river that I [Ezekiel] could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross (v. 5).

On the banks were “a great number of trees on each side of the river” (v. 7). Entering the Dead Sea, the salty water became fresh. The Dead Sea came alive. It was resurrected (v. 8), restored to life. Ezekiel prophesied, “Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows... large numbers of

¹¹ A cubit is roughly 18 inches; a royal cubit, 25 inches. Using the common cubit as a measure, a thousand cubits is then 1500 feet or (three feet per yard) 500 yards. That’s the length of five American football fields.



A God That Blesses

fish... so where the river flows everything will live" (v. 9). He predicted, "Fishermen will stand along the shore... spreading nets. The fish will be... like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea... Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing" (v. 10-12).

We are back in Eden, back in Psalm 1. This is an unstoppable river. But does it flow from a rebuilt temple constructed with human hands, and earthly materials? Or is it the river that Jesus predicted would flow from each of us? In John 7:38, Jesus declared, "He that believes in Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Not a river – but rivers. Like Eden, there was a stream that flowed in, and multiple streams that flowed out. What a vision! "From within him [the believer] shall flow rivers of living water." The Amplified says, "He who believes in Me [who adheres to, trusts in, and relies on Me], as the Scripture has said, 'From his innermost being will flow *continually* rivers of living water.'"

Exercise 3:

1. Prayerfully ask yourself: Have you received God's blessing? Do you really sense that He loves you? That He cares about you? That you have been blessed by God?
2. Here is a tougher question. Have you violated boundaries that might have caused you to forfeit God's blessing? God's way is grace, but it is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit (1 Timothy 6:11; Ephesians 4:30; Isaiah 63:10). Grief is a love word. It is how we react when we experience a loss. That is what God, the Holy Spirit



Evangelism As Blessing

does, when we pull away from Him and commit sin. He grieves, longing for us to walk in his blessing.

3. In Genesis, God made temporary coverings for Adam and Eve, but through the crucifixion of Christ, we were clothed in His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10; Ephesians 4:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 6:14). Psalm 34:15 says, “The eyes of the LORD **are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.**” Galatian 3:5 declares, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”
4. Do you believe God wants to bless you and dwell in you? And allow His love and grace to flow out through you as blessings to others? Believe it. Behave like God really loves you. You are blessed Walk in that blessing – and think, “Who can I bless today?”

ACTION:

- God in the Old Testament, and Jesus, in the New, encountered men and women to not only bless them, but to bless others through them. *Ask God* to put you in some ‘middle’ between Him and another and teach you how to hear His voice and speak a blessing to a weary soul.
- *Do a study* of the word *bless*. Review the scope of God’s blessing, and allow the Holy Spirit to say to you, “This blessing could be yours!”
- *Pray* to be empowered by God’s hand of blessing on your life! Seriously. To be energized. Pray for the experience of God’s blessing that affects your life quality. And pray for such a blessing that your children notice the change in you. Let that blessing overflow to them. Remember, you don’t have the



A God That Blesses

right to die until you have blessed your children.

- *Do an inventory.* Are you constantly asking, “Can I do this and still go to heaven?” If so, what you are really asking is, “How close to the edge can I get without falling off?” Or to be more candid, “How far from God can I live and still call myself a Christian?” The more appropriate question is, “How close to God can I get and still be in my mortal body?” Are you asking the wrong question? This is the issue of boundaries, the discipline intended to protect the blessing.
- Get close enough to God for Him to breathe on you!





Chapter 4

The Relentless Love of God

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. God blessed Adam – but he, and after him, all humanity sinned. After the flood, He blessed Noah – but Noah sinned and failed to carry the blessing forward. Humans then gathered at Babel to create a global pagan worship center. The whole world, it seemed, had again rebelled against God. He then chose one man and his family to represent Him and be a blessing to all nations – Abraham (Gen. 12:1f). Abraham was faithful, and “it was counted to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3).
2. Eventually, Abraham’s children failed as well. God wanted them to be a ‘kingdom of priests’ for all nations (Ex. 19:6). They refused. Following a long series of backslidings, ten tribes were scattered to never return. Then the two southern tribes were



Evangelism As Blessing

scattered as well, but a remnant returned from Babylonian captivity. Upon their return, God again offered Judah the opportunity to be a priestly people (Isa. 61:6). But they refused.

3. God then wrapped Himself in flesh and came, as a missionary, to live among men. With John, the Baptists, and continuing with Jesus, there was break from institutional Judaism and the Aaronic priesthood. Jesus, in calling his disciples, launched a new priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. It was organic. Relational, not positional.
4. In Acts 2, 120 of the disciples of Jesus obediently gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit anointed them as priests. God now had His 'kingdom of priests.' With the impact of the Holy Spirit's descent and the explanation offered by Peter, there was a harvest of souls that represented 15 nations. Thousands carried the message to the nations that Jesus was alive and seated on David's throne in heaven. A new era had begun.
5. For 300 years, the organic movement continued, turning the Roman Empire upside down.
6. Two or three Christians represented Christ in a city – an *eclesia*. They prayed together. They did mission together. Until mission gave birth to a formal and organized church with elders and deacons. Prayer and mission were the DNA.
7. We must not only be loved by God, and know it, but we must become the love of God to others.



Synopsis:

We are living in a culture that has fundamentally turned away from God. We moved quickly from being a Christian nation, to pluralism, then to paganism. Now, only a New Testament church can impact the Harry Potter culture in which we live. It is not impossible. In 100 A.D., there were, it is estimated, no more than 20,000 to 25,000 Christ followers. They lived amidst the paganism of Rome and the gods of Greece. By 320 A.D., there were 20 million believers. They grew with no buildings, no budget, few resources, no favor from political powers, and through ten imperial persecutions. They were a praying people, a missional people who founded missional churches. The movement was not highly organized in the beginning. It was not hierarchical, but servant based. Two or three believers in a city found one another, encouraged and supported each other, prayed together and engaged in mission-evangelism until three became six, and then twelve, and then twenty-four. They persisted until mission gave birth to a church. This was not an institution endeavor. It was organic. It was not driven by professional clergy, but by the laity. It was not the priesthood of Aaron, but that of Melchizedek. They did not stand in the institutional shadow of Judaism and the temple, but in the organic lineage of Jesus, the disciples and the priesthood of all believers.

After God scattered humans at Babel, he refused to give up on mankind. Given the disaster at Babel, He changed the way he would bless. He moved from the global – blessing all of humanity, as in Adam and Noah – and chose to use one family among all the families of the earth. He chose to use Abram as a bridge. Through him the earth's families would be blessed (Gensis 12:1-3).



Evangelism As Blessing

Sadly, Abram's family also failed to be the instrument of God's blessing. They sealed up the blessing for themselves (Mt. 23:13). The ten northern tribes were scattered by Assyria. The two southern tribes were exiled to Babylon. When they returned, the prophets, like Isaiah, were hopeful. Isaiah predicted that the Spirit of the Lord would be poured out on all of them, and they would become a nation of priests, serving other nations (Isaiah 61:1-6). That had been God's plan. But that transformation did not happen. Judah violated God's boundaries by their pride and idolatry (Jeremiah 5:1-3; 17:1-10; Lamentations 11:5, 8, 18).

In the opening verses of the New Testament, John the Baptist appeared and called the nation to repentance. He declared that "the ax would soon be laid to the root" (Matthew 3:10). Why? There was no fruit from the nation of Judah, he warned. No mission had been launched to the nations. No welcome was offered to Gentiles at the temple. The Court of the Gentiles had been commandeered for monetary exchange and the profitable sell of sacrificial animals at inflated prices. God was not pleased.

John's father, Zacharias, was an Aaronic priest who burned incense in the temple (Luke 1:8-12). John could have followed in his father's footsteps, and he would have also been a temple priest. Instead, he broke from the institutional priesthood of Aaron, clothed himself in camel hair, went to the wilderness and survived on a diet of locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6). He preached a message of repentance to the nation, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2). He called for the sons of Abraham to be baptized. Everyone, Jew and Gentile, needed to be cleansed. He picked up the theme of Isaiah – the offer of God to be a kingdom of priests was still on the table, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him." People streamed out to the desolate dessert to hear him "from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region



The Relentless Love of God

around the Jordan” (Matthew 3:5). They confessed their sins and were baptized in the muddy Jordan river (Matthew 3:6). The Pharisees and lawyers also made the trip out into the wilderness, but only to skeptically observe – they did not venture into the baptismal waters (Luke 7:29-30).

Jesus himself, rose from the baptismal waters, the Spirit descending on Him. He set an example of humility and consecration for us. The Spirit descended on him and the father spoke, and, following a time of prayer and further consecration, launched a new priesthood of which John had been the forerunner. Jesus could not follow in the Aaronic order of priestly ministry. Instead, he picked up the fallen mantle of the priesthood of Melchizedek, king and priest, a royal priesthood. Melchizedek had been king of Salem – the city of peace (Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:1). And that was the goal of Jesus – peace, reconciliation. It was what the angels sang about at his birth, “Peace on earth, goodwill to men” (Lk. 2:14). That is a radical shift. Jesus, not of the tribe of Aaron, but rather of the tribe of Judah, did not qualify to be a temple priest. With his ministry, he launched a new priestly order.

Aaron’s priesthood was that of class and kind, strict and institutional, and bound to the temple. The priesthood of Melchizedek was not institutional, but organic. It was free of the temple and the institutional rituals. This was God’s original invitation at Sinai. He wanted the whole nation to be “a kingdom of priests.” But they refused – so God instituted the Levitical priesthood (Exodus 19:6; 20:18-20; 29:1, 4-9; Leviticus 8).

After the Babylonian captivity, God again extended the opportunity to the entire nation, to be “ministers of God” (Isaiah 61:6), a kingdom of priests. Everyone would be anointed to proclaim good news, to heal the broken-hearted



Evangelism As Blessing

and set the captives free (Isaiah 61:1-4). Judah again balked. They rejected the offer.

Jesus, in calling his disciples, was again activating the priesthood of all believers. He called some directly. They connected him to yet others. Andrew, for example, brought his brother Peter. In Acts 2, these followers, both men and women were anointed as priests, not by men, but by God. The Holy Spirit came in the name of Jesus to complete through us the work of Jesus. Through our new priesthood, the people of God as a newly formed nation, a new creation, a new race of men are called to complete the mission given by Jesus. Israel at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:6, 9, 16-19; 20:18-19), had backed away from the mountain.¹² In contrast, these disciples fellowshiped with the fire and received the Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness resulting in a harvest of 3000 people from at least 15 nations. This was not only the first harvest. The converts at Pentecost represented the first international missionaries of the church. They came to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, but they returned home with the news and evidence that Jesus was alive. They had witnessed a new Sinai where the fire fell, and God wrote His law on human hearts. The disciples we know, from history, divided up the world, and took the gospel to Asia Minor, Northern

¹² The New Living Translation reads, “When the people heard the thunder and the loud blast of the ram’s horn, and when they saw the flashes of lightning and the smoke billowing from the mountain, they stood at a distance, trembling with fear” (Ex. 20:18). The ESV says, “they stood far off.” But the KJV version adds, “they removed, and stood afar off.” They backed away from the mountain, from an intense encounter with God. The Amplified echoes the KJV, “they trembled [and moved backward] and stood at a [safe] distance.” The Contemporary English Version reads simply, “They stood a long way off.” They put distance between themselves and God. Young’s literal said they ‘saw’ and ‘moved’ far away. They said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen. But don’t let God speak directly to us...” (v. 19). This is one of the saddest moments in scripture.



The Relentless Love of God

Africa, India, Russia and parts of Europe. All, but John, died as martyrs, witnesses, believing that as Christ rose from the dead, death would have no hold on them.

For 300 years, the movement lasted. Every believer saw themselves as a priest. They turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). In 100 A.D., 70 years after the resurrection, 30 years after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple – there were only 20-25,000 believers. All the apostles were dead, as were Paul, Timothy, Titus, John Mark and Luke, Silas and Barnabas, and James and Jude, brothers of Jesus.¹³

Yet, in 50 years, the number of Christians would virtually double to 40,000. By 180 A.D. the number first passed 100,000. Christians were in all the provinces of the Empire, in 23 of the 31 largest cities. By 197 AD every nation had a movement of Christianity, despite the blood of martyrs that still flowed. By 250, the number of Christians passed a million. In 310 A.D. after another episode of severe persecution, there were 20 million globally, 10 million in the Empire (out of an empire population of 60 million, a ratio of 1:6, 14% of the Empire's population). Unbelievable! All this was after 10 imperial persecutions, each of which destroyed bishops, key leaders and pastors, their best minds, and their most stalwart examples. In a sea of paganism, with an illegal faith and worship that took place in secret, they grew – until the empire capitulated! Foreign armies were no match for Rome's power, but this group of roaring lambs toppled the Empire.

With no buildings or budget, few resources, virtually no favor from political powers, and with only a handful of untrained followers – the world was changed. Can it happen again? If so,

¹³ *The New Apostolic Epoch – God's Determination to Have a Missional Praying People*, by P. Douglas Small. Available from Project Pray Publications (www.projectpraypublications.org).



Evangelism As Blessing

how? These ordinary Christians fellowshipped with fire. In the daily flow of their lives, they carried the gospel wherever they lived and worked. And they were made to the world around them, salt and light.

In cities without churches, two or three believers connected, creating an *ecclesia*¹⁴ – a miniature church. As these cells grew, they became a fellowship for personal encouragement and mission. They evolved, as new converts were added into ‘houses of prayer for the nations.’ Then into more formally organized churches, and they changed cities.

Note the order: prayer – mission – church. Praying people: missional people; praying churches: missional churches. Today, we begin with churches, with buildings, with songs and a sermon, by attracting a crowd and then motivating them to engage in mission and pray for the effort to be successful. The New Testament order and that of the apostolic church places mission first, subordinated only to prayer. And prayer and mission gave birth to the church. The church does not do mission; mission does church.

¹⁴ *Ecclesia* was a political term. Jesus could have used the term synagogue or temple, but instead he reached for this secular and political term. Under Roman law, as few as two or three Roman citizens could demand that Roman law be observed to the letter, that their rights be acknowledged. As an *ecclesia*, as small as two in number, they had the power to enforce the will of the Empire. Jesus utilized this term to describe his church – they were agents, if only two-or-three in number, who enforced the will of the Kingdom, who prayed, “Thy kingdom come.” Matthew 18:19-20 underscores the authority of the ecclesia, “Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I mean this. When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I’ll be there” (Message Bible).



The Relentless Love of God

Our future is in our past, recovering the DNA of prayer and blessing at the intersection of mission. As division and darkness grow, we need unified, humble, praying people, deeply dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot reduce Christianity to a personal relationship with God through Christ. That is, we cannot privatize it. It is not merely *being* loved by God but *becoming* a loving, blessing Christian.

The darkness is gathering. By its words and deeds, our nation is inviting and empowering evil. A generation has been mentored on Harry Potter and can't distinguish between Wicca and Christianity. Allah and Yahweh are seen as equivalents. Discernment between right and wrong is so displaced that egregious immorality has become common and acceptable in the land. Biblical morals are seen as oppressive and regarded as hate speech. Only the Holy Spirit can awaken and revive such a culture. The Holy Spirit wants a partner. God desires to empower us as his visible instruments. Are you ready for the ride?

Think of it, the church grew from 25,000 disciples around 100 A.D., to 20 million by 320 A.D. Then with Constantine, it all changed. The movement reverted from the priesthood of all believers to a designated and separated priesthood, an emerging professional clergy, a tiered arrangement. Buildings were donated to the cause, and soon, the structures themselves, not the people, were seen as the church. It was sacred space, not the people who were the carriers of His presence. Evangelism stalled. Over the centuries, the church grew corrupt. The monastic movement kept faith alive. Then came the Reformation. One of Luther's hallmarks was the priesthood of all believers – but the Reformation did not bring complete reform. So here we are again.



Evangelism As Blessing

God is again calling us to a kingdom of priests – all of us. We are to stand between God and a lost world. We are to join Jesus in his intercession – He is interceding now! He wants no one to perish but all men to come to repentance and find grace (1 Peter 2:9). He wants to bless others through you. Will you let him do that? In a culture that has fundamentally turned from God, one where only 15 percent of the population is in church on any given Sunday, a professional clergy alone cannot be expected to induce and sustain national spiritual renewal. Will you obey God and step into your priestly role?

Exercise 4:

1. Are you amazed at God's patience with humanity? What about his patience with you? He keeps waiting for a people who will speak for Him, share His love with others – and all of us move to the end of a blessing. We like to be blessed, but we are reluctant to get in the middle and be used of God to bless others. Examine your heart. Why are you reluctant to speak up for God and bless others?
2. Remember, the priest didn't speak for himself, but for God. That is, God gives the right words, and the Bible says, he gives them at the right moment. Do you trust God to speak to you, so you can pass on a message of love to someone else? If you are honestly still reluctant, pray, and ask God for more courage, and the ability to overcome any fear.
3. Had you ever considered how relentless God has been with His process?
 - He began with Adam and started over with Noah.
 - Then He called Abram, but Abram's family failed.



The Relentless Love of God

- With the exiles of Judah who returned from Babylon, through Isaiah, He issued the call to be a priestly nation once again. They declined.
- Finally, with John the Baptist, He was exasperated, and in Jesus, He broke with the temple institution and the Aaronic priesthood and called ordinary people to be His 'kingdom of priest'.
- For three centuries, the church as a kingdom of priest was unstoppable.
- Then, they reverted to the old model – a special group of ordained leaders and the rest passive, no longer were the people priests in the middle, between God and a hurting world.
- But there is a new reformation afoot. God is again calling His people to be a kingdom of priests. Do you want to join the parade?

What would it take for you to make the first step to the middle, and be used of God to speak a blessing over another person, with confidence and compassion? Are you willing to try? God often puts people who need His love right in our path. Watch out, he may do just that today. If so, relax. You can't mess up – God will give you grace. Not only the words, but how to say them. And you will walk away feeling blessed yourself.

ACTION:

- If God is indeed calling us, all of us, to be a kingdom of priest – what is your response? To Him? Now?
- Are you ready to move from *being loved* by God or *becoming the love* of God to others? Or, have you settled



Evangelism As Blessing

the fact that God loves you clearly in your own heart. This is fundamental. You can't love others with your love – it is inadequate; it is God's love flowing through you that is desperately needed.

- You may be attending a church, but are you in a tight relationship with two or three other on-fire Christians who are urging one another to be missional? Who are praying together for lost people? That two-or-three, that Operation Andrew group, will make a major difference in your life. Find your two! Start your *ecclesia*.





Chapter 5

Navigating the Rapids of Life

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. Ezra, a priestly leader among Jewish exiles in Babylon, in reading and praying over the sacred Hebrew scrolls, had a profound change of heart that led to second return of exiles to Jerusalem. That sparked a revival in the city, paralleled by the rebuilding of the walls of the city under the leadership of Nehemiah.
2. Ezra is probably responsible for collecting the psalms and putting them in order, and, he is considered the author of Psalm 1.
3. Psalm 1 is a Torah psalm, a call to elevate scripture by meditation. That is significant because Psalm 1 sets the trajectory for the entire book. It begins with the word *bless* and ends with the word *perish*. It is a formula for navigating between God's blessing and destruction. That difference is found in what



Evangelism As Blessing

guides our lives – the Torah, God’s word, or the counsel of the ungodly. The state of the prayerful mind is the difference between success and failure.

4. Psalm 150, in fact, the last five psalms, are characterized by rapturous praise. Between Psalm 1 and 150, we find the lament psalms (40% of all psalms). These are often called complaint psalms. They question God. They ask ‘why?’ They doubt. They reflect anger. At times they take on a tone of revenge. They are bare-knuckle pleas to God for intervention. Raw and unvarnished. The question is, “How does one navigate through the laments of life, the disappointments – even with God – and end up in Psalm 150, in praise?” The answer is found in the roots, the trajectory of Psalm 1 – being planted, rooted, like a fruitful evergreen tree, by the stream (We are back in Eden).
5. Psalm 2 finds the nations raging. Psalm 3 reveals the rebellion of Absalom, David’s son. Here, on one hand, the nations are aligned against God (Psalm 2) and all who stand with Him. On the other hand, family life is imploding (Psalm 3). Outside and inside, there is war. In such moments, how do you keep your head? Psalm 1 declares we do that by listening to the right counsel. And by meditating in the Word, the law of God! Prayerfully.

Synopsis:

Israel, the northern ten tribes are gone – scattered. And Judah, the southern tribe was exiled. The city of Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed. For 50 years, the city was virtually



Navigating the Rapids of Life

abandoned, until, in 535 A.D., when the first wave of exiles returned. By 516 A.D., they had a small temple, but it was in no way comparable to Solomon's temple. Our story begins 90 years later, around 457-458 A.D. Ezra, a priest, while reading and praying over the sacred scrolls in his possession, was moved to return to Jerusalem. The underlying question is this, "How could Babylon become comfortable to so many of the exiles?" And then we must ask, "Have we become comfortable in Babylon,' also living in a state of compromise?" And what is the solution? Ezra believed it was meditation in the Word of God. It was prayer over an open Bible. It was in refusing the 'counsel of the world,' as a substitute for God's law. We too must make the break from Babylon. And navigate, from Psalm 1, through the laments of life, and pray to end up on our feet in praise – Psalm 150. When there is international strife without, full-blown rejection of God by nations, and there is disorder in our family circle – the devotional trajectory that we set is critical to walking in God's blessing and not perishing. Without a life of prayer over an open Bible, we are empty, like chaff, driven about by the wind. We lack roots. We are fruitless. We wither in a spiritual summer. There is another way – it is the way of prayerful dependence on God.

In 722 B.C., the Assyrians invaded Israel, the Northern Kingdom and took them captive. They never returned to the land. They are called the ten lost tribes. A century later, in 605 B.C., Babylon took the first captives from the Southern Kingdom, Judah. In 586 B.C., Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and the southern tribe was taken into captivity. In 535 B.C., a remnant returned to Judah, but many remained in Babylon. It had become home to them. In 558-557 B.C.,



Evangelism As Blessing

almost a century after the first remnant returned, another group returned from Babylon to Jerusalem led by Ezra.

Ezra is most likely the scribe-priest who collected the psalms and put them in order. He was among the exiles who were living in Babylon. A large number had returned to Jerusalem around 535 B.C., but many did not. They chose to remain in Babylon. For almost another hundred years (457-458 B.C.), they were comfortable there. Then, Ezra, who was in the priestly line and had a copy of the sacred scrolls, was disturbed by something he read (Ezra 7:10). It changed his life. He altered his behavior, and he began to teach what God was revealing to him. The result was that many exiles could no longer be content to stay in Babylon. They wanted to go home, to a home they had never known – to Jerusalem. Ezra 8 tells the story of their journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. The succeeding chapters in Ezra reveal their impact on the city and the revival that followed with the open reading of God's word in the public square, the repentance and the reordering of their personal and family lives and the rebuilding of the walls of the city. This is how revival comes.

One man, Ezra, in prayer, over the scrolls, the word of God, has his heart stirred until the change in him is evident in his behavior. As he shares what he has encountered over the open scrolls, a spontaneous movement is generated. Suddenly, a remnant previously comfortable in Babylon wants to go home – to Jerusalem. Arriving there, their devotion, their generous offerings and sacrifices cause a stir at the temple (Ezra 8:31-36). That is followed by the confession of the elders. They are convicted by the example of this remnant, confessing that they live compromised lives. Their sons have married the daughters of the pagans around them, and likewise, the daughters have married the sons of pagans and “the holy seed was mixed.” There was no longer a distinction between the godly and the ungodly (Ezra 9:1-2).



Navigating the Rapids of Life

Era pulled out his hair. He sat shocked by the confession. He prayed all day, until he sensed that God would grant “a little grace” (Ezra 9:3-8). Subsequently, there would be the open reading of God in the square, and the reordering of personal and family life (Ezra 10:1f). They would ‘tremble’ at the word of God. Eventually, Nehemiah would lead the rebuilding of the walls and the restoration of the city.

Watch the progress.

- One man, Ezra, on his knees, over the open book – the Bible, praying. God changing his life. Ezra 7:8-10.
- Others, seeing the change, deciding they cannot stay in Babylon any longer! Ezra 8.
- A stirring at the temple! Ezra 8:31-36.
- The confession of the elders – the acknowledgement of compromise. Ezra 9:1-2.

One man again, desperate before God, asking for grace and for change in the whole community. Ezra 9:3f.
- The community gathered – weeping, repenting, evidencing conviction. Ezra 9:4f; 10:1f.
- A stirring in the city – changes in personal and family life. Ezra 10:2-6.
- The elders and the city-wide proclamation and call for confession. Ezra 10:7f, 18-19.
- One man, Nehemiah, with authority that Ezra, as a priest, did not have, and the restoration of the city and the rebuilding of its walls. Nehemiah 6:15.

We must also determine to make the break from Babylon, from the world, and return to the Lord. He wants us to come



Evangelism As Blessing

home – to Him. That will demand sacrifice. It will demand changes in our personal lives, and family values and practices. It will not be an act, but a process. But such changes will bring God's blessing.

As noted earlier, Ezra most likely collected the psalms and put them in order. He also wrote Psalm 1. In it he gives us a wonderful picture of how the lost blessing is restored. He begins the psalm with a *blessing* and ends it with the word *perish*. This is choice we have – to live a blessed life, or to experience a languishing life, where true joy and peace are far too rare. One in which we perish spiritually. Psalm 1 is a *torah* psalm that calls for us to engage with the law of God – that is a call to discipline, to pay attention to the boundaries. Remember, in violating the boundaries, we lose the blessing.

Looking at the end of the book we discover that the last five psalms are those of total praise. This is how we are to end up! Blessed and blessing God, and so full of His presence that we can bless others.

Hallelujah! Praise God in His sanctuary. Praise Him in His mighty heavens. Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him for His excellent greatness. Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet...Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!
Hallelujah! (Psalm 150).

This is living in the overflow. It is the end of the blessed life.

The first psalm challenges us to choose the right way - the way of blessing. Then, in Psalm 150, the last psalm, there is glorious victory and praise. However, in between, there are dozens of psalms that are called "psalms of lament." They make up forty percent of all the psalms. These psalms are characterized by "Why God?" questions. They are tearful. They are at times frantic and despairing. They are not fluff. They are bare-knuckle



Navigating the Rapids of Life

desperate pleas that in the end recognize there is nowhere else to go besides God. So, despite the pain and the confusion, the writer turns to God with a kind of desperate trust. There is a pattern to these psalms. Some are psalms of order. Others of disorder. Still others of a new order. This is life. We move from a well ordered life, to times and places of disorder. We may feel abandoned by God. Then he leads us into a new place where our lives are reordered.

Psalm 1 sets the trajectory for the entire book of psalms. It helps us see how we are to navigate through the laments of life and end on our feet in praise (Psalm 150). In Psalm 2, the nations are raging. In Psalm 3, we find Absalom, David's son, in rebellion against him and his kingdom. He is trying to take his father's position. So, with nations raging against God (Psalm 2) and family life exploding (Psalm 3) – how do you keep your balance and retain the blessing and keep from perishing?

Ezra tells us, we must refuse to *walk* according to the counsel of the ungodly. Instead, we look for answers in the word of God. If we don't, we will end up '*standing*' in the way of sinners. Our progress stopped altogether. At a crossroads, without the counsel of God, we will take the wrong path! Soon, we are at a full stop, and we are *sitting* in the 'seat of the scornful.' Bitter, not blessed. Disillusioned, our faith is gone. We didn't keep going by faith. We got the wrong advice and took the wrong path. Then, confused and disillusioned and angry, our progress was halted. We sat down – and quit. How many Christians do you know who have gotten unbiblical advice and taken the wrong road to end up bitter and confused? Has it ever happened to you?

What is the remedy? You meditate on the law of Lord. You reject bad counsel and “delight in the law of the LORD; and think about it day and night” (Psalm 1:2). This is not duty, but



Evangelism As Blessing

delight. Not spinach, but God's word as dessert. It is not a *have to*, but a *want to*. You are transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:1-2). Notice Psalm 1, "And he will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." We are suddenly back in Eden, in paradise, where we find rivers and fruit trees. Psalm 1 is the way home. The way to a life of victory. "His leaf shall not wither," this is an evergreen tree. No foliage is lost in the fall. It is green even in the winter. And it bears fruit. The only Middle Eastern tree that fits this description is the olive tree from which the sacred anointing oil is produced. This tree is planted, with roots, by a stream. It is a tree that defies the seasons and is green all year round. A tree that produces fruit – that prospers. This is a rich picture of the blessing of God.

"The ungodly are not so." They take the wrong path. They have no roots and become "like the chaff which the wind drives away." They are carried about, this way and that, lacking any grounding. They "will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." In the end, those who take the wrong path, who listen to ungodly counsel, who get angry and bitter, will perish. "But the LORD knows the way of the righteous." He is walking with you. He never leaves you – not even in seasons of disorder. He wants you to end up in Psalm 150. On your feet, praising Him.

Exercise 5:

1. Have you ever gotten bad advice? Unbiblical counsel? Maybe sincere, but wrong options were presented to you? All around us are people who got bad, unbiblical advice, and ended up in a train wreck. They just need someone to come along and give them hope – to bless



Navigating the Rapids of Life

them. That is, to pass on the blessing, the love of God, that will open a door in their heart to God. Who comes to mind as you read this? Pray for them. Ask God what you should do or say to them, if anything. Sometimes just your presence, just a hug, makes a world of difference.

2. Do you need someone to come alongside you, and bless you, and pray with you to know that you are on the right road? If you made some wrong decisions, remember, that is why God puts up road signs and sometimes roadblocks. He watches over us, always wanting us to come home and find the right way. Do you believe that? What Adam and Eve failed to see was the goodness of God. You can never trust God until you know His goodness – and you know that because of His goodness to you. Trace His hand in your life. Reflect back – was that an accident, that blessing, or were you being protected and guided even though you did not know it?
3. Who do you know that has taken a wrong path, made some bad choices that you could pray for? As you pray, make yourself available to God to be His voice to that person, His hands and arms.

ACTION:

- Today, you must spend time in prayer, over an open Bible. You don't want to *read* the Bible; you want to *pray* the Bible.
- Your inability to stop, to take time, to meditate and clear your head, is an indication of your rootlessness, of your being driven, blown about like chaff. The end of a prayerless life is not God's blessing, it is a



Evangelism As Blessing

languishing existence.

- Start today –
 - » Read a small portion of Scripture.
 - » Identify its key ideas, those that stand out to you.
 - » Use those ideas to form a Prayer. Pour out your heart to God. Push back all the ‘God help me’ emergency prayers and pray the principles of Scripture.
 - » Then, pause. Listen for God’s voice. Be still.
 - » Then, on the strength of the passage and the ideas you identified – Enter the promise. Experience God’s grace to bring change to your life.
- Psalm 1 is a good place to start. Use the acronym RIPLE (above) – Read, Identify, Pray, Listen, Experience.





Chapter 6

The Nature of Jesus - To Bless

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. Matthew 5-7 is the 'Sermon on the Mount.'
2. It begins with a renewal of the theme of 'blessing.' It is God, in Christ, again offering to humanity, His blessing. In Matthew 5, we find the characteristics that attract and sustain the blessed life. The high point in the beatitudes is the 7th blessing – that of being peacemakers. As agents of reconciliation, we make peace in the face of persecution – the 8th blessing. God blesses us in order for us to bless others, even those who are hostile to us.
3. Here, Jesus calls us to be salt and light. He reiterates the law, not allowing grace to eclipse it, but tying it to something greater – love. Love restrains. Love lives within the boundaries of the law. It moves us toward transformation, maturing us, to become like



Evangelism As Blessing

the Father. That's the bottom line of Matthew 5.

4. In Matthew 7, we have a series of negative outcomes. They are set forth in an either-or fashion. The bottom line of that chapter is the stark warning, “It is not he who ‘says’ Lord, Lord that will enter the kingdom, but he who ‘does’ the will of the Father.” It is behaving one’s belief.
5. In Matthew 6, we have a roadmap, measures, showing us how to move back from the disaster of Matthew 7 to the blessing of Matthew 5. The key is found in three disciplines – prayer, fasting and giving. Prayer relates to seeking God, fasting to surrender, and giving to serving. This is the whole Christian life. With the disciplines is the model prayer Jesus taught. The bottom line of Matthew 6 is that we should ‘seek first the kingdom of God.’ His rule in our lives.

Synopsis:

Jesus came to renew the blessing of God offered to Adam and Eve, and to others throughout the Old Testament. In what some consider his greatest sermon, he outlined the characteristics of a blessed life, and then reinterpreted the law – the boundaries, that if violated, destroyed the impact of the blessing (Matthew 5). The standard of morality was the same. Christ did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. What was different in the New Testament was the driving force inducing morality. It was not the law, but love. The effect of the blessing was the experience of God's love. The goal is not to be blessed, or live within the boundaries, but to become like the Father, to see the image of God restored in us and reflected through us. In



The Nature of Jesus - To Bless

Matthew 6, three disciplines guide us toward Christlikeness – prayer, fasting and giving. They are not the goal, but the tracks on which we move toward the goal. In Matthew 7, we have a description of disastrous consequences to a life when there is no discipline. In Matthew 6, we have a litany of glorious outcomes when we embrace these disciplines. In Matthew 5, we have the blessed life and its characteristics and behavioral profile.

Early in Matthew, we find Jesus giving what scholars call the ‘Sermon on the Mount.’ It is found in Matthew 5 – 7, in three chapters. In chapter 5, Jesus is offering blessings. Remember God, the Father, in Genesis also came blessing. Now His Son, Jesus comes, doing the same thing. This is a renewal of the blessing offered to Adam and Eve and all humanity. The offer of the blessing of God, the invitation to walk with Him, to experience the bliss of the garden was back on the table. It is the desire of God to bless. That is evident throughout the scripture. And it is the nature of Jesus to bless. And this should be our nature as followers of Christ, our practice, to bless others with the blessing of God’s grace and love that we have received. God loves – that is, His love flows outward. It is His nature – He cannot do otherwise. Paul said, “[W]e have been justified through faith, we have peace with God.” And we “have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” He enables us to “glory in our sufferings” because of the hope that is in us. And “because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (Romans 5:1-5). The word ‘poured out’ is *ekcheo*. One meaning is to gush out, to spill without restraint, to dump the whole bucket. This is not love that is given greedily but freely, abundantly. It is love that is bestowed on us so it can



Evangelism As Blessing

As in Genesis, there were behavioral boundaries attached to the blessing (Gen. 2:17). So here, in Matthew, with every blessing, there is an attitude or action that enables or potentially cripples the blessing. Jesus is telling his followers how to qualify for these eight blessings. Altogether, there are nine blessings, with the eighth blessing repeated for emphasis. The 7th blessing, seven representing completeness, wholeness, even perfection, is the ministry of peacemaking. Every blessing prior to this is a prerequisite for the ministry of reconciliation. And what follows, persecution, doubled as blessing eight and nine, is the reaction of the world. That explosive and toxic reaction doesn't change the nature of the blessing. What does the blessed life look like? Here it is.

The blessed inherit the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:3). And while on the earth, they are comforted (Mt. 5: 4). They will also inherit the earth (Mt. 5:5). They will be spiritually full, satisfied, fulfilled, not hungry on the inside, unsettled, spiritually thirsty and empty (Mt. 5:6). They will obtain mercy (Mt. 5:7), and their purity of heart will enable them to see God (Mt. 5:8). Their role, their calling, is to be “peacemakers” (Mt. 5:9). And because they stand in the contested middle and advocate for peace and reconciliation, they are “called the children of God.” The calling will not be without resistance from the world. Despite their efforts at peace, they will experience persecution (Mt. 5:10). But knowing this world is not their home, they will have the assurance that “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

God promises to bless “when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.” In such hostile moments, he calls for us to, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad,” knowing that we have earned a great reward in heaven. And when we are being persecuted, we stand in the same class as the prophets which were before us (Mt. 5:11-12). That's not bad company.



The Nature of Jesus - To Bless

We are blessed to bless others. But the blessing requires something of us. There are attitudes and actions that enable the blessing or inhibit it. For example, we must realize that we are *paupers* without God (Mt. 5:3). We have to develop the capacity to lament, to weep with others. This is *empathy*. It stands with people who are hurting and shows them love. It joins Jesus as he weeps over our city as he wept over Jerusalem (Mt. 5:4). We must learn to be *meek*, to control our strength, to be a “velvet covered brick.” Tough on the inside, but tender and gentle on the outside (Mt. 5:5). We can never lose our *hunger and thirst for righteousness*, for God’s justice in the earth (Mt. 5:6). And while we pine for justice and righteousness and abhor evil, we can’t lose our capacity to be *merciful*. We must learn to live in the tension between truth and love. We can neither let love muzzle truth nor let truth eclipse love (Mt. 5:7). In a dirty world, we must keep our own *heart pure* (Mt. 5:8). Only then can we fulfil our mission of being *peacemakers* and being known as the children of God (Mt. 5:9).

It may mean persecution, just for standing up for right. But there is a blessing even in that (Mt. 5:10-12). We are to be salt and light, a city set on a hill. A candle in dark places – not hidden but glowing. Our good works glorify God (Mt. 5:13-16). We live by the law of love – that is a standard higher than the law. Christ did not come to destroy the law, he declared, but to fulfill it. How? By introducing a higher law – the law of love. Not “one jot or one tittle” – not a dot of an ‘i’ or the cross of a ‘t’ will pass from the law.

A cavalier attitude toward spiritual discipline and godly standards, we are warned, could be ominous. “Whoever breaks one of the least commandments, and teaches others to do so, shall be the least in the kingdom... whoever does and teaches them, shall be called great...” Greatness in God’s eyes is living in grace above the grip of sin. Jesus was not finished. He declared,



Evangelism As Blessing

“[E]xcept your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Love then, is the higher standard. How can that be? What we have in Matthew 5 is a reinterpretation of the law, raised to an even higher standard, lived out in human lives only by the supernatural enablement of God’s grace.

Here is the new standard, not law but love. Watch how Jesus reinterprets the law and elevates the standard.

- Love refuses to take the life of another (Mt. 5:21).
- It is not easily angered and embroiled in a toxic relationship (Mt. 5:22).
- It repents quickly and keeps its heart right with God (5:23-24).
- It attempts to reconcile quickly when a relationship is broken, even if the costs to repair the relationship are high (Mt. 5:26).
- It does not commit adultery, love is faithful (Mt. 5:28).
- It monitors self-behavior, guarding what it allows the eye to see and what it allows the hand to do.
- It is not only self-aware, but ruthless with its own aberrant behavior – plucking out the eye, cutting off the hand, metaphors for extreme control over desires and deeds contrary to holiness (Mt. 5:29-30).
- It fights for the family, even if unfaithfulness occurs (Mt. 5:31-32).
- Love keeps its word, it honors any covenants made, any oaths taken.
- It also avoids the trap of oaths, by being so honest that one’s word is his bond, a “Yes,” is believed, as is a “No!” (Mt. 5:33-37).



The Nature of Jesus - To Bless

- Such a person does not lie or bear false witness. He does not live by the law of revenge (Mt. 5:38) – and “eye for an eye.”
- He does not react to violence, returning it, acting himself in the image of the aggressor.
- He resists the temptation to behave like the sinner. He turns the other cheek instead (Mt. 5:39).
- This is love in action – it is the restraining power of love, and that is greater than the law. It surrenders its coat and cloak to avoid a court battle (Mt. 5:40).
- When legally compelled to go a mile, carrying some burden, as Roman soldiers could do, love goes two miles (Mt. 5:41).
- It is always generous (Mt. 5:42).
- Love is kind to both neighbors and enemies.
- When relationships break down and become lethal, love chooses to return a blessing for a curse, good deeds for the active haters, and prayer for the spiteful and the persecutors.

