

B R I A N M . K E L L Y

ONE STEP CLOSER TO CHRIST



Evangelism as Spiritual Pilgrimage Together

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ONE STEP CLOSER TO CHRIST:
Evangelism as Spiritual Pilgrimage Together
by Brian M. Kelly, Ph.D.,

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Introduction

WHY THIS BOOK?

We all need help when it comes to sharing our faith. Since 1985 I have been active in teaching others in personal and the more deliberate marketplace evangelism approaches. Yet I still struggle with apprehension when it comes to telling others about Jesus. Let's face it - evangelism is a fear word. Christian believers and unbelievers alike react primarily in hostility when they hear it used. Both groups want to have little to do with its planning or practice. This resistance often stems from a fundamental misunderstanding concerning the nature of the process of conversion. This book will help believers sift through some of the myth and confusion concerning the evangelistic task by engaging them in the formation of their own practical ministry of evangelism.

It is imperative that the Christian church take a fresh look at the task of evangelism. No other issue in the life of the church, except perhaps the subject of prayer, receives so much attention with so little action as evangelism. This estrangement between intention and practice is worsened by the decided lack of accurate reflection on evangelism.

Furthermore, the question of how to actually encourage effective evangelism is too often answered by the eager importation and application of each new and seemingly successful method into the life of the church. Unfortunately, the implementation of an approach generally is not due to its built-in theological integrity, but rather because of the results produced elsewhere when it was employed, proving that a philosophy of expediency reigns supreme as the end justifies the means.

Likewise, the common conception of what constitutes genuine Christian conversion, an end so diligently pursued by lay persons and clergy alike, is most likely flawed. As is often the case, a significant facet of the problem may also contain the key to the solution. In this instance it is the mistaken focus on sudden crisis as the primary catalyst for conversion. Because one's concept of conversion and practice of evangelism are inextricably linked, if the former is misconceived, the latter will naturally lose its effectiveness