This behavior solidifies our identity as “the children of your Father which is in heaven.” He treats the unjust and the just with grace. He could withhold light and rain from the unrighteous, instead, “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” So, we treat good men and bad men with grace and love. Because, as Jesus warns, “if ye love them that love you, what reward do you have? Even the publicans do that” (Mt. 5:43-47).

This is a revolutionary view of the law – overlaid with the demands, the constraint of love. Love, it turns out, is the higher standard. In loving, all the law is fulfilled, not discarded. In the end, the goal is for us to be more like the Father. “Be



Evangelism As Blessing

ye therefore perfect (whole, healthy, holy), even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). This is a picture of the image of God, in which we were created, now restored. We look like God! We act like God. Wow!

In Matthew 7, we have a train wreck. We have the profile of a stuck Christian life and a series of good and bad outcomes. We are warned about being quick to judge others when we are blind to our own shortcomings. We are too often like the brother with a log, literally, a stick of lumber in his eye, trying to improve the vision of one who has only a speck or a piece of dust in his eye (Mt. 7:3). In such a scenario, the whole world is blind. But the Christian with a beam in his eye seems unaware of his blindness. He focused on the vision problem of others. Unaware of his own distorted vision and perspective of others, he can be of no real help.

Second, we also find a lack of discernment as pearls are offered to pigs (Mt. 7:6). We must learn how to read people, their openness, or their settled commitment to the unholy. The decidedly unholy are oblivious to the beauty of pearls – the gospel. Third, we discover a frustrated prayer life (Mt. 7:7-11). The bottom line seems to be a lack of understanding of the nature of God Himself, of His goodness. Prayer is possible, not due to our goodness, but due to God's goodness. And out of prayer, our behavior is to be changed, so that "we do unto others as we would have them do to us" Such behavior is the 'sum total of the demands of the law and the words of the prophets' (Mt. 7:12). Yes, prayer is about asking, and knocking and receiving, but it is more – it must also be transformational.

Fourth, there are only two ways on which people travel - a broad way and a narrow way. Few even find the narrow way (Mt. 7:13-14). Fifth, there will be false prophets among the true (7:15-16), but the righteous will discern their lack of fruit



The Nature of Jesus - To Bless

and their nature – thorn trees don't bear grapes (Mt. 7:16). These prophets lack grace in their lives. Their lack of fruit will be evidence of their inner condition. Jesus is picturing the church as an orchard with trees that bear good fruit and trees that bear bad fruit (Mt. 7:16-20).

Sixth, there are those who will know kingdom language, Christainese, but they will not be true disciples. They will say, “Lord, lord,” but they will not do God's will. This is baffling, because they will prophesy, cast out devils and do miracles. But Christ will say to them, “I never knew you.” The meaning is this – ‘You and I were never really close, never intimate. You worked for me but never tried to get to know me.’ He continues, “You work iniquity.” That is, ‘You are lawless, a maverick, who never submitted, who never came under my hand. You did my work in your own way, for your glory.’ And then the judgement, “Depart from me.” Underneath, their life was undisciplined. They were lawless, failing to observe any boundaries. In the end, even their miraculous works could not save them.

There is one more differentiating metaphor. There are two houses, one with a foundation and one without a foundation. They both look alike. It is what is hidden that differentiates them. So, we should have a hidden life of prayer and dependence on God, established on Christ the rock. With no prayer life, no spiritual discipline, no consistent devotional practices, no private worship and reading of the word, we are a house built on sand. Someday, a storm will come and take such people out. These are shocking comparisons. The bottom line in Matthew 7 is this: It is not what we say, but what we do that matters, and doing involves ‘doing the will of God.’

In Matthew 7, one's walk and talk are contradictory. We have a picture of hypocrisy. In Matthew 5, we have the standard, the template that moves us from carnality to godliness. The



Evangelism As Blessing

Sermon on the Mount is the challenge to move from a life characterized by the chaos of Matthew 7 to the blessed life of Matthew 5, where we are growing to be like the Father. The key is found in the disciplines of Matthew 6. There, we are given three disciplines that can change our life – prayer (Mt. 6:5-14), fasting (Mt. 6:16-18) and giving (Mt. 6:2-4). Prayer draws us near to God. This is the discipline of *seeking* God. Fasting disciplines the flesh and helps us *surrender* to Him. Giving is how we *serve* God, how His grace flows through us – and that is not only about money. It is the way we bless others as well, giving them a kind word, showing love, offering prayer for them. It is also the call to travel light. Fulfilment is not in the toys and gadgets of this world. If you have something you can't give away, you don't own it. It owns you.

In the section on prayer, we are given the model that Jesus taught us, the “Lord’s Prayer.” Around this model for daily prayer, we are given three disciplines. In a sense, they encompass the whole Christian life – 1) drawing near to God, through *prayer*, and solitude, and seeking God; 2) surrendering to Him through *fasting*, subordinating the most basic appetites to our desire to know Him and do His will; 3) and then *giving*, serving Him. This is how we give away His love, His grace, the blessing of God. The key in Matthew 6 is “Seek first the kingdom of God,” the reign, and rule of God, in our hearts, “And His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33). The goal, however, is not a better prayer life, or breaking some fasting record, or giving everything we own away. The goal is to know God, and to become increasingly like the Father as revealed in Christ, to be an instrument of his grace and love. The disciplines are the track that gets us to the place of *knowing* him (prayer), obeying him (fasting), and serving Him (giving). The disciplines help *seek*, *surrender* and *serve* as instruments of His kingdom work.

And there is more. Something glorious happens to us.



The Nature of Jesus - To Bless

- Our bank account in heaven grows. Treasures accumulate there (Mt. 6:19-20).
- Our whole body is characterized by light. The power of inner darkness is broken (Mt. 6:22-23).
- We are able to deal with the two-master problem, of the inner back-and-forth (Mt. 6:24).
- We worry less about worldly and earthly needs – what we will eat and what we will wear (Mt. 6:25-31).
- We stop striving and begin to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Mt. 6:32-33).
- We focus on the present – this day. We live in the moment, not borrowing anxiety from tomorrow or carrying it over from the past (Mt. 6:34).

Exercise 6:

1. Be honest. Do you want to live the blessed life? Are you willing to embrace the disciplines of prayer, fasting and giving, that move you in that direction?
2. Do you see any of the negative features of Matthew 7 at work in your life? A lack of objectivity? Being too quick to judge others? A frustrated prayer life? Do you sense that you might not be on the right road spiritually? Do you recognize too much of a wolf attitude and not enough lamb in your disposition? Is there a lack of fruit in your life? Or a concern about your spiritual depth, your foundation, your hidden life? Be honest.
3. Are you seeking the will of God in everything – everything? Are you praying? Fasting? Giving – not only to the church, but almsgiving, to the needy? Are you a generous person? Are you growing to be more like the father?



Evangelism As Blessing

ACTION:

- Determine to embrace the disciplines of prayer, fasting and giving.
- The standard of giving in the Old Testament was a tithe – how can we do less? The standard in the New Testament is that everything belongs to God.
- The apostolic church kept a fast on Wednesdays and Fridays until 3 PM. It was a regular discipline in their lives. They suppressed natural appetites for those that were spiritual.
- The pattern of prayer through the centuries has been personal prayer, family prayer, small group prayer, and congregational prayer. Prayer becomes the rhythm of the believer's life. The early church came to observe the 'hours of prayer' throughout the day. This is the discipline of walking in the presence, of constant attention to God.
- Put the disciplines into practice this week – all three. Begin with 15 minutes of prayer in the morning over an open Bible. Set an alarm for Noon and later in the afternoon. Pause and pray. Fast at least one meal a week and use that time for prayer. Step up your 'almsgiving' to those that you sense are in need. Become a giving person, a praying person, with a greater appetite for God than a hamburger.





Chapter 7

Living a Life of Blessing

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. Jesus, as a child, was blessed by the prophet Simeon and the prophetess Anna.
2. He lived in the blessing. And he blessed others – men and women, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, adults and children.
3. The natural odds of Simeon and Anna both encountering Joseph and Mary in the temple at the time of the consecration of Jesus are slim. It was not a coincidence. They were directed by the Holy Spirit. We treat such encounters as chance, when they may be a result of the Lord ‘ordering our steps.’
4. From cover to cover, Genesis to Revelation, God is persistent in His action of blessing men and



Evangelism As Blessing

women so they can be a blessing to others. Even in the earth's dark 'last days' described in the book of Revelation, the blessing continues.

5. Gerald Janzen says, "the divinely intended governing principle is the power of blessing."¹⁵ Restated, God governs by blessing. And blessing is an expression of God's love.
6. With Adam and Eve, Noah and his family, Abram and his family – God, by blessing, is in the business of creating a blessed community that will be a blessing to a city, to a nation, to all the earth.
7. The end of the blessing is peace – *shalom*, wholeness.
8. We live between Babel (confusion) and Salem (peace). And we create families characterized by these extremes. At Babel, God was a visitor; at Salem, He was king. Receiving the blessing is dependent on our embrace of the God who blesses. Is He a stranger to your home, a visitor? Or is He king, the center, around which all lives revolve?
9. Jesus is called the 'Prince of Peace.' At his birth, the angels announced the intention of his coming, "Peace on earth, good will [from God] to men." It was his peace, that he left with the disciples (John 14:27). His vision is for a reconciled world, and we are the agents of reconciliation.
10. Blessing is a matter of being (a blessing) and doing. It is not merely in words. In prayer, God prepares you and me to *be* a blessing to others.

¹⁵ J. Gerald Janzen, 4.



Synopsis:

God orchestrates our lives – not only to be blessed by others, but to be a blessing. Daily prayer prepares you for God-encounters in the day in which God intends for you to speak a blessing, be a blessing and take actions that demonstrated His love to others. It may be with a friend or family member, a work associate or a neighbor, or someone with a flat tire on the side of the road. God will order your steps and put ministry opportunities in your path – stay awake! Some traditions avoid the words prophet, prophetess, or prophesy. But Paul defines the idea as an inspired word of ‘edification, exhortation or comfort’ (1 Cor. 14:2). God may inspire you to say something to a friend that builds them up, that encourages or motivates them, that comforts them – and that word, in such a moment, will be more than sounds. The Spirit of God will quicken such words to their hearts, making them life-giving words. God wants to talk to people – everywhere. He wants to bless them. He just needs someone to ‘say the words.’ In good times and bad times, God’s disposition, His desire to bless, never changes. It is the way God governs – by blessing! By love. By grace. The church is the community of God that blesses the city! But are we that? We should be! We are, by the power of blessing, peacemakers. That fulfills the purpose of the coming of Christ. We are, as peacemakers, as peace-speakers, doing his work. Are you a peacemaker?

The old prophet Simeon blessed the Christ child in the temple saying, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel” (Lk. 2:34). He was right. When Jesus came, he was not only dedicated as a child by his parents in the temple, but he was also blessed by prophetic hands. He would live in the blessing. This was no chance encounter, it was



Evangelism As Blessing

divinely orchestrated. The Bible says Simeon “was righteous and devout” and he looked “forward to the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:35). The scriptures declare, “The Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:25-26). He did not casually amble into the temple, “He came by the Spirit into the temple.” There, he encountered Joseph and Mary who “brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law” – the dedication and consecration of their first-born child. Simeon took Jesus, the infant, in his own arms, “and blessed God,” and then he said,

“Now, Lord, You are letting Your bond-servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all the peoples: a light for revelation for the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

Joseph and Mary “were amazed at the things which were being said about him” (Luke 2:33). Simeon then “blessed them and said to His mother Mary, ‘Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and as a sign to be opposed - and a sword will pierce your own soul...’” (Luke 2:34-35). Indeed.

Also, in the temple that day was “a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years,” actually, she was 84. She had been married for seven years, but her husband died, and she had continued to live as a widow. She gave herself to ministry and “did not leave the temple *grounds*, serving night and day with fasting and prayers” (Luke 2:36-37). As Simeon was blessing Jesus, the Christ child, and his parents, “at that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God and continued to speak about him [Jesus] to all those who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” These two encounters were no



Living a Life of Blessing

coincidence. They demonstrated God's divine orchestration of the life of Christ. That confirmed that he was blessed to be a blessing. Through him, the full impact of God's goodness would be seen.

Here is the good news. He also orders our steps (Psalm 37:23; 119:133). From the time you were conceived, God has had his hand on your life, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psa. 139:13-14). The psalmist added, "I know that full well." But do you? Do you know that God's hand is upon you?

What are the odds that Simeon would be in the temple at the time Jesus was being consecrated and that Anna would intersect with them simultaneously? God orders our steps (Psa. 37:23; Proverbs 16:9). You will have similar moments that you know cannot be a coincidence, when God thrust someone in your path that needs a word of blessing. Returning to Nazareth, Joseph and Mary watched as "the Child continued to grow and to become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the favor of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40). The blessing of God was on his life.

Blessed, Jesus' ministry was one of blessing. He blessed adults and children, Jews and Gentiles, soldiers and tax collectors. He healed the blind and the lame, set captives free by deliverance. And when he left the earth, the last thing he did was to lift his hands in a priestly manner and pronounce a blessing! In fact, he was taken up into heaven, blessing! Perhaps, he is still blessing, from heaven. His ministry is framed with this desire of God to bless humanity.

Even in the Revelation, the blessing continues. As the anti-Christ rises, the false prophet speaks lies, and the dragon rages – we find seven blessings from the early chapters of the Revelation to the latter chapters. God's blessings never stop.



Evangelism As Blessing

- In Revelation 1:3, there is a blessing for simply reading the book of Revelation, hearing its words and keeping its contents in our hearts knowing the time of the end is near.
- In Revelation 14:13, a voice from heaven pronounces a blessing on those “die in the Lord from now on!” From a certain point on the eschatological continuum. They will “rest from their labors.”
- In Revelation 16:15, there is a blessing for the one “who stays awake” and restrains his holiness at the time of the coming of the Lord. .
- In Revelation 19:9, there is a blessing for those “who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.”
- In Revelation 20:6, there is a blessing for the “one who has a part in the first resurrection.” The “second death has no power” over them, and “they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” Quite a blessing.
- In Revelation 22:7, there is a blessing for “the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book,” the Revelation. No other book offers such a blessing.
- In Revelation 22:14, we have the final blessing for “those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life, and may enter the city by the gates.” We are back in Eden at the tree of life. No longer a garden, Eden has become a city.

The blessing of God settles on godly people during the earth’s greatest time of judgment and woe. His blessing overrides the dark shadow cast by Satan’s final hour on the stage of time. Nothing can stop God’s blessing,



Living a Life of Blessing

J. Gerald Janzen declared that “the divinely intended governing principle is the power of blessing.”¹⁶ That’s quite an assertion. As we have noted earlier, Janzen says, Genesis 1 and 2 shows the world and humans in it, as living in “a place of blessing and fruitfulness.” The garden is “a picture of the total blessedness of creation.” The redemptive process, he asserts, “is the counteract the workings of evil in the world and to restore the world to its divinely intended blessedness.”¹⁷ In Abraham, God picks up the theme of blessing, which was articulated to Adam, and offered again through Noah. Abraham took the offer seriously.

The redemption of humanity gets a fresh start with God’s covenant with Abraham. It is “a journey in blessing from a single person to all the families of the earth.”¹⁸ From a man with a barren wife, to son and grandson, and great grandfather to a dozen sons of Jacob, the blessing spread. The goal was the creation of a community, a family, “called to serve the well-being of all human communities, by becoming the kind of community they would all like to become” (cf. Dt. 4:5-8).¹⁹

Blessing is well-being or to use the Biblical word – *shalom* (peace). That’s more than the absence of conflict. That’s a sense of wholeness, health, and yes, of holiness. It is a place of inner congruence made possible because one has, by grace, made peace with the very nature of God. Today, Jews greet one another with the word *shalom*. “Seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:14) is urged on them by scripture. From the chaos that streams from the sin in the garden, from which man was expelled, redemption is a journey to recover paradise, to restore peace.

¹⁶ J. Gerald Janzen, *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: Genesis 12-50* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 4.

¹⁷ Ibid, 5.

¹⁸ Ibid, 15.

¹⁹ Ibid, 17.



Evangelism As Blessing

Christians too, should be people who bless – who greet one another, and others with the invitation to know the peace of God, to be reconciled to God. Israel's Biblical capital, Jerusalem, has embedded in its name – peace. It is the fortress (*Jebus*) of peace (*Salem: shalom*). We call people, the Bible declares, to the Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:6) where they can find freedom and know the peace of God.

Jesus is now the 'prince of peace' (Isa. 9:6) in the heavenly Jerusalem. At his birth, the angels declared, "Peace on earth, good will to men" (Lk. 2:14). This was his purpose in coming – peace. To bring heaven to earth. He called his followers, that's you and me, to be peacemakers (Mt. 5:9). Among his last words to his disciples were these, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn. 14:27). The biblical vision is for a reconciled world in which, "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Ps. 85:10). He spoke with grace. He spoke blessings over the lives of people. Have you ever spoken a blessing over someone?

Blessing others is more than saying a set of words, but that is a part of what God is calling us to do. This may be a bit over-the-top for you, but God wants you to prophecy. According to Paul, that means that you speak words of comfort, or edification to build up and encourage another person. And words of exhortation are spoken to urge another person onward, to incite action, or to appeal to them. And this is done by you as you yield to the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 14:2). It is His message to a friend; you deliver the mail. God wants to talk to people. He wants to bless them. He needs someone to be His voice. God also calls us to live lives of blessing. Blessing is a matter of *being*, and *doing*, not merely a set of sounds. That means that the blessing God must reorder our lives in order for us to more authentically pass on the blessing of God.



Living a Life of Blessing

Isaiah 50:4 expresses God's desire. "The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He awakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed." Indeed. This is why morning prayer is not an option but a necessity. It prepares you for your day. God knows the steps you will take, the people you will meet, the needs they will have, and His desire is to load you up, to be and speak His blessing of others.

Exercise 7:

1. As you consider the encounter of Simeon and Anna with Joseph, Mary, and the Jesus the Christ child, have you ever had a moment where you felt God had divinely orchestrated your steps and some meeting was no chance encounter? Reflect on that. Do you think we miss such moments, because we are not Spirit-directed?
2. Had you ever noticed how the blessing of God continues throughout the book of the Revelation? What does say about the nature of God? What does it say the pervasive goodness of God in the darkest of times? Have you ever had, in tough times, a special breakthrough, a word of encouragement from heaven that gave you hope? Think about people around you going through especially tough times – how might we be a voice of blessing to them?
3. Gerald Janzen's idea, that "the divinely intended governing principle is the power of blessing,"²⁰ is stunning. God governs by the power of blessing? His blessing on our lives? His blessing through us? That means blessing is essential, not optional. Do you agree? Are you blessed?

²⁰ J. Gerald Janzen, *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: Genesis 12-50* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 4.



Evangelism As Blessing

Do sense God's favor and goodness on your life?

4. The other critical idea is that of peace – which seems to be the goal, the end of the blessing. To create a state of peace, shalom – wholeness, health, holiness. And our role, is to be peacemakers, offering the blessing of God to others, a blessing that is intended to move them from brokenness to spiritual health and wholeness. Jesus came to establish peace in a broken, divided, oppressive world; and he now charges us with the task of being peacemakers. Are you a peacemaker?
5. What else stood out to you in this chapter?

ACTION:

- Today, watch for who God puts in your path. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Don't be overzealous or fearful. The Holy Spirit is a gentleman, a comforter, a dove. Relax, you can't mess this up! You will sense the moment that it is right and appropriate to say, "God bless you ... Jesus loves you ... I am praying for you." Or some other word of encouragement.
- Break your silence.
- Remember, a blessing is an expression of God's love. It opens hearts.
- You are called to bless others, as God has blessed you – and, in doing so, the sense of God's blessing on your life will intensify.





Chapter 8

The Way of Blessing

The next three chapters were expanded during the editorial phase. They contain significant propositions that not only bear on your evangelism style but also call for significant alterations to the way we live our lives before a watching world. Get ready for a deep dive.

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. “The blessed,” Nouwen notes, “cannot help but bless others.”
2. Blessing others is the overflow of our lives.
3. This is our calling to live in the presence of God, to know the peace and rest of God and be ourselves peacemakers.
4. This is possible only because we are confident, because we are assured of the love of God.
5. Sensing His benevolent presence, we bless others – with the blessing we have received. With the same peace, joy and love. And in that moment of our



Evangelism As Blessing

speaking a blessing, we pray for the recipient to sense the convicting, transforming presence of God.

6. As the Lord is compassionate, so are we. As He is gracious, so are we. As He blesses us, we bless others. We are in the middle, serving the invisible God before men – expressing His love and doing godly deeds.
7. In this chapter, you will find the first nine of thirty-two ‘ideas.’ These are propositional ideas that appear in *italics* at the end of each paragraph. The text is at times cumbersome, so the idea declarations are there to help you grasp and see the ideological movement between the ideas.

Synopsis:

Pride forges a prayerless life, without humility and deep dependence on God! The proud individual cannot realize how impoverished they are without God’s constant blessing, His peace and His presence. Christianity is an attachment to their life – not a new way to believe and behave and belong. God has a mission for us – it is bigger and grander than any self-produced plans. It invigorates the community and moves it toward mission. It impacts cities, and then nations. This is the power of God’s blessing. He offers an anointing, a supernatural enabling – the words that we could say, the way that we can relate to hurting people, the authority to liberate others from the crippling effects of sin. Wow! All of this comes out of knowing Him, pursuing Him, loving Him and being loved by Him. We become carriers of His presence. It is not something we merely do or say. It becomes a way of life. The way of blessing.



Henri Nouwen noted, “The blessed cannot help but bless others.”²¹ He continued, “It is remarkable how easy it is to bless others when you are in touch with your own blessedness.”²² God offers a supernatural blessing to and through those who bless others. We do not do this on our own or out of our goodness. We are blessed. And if we have *received* the blessing, it changes us. And it changes others through us.

CHRISTIANITY: A NEW WAY OF LIFE: THE WAY OF BLESSING

We are being called into a new way of life – it is the way of blessing. This is not the life lived by the average American Christian. Living the way of blessing demands a new rhythm of life that makes space for God and sacred time with Him – a Sabbath. We need to live in the peace of God, in the rest of God, and from that peace, we work as peacemakers. We can’t work in a frenzied state as the world works, but in measured way that creates space for God in the daily grind of life. Did you ever notice, Jesus never seemed to be in a hurry.

IDEA ONE: *Christianity is a completely different way to live. We do not merely clean up our lives morally, language and few bad habits, but still continue to live essentially the same as the unredeemed around us. Christianity is transformational. We become new creatures, distinctly different than the world, living lives of inner peace, measured and disciplined lives in a new rhythm that makes space for God.*

We are not only to live in the rest and peace of God, but also in the love of God. It is in knowing, with certainty, that God loves us, that peace and rest are enabled in our lives. Being nurtured by God’s love and His compassion for us, we nurture others.

²¹ Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

²² Quoted by Peter Lord, *Bless and Be Blessed* (Revell: Grand Rapids, 2004), 93.



Evangelism As Blessing

It is the only way – we need divine love, given and received to pass along to others. Hearing the *word* of God, and knowing God as the *Word*, His word burns in our heart. As we receive God's word, we cannot help but share the good news. If we don't share, we haven't heard. As we speak God's word, it changes both us and others. Psalm 107:20 declares, "He [God] sent out his word and healed them, snatching them from the door of death." This is the power of God's speech, echoed by us.

IDEA TWO: *Christianity experiences and expresses God's love for others, hearing, knowing and speaking God's healing, lifegiving Word. Silence is not acceptable.*

THE WORD MADE FLESH

Let's take a moment and consider the *Word* that became flesh. Here is the divine Word made audible and visible. It is the divine Word clearly seen by the actions and attitudes, the disposition of Jesus toward others. That same *Word* is to be alive in us and in the words that we speak, the behaviors we manifest. It's shocking - God, the *Word*, became flesh. God, in Christ, was among us- living, eating, breathing, speaking, laughing. We must pray that again, that God's word will be among men, revealed in us and through us. God was manifest in human flesh, and that is a model for us, "Christ, in us, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). God was not silent in Christ; how can we be silent? He revealed the Father with both his life and his lips.

IDEA THREE: *Christianity is divinity pressed into human flesh. It is God manifest through the man Jesus – and through us. We are the second, and lesser, incarnation, by the indwelling Holy Spirit.*

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... Through Him all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that has been made. In



The Way of Blessing

Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”
(John 1:1-5).

What a passage. The Word was life and light – and it overcomes the darkness. John was a witness to Christ, as we are to be. John 1:7, declared, “He [John] came as a witness to testify about the Light, so that through him everyone might believe.” John declared that Jesus, the Christ, was “the true Light... who gives light to everyone” (John 1:9).

IDEA FOUR: *We too are witnesses for Christ, bearers of the light in which there is life, offering a testimony that men might believe.*

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God— children born not of blood, nor of the desire or will of man, but born of God” (John 1:10-13).

RECEIVING THE WORD

There is one key word worth considering before we move on – the term ‘receive.’ The light shone in the darkness, but some did not *receive* it. Jesus came to His own, but they did not *receive* him. “[A]s many as *received* Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). We must not only *believe* but also *receive*. And here is the problem, “The natural man does not *receive* the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

IDEA FIVE: *Those to whom we witness must not only hear the words of the gospel, they must also receive them, deeply grasping*



Evangelism As Blessing

them. That is true faith, true belief. It is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Let's pause for a moment. The language of Paul is clear, "the natural man," because of his nature, is prevented from *receiving* the things of God. He cannot grasp them. The parable of Jesus is helpful here. He suggests four difficulties in receiving the gospel seed. There is the heart that is hard and stony. Another with inner weeds that are too thick and thorny to allow the gospel seed to survive. We also find birds, the demonic powers that surveil the unredeemed, that prevent the seed from even reaching the heart. Finally, there is condition of the inner ground of the heart that is good and ready to receive the seed of the gospel, bringing forth a hundred-fold, some sixty-fold and other ground, thirty-fold. Is the soil of your heart good, yielding rich returns? Or poor and not ready to receive the seed or replicate it? (Mt. 13:1-23) Only the Holy Spirit illuminating the 'word' of God can soften a hard heart and free a cluttered mind for the gospel.

IDEA SIX: *It is the state of the resistant heart that prevents true salvation. The unbeliever can't receive the seed of the word because of the condition in which he lives – the birds (demonic influence and surveillance), a hard heart, a weedy and thorny heart, or poor soil. A supernatural work is necessary in his heart.*

One can give mental assent without *receiving unto salvation, unto transformation* – the word of God. The Greek word for receive is *dechomai*. It means, not only to *receive*, but to welcome, and to *fully accept*. It is the idea of embracing the word, the gospel, and by extension, Christ himself. It is a verb, an action word. It means to take something, exclaiming, "It's mine!" The truth has been owned; it has been *received* in a *welcoming* (receptive) way. One of the primary New Testament uses of this term receive, (*dechomai*) is people *welcoming* God into their lives resulting in their salvation (1 Thess. 2:13). Their mind is



renewed and their life is transformed (Rom. 12:2). They adopt God's way of thinking and seeing the world (Eph 6:17). This is not a cool and guarded reception of the gospel and Christ, but a 'warm welcome, a ready reception.'

IDEA SEVEN: *The reception of the seed of the gospel is not passive. It must be received, accepted, owned. God must be welcomed for a life to be transformed. Cool, get-out-of-trouble salvations are far too self-interested to last. Hot, Christ-focused salvations, get us out of trouble, and launch a life-time journey of gratitude to God, driven by grace, decorated with the reality of knowing God and being profoundly changed.*

RECEIVING IN ORDER TO KNOW

A worldly and fleshly orientation sees Biblical ideas as foolishness, as irrational, as silly if not stupid. You may meet this viewpoint in friends and acquaintances as you engage them in a good news encounter. Don't be offended. Such people cannot *believe*, because they won't *receive*. Bluntly, here is the inverse, they don't *receive* because they don't want to *believe* (1 Cor. 2:14). They may understand the gospel rationally, propositionally, but to *believe* that the gospel is true would be to concede that it had a claim on one's life. To *receive* Christ, one must adopt, by grace, the ways of Christ. Not accepting that truth, they cannot *know* Christ – He is truth. He is more than intellectual truth – he is truth that trues, that changes, that straightens. Therefore, they cannot *know* the salvation offered. To *receive* Christ would abruptly change the course of their life, and to *believe* it would end self-indulgence. *Believe, receive and know* – note the order. Biblical principles or ideas are foreign to those the Bible calls fools (It is better that you and I do not use that term!). Such people think they can reverse the process – they want to *know*, before they *believe* and *receive*. They doubt the intrinsic value of the Christian life. They see it as inferior to a self-directed, world-aware, sensate life. It



Evangelism As Blessing

is too narrow and restrictive. Their approach is purely left-brained and analytical. The deeper things of God are not understood by mental acuity, they are ‘spiritually discerned.’ The worldly Christian, so-called, wants to weigh their options. They are not focused on Christ and the cross, but purely on the benefits of being a Christian. They want self to live and not die. Only the Holy Spirit can open such a heart. Pray and give them time. Keep the bridge of love in place. Respect them but graciously challenge their views.

IDEA EIGHT: *The person gripped by the world and under the control of the flesh wants to stay in charge. They want to know how a change of course would benefit them. The desire for control is a pride issue. The unwillingness to surrender is an issue of trust. They resist faith and depend on their own logic and analysis. They are attempt to believe with their head, not their heart.*

The word *know* in 1 Corinthians 2:14 is *ginóskó*. The verb carries the meaning (Strong's) of giving permission to an idea or entertaining a notion. In knowing, the will surrenders. It bends to understand and believe. It then recognizes truth. It perceives, creating an ‘aha’ moment. Discernment and insight follow. The natural man cannot *allow* the gospel to be true – it would be too disruptive, too disordering of his preferred lifestyle. Paul, writing to the Romans argued, “[W]hat may be known about God is plain... God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from His workmanship, so that men are without excuse.”

IDEA NINE: *The flesh-dominated individual does not want to know. If Jesus were God, the Messiah, and the Bible true, his preferred self-indulgent lifestyle would be finished. Though God’s existence is obvious, this person chooses spiritual blindness. Evangelizing him is a work only the Holy Spirit can do with a great deal of patience from us.*



Exercise 8:

1. Review the first nine ideas in this chapter.
2. What can you learn to inform a life of evangelism from these ideas? What are the two most important ‘ideas’ to you in this group?
3. Have you ever sensed a depth of God’s love – that overwhelmed you? That brought tears – tears of joy? Do you know His peace?
4. Do you have the boldness necessary to express His love to others? That is simply the condition of being so full of God, that His fullness spills out on others through you.
5. Have you discovered ‘the way?’ That Christianity is not merely a set of morals, but a radically ‘new way to live,’ to see the world, to experience God, His love and the depth of His peace?
6. Or have you only prayed “a prayer of salvation” and made subsequent moral readjustments? There is a new way to life – Jesus is the ‘way, the truth, and the life!’ Don’t get stuck in your Christian development. There is more.
7. Get in His presence regularly. Remember, to bless others, you need to be assured of God’s blessing on your life.

ACTION:

Presuppositions:

- The blessed, bless others.
- In Christianity, we express what we have experienced.
- To experience God, we must ‘receive’ Christ – and



Evangelism As Blessing

that is not a passive matter.

- The unwillingness to receive is due to a condition that the natural man, the sinner, prefers. He does not receive because in receiving, he must affirm beliefs that obstruct the lifestyle he prefers. The problem is not a lack of understanding but a preferred ignorance, a choice for the darkness and against the light.

ACTION:

- Review the nine idea propositions in this chapter. Evaluate yourself.
- Go through each one asking the question, “Do I agree with this proposition?” If both a disposition (believing) and an action (behaving) is implied, ask, “Do I pass this test? Meet this standard? Or do I need more of God’s transforming grace?” Be honest.
- Multiply your positive answers by eleven. Did you get an 80% score or better? If so, straighten your halo. 60% or better? Average. Below 60%, you have work to do. Below 40%. You get a metal for being honest. Plow through the list again and ask God to change you.
- Spend time with God. Be honest about your feelings of inadequacy. But tell God you are willing and available. You will not have to create the moment; it will come to you. When it does, relax. Pray silently. Don’t try to be spiritual. Be natural. And the words will come, and God’s Spirit will be present.





Chapter 9

The Way: The Wise Tongue

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. Creation declares the existence of God. Men, without excuse, knew of God, but denied the truth of His existence.
2. Some men and women are in darkness by choice.
3. They are, unknowingly, under a spiritual spell. Only a supernatural encounter with God can save them.
4. Sharing the word with them is not adequate, they must receive it, grasp it and own it. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, beyond the mere cognitive.
5. True salvation demands full surrender.
6. To be an effective witness, we must be fully surrendered. Wobbly, lukewarm Christians do not offer evidentiary proof of the difference between a Christian life and that of an unbeliever.
7. A component of this proof is wise speech, inspired



Evangelism As Blessing

by the Holy Spirit. The language of life.

8. In this chapter, you will find twenty-three additional ‘ideas’ – propositional declarations to help you grasp the ideas presented in this and the last chapter.

Synopsis:

Creation offers a witness to the existence of God. Those who deny that obvious revelation and suppress truth commit themselves to blindness. To see such people come to Christ involves an act of spiritual warfare – a liberating work of the Holy Spirit in connection with intercession. They must not only understand the gospel rationally, but they must also receive it. Salvation is spiritual encounter with the Trinity – the Father’s love revealed in Christ and experienced by the work of the Holy Spirit. The role of the believer is that of witness – the wise tongue. The godly tongue. The restrained and disciplined tongue. We speak the language of life and grace. Wisdom is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, who guides our gracious speech. Our love and joy overflow in our language. Anointed, we have good news, words that heal and liberate. We are carriers of His presence and His message, in word and deed.

Creation witnesses to the existence of God. It reveals His power. It gives us clues to His nature. This witness of Creation “is clearly seen” leaving men “without excuse.” But men, due to the orientation of their heart, “knew God,” but withheld worship and gratitude. The result is the closing out the obvious truth about God’s existence. It is useless and pointless thinking, leading to a dark heart, one where the



The Way: The Wise Tongue

lights have gone out. Paul describes these people as “darkened in their foolish hearts.” Still, “they claim to be wise.” Proud and self-assured, they “became fools... God gave them over [he released them] in the desires of their hearts to impurity” (Rom. 1:19-24). The commitment to impurity and ungodliness intensified their blindness to the obvious truth. They will not acknowledge that they are thinking and living as fools, supposing themselves to be wise. They are deluded. Blind. This is stark language.

IDEA TEN: *When a person closes their heart to obvious truth, their heart-lights go out. Inner guidance is diminished. They live in and love the darkness. They don't hear God. They have muzzled their conscience. They are self-deluded, elevating themselves as wiser than others. Committed to impurity, practiced privately or publicly, they are fools. Only the Holy Spirit can help us reach them. We must pray.*

When God ‘gives a person over,’ it is not the end of His love. Like the Prodigal’s father, He knows that only when the son (or daughter) reaches the end of their rope and ‘comes to themselves, to their senses’ (Luke 15:17), will they have a window of godly reason, and hear the call of God’s grace to come home. The Biblical language implies that such people are ‘under a spell,’ not themselves, no longer clearheaded. “The god of this world has blinded their minds” (2 Cor. 4:4). Every salvation is therefore an act of spiritual warfare. You, with the partnership of the Holy Spirit and the Word, “save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 1:23).

IDEA ELEVEN: *The salvation of those who are spiritually blind is possible. It is an act of spiritual warfare in partnership with the Holy Spirit. It rises out of prayer, emphasizing the*



Evangelism As Blessing

irreplaceable role of intercession and its connection to the Holy Spirit's action in the life of the unbeliever. Gospel engagement with such people cannot be accomplished merely by the presentation of propositional truth. Some of our friends are clearly 'under a spell,' unknowingly. They have closed their eyes to the obvious truth and their heart-lights have gone out. That is why a rational appeal to them is inadequate. God has let them run through the barricades toward destruction – what else could He do? What can we do? Pray that God will break the spell and the Holy Spirit will remove their blinders. That they will wake up to God, and come home.

The word *know* (*ginóskó*) in 1 Cor. 2:14, also carries the meaning of ‘feeling.’ As in Romans, the unbeliever is *past ‘feeling’* without being *aware* of it. He cannot resolve the incongruence between Biblical ideas and the worldview he prefers. A world created by God is unacceptable. It demands deference to God, an acknowledgement he is unwilling to grant. This is not merely a conscious and rational problem. It is not more information that he needs. He needs ‘supernatural perception’ orchestrated only by the Holy Spirit. Our role is continuing prayer, until God illuminates his mind and opens the door of his heart. He must ‘come to himself.’ The spell has to be broken. All we can do is pray and wait and watch like the prodigal’s father, ready to welcome the lost child with open arms, leading with love.

IDEA TWELVE: *There are some of our friends who are hostile to the gospel, ‘past feeling,’ under a spell. They are running the red lights. Reason cannot reach them. Their salvation is a matter of prayer and patience. In the end, love will be more compelling and bumbling to them than truth – they already know the truth.*

Paul says to the Thessalonians, “You *received* the word of God which you *heard* from us, you *welcomed* it not as the word of men,



The Way: The Wise Tongue

but as it is in *truth, the word of God*, which [now, because you did so] also *effectively works* in you who *believe*” (1 Thess. 2:13: Italics for emphasis). Salvation does not occur with superficial, merely cognitive *belief*. It demands a radical embrace, the welcoming and *receiving* of the gospel. Only then does truth *effectively do its work*.

IDEA THIRTEEN: *The word of God, the truth, must not only be heard, but it must also be welcomed, received, radically embraced. This is deep belief that allows the word of God, the truth to do an effective work of transformation. The superficial acknowledgement of gospel facts does not bring change; it is only mental assent, without a full welcome and embrace of Christ or his truth. Receiving it as the word of God, as divine truth, places us in the subordinate and surrendered posture. We no longer have the good news, it has us.*

“Unrighteous deception” characterizes “those who perish, because they did not *receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved*” (2 Thess. 2:10). Again, it is not a matter of merely *believing*, but also of *receiving*. Here, deception is driven by unrighteousness. This is self-deception. It is the unwillingness to change, to embrace holiness and righteousness, and that assures continuing deception. One can claim salvation, without surrendering, without crucifying the flesh. They are cultural Christians. Superficially committed to Christ while continuing to practice sin. Such people have eyes, but they can’t see. They have ears, but they can’t hear. Their heart is hard and closed to the gospel. Only the work of the Holy Spirit can break the grip of such deception.

IDEA FOURTEEN: *One can hold the gospel and pretend salvation without full surrender. Full surrender, the radical reception of the gospel, forces out unrighteousness. And unrighteousness is deadly in its capacity to deceive. The gospel is sobering. It breaks the power of deception, showing us our true*



Evangelism As Blessing

inner self. A true Christian, beholding themselves in the mirror of God's word, cannot be self-deceived.

A SPIRITUAL ENCOUNTER

Again, this cannot be overemphasized as we emerge from an age of rationalism that has so impacted both evangelism and our understanding of Biblical salvation. It is more than a rational presentation – it is a spiritual encounter. In any evangelism encounter, there is more than the witnessing believer and the unchurched unbeliever present in the moment. God is there, by the Holy Spirit – and if He is absent, there can be no salvation. And His presence cannot be assumed; it must be recognized. Angels are watching. The invitation to know Christ is a holy and critical point in time. In the salvation moment, Paul says the gospel is ‘spiritually discerned.’

The Greek for *discerned* is *anakrinó*. It means to examine or to investigate. It means a long and hard look at the demands of the gospel, and cost of following Christ. It can mean to question and to judge. God is not afraid of honest questions. The term is from *ana* and *krino*. *Krino* means to scrutinize, interrogate, to discern and to make a determination. *Ana* means *up and down*. It implies our completing the process of deciding by separating the facts and reaching a conclusion. We properly *distinguish* by vigorously judging “up and down, and down to up.” We ‘closely’ *examine* through “careful study, evaluation and judgment.”²³ This is not a quick and superficial act. It is studied, weighed and carefully considered. It is a life-altering decision. Wow.

IDEA FIFTEEN: *The Holy Spirit orchestrates our salvation – our conviction of sin, our being convinced of God's righteousness, our being justified and freed from judgement (John 16:8). The Holy*

²³ See Strong's. 1 Cor. 2:14, Greek: discerned. See also: J. B. Lightfoot, Notes, 181f.



The Way: The Wise Tongue

Spirit effects our regeneration (new birth) and sanctification. He fills us with himself. The Holy Spirit helps us move beyond mere rational objectively to ‘spiritual discernment,’ where we distinguish sin and righteousness, seeing the world in a different manner. We see things with different eyes, illuminated by the Spirit.

As we pray and offer a witness, the Holy Spirit quietly works in a closed heart, offering a radically different way of seeing self and the world. Questions and misgivings are common. The Holy Spirit presses the case for Christ in a manner that is impossible for us to do. He unlocks the closed heart in response to earnest faith. The individual then not only *hears* the gospel but ‘receives’ it, and ‘knows’ for certain that God is being revealed to them (1 Cor. 2:14). He helps the person spiritually discern.

IDEA SIXTEEN: *With some lost friends, we can only pray and offer the witness of our lives, our godly presence around them, giving the Holy Spirit the opportunity to work in their closed hearts. At times, their misgivings surface, and questions are voiced. We look for times when their hearts are open, even if only slightly, to hear the gospel, praying that they receive it and ‘know’ the certainty of God’s love and truth. That they will taste the liberating power of the gospel.*

THE MOUTH OF THE GODLY

There are dominant voices the unbeliever hears. Human voices, and at times, that of the Holy Spirit. There are the deceptive whisperings of the serpent. His voice is predictably deceptive – urging us to be self-interested, to doubt God, to disbelieve the stated consequences of sin. It suggests that we act boldly and independently in the face of God. That we rebel against Him and violate His standards, arrogantly breaking His laws. That we dare Him to act and challenge Him as impotent or treat Him as



Evangelism As Blessing

non-existent. At times, even as believers, we echo these whispers – doubting, disbelieving the toxic nature of sin, dismissing its consequences, dancing over the line of righteousness, testing God.

Satan's tactics are predictable as are sin's consequences, but the problem with deception is that it is deceptive. We take the first step, and suddenly we are pulled into the undertow. The role of the Holy Spirit is predictable as well – he comforts but also convicts. He is, to us, as is the Father, as is Christ, both love and truth with power. We are the ones with unpredictable voices, at times echoing the deceptive whispers of hell, and at other times, speaking the language of faith and hope.

The problem is that what we say affects others. Even our self-talk can be toxic, and it can leak into verbal speech before others. For this reason, we must guard our speech, not only for our own health, but for the sake of those we might influence – either as bold and steadfast believers or as those who wobble in their faith and run both hot and cold. James 3:10 warns us about 'blessing and cursing coming from the same mouth.' God hears "every careless word that people speak." (Mt. 12:36). He reads our thoughts. Proverbs 10:31 declares, "The mouth of the godly person gives *wise advice*" (Prov. 12:14 NLT). *Wisdom* is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. So 'the mouth of the godly' is an instrument of the Holy Spirit 'giving wise advice.' May that be me and you!

IDEA SEVENTEEN: *Unbelievers need a clear and consistent witness from us, one that speaks both love and truth. Our wobbling, our lukewarm state, could be keeping our uncommitted friends from believing, our lives being not much different than theirs. Blessings and curses should not proceed from us. We should be predictable, disciplined in our speech. We should reflect in our lives and with our lips the predictability of the Holy Spirit and not the deception of the serpent. The difficulty in evangelism is not always the hardness of the sinner, but the bad behavior of the saint.*



The Way: The Wise Tongue

*Proverbs 15:4 presents a similar thought, “Wise words bring many benefits” (Prov. 15:2 ESV). We might say, ‘words inspired by the Spirit and graciously spoken by us are loaded with godly benefits.’ Wow. The word for benefits is *yatab*, which can mean to make one well. It can mean to mend or make better, to make one sound or beautiful again. And to make one successful and happy. Language then is either deadly or lifegiving, worthless or wise.*

IDEA EIGHTEEN: *Here is the power of words. Words as wisdom, words that heal and edify or the inverse, words that wound. We are to speak words that are wise, “loaded with godly benefits.” That may feel to us inauthentic. Why? Because of the dissenting voice within, the echo, the whispers of the serpent. They need to be dismissed, so that with conviction, we can become the voice of the Spirit. And by grace, we can become the example unbelieving friends need to see.*

THE LANGUAGE OF LIFE

“A gentle tongue is a tree of life” (Prov. 15:4 ESV). We are back now in the garden of Eden. Other translations call this a “soothing tongue” (NIV). The KJV calls this “a wholesome tongue.” The Legacy Bible is simpler, “a tongue that brings healing is a tree of life.” The Amplified expands the idea, “a soothing tongue [speaking words that build up and encourage] is a tree of life.” The Christian Standard Bible calls this “the tongue that heals.” A few translations read “a healed tongue” emphasizing the transformation of the one who speaks.

IDEA NINETEEN: *We are to speak the language of life. Soothing words. Bringing healing – the language of mediation, of reconciliation.*



Evangelism As Blessing

Proverbs 15:1 reminds us, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Gentle is *rak*, meaning tender, soft, delicate, even weak or we might say vulnerable. There is the opposite of attempting to meet power with power, or aggressive speech with equally aggressive speech.

On the contrary, our speech is to be measured, guarded and refined, thoughtful and gracious. It uses wisdom, coming against anger in the opposite spirit. Coming against hate with love; unforgiveness and revenge, with grace. What is needed is the “tongue of the wise [that] commends knowledge,” not “the mouth of the fool [that] spouts folly” (Prov. 15:2). God is watching our response to others, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, observing the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). **James 1:26 (NLT) asserts**, “If you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.”

IDEA TWENTY: *We are to speak in a manner that is gentle and intended to diffuse hostility. The tone of our speech is to be soft. The choice of words are thoughtful and at times decidedly delicate, diplomatic, tactful, refined. These are words, that like a surgeon’s scalpel – even if they momentarily hurt, are in the end, meant to heal.*

THE BIBLICAL STANDARD FOR SPEECH

Paul, writing to the Ephesians (4:29) urged, “Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up the one in need and bringing grace to those who listen.” In Colossians 4:6 he advised, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Jesus gives us a solemn warning, “I tell you that men will give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words, you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mt. 12:36-37). Pretty sobering.



The Way: The Wise Tongue

IDEA TWENTY-ONE: *Our speech is to be pure, helpful and healthy, godly and edifying, always gracious. That is a tall order. But remember, we will give an account for every careless word we have uttered. Nothing is more telling about our true Christianity and spiritual discipline than our speech.*

James 1:19, the brother of Jesus and bishop of the Jerusalem Church wrote, “My beloved brothers, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.” Proverbs 10:19, “Wen words are many, sin is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” And note Proverbs 12:18, “Speaking rashly is like a piercing sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” We are reminded again of the power of speech in Proverbs 18:21, “Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” In Proverbs 21:23 we read, “He who guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from distress.” Ecclesiastes 10:12-14 says, “The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool consume him. The beginning of his talk is folly, and the end of his speech is evil madness. Yet the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming, and who can tell him what will come after him?”

IDEA TWENTY-TWO: *Our words are to be carefully chosen, monitored, guarded in terms of their potential impact. We have little respect for the idea of the discipline of silence. The scriptures speak of a Christianity that has a guarded mouth, the does not speak incessantly. A faith practice that has learned to restrain the tongue. It speaks less than its unredeemed neighbor and when it speaks, it is a tongue of life, and of wisdom. Could modern Christianity learn such discipline?*

There are so many passages that shout to us about our speech, “The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice” (Psalm 37:30). The psalmist declares what we all should say, “My mouth will impart wisdom, and the meditation of my heart



Evangelism As Blessing

will bring understanding” (Psalm 49:3). If you guard your mouth and monitor your speech, you will protect your life, “but the one who opens his lips [mouth] invites his own ruin” (Proverbs 13:3).

IDEA TWENTY-THREE: *We protect our life and our credibility by the discipline of silence. When we speak, we impart wisdom with our words, guarding our language, and choosing the right moment to speak. We can get hung by our own words. We are ruined by undisciplined, unguarded speech. This is a life and death matter.*

DEALING WITH THE FOOL

Because of this, we are advised to “stay away from a foolish man.” We will, the Bible says, “gain no knowledge from his speech” (Prov. 14:7). Avoid him. In contrast, “The heart of the wise man instructs his mouth and adds persuasiveness to his lips” (Prov. 16:23).

IDEA TWENTY-FOUR: *We are to be discerning of those who are closed to the gospel and those who are open. We can, by grace, be persuasive in our presentation of the gospel, out of wise heart. However, some people cannot be persuaded in their present state. We are instructed to avoid them. We can only pray for them.*

The Bible highlights the destructive power of speech, particularly foolish speech. In scripture, a fool is not someone who lacks intelligence. He does not need more information. Immorality, not the lack of knowledge, is the marker for foolishness in Scripture. The fool is immoral and deficient spiritually. Why? He has rejected God’s wisdom (Psalm 14:1). As a result, his speech is careless, reckless and lacking in sensitivity or understanding. It leads to chaos and damage to others.

IDEA TWENTY-FIVE: *We can discern the spiritually foolish by their speech. The problem in their resistance to the gospel is not their lack of knowledge, but their commitment to sin patterns.*



The Way: The Wise Tongue

Pray. Only the Holy Spirit can break through such bondage.

In ancient Israel, speech was a primary reflection of character and an indicator of the depth and sincerity of one's relationship with God. The fool's mouth is at times like a fountain, a gushing of words, suggesting a lack of control and personal discipline. It is a fountain that cannot be stopped (James 3:5-6). Such people never seem to be able to be quiet. James reminds us that our tongue is also like a rudder on a ship. Compared to the vessel, it is small, but it turns the massive ship. So, our tongue, our speech, turns us. It turns the direction of groups, even nations. This small part of the body can cause great destruction. We are warned against careless and reckless words.

IDEA TWENTY-SIX: *In a free-speech culture, the right to speak is overrated, and the value of restraint and silence is ignored. The nature of the secular culture around us also affects the church. Our mouths too are like fountains. Words steer our lives; they control our destiny. They are revelations of our heart's orientation. What we think, we say, and we say, we do. We talk ourselves into things – both godly and ungodly. We follow the crowd and conform to its norms. Our character is revealed in our speech. And speech drives action. With it, we are revealed as foolish or wise.*

And there is more:

- “The tongue of the wise uses knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness” Prov. 15:2.
- “A prudent man conceals knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness.” Proverbs 12:23.
- “Every prudent man deals with knowledge: but a fool lays open his folly” Proverbs 13:16.
- “Behold, they belch out with their mouth: swords are in their lips: for who, say they, does hear?” Psalm 59:7.



Evangelism As Blessing

THE POWER OF SPEECH

“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word *spoken* in due season, how good is it!” (Proverbs 15:23, 28). This passage is telling. In Psalm 59:7, the tongue is like a sword – it destroys lives, it cleaves. Words start wars. James says, the tongue starts fires (James 3:6). Speech is powerful. Lifegiving or deadly.

IDEA TWENTY-SEVEN: *Your speech is a monitor of your emotions – sadness and joy, anger and forgiveness, revenge or grace, a stingy or giving spirit. All are indicated by one's speech. At times, our inner emotions, not reason, drive the tongue making it a sword, severing friendships, creating divisions, starting a fire, or even a war. The alternative? A life-giving, conciliatory word spoken by a disciplined person at the right time.*

In Biblical literature, wisdom is often associated with the Holy Spirit, and also with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10) – worshipful reverence for God. The wise person speaks in a manner that promotes understanding and truth, reflecting biblical principles. These are words that have the power to edify and not tear down (Proverbs 18:21).

IDEA TWENTY-EIGHT: *A wise person lends his tongue to the Holy Spirit, this is great idea of Acts 2, speaking by the Spirit. Such speech reverences God and godliness. It promotes understanding and truth, it is meant to be positive and conciliatory. It declares the gospel and the risen, enthroned Christ. It calls for reverence for God, for a decision to believe and receive Christ.*

The Hebrew culture was an oral tradition. The spoken word was important to them. It was their primary means of transmitting truth and preserving their treasury of knowledge. Ultimately, the wise tongue is a type of Christ - the Word made flesh (John 1:14), perfect wisdom and truth. And the Spirit's residence in



The Way: The Wise Tongue

us, is to replicate Christ.

IDEA TWENTY-NINE: *The wise tongue, under the control of the Spirit, gives expression to Jesus, the Christ. It is 'the word,' by the Spirit, again manifesting in flesh. Christ in us.*

Let's return for a moment to Proverbs 12:18. We noted this passage earlier in talking about the Biblical standard for speech. The NIV reads, "The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." The NLT, "Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing." Notice the variations in translations. Here is the ESV, "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." The Good News Translation is helpful, "Thoughtless words can wound as deeply as any sword, but wisely spoken words can heal."

IDEA THIRTY: *We are reminded again of the power of words, a fact we ignore. And by implication, of the need to discipline the tongue to avoid reckless words that are deadly. To speak wisely, with words that heal.*

In Proverbs 12:18, we have one who speaks rashly and thoughtlessly, and one who speaks wisely. We have one that speaks words that wound and the other that speaks words that heal. Both times, these are words that are *spoken*. One is like a warrior's sword, meant to draw blood and inflict an injury. The other is like a medic's scalpel, surgically caring for an illness or treating a wound along with the application of medicine and the offer of comfort meant to assure and encourage the wounded that they will be healed. The last phrase, "the wise brings healing," is more consistent in various translations than any other portion of the passage.



Evangelism As Blessing

IDEA THIRTY-ONE: *If you are consistently speaking words that heal, that bind up wounds and offer comfort, you are among the wise. These are not merely thoughts about another person, they are spoken over and to the person. This is the prophetic – words of comfort, exhortation and edification (1 Cor. 14:2).*

The assertion in Proverbs 12:18 is remarkable – words that heal. The Hebrew for heal is *marpe*. It means healing a person by effecting a cure to restore health, to find and apply a remedy. This is the role of the believer. It is the idea of the prophet Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to proclaim good news...to bind up the broken-hearted” (Isa. 61:1). The end is soundness, wholeness, tranquility. The pain that has crippled and confused the wounded is replaced by calm and composure. Dignity is restored. In Isaiah 61, the poor, the wounded, the captive, the bound – are all conditions where dignity and freedom have been stripped. Yet, by the Spirit’s proclamation, through anointed men and women, these people pass into favor with God, receiving comfort. To them is “bestowed...a crown of beauty” (Isa. 61:3), along with “the oil of joy...and a garment of praise.” They are the people through whom God “displays His splendor” (Isa. 61:3). Not only are they healed, but they also become agents of healing. They “restore ruins” (Isa. 61:4). They are healing communities. They are named “priests of the Lord,” elevated to the noble and sacred role of representing God (Isa. 61:6). A new disposition of poise is enabled by grace.

IDEA THIRTY-TWO: *Words heal. The power of comfort by the voice of a loving friend in the healing process has never been fully understood. It can't be overvalued. And the same is true for emotional wounds. Words find remedies for conditions that medicine cannot cure. They effect inner peace, tranquility, assurance – love. They renew one's sense of dignity.*



The Way: The Wise Tongue

- “The tongue of the wise commands knowledge,” Proverbs 18:21, NIV.
- “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit,” Proverbs 16:24, NIV.
- “Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones,” Proverbs 25:11, NASB.
- “Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances,” Proverbs 25:11.

Exercise 9:

1. Review the 23 ideas in this chapter. What can you learn to inform a life of evangelism from these ideas? What are the three or four that are most important ‘ideas’ to you?
2. Review the idea of the Creation as an obvious witness of God’s existence and consider what the denial of God’s hand in creation does to an individual.
3. Review the idea of God ‘giving a person over.’ This is someone who has run all the red lights! They are now self-deluded, under a kind of spell. Only a liberating act of God’s grace can remove the blinders.
4. What does it mean to ‘know’ God, to ‘know’ that one is saved. ‘Past feeling,’ the heart has become hard and the hearing dim – how do we reach such people?
5. What is the difference between believing and receiving?
6. How important is wisdom in dealing with the lost? What is meant by wisdom? What is the relationship between wisdom and the Holy Spirit?
7. What is the role of the believer’s speech in witnessing? Is it beyond sharing the gospel itself?



Evangelism As Blessing

ACTION:

Presuppositions:

- Words are powerful. God's word is creative, life-giving. Consider the power of speech in evangelism, and the loss of credibility by careless and reckless words.
- Consider the closed heart, hardened by the choice to not believe, how can such people be saved?
- Consider the importance of discipline in Christian speech, the value of the wise tongue.

ACTION:

- Review the 32 idea propositions from the previous chapter and this one.
- Evaluate yourself. Go through each one asking the question, "Do I agree with this proposition?" If a disposition and action is implied, ask, "Do I pass the test, meet the standard, or do I need transforming grace?" Be honest. Multiply your positive answers by three and add four. Did you get an 80% score or better? If so, straighten your halo. 60% or better? Average. Below 60%, you have work to do. Below 40%. You get a metal for being honest. Plow through the list again and ask God to change you.
- Spend time with God. Pray especially about a tender heart and a disciplined tongue.





Chapter 10

The Way: Speaking the Language of Life

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. Since ours is the ministry of reconciliation, peacemaking (2 Cor. 5:12), that demands the disciplined tongue and the language of life.
2. We are to be a ‘good news’ people.
3. We offer comfort, beautification, a garment of praise (Isa. 61:2-3). We restore, helping people begin a new life. We are ‘trees of righteousness.’ That implies that we are back in Eden, paradise, our relationship with God renewed. Whole cities are to be impacted – quite a vision. Disintegrated families are to be healed, even if the disorder has spanned multiple generations. Remember, there is no cultural order without family order.
4. The early Christians were people of ‘the Way.’ Their lives and habits had been redirected. There



Evangelism As Blessing

was something different about ‘the way’ they lived and related than the lives of people around them.

5. They lived lives dependent on God, the Holy Spirit, out of a life of prayer. Here is the blunt truth: No consistent prayer life? The problem is pride! A lack of humility. Failure to depend deeply on God. This is the root of all sin!
6. It is at the heart of the Genesis 3 problem. There, the serpent offered a life independent of God. It is the opposite of the root of the blessed life in Matthew 5:3, which is the recognition of a poverty of spirit without God.

Synopsis:

In the beginning, God spoke – and creative forces worked. In time, the Word became flesh, and we beheld God’s glory. Words are powerful – they carry both life and death. Creation demonstrates the power of God’s speech. And while our speech is not omnipotent, borrowing Biblical speech, it is nevertheless potent. Jesus speaks of mountain-moving language. Of disciples whose words would have more power than those of Herod. The anointing of the Spirit (Isaiah 61), first empowers language – it makes us a ‘good news’ person. It enables us to heal, not merely the body, but the broken heart. It is powerful enough to liberate captives and break the chains of bondage. It declares a new beginning – a year of Jubilee. The anointed community rebuilds the fallen ruins – it impacts cities. These are not merely principles by which we live; this is a whole new ‘way’ to live. God has a mission for us – it is bigger and grander than any self-produced plans. This comes from knowing Him, receiving Him, loving Him and being loved by Him. We carry His presence.



The Way: Speaking the Language of Life

We have immersed ourselves in the power of words. No one understood the power of words more than “the Word who became flesh,” Jesus. He was the instrument of Creation,²⁴ of separating darkness from light, of imparting life to the earth and to Adam and Eve, the first humans. He, the Word, commanded life with his voice. In Genesis, there is the power, not only of God’s speech but of His surveillance, His omniscience, His involvement in earth’s design.²⁵ In the New Testament, notice the creative power that is revealed in Jesus. He exhibits a healing touch, dominance over the darkness that invades human souls, power over the wind and waves, the ability to multiply loaves and fishes, and to summon Lazarus from the dead. He “speaks the word only” and healing occurs (Mt. 8:8). In his presence leprosy disappears. His teaching is simple, insightful, yet radical. In the Old Testament, we meet God’s surveillance, in the New Testament, we meet a ‘seeing’ Jesus.

In Matthew 9, “Jesus *saw*.” He *saw* the *faith* of a paralyzed man and of his friends who brought him, “When Jesus *saw* their faith, He said to the man, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven’” (Mt. 9:2b). In the midst of a crowd, a bleeding woman touched his tallit and was healed. “Jesus turned and *saw* her. ‘Take heart, daughter,’ He said, ‘your faith has healed you’” (Mt. 9:22). Jesus *saw* more than crowds of people who came to hear Him preach. Mt. 9:36 says, “When He *saw* the crowds, He felt compassion for them.” He sensed that “they were distressed and dejected,” and like “sheep without a shepherd.” At the beginning of his ministry, still in the baptismal waters, Jesus “*saw* the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him” (Mt. 3:16).

In Mark (11:23 NKJV), we find this stunning claim of Jesus

²⁴ See the end of the chapter – Additional Note #1.

²⁵ See the end of the chapter – Additional Note #2.



Evangelism As Blessing

regarding the power of words. “For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.” This is mountain-moving speech. There is a historic allusion that might help us here. Herod, the king, fearful of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra’s relationship and of an attack from the south had ordered an astonishing feat. His southern outpost was Masada, about 102 kilometers south (66 miles). If Egyptian forces were visually spotted from Masada’s height, he was not certain that a messenger could escape in time to warn him. He also had a palace in the coastal town of Caesarea, 75 miles away (120 kilometers), to the northwest.

Here was his ingenious solution. Less than ten miles south of Jerusalem and three miles southeast of Bethlehem, Herod found a location for a visual relay between Jerusalem and Masada. The problem? He had to move a mountain and place it atop another mountain to create the height necessary for a visual relay. And he did. It is called the Herodium, a massive and palace-like fortress. Herod is buried there. It is logical that Jesus had this feat in mind. He was saying, ‘You think Herod, the king is powerful, in commanding a mountain to be moved? You don’t yet know who you are! You doubt. But you too are kings and priests, and to advance the kingdom of God, the Father will do mighty things through you – through the power of anointed declarations. You will move mountains.’

True salvation touches every part of our lives – not just our souls. It isn’t just a ticket to heaven. It means that God is now present with us, in us, and working through us – to save others, to heal, to offer wisdom and comfort, grace and forgiveness. We are carriers of His presence – a lively temple (1 Cor. 6:19; 1 Peter 2:5). Collectively, we are a sacred people with whom God dwells. We imitate Jesus – by the enabling Holy Spirit, Christ in us, being



The Way: Speaking the Language of Life

Himself through us (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20). We are the forerunners of the blessing of God.²⁶ Let's review. Time with God, in which we are centered in His love, and where we experience His peace, prepares us to be carriers of His presence, God working in us and through us – saving others, healing, offering wisdom, comfort and effecting their reconciliation with God, the end of which is peace. This is our calling.

Psalm 103:8, 13, declares, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious... abounding in love. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear [reverence, deeply respect] him.” We get to express, to articulate, to demonstrate, that grace, that compassion, and that love, the very nature of God. If we are silent, the voice of God is silent – not heard through us. Not heard by our friends, but those around us. Our mission is to be a witness to Christ's resurrection and to the reality of God's love, His desire to bless. The Holy Spirit does this through us – he blesses others and shows them the love and goodness of God. We are witnesses, the Bible says, and so also is the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). We can't do his part, and he won't do our part.

Isaiah 61 notes that when the Spirit of the Lord comes upon us, his purpose is to “anoint us” for this work. The presence of the Spirit helps us express God's grace to others, the good news – the gospel. To break our silence. We are not alone. The Holy Spirit is our partner in this endeavor. He not only helps us with the language we need, but he empowers us, “to heal the brokenhearted.” The idea in Hebrew is that God helps us relate like a medic who binds up a broken limb to protect it from further injury and to allow it to heal. God helps us relate to broken people in a way that does not cause them more pain, and yet it deals with their brokenness in a healing and healthy way.

²⁶ Roy Godwin, *The Way of Blessing* (David Coo Colorado Springs; CO, 2016), 12-13.



Evangelism As Blessing

First, the ministry of peace and reconciliation is good news – that's basic (Isa. 61:1f). It is the language of love. Then it touches the wounded, the broken-hearted. That requires more sensitivity to the Spirit and the person needing help. Then ministry intensifies. We “proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who *are* bound.” This is the ministry of liberty, of freedom from bondages and addictions. It is a special ministry of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1). One that God enables us to do.

We are called to “comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn... to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness... that He [the Lord] might be glorified” (Isa. 61:2-3). We are back again in Eden. This is evangelism – it is more than a presentation. It is a relationship that helps people begin a new life – to find comfort in God, consolation for their losses, beauty out of ashes, joy. It breaks depression and heaviness and puts joy in hearts. It helps them find way back home.

There is more. As anointed agents of peace and reconciliation, we “rebuild the old ruins... raise up the former desolations... [impact whole] ruined cities, the desolations of many generations” (Isa. 61:4). Cities that have been ruined because of family disintegration over multiple generations. “You shall be named,” Isaiah declares, “the priests of the LORD, they shall call you the servants of our God” (Isa. 61:6). We stand, as priests, in the middle, between God and the broken, between God and cities and families in ruin – and God brings healing through us. Can you imagine such a thing? Are we up to this task? Impacting cities? Reversing the generational disintegration of families? God has a robust vision for us, much larger than we have embraced.

Christianity is not a philosophy, nor a religion in the broad



The Way: Speaking the Language of Life

sense of that term. It is not a set of theological propositions, a rational matrix to express simply one more worldview. It is more than a mere cluster of ethical principles. And yet, it involves ethics, and it is theologically propositional, manifesting as a distinct world view, and an unparalleled philosophy of life. It is more than traditions, and yet, it respects ancient paths and processes. It is a new way of life. It is the language of theology lived out in manifest ways, beliefs and behaviors. Or to be more distinct, behaviors that manifest beliefs. Believing without behaving our beliefs makes our lives contradictory. Yet to adopt the behaviors, to conform to so-called Christian norms, without being transformed is empty, lifeless. It is not outside-in conformity; it is inside-out transformation. The inside work of God, if authentic, will make its way outside. It will manifest itself in our attitudes and actions.

The earliest Christians were not called Christians. Others used that name derisively. Christians were those “who belonged to the Way” (Acts 9:2). The way was “the Way of God” and Christ (Acts 18:26). They followed the pattern of the life of Jesus (Heb. 2:10; 12:2) who was “the way – the truth and the life” (John 14:6). This was more than theology, more than a set of ethical, behavioral norms. It was a way of life, a way of relating to others, a way of blessing, a way of being filled and led by the Spirit, a way of ministry, a way of seeing God and the world He created.

They lived, dependent on the Holy Spirit, out of a life of prayer. You cannot find a godly autonomous man or woman in the Bible. The modern view of the free, independent, self-directed, self-sufficient human, confident and daring – is not found, not among the godly. Too many Christians fit this profile. They are prayerless and driven by their own egos, earthly goals and desires, too often with God, not at the center of the lives, but only at the margin.



Evangelism As Blessing

Those are the markers of pride, the root of all sin. This was the toxic offer of the serpent in Genesis 3 – independence, freedom. The Bible, in contrast, puts its spotlight on humans who were dependent on God, who reflected His image, and emulated His character. Sin attempts to forge a life apart from dependence on the Holy Spirit by a life of prayer – and it is, therefore, against true life, divine life. It embraces a slice of spiritual life, becoming a caricature. Soon, it lacks true freedom and no longer experiences God's love and His *shalom*. Sin opposes dependence on God. It opposes moral restrictions. It contradicts God's word. It doubts God's character as being trustworthy. It warps our perception of God, ourselves, the world, of right and wrong.

It prevents us from knowing the blessed life and living in such a way that we are empowered to bless others.

Exercise 10:

1. Review the Word, and by extension, the power of words from the Creation narrative. Think about the assertion of Jesus, that words have mountain-moving power.
2. Have you discovered ‘the way?’ That Christianity is a ‘new way to live,’ to see the world, to experience God, His love and the depth of His peace? Or have you only ‘prayed a prayer’ of salvation and made some moral readjustments? There is a new way to life – Jesus is the ‘way, the truth, and the life!’ Don’t get stuck in your Christian development. There is more.
3. Is Isaiah 61 over the top for you? Sharing good news, healing broken hearts, ministering to the addicted and those in some form of bondage? This is a part of the exciting journey that God wants to take us on.
4. What do you need to do to prepare yourself to join



The Way: Speaking the Language of Life

Him on this journey? To minister a blessing to others beyond your natural capability, a result of the Holy Spirit working through you. How difficult is it for you to imagine yourself in this role?

5. What if it were easier than you think, more a matter of your availability than your ability. Are you willing to be open to how God might use you?
6. Get in His presence regularly. Remember, to bless others, you need to be assured of God's blessing on your life.

ACTION:

Presuppositions:

- Words are powerful. *God's word* is omnipotent, creative, life-giving. Our words, especially, borrowing His words, are potent. Consider the power of speech in evangelism, and the loss of credibility by careless and reckless words.
- The anointing, the presence of God given as power, helps us do the work of God!
- What we are called to do is impossible. Who has the words that comfort after a tragedy? Who can bind up a broken heart or exorcise the demonic? Or free the addicted? This requires the supernatural enabling of the Holy Spirit – and that is why we are intimidated, and we leave such things to professional ministers.
- But God wants us to be 'kingdom of priests,' all of us. To stand between Him and the hurting – and allow Him to give us the words to say, tell us what to do and how to do it.



Evangelism As Blessing

- You don't have to be perfect. God is patient. If you are sincere, humble, and yielded to God, loving to the person to whom you are relating, God will use you. And listen, your bucket will be full when the encounter is over!
- The blessed, bless others.

ACTION:

- Review the 32 idea propositions. Evaluate yourself. Go through each one asking the question, do I agree with this proposition? If a disposition and action is implied, do I pass the test, meet the standard, or do I have more work to do on myself? Be honest.
- Multiply your positive answers by three and add four. Did you get an 80% score or better? If so, straighten your halo. 60% or better? Average. Below 60%, you have work to do. Below 40%. You get a metal for being honest. Plow through the list again and ask God to change you.
- Spend time with God. Ask God for faith. Tell Him you are willing and available. If you do that sincerely, you will soon find yourself in front of an open door, an open heart. Pray silently. Be natural. The Holy Spirit will give you the words! God's Spirit will be present.



The Way: Speaking the Language of Life

ADDITIONAL NOTE #1:

Allow a diversion. This is too much to consider in the main body, but worth noting. The Hebrew word for create is *bara'*. It can mean to create, to shape, or to form. It is a verb, an action word, noting God's active involvement in the creation process. It can either mean to create, or to cut down, as one might do with a forest, to create a clearing for a new building or a garden. Creating includes pre-creation. Thus, the work that precedes creation, that is necessary for creation, is one with creation. So, when a tree is cut down to be shaped into something else, that is a work of creation. Both the severing of the tree and the shaping of the word are one. The destruction (judgment) that makes way for new construction are hard together. We lament the loss - what was; God rejoices over what will be. When a reed is broken to be used as the bare material for making a writing tool, the breaking is a part of the creative act. As is a limb, severed from the tree so that it can be turned into an arrow. In Genesis, the formless, wasteless and dark earth was refashioned, God created by speaking, making and forming.

The term “*bara'*” opens Scripture: “In the beginning God *created, bara'*, the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The verb marks pivotal creative acts—matter itself (v. 1), the living creatures of the sea and sky (v. 21), and humankind (v. 27). Then “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it... He rested from all the work of *creation* that He had done” (Genesis 2:3). In Genesis 5:1-2, 6:7, and 14:19, we are reminded that humanity is God's creative work alone. All anthropology that does not acknowledge God as Creator is flawed. All moral systems that do not derive their values from God's creative existence, His nature and life-giving character, are not to be trusted. All earth-care and ecology that fails to have its ideological roots in the Creation and the stewardship of the earth as a divine charter, informed by scripture, will lose its way.



Evangelism As Blessing

Bara', the word for create, is to be distinguished from “*asah*” (to make or do) and *yatsar* (to form). Numbers 16:30 tells us that God’s *creative* work is not done. At any time, He can do “new thing,” a new thing that might not be good for rebellious humans. Such a creative act might be one of judgment. To vindicate His holiness, He may cut down or remove in order to do a new thing. He may take land from a people group due to their reaching the ‘brim of iniquity’ – a level of sin and lawlessness that He will no longer tolerate (Gen. 15:6; Rev.18:5-8; I Thess. 2:16). 1 Samuel 2:29 emphasizes God as sovereign over humanity. The corrupt priests had defied moral and theological boundaries. God as Creator retains the right to set the rules in His created domain. Because of sin, Eli, the high priest, and his line, was severed. The old priest died as did his sons and the ark of the covenant was exiled from Israel.

Isaiah echoes the same theme, “I, the LORD, am the Maker of all things, who stretches out the heavens... I have *created* you” (Isaiah 43:1, 7). A paraphrase: “I created you and I created the world for you. I stretch out the heavens! Who are you to defy me, or think that you are smarter, wiser than me. Trust me!” Isaiah quotes God, “I form the light and create darkness; I bring prosperity and create calamity” (Isaiah 45:7). He continues, “For thus says the LORD— ‘He who created the heavens, He is God’... He did not create it to be empty but formed it to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18).

Scriptures here elevate God’s sovereignty. But note the phrase, He “create[s] darkness... create[s] calamity.” The Creator-creature distinction is maintained as is God’s providential oversight. But Isaiah also hints at the existence of dark adversarial elements that God has permitted, at least for a season. So much so, that God takes responsibility for calamity. That is, the darkness is real, but it is contained by the light. Darkness is not the opposite of light, merely its absence. The dark Lord Lucifer, only implied



The Way: Speaking the Language of Life

here, may be the direct cause of some calamity, but it is not without God's notice. He is in opposition to God, but He is not God's opposite. God has no rival.

There is a puzzling science-theology concern in the Creation narrative. The Old Testament does not explicitly or even philosophically define "nothingness" But the repetitive use of *bara* in Genesis 1 along with references like Psalm 33:6-9, reveal that the Creation was by divine decree. "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the stars by the breath of His mouth. He piles up the waters of the sea; He puts the depths into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere Him. For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm." In Isaiah 40:26, the prophet summons Israel to gaze on the night sky full of stars and to consider their fixed place in the sky, a universe ordered by God's creative command. This idea of an ordered creation, of God's sovereignty and goodness, is the supporting ideology and reason for our worship. Our faith in answered prayer is due to the goodness of God. Our repentance and the reordering of our life is due to our confidence in God's promises.

The Creation of God reaches to fallen humanity. David prayed, "*Create* in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). God created man in His image, and by redemption, He again creates in us clean hearts. This creative work is miraculous. From it comes the 'heavens and the earth,' the formation of galaxies. However, in this passage, *bara* shifts from the cosmic to the common man. From power that regulates stars and planets in their orbit to personal renewal. Only such a powerful God can regenerate the human heart.

Ezekiel 36:26 is an echo of this promise of a new heart. "I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive



Evangelism As Blessing

heart” (NLT). This is the creation of a new creature out of sinful, rebellious humanity. The new covenant with God is possible only with an act of divine creation inside the heads and hearts of people. Human beings cannot *bara*. Spiritual transformation is divine, and act of God, completely grace based.

But the new creation does not stop with human redemption. Isaiah declares of God, “Behold, I will *create* new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17). And “I will create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people a delight” (Isaiah 65:18).

ADDITIONAL NOTE #2.

In Genesis 1, we find Him creating and making. The textual extracts are from Genesis 1 in the Berean Standard Bible.

The First Day

1:1, God *created*.

1:2, the Spirit of God was hovering.

1:3, God *said...*

1:4, God *saw...*He separated the light from the darkness.

1:5, God *called* the light “day”...

The Second Day

1:6, God *said*.

1:7, God *made*.

1:8 God *called*.

The Third Day

1:9, God *said...* And it was so.

1:10, God *called*.



The Way: Speaking the Language of Life

1:11, God *said*, “Let the earth bring forth...and it was so...
And God *saw*.

The Fourth Day

1:14, God *said*, “Let there be lights...and let them be signs.
1:15, [God *said*], and let them serve...and it was so.
1:16, God *made* two great lights...and He made the stars as well.
1:17, God *set* these lights...
1:18, God *saw* that it was good.

The Fifth Day

1:20, And God *said*.
1:21, God *created*...and God saw that it was good.
1:22, Then God *blessed* them and *said*, “Be fruitful and
multiply and fill the waters of the seas, and let birds
multiply on the earth.”

The Sixth Day

1:24, And God *said*... and it was so.
1:25, God *made* the beasts of the earth...and God *saw* that
it was good.
1:26, Then God *said*, “Let Us make man in Our image...
1:27, So God *created* man, in His own image He *created*
them...male and female He *created* them.
1:28, God *blessed* them and *said* to them, “Be fruitful and
multiply...
1:29, Then God *said*.
1:31, And God *looked*...and indeed, it was very good.



Evangelism As Blessing

GOD SAID

The point of the above is to highlight the eleven times explicit God speech – *God said* - occurs in Genesis 1. This is creative, life-giving speech that orders the design of the universe as well as the earth. Every day, God speaks – and if He does not change (Mal. 3:6), can we not expect His creative, life-giving speech to continue in our lives?

GOD MADE

Genesis has another word for creation – the term *made*. The Hebrew word for made, *asah*, means “to do, to make, to accomplish, to perform, to act.” At first glance it appears more deliberate than the ‘God said’ declarations. It appears in the King James Version five times in Genesis 1:7, 16, 25, 26, 31). But in the Hebrew text, it appears seven times. The two additional appearances of the word *asah* occur in verses 11 and 12. There it is not translated ‘made.’ Rather, it is translated ‘bearing or yielding’ as a tree or plant that makes or yields fruit. To *make* something then, as God makes things in Genesis 1, is to construct them in a manner that they *yield* something. They are lifegiving. God *made* the atmosphere (v. 7), He *made* the sun, moon and stars (v. 16), He *made* all forms of animal life (v. 25), and He *made* humans (v. 26), and then He blessed everything He had ‘*made*’ (v. 31) – the atmosphere that *yields* oxygen and gives rain; the sun and moon that *yields* heat and light and regulates our seasons; animals that *reproduce*, those that can be domesticated and those that are wonderfully wild (v. 25), and He *made* humanity – to *reproduce*, to *replicate* His image, never done before in time, not with angels or any other member of the celestial community. Humans were to populate the earth, to exert God’s authority over it and reign in a benevolent fashion (v. 26), And then the climatic blessing! (v. 31). *Asah* is a verb



The Way: Speaking the Language of Life

– it does something. It is created to accomplish a purpose, to bestow, the bring forth, the bear. It can mean to have charge of a matter, therefore, authority, governance.

God's Goodness

Six times (though not noted above), the goodness of God is sown into creation. The last mention declares creation ‘very good’. Let’s review them. *God’s declaration of goodness* occurs on the 1st day, verse 4; on the 3rd day twice in verses 10 and 12; on the 4th day in verse 18; and the 5th day in verse 23; and on the 6th day twice, noting that Creation was good and then, that it was very good. Only on the second day, when the atmosphere, the sky is being constructed, is there the absence of God’s pronouncement of good. Virtually *every day God speaks a word of goodness over creation*. On the third day when the earth rises from the sea and vegetation is seen along with seed-bearing plants and fruit trees, the blessing is doubled, as it is on the seventh day when he creates animal forms and mankind. Again, the blessing is doubled. God likes to see life, reproducible life.

God Creates

Five times we find God *creating* in Genesis 1 in the KJV. First, He *created* the heavens and earth (v. 1). Second, He *created* great sea creatures (v. 21) and every winged creature. Third, and finally, He *created* humans, male and female (v. 27). Notice something unusual here. The term *create* is mentioned three times in describing humans. This three-fold emphasis occurs in no other verse – not with the heavens and the earth, or any other aspect or species of creation, only with regard to Adam and Eve. “So, God **created** man in His *own* image; in the image of God, He **created** him; male and female He **created** them.” Notice the intentional redundancy. God created humans in His



Evangelism As Blessing

image, fact one. He created him “in His own image,” fact two. Notice the repetition. God “**created** man in His *own* image; in the image of God, He **created...**” It is the same idea, duplicated for emphasis: “Created – in His image; in His image – created.” Further, He created both male and female “in His image” designating an equivalency, fact three. It cannot be denied from scripture that God has, in Creation, claimed humans as related to Him above everything else in creation. Humanity is stamped with His image, in two equivalent, but distinct genders.

GOD SEES

On five occasions, we also meet the surveillance of God – God saw or looked. ‘God saw’ shows up seven times. Once on the first day (v. 4), twice on the third day (vv. 10, 12), once on day four (v. 18), and on day five (v. 21). Then, twice on day six (v. 25, 31). The surveillance of God is noted on every day but one, the second day. God sees. Nothing escapes his vision.

GOD NAMES

Three times God *names* things in Genesis. And those names have endured. In Genesis 1:5, he *called*, or named the condition of light, *Day*, and the absence of light, *Night*. In Genesis 1:8, God *called* the sky, *Heaven*. In Genesis 1:10, he *called*, dry land, *Earth*, and gathered waters, *Sea*.





Chapter 11

The Mission: To Bless

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. When Jesus sent his disciples on mission, it was to bless – with the good news, with prayer for the sick and their healing, to give voice to the goodness of God. To make His love and His presence real.
2. To bless others is to provoke a God-consciousness. It ignites curiosity about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
3. To bless others is to speak, and hopefully, impart peace. It is in the least, an offer of amnesty, an invitation for reconciliation with God. We are peacemakers.
4. The God of the Bible is different than all the pagan deities noted in scripture, than the Greek or Roman gods. The God of the Bible wants a relationship with mankind. He wants peace. And that necessitates a gift of His peace. Paul says the “peace of Christ” is to rule in our hearts.



Evangelism As Blessing

5. Loving God and experiencing His love, we become love to others. Being a blessing is foundational to the act of blessing.
6. Blessings are not an affirmation of godliness or holiness. Rather, it is an invitation to transformation. The blessing of God is not static, but dynamic. It is an expression of God's love, that invites one to encounter His truth – as Schaeffer called it, “truth that trues.” We make God's blessing conditional. God, on the other hand, “commends His love to us while we are yet sinners” (Rom. 5:8). His love, the offer of blessing, constrains us. We are not driven to God but attracted. The “goodness of God,” then, “leads to repentance” (Rom. 2:4). This is a different approach to evangelism.
7. Roy Godwin makes the pronouncement of a blessing so simple. Note the three stages. First, I bless you. Then, I bless you that ... And finally, I bless you that He may ... Each stage allows the Holy Spirit to expand the blessing as noted below in the chapter.

Synopsis:

Much of evangelism in the past begins with truth claims. It offers conditional love – accept the truth, repent, be baptized, and be loved. Evangelism as Blessing ends with love – unconditional love. It is not the approval of a sinful lifestyle. It is not the affirmation of someone's pathology, but of their potential. We are to bless those “who curse us!” Who do not treat us with respect. That is unthinkable to most people, even to Christians. But this is the way to overcome evil with good. It is the way God acts toward



The Mission: To Bless

us. Some evangelism approaches cause division, they create strife, they draw hard lines of separation. We champion unity, speak peace, and draw circles – as God does with us. Rather than allowing strife to rule, we facilitate peace – the peace of Christ that rules in hearts. Our mission is to bless. To give voice to the goodness of God, His offer of amnesty. We must learn the language of peace, of blessing. We must become a blessing before we, with legitimacy, can speak a blessing that gives life.

When Jesus sent his disciples on mission, it was to bless – to preach the gospel – the good news. They were to give voice to the goodness, the love of God. They were to heal the sick (both broken hearts and more) and exorcise the demonic (that's deliverance ministry again), as we saw in Isaiah 61, all possible because of the Holy Spirit's partnership with us. They were to enter a house and say, "Peace to this house" (Lk. 10:5). The end of all ministry is peace, but its basis, its foundation, its beginning point, its launching pad, is also peace. Roy Godwin says that when we bless others, the action "provokes an other-directed heart within us and cannot help but ignite our curiosity about mission and the work of the Holy Spirit. It takes you deep into the idea of the kingdom of God that Jesus constantly spoke of."²⁷

The Hebrews knew a God who was consistently gracious and merciful. The gods of their neighbors were inconsistent, warlike, immoral and vengeful, unforgiving. Grace was unknown. They feared these gods, but they did not love them, nor did they sense love from the various deities. The Hebrews had a relational God, who had entered a covenant with them, who wanted to reveal Himself to them and be known by them.

²⁷ Roy Godwin, *The Way of Blessing* (David Cook, Colorado Springs; CO, 2016), 30.



Evangelism As Blessing

They celebrated His steadfast love and mercy. They enjoyed His creation and gave thanks for the bounty that demonstrated His blessings in their lives. Every day, Jews prayed an eighteen-verse prayer of gratitude. In the New Testament, we see this tradition of thanksgiving continue with prayers of thanksgiving woven into the Biblical texts.

Paul commands a rhythm of gratitude,

“Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs of the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:15-17).

You must not miss how this passage is frontloaded with the idea of peace, “Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts” – *shalom*, wholeness, wellness, and yes, holiness. The end of the blessing, the state of having been blessed, is to know the peace of God, to settle into the rest of God – this is the true purpose of Sabbath. This is the effect of worship, of being in His presence. To this, “to peace... you were called.”

And then notice as well, the theme of gratitude, of thanksgiving. This is an acknowledgement of the goodness of God. That is what Adam missed in the garden in the absence of gratitude. Blind to God’s goodness, his heart was unsettled, and he sinned. All around us are people, Christians among them, who lack gratitude, whose lives are unsettled, without peace, and rather than acting, they react to life. Missing the optimal mark – that’s the definition of sin. It is settling for something less than the will of God for our lives.



The Mission: To Bless

The opposite is expressed by Paul. “The message of Christ,” is not to be displaced, or disregarded, as the words of God were to Adam. Rather, “the message of Christ [is to] dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another.” Here is another key. We are not to be alone, but in community. We are to host Christ and his word, and admonish one another, holding one another accountable. Helping one another be sharp, and at our best.

As we love God and experience His love, imitating Him, reflecting His image, worship and serving, we bless our communities. *Being* a blessing is foundational to the *act* of blessing, and that is a character issue. That is transformational. Here is the secret. Conveying the blessing is the outflow, which is missional. Transformation, *being*, and mission, *speaking and acting*, flow together. Yet, if you wait until you feel transformed enough to be an instrument of blessing to others, you will probably never move off your shelf. But if you allow God to put you in some middle, between Him and someone else who is hurting in some way, you will experience transformation and mission at the same time. God will change you, not only for the mission, but in the midst of being on mission.

The church, and Christians, often have such a such a negative view of the world, that thinking about blessing others who are not yet Christians, or our city or nation, is unsettling to them. The world is our enemy, we seem to think, and so are hardnosed sinners. We’re against the world and worldly things. We condemn sin and sinners. It’s them and us. There is a thick line between us and no thought of drawing a welcoming circle. Exclusion, not inclusion is our style. We are willing to preach *to* them, or better, *at* them, keeping a safe distance *from* them. We accept their act of repentance, offer them baptism and then cautiously receive them into fellowship. Sometimes we limit any ministry activity or rise to an office to one or two years.



Evangelism As Blessing

By words, actions and attitudes, we judge and curse the world around us, all the while keeping our rapture bags packed. We have already checked out.

To bless that world, we propose, is unthinkable. There is, of course, a ‘world’ we cannot bless. It is the ungodly system characterized by sin and energized by Satan. But if we mean Creation, though fallen, that is another matter. Creation is ‘groaning for redemption’ (Rom. 8:22-23). Both we and the earth will be redeemed and made new (Rev. 21:1). Still we balk at speaking a blessing over the ‘world’ that Christ and his father love so deeply (John 3:16). If blessing the ‘world’ is a stumbling block, then to bless sinners is beyond the pale. And yet, “Christ died for us while we were yet sinners” (Romans 5:8) and “God commands His love to us, while we are yet sinners.” If God is so gracious, how can we continue to be so resistance to manifesting unconditional love?

I find Christians who are convinced that we must not bless others who are not yet Christians. This is withheld love. It is not only inappropriate, but unbiblical. They believe sinners deserve judgement, condemnation, not blessing. But this makes God’s love conditional, “Shape up, and be loved; straighten your life out, and we will bless you.” On the contrary, Jesus calls us to “bless those who curse us,” and Paul echoes that command (Lk. 6:28; Rom. 12:14). A blessing is not the approval of a lifestyle, but an indication of God’s love, and an offer of grace and amnesty. It is the attempt to awaken in another the goodness of God. And that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

For the past half-century or longer, evangelism was truth centered. We led the evangelism encounter with the truth claims of scripture – God is holy; you are a sinner; you must repent and saved; be regenerated and sanctified; get baptized and join the church; and become like us! That is a harsh way of



The Mission: To Bless

expressing it; perhaps a caricature of reality, but in some places, this was reality. One memorized a few dozen scriptures, and a script, and presented the facts of the gospel to a ‘sinner,’ and pushed for a decision. It was all truth-based. “Do you believe this? Let’s pray. You’re saved. Get baptized and join a church!” Done. Another scalp, another notch on the gospel gun. So that you will not misunderstand, let’s drive stake deeper, “The truth [and only the truth] can set you free! (John 8:32). That Biblical idea is unchangeable; it is a non-negotiable point. The gospel is not only left-brained, factual, logical affirmation, it is also love, and power. With which do we lead?

The truth-first, truth-based evangelism model worked well in a culture bound to rationalism. And one that was still deferent and respectful to Christianity. Both conditions have changed. We are now in a post-modern, arguably anti-Christian, non-Biblical culture where truth claims are countered with the contention, “That’s your truth, not mine!” No amount of Biblical reason can move such a me-centered, relativistic thinker. A great number of the Gen Z, Gen Alpha generation has been raised in unstable, broken homes. They crave love, and doubt truth-claims from authority figures or institutions, including the church. The world in which they have lived is fragmented, full of wars, unstable and unpredictable – and that is both the world outside, and one at home. At the time of their birth, almost 40 percent of their fathers had already vanished. Their growing up years have been characterized by single-parenting, shared parenting, blended families, grandparent care and general instability. Truth? Integrity? Covenant? To them, these are all empty words. Their generation medicates themselves to survive.²⁸ They develop relationships cautiously,

²⁸ The use of lethal drugs among 12-17-year-olds has declined, but more than 80 percent have experimented with marijuana. Some 22.7% of teenagers reported drinking alcohol in a recent 30-day period. Surprisingly, alcohol use for females



Evangelism As Blessing

preferring the insulation of on-line friending and defriending. Even in a group, they are likely surfing on their devices. Love, friendship, at least at the level they crave, is “somewhere out-there.” They are hungry for authentic love.

Only a relational approach to evangelism, an investment of time, can build a bridge of love and trust adequate to carry across it, the heavy building blocks of truth. And only a taste of the power of God, can quicken the deadness on the inside. With them, we must learn not only to lead with love, but to give love a lot of time before we attempt a truth encounter. Love opens the heart to trust and truth, and at the intersection of love and truth, we discover the power of God that delivers and saves. We must learn to bless them into openness to God’s love and presence.

exceeded that of males (26.8% of female students; 18.8% of male students). Those numbers are down from the previous year. Around 27.1% of US college students meet the criteria for a Substance Use Disorder (SUD). Almost half (49.6%) of college students consumed alcohol in a recent 30-day period. This is now the drug of choice. 14% have an alcohol use disorder. 22% of full-time college students used an illicit drug in a recent 30-day period. Marijuana usage among college students has reached historic 39% high. Marijuana is seen as a “harmless” recreational drug. Increasing legalization has contributed to its popularity. Profs and students alike embrace its use, ignoring the fact that it can impair cognitive function and lead to dependence. Drugs like Adderall and Ritalin are being misused as “study drugs” to improve focus and academic performance. They carry risks like increased heart rate, anxiety, and they can also be additive. MDMA (Ecstasy), a popular party drug known for its euphoric effects can cause dehydration, hyperthermia, and an increased heart rate. Cocaine is also on the drug-use list by young adults. It is a stimulant known for its euphoric effects and energy boost. It is highly addictive and can cause severe physical and mental side effects. And then there are the Opioids, painkillers like Vicodin and OxyContin which are often misused. They can lead to a high risk of addiction and can be potentially fatal, if an overdose occurs. Lastly, benzodiazepines, medications like Xanax are often used and misused for anxiety and insomnia. They can cause drowsiness, and if taken while driving, the consequences can be fatal. They also cause confusion. There is the possibility of dangerous interactions when mixed with other drugs, particularly alcohol.



The Mission: To Bless

When Judah had been exiled to Babylon due to their sin, the prophet Jeremiah admonished them, “to seek the prosperity of the place where they now lived” – Babylon? How can you pray for the prosperity of Babylon? How do you pray for someone living in Babylon to be blessed? Seek their prosperity? We tend to do the opposite; we seek their discomfort. But God cared about the exiles who were stuck in Babylon. And because He cared about them, Babylon would be blessed because the people of God, though they had sinned, were present in that wicked nation. This is the surprising grace of God, out of His goodness.

The person you are trying to reach may be living in Babylon. They may be in a living arrangement that you view as sinful. But drawing a line, making demands on them, is not likely to attract them – not in the current cultural climate. Blessing them, not their pathology, but the potential of a relationship with God, is a declaration of love and grace. It is an expression of the goodness of God. And God wants them to know His love even in their compromised situation. As we have noted before, “The goodness of God leads to repentance” (Rom. 2:4). We “overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

What can we do with this disenfranchised generation? According to one study, only 16 percent of them are in church, not weekly, but monthly. Do we write them off? Curse them in their sin? No! Using the wisdom of Luke 15, some, like the lamb that strayed, can be reached. They will not find their way back home by themselves. We, as shepherds, must go after them as an expression of God’s love and ours. We, as grandparents, must invest time with them.

Second, some are lost in the house. The Move Study indicated that as many as 10 percent of people who are in church regularly, have never made a serious commitment to Jesus as



Evangelism As Blessing

Lord. We must sweep the house, look for them, engage them, declare their worth before God, as if they were a rare and irreplaceable coin, a treasure to us – and they are. How many of our teens are “lost in the house?” They were pulled away by the undercurrent of the culture, the influence of peers, and they are imperceptibly drifting away from God and the church – and the family. They are “lost in the house” of a blended family, a single-parent home, a joint-custody ping-pong arrangement, a grandparent picking up the shattered pieces of family dissolution. Suddenly, there is an eruption and indications of rebellion. They take us by surprise, but the clues have been under our noses. We simply took our kids for granted. They were “lost in the house” – so close, so far away.

Third, if they are completely rebellious and independent, as was the prodigal son, all we can do is wait for them, pray for them, look for them, and welcome them when they return.

In no way do we want them to be molested, arrested, jailed, attacked, or harmed. We don’t want them to be destitute, sleeping on the street, eating throwaway food, ending up being friendless and in some pig pen, like the prodigal son. We must pray that God would take care of them, while convicting them of sin and convincing them of the love of God. Jeremiah believed that the prayers of the righteous for those still in Babylon, would result in “their prosperity” and that of the “place where they now lived.” For some of us, that approach is unthinkable. We have a “shape up and be loved” gospel approach. Conform to the truth, and then we will love you. This is conditional, not unconditional love. We seem to have no idea of the way God regards humans and of His desire to bless them and others through them, even if they are now living in Babylon.

Roy Godwin says that there are three simple building blocks



The Mission: To Bless

to blessing.

First, “*I bless you...*” As noted earlier, God desires to give us a well-instructed tongue to sustain the weary. And to that, He awakens us morning by morning, quickening our ear to listen to His instructions for the day (Isa. 50:4). There is no power in our words, but there is in us a “well-instructed tongue” that God desires to use to “sustain the weary” with something He may have whispered to us in our early morning time with Him. As God’s agents, in the middle, between Him and the hurting, our words have the weight of divine authority – they are not empty, nor are they magic. But they have life, and express God’s love, and occasionally, when they are uttered, they bring tears. At times you can watch the entire countenance of the one being blessed changed. It is as if a load has been lifted – and often, it has.

Second, “*I bless you ... That He...*” That God, the Father. That His Son, Jesus, the Christ, the Lord [the One who heals, comforts, directs, or a dozen other things], that he would ... [and God will lead you in terms of what to say].” Ultimately, the power is not in *our* words, but in *his name*. It is in invoking his name, calling it out, inviting his presence. We bless as an invitation for God to break in and confirm the blessing, confirm His word with signs following, with evidence of His love and grace. God told Aaron to *speak* the blessing and to “*put My name on the people*” and then He promised, “*I will come behind you and bless the people.*” Aaron said the words of the blessing, but the work of the blessing itself was from God. And it was associated with His name, in His name, and by the authority of His name. Thus, out of the New Testament covenant, we appeal to the authority of the name of Jesus and to its power, and on that basis, we bless people “*in the name of Jesus.*”



Evangelism As Blessing

Third, “I bless you...That He... *May...*” do this or that. Open this door or close that one. This is the invitation for God to act as a matter of blessing. So, the blessing is not merely words, but an invitation for divine action. In Psalm 20, we see a variety of ways that God might bless. “I bless you, that He...” we might pray. Then borrowing from Psalm 20,

“*May...answer you* when you are in distress. May the Name of the God of Jacob *protect you*. May He *send you help* from the sanctuary and *grant you support*...May He *remember* all your sacrifices and *accept your burnt offerings*. May He *give you the desire of your heart* and *make all your plans succeed*. May we shout for joy over *your victory* and lift our banners in the Name of our God. May the Lord *grant all your requests*” (Ps. 20:1-5).

What a powerful prayer of blessing.

Exercise 11:

1. Review the model of blessing here – the three stages. It’s simple, but profound. “I bless you (that alone may bring tears)...that God (the God of comfort, or hope, or of love, or a second chance – follow the leading of the Lord)...may (again, be led of the Lord. Use Psalm 20 as a guide).
2. Talk to others about God blessing the unbeliever. To some, this might be objectionable. Discuss it.
3. Can you see that a blessing is a declaration of God’s love and grace, and not an affirmation of sin? For example, when we bless a person in authority, the chair in which they sit is sacred, whatever the condition of their soul might be. For all authority is given by God (Rom. 13:1-7). We can bless the office, bless the



The Mission: To Bless

potential of a converted mayor or councilman, in an already sacred chair, and do so without affirming the pathology – the sin. Talk about that distinction.

4. Can you see blessing as an expression of God's love, as an appeal to know him?
5. God's goodness is revealed in common grace – even to those who may not have experienced saving grace. The rain falls on the just and the unjust (Mt. 5:45). We all share the grandeur of the sunrise, and the beauty of a sunset, the life of spring and singing of the birds, and more. Are all indicators of God's goodness, of common grace. So much so, that God's goodness blinds us to our need for saving grace.
6. Our mission is to bless – to wake up in others the desire for 'more' of God. Talk about it.
7. We bless out of a state of inner peace and rest. And that demands, for most of us, a deeper and different prayer life. It calls for sacred time and space in our lives. We then, live from peace – not at a frenzied pace.

ACTION:

- Review the three simple building blocks of speaking a blessing articulated by Roy Godwin. It is so simple – but helpful in creating space for the Holy Spirit to help you expand the blessing. I bless you...that He (God)...may...
- Practice saying this blessing to someone you know. Do it prayerfully. Let the Holy Spirit lead you.
- Review the language above for each phase of the blessing. Put the outline in your own words. Become



Evangelism As Blessing

comfortable with it.

- Now, practice saying this blessing to someone else. You will find that the outline remains the same, but the blessing, the language will change.

This is beyond, “God bless you” or “Have a blessed day.”

- Ask God to give you the opportunity to speak a blessing into someone else’s life. Start with a member of your family. Start with another believer. Then, move to someone who is not churched but may be hungry to know God’s love.





Chapter 12

Being the Good News

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. There is an important difference between our talk and our walk; between proclaiming the good news and incarnating the gospel. The credibility of our message rides on the beauty of our transformed life.
2. The late Joe Aldrich calls this the music of our lives. It is nothing less than the life of Christ lived out in us.
3. Paul, in speaking of the incarnated Christ in us, used the metaphors of *fragrance*, of our being a *letter* from God to others, a life that could be read, and finally, of our reflecting the *glory* of God.
4. The best contemporary argument for Christianity is Christians – true Christians. God changes us in ways we cannot change ourselves, and such change results in our transformation and is evident to others.



Evangelism As Blessing

5. The message of the gospel does not change, and yet, Paul adapted to different cultural settings. For many, cultural accommodation is impossible without compromise. Paul became “all things to all men,” shifting his *identity* without altering the *information* he shared.
6. The incarnation of Christ is an example. God, in Christ, takes on a new identity. He wrapped Himself in flesh. But he was still ‘the Word,’ though manifesting in a human body. In the incarnation, God identifies with humanity. He loves the world through Jesus. He affirms humanity, by becoming human. This is the adaptation of identity.
7. The evangelism needed today is personal, not positional. It is organic, not institutional. It is relating as a peer, not from a pedestal.

Synopsis:

There is an age-old truism – methods change, the message stays the same. The methods of evangelism many of us used in the past simply don’t work today. They are not respectful. They are not personal. They are too stiff and institutional, like a memorized sales pitch. That doesn’t work in this culture with Gen Z and Gen Alpha. Indeed, it is doubtful that the old method ever worked effectively. The late Joe Aldrich would say, ‘The beauty of the gospel rides on the back of the transformed church. We don’t have the message; we are the message.’ We are a sweet smelling fragrance, a flower, a perfume – attractive. We are an open letter, easily read, by our obvious attitudes and actions. We are reflectors of the glory of God. There is a music about our lives. The words matter, but they become magic



with the music. Believers who have only the words of the gospel, without the music, are very convincing. We must walk our talk, incarnate what we proclaim. We are to be holy, carriers of truth, but not without love, not holier-than-thou, not condescending. In the incarnation, God affirmed humanity. He ‘loved the world’ so much ‘that He gave His only begotten son.’ He identified with humanity, fallen humanity. He ate with sinners. He forgave adulterers. He admitted to his inner circle a traitor. He gave his life loving the lost. We are called to allow Christ to again be himself in us and through us. That requires radical identification with lost people, with sinners, with those who might harm us.

After “knowing the Lord two years, the average Christian has no significant relationships with non-Christians.”²⁹ In recent years, we have paid closer attention to the difference between *proclaiming* the gospel and *incarnating* the gospel. Articulating, words, are easier than integrating the gospel into our life. In plain language, we *talk* better than we *walk*. “Christians,” the late Joe Aldrich argued, “are to *be* good news before they *share* the good news.”³⁰ To state it differently, the lyrics, the words of the gospel, need music – and that’s the music of our transformed lives. We are the evidence. Doing evangelism without evidence of its effect in our transformed life is a dead end.

The music, Aldrich says, “is the beauty of the indwelling Christ as lived out in the everyday relationships of life. The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ has solved the problem of

²⁹ Joe Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Multnomah Press: Portland, OR; 1981), 19.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 20.



Evangelism As Blessing

man's sin and offers him the potential of an exchanged life..."³¹ That's a life lived out of grace, not striving; out of faith, not human effort alone; it is the life of Christ, lived in us, from the inside out, not mere conformity to religious standards.

The old evangelism was all about saying the right words, quoting the right scriptures, winning the argument, getting the person to say the right words – of repentance and confession. It often sounded like a memorized sales pitch. The new evangelism does not disregard scripture or Biblical truth, but in a post-truth culture, where my truth is not your truth, and everything is relative, a new beginning place has to be established in evangelistic encounters – and that begins with us, not with the individual needing Christ. We need to incarnate his beauty. Paul says, as believers, we *carry a fragrance* about us (2 Cor. 2:14-17). He also says, we are *open letters* to be read – our lives telling the story of transformation (2 Cor. 3:2). Finally, he says, we are to be the *carriers of God's glory* by a radiance that we cannot always see ourselves. One greater than the shining face of Moses when he descended the mountain with the law (Ex. 34:29-35; 2 Cor. 3:7). In summary, the fragrance of Christ, a life that can be read by others pointing them to Christ, and the glow of God's glory, evidence that we have been with him – are the ways we incarnate Christ.

This is the 'music' of our lives, the joy, the peace, the love, the grace, which causes others to ask us about the source of such hope. This evangelism is letting Christ be himself in us. The best argument for Christianity is Christians – true Christians. "Christ in us, the hope of glory!" (Col. 1:27). When we are joyless and ungrateful, self-righteous and proud, narrow and judgmental, we deny the work of grace in our lives.

³¹ Joe Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Multnomah Press: Portland, OR; 1981), 19.



God's desire for us is that we are holy, but not stuffy and segregated, not untouchable. No, the idea of holiness is wholeness, wellness, completeness in Christ. It is the place of rest and peace. First, God declares us holy that He might make us holy or whole. He does that by constraining us with His love. Love acts like an anesthesia as God trues us with truth. He changes us in ways we cannot change ourselves – and He does this in our prayerful surrender to Him. He declares us holy – and then a process of sanctification begins. He makes us increasingly holy, by our pursuit of Him, our consecration, until in the final stage of sanctification when we exhibit wholeness, wellness, and maturity. This is His purpose, a people who walk in the beauty of holiness.

In evangelism, we use words, sometimes inadequately, to explain the change in our life. We never claim perfection, but we demonstrate a growing hunger for God and His transforming grace. All of this happens without being completely disengaged from the world. We have practiced extraction evangelism – we help people find Christ, get them in church, and disconnect them from their friends. This is a failed missionary model. It is the church as a compound, as a retreat from the world.

Rather, the church is to be the visible embassy of the invisible kingdom of God, training and sending ambassadors, representatives, to every sector of the community, with a blessing, with joy, with the music of our lives. Christ did not come to the earth and live in hibernation. In the incarnation, Christ radically identified with the world – its pain and its people.

Paul claimed to “become all things to all men so that by all possible means [he] might save some” (I Cor. 9:22). To win his Jewish brothers, he restricted his liberties and lived like a conservative Jew. He went to Gentiles (non-Jews) as well.



Evangelism As Blessing

He became a slave to all to win as many as possible (I Cor. 9:19). Some see this as hypocritical, as chameleon Christianity. But it is not Paul's core values that changed, nor the centrality or supremacy of Christ, but rather, Paul gives us a picture of cultural adaptation. This is often what the church is not willing to change – its culture. Notice again, Paul “became all things to all men.” The central ideas at the heart of the gospel, the message, the *information*, does not change, but Paul's face changes, he adapts his *identity*. In one place, Paul is a Roman citizen, in another, a Jew. There is, he knows, liberty beyond the cultural constraints of the law. But here, he is claiming his old Pharisee identity. As Bonhoeffer would say, “Christ bids us to come and die!”

What a shock it must have been to the angels, to heaven, even to hell, to see God become flesh, to see the Word hidden and veiled in human flesh. Christ became a man to win us back to the Father. He didn't change – he was still God, the Word, though made flesh. It was not the *information*, the Word, that changed, but the *identity*, the face, the form, the culture.

The incarnation respected humanity, even in its fallen form. It stretched, it reached, it chose to live among men – disguised. This is *organic evangelism*, not *institutional*. It is *personal*, not *positional*. It is peer, at times, posturing as the underling, not stiff and condescending. The old evangelism cornered a potential mark, witnessed – with the individual passive, listening, and then it pressed for a quick decision.

The new generation has reacted strongly to such a tactical approach, and those who jumped through the evangelism hoops of such encounters have often fallen away. That evangelism approach, if it ever worked, will certainly not work in this culture. It is a form of assault. It lacks respect for the dignity of the other person. It does not trust the Holy Spirit



who witnesses with us, and better than us.

We are reminded that changing our *methods* does not mean changing our *message* though to some it may feel that way. The gospel is, as we have noted before, both love and truth. That's the message – unconditional love and unbending truth. In the past, we have, as a *method*, led with truth. It might have seemed to some that such love was then conditioned on their positive response to truth. But God's love is unconditional. In leading with love, we build a relational bridge on which we can carry the heavy cargo of truth. In leading with demonstrated love, we avoid combative exchanges that frontload the relationship with tension and create barriers to truth. Without an atmosphere of love, truth is misunderstood. The great truth is the love of God. The method has changed by leading with love, but the message has not changed.

To evangelize effectively today, we must not only offer good *words*, but be, ourselves, the evidence of good *works* – the work of God in us. Years ago, an African attending a USA evangelism conference was amazed, appalled, at the evangelism strategy being articulated. Some asked, “How do you do evangelism in Africa?” Her response was shocking, but simple. “We simply have a Christian family move into the village, and when the people see their lives, how they live, their joy and peace, everyone in the village wants to become a Christian.”



Evangelism As Blessing

Exercise 12:

1. Are you a ‘good news’ Christian by the way you live? Evidenced by your joy and peace? Do you love the Lord and know His love in such a way that it is evident to others?
2. Do you have relationships with non-believers or are all your friends Christians? What does it say about us, that we do not relate in a loving and caring way to those who are lost?
3. Aldrich calls the witness of our lives, our joy and peace, the music, and gospel presentation, the lyrics. Both are important. Both need the other. But do you think we often have more words than we have music? Do you get the terms – incarnation and proclamation. Make sure you understand those.
4. What about cultural adaptation? Information and identity? Had you considered Paul’s adaptation to Jew and then to Gentile? Or God’s adaptation to humanity in the incarnation? Have we completely missed this principle of adaptation? Are we culture-bound? Can we change?

ACTION:

- Today, monitor your walk – not simply your talk.
- Use these measures.
 - ✓ *Fragrance* – are you sweet, kind, positive with others.
 - ✓ *An Open Letter* – are your obvious attitudes and actions Christlike. If people are reading your responses, do they conclude that you are ‘good news’ person, confident but not arrogant,



constructive and not critical, affirmational but still principled?

- ✓ *Glory* – do they see Christ in you? Do you glow? Not literally, but is there a radiance about your life? Do you carry about you the presence of God to the degree that you would like?

Questions And Presuppositions:

- Do people around you know that you are a Christian – by the way you behave? Is there that ‘difference’ about you?
- Remember, you cannot make yourself holy. You cannot will yourself to be like Christ. Only Christ can be himself in you – and that is possible only by the indwelling Holy Spirit. That is why we are to be told to be ‘continually filled with the Spirit.’
- Focus on yielding to Christ, on His transforming presence – on carrying the fragrance of His presence, being a letter from God, and reflecting His glory. Invite God to reveal Himself through you. You want to be accused of being a Christian and found guilty.



Chapter 13

Integrity

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. Here again, we bump into the concepts of proclamation and incarnation. And we meet the assertion of Augustine that “the preacher’s life” and its integrity is directly related “the reception” of what is preached. It is in living the message, not in its articulation, that the congregation is moved to follow the example of the pastor and practice what he preaches.
2. Credibility, integrity of life, is the key operative factor.
3. Today, we are afloat with scandals involving pastors so much so that cynicism toward the church, and its message is a major obstacle to cultural engagement and transformation.
4. We again link the ideas – of belief and behavior –



Evangelism As Blessing

asserting, that if we do not behave our beliefs, it is obvious to others, that we do not truly believe what we preach.

5. The culture is watching. It wants, from the church and its leaders, credibility. And integrity. It wants to know that Christianity is practical, and that practicing its principles affects the quality of life. It wants to know if the church is self-interested in its missional engagement, or truly philanthropic. Does it care about the poor, the hurting, or is it a club with benefits for members only? Finally, it wants to know if the mission of the church, if practiced, would change the world?
6. Effective evangelism happens in the context of covenant. It is not primarily propositional truth. It is relational and redemptive.
7. We have created a rigid faith narrative that tramples on any expression of doubt. That makes evangelism tough in skeptical and cynical culture. We no longer have a society around us that reverences an idea because it comes from the Bible. This is a different audience than has existed in the recent American past.
8. A look at the disciples and Jesus and their interaction, reveals a group of men who also had questions, and doubts. They argued, not only among themselves, but with Jesus. And Jesus gave them the space to doubt, to ask questions. Faith then is seen as a journey. Someone called theology “faith seeking understanding.”
9. Faithfulness, honest inquiry, is the cradle in which truth is discovered. We belong before we fully believe.



10. Faith is not, as Hershel says, a “leap of thought,” but a “leap of action.” It gets out of the boat and walks on the water.

Synopsis:

The greatest hindrance to the cultural embrace of Christianity, to revival and awakening, is not the lack of pizzazz in our pageantry or the need for more polished preaching. It is that the unchurched no longer believe the gospel narrative. They fail to see the gospel lived, incarnated in our lives. We don't behave our beliefs – and they are convinced we don't really believe our beliefs. We can continue to argue truth with the culture, but until they see truth in our lives, they will remain unconvinced. They accuse us of lacking integrity. Our lives are lies. As someone said, “Sin are the untruths that we, created in God's image, tell about Him by the way we live.” The lack of integrity creates a problem of credibility. Failing to live the truth, the truth we represent is rejected. We are too much like the unsaved, unchurched world around us. The conclusion is simple: Christianity has no practical effect on the attitudes or actions of practicing Christians. It is worthless. Christians are savorless salt. This calls into doubt the mission of the church, If the gospel has left us so thoroughly unchanged, it is not worth perpetrating to the billion who have not heard. The church is only a club for its own members – not an expression of the kingdom of God. It cannot be counted on to change the world. These are dreadful charges. Sadly, too often, they are correct. Christianity must be more believable, not by the work of sharper apologists, but by the brightness of the glory of God on the lives of Christians themselves.



Evangelism As Blessing

Augustine noted that the preacher's life, known to his people, and their perception of the depth of his practiced devotion, strongly influenced their reception of what he preached. If the preacher preached what his congregation knew he did not live, they didn't take his preaching seriously. But if they saw in him deep devotion and dependence on God, humility and grace, patience and kindness – they were convicted to deepen their own spiritual roots.

Saint Patrick held high expectations for his mission teams as they entered each settlement. The high level of extrinsic *ethos*, evident to the villagers, served to enhance the reception to the message. That is, the people received what Saint Patrick's people lived, what they *incarnated*, not merely what they *proclaimed*.

Theologian Helmut Thielicke claimed that credibility was the key operative factor in the preacher's arsenal.

“We live, he maintained, in an age of ‘paid propagandists’ for causes ranging from consumer products to political candidates. In that context, hearers want to know whether this politician will deliver on her promises if elected. They want to know whether that sports star really uses the underarm deodorant he advertises, and whether it transformed his social life, or whether he is just a paid propagandist for the brand.”³²

The same is true for preachers and Christians and the church. We face an enormous credibility gap by not incarnating the truths we proclaim. The culture is asking, “Are pastors and preachers just paid propagandist for Christianity and the church? Or do they believe what they say? And more so, if they *believe* it, do they *behave* it?” Sadly, the answer is, ‘No!’ – too often they don’t behave it. They own the faith superficially, not profoundly.

³² George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again*, AbingdonPress: Nashville, TN; 2000), 50.



Ghandi once asserted that if Christians had lived the Christian faith, everyone in India would have been converted. George Barna, in one survey, noted that on more than 100 measurements, there was little to distinguish the self-professed Christian from the non-Christian. This is saltless salt and dim, dark lights.

As one poet charged, “I could believe in Christ, were it not for the church!” Among the youth population, their problem is not Christ, it is Christians; it is the church. We are not the glorious church of which Paul spoke. As a result, the unchurched around us have come to doubt the gospel narrative. They already have cultural reasons to doubt – the exalted narrative of science and the values war, as well as the screams of the flesh for radical liberty. We give them one more – and that may be the most compelling of all their reasons for not believing. We can argue the truth, but until they see truth in our lives, they will remain unconvinced.

George Hunter clicks off a series of notes about the skeptical world around us and their cautiousness about the church, their reticence to embrace faith. First, he says, on the minds of the world is the question of *integrity*. Do Christians *really believe* in Christianity, in what it teaches? Do they even know what they supposedly believe. In many cases, they do not! Only 9 percent of Christians are now ‘Bible Christians’ who take scripture seriously, not merely at the point of believing but also by practicing those beliefs. We are too much like the unchurched – and if so, what advantage is Christianity, church attendance, or prayer and scripture engagement.

That is Hunter’s second point. Some in the culture don’t doubt our mental and *intellectual* commitment to faith, theology and ethics, they simple do not believe that we *live* according to that faith. That is a *credibility* issue.



Evangelism As Blessing

Hunter's third point is even more invasive. There are those who know Christians who both believe their faith and behave its principles. Still, these doubters wonder if it really makes any real *difference*. Is heaven real? Does God really act in a time-space world for those who follow Him? Is there really a deeper peace, and greater joy, and fuller love in following Christ? What difference does it really make? This is a consequential concern, an issue of theological *praxis*. What is the practical, measurable difference in the lives of those who practice Christianity.

Fourth, and even more broadly, some surmise, that if Christianity makes a personal positive difference, can it really make a difference in the world. This is crisis of doubt regarding missiology and the social-cultural impact of the church on mission. For example, these outsiders wonder, "Where is the church on issues of justice, reconciliation and peace, on the environment, as champions for the oppressed?"

Is the mission of the church only for the fulfillment of its members? Is it narrow and self-interested? Is it merely for comfort and its devotional value? Or is the church willing to speak to the cultural chaos?³³ Most churches, and for that matter, most Christians are silent on the salient issues that are deemed controversial – even those that clearly moral matters. Such a church is neither salt nor light. There is not doubt that we are contending with a much more skeptical audience than in previous decades. The church no longer has a free pass – it is now being tested by the younger generation, re authenticity, integrity, credibility, praxis and cultural sensitivity. They see the cultural chaos, the world as a powder-keg, the social-cultural fault-lines, the nuclear arsenals. They are confused on the issues of gender, and political models, the environment and family

³³ George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West... Again*, AbingdonPress: Nashville, TN; 2000), 50.



life, sexual liberty and abortion. Who, they ask, is responsible for being a voice of clarity? Of bringing order to chaos?

What do you think? Is this not the message of the kingdom of God? – righteousness (justice), peace (inner peace, but also, geopolitical peace) and joy (evidence of fulfilment)? To say it differently, does God only change individuals, or does He change cultures, cities, even nations? We have a narrow and personal perception of evangelism. Psalms looks to the day when “nations will be joined to the Lord” (Zech. 2:11; Hag. 2:17; Psa. 2:8). The book of Acts includes some one-hundred place names. It is the story of God impacting cities through the ministry of the apostles. We see Paul interfacing with community leaders, kings and those with authority.

Evangelism has sometimes been overhanded, “Sit down, I am going to tell you about Jesus – don’t interrupt. Remember, I am holy, you are a sinner. I am doing you a favor. So, listen – no questions.” Rabbi Irving Greenberg reminds us that “in the context of a covenant” faith is an open dialogue. It involves both obedience and questions. “Unquestioning obedience is not morally desirable; it is not asked of us and should not be given. Biblically, only an idol cannot stand up to questioning. Only idols refuse to be questioned. God invites questioning.”³⁴

Note the interaction of Jesus with his disciples – they were always questioning him and conferring one with another in a doubtful, disagreeable manner behind his back. Balance is essential. Greenberg cautions, “God invites questioning.” However, the questioning disciple who is not really seeking to actively live out the Christian life is also inauthentic. Covenantal faith is not merely a matter of believing or assenting to a

³⁴ Irving Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust,” appearing in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* Ed. Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1977), 38; cited in Fashing, Narrative Theology After Auschwitz, 15.



Evangelism As Blessing

proposition. It is an attitude of the heart. It is faithful as it struggles to believe and understand. A Hebrew term for faith, *emunah* (from which we get “amen”), connotes faithfulness, trust – that’s relational. It suggests the ability to remain steadfast amid unsettling circumstances. This is the integrity of life. Theology it is said is “faith seeking understanding.”³⁵ Those who know God walk faithfully (I Kings 2:4; Isa. 38:3).³⁶ Abraham is the poster child of faith. Abraham Heschel notes, his life was not a “leap of thought,” but “leap of action.” He behaved his beliefs.³⁷

Exercise 13:

1. Reread Augustine’s comment on the preacher’s life, verses his preaching. Does that apply to laymen as well? How will we win the world with the low standard of living and holiness that the church seems to have embraced? And how do we prevent those with higher standards from taking the ‘holier-than-thou’ position of pride? It’s a call for a delicate balance, isn’t it? Talk about it.
2. Do you agree with Helmut Thielicke that credibility is the key operative factor in not only the preacher’s arsenal, but in the believer’s life as well? Is he right that the world, observing the gap between what we say and how we live, are only ‘paid propagandists?’ What does that say about our credibility?

³⁵ Clark Williamson, *A Christian Theology: Way of Blessing, Way of Life* (Chalice Press: St. Louis, MO, 1999), 27.

³⁶ Irving Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust,” appearing in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* Ed. Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1977), 38; cited in Fashing, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz*, 15.

³⁷ Abraham Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1955); 238.



3. Revisit Hunter's four questions, particularly the last two – does Christianity really make a difference in one's life? What is our evidence? And could it make a difference in the world, the culture, the city? How?
4. What is our mission, the mission of the church? Do you believe God could touch whole cities? That nations will be joined to the Lord?

ACTION:

- It is brass tacks time. ***What beliefs do you hold that you do not behave?*** I know – ‘grace’! It is always our defense. However, nowhere in Scripture does God call a regenerated person a sinner. He calls us saints. He expects a higher standard from us – not perfection, but holiness. And that is possible only by grace, empowering grace, transforming grace.

Do an inventory of ‘What I believe,’ and ‘How I behave?’ List ten things! For example: I believe there is power through prayer. I believe that believers should exhibit the joy of the Lord? And be generous? Etc.

Notice in Titus 2, ***Paul introduces the idea of ‘sound doctrine,’*** and then, rather than plunge into a deep theological lake, ***he provides a list, not of beliefs, but of behaviors.*** In Paul’s mind, sound doctrine resulted in sound living. And doctrine that leaves us in a less than Christ-like way may not be sound.

How Do Your BELIEFS AFFECT Your BEHAVIOR?

- ***Check off George Hunter’s list*** – Integrity (Are we



Evangelism As Blessing

living the truth, or a lie?), Credibility (Does the world have confidence in us? See us as moral and godly?) Do we make a difference in the city, in our neighborhood, at work, among our friends? Do we serve others, or are we focused on serving those inside the church? Could Christianity make a difference in our world?



Chapter 14

A New Approach to Evangelism

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. The scripted evangelism model of the past with leading questions and a bevy of memorized scripture is now failing us.
2. Evangelism as Blessing is relational. Its pace is not driven by the evangelist, but by the openness and hunger of the unchurched, and by the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in their life.
3. Don't be shocked by a purely cynical view of faith by young millennials, Gen Z and Gen Alpha. They have little reverence for the holy and sacred. Their worlds, both secular and domestic, have only known brokenness and uncertainty.
4. Acts 16, gives us a model of three gateways to salvation – truth, power and love. These three gateways are demonstrated by Lydia, the demonized slave girl and the jailer (Acts 16).



Evangelism As Blessing

5. In the past, we have elevated the gateway of truth. That is, in part, due to the influence of enlightenment and rationalism in which 20th century culture had been steeped. But rationalism is out. Relativism is in. “Your truth is not my truth!” is the mantra today.
6. This is very different ground on which we are now standing. In this environment, we must lead with love. Even then, the young in the culture are suspicious, fearing manipulation. They make internet friends who they can keep at a safe distance and unfriend with the click of a mouse. Such relationships don’t tend to be deep.
7. Patient love must pray the door of hearts open and build a relational bridge strong enough to carry the heavy building blocks of truth. At the intersection of love and truth, we will experience the power of God that saves.
8. In the apostolic era, there was often a long season of discipleship before baptism and the first communion. That was due to converts with no Judeo-Christian background who were fresh out of paganism. We now have a culture that is detached from Judeo-Christian values, a Harry Potter culture. We may need to learn to reverse our process – instead of evangelism-conversion-discipleship, we may find the order reversed – discipleship-evangelism-conversion.



A New Approach to Evangelism

Synopsis:

While we value evangelism approaches that worked in the past, we recognize as culture changes and societies evolve, they become resistant to certain methods. The message does not change, but the method must. In scripture we have models of evangelism that are not only on the continuum of truth, but also on the continuum of love, and of power. These are only gateways. They are not ends, but pathways. The goal is to help people open a relationship with God as Father, through Jesus Christ, by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. The continuum of love leads to truth. In fact, love becomes the bridge that allows the heavy building blocks of truth to be transported. Love establishes the relationship. And that creates a different context in which truth is unwrapped. Truth without love is propositional, and sometimes cold. Love warms up hearts and opens them to truth. And at the intersection of love and truth, we find the power of God at work. In the past, we have engaged people with truth, argumentatively. We can win such a debate and lose the soul, never moving them to a solid decision to be a disciple.

In the past, we used a version of evangelism that memorized scripture and followed a script with leading questions designed to move the subject to a “Yes” answer.

“Yes, I want to go to heaven when I die.”

“Yes, I believe Jesus is the Son of God, that he was crucified and rose from the dead.”

“Yes! Yes.”

“Well, then,” we said to them, “The Bible says in Romans 10:9, ‘that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe



Evangelism As Blessing

in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.’ Congratulations – you are now a Christian.” No emotion. No heart witness. Not even any real conviction. Only a superficial acknowledgement of the facts, that fifty years ago, almost all Americans believed.

Times have changed.

A conversation with a young millennial or Gen Z, and you are likely to be met with frontal resistance. “No, I am not sure I want to go to heaven, or that such a place exists.”

“No, I am not sure that Jesus is anything more a myth – he’s like the tooth fairy, Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny.”

“Rose from the dead?” Are you out of your mind.” You will find little reverence for holy things, no tolerance for mystery, and no willingness to take a leap of faith in the dark. How do we reach such a culture?

We need a new approach to evangelism. The older approach above is evangelism on the continuum of *truth*. It seeks an affirmation to scripture as the gateway to salvation. We quote one verse, and then another passage of scripture, soliciting agreement – but the agreement is often superficial, one dimensional, cognitive assent only. In this approach, we majored in truth. We reached into the apologetics bag, laying out the case for Christ. We may have won the argument but still lost the soul.

Is there another way?

In Acts 16, there are three gateways to salvation.

- First, Paul engages Lydia on the continuum of *truth*. She is a *truth seeker*. You will meet some Lydia types – open, ready, hungry for truth (Acts 16:13-15).
- Paul then encountered the slave girl. She was under



A New Approach to Evangelism

the control of an evil spirit, following them in the city, channeling the demon inside her. She was not rational enough for a truth encounter. She was not sober mentally. She was deluded and under Satan's power. She needed to be delivered, a *power* encounter. She needed liberty that could only come by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:16-18).

- The jailer had no doubt heard components of Paul's preaching, and he had witnessed something of the slave's girls' deliverance. But he was not moved by either *truth* or a manifestation of *power*. Only when Paul and Silas were praying at midnight and an earthquake broke off their stocks and bonds and flung the prison doors open, and Paul refused to escape, knowing that fleeing would lead to the guard's death – only then did God have his attention. "What manner of love is this?" - he must have thought to himself. Moved, that he had lacked compassion by throwing them into the inner prison without medical aid, he took them to his home and treated them. He may have missed the clues around the story of the slave girl, but he certainly could not miss the *love* Paul demonstrated toward him in the face of his callousness. He and his household heard the story of Christ and were saved (Acts 16:25-34).

THREE GATEWAYS – TRUTH, LOVE, POWER.

Think about lost family members and friends. Each of them may demand a different approach that opens them to the gospel. Who, in your circle, is open to truth – they are the easiest to win. Who is wrestling with some bondage, some addiction? Or they have gone deep into the woods of spiritual bondage. They have a cold, hard heart. They may be won only by an encounter with God's Spirit. God will have to break the power



Evangelism As Blessing

that is controlling their lives. Then, there is the other person – they too are cold and indifferent. They have no interest in the gospel message, and they are not impressed with a miracle. But when fear surfaces in their lives, and they face the possibility of some calamity or even death, they are open to kindness, to God's love. Who in your circle fits the profile of Lydia (truth seeker), the slave girl (needing a power encounter with God), or the jailer (the compassion, love gateway)?

These three approaches are not exclusive of each other. For example, the great truth is the unconditional love of God. And at the center of God's love, one finds truth. It is not love that trues; it is truth that trues. Love is the sugar that makes the bitter medicine of truth go down. Love is the anesthesia. Without truth, there is no change. Nor can there be true love. Without truth, love is only a wrapping for a lie. Where love and truth intersection, we experience the Holy Spirit's regenerative power, new life, liberation from the old to the new. Thus, love, truth, power.

There are times when the best arguments for truth don't seem to work with this generation. A bridge is necessary to carry the heavy blocks of truth across. That bridge is love. In my youth, you could say "Jesus" and half a dozen people would admit that they needed God. You could catch fish with an unbaited hook. Not now, not generally. Then you witnessed and won the person to Christ usually in one encounter and then encouraged them to get into church and into a discipleship program. Evangelism – then discipleship. Now, witnessing is a process. It is not a one and done deal. You disciple the person toward conversion.

In the first three centuries of church history, a long season of discipleship often occurred. It sometimes lasted a year or more. At the end of that season, the individual seeking conversion



A New Approach to Evangelism

went through an exorcism. They confessed their faith in Christ publicly and were baptized and only then did they receive their first communion. They were anointed with oil and prayed over, for the fullness of the Spirit, as a seal of their salvation. Why the long discipleship program? These were converts out of paganism. They had no background in Christianity. Salvation was a journey. It should not shock you that in this Harry Potter age, we now appear to be an occultic culture. A break needs to be made with such darkness. We may need to reconsider our evangelism-discipleship model. Are we filling up the church with folks who have never made a clean break with the world? Who have simply added church to their weekly schedule? Are we seeing converts who are being radically changed?

Exercise 14:

1. Start your list of lost loved ones, folks you know and love who are not practicing their faith – they are distant from the church and perhaps from God. They may be living an open life of sin. Ask the question, as you pray, “Lord, how do I reach them? – With a truth encounter? Or only by a moment in which they encounter God’s power? Or, by looking for opportunities to show them love?” How do I reach them?
2. Do you have young Millennial or Gen Z or yet, a Gen Alpha who is completely closed to the gospel. Perhaps, they were raised in church but have attended a university and returned not only as an unbeliever, but somewhat virulent in their rejection of faith. In most cases, the truth continuum will not be effective. Only an insider relationship with them, one of love, and then at the right time, will allow a sincere moment of gospel engagement. Such evangelism is not at the pace of a



Evangelism As Blessing

sprint, but of a marathon. Share with one another.

3. Take a moment and reflect on evangelism approaches used in the past – a script, a bevy of scriptures with leading questions. Mental assent without the heart, with no pathos, which was nevertheless called conversion. Have you used such evangelism models? Or were they used with you? Talk about their effectiveness or lack of effectiveness today.

ACTION:

- Read Acts 16 multiple times. Mark up a Bible. Make notes. Notice the three gateways to conversion. Think about those gateways and folks on your prayer list who might be reached in different ways.
- Be honest, which of these three ways is more natural to you? Which do you think might be more challenging? Can you learn to use all three as the Holy Spirit leads? Roll this over in your mind and heart until you sense that you have a grasp on all three approaches. Practice on another believer. Help each other develop the natural capacity to use all three gateways.
- Remember Paul’s prayer was that God would open a door, that He would then give Paul the right words to say, at the right time, in the right way.





Chapter 15

The Language of Love

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. To be effective in evangelism with the current culture, particularly, the youth generation, our approach must be more conversational, and less contentious.
2. Confrontation doesn't work. There are those whose reaction to our faith narrative is at times quarrelsome. The younger they are, especially those in college, the more likely they are to be parroting the voices they have come to trust, voices that are almost always hostile to the gospel. They want to belong, and many, though raised in church, have traded beliefs for belonging, for the affirmation of professors and peers.
3. We will not win them by facts alone. It is their trust in us as Christians that we need to restore – and that is the gospel on the continuum of love and grace.



Evangelism As Blessing

4. As the culture has grown indifferent to the gospel and distant from the church, the liberal church has toned down their commitment to absolute values. They have emphasized the relational – love, acceptance and forgiveness. Those are critical values for which conservatives have not always been known.
5. The counterpoints to these values are emphasized by conservatives - truth, accountability and reconciliation. For the gospel to be whole, you need both – love that leads to truth engagement, acceptance that involves accountability, and forgiveness that ends in reconciliation. The liberal church has taken half the gospel, and the conservative church, the other half. We need a whole gospel.
6. Confrontation has to be replaced with conversation. Talking has to give way to listening. The I-know-more-than-you disposition must be replaced with humility. The push for a quick decision must give way to a slower pace. Salvation as a transaction needs to give way to salvation as a transforming process.
7. We must partner with the Holy Spirit and let him lead. We must let God love others through us. As Aldrich says, “A person listens because he’s been loved.”
8. Content-based evangelism depends on *what* you know. Evangelism as blessing is conversational, relational, and dependent on *who* you know. That is, your relationship with God, through Christ, makes him evident. It is His presence, characterized by



The Language of Love

love, that attracts.

9. The relationship matters. In the beginning, listening is more important than telling. Evangelism is not a one-shot deal. In the past, you evangelized and then discipled. With this culture, you disciple toward evangelism.
10. You pray the door of hearts open. You lean on the Holy Spirit in order to say the right thing, the right way, and at the right time.
11. The communication spectrum involves more than words. Verbal content is only seven percent of communication. Tone of voice is five times greater – 37 percent. Our perceived attitude and disposition is a whopping 55 percent.
12. Our walk is as important as our talk, and when we talk, it must be in a gracious manner.
13. Our walk, our use of wisdom (a metaphor for dependence on the Holy Spirit), and recognizing the window of openness are all critical components in the new evangelism.
14. The most powerful position is not a telling position, but an answering position. It is when our friend is asking questions.
15. You must start where you find people. The bridge of love will become the most critical piece, the relationship, as you help them discover God's grace.



Evangelism As Blessing

Synopsis:

Don't be overwhelmed. The relational approach is natural. It is loving people and being gracious. The old evangelism approach required the script and a hundred scriptures in your arsenal – that is what made so many people feel unqualified to evangelize. Here, you are letting God love another human through you. You are there for them. Listening. Caring. And when they ask you why you care – in your own words, you tell them the story of how Jesus changed your life. Start with them, with where they are – addictions, depression, pride, arrogance. Let prayer open the door of their heart. Ask God for wisdom. Choose grace words in your conversation. They will listen to you because you love them. You begin with love, acceptance and forgiveness. And you move toward truth, the need for and standard of accountability, and reconciliation with God. Your goal is to reveal Christ. It is not what you know that matters as much as who you know. In the end, the presence of God, in some way, will draw them to Christ. Keep lifting him up without lecturing. Do it by your example. Keep breaking bread with them – the salt covenant. Be a friend.

Much of the evangelism style we have used in the past is confrontational. It was sometimes contentious, not conversational. Those two approaches differ in both tone and tactics. Past evangelism addressed the ‘sinner’ from across a line, differentiating the evangelist, the Christian, from the one needing to be evangelized. This saint-sinner dynamic was prideful and often condescending. It emphasized the contrast between the saved and the lost, right and wrong, sin and righteousness, law and grace. The result was too often a dialogue that degenerated into a disagreement, and sometimes an open and not so civil debate.



The Language of Love

The liberal church, in contrast to this approach, made evangelism about “love, acceptance and forgiveness.” But they did so without regard to *truth* – the counterbalance to love, and *accountability* – the counterbalance to acceptance, or true *reconciliation* which is the intended goal of forgiveness.

There is a middle way. It is the way of conversational evangelism. It crosses the line to identify with the other. It is humble in disposition. It is not foremostly propositional. It listens more than it talks. It tries to understand the other, to empathize, to feel the pain that sin has caused. It is a slower, a more relational approach. It refuses to win an argument and lose the soul. It is not concerned about getting a quick decision, another notch on the evangelical gospel gun. It is concerned about the redemption of a life.

It asks to be invited into the story of the other. This coming alongside the other is relational, transformational evangelism. It is love and truth together, with love leading the way. It is acceptance, with both arms wide open, before it speaks of accountability. It is forgiveness – the 70 times 7 kind (Mt. 18:22). It is forgiveness that hopes for full reconciliation. The third party in the conversation is the Holy Spirit. He is also witnessing to the heart-broke friend. We witness from alongside them, but the Holy Spirit witnesses from inside their heart. We are partners with the Holy Spirit – and we should see ourselves as the junior partner in this process.

Joe Aldrich said, “A person listens because he’s been loved.”³⁸ Love opens the door to truth. It builds the bridge from one person to another to support the heavy blocks of truth needed for transformation. Love arouses a sense of God’s presence, and that changes everything. The effective proclamation of the good

³⁸ Joe Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Multnomah Press: Portland, OR; 1981), 83.



Evangelism As Blessing

news must happen in the presence of God, from a witness that shows evidence of transformation. The clearest indication of God's presence is a spiritually quickened sense of His love.

Let's diffuse some myths.

To evangelize today, you don't have to memorize a hundred verses of scripture and have a Bible College degree. *What* you know is less important than *who* you know. You know Christ and knowing him will be evident by His presence. Second, relationship matters. Personal evangelism is personal. You know both Jesus and the person you are trying to reach for Christ. If not, stop and build a relationship. Hear their story. Listen more than talk.

The new evangelism is not a one-shot deal. In the past, we evangelized, and then discipled, often handing off the person to the institution, the church, or to a discipleship program. Not now. You may have to disciple the person to evangelism – answering a ton of objections, making the relationship more important than the quick decision. You have to build a bridge of love. Somewhere along the line, the one struggling to believe will hear the music. God will speak to them. Their heart will open to the gospel. Your role is not to push, not to induce the birth, but to wait, and let it happen in God's time.

Paul called the Colossian church to be his intercessory prayer partners. They were asked to pray open a closed door. Note, Paul knew speaking though, preaching at a closed door was ineffective. God, through our prayers, and those of our prayer partners, opens the doors of hearts, indeed, of cities and nations. And preaching, witnessing, to open hearts changes everything.

But then, notice. Paul does not assume that a memorized presentation of the gospel is adequate. He asked for prayer to share the right thing (content) in the right way (attitude,



The Language of Love

disposition, relational) and at the right time (context). Here is hypersensitivity to the person, the audience, and to the Holy Spirit. Only about 7 percent of communication is verbal. Tone of voice is more important than content, valued at 37 percent. We need love in our voice, music in our message. A whopping 55 percent is perceived attitude and disposition, completely non-verbal. It is Christ in us; it is how we carry ourselves.

Then Paul, as if changing the subject, speaks of our walk, our behavior, before the unbeliever, the one outside a saving relationship with Christ. We are to walk in wisdom, reverencing God. “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time” (Col. 4:5). Wisdom, in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, is a code word for the work of the Holy Spirit. Here, it may be a metaphor for the role of the Holy Spirit in the evangelism process. “Redeeming the time,” refers to our sensitivity, by the wisdom of God, to be able to seize the kairos moment. Just the right time when there is an openness to the gospel. Notice the level of sensitivity in this evangelism style. We are walking out our faith, being exemplary. We are using wisdom in the relationship, with a heightened sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. We are looking for just the right window of time, to sow our gospel seed. This is not indiscriminate ambush evangelism. It is deeply relational.

Paul then urges us to “speak with grace, seasoned with salt, and ready to answer” (Col. 4:6). Pardon the bluntness, but ‘turn or burn’ is not gracious speech. Some of our evangelism has been toxic, caustic. Paul urges gracious speech. Kindness. No argumentation. No talking over the other. No superior-to-inferior tone. Grace.

And then he urges a strange thing, that our “speech be seasoned with salt.” What does that mean? It appears that Paul is referring to the ancient ‘salt covenant.’ This was a covenant



Evangelism As Blessing

of friendship at a shared table, a time of breaking bread with the other. Ancient folk saw meal sharing as sacred. The Arabs would say, “We have tasted salt together, we must now be friends.” And on the other hand, “There is no longer salt in his belly, he is a traitor to the salt.”

When Da Vinci painted the last supper, he placed an overturned saltshaker in front of Judas, he was, in the coded language of Da Vinci, a traitor to the salt. The salt covenant reaches across the line, even to enemies, and breaks bread with them, establishing a means of communication, restoring civility, aiming at peacemaking, keeping the relational door open.

The most powerful position in evangelism is not a telling position, but a listening position. Notice Colossians. We pray a closed door open. We walk in wisdom, exemplifying Christ, being careful to do gospel engagement at the right time, in the right way, with the right words. Our speech is always with grace. We keep renewing the ‘salt covenant,’ breaking bread to strengthen the relationship. Across the table, our friend begins to ask questions. That is the open door for which we have been praying.

Aldrich says, the inductive method of evangelism, builds a relational bridge. It discovers needs that can only be met by God and the good news. It listens. It pays attention to pain. It applies grace to the need – pointing out the sufficiency of Christ in plain language. His love. His care. His transforming power. And yes, the call to change, to follow Him. It offers the opportunity for the individual to invite God, in Christ, into their lives – not simply to fix a problem, but to change them personally. It continues to walk with the person to help them understand the decision they made and its implications.³⁹

³⁹ Joe Aldrich, 88-89.



You must begin where people are – in depression, on drugs, in rebellion, denial, anger, dealing with a wound. Some conversions will be miraculous. You will see supernatural change. Most will be a process with starts and stops. Faith may surge, followed by doubt. There will be progress and relapses. Through it all, it is the relationship that matters. It is the bridge of love that needs to be protected.

Don't be overwhelmed. The relational approach is natural. The driver in the relationship is love. It is letting God love another person through you. It takes the fear out of evangelism. Evangelism in the past focused on you talking and saying the right words. Remembering the scriptures and quoting them correctly. This approach to evangelism majors on you listening. Hearing their story and genuinely caring. Then telling your story, right up to your encounter with Jesus that changed your life. Then, at the right time, telling his story. It's simple.

Exercise 15:

1. Talk about the difference between a confrontation model of evangelism and one that is relational. Share your evangelism efforts in the past. Have you used both models?
2. Do you think Aldrich is right, the person listens because they are loved? How important is it then, to pray for God to love the lost through us? Is it our love they need, or His love working in us and through us? What is the difference?
3. Who do you know that only prayer can open a door for them to receive the gospel or go back to church? Paul urges the creation of a prayer team for such a scenario. Do you have one? Do you have others agreeing with



Evangelism As Blessing

you in prayer to see that door opened by God?

4. Paul also cautions us to be very sensitive *when* the door opens, with regard to *what* we say, how we say it, and even *when* we say it. In the past, have you cultivated that kind of sensitivity to the person, and to the Holy Spirit? Have you ever ‘crashed’ their gates? What was the result?
5. Review Paul’s advice about our walk and our gracious talk – and particularly, the moment when the door opens and the person, we are trying to love into the kingdom has questions. Are there some lost friends with whom you need to break bread?

ACTION:

- Read Colossians 4:2-6, in several versions.
- Review this chapter again, especially the section on this passage.
- Make notes – outline the passage in your mind. This may be clearest and most succinct evangelism strategy in the New Testament.
- Think about the components – a closed door, prayer partners, watchfulness (persistent prayer, even in the night). Dependence on the Holy Spirit for the right thing to say, in the right way, at the right time. The importance of both you walk and your talk. The need for wisdom and grace. The use of the salt covenant. The moment the questions start coming!
- Wrap your head around this process!





Chapter 16

Belonging – Being Loved

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. What anchors the convert, or that matter, all of us, is the sense of belonging.
2. This is a matter of identity.
3. It involves ‘the name of the Lord,’ which is ‘put upon us.’ We become God’s children, a part of the heavenly family, bearing His name, and hopefully carrying it with dignity and reverence.
4. What we believe is important – and that has been the supreme measure of Christianity in the shadow of enlightenment’s rationalism. That we behave our beliefs emulating Christ is critical to our credibility. But belonging to God, in Christ, by the indwelling Spirit, reinforces beliefs and empowers behaviors.
5. Cultural Christianity has failed us. We have substituted a weekly relationship with the church for a daily relationship with Christ. As Christians,



Evangelism As Blessing

we belong to a brand of Christianity more than we belong, collectively to Christ. We identify by this label or that, as a part of this stream or that, and often with an adversarial posture toward other sectors of Christianity. In truth, as Christians, we belong to God. It is by His name that we should be branded. It is by a life-altering encounter with Christ that evidence emerges that we truly belong to him.

6. It is this encounter story that we tell others, inviting them into God's story.
7. We do this by drawing a circle, not a line. A circle that invites others to 'belong,' before they believe. That is radical for some of us! It is the embrace of love that leads to transforming truth. What is our basis for this action? The incarnation. God identified with humanity in Christ. He belonged to us, before we believed and before our behavior was changed.
8. This is then, personal before it is propositional. It is the poetry of our lives more than polemics. It is empathy, humility, standing in the moccasins of the other. It is refusing to talk-down. It is visionary, "This is what life in Christ looks like!" It is patient, not forcing a decision. It offers a story which the other person can step into. The story of God.
9. The young generation is open to God more than they are to the institutional church. They are less open to traditional faith than to mysticism and spirituality. They 'feel' before they think. Their hearts have been broken repeatedly. Their relationships are managed digitally – its safer that way.



10. Yet, deep inside, they long to belong. To know a loving Father. To be a part of a caring community. To know that they are loved.

Synopsis:

This chapter is all about belonging, the relational dimension to evangelism. In the past, evangelism was almost exclusively about content, theological propositional truth, and one's assent. But Evangelism as Blessing is about relationships. About love, and being loved, and belonging. It is personal, not institutional. About Christ, before it is about his church. It is not about religion, but spirituality. It allows for mystery – a God who can be known but not fully known. It allows us all to say, "I don't understand, but I choose to trust, to have faith." This is not faith that is a pure leap in the dark. It is faith that is rooted more in the character of God – love, than in understanding God - truth. It is faith as a process, as a journey. It is the story of God and the invitation to walk with Him. His story, we discover, includes our story. And our story is never complete without His story. The story involves content – but the storytelling demands attentiveness, trust, love, a relationship. We come to belong to our stories. We discover ourselves in the story. Stories call out the best in us, they encourage noble behavior. They are gateways to change. God is calling us into His story – of creation, the fall, redemption in Christ, and a sacrificial but triumphant life. He wants us to belong to Him. He wants us to carry His name. To be openly identified with Him.



Evangelism As Blessing

The ultimate connection that anchors the convert, is a sense of belonging. This is a matter of identification, and it is related not only to the church, and its Christian constituents, but specifically to the ‘name of the Lord.’ This is important. God Himself claims us by changing our names, by attaching His name to us.

God told Aaron that He would ‘put his name’ on the people and bless them. They did not belong to Aaron, or Moses, or even to the tabernacle they would erect or to its altar. They belonged to the Lord. The blessing was fulfilled then, not in its mere words, but in this relational connection. As with Israel, it is not merely in *believing* and *behaving* that we are Christians – it is in our *belonging* to God, to one another, to mission and purpose. It is in our identity with God, in Christ, and our willingness to carry his name, and be identified as belonging to him. Yet, belonging cannot be related only to mission and purpose. That is far too cold, too institutional, too utilitarian.

The attachment that fills us with a sense of belonging is the quality of God’s love that we experience. We belong, by being in the arms of God, the Father. We are home. And we feel at home. This is not institutional, but personal. It is not geophysical space that satisfies us, but something transcendent to which we are bound. This is the ‘heart strangely warmed.’ This is the effect of the robe and the ring and the fatted calf and the welcome party that followed (Lk. 15). The reception of the prodigal was not on the basis of his morality – it had been despicable. It was not on the basis of his confession, nor was it without it. His heart was repentant – that was not the problem. He had rehearsed his confession all the way from the pigpen to the father’s gate. He knew standards of his father’s home, and he was fully prepared to rehearse his sin and his failures publicly and take a lower position, not the role of a



son or yet a servant, but that of a hired hand.⁴⁰ He understood truth, but what he did not understand was the depth of the Father's love. For the father, this was the redemption of a lost relationship with his son. His dead son was now alive. It was not about the farm, the wasted money, the soiled family name, or the imposition of a penalty for past failures. No, the father loved the son, and insisted that he belonged to him.

Far too many people in America, in Christendom, are cultural Christians. They consider themselves Christians, but they have never had a life-altering encounter with God. They have never been undone by the love of God or the holiness of God, contrasted with their sin. They do not live out the Biblical values of the Christian faith – but, if asked, they will say, “Yes, I am a Christian.” You cannot tackle their lostness with a direct frontal approach, inditing them for hypocrisy. Such an approach engenders defensiveness and inoculates them against listening. The culture, with an aberrant emphasis on grace, has made Christianity a matter of mental assent to fundamental Christian truths. Grace in such a theological scenario is static. Biblical grace is dynamic. It is not a mere transaction with God; it is transformational and relational in a felt manner. It is not merely positional. It is a radical conversion, a new life, a new heart, a new purpose and mission in life, a new love. It is as

⁴⁰ On a significant first century farm, the owner would typically have paid, on-premises servants – a ready staff. They had the benefit of housing and food, security in all four seasons. This is not what the prodigal son requested. He did not aspire to such a position. Rather, he asked to be considered a hired hand. Such people had to fend for themselves. There was no promised room and board. They were called as needed. At times, their work was seasonal. But such work would have given the son the right to visit his homeplace, to see his father, mother (though she is not mentioned in the text) and his brother, and to experience the nostalgia of the place he had foolishly deserted. The father would have none of that. Nor did he want to hear the confession, the story of his sordid life and his unfortunate waste of family money. He instead, radically welcomed him. The son experienced ‘belonging’ in the father’s arms.



Evangelism As Blessing

personal as it is propositional. It is about Christ, not primarily and first about the church. We belong. We're home.

George Hunter, an evangelism specialist, urges an indirect approach in evangelism. He says we should use narrative as a means of evangelism. The use of story and engaging conversations encourage others to discover Christ⁴¹ in a way they have never known.⁴² Pride blinds those who perceive themselves to be Christians but lack a vital connection to Christ. Wisdom, the work of the Holy Spirit, love and grace, must call them out of their self-deceit and pride. Only God can unwrap such a heart.

In sharing the gospel, the unchurched, and even the cultural Christian is asking, “Is this person who is sharing the faith with me, for me or against me?” Your attitude, your disposition in evangelism is the difference between witnessing from inside a circle or from across a line, whether you are working with someone clearly outside the faith or a cultural Christian. “Is there goodwill here?” they ask. Or we might use the word, “Love.” It is important to keep the presentation grace based. Does it invite the sinner, or the cold Christian, or does it attempt to drive the individual, coercively?

Remember, Christ identified with humanity – that is the essence of the incarnation. Are we Christlike, then, in our evangelism? Are we human, sharing our own experiences, our own story? - feelings, attitudes, doubts, beliefs, values.⁴³ Are we vulnerable and relatable? Or plastic and above the fray, reaching down into the gutter to help the sinner? All this matters. Remember sin alienates. Identification descends into the pit, and tends to the hurting – and yet, that identification with the sin and sinner

⁴¹George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West... Again* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN; 2000), 53.

⁴² Ibid, 52.

⁴³ Ibid, 51.



is not the salvation experience itself. It is a prelude to it. It puts one in the position of saying, “Lord, I believe.” Paul confessed, “I could wish myself accused for my kinsman according to the flesh.” That’s identification. It is the bridge to reach the lost.

Soren Kierkegaard was a 19th century theologian, philosopher and existentialist. He offered numerous tips on evangelism. First, he said, “*Speak personally.*” *He urged intimate, one-on-one evangelism.* William Sweet added, “*to personalize religion is to emotionalize it.*⁴⁴ That is, communicate from your heart and not your head.

Second, Kierkegaard advised, be imaginative, poetic, avoid abstractions. Third, and this is the identification piece – “*Speak to yourself as you address the other.*” Allow the other to feel like they are listening in on your own musings and self-talk – that mutes the force of direct communication and allows them to relax. Fourth, lay out a vision of what the fully dedicated life to Christ is like – a new sense of purpose and mission, a closeness to God in Christ, by the indwelling Holy Spirit. His peace, joy, love, and grace. Hold up models, heroes of the faith, but in not a distant way to be admired, but in a close and proximate manner, to be emulated. Fifth. “Don’t get impatient. Don’t pressure the individual. Don’t force their decision. Respect their freedom and trust God’s grace at work in their lives.” Remember, in witnessing you are the junior partner to the Holy Spirit. Don’t get in his way. Don’t usurp his role.

Walter Fisher taught at the University of Southern California, and authored the book, *Human Communication as Narration*. Fisher challenged the enlightenment’s rationalism that asserted that humans, driven by reason, made their decisions based on the facts, based on the best evidence and arguments. That they lived their lives through rational analysis – a very scientific

⁴⁴ Quoted by George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 53.



Evangelism As Blessing

position. “Nonsense,” he contended. “Humans are ‘story-telling animals.’” We make sense of our world through the prism of story and story lines; the inspiration that stories and their characters provide.

The best communication, he believed, was through narrative. When the storyteller offers a tale that the audience can step into, one to which they can belong, real communication happens. The story being told then becomes the story of the listener – he is in the story, and in that resonance, powerful insight and change is possible. Such stories must be credible. They must ring true.⁴⁵

Young millennials and those in Gen Z are less interested in religion than they are in spirituality. They tend to explore the Eastern faith systems that have an impersonal God – and in the end, those narratives leave them empty. Christianity is personal – because, God, created man in His image, and Jesus is the incarnate expression of God. Christianity’s God has a body – He is known but never fully known. There is mystery in our relationship with God. This allows us all to say, “I don’t understand, but I choose to trust, to have faith.” The Christian faith is never a pure leap in the dark. Our faith that is more rooted in the character of God – His holiness, His unconditional love, His goodness, than in our perfect grasp of theology. Every true believer stands in awe of the Father’s love, though he cannot explain the depths of that love or the degree of God’s holiness, nor the truth of God in Scripture. This is faith as a process, as a journey. It is the story of God and our invitation to walk with Him.

With the end of the enlightenment and the age of rationalism, the modern youth population is now very skeptical of people and institutions, including the church. They doubt any claim to

⁴⁵ George Hunter III, 54.



authority, especially unquestioned authority. They operate less on the rational and more on their own intuition – and they lack trust of authorities, institutions, traditions and the like. They are more prone to exploring spirituality and mysticism, than traditional faith forms held by the church.⁴⁶ They are reached on the continuum of love with stories – stories that resonate with them. They are deeply capable of empathy, often with the wrong causes. They are not rational, but reactionary, pulled in by compassion, even if it lacks a rational basis. They ‘feel,’ and feelings with them are stronger than reason. They need, as rebellious and non-traditional as they are, our love.

George Hunter III recalled a personal incident at a laundromat. Eight people were doing their laundry, and he chatted with each of them. Seven were unchurched. Six had never been involved in a church. However, five indicated an interest in exploring a church – that is interesting. Open people, outside the church, unengaged. There was a caveat. They were interested if the church was interested in them. They were hungry for love – hungry to belong. It is not about the church as an institution, but as the family of God, the body of Christ. This evangelism is more about belonging to Christ, the personal, than belonging to a church, the institutional.

Hunter gave the names to a local pastor asking if he would follow up. The response of the pastor, he said, was telling, “The people who frequent that laundromat aren’t even nice.” The church, at least the pastor, wasn’t interested in six people who were interested in faith. Interested in belonging. Not if the bridge to their belonging was that of unconditional love.⁴⁷ What does that say about the church?

We have to become a safer place for strangers. A place where

⁴⁶ George Hunter III, 103.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 54.



Evangelism As Blessing

outsiders are welcomed, especially those who have tons of questions and ragged lives that don't meet our social-cultural norms. The church is God's house, a house prayer for the nations, one that welcomes those who are yet to believe.

Exercise 16:

1. Believing, behaving, belonging. Where has the emphasis in evangelism been in the past? On believing – beliefs? On behaving – moral change? Or on belonging – the love continuum? What is your current approach to evangelism? The young generation wants to try out the faith, kick the tires, feel from the inside. Are we comfortable with that? Did the disciples exhibit a fully developed faith system before Jesus made them insiders? Or, were they still leaning and growing? Talk about it.
2. What about the use of story in evangelism? Have you ever told your story to someone else about how you came to faith? About your doubts? About your reluctance to commit? About how wonderful it was when Christ set you free and saved you? Why don't reflect on your story, develop it, and look for opportunities to share it. Your story will have elements that others can relate to – and that might be the key to their commitment to Christ. If Christ changed your life, they surmise, he can change their life.
3. Review Kierkegaard's five suggestions for evangelism. What do you think? Helpful? In which of the points do you need more improvement?
4. Finally, consider George Hunter's laundromat story. Are there people out there really that hungry, that



open? And do we prefer people of a certain type at our church? Do we also speak of “those” people in a disdaining manner? Do we love all the lost, or just a certain social class of lost people? Pretty nasty question, right?

ACTION:

- Rehearse your story!
- It is the story of your life – but it isn’t about you. You are not the star in the story of your life. That star is God, in Christ by the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- Your highlight of your story begins at the intersection where God became real to you and you responded to His love. Rehearse that story. Until you can tell it, in a dozen different ways, with a longer and shorter version, always focusing on Christ. Remember, what he did for you, he wants to do for your friend.
- Be open about your questions, your resistance, your running from God and then running into Him because of love’s pursuit.
- Your story is God’s story – and it can become the story of your friend.





Chapter 17

The Evangelism Style of the Celts

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. The overwhelming majority of Christians are silent witnesses—they are uncomfortable with evangelism, or at least, with most current evangelism models. They have adopted a ‘don’t ask; don’t tell’ policy.
2. The prevailing model for personal evangelism has been the lone ranger – with little support or mutual encouragement. That, with a closed culture, discourages only the most determined.
3. Billy Graham used for much of his ministry the Operation Andrew model, partnering Christians to pray together, to encourage one another, and at times, partner in conversations with the lost. These triplets were the key to Billy Graham’s success. Those who worked closely with him will tell you – some crusades were cancelled or put on hold if



Evangelism As Blessing

the prayer triplets were not utilized. Of those who came to the crusade, eighty percent were invited by a friend. It is not content, it is relationships.

4. The Celts used a team approach in relating to pagan villages. The team camped next door. They developed relationships. Served. Listened. Found parallels or contrasts in the tribe's belief system to Biblical truths – Creation, a flood narrative, the nature of God, a Savior theme, eternal life – and they extrapolated from the tribal belief system to the Biblical narrative.
5. They did not use extraction evangelism, pulling tribal converts out of the community. They did the opposite. They used their attachment, inserting Biblical ideas into tribal life, integrating gospel principles.
6. As a team, they prayed together, planned together and inspired one another. They shared challenges and breakthroughs. With multiple teams, they impacted a nation.
7. They drew on the discipline of prayer as solitude. They encouraged a 'soul-friend.' They also took part in a small group of ten or less. They participated in the life of the community. They grew in the experience of ministry and witness.
8. We have been influenced by the Roman model more than that of the Celts. The gospel as presentation contrasted with an invitation into community.
9. Today's converts experience God first through relationships. It is not a decision, but a process. The Celts called this the 'ministry of conversation.'



The Evangelism Style of the Celts

10. The Celts engaged village leaders, seeking their blessing. Then they engaged the people, not to evangelize them, but to befriend them. To understand them. They did not assume a telling position, but one that listened. They mixed with the villagers and invited them to come to their camp and see how they lived and behaved. Community preceded conversion.

Synopsis:

We need to rethink our approach to evangelism. What we have been doing is not working – either for us or for those we are attempting to reach. The change is not subtle. It is not merely a matter of learning a new script. It involves the investment of our time with those we care for who need to know God. It involves thinking about evangelism as a group, to a group – a village, a city. And doing so, not with the goal of winning one or two and extracting them, but winning the village, or a significant enough number to create a community that will endure, and have further impact on the village. It is not an us-against-them mindset, but one of service, love, and conciliation. It seeks integration instead of extraction. It demands that the believer-evangelist maintain a discipline of solitude before God. That he is not alone in his faith and mission journey but relates to both a peer and a small group. This is a team approach, without forgetting personal prayer. It is a model of belonging inside and out. It draws circles instead of lines. It affirms rather than confronts. It is relational, leading with love then truth.



Evangelism As Blessing

Much of the evangelism we have known is one-on-one, as urged by Soren Kierkegaard. One person, engaging another, presenting the gospel message and attempting to solicit a decision.

There is also street preaching, revivals and crusade evangelism. Often, recent approaches to evangelism, as we have noted, have had a confrontational edge to them. Many require learning a script and a bevy of memorized scriptures used as an arsenal. Evangelism feels to some like us-against-them and too adversarial. The great majority of Christians have opted out of evangelism as a result of these approaches – that number, according to some statistics, is as high as 99 percent of all Christians who have adopted a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy about Jesus.

We have encouraged in previous chapters triplets – a kind of mini-support team in which all three are aware of the other’s friends who need Christ and all three are willing to help with engagement and support. This encourages an informal accountability of one another.

The Celts used a team approach. They would identify a village without a church, and as a team, they would engage the villagers in friendship, in conversations, and to ministry toward them (service: acts of kindness) all the while looking for opportunities to witness. The ultimate goal was to establish a church in the village with those who had become believers, but were also members of the community, and then move on. This was not extraction evangelism, but attachment, insertion, the integration of the gospel into the life of the community. They left the witness of changed lives who then attracted others to the church. The Celts believed that, as a team, believers could pray together, think together, inspire and encourage one another onward. Alone, an evangelist was easy



The Evangelism Style of the Celts

prey to discouragement, self-doubt, the dulling of vision, and the dwindling of the inner fire of evangelism.⁴⁸

For a team member to prepare to be a vital well-functioning part of the group, the Celts had a five-fold preparation regiment. First, was solitude. Private prayer and meditation. This was voluntary but essential. Celtic leaders advised their followers, “go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.” This is right out of the tradition of the desert fathers of the Eastern church. Get alone with God – and that has the power to change you. Second, find a “soul-friend,” a peer, who is on the journey with you. Not a pastor, not a spiritual director – but a partner. Be vulnerable and accountable one to the other. Support and challenge each other, as iron sharpens iron. Third, join a small group of ten or less people – again, peers, and yet, with a leader whose life is marked by devotion. Fourth, participate in the life of the community/church – shared meals, work, learning opportunities, biblical readings, prayer times, ministry outreaches, and worship when the entire community was gathered. Finally, learn from evangelism ministry experiences.⁴⁹

The purpose of the multiple engagements was to be rooted in the gospel and scripture. Together, we experience the presence of God and His power for witness. We are moved to fulfill our Christian and we gain confidence as we minister together.

Two distinct models of evangelism are dominant in looking back into church history – the Roman and the Celtic model. In the Roman model, evangelism was a presentation. In the Celtic model, it was embedded in fellowship. In the Roman model, the goal was a decision. In the Celtic model, the goal

⁴⁸ George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West... Again* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN; 2000), 36.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 37.



Evangelism As Blessing

was conversation and ministry. In the Roman model, fellowship was offered following the decision to follow Christ. In the Celtic model, fellowship led. Out of relationships, conversation and ministry, beliefs were engaged with the invitation to commitment to Christ. The Roman model emphasized content, the proposition, the decision, and only then, the relational. The Celtic model emphasized the relational, care, sharing – a more casual approach, an invitation to belong, before the invitation to believe. One is truth based. The other love based. In the first, love follows truth. In the second, truth follows love. The Celts believed, “Christianity is more caught than taught.”⁵⁰ George Hunter asserts that in his work among Gen X and Gen Z converts, they felt like they belonged before they came to believe.

Jesus called his disciples, a rag-tag group, whose faith was inconsistent at best. It was late in his ministry when he asked the question that we might have assumed should have been asked at the beginning, “Who do men say that I am?” And, more probing, “Who do you say that I am?” (Mt. 16:13-15). They belonged, and in their belonging, they came to believe that he was without a doubt, the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

A study by the United Bible Societies of Great Britain is telling. A research team reviewed 360 questionnaires from converts. They interviewed almost half of them – 151. Over 511 converts were from across the denominational spectrum, from Roman Catholic, Anglican to members of ‘free churches.’ John Finney, in *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* reported that today’s converts experience God first through relationships in a community of faith, formal or informal. It is not a decision with this generation; it is a process. In a sense, they are discipled to conversion. Finney noted, “belonging comes before believing.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ George Hunter III, 43.

⁵¹ Ibid, 44.



The Evangelism Style of the Celts

The Celtic model of evangelism impacted whole villages and here is how. First, the Christians were credible. They lived the values of their faith. Second, they engaged the village leaders first and explained their mission, seeking their blessing. Then, establishing their camp next to or near the settlement, they began to engage the people – not evangelize them, but befriend them. They sought to understand them. They did not assume a telling posture, but one that listened. They invited villagers into their community to see how they lived and behaved. That is, community preceded conversion.

In the model Jesus used, he invited those who are exploring, who had not made a decision about him into his circle and gave them opportunity to examine his life and hear his teachings in an intimate context. There, they heard the gospel, the message that invited faith in Christ as Savior and Lord.

Anselm, an early church father, called theology “faith seeking understanding.” The Celtic model gave inquirers the space to ‘seek understanding’ as they explored faith. A key part of the Celtic evangelism model was conversation. They called it ‘the ministry of conversation.’ Dialogue. Back and forth processing. Questioning was not only permitted but encouraged.

Another feature of Celtic evangelism was their flexibility. They did not have a one-size-fits-all wineskin. They allowed each community latitude in forging out a profile of communal faith. They adapted to the culture. Their approach was indigenous, bottom-up, inside-out, and not top down, outside in. The values were solid, but the culture and customs created varied from community to community. Many mission movements utilize extraction, extracting new converts from the old culture. Often called a ‘slash and burn’ mission strategy, it goes head-to-head with the existing culture and its faith practices.



Evangelism As Blessing

The Celts looked for parallels in the indigenous faith, and drew on those, to help the transition to Biblical faith. They built on the native's belief in God, for example, pointing out the uniqueness of the Christian's God. They clarified creation accounts, pointing to God's goodness, His sovereignty. From existing belief systems, they helped the people construct a Christian worldview.⁵²

Exercise 17:

1. Take a moment and review the contrast between the Roman model of evangelism and the Celtic model. Talk about the differences.
2. After reading this, how important is belonging, the relationship piece in evangelism? Discuss this with another person. Why? Why does it seem to precede believing?
3. Review the five aspects of Celtic preparation for evangelism engagement. Does your evangelism ministry use a model like this?
4. What do you think about the team approach? About a missionary team evangelizing a non-Christian village or neighborhood successfully?
5. One of the keys to village transformation used by the Celts is that they avoided extraction evangelism. Talk about that. Do you understand the concept? Do you think we do a bit of that today?

⁵² George Hunter III, 104-105.



The Evangelism Style of the Celts

ACTION:

- To fully employ the Celtic model, you need a group, a community committed to a new approach to evangelism. But that is not where you need to begin. The Celtic model rose on the back on one person – Patrick.
- Begin with your own solitude. Take prayer seriously. Remember, while prayer is at its heart worship, it is always missional at its edge. Pray with both your own transformation in mind, and with mission in view. Give yourself to God in worship and make yourself available to do His work.
- Then, look for one or two others who want to forge a new approach to evangelism – these are your peers. This is your Operation Andrew group. Think – you always find Paul in a group. At the end of his letters, it is not uncommon for him to mention numerous people. This is community. It was the context for Paul's effective ministry. This is how he planted churches, at times, in a matter of months.
- Begin with prayer. Find a peer – and then peers until you have a small group committed to explore 'group evangelism.' That is evangelism by a group, to a group; in a neighborhood to a neighborhood; in a workplace to a workplace; in a town or city, to the city.





Chapter 18

Being the Good News

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. We should *be* good news before we try to *share* good news.
2. It is not just the *words* that the unchurched need to hear, but the *music*. That comes from the beauty of the indwelling Christ. We don't *have* the message, as much as we *are* the message. What we say with our lives must be as evident as what we say with our lips.
3. When love is seen, the message is heard. Truth may be the words, but love is the music. We too often share the gospel without music.
4. Evangelism is explaining the change in our lives and how that change occurred, and further, how it can happen in the lives of others.
5. God's model has always been to live among humans – to walk in their garden, to walk with



Evangelism As Blessing

them, to ‘tabernacle’ among them, and then, to wrap Himself in flesh and live, in Jesus, the Christ, as a man. This is the incarnation.

6. Incarnation is God’s method of ministry – identification, radical identification. He became truth which was ‘open to view, transparent.’ God moved in next door and became our neighbor. He identified with us, without being identical to us.
7. Evangelism happens in three stages – presence, proclamation and persuasion. We have emphasized proclamation and persuasion with too little attention to presence.

Synopsis:

The great emphasis that we have placed on content in evangelism, on proclamation: the right words, and persuasion, has often missed the more important non-verbal element – presence. We must be present – by identification and empathy, sincerely relating to the lost. God must also be present – and not assumed. This is the critical element that we have consistently overlooked – God among us, incarnation as a foundation for proclamation. This is more costly than words. Taking the short-cut, we have grown increasingly ineffective in evangelism, until the great majority of believers have given up on evangelizing either family or friends. God among us, in Christ, changed the trajectory of the world. And the apostolic church, adopting the model of care, of relating, of being, impacted the Roman Empire. God wants to live among the lost – in us, and through us. We want to live apart from the lost. As a result, we say the words, declaring the claims of the gospel, but our words are without the music. They truth without love, and unimpressive. To join the song, those around us need to hear the music. We must identify with the



world – its pain and problems, its fallenness and disintegration, but we must not be identical to it. We live the alternative. The truth we offer is ‘open to view... unconcealed and transparent,’ not in what we say, but in who we are in Christ and what is evident in our lives. We don’t merely share good news; we are good news.

The late Joe Aldrich believed Christians were to *be* good news before they *shared* good news.⁵³ This is called incarnating the gospel, before we proclaim the gospel. Aldrich continued, “The *music* of the gospel must precede the *words* of the gospel and prepare the context in which there will be a hunger for those words.”⁵⁴ That is, the words are to be *incarnated* before they are *articulated*. People see a vision of the gospel that we say we believe, one that is evident in our attitudes and action, before we say a word in witness.

These are stunning presuppositions to evangelism. The challenge, according to Aldrich, is not with the unconverted, but with the Christian, the messenger.

“The music of the gospel is the beauty of the indwelling Christ as lived out in the everyday relationships of life. The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ has solved the problem of man’s sin and offers him the potential of an exchanged life, a life in which the resources of God Himself are available for his transformation.”⁵⁵

The age-old truism still rings out, “When *love* is seen, the message is heard.” Again, we don’t *have* the message, we *are* the message. Witness is not a verb, but a noun (Acts 1:8).

⁵³ Joseph Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Multnomah Press: Portland, OR, 1981), 20.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.



Evangelism As Blessing

Aldrich observes that much of our evangelism training is focused on what words to say and how to say them.⁵⁶ Saying the words of the gospel without the gospel itself having seized our lives is hollow. Aldrich says, “Once the *music* has been heard, expect to be asked for the ‘reason for the hope (beauty) that you have.’”⁵⁷

Evangelism then, is “expressing what I possess in Christ, and explaining how I came to possess it.”⁵⁸ Evangelism puts God’s character, reflected in our lives, on display – His love and faithfulness, His justice and righteousness. To evangelize the world, God called Israel and gave them the tabernacle (God’s presence in their midst) and the tablets (the law). One showed them how to worship, the other, how they should walk. He called the entire nation to be a kingdom of priests – but Israel declined the offer. He then sent prophets, but their hearts were hardened. He sent them into exile, and they came back more closed to mission to the world than before.

In the end, God wrapped Himself in flesh and came to the earth disguised as a man. John said he tabernacled among us. Like the tabernacle that was erected in the center of Israel’s wilderness camp, so God pitched His tent in Christ, and dwelt, lived, among men. God sent a man – the man Jesus, the Christ. And God still sends men to accomplish His purposes and complete His mission. Men who ‘tabernacle’ among other men, hosting God’s presence.⁵⁹ Here, men meet grace and truth. The Greek word for truth is *aletheia*, “that which is open to view... unconcealed and transparent.” The Hebrew word is *emeth*, meaning secure, solid, firm. It is the idea of trustworthiness

⁵⁶ Joseph Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Multnomah Press: Portland, OR, 1981), 21.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 29.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 30.



and reliability. The Lord is ‘full of truth.’ His life is open, transparent, with nothing to hide, free of deception, with no intent to conceal or cover something up.⁶⁰

Remember, Aldrich says, *identification* with the world is not the same as being *identical* with it. Christ was effective due to his radical identification with the world, while being radically different. This radical identification was different than other religions in which their gods kept their distance. Not so with Christianity. God, in the incarnation, radially identified with the fallen human race, and in his ministry, despite that radical identification, his radical difference, his deity burst through.⁶¹ Even his disciples were amazed, “What manner of man is this?”

Neighbor means to be near or close. To be a neighbor is to develop the capacity to be near, to get close to someone, to settle down beside them. Evangelism effectiveness is related to the ability to become, to adapt. Paul said that he had “become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (I Cor. 9:22). To the Jews, he related as a Jew. To non-Jews, he drew on his Greek and Roman heritage. To those devoted to the law, he observed the law. He became a slave to everyone to win as many as possible (I Cor. 9:19-23). We have placed the emphasis in doing evangelism on what we need to *know* to evangelize. Paul placed the emphasis on what we needed to *become*, how we adapted, and related and built bridges. Evangelism is then as much about *identity* as it is *information*. How do we relate? What posture do we take? What identity do we claim?

Aldrich, quoting James Jauncey, notes, “buttonholing a stranger, witnessing to him and pressing him for a decision will

⁶⁰Joseph Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Multnomah Press: Portland, OR, 1981), 31.

⁶¹ Ibid, 54.



Evangelism As Blessing

likely do more harm than good. Most responsible people react negatively and often quite violently to this kind of assault. It shows a fundamental lack of respect for human dignity and personality.”⁶² We must adopt models of care, of being, of loving. What impacted Rome was the care of the believers of the throwaways, the babies, along with the elderly, left in the streets to die. The church took such folks in, so much so that they became known as gatherings of old folks and children. This love ultimately rocked the Empire.

Aldrich sees evangelism in three stages – presence, proclamation and persuasion.⁶³ Persuasion is primarily a work of the Holy Spirit with encouragement by the evangelist. Proclamation is exposure to the scriptures – by Bible reading, a book or literature, personal sharing, an invitation into a Bible study or an Alpha course. Here, this stage is complete only after someone has heard the words, the message, and understood. Presence is the foundational movement. Here the music more than the words, matter. This is where the unbeliever gets a taste of the *ethos* of true Christianity – love and unity, good works and deeds, a resilient sense of hope, acceptance, understating, the invitation to belong. Here, for the first time, the unbeliever encounters the presence of God – a drawing, attractional dynamic. Hearing the music opens them to hearing the proclamation, the words. And that brings them to a place of persuasion – encouraged by us but orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. The person listens because they sense love. Truth engagement must follow love. As is stated often, “People don’t care how much we know (proclamation) until they know how much we care (presence).”

⁶² James Jauncey, quoted by Joseph Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Multnomah Press: Portland, OR, 1981), 84.

⁶³ Joseph Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Multnomah Press: Portland, OR, 1981), 82.



Exercise 18:

1. Review the idea of being good news before you share good news. Earlier, Aldrich introduced this idea of words (gospel content) and music (the incarnational). Make sure you understand the point he is making.
2. Rehearse the three stages of evangelism and talk about how they differ and how they relate to one another.
3. Aldrich places a lot of emphasis on Paul's adaptation to each culture, his becoming all things to all men. This is striking, isn't it? First, Paul's ability to move in and out of diverse cultures is admirable. But his willingness to adapt to those cultures, to present himself in a manner that was not offensive to the culture and invited their acceptance – that is striking. It is sacrificial. Do you agree?

ACTION:

- To whom can you be a neighbor? An unchurched family member, friend, work associate, a community leader?
- This is relational – an investment of time. It allows the unchurched or the one who has not made a full commitment to Christ, to see you up close – when the bad-news phone call comes, when the waiter spills hot coffee on your newly pressed suit, when the traffic is going nowhere, when you are caught in some storm.
- Make a list of unchurched family, friends, work associates, neighbors – and then add a community leader to the list. Be open to a stranger that God may put into your path.
- Pray over this list for ten days or so. Ask yourself, as



Evangelism As Blessing

you call out these names, are you consistently drawn to one or more? Make a note. Divide the list in three sections – most open, ambivalent, mostly closed. The open list should number at least 3-5 persons including the one or two to whom you are consistently drawn when you pray.

- You can't manage more than a handful, so pray daily over the most open on the list. Pray weekly over the entire list. Don't be surprised if you get a call or have a chance meeting with someone on your ambivalent or mostly closed list. Make adjustments. Follow the Holy Spirit.
- As you pray for those who are most-open, develop a strategy – a card, a text, an email, a reach-out. And with a positive response – coffee, lunch, some other connecting activity. Go with those who are most open but keep reviewing and praying over your entire list.
- The goal is to establish a bridge of love and genuine care. You must ask this question: Would you be willing to be their friend if you were not attempting to win them to Christ? Is your love for them unconditional or motivated by an ulterior motive, though noble. They will know and you should know your own heart. “God commends His love to us as sinners” – He loves the world. And He does so one person at a time.





Chapter 19

Relational Evangelism

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. The most productive group of evangelists in the church are new converts. And yet, we constrain this group, doubtful of their readiness to evangelize. They don't win others due to head knowledge, but by the evidence of the change in their life.
2. As they share their newfound faith, they grow in it. They learn the answers to the questions they are being asked by unchurched friends. They may lack in head knowledge, theology, but they excel in the testimony of their new relationship with Christ.
3. This approach to evangelism and discipleship is relational, not institutional. These new converts are discipled by the Holy Spirit and mentors as they stand in the middle between Christ and their lost friends. They do so with broken hearts and a longing to see them experience what they now know as truth.



Evangelism As Blessing

4. Relational evangelism is not about *what* you know, but *who* you have come to know; not knowledge as much as *authenticity*. It is not outside-outside-in, but rather, it uses existing relational networks.

Synopsis:

We are afraid of new converts making a mistake in theology as evangelists. We see them as too green. In truth, it is their zealous, sincere authenticity that often makes them more effective than seasoned Christians. Like new couples – their love is fresh. Seasoned Christians too often get hurt, grow cynical, develop doubts – and you can't convince others of truth that you yourself are doubting. Trust the Holy Spirit and bless new converts. Allow them to infect their friends with the fresh experience of their new life in Christ. Be a grandparent – mentor them and help them care for those who they have won to Christ. But don't take responsibility away from them. It is the secret to their growth and development. It is not what they know, that makes them effective, but who they know. It is not the depth of their knowledge but the profound freshness of the change in their lives. The most effective evangelism is with insider relationships – and these new converts still have unchurched friends. They may not have the gift of evangelism, but the Holy Spirit will use the motivational gifts they have – mercy, encouragement, giving, teaching, etc. (Rom. 12:4-8). Grace unsurprisingly flows through those native gifts. And inside our network of friends, it will flow more naturally. They know these unchurched friends, and they care about them – and that relational connection is magic. Encourage them to listen. And wait – to not force a flower open. We want our friends to want to hear what happened to change our life.



Barbara and I have five children, four girls and a son. We lost one child in a miscarriage. We have twenty wonderful grandchildren. When our children began to have children, it was delightful. Grandchildren!

But time flies, and suddenly our grandchildren began to have children. I was horrified. It was not the same. Our grandchildren were having babies. “They are too young to have babies. The babies are not safe with them. They are still children themselves.” Yesterday, they were brats, and today, they are bringing up children. Unthinkable. What was God thinking?

In the church, our most productive group is new converts. They are deeply and freshly in love with the Lord. They have friends who they can lead to Christ, friends who witnessed the dramatic change in them. We too often conclude that they are not mature enough to care for these newborns. We offer them institutional discipleship and make it a class at church. We encourage a break with their unsaved friends – and demand more Bible knowledge before they witness. This is a mistake.

It is in their sharing of faith that their faith is confirmed. It is in their parenting, winning others to Christ, that they grow, with the support of a larger Christian family around them. They run into questions, and need answers, and getting them, they mature. It is in this middle that they grow into stable believers. The very middle from which the institutional approach excuses them.

Contrary to the traditional idea, effective evangelism does not depend on lots of Biblical knowledge or as we have noted earlier, memorized scriptures or a script. Here are five principles regarding relational evangelism. First, what you *know* is not as important as what you *are* – a believer, a follower of Jesus Christ. Second, the most effective evangelism takes



Evangelism As Blessing

place in insider relationships – between *friends*, not strangers. It begins with people with real names. Third, it does not utilize only the gift of evangelism. The person with the gift of helps might win someone to the Lord, and the one with the gift of mercy might also lead someone to know a loving God. The gift of evangelism flourishes in the context of the *full range of giftedness* – all focused on the lost. Aldrich notes that the gift of hospitality has explosive potential in evangelism.

Fourth, the incarnational/relational approach is effective because it is so *natural*. It allows the Holy Spirit to do all the heavy lifting. It is low pressure and long range, and we are not to be in a hurry. It plants seeds, waters them, and waits. Fifth, the relationship creates the context for sharing, for discipling, for ongoing *encouragement*. The content of the gospel makes sense, its meaning comes alive, when it is unwrapped in context where the gospel is already being lived. The words have more impact, meaning, when the music is already playing.

To share the gospel with no gospel evidence is baffling. But to share the gospel where love is being demonstrated and grace is on the table, the unbeliever not only hears the gospel, but they also see it, smell it, and taste it. The relational approach is not only the launching pad for gospel engagement; it is also the support system for discipleship. Once the individual makes the decision and commits to follow Christ, and experiences transforming grace, they infect their oikos, their web of unsaved friends, and now, multiplication takes place.⁶⁴

Here in a nutshell is the process. You create space, a sense of openness and sincere interest that allows the other party to share their story with you. That's step one. Make sure you defer to them. In the next meeting, they may have more to tell

⁶⁴ Joseph Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism*, 84-85.



you after reflection. You wait for the opportunity to ask them if you can share your story with them. When appropriate you do that. Your story introduces Christ – it has to. It is the most important chapter in your life. Now, you want to tell ‘His’ story – and that includes the principles of salvation.

- **STAGE ONE:** Ask the question, “Where are you in your spiritual pilgrimage.”

CAUTION: You should have spent enough time with them that they know that you are a Christian and that you care about them. This cannot be a cold question. It must be warm and inviting.

- **STAGE TWO:** They respond positively and tell you THEIR story – or at least part of it. You WAIT. They may need time to process their openness to you, their vulnerability. They need to continue to feel safe and be in charge of the disclosure.
- **STAGE THREE:** When appropriate, you ask for permission to share YOUR story. That story will include your encounter with Christ, but it will not be the gospel presentation itself. “Bill, I loved hearing your story. Thanks for sharing it.” Pause – wait for a response, anything they might want to add. Don’t rush – this is a major flaw in the failed evangelism model we have been using.

When appropriate, you continue, *“At some point, I would love to tell you a bit about my journey – maybe the next time we are together.”*

Leave it there! Don’t force the issue. Too much ground in one session, and you miss the gold under your feet. You don’t want to force your story on them; you want them to welcome your telling it.



Evangelism As Blessing

- **STAGE FOUR:** What you hope for is, that ‘Bill’ will say to you the next time you meet together, “You were going to tell me about your life, background and a bit of your journey!”

And with that open door, you share your story – highlighting your conversion.

Again, don’t press, at this point, for a conversion. Give them a chance to process your story, and ask any questions they might have or make an comments they choose.

You can say, “I told you my story, but there are some principles that helped me change and begin my journey with God. At some point I would love to share those principles with you.”

You need them to want to hear those principles.

CAUTION: We make a mistake by pressing for a quick decision, by not giving them time to decide, “I want to hear more!” Or by putting them in a position where they say, “Let’s not talk about this anymore.” We don’t allow the Holy Spirit to quietly work in their life. Further, for them to want to hear the ‘principles’ from us, they need to have some admiration for us and the life we live.

- **STAGE FIVE:** “Hey, you were going to share some principles about how your life changed?”

CAUTION: If, they do not, after a reasonable time, take the initiative, gently repeat the offer, “If you are open, I would love to finish the conversation we were having earlier about our spiritual journeys. I think I have some principles that might help you



process where you are – they sure were a blessing to me.” Meanwhile, there may be life issues that occur in which you can offer prayer and support. And you may have presenting life challenges that allow your friend to see you up close and personal. Both of those may trigger the next step.

It's simple:

- You open the spiritual conversation.
- They tell their story.
- You affirm them, thank them, and ask permission to tell your story.
- You tell your story.
- You tell his story.

STAGE ONE

Aldrich advises, when you sense an openness in your friend, you might test the water. “Bill, we have never had a chance to talk about your religious background. At what point are you in your own spiritual pilgrimage?”⁶⁵ The question is not, “Are you a Christian?” Rather, it is a general question, not meant to corner the individual or make them uncomfortable. It is an open question. It can easily be avoided, or it could begin a meaningful dialogue that launches a process, a journey toward discovery.

STAGE TWO

Once you ask that initial pilgrimage question, you may get silence or an immediate flood of ideas and opinions, glimpses into the life of your friend. They may share their story in stops

⁶⁵ Joseph Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism*, 221.



Evangelism As Blessing

and starts, in pieces. Chances are, they have never reviewed their life in this manner before. If they share, even glimpses into their private life, their heart, you have had a positive session. Don't break down the bridge. Don't force the salvation issue. Thank them for sharing their story with you. Pray with them, or for them, if appropriate.

STAGE THREE

When you are together again, affirm them. Show genuine interest. You might ask, "How is that relationship with your daughter?" – you don't want to pry. But you want to indicate an openness to hear their continuing story. Too few people have friends who are willing to listen nonjudgmentally. So, they find ways to medicate their pain – with a hobby, by drinking, using drugs, or by angry episodes or depression episodes. "How is that situation we talked about last time, any better?" Focus on them, their openness to and their need for God. Be genuine. Go slow. Be natural.

Say at the end, "Sometime, if you are open, I would like to share with you how my life was so radically changed." Or "How I beat alcoholism." Or "How my marriage was saved." Or "How we won back the heart of our daughter." Let the offer simmer. They may have just unpacked a ton of emotional baggage, stuff they do not regularly process themselves. Give them some time. You don't want to press too hard – forcing a flower open only ruins it. Let the Holy Spirit work.

You know that your story in some ways, parallels the pain of your friend and introduces Christ as a living solution. Your story should not be a deep dive into your sinful past – after all, you are telling it for the benefit of your friend, to find point of resonance with his life. Its less about you and more about Christ and his love for your friend.



STAGE FOUR

Tell your story. Then offer prayer. Leave it there.

You might say, “Bill, exploring Christ by inviting him into your life is the only way to really discover who God is. Maybe the next step God has is to help you understand how to establish that personal, saving relationship, how to invite Christ into your heart. It is really a matter of responding to his love.” Again, you let the comment simmer. That’s courteous. It’s gentle, but it is also direct.

If you sense resistance, don’t press. Here is another way to make the offer. “Bill, underneath my story are some ‘good news’ principles. Those principles changed my life, and I think they would be helpful to you. Whenever you are at the point where you would allow me to share, let me know.” You leave it there, empowering them to open the door and do ‘the ask.’ You might get a brush off or a vague response.

If on the other hand, you sense openness, say, “Next time we get together, I would love to share some simple principles that changed my life. They might help you understand what it means to have a deep personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”

You have gently dropped the idea of a further discussion, multiple times, and your desire to share principles with them. Just your presence, your being with them, along with the work of the Holy Spirit, is a reminder.

If there is no open door for you to share next time you are together, don’t push. Give them time and space. You want them to ask you, “When are you going to share those principles you keep talking about with me?”

Now you have an open heart. You don’t want them to burn the



Evangelism As Blessing

bridge because they anticipate a gospel assault each time you are together.

Before you move on, read Acts 26:1-23. This is the account of Paul before King Agrippa, telling his story.

- In verses 4-11, Paul summarizes his life before he met Christ. “My manner of life from my youth,” he begins (26:4).
- Then in verses 12-18, he talks about his conversion experience. “At midday... I saw a light... brighter than the sun!” (v. 13).
- In verses 19-23, he talks about his post-conversion life, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision... [I] declared [the gospel.]” in Damascus and Jerusalem, in Judea and to the Gentiles, “the Jews seized me... [and I] having obtained help from God, to this day I stand witnessing to small and great...” (vv. 19-22).

This a three-point outline: 1) What your life was like before you received Christ; 2) How God spoke to you and opened your eyes to spiritual truth; 3) How your life has changed since being forgiven and following Christ.

STAGE FIVE

Once you have shared your story, the most important story is God’s story, the story of Christ. “Bill, do you think you are at the point where you might consider opening your heart to Christ and beginning a journey of discovery with him?”

You have listened to their story, and you have shared your story. And you have kept caring and loving and connecting, and not assuming a readiness on their part to jump into baptismal waters. You have tried to be sensitive and to follow the lead of



the Holy Spirit. You have allowed them to set the pace without dropping your concern for their spiritual life. Now they are open. What do you say?

The Four Spiritual laws are a basic model for sharing faith. They begin with the *love* God, “God loves you and He has a wonderful plan for your life.” But there is a *problem*, “Sin separates us from a holy God.” There is also a solution, “Christ came to seek and save, and his death is counted for us as *redemption*. He is our bridge back to God.” Finally, action is required. “You must receive Christ as your Savior, inviting him into your life! And then you will experience his love and begin your journey of following him.”

Here are some additional models of evangelism:

Here is a quick overview of some gospel narratives:

THE FOUR SPIRITUAL LAWS

- God loves you (John 3:16; 10:10), and He has a plan for your life.. **GOD'S LOVE.**
- As flawed humans (that includes you and me), our sin has separated us from a holy God. (Romans 3:23; 6:23). **OUR SIN.**
- Jesus Christ is God's only provision for our sin. (Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3 – 6; John 14:6). There is no other way of salvation. **JESUS – OUR PROVISION.**
- We must individually, each of us, personally, pray, believe, and them receive, welcome Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (John 1:12; 3:1 – 8; Ephesians 2:8 – 9; Revelation 3:20). **OUR PRAYER – BELIEVING AND RECEIVING.**



Evangelism As Blessing

STEPS TO PEACE WITH GOD (Billy Graham Method)

- **Gods plan** – Peace and life (God loves you and wants you to experience His peace and life. The Bible says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16)
- **Our Problem** – Separation (Being at peace with God is not automatic. God gave us free will to choose and we chose to disobey him. This is what separates us from God).
- **God's Remedy** – The Cross: Jesus Died on the cross and rose again. Paying the penalty for our sins, Jesus bridged the gap between us and God.
- **Our Response** – Receive Christ: We must trust and receive Christ as our Lord and Savior (John 1:12).

THE ROMAN ROAD

- Romans 3:23 – “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- Romans 6:23 – “For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- Romans 5:8 – “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we still sinners Christ died for us.”
- Romans 10:9 – “If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”
- Romans 10:13 – “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”



THE G.O.S.P.E.L JOURNEY

- **G**od created us to be with Him (Genesis 1-2).
- **O**ur sins separate us from Him (Genesis 3).
- **S**ins Cannot be Removed by good deeds (Isaiah 64:6).
- **P**aying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again (John 19:30).
- **E**veryone who trusts in him alone has eternal life (1 John 5:11-13).
- **L**ife with Jesus starts now and lasts forever (John 10:10).

THE 5 FINGER METHOD

Here are five key components of the Gospel.

- Jesus' virgin birth
- Jesus' sinless life
- Jesus' atoning death
- Jesus' literal resurrection
- Jesus' ascension and present enthronement

TESTIMONY GOSPEL METHOD

As you develop relationships, people should notice differences in your life – your speech, your manner, graciousness, and more. It is not uncommon for some people to ask about your life choices. “Why don’t you ever go out with us to get a drink? ... Is the book on your desk a Bible? ... I don’t understand why you



Evangelism As Blessing

are not upset – I am blistering mad about what just happened... Hey, we are doing a Sunday barbecue, I would really like for you to come.”

Always respond with grace. With a smile. Find a way to answer the question or respond to the invitation in a non-condemning manner. You neither want to be condescending and holier-than-thou nor condoning of behaviors about which you have convictions. “Sometime I would really like to talk with you about that if your question is sincere, and you really want to know. Could we do that? Are you sincerely asking me?”

Keep nurturing the relationship until you sense an openness and a readiness to listen. However, if may not be best to jump into your end of the pool. You might want to go back to STAGE ONE. “You asked me a question, but before I answer it, could I ask you something first?” If the answer is yes, ask them the spiritual pilgrimage question. “Tell me where you are in your spiritual journey.”

Allow an opportunity for them to share their story. Listening is a quicker way to build a relational bridge than talking or telling. You have demonstrated an interest in them and have invested time in hearing their story. They will be more open to your story, and the answers to the questions they asked you. You want to keep these exchanges discreet and for the most part private. However, someone may hear the fellow worker ask you why you don’t drink or swear or lose your temper. And they may say to you, “I’d like to hear the answer to that question too!”



Exercise 19:

1. We have avoided using pre-rehearsed gospel presentations, but the Four Spiritual Laws are more like an outline for the evangelist – It begins with God and His love. It notes the problem of sin. It introduces the solution – the cross, Christ death in our place. It calls for the action of receiving Christ. Have you used this evangelism model? Have you found it effective?
2. There are multiple reasons to argue with this presentation. Some would say, like other presentations, it is rational – more head than heart. Others would suggest that it trivializes sin, not dealing with it soberly. Still others, that it makes the cross too glib, taking the death of Christ too lightly, and ignoring the resurrection. And finally, the emphasis is, as in many presentations, on our receiving Christ and not his receiving us. There is little repentance and all in all, it can be just another rote gospel presentation. but the movement – God, Sin, Christ, Faith can also be expanded. Talk about it.
3. Analyze the questions Aldrich uses and try them on – are they questions you could use?
4. Aldrich suggest that the first movement is the person being willing to unpack their own story, and that might not leave time for gospel engagement – with him, that is okay. He is suggesting that you allow for time for the individual's hunger to develop. Do you agree?
5. Early in the chapter, five principles for relational evangelism were noted. Review them.



Evangelism As Blessing

ACTION:

- Pay special attention to the series of questions, the process, the movement, the stages in the evangelism engagement illustrated by Joe Aldrich.
- Review the six evangelism narratives – don't lean completely on one. Pick at least two, three is preferable.
- The relationship is the premier thing to be preserved. Pressing too hard, moving to fast, could close the door, and then, not only will conversion not take place, but there is no relationship for discipleship. To sacrifice the relationship for a quick decision is contrary to the gospel itself.
- Notice the stages in Aldrich's model. This is a bit more complex than the FIVE STAGES above. I have integrated the two below.
 - ✓ **STAGE ONE:** KNOCK, KNOCK: First, sensing openness, you test the waters and listen to your friend and assess where they are spiritually.
 - ✓ **STAGE TWO:** WAIT, WAIT: Second, give them space and time to share their story with you – and that might take a while.

GRATITUDE: Third, be grateful. Thank them for sharing their spiritual journey. That was a huge indication of openness. They may have confessed doubts, hurt by other Christians, anger at God for some loss in their life or other things. Their story should have given you a sense of the degree to which the door of their heart is open. Thank them and make a gentle suggestion about sharing your journey with them – let that suggestion simmer



even if they immediately prop the door wide open.

RELATIONAL SPACE: Fourth, their sharing is the first major green light for you. You can't do a lot until they open their heart and trust you to share spiritual things. Once they share in a way they rarely have, they need time to process. And you need to give the Holy Spirit, your senior partner, time to work. You want them to express hunger. You don't want to dominate the relationship. It must be mutual. You make the offer, give them the right to decide without pressure.

- ✓ **STAGE THREE: PATIENCE. IT'S YOUR MOVE.** Fifth, at the appropriate time, if you have kept the relationship warm, you repeat your earlier gentle offer, "I am praying for you. And I would love to share my story with you – when you are ready. I think we might have some things in common." As before, you want them to take the initiative. You want to share your story and the gospel, but through an open door, to a receptive heart.

SENSITIVITY. Sixth, keep praying. Look for ways to connect your friend with others with whom they might develop a relationship. That creates a team and enlarges the chances of your friend hearing the gospel.

- ✓ **STAGE FOUR: IT'S MY MOVE.** *Seventh*, when the door opens, be ready to share. Rehearse your story beforehand. Rely on the Holy Spirit. He opened the door. He will whisper WHAT to say,



Evangelism As Blessing

HOW to say it, and WHEN to say it (Col. 4:2-6). Walk in wisdom. Seize the right moment. Pray for the right answer to their questions.

I'VE GOT MORE GOOD NEWS: *Eighth*, Suggest the next step, “I think the only way you will know the truth of this, and the love of God is to trust him. There are some principles that I think could help you. Maybe we could talk about them next time.

- ✓ **STAGE FIVE: HIS STORY!** *Ninth*. Now you are at Stage Five, the gospel. You probably shared nuggets in your own story – but your story, though it includes a gospel encounter, is not His story. It is not the gospel. Be prepared.

HERE IS THE GOOD NEWS OFFER: *Tenth*. Be systematic, deliberate and intentional. Depending on the model you are using, it may be good to have an open Bible to point out scriptures. Ask if they have one. If not, buy one – and use it to guide them through the gospel narrative. Mark up the passages so they will find them easily. Pray with them. Offer to continue to connect and disciple them.





Chapter 20

Honest Answers – With Love, Truth and Power

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. It must be said again, memorized approaches with leading questions that constitute manipulative dialogue don't work with the youth culture. Cookie-cutter approaches to evangelism are not what Paul advocates in Colossians 4:2-6. He emphasizes an evangelism that is sensitive to the open door, the receptive heart, that looks to God for what to say, and how and when to say it. This demands deep dependence on the Holy Spirit, who witnesses with us.
2. We want to 'give honest answers to honest questions.'
3. The three gateways to evangelism are truth, love and power.
4. They don't work independently – they work together, like a three-fold cord.
5. Beware of witnessing or telling someone about God in the place of introducing them to God.



Evangelism As Blessing

Synopsis:

There are a number of themes and ideas that you are finding that are repeated in this booklet. These are not one-and-done ideas. They deserve more than a mention, more than one airing. One of these ideas involves the gateways through which the gospel is transmitted. These are like frequencies. Some people, like Lydia, are tuned to truth, they are seeking truth – and true truth resonates with them. The slave girl was possessed. Her mind was twisted in such a manner that only deliverance, on the a power encounter with the Holy Spirit could liberate her to understand truth or respond to love. Others, like the jailor, are uninterested until they are in a crisis and uncommon love is shown to them. They may have heard elements of truth without an impact. They may have heard about some deliverance, as in the slave girl, but they remain hardened and distant. But when Paul sacrificed his freedom to preserve the life of the jailor, his eyes were opened to the gospel. Each person responds to a different frequency – truth, power or love. You have to learn to use all three gateways. Where truth and love meet, there is saving power. Love can't save us – we need truth. Power does not reach the heart, we need sacrificial love. Truth without love is bitter, and without power, it is impotent.

Obviously, in the last chapter, I suggested some evangelism models. You need a starting point. I also suggested that you might want to study and commit to memory at least two, preferably three, of these models. That being said, it should be clear that formulas and cookie-cutter approaches are not the best tools for reaching the current generation and culture. They fail to consider the differences between people. Some need to hear the message of love, others need to be jolted by the necessity of repentance.



Honest Answers - With Love, Truth and Power

Some, like C. S. Lewis, will be surprised by God's joy. For others, the path will include deep remorse and brokenness. Some are wounded, and fearful of even trusting God. For some, the image of God as Father is an impediment. Others try to enter the door of conversion with baggage – old beliefs, remnants of the faith system they have relied on in the past, habits, even demonic strongholds. Every case is different.

It was the practice of Francis and Edith Schaffer's L'Abri to always "give honest answers to honest questions." Too often, traditional evangelism has rushed to close the deal. Such an approach disregards the person, only forcing them, like mice, through the gospel maze and out on the saved side. One model suggests that questions are always a smokescreen – and witnessing Christians are encouraged to ignore them. Run through the red lights, and keep the presentation going, looking for the right responses and the desired conclusion – and you will have another gospel scalp.

Keep Acts 16 in mind.

- Lydia was saved on the continuum of *truth* (Acts 16:13-15)
- The slave girl by a manifestation of *God's power* (Acts 16:16-18).
- The jailer by a display of *love* (Acts 16:25-34).

All three of these – *truth, power and love* - are gateways to conversion. They are not independent of one another. Love and truth are always bound together, and at the intersection where they meet, we experience God's saving power. The greatest truth is the love of God; and truth without love is not truth, only a wrapping for a lie. It is less than *true* truth; less than truth that trues.

Where truth and love meet, there is liberating, life-giving power. All three components are essential for true salvation. One may experience God's love – but not embrace the truth



Evangelism As Blessing

that requires repentance and reorders our life. One may repent and be deeply sorrowful and start a loveless journey of penance and self-denial – but not have experienced true conversion. They have religion, not a relationship. They drive themselves with law, without being drawn to God by grace. Yet, neither knowing truth or tasting love are enough to change us – that is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Reinhold Niebuhr notes the limit to the power of God alone, since “power does not reach the heart of the rebel.”⁶⁶ Power can disable our defenses, paralyze us before God’s awesomeness. It can block us, but “only sacrificial love can find us out. Power can win when we are ranged against it, but it cannot win us.”⁶⁷ There is a “festering core of sin at the heart of each one of us that only... tenacious love disguised in the absurd powerlessness, shame, pain, loneliness and desolation of the cross – all for us – could reach us and subvert us.”⁶⁸

There is no other way, Os Guinness asserts. Only in the shadow of the folly and weakness of the cross does God find us, redeem us and win us back to Himself. The love of God wins our hearts, but only the truth of God trues hearts, and it does so by the power of the Holy Spirit. Guinness, paraphrasing Paul, declares,

‘At the heart of sin and disobedience... is a flagrant deliberate and continuing act of violence to truth. Sin and disobedience lay hold of truth, grasp it roughly, and will not let it be what it naturally is or say what it naturally says. In this way, the deliberate dynamic of unbelief is to suppress truth, stifle truth

⁶⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, “Power and Weakness of God,” in *Discerning the Signs of the Times* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1946), 145.

⁶⁷ Os Guinness, *Fool’s Talk: Discovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (IVP Press: Downer’s Grove, IL, 2015), 73.

⁶⁸ Ibid.



Honest Answers - With Love, Truth and Power

and hold truth hostage. What may be known of God... is adamantly denied by the determined act of will that is sin and disbelief" (Romans 1:19, 21-23, 25).⁶⁹

Gregory of Nyssa believed, “We are led to God by desire,” consciously or unconsciously, “drawn to him as if pulled by a rope.”⁷⁰ Caught up in the content of gospel engagement, we dare not forget, this is not about teaching people *about* God, but in introducing them *to* God, to know Him and love Him, and to be known by Him and loved by Him. To be changed, our crooked hearts trued by His truth, by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

God, Paul asserted, is “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Eph. 3:20). The NLT declares, “Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.” The Berean Literal Bible says the work that God wants to do in us is “exceedingly above all things that we ask or think, according to the power [the Holy Spirit] working in us.” The King James compounds the idea, He “is able to do exceeding, abundantly above all...” The Amplified reads, “Now to Him who is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly more than all that we dare ask or think [infinitely beyond our greatest prayers, hopes, or dreams], according to His power that is at work within us.” More than what we pray for. More than what is in our mind, beyond what we think is possible. Not by our efforts, but by the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Weymouth says it is in the “exercise of His power that is at work within us... [that He] is able to do infinitely beyond all our highest prayers or thoughts.”

Don't do it alone. In prayer, lean deeply on the Holy Spirit!

⁶⁹ Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 85.

⁷⁰ *Gregory of Nyssa*, quoted by Os Guinness, 143.



Evangelism As Blessing

Exercise 20:

1. Take time and slowly review Ephesians 3:20. Bluntly – do you believe that? About yourself? About God's work in you and through you?
2. What then, is keeping you from blossoming into full bloom as a believer, a follower of Jesus Christ? What is limiting you? Intimidating you? Keeping you silent? Causing you to doubt God's love for you, His grace on your life, and His ability to use you? Have you ever seriously considered the plan God might have for you? Or, is He an appendage to your life and your plans?
3. What is meant by the idea – that truth trues? How do love and truth partner to change our life? On which side do you lean – truth or love? Do you allow your sense of God's love to eclipse truth – and calls to repentance. Does the sword of truth keep you from enjoying the unconditional love of God? Have you experienced the 'power of God' that saves?
4. What do you think of Gregory of Nyssa's idea, "We are led to God by desires!" Are you being led to God? Regularly? Do you desire more of Him?
5. Do you think traditional evangelism sometimes forces our desire on those who we are witnessing to, rather than giving the Holy Spirit a chance to cultivate desire in their heart? What happens when we press for a premature decision?



ACTION:

Presuppositions:

In an earlier chapter you were asked to review Acts 16 and the three gateways for evangelism – truth, love and power. And to note, which of these was more native to you.

- We have revisited this topic because it is so critical to our evangelism efforts. It demands our flexibility. It demands discernment – where is this person, on what frequency can I reach them?
- Paul, in Romans 1, reminds us that there are some people “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” What “can be known by them” is rejected, not because it is not true, but because in embracing that truth their lives would need to radically change.
- Paul then gives three stages that reveal the consequences of such hard hearts – moral depravity, emotional instability and finally, mental illness and the implosion of culture.

ACTION:

- Look at the list you created. You have examined it for openness, now, look closer. On what continuum do you think you can best reach the top five on your list? And then the deeper question. Are they suppressing truth? Have they already run the redlight of moral recklessness? Of some emotional breakdown related to their lifestyle? To mental issues due to their resistance to reality, to the consequences of sin? To whom can you build a bridge? And through what gateway? And who is most desperately in need depending on the



Evangelism As Blessing

stage to which they have progressed. Remember, an imploding life, without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, does not mean openness to the gospel.





Chapter 21

Loving Apologists

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. Genuine love is disarming. It is hard to resist unconditional love. It fractures hard hearts and opens them to the power of the gospel. Perhaps our greatest need is not memorized truth or scripture verses, but God's love poured through us.
2. Love is not enough – as sinners, we need a truth encounter. Our crooked wicked hearts need to be realigned. But that is not a mere adaptation to Christian values. It is not mental alone. It is not will power. True Christianity only begins in our hearts by the powerful transforming work of the Holy Spirit. This happens in the crosshairs of love and truth.
3. Apologetics is the art or science of defending and articulating the faith. This happens on the truth continuum. Sadly, at times, it degenerates to argumentation. This is never the goal of true



Evangelism As Blessing

apologetics. You can't drive someone to faith even with the most compelling reasons. People must be drawn, not driven, and that is a function of love.

4. Winning the argument is not the goal. Rather, it is winning the person, and not to a truth, but to the One who is Truth. To a person and not to a set of principles.
5. As Os Guiness says, true apologetics has an interest in evangelism – that is its goal. It wants to remove the intellectual obstacles to faith so that someone can believe. Without that end, apologetics too often becomes an exercise in knowledge without wisdom.
6. Start with the person. Hear their story. You need to be good news to them before they are willing to hear good news from you.
7. At resistance points, as Schaeffer would say, 'Give honest answers to honest questions.'

Synopsis:

At times, in your attempt to lead someone to Christ, you will hit a brick wall. They will have sincere, but tough questions. You will have tried to reach them with love – to no avail. They may have even seen a display of God's power with the result of further doubt and cynicism. There are two options left, neither are exclusive of the other. One is time for the Holy Spirit to open the door of their heart more widely. Second, is a return to the continuum of truth, in an atmosphere of love – giving them answers, as best you can, to the questions they have. This is the use of apologetics with evangelism in view. Don't forget that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to convince men and women of truth. Let him do his work. He witnesses with you. Pray as much as you attempt to persuade. And remember, ultimately, the argument is



not won in the head, but in the heart. Surveys indicate that the real issue is not a lack of truth or the need for better answers, but a commitment to a lifestyle, to moral standards that would be objectionable if they embraced the truth. They want to believe a lie – and in that case, only the Holy Spirit can awaken them.

Love disarms us. It allows the gospel of Christ to be “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes” (Romans 1:16). Its effect is not limited to cultural barriers. It saves both Jew and Greek. This can’t be missed. The gospel’s transforming effect demands a truth encounter, that on our embrace of truth by faith through grace becomes liberating power. This is more than mental assent. It is more than value realignment. It is more than a sentimental sense of God’s love. Here, love opens the door to truth – to true truth, truth that straightens our thinking and alters our behavior. And it does so, as we believe, as we surrender to God by faith, by the power of the gospel, the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

Apologetics is the art or science, perhaps a bit of both, of defending and articulating faith in a winning, rational manner. At times, we need to become an apologist to lay the groundwork for evangelism. The apologist clears the way, dealing with objections to the faith, attempting, as Schaeffer said, “to give honest answers to honest questions.” But apologists can lose their way and get lost in argumentation and disputing. Healthy apologists keep the goal of evangelism in view. They use apologetics to pave the way for the hearing the good news by the unbeliever or the skeptic with major objections satisfied.

Os Guinness declares, “The Scriptures know nothing of an apologetics that has no interest in evangelism.”⁷¹ Remember too,

⁷¹ Os Guinness, *Fool’s Talk*, 111.



Evangelism As Blessing

that the terms apologetics and apology – which seem worlds apart – actually share the same etymological root. Apologists can posture in a very dogmatic, bull-dog manner that lacks Christian grace. On the other hand, a simple Christian can offer a sincere apology because they feel that some insensitivity has been done, or that they acted in a less than gracious manner. In doing so they touch some line of truth, lighting it up, so that it glows not only in their heart but in the heart the other. Such a demonstration of love and humility are sometimes more effective at enforcing truth than five-dollar words. The “message of Jesus is both simple enough for a child to paddle in and deep enough for an elephant to swim in.”⁷²

Start where the person is, on their ground. Hear their story. It is a mistake to begin with the good news before the potential convert is ready. They need to see that the good news is good – and that is seen in our goodness, our kindness, our listening demeanor, our love. Too much evangelism is an attempt to persuade the unbeliever, hard heart and all. To preach to them, or at them, which usually results in a deaf ear and their turning away. The insensitive evangelist then concludes that they are beyond redemption, not that his approach is faulty.

When hearts and minds are closed, patience and an apologetic approach can answer objections that peak interest and open the heart. First, there are people who are *spiritually closed* because they are satisfied with a non-Christian faith and a set of non-Christian values. They are contented atheists, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Wiccans and they are not looking elsewhere. They are not hostile to the faith, not typically, just satisfied with their life and closed to the gospel. There is little you can do with this group except pray that God would open a door for the gospel. At times, sometimes miraculously, he does so with quite dramatic results.

⁷² Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 111.



Second, another group is closed due to their *objections* to Christianity. Those objections have inoculated them against believing. For them, faith is unthinkable, untenable. These people often hold a philosophy or world view opposed to authentic Christianity. They are Marxists and Freudians who see faith as an illusion, as wish fulfillment. Or they are logical positivists who simple dismiss Christianity as foolishness. They may be steeped in science, believing that faith is not verifiable and therefore not worth considering. Others, due to a moral commitment to relativism and hedonism simply do not want to believe.

These philosophies always, at some point, overplay their hand. Marxism was caught up short recently in its politically correct theory of intersectionality. The class warfare that was loosed on the nation and ran amuck through schools and government agencies, even corporations, hit a wall with a public backlash. DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) has been put on hold for the moment, but don't count it dead and out.

Scientism has also suffered a bit of a setback as a handful of first-class scientists have stepped out of the shadows to boldly declare their faith and articulate it in a rational, defensible manner, showing science and faith to be compatible. Others have boldly exited science's cave declaring that the senses, the testable, cannot be the only means for grasping reality in our world.

Those who live on the continuum of relativism, though they deny absolutes, are careful not to go to the extreme. They relativize the views of others, not their own; the past, not the present; this culture, not that one. Relativism is an escape, “I was born that way... We’re just wired differently... It’s a generational thing... You wouldn’t understand.”⁷³ On and on. Relativists argue against moral and spiritual absolutes and then retreat to absolutes. Sooner or later, we all have to go home. We all need

⁷³ Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 113.



Evangelism As Blessing

some fixed, immovable furniture on which we rest.

Enter the Holy Spirit. God is the great unmasker of lies. He tears down idols. He debunks myths. He presses us into the bare knuckles of truth. When we are determined to resist truth, as in Romans 1, he releases us to the consequences of our own sin. He gives men *over*, first, to *moral* depravity. That escalates to *emotional* illnesses, and finally to *mental* illness (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). Here, God allows sin to run its course, to collapse on itself, until there is there is social chaos (Rom. 1:29-31).

Here, men reap the consequences of their behavior. This is the greater judgment, when God stands back and “gives us over to sin,” removing the roadblocks, the signs, “Beware. Cliff ahead. Bridge is out!” Impurity, violating the conscience repeatedly, leads to emotional instability and finally to mental illness. Sin will drive us out of our minds. When the Holy Spirit stands back, we must stand back with him, hoping, praying that a handful will stagger back from the brink of disaster ready to repent and change their way of life. The passage in Romans 1 has its roots in Psalm 81:11-12, “Israel did not obey me. So, I *gave them over* to the stubbornness of their heart to walk in their own devises.” e He The ten northern tribes were scattered to never return. The two southern tribes were also scattered, and only a remnant returned. What will happen to America if we do not turn back?

Exercise 21:

1. Try and remember the first time you experienced unconditional love. It may have come through someone whose love for you was disarming. You had no defenses. Such love is *agape*’ like. It is pure, from above, as Paul says. Think about your reaction in that moment, or in the presence of that person. Behind them, behind that moment, was God, in Christ, manifesting Himself by the Spirit. The Bible calls us to ‘keep ourselves in such love’



How do you do that?

2. Do you know people who have run all the redlights, crashed the barricades – perhaps someone close to you. Irrationality has put them beyond arguments of truth. Even love no longer constrains them, they are drive by lust fixed on some pleasure. Their only hope is an encounter with the life-altering power of the Holy Spirit. But your role is not passive – this is the time to pray for them like never before that the door of their heart, so tightly sealed, would be opened to the gospel.
3. Repeated we have used Francis Shaeffer's term, *true truth*, or *truth that trues*. What do you think that means? We use the term truth so casually, especially in a relativistic culture, that we fail to understand that Biblical truth transforms us. It straightens our bent nature. Reflection that idea.
4. The goal of apologetics is evangelism – it cannot be debate for the sake of debate, or for winning the Christian argument, or putting the skeptic in their place, or yet, embarrassing them. Agree? How has the ministry of apologetics sometimes lost its way and become an end itself? Define it.
5. Two groups are identified here as closed to the gospel without a divine intervention – the Eastern, metaphysical, non-theistic religions. And then secularism-scientism as faith or as no faith. Only an open door, through prayer, can penetrate the hearts of such people. Meanwhile, both groups run the risk of suppressing true truth (Romans 1) and running the red lights. Review the three phases that such people progress through (Romans 1), as God allows them to run through the barricades. Where is America as a culture on this road?



Evangelism As Blessing

ACTION:

- Review your list.
- Who do you sense may be among the most difficult to reach?
- What are the questions that they are likely to ask? Are they spiritually closed, satisfied with a non-Christian faith, Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age, etc.? Or are they a contented atheist or agnostic? Are they socialists or Marxists? Have they embraced scientism with no room for God? Are they relativists? Are they lukewarm, non-practicing Christians?

CAUTION:

- This is the point at which we backslide from evangelism. Who is up to such a challenge? The answer is that few of us are equipped to answer objections from these perspectives. Remember the advice, 'Honest answers' to 'honest questions.' Don't pretend to be the expert that you are not. That's hypocrisy and that is a dead-end.
- This *will* require some digging on your part. That is part of God's plan! To grow you in the middle, between Him and your searching friends. You don't have to become an expert on world religions or faith and science, although you may become just that. You are the friend in the middle (Lk. 11:5-8). That friend goes to a neighbor, representing God, to get bread that he can't supply for a friend of his who has come on journey. That is an apt picture of evangelism. We find bread, answers we don't have, from neighbors, from God, to give to our unsaved friends.





Chapter 22

Leave the Door Open

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. In Luke 15, we have three accounts of lostness – the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son.
2. The shepherd went after the helpless lost sheep – that is role of the shepherd. The woman swept her house to find the coin she had lost – it was her responsibility. Some say it was a dowry left as a promise of marriage. Her future depended on her faithfulness. Carelessness could have affected her life forever. Unlike the first two stories, no one went after the lost son. Why? He left willfully, and in a state of rebellion. All the father could do was prayerfully wait, ready to welcome him home.
3. C. S. Lewis says, in dealing with someone who is recalcitrant – push them to the edge the consequences of their choice. “So, what will you do then … and then … and then … and then

Evangelism As Blessing

where will you be?” You want them to be shocked by the irrationality of their thinking.

4. Francis Schaffer noted that most people in unbelief stop short of self-destruction in what he called ‘half-way houses.’ Like the prodigal son, they ‘come to themselves.’ Those are the reachable rebels.
5. Despite the appearance, God, Augustine noted, is always at work in the hearts of the most rebellious. That’s encouraging.
6. At some point, the Buddhist or the Hindu, the New Ager or the atheistic scientist, finds their belief system inadequate. At that time, they need a friend to lead them to the Lord. Each conversion is different. Each approach, even by God into human hearts varies, depending on the individual. Be open to God’s surprising work in the lives of people you might write off.
7. Only in Christianity is there music! Heavenly music. Joy unspeakable. Peace beyond understating. Unconditional love. Pray for those trapped in religion, and those closed, with hard hearts due to agnosticism or atheism, to hear the music.

Synopsis:

Every individual is unique. And every gospel conversion is likewise unique. God’s approach to each person is personal, and so ours should be. This is the wonder of humans – alike and profoundly different. Don’t expect some technique, some set of words, to be magic. God has to unlock the door of each heart. But, as Augustine notes, ‘God is always present... working in someone’s life.’ Consider the University professor and his



Leave The Door Open

wife, suddenly open to the faith on the discovery that they were about to have an unexpected child. Like the prodigal who had to come to himself and believed that he would be accepted by his father, at least as a hired servant – that some level of love had remained. So it is with the potential converts with whom we work. Think about C. S. Lewis, and W. H. Auden, Dean Jones and Chuck Colson, Constantine and Nicky Cruz – all impactful lives with radically different conversion stories. The one common denominator, east or west, Buddhist or skeptic, they all have a hole in their heart that only God can fill.

There would have been no way to have persuaded the prodigal son to return home the day he walked away. He wasn't ready. In the pigsty, broke and abandoned by his fair-weather friends, he needed no persuading. God sees where the path of sin and rebellion takes prodigals, and He sees their way back home. All the Father could do was patiently wait. At times, that is all we can do.

Augustine advised, when dealing with false ideas and values to which others cling, to let them develop to their disappointing end. It is difficult for us to do that, but sometimes that is our only option – to momentarily 'give them over,' praying, trusting God.

C. S. Lewis was more radical. He advised, "Push them to the logic of their presuppositions." Ask them, "And what then? And then?" Most have not clearly thought through the implications of their actions. Francis Schaeffer called human varieties of unbelief halfway houses. The unbeliever, he argued, usually stopped just short of the cliff of destruction. There, Schaeffer said, they end up in the halfway house of unbelief, momentarily too ashamed or confused to come home. Those are unbelievers that can be helped.



Evangelism As Blessing

Augustine, the great church father, would acknowledge, looking back on his life of sin,

“You [God] were always present, angry and merciful at once, strewing the pangs of bitterness over all my lawless pleasures to lead me to look for others unallied with pain. You meant me to find them nowhere but in yourself, O Lord, for ... you smite so that you might heal.”⁷⁴

Os Guinness tells the story of lecturing at a University north of London. When he finished, a professor from the university lingered to have a word with him. He confessed that neither he nor his wife, 15 years younger, had ever had an interest in faith. He had been quite liberal in his thinking and the two had agreed to an open marriage which had been marked over their years together by multiple affairs by them both.

Occasionally, the professor noted, a student emerged with a passion to witness and win him to Christ. He met such students with a cool indifference, enough to quiet and muzzle them. Now in his mid-fifties and his wife at the late stage where the probability of childbearing was minimal, they were surprised to discover that she was pregnant. They were expecting a child. Something they had never had in their plans. Immediately, they both realized that they did not want a child raised in the atmosphere they had created, not with the morals with which they had lived.

The idea of being a parent shocked their sensibilities. “We have always had an open marriage,” the professor told Guinness, “but the younger generation has taken the openness further, to the point of chaos. We don’t want that for our daughter.” Suddenly, always closed to faith and to God in the past, they were now wide open.⁷⁵ Perhaps around us are more people

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Confessions* 2.2, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin London: Penguin, 1961), 44.

⁷⁵ Os Guinness, *Fool’s Talk*, 121-122.



Leave The Door Open

ready for a radical decision to follow Christ that we realize. There are, as in the case of this couple, windows of time when there is an openness. Earlier, they would not have considered such a decision. And later, their heart may grow cold again. Our job is to discern, by the leading of the Spirit, inside a covenant of friendship, the *Kairos* time when their hearts are open to the gospel.

Augustine's mother approached Ambrose, the Bishop, encouraging him to talk to Augustine. The Bishop resisted. Augustine would write,

“My mother asked him, as a favor, to have a talk with me, so that he might refute my errors, drive the evil out of my mind, and replace it with good... but he refused... a wise decision, as I afterward realized. He told her that I was still unripe for instruction because, as she told him, I was brimming over with the novelty of heresy... ‘Leave him alone,’ he said. ‘Just pray to God for him. From his own reading he will discover his mistakes.’”⁷⁶

We stand ready to give answers when the people we want to win don't know the questions. Sometimes people need questions more than they need answers. This is one of the functions of the apologist. You use questions to raise questions. You want to arouse the desire in them to find truth, to know God.

When Issa, the 18th century Haiku poet of Japan lost his wife and all five children, he was grief stricken. With each loss, he went to the Zen Master for comfort and was given the same counsel. “Remember the world is dew.” Dew, like the early morning fog, is transient. It is there – then gone, ephemeral. So too, Buddhist believe, is the suffering of this world and its end, death – all an illusion.

⁷⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* 3.12, 69.



Evangelism As Blessing

Detachment, they argue, is the answer. Don't get attached to anyone or anything and then losses will not matter. Detachment, Buddhism advocates, lets one transcend the mourning that prolongs the grief. In truth, it is a stoic, self-protecting and loveless way to live. It is cold detachment, the conditioning of oneself to be uncaring. It is not life at all. It can know no meaningful, sacrificial relationships. It is designed to be self-protecting.

Issa went home, but he was not consoled. "The world is dew; the world is dew," he would write, "And yet; and yet." It is this "and yet" to which Buddhism has no answer, nor does secular humanism or Marxism. Only in the resurrection of Jesus Christ do we find the answer to the "and yet" of living in a painful, disappointing world.⁷⁷ And that "and yet" is found in the radical identification of God with men, the incarnation. And in the radical sacrifice, the cross. And in the "and yet" of the resurrection from the dead, as well as the "and yet" of the Second Advent. As Corrie ten Boom would say after her ordeal in a Nazi concentration camp where she lost her sister, Betsy, and saw so much suffering and senseless cruelty, "There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still."⁷⁸

- C. S. Lewis encountered the joy of the Lord, and that was the trigger that moved him toward Christianity.
- W. H. Auden, a philosophical atheist, was moved by a passion for justice.
- Dean Jones, the actor, perplexed and empty, knelt at a bed in a hotel room and prayed. He recalled the moment, saying it was if he was in the middle of a Disney movie where Bambi had walked across the set.

⁷⁷ Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Discovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (IVP Press: Downer's Grove, IL, 2015), 126.

⁷⁸ See: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/254564-there-is-no-pit-so-deep-that-god-s-love-is>.



Leave The Door Open

Peace flooded into his heart as never before.

- Chuck Colson retreated to his car after an evening with peers who had worked with him in the Nixon Administration. They informed him of their newfound faith in Christ. Colson was shaken. His hands were trembling so badly that he could not insert the car key into the ignition. All the while he argued with himself, “How could they believe? They are intellectuals. They are bright folks.” With an arm load of books, he retreated the following weekend to a place to read and reflect. He came back a believer hooked by the rational claims of the gospel. A gospel he had never seriously considered before.
- For Constantine, it was a vision of the cross.
- For Nicky Cruz, the New York gang leader, into witchcraft and street wars, it was the challenge by David Wilkerson to be a true man, free, and bold enough to differentiate oneself by following Christ.

Each person responds to a different trigger and is drawn by a different desire. Every conversion will be different in that sense. Only the Holy Spirit can orchestrate such a diverse score, each of us singing a part of the same song.

Clark Williamson speaks of the “music of a passage,” which one cannot hear if they are tone deaf.⁷⁹ It is this music to which we respond in conversion. We are invited to join the song – heaven’s song, to sing here on the earth as an echo of what we have heard in heaven. We resonate – we vibrate with the sounds of heaven, life-giving language, set to music. This is the essence of worship. Writings, words, are in monochrome; but speech,

⁷⁹ Clark Williamson, *A Christian Theology: Way of Blessing, Way of Life* (Chalice Press: St. Louis, MO, 1999), 88.



Evangelism As Blessing

sound, music are in color. It is completely different – because in hearing speech, in hearing the sound, something in us is awakened. We hear in the nuances of other voices emphases that would have been missed by the letters and symbols of the written word. Augustine believed that to understand a text, one must decide how to “pronounce” it.⁸⁰ This is called “tone of voice exegesis.”⁸¹

Jesus is the “Word, made flesh.” God did not give us a book, but a Himself, a person, in Jesus, the Christ, the Lord. Have you heard him sing? Zephaniah 3:17 says that God rejoices over us with loud singing. The word rejoice in the passage can be translated as dance. Here is a dancing, singing, rejoicing God – when He thinks of you.

Exercise 22:

1. The prodigal’s father did not pursue him and attempt to force him to return home. But he never stopped watching for him – and watching is a metaphor for prayer.
2. For some, all we can do is to give them space and time, and pray, and wait. God knows where they are.
3. What do you think of the advice of Ambrose to the mother of Augustine?
4. If conversation is still possible with your prodigal – what do you think of the advice of C. S. Lewis and his, “What then?” questions?

⁸⁰ Clark Williamson, *A Christian Theology: Way of Blessing, Way of Life* (Chalice Press: St. Louis, MO, 1999), 89.

⁸¹ Ibid, 89. Note: Charles Blaisdell coined the expression “tone of voice exegesis” in a sermon, “*A Gryff God?*” preached at Christian Theological Seminary, October 4, 1998.



Leave The Door Open

5. What about Schaeffer's idea, that most people stop just short of the cliff, at the 'halfway house' of unbelief – and like the prodigal in the pigsty, they are then ready to consider a turn for home. Would you say that this is what happened to the professor and his wife mentioned by Os Guinness?
6. Are we sometimes attempting to give answers to people who have not yet figured out the questions? How do we discern their readiness? Notice in this chapter, the different triggers for different individuals, none of them alike. Consider that.
7. Clark Williamson returns to the theme used by Aldrich earlier – the music of a passage, the music of our lives. Evangelism is more powerful in its attractive form than in its compelling form, do you agree? Have we, in the past, relied too heavily on compelling men? In some cases, we may have been moved by both scripture and the Spirit to "compel them to come" to Christ (Luke 14:23). It is a matter of discernment.

ACTION:

- Review your list. Who is the sheep on your list that you need to 'go after?' Who is like the dowry coin, 'lost in the house,' in the family, in the church – even if they regularly attend. And who is the defiant prodigal for whom you can only pray and wait?
- Be a shepherd, and go after the helpless lamb or defenseless sheep, before some wolf finds them. Like the woman who has lost the dowry coin, sweep the house with prayer – asking God to save sons and daughters, loved ones who have not completely made



Evangelism As Blessing

peace with God. To be lost in the house is to be terribly lost. Like the father, keep watching and praying for the prodigal.

- Look for God's intervention in the lives of those for whom you are praying. Some episode, some unpredictable turn of events may open them to the gospel. Keep the welcome mat out for the prodigal. Tie the ribbon on the tree!
- Focus not only on the lost, but on yourself. Don't let the burden of caring about the lost diminish your joy. Keep the music going in your heart.





Chapter 23

One Man's Unlikely Journey

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. The story in our chapter today is the chronicle of a most unlikely convert, W. H. Auden.
2. The story is presented for just that reason. This influential Marxist was deeply rooted in sin, yet he had two Christian grandfathers who were preachers. In one afternoon, he was jolted into reality that led ultimately to his conversion.
3. The story illustrates how quickly a radical sinner can have a 'God moment' that changes the direction of their life.
4. It urges us that we dare not write anyone off. God works in the hearts of men and women who appear far from him and are openly hostile to the gospel.
5. Throughout the nation, the humanistic belief in the fundamental goodness of humanity is held by the

Evangelism As Blessing

majority of Americans (69%), as well as self-defined Christians (65%). The sin nature resulting from the fall is dismissed. Humanism has triumphed. Why would good people need salvation? Dostoevsky believed it too, until he saw the unthinkable cruelty of communism in Siberia.

6. Auden's relativism cracked when he saw human depravity at its edges. He soberly recognized what he had been able to deny to that point – that evil exist, absolute evil, and therefore, all cannot be relative. Some things need to be absolutely condemned. His intellectual honesty caused him to fall on his own sword and led to a change in his perspective and in his life. This is hopeful.
7. All around us are people with 'holes in their heart,' stuffed with entertainment and self-medication, with busyness and vanity. Yet underneath, most recognize a faint longing to 'go home,' if they could only find the way.

Synopsis:

Some people have amazing transcendent experiences – Paul did, on Damascus Road. Isaiah did (Chapter 6). As did Daniel and John, the Revelator. Others get gentle nudges. Both lead to some revelation, some unveiling of God, some change in life or perspective. We may be like Moses, not even looking for God, but we are drawn aside by some anomaly, some strange sight. In the case of Moses, it was a bush that was burning and yet, it was not being consumed. He was curious. He turned aside and encountered God – and his life was changed, and a nation was emancipated. With the 120 in the Upper Room, the fire



and wind rushed into the chamber – they were amazed and wonderfully terrified and filled with the Spirit of God. The church was born, and 15 nations were impacted. Even when we are not looking for God; He is looking for us. We are Adam's lost children, created in the image of God, an image now marred by sin and distorted, yet that residue of God's image is worthy of redemption. God is on a mission to call us back home, back to the garden. To repair the hole in our hearts and restore His image in us, so that for all eternity, we will reflect His glory. Humanistic thinking pushes God away, simply by seeing no need to repent. It defies the fundamental sin problem in all our hearts, cured only by the Holy Spirit and our entry into God's redemptive process. That demands humility, repentance, confession of sin and profession of faith in God. It begins with our admission of spiritual poverty. How did your change begin – a jolting moment of reality or a gentle nudge? An in-you-face moment, or a still small voice? Think about the people on your prayer list. You cannot know how God might draw them to Himself, but you should know, that as you pray, the Holy Spirit is at work, plotting the possible turning point in their lives.

Those who studied the era of Hitler's rise to power and WWII, may know the name W. H. Auden. He was one of the most influential English poets of his day. He was considered a kind of secular prophet. He was no Christian. Rather, he was an atheist, a left-wing socialist, a practicing homosexual, and a veteran of the Spanish Civil War.

Raised at Gresham's school in England, both his grandfathers had been clergymen. Still he, at the age of 13, abandoned the faith he had been taught since childhood. He considered faith 'a vague uplift,' about as appetizing and "as flat as an old bottle of soda water." He simply lost interest, he would say later.



Evangelism As Blessing

In 1939, he came to the United States. On September 1, he casually popped into a cinema on the East Side of Manhattan, a dominantly German area, though he did not realize it. It might have made no difference except for what happened that day. The film was entitled *Sieg in Poland*, a documentary on the Nazi invasion and conquest of Poland. On the screen, he watched Hitler's S. S. Storm Troopers bayonetting innocent women and children heartlessly. The cold brutality released on civilians was senseless, morally repulsive. What shocked him, however, was the vocal and harrowing response of the audience. Like a crazed mob, all around him, voices cried out, "Kill them! Kill them!" as if the soldiers on the screen could hear them calling for more blood, for the escalation of the violence. Auden realized, it was not only Nazi soldiers who were capable of such viciousness. It was supposedly ordinary folks on the East Side of Manhattan who were sitting all around him in the theater.

Auden was shaken, horrified. He was, himself, a liberal-socialist-democratic, a left-of-center thinker. He embraced Sigmund Freud's ideas, the repression of super-ego, the inner voice of restraint and moral reason. He had championed the liberty of id – impulse and gratification, few boundaries and an amoral orientation. He liked Karl Marx's godless political philosophy. He was not a conservative by any stretch of imagination. The humanism that he had embraced from his early teen years had always remained in place. At its core was a belief in the essential goodness of humanity. A sin nature? A dark center in the soul of man that only God could tame? "Nonsense," he believed. On the contrary, like other humanists, he believed that once humanity worked out global problems, all would be well. Utopia would be possible, because humans were good.

Leaving the cinema that day with the savage scenes of the S. S. Soldiers playing in his head and the echo of the bloodthirsty audience hungry for violence ringing in his ears, he knew he



One Man's Unlikely Journey

had been wrong. He had encountered absolute evil, not merely on the screen, but sitting in seats all around him. Such evil he knew, had to be judged and condemned – absolutely and definitively. Why was Hitler so utterly wrong, and how could he seduce a nation with profound Christian roots to embrace his rage and savagery? Something evil was afoot, more sinister than the evil that could be attributed to mortal men. Hitler was not evil; he was absolutely evil. Yet, he was not, Auden knew, the source of evil, only the channel. Hitler was inspired by a force more fundamentally evil than that of any mortal man. Auden was shocked by evil – by a spirit that had gripped the soul of a people, and that frightened him into spiritual sobriety – he began a journey to rediscover the faith of his grandfathers.

In the 19th century, Dostoevsky also maintained a belief in the goodness of mankind. He held that belief until he came face to face with cruel depraved behavior in Siberia. There, he concluded, he had been wrong. Auden's confidence in humankind's goodness was shattered in one jarring afternoon. Like a vapor, it was gone. His balloon of idealism burst.

Auden was hemmed in by his relativism. How does one account for undeniable evil, absolute lunacy; and justify condemning it with absolute and unconditional judgement? Suddenly in his relativistic world, he was bumping up against absolutes. He had championed nonjudgemental tolerance and acceptance. There was no need, he believed, for absolute judgement of anything or anyone – until that day in the theater. There could be no acceptance of Hitler, or the actions of the S. S. Storm Troopers, or yet, the attitude encountered in the theater.

He told one of his friends, “The English intellectuals who now cry to Heaven against the evil incarnated by Hitler have no Heaven to cry to.” Dismissive of God, in the face of hellish evil, to whom do men turn? He suddenly knew, the whole



Evangelism As Blessing

premise of his liberal life had no foundation, no fixed walls – everything moved, all was relative. The real-world facing Nazism demanded an end to the make-believe world in which he had lived.

“The whole trend of liberal thought,” he wrote, “has been to undermine faith in the absolute... It has tried to make reason the judge... but since life is a changing process... the attempt to find a humanistic basis of keeping a promise works logically with the conclusion, ‘I can break it whenever I feel convenient.’”⁸²

In another interview, he would comment,

“Unless one is prepared to take a relativistic view that all morals are a matter of person taste, one could hardly avoid asking the question: ‘If, as I am convinced, the Nazis are wrong and we are right, what is it that validates our values and invalidates theirs?’”⁸³

Auden became an advocate for the renewal of ‘faith in the absolute.’ We must, he argued, “serve the unconditional,” or another monster like Hitler will arise and create a set of skewed values by which evil is justified. Auden’s cinematic experience did not move him from sinner to saint, but it unsettled him and his relativistic, Marxist ideas. It is such an unsettling, orchestrated only by God, which provides the opportunity for witness.

Alberto Giacometti, a Swiss sculptor, a close friend of Picasso, lost a close friend when he was only 19. He called the experience one in which a “hole was torn in his life.” What Auden experienced is what Os Guinness calls “a signal of

⁸² Humphrey Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Bibliography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 283.

⁸³ Arthur Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity* (New Haven: CT:Yale University Press, 2005), 22.



One Man's Unlikely Journey

transcendence,” a clue as from heaven that there is more. That something is missing, and that we are settled on the wrong limb and in danger of losing our souls.

Some transcendent experiences are abrupt and disconcerting. Others are gentle nudges by God. Some are triggered by the loss of a friend or companion, or by a simple, haunting memory. Others, by encountering some wall in life that leaves us at a dead-end and disoriented. Guinness speaks of ‘homing signals, clues, hints, jolts, triggers, epiphanies, transcendent impulses,’ all road signs that prompt a radical turn or even a U-turn.⁸⁴

Humanity, all Adam’s children, are living, as it were, somewhere ‘east of Eden.’ We know, intuitively that there was once a homeplace, and we have a longing to return there. This is a “homesickness that no other home can satisfy, a desire that no other satisfaction can fulfil, a yearning that can be assuaged nowhere else, and a restlessness that finds no rest in any other stopping place.”⁸⁵ Augustine declared, “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”⁸⁶

Sin cut us off, and exiled us from Eden, from paradise and from the presence of God. It left us with a hole in our heart, a longing satisfied only by coming home to the Creator-Redeemer, Father and Son. We attempt to stuff the hole with pleasures, power and conquests, or to medicate it, or to ignore it with addictive behaviors and substitutes. But the inner pain never stops. It begs for more – and the ‘more’ that we feed it cannot satisfy it. The pain only grows until the fix no longer works. God is the ‘something that is missing’⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 134.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 137.

⁸⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1.

⁸⁷ Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 137.



Evangelism As Blessing

Exercise 23:

1. Rehearse the experience of W. H. Auden. He was shocked into conversion, unsettled from his relativism – with a appalling dose of realism. Until that moment, no argument could dissuade him, and after it, he could not go back to his old philosophy. This is what Guiness calls a ‘signal of transcendence.’ Talk about the Auden experience and the characterization of Guiness.
2. Who do you know with a hole in their heart – that can only be satisfied by God? And what are they doing now to medicate themselves? How is God leading you to pray for them?
3. Did you have a kind of homesickness for God before your conversion? Do you understand the metaphor? How many people do you know who are searching for God – and they don’t even realize what, or who, they are looking for? How do we help them, point them toward home?
4. Review Augustine’s idea that we made for God, and restless until we find him.
5. Guiness points out a number of life-events that are signals of God’s intervention in a life, what he calls ‘signals of transcendence,’ things that point to the ‘more,’ to God, to the spiritual. Are you monitoring the lives of loved ones who lack a saving relationship with Christ closely enough to notice these moment and perhaps help them interpret them?



ACTION:

You have your prayer list. And you are praying over the entire list weekly.

- You have three categories – Most Open, Ambivalent, Mostly Closed. You are praying over your 'Most Open' list daily.
- Now, think of someone in the nation whose conversion would be a shock to the nation. Add them to your list and pray for them daily.
- Think of someone in your city, your county, who has a godless reputation. Or a lot of influence and their faith status is unknown. Or an influential Christian who is far too silent. They don't use their influence for godliness. Add them to your daily list.
- Now you have 5-7 that you are praying for daily. If you get a nudge from the Holy Spirit to send a card, an email, etc. – follow your heart. If you run smackdab into one of these people, especially those with a higher profile, it is probably not an accident. God works behind the scenes. Don't miss the moment.





Chapter 24

When God Breaks In

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. True conversion is not a result of human initiative or activity. It is divinely orchestrated. Angels pay attention and serve as cheerleaders in heaven over every conversion – all of them (Luke 15:10).⁸⁸
2. You pray. You faithfully look for open doors and hearts. You do your best to love those on your list.
3. But what is needed is for God to break in. That is His role – acting, speaking, revealing Himself, giving obvious clues.

⁸⁸ There is some disagreement here. The scripture says, “there is rejoicing in heaven in the presence of angels,” not necessarily by the angels. Although, a general interpretation is this rejoicing involves angels. The salvation of humans, the investment of heaven in humanity’s redemption is something the angels desire to “look into” (1 Peter 1:12). That is a curious passage. Angels are, and will be involved in the proclamation of the gospel, now, by assisting the church, and in the Revelation, by a more direct involvement.



Evangelism As Blessing

4. That action of God creates the opportunity for a faith response. Your role is to help that along. To coach the individual as to the meaning of what has happened to them. The prophets did this in the Old Testament in interpreting dreams and experiences.
5. Your witness is critical. It should not be diminished. Your apologetic overtures to help the person for whom you are praying overcome objections is noble. But all our talk *about* God is different from the revelation *of* God.
6. What you are praying for is a God-moment in the life of the uncommitted. An inexplicable encounter with the divine. It is a clue from God regarding the individual's lostness and His love. An estimated 20-25 percent of Muslims who come to Christ do so after what they see as divinely given dreams.
7. In such moments, God is breaking in, opening a door, and inviting our friends into His story.
8. Conversion is certainly cognitive. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds. But it is also richly emotional, our heart is warmed.
9. In the seam between the Word and the Spirit, truth and love, we are changed.
10. There are only three approaches to faith systems. 1) Eastern religions that embrace impersonal forces as god(s). 2) Science or reason as the ultimate authority. 3) And the monotheistic faiths with a personal God.



Synopsis:

Once you get a grasp on the big picture of faith structures, it is much easier to navigate the rapids in a difficult conversation, say with a Hindu or Buddhist or New Ager, or rationalistic humanist. The three paths are god(s) as impersonal forces; science and reason as the ultimate measures – humanistic atheism; and a personal God. Buddhism, for example, is so different than Christianity. Buddhism teaches detachment – no love, no attachment, no hurt and no worries. Christ, on the other hand became attached forever to a body, to humanity. In Gethsemane he agonized over humanity's sin. On the cross, he died loving us. These faith approaches could not be more different. Using these categories, you can better engage the non-Christian in dialogue, but you dare not reduce it to a rational appeal absent the work of the Holy Spirit. Christianity cannot be reduced to a left-brain rational exercise of assent. It is a new birth, by which one becomes a new creature. This is radical language, more so than most of our conversions. This is night and day, all things new, Christ-in-us, the hope of glory. The idea that becoming a Christian is simply the affirmation of basic Biblical facts is not Biblical. It fails to produce transformation. This is more than proposition; it is an invitation into the story of God.

When God breaks in on us, there is always an objective and subjective dimension. The objective side belongs to God – He acts, speaks, reveals Himself in some way. He gives us obvious clues that He is alive. The subjective response is ours. It is a “response of faith.” Such faith can never be passive.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Clark Williamson, *A Christian Theology: Way of Blessing, Way of Life* (Chalice Press: St. Louis, MO, 1999), 62.



Evangelism As Blessing

The revelation, the inbreaking of God, as with Auden, and Augustine and others we have mentioned, evokes a response that is not general – but very personal. God relates to each of us in different ways. He discloses Himself to each of us as individuals. When Paul had his encounter on Damacus Road, it was personal. Others heard, sensed something – but Paul heard the voice of God and saw the light of His glory (Acts 9:3-9). What happens in such a moment is more than intellectual assent. It has the potential of being transformative.

We can study about God but is it altogether different when God reveals Himself to us. You only truly know another person when they choose to disclose themselves to you. Martin Luther, the Reformer, said, “God opened His heart to us in Jesus Christ.” This is not faith as theological content – it is person to person. It is intimate. The truth of scripture sets us free, “Yes.” As Luther said, Christ is rex scripturae (king of scripture), the ultimate authority. It is not an encounter with the Bible or Bible verses that save. It is an encounter with Jesus, the Christ – the Savior.

The Bible is more than a series of propositional theological notions. It is the story of God – from Creation to His covenant-making role with Israel, to His incarnation in Christ – and beyond, to the ultimate triumph of the kingdom of God. Salvation is the invitation to join God’s story. In evangelism, we quickly learn, as we take time to listen to the stories of others, that their story is intertwined with God’s story – even though they may not see the markers of His intervening hand. Evangelism helps them discover the love and grace of God at work in their lives, when they were completely unaware.

Consider the difference between Buddhism and Christianity in this story. Buddha, under the Bo tree, is unassailable, because he is detached from the world, everything and everyone in



When God Breaks In

it. Buddha believes that fifty loves equal fifty woes, and ten loves equal ten woes. No love, no attachment – no woes, no worries.⁹⁰ This is so different than Christ.

In Gethsemane, he agonized over the sins of the world and their consequences – death. He knew he had to taste death in a few hours on the cross, and drink the bitter cup to the bottom – dregs and all. Far from being detached, Jesus carried the woes of humanity on his back, and to the cross where they were nailed. Frederick Buechner observed, “the suffering that Buddha’s eyes close out is the suffering of the world that Christ’s eyes close in and hallow. It is an extraordinary difference.”⁹¹

Much of modern evangelicalism became steeped in evangelism that was shaped by Enlightenment. Evangelism became strictly propositional, a declaration of faith and theology to which one assented, and if so, it was followed by baptism, and one was then confirmed into the faith. The approach was pedantic, doctrinaire. Almost rote and cold. There was no need for the heart to be involved. Enlightenment evangelism was not, as John Wesley, the Methodist evangelist said of his conversion, one in which the heart was “strangely warmed.”

The evangelist of the past would warn, “It is not a feeling – believe it, receive it, confess it, and you are saved. No matter how you feel.” Such an approach, as Tertullian noted, chases the Holy Spirit into a book. Even if the book is the Bible, the inspired word of God, it is the Holy Spirit, not the Bible, who is God. That is not to devalue the Bible. The Spirit himself inspired the scriptures and only he can unlock the meaning of a passage. We dare not squeeze the Holy Spirit out of the evangelism process. Or, as Tertullian implied, smother him in the pages of the sacred texts. An encounter with Bible verses is not enough.

⁹⁰ John B. Noss, *Man’s Religions* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1957), 173.

⁹¹ Frederick Buechner, *Now and Then* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1983), 53.



Evangelism As Blessing

True conversion means being convicted of sin – a work of the Spirit, and then being convinced of righteousness, also by the illumination of the Spirit (John 16:8). Some evangelicals act as if an encounter with the Word, or a set of scriptures, or their principles and mental assent to them is the essence of salvation. Where is the Holy Spirit? What is his role?

True conversion means being ‘born again,’ birthed into the kingdom of God, a new life, a new beginning, a new name and identity – all orchestrated by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3). Conversion to true Christianity is not a left-brain rational exercise in theological assent to propositional truths. It is personal, transformational – at times dramatic, but always heartfelt. It cannot be conversion in the head alone – it must involve the heart, and ultimately, the whole of our being.

Pascal called for balance. “If we submit everything to reason, our religion will have no mysterious and supernatural element. If we offend the principles of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous.”⁹² Socrates, not a believer, but a wise man, would say, “the unexamined life is not worth living.”⁹³ That is, far too few think deeply about the meaning of life. They amble their way from day to day, reacting more than acting, going through the motions of life – eating to survive and stopping only long enough to catch their breath or engage in a diversion.

The big questions about the origin of life and its improbability are brushed aside with inadequate answers. The nature of the universe, and the complexity of human anatomy hold incredible questions. The delicate balance of the ecosystem, not to mention solar systems, planetary orbits and their rotations are managed by scientists, who claim superior knowledge, not merely of

⁹² Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1956), 54.

⁹³ Plato, *Apology 38a*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. Harold North Fowler, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).



scientific facts, but of faith's impotence as well. The blanks are filled with pat answers. The deeper questions, "Who am I? Why am I here? Why am I here, now? Is there a purpose in all of this for my life? What is the basis for discerning right and wrong? How do I know there is a God? How do I know there isn't one?" It is not scientific facts that create anxiety in humans and drive our kids to commit suicide – it is meaninglessness.

Carl Jung, the great psychologist famously said, "Man cannot stand a meaningless life." Anthropologist Clifford Geertz echoed the same sentiment, "The drive to make sense out of experience, to give it form and order, is evidently as real and pressing as the more biological needs."⁹⁴ José Ortega y Gasset, speaking to the rationalistic, science-soaked culture, exclaimed, "Life cannot wait until the sciences have explained the universe scientifically. We cannot put off living until we are ready."⁹⁵

The Eastern family of faiths, Hinduism, Buddhism are impersonal forces as a faith system. The western form, New Age religious varieties, all leave humans in charge and utilize 'spiritual' or religious principles to make sense of life – all in vain. The secular family of faiths – atheism, agnosticism, naturalism and materialism, make science the ultimate authority, with a mixture of chance and time (evolution). As Richard Dawkins would say, the universe was a 'stroke of good luck.' That is a cold life, a roll of the dice – a dead end. Third, the Abrahamic faiths – Islam, Judaism, Christianity find their ultimate authority in the existence of a personal God. Judaism and Christianity share the same God, infinite and transcendent, yet knowable. They share parts of the same holy book, the Bible. Islam acquiesces to its holy book, the Koran, and to Allah, as the Supreme being, yet they remain monotheistic and claim aspects of both Judaism and Christianity.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Carl Gustav Jung, *The Age of Nothing: How We Have Sought to Live Since the Death of God* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2014), ix.

⁹⁵ Quoted by Os Guinness, 243.



Evangelism As Blessing

All these faiths – Eastern, secular and monotheistic - have consequences, as do their ideas. Look at the cultures each of these faiths have produced – the link is obvious to all who are willing to see it. Christianity produced Europe, England and America, though now, these nations are rejecting the God of their fathers. They have chosen, in the view of Romans 1, not to believe the obvious. Hinduism produced India. Buddhism is the religious-philosophical driver of Myanmar. The Arab world, and much of North Africa, is under the influence of Islam. China is dominantly atheistic; it is classical Marxist-Socialism. South Korea stands in its shadow. The state is their god. The same is true in Russia with some recent latitude for the Orthodox church. No one is breaking down walls to gain access to these nations.

Europe and America have been overrun by illegal and legal immigrants. Much of the world wants to come here without knowing why the nation is so free, so rich and why it offers such a promising life. Reasonable people cannot deny the link between values and culture.

God has broken into our world – as Creator, and the evidence of His fingerprints are clear (Romans 1:20). AI notes, “The probability of a specific sequence of amino acids forming a functional protein is indeed astronomically low...” Further, AI concludes, “the alpha-globin molecule, are ‘irreducibly complex,’ meaning that all parts must be present simultaneously for the structure to function, and the probability of such a complex structure arising by chance is infinitesimally small.” AI then confesses, “the timescale of evolution, billions of years, is often cited as a way to counter arguments about low probabilities. However, the time available is still not enough to overcome the fundamental improbability of complex structures arising solely by chance.” Evolution, scientism, is a greater leap of faith than Christianity.



The Institute for Creation Research claims,

“Elementary statistical theory shows that the probability of 200 successive mutations being successful is then $(1/2)^{200}$, or one chance out of 10^{60} . The number 10^{60} , if written out, would be ‘one’ followed by sixty ‘zeros.’ In other words, the chance that a 200-component organism could be formed by mutation and natural selection is less than one chance out of a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion! Lest anyone think that a 200-part system is unreasonably complex, it should be noted that even a one-celled plant or animal may have millions of molecular ‘parts.’”⁹⁶

There you have it!

Exercise 24:

1. Conversion begins with God. It may be triggered by the prayers of an intercessor, as they join Jesus, the heavenly intercessor, but ultimately, it is not initiated by a human decision – God breaks in on a life, in a gentle way, or a profound way that cannot be ignored. God, it appears, is searching for man, more than men are searching for Him. Talk about the inbreaking God.
2. Talk about enlightenment-rational evangelism verses a more holistic approach of head and heart, of truth and love. Consider the metaphor of being ‘born again,’ and how that describes the transition from sin into our new life in Christ.
3. Can you see, with the three broad categories – Eastern faiths, scientism-rationalism-atheism, and monotheism – the general differences? Does that help you grasp those faith narratives, and understand how you might respond to them?

⁹⁶See: <https://www.icr.org/article/mathematical-impossibility-evolution/>. Henry Morris, “The Mathematical Impossibility of Evolution.”



Evangelism As Blessing

4. Take a look at the idea of evangelism as story – as God’s invitation into His story, rather than assent to cold propositional truths, or even experientialism. Story is salvation as a journey, an adventure with God leading, not only to discover Him, but to find our own fulfilment – to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, even if that means fellowshipping with His sufferings.
5. Review the AI responses to the probability of evolution and then the deduction of the late Dr. Henry Morris of the Institute for Creation Research on the odds of evolution.

ACTION:

- You want to review the idea that all faith systems fit into one of three categories – eastern, non-personal religions, science and reason as faith, and monotheistic traditions.
- Only in Christianity and Judaism do you have the record of the extraordinary in-breaking of God, of His intervention in human history, of His insertion into the lives of men and women – Abram, Jacob, Moses, David, on and on. And these men change the trajectory of nations.
- Settle in your mind the radical differences in these faith systems.
- Review your list. Where are the people on your list? Any that lean toward impersonal forces as gods – Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age? Any that are hard-nosed agnostics, just-the-facts science oriented? Any that are the children of Abraham? Or Christians not practicing a vital personal relationship with God?
- Think about how you might approach those in these different categories.





Chapter 25

Larry Lane's Story

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. This is another story, this time a semi-retired pastor of a mega-church and chairman of the Board for an international ministry.
2. What happens when people of faith 'go to work,' and do so as believers?
3. In this story, Larry worked humbly as a store employee, punching the clock, stocking shelves, and nobly serving. His work was exemplary. He built positive relationships with the other store employees. He listened to their stories.
4. When he left the seasonal job, he asked to be engaged as store chaplain. Both managers enthusiastically embraced the idea. He now makes weekly rounds in the store, chatting with employees, encouraging them.
5. Now several of them are attending church, and renewing their faith, and they are beginning to be



Evangelism As Blessing

lights in the store as he was.

6. In his work as a pastor in Northern California, not a part of the Bible-belt, he befriended the local police chief and worked to establish a chaplaincy. The grace of his congregation shifted a left-leaning newspaper, to a more conservative stance. He asserts that such things happen when we determine to be people of blessing.
7. Rodney Stark, an early church historian, claims that the apostolic people of God won the Roman Empire not by great preaching or even the miraculous, but by the profound way they loved the community, particularly, the sick, dying and vulnerable.

Synopsis:

When ex-mega pastor and international revival specialists, Larry Lane, ended up in a seasonal job before Social Security benefits kicked in, he was planning to do nothing more than work through the Christmas season. But pastoral ministry was not what he did, being a pastor was who he was. Yet, if he had presented himself to the store, its managers, or fellow employees, as a pastor, he might have encountered a wall. But, as a regular guy, working a regular job, his humility made him approachable. This is the essence of incarnational ministry. It is not what we do, but who we are – Christ in us, who cannot be constrained. Larry cared – that's who he is. And those around him responded to that love and care. He listened. And his fellow employees often found someone who for the first time in a long time, empathized with them – and they shared. It is simple. Slow down. Be humble. Be Jesus in disguise. Listen. Care – and then God will give you what to say, when to say it and how to say it. In the Old



Larry Lane's Story

Testament, our work is seen as worship. Service in the harvest field is an outflow of worship in the temple. Your place of labor is a laboratory for ministry. It's not about making money – God is your provider. Its about influencing people to know Christ.

Larry Lane was a successful pastor, and for almost a decade, he served as Chairman of the Board of The Sentinel Group. Recently, he joined Project Pray as Senior Fellow and created Revival Road Ministries. During his transition, he took a seasonal job at his local Hobby Lobby. On his last day of seasonal work. In the three months that he worked at the store, he invested in getting to know each employee. He estimated that he knew them better than some who had worked there for years.

The co-managers were two retail-seasoned, hard-working women. They knew Larry's pastoral past. They also knew that for a season, he had developed a leadership program for upper-management personnel and had served as a program manager for a business incubator. All that gave him more credibility. He had also witnessed how the regional manager used fear to motivate and was quite stingy with affirmation. Larry asked these two store managers if he could have a word with them on his last day. They huddled in the stockroom away from any listening ears. He recalled the moment, "The roles suddenly felt reversed. It was not now manager-employee, but father and daughters. They appeared a bit anxious, not scared, but knowing I had something to share with them that required some privacy." In that moment, he proceeded to make observations about their good leadership, citing examples, highlighting their competency and excellence. He had given this moment a lot of thought and made mental notes. These were not sentimental



Evangelism As Blessing

ramblings, but sincere and insightful encouragement. When he finished, they were wiping tears from their eyes and hugs followed with invitations to stay on as an employee.

Larry was flattered by their offer, but he had another idea. He had not only been an exemplary employee, developing relationships with peers, but he had prayed for opportunities to represent Christ to fellow employees. In fact, he had asked God to give him that store for His Kingdom, and for Him to do something extraordinary that would bring Him glory. While he knew he was finished as a seasonal employee, he didn't feel finished with the ministry he had developed there. As he prayed, God put on his heart to volunteer to be the store's chaplain. He would make rounds weekly on the store floor, offering encouragement and prayer for the employees.

When he presented the idea to the two co-managers, they enthusiastically embraced the idea. Now, almost two years later, a highlight of his week, is making his rounds in the store, praying for folks, and speaking words of encouragement. This is the ministry of blessing.

Had he walked into that store a few years earlier and offered to be the store chaplain, those co-managers would have smiled, thanked him, and shown him the door. Working as a peer, demonstrating humility, he had built trust that allowed him to speak words of blessing. And that blessing brought favor, and that favor allowed amazing freedom to minister to the people who call that local Hobby Lobby their workplace.

Here is an interesting note worth considering. Others ask him, "Did you share the gospel, and lead anyone to Christ? Did you actually ask anyone to pray the sinner's prayer and receive Christ?" HH His answer was, "No." Here is why. In the Bible-belt of east Tennessee, nearly everyone believes they are a Christian. They have enough church-knowledge to tell



Larry Lane's Story

you they are saved. Larry had pastored and served in northern California for three decades. That was not the disposition that he found there. He knew, in East Tennessee, he was in a different religious-cultural context. In East Tennessee, he came to believe that the most helpful distinction was whether or not the individual was practicing their faith by faithful church engagement. If they were unchurched, he was concerned that were either unsaved, or saved, but drifting spiritually.

He now has two employees from the same family who have renewed their church commitment and are now attending church. The newly married daughter in one of those families is also attending church with her husband, and they brought his parents. Two other employees have promised to attend. They are leaning toward 'openness.' The first family is not only attending church, they have joined Larry in praying for other employees to know God and renew their relationship with him. Larry believes God may still get His store!

The point of Larry's story is how a seasonal job became an open door to serve as a missionary, a gentle relational evangelist, using the power of blessing. The simple act of being a listening friend as a bridge to faith engagement is too often overlooked in our confrontational, propositional approach to sharing the gospel. What is missing is the power of blessing.

Larry's approach to evangelism in his seasonal job was not something novel. In his years of community ministry, he can tell stories of how God opened up child-protective services to hear God's truth. Of how he worked to establish a police chaplaincy program that led to the conversion of the police chief. And how, with love and kindness, he effectively shifted a left-leaning newspaper to middle ground all through the power of blessing.

We are to be, he argues, a people of blessing. Jesus told us to



Evangelism As Blessing

bless our enemies – not instead of our friends, but in addition, we bless all people. We may miss the subtle way the New Testament reinforces this principle. For example, note how Paul began his address to the Athenians: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious. . .” (Acts 17:22).

He began by making a positive observation, by choosing to commend them. He could have begun with, “Men of Athens, I can see that you are all a bunch of idolaters.” He doesn’t shy away from sharing Christ later in his message, but he begins by finding common ground, affirming a good trait even though misdirected.

Larry is not one to promote a soft, easy-believism. He is reenforcing the old adage, “People don’t care what you know until they know that you care.” He advocates, “If we, as Christ’s body would learn how to bless, to pray for people’s felt needs, to meet some of those needs, we would gain favor and favor would open hearts for Jesus to enter.” And then he warns, “In our haste to ‘close deals’ and get people to pray that sinner’s prayer, we forget how Jesus invited people to follow Him, watch His life and ministry, listen to His teaching before He called them to a decision.” He recalls that “Saint Patrick followed that same pattern, inviting people to belong before they believed, allowing them to be blessed in the community of believers. That model began a revival that swept through northern Europe.”

Rodney Stark in his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, reveals from his research that the key to the advancement of the Kingdom of God in the Roman Empire was not the great preaching or the signs and wonders, but the profound way the church loved the community around them. They stayed and cared for the sick when plagues swept through cities. They picked up off the street the throw away babies, took them in and raised them.



Larry Lane's Story

In other words, they were a blessing to their community. Emperor Julian, in the 4th century, expressed concern about Christianity's growth and its impact on traditional Roman religion. He noted that Christians, through their charitable works and care for the poor, were "specially advanced" in drawing people away from Roman gods. Why? Love! The Church blessed their community and that blessing brought favor and on the back of that favor the gospel made its way into the hearts of people. Blessing others will open the hearts of the people in your community.

Exercise 25:

1. Talk with other Christians about the workplace as a mission field.
2. Consider this. Paul is found making tents, working a blue-collar job, and teaching in the afternoon (Acts 18:1-4). It was from his place of work that the miracles occurred. Evidently, people, desiring to utilize his skills, ended up in conversations with him that changed their lives. We might imagine Paul praying for them. From there, they took scraps of cloth that Paul had used, and miracles began to happen. It was Paul being Paul – at work as he was in the synagogue.
3. Secular work is not inferior to ministry. It is another platform for ministry – a missional opportunity. It is not about preaching at the plant, but about being salt and light.
4. It demands that we are genuinely Christian in our words and deeds – we have to have Christ in us, for others to want Christ.
5. For most of us, a job is a job, and church is church – and the two are not connected. But you *are* the church,



Evangelism As Blessing

beginning on Monday. And with only 15 percent of Americans in church on Sunday, you may be the only bridge that have that leads them back to God and church involvement.

ACTION:

- Review your list again.
- Pay special attention to the names of unchurched friends that work around you.
- Amend the list as necessary. Other than family and friends, this is your best mission field. You are with some of these people forty hours a week. That is a lot of opportunity to be an influence.
- Pray through the list.
- Circle those that appear most open.
- Be more conscious of your attitude and actions. Be Christ. Pray before you go to work. Pray at work. Find another believer who works around you – and begin a SALTY group. Invite God to your workplace.
- Identify one person – talk with them. Care. Invite them to coffee. Build a bridge.
- Be a blessing. Speak a blessing into their life.





Chapter 26

The Final Lesson

Highlights of the Chapter:

1. As a believer you want to be a blessing and speak the language of blessing.
2. You want to build a bridge by caring and listening.
3. You want to learn about them – not ignore them.
4. You want to determine the degree of their openness and if possible, find out what blocks the door of their heart from opening to God.
5. Building a bridge takes TIME, and that spells – love. That bridge will allow you to carry the heavy building blocks of truth.
6. When truth is heard and believed, what do you do then? Your friend needs to be discipled – and just going to church will not do that. Like evangelism, discipleship is relational, not institutional.
7. Consider starting an Alpha group, or a Disciple Making group, not only for your friend with fresh



Evangelism As Blessing

faith, but for their friends who are not yet believers. Let the new convert lead the group and you serve as the outside coach. Both of these approaches are designed to allow people to explore the Christian faith or Biblical ideas.

8. The end goal is not a salvation experience, baptism or church attendance. It is full reconciliation with God. It is the ‘setting right’ of all aspects of their life. That is a lifetime process.
9. We become ‘setting right’ agents of the kingdom of God, first, by being salt and light.
10. Paul suggests in 1 Timothy 2, an impact of praying Christians on the culture. As they pray, they affect the *ethos* of a society and they join God on His mission to see men and women saved.

Synopsis:

We have now come to the final lesson. It’s time for us to do mission. The Holy Spirit will give us boldness – so prayer is the key to everything. This is not something you do, but something God does in you and through you. You don’t press or pry open doors. God opens doors by prayer. Take a deep breath. This should be one of the most natural things you do. You do what you are. The deficit in obedience always finds a remedy in time with God, that’s the place and means of surrender. You are not to be driven but drawn. You don’t do what you are called to do as a Christian out of guilt, but by grace. You take the passive role – listening, caring, learning about the other. If you are not at ease, they will not be at ease. And they will remain guarded and closed. In this model, evangelism is as much relationship as is truth sharing and discipleship. It is not an ambush. It is not a one-and-done



transaction. It is the impartation of life. God wants to have a relationship with your friend, not merely a spiritual moment decorates their life. You and I are the forerunners of God, in the middle, between Him and our friends. We are His hands and feet, His eyes and ears, His body. Our relationship, God loving others through us, builds the bridge for His relationship with them.

Once you have spoken a blessing, or perhaps prayed a blessing prayer, or more specifically, for a need the individual might have, what's next?

You may find yourself stuck, so what do you do?

- Listen.
- Let them talk, if they will.
- What is their religious background? Listen, without arguing or contesting the asserted beliefs.
- What is their current world view? Listen again – be attentive, interested.
- When you prayed for them, with them, or spoke of Christ, what was the reaction you noted?
- Is your relationship with them at ease, comfortable, or strained?
- As they unpack their needs, if they are willing to be that open, where are the areas in which the good news of Christ would be good news to them? Make mental notes.
- Are they open?
- Are there roadblocks, caricatures of Christ or Christianity that need to be eliminated, clarified?



Evangelism As Blessing

- Are there questions, excuses? Hurts and wounds?
- Does there seem to be a freedom to discuss such things?

If not, you will need to work on the bridge between you to make sure it is capable of carrying the heavy cargo of truth. Love strengthens and builds that bridge. And love is also spelled – TIME. This is the power of the “salt covenant.” Look for the appropriate moment to share your own story, your journey toward faith and its obstacles? But don’t rush that. What book might you give them that would open their mind and heart – it all depends on where they are in their journey.

THE ALPHA COURSE

The Alpha Course was immensely successful not only in England, but around the world. Holy Trinity introduced the course as a bridge back to faith and to the church. The course was designed for those disenfranchised and not quite ready to take the faith plunge. The Alpha Course was designed to reintroduce Christianity, to give explorers the opportunity to ‘sniff around and kick the tires, check out Christianity, try it on for size.’ It was a bold experiment, and it worked.

In six years, the movement grew from five registered courses to more than 10,000 in 72 nations, and in the next ten years, to 33,500 courses in 163 nations. The world wanted to explore Christianity. The Alpha course unwraps over a ten-week period, a lesson a week, climaxed by a weekend retreat. Each participant is treated as an ‘honored guest,’ with the sponsoring church or group working hard to demonstrate the ministry of hospitality. Each session begins with a fellowship meal, a welcome, a brief time of worship, and then the Alpha lesson or talk. Discussion follows in small groups, with more fellowship and refreshments.



The Final Lesson

The group leader does more than teaching or talking, he develops a pastoral relationship with each participant. He encourages them, prays for them, with them, and encourages them to respond to the Holy Spirit. At the meetings, questions are asked, possibilities are explored, “What would this look like if it were lived out? What difference would it make? Can I do this? Should I?”

Group members are imagining their lives as believers, though they have not yet fully believed. They have a sense of belonging to the group, a connection to the host and group leader, but they don’t yet believe, and they are attempting to imagine behaving their new beliefs. The sense of belonging causes many in the group to stay together well beyond the ten weeks. They have started a journey and want to finish together.⁹⁷

The Alpha Course is a great curriculum to use with a small group that is exploring Christianity. Those using it credit it with changing the lives of tens of thousands.

DISCIPLE MAKING CURRICULUM

Another resource is the Disciple Making curriculum of Final Command Ministries. This resource is being used for secularists, those without Christians roots, and even for Muslims. It involves a small group, limited to twelve. Once the group is launched, it is closed to new members. That prevents the unsteadyng of group dynamics with comers and goers.

The group outline involves a warm greeting, and a round-the-circle “How are you doing?” It introduces a small portion of Scripture. Muslims participants immediately draw parallels to the Koran. An estimated 1.6 million Muslims have converted to Christianity using this model. Everyone takes a turn as leader – so it is peer led.

⁹⁷ George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 122.



Evangelism As Blessing

After the passage is read, each member restates what they heard. They then ask a series of questions – “What does this say about God? What does it say about me – about man? If this were true, what should I do? If this were true, who else should know?” Then the group turns back to the personal and expresses concern for one another offering assistance if needed. Then the final question, “Who will I tell about what I learned today?”

When new folks express an interest, a group member stays in the original group to its conclusion but also agrees to start another group. Before the first group has finished its course, some groups are five generations deep, with members in two groups, one as a peer, and the other as a peer-facilitator. The Disciple Making effort is just now being introduced into America, and offers hope for young millennials, Gen Z and Gen Alpha.

God’s redemptive work is reconciliation. It does not stop with a conversion experience. We are to be at peace with God and one another, and then, peacemakers to the lost. Luther’s term for justification was the German, *Rechtfertigung*, meaning “setting right.” God, then, is a “right-setting” God. He wants to redeem us, liberate us, justify us, regenerate us, and reconcile us to God, the Father, transferring us into the “kingdom of His dear Son.” He breaks down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, male and female, bond and free, black and white, poor and rich – and establishes peace in us and between us and our God. Our love, or better, God’s love through us, articulated as blessing, and demonstrated as “deeds of loving kindness, deeds that ‘mend the world’ (tikkun olam).”⁹⁸

We see this ‘right setting’ God in the opening verses of Genesis as the Spirit broods, hovers over the “formless and empty, darkness [that] was over the surface of the deep.” This is, though it is not explicit in scripture, an expression of God’s love. It is

⁹⁸ Clark Williamson, *A Christian Theology*, 109.



The Final Lesson

life-giving love. In Genesis 1, seven times God sees what He has made and calls it good, and in the last instance, very good. Once the good has been established and the chaos of Genesis 1:2, addressed, God creates man, and gives humanity dominion. The purpose is not to exploit or overlord it, but to restrain chaos from reoccurring and to maintain an ordered world.

That's our function as salt – to stop the decay; and light – to expose the darkness. Over all, to constrain evil. Paul, in 1 Timothy 2, unpacks the effect of praying Christians on culture – it engenders peacefulness, because of people with inner peace, because men and women are pious and godly, and that, because of fear and reverence for God. Prayer, Paul seems to suggests, moves this process along, and results in the salvation of souls.

We have no idea who we are! Or the power that God has designed to flow to us, and through us. If we were to only rise to our full potential in Christ!

Exercise 26:

1. Review the next steps after the prayer of blessing, and remember, no two people or experiences will be alike. God will open the door, and as we noted in the past, give you the words to say, in the right way, at the right moment, until you have before you someone asking questions.
2. Look for curriculum options – the Alpha Course, the Disciple Making curriculum, and pray about how you might more deliberately help those with whom you are praying to make a commitment to Christ.
3. The goal is not getting your friend to ‘pray the sinner’s prayer’! It is full reconciliation with God. What do you think that means?



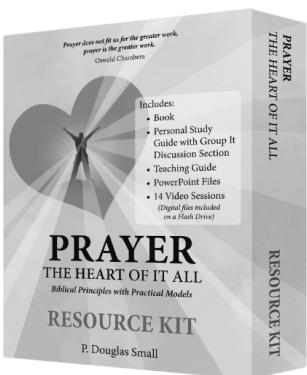
Evangelism As Blessing

ACTION:

Go back to your list. Amend it for the last time. Those who are most open, ambivalent, mostly closed.

- Review where these people are – family, friends, work peers, neighbors, community leaders, etc.
- Pick 3-5 and pray for them daily, without discarding the entire list.
- Reach out those who you perceive to be most open. Arrange for coffee – or whatever ground is comfortable to them! If you discover that none appear open, go to the next 3-5 on your list. Don't be discouraged. God opens doors – so keep praying.
- Once you have spoken a blessing, and perhaps, prayed for them – let them set the pace. Hear their story before you tell your rehearsed story! Your experiences might fill up a book, but you need to testimony that can be highlighted in five-to-ten minutes.
- Now, you test the degree of openness and you let them tell you that they are interested in hearing about Christ. Don't push, but don't be silenced. Your life is also a witness. That they are around you, knowing your faith, and knowing their lack of faith, is a testament to their openness. They value you as a friend. Be that friend to them.
- Be ready to disciple them – that is, to keep the relationship going after they make a move toward God. They are wide open now. Your role is not done, it is even more critical.





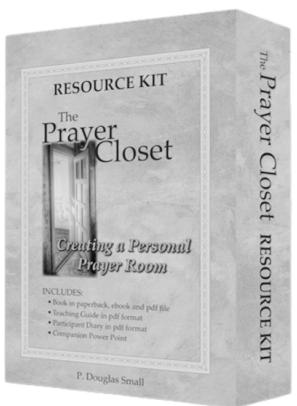
Discusses prayer fundamentals; the four critical elements: at home daily prayer, the church at prayer, intercessory prayer and prayer evangelism; and how to apply each of these to create a great awakening in yourself, your church, and your sphere of influence in the world.

Resource Kit includes book, personal study guide and flash drive with additional materials. Special Group Package Pricing is also available at www.projectpraypublications.org



The lack of answers to our prayers is not because God no longer answers or does not want to help. It is often an issue on our side - some hindrance to prayer, blockages in our own heart. In such moments, no one is more disappointed than God. He wants to help us, to deliver, to answer. Prayer works, because God works. It is effective, because its hope is in Him and His action. But it also demands changes in us. There are prerequisites to answered prayer. Learn practical steps to answered pray!

Resource Kit - includes book, personal study guide and flash drive with additional materials. Special Group Package Pricing is also available at www.projectpraypublications.org

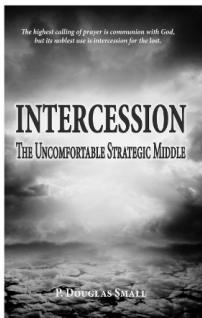


What we seek is more than a place, more than mere words or even a disciplined, noble routine. It is more than the fact that we pray daily or the function of prayer and its benefits. It is relationship that, to be transforming, has be centered in the heart. Prayer is not something we do, it is someone we are with. And that needs a place!

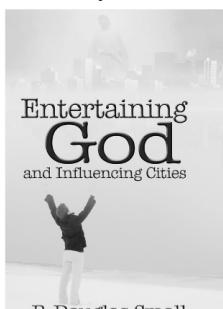
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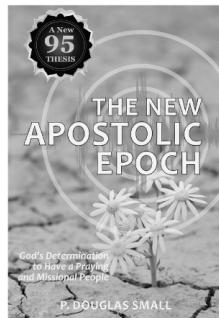
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Jesus came to the middle to die praying from the middle cross. God wants to move us to the middle, connecting lost and hurting people to God. This is the central focus of intercession, the reconciliation of men and women to God, the Father, through Christ, by the enabling work of the Spirit.



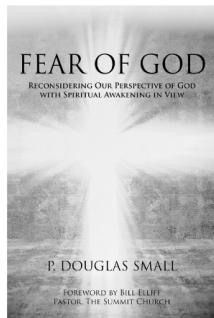
P. Douglas Small
Entertaining God invites Him to reveal His secrets to us as His mysteries are unwrapped in riddles that slowly unravel over time. Their meanings become clearer as days and years go by.



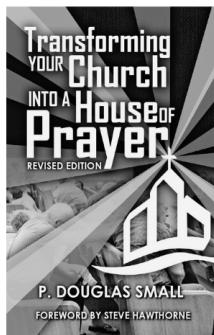
Apostolic epochs involve a breaking away, a new definition and a reorientation. They refocus kingdom purposes. The apostolic epoch that we are now entering is the fulfillment of the desire of Jesus, that His church be a house of prayer for all nations.



The Praying Church Made Simple is a leader's guide for a multi year process to create a culture of prayer in a congregation. Here, you will find a strategy to lay the groundwork for an effective prayer ministry.



The more we reverence God, the higher self worth and self esteem rise without becoming self centered, or being blinded by pride and arrogance. Nobility emerges. We see ourselves as God's children, reflecting His image.



It was the desire of Jesus that the Temple be a house of prayer for the nations. Discover seven things that must change if the church is going to embrace a new reformation.



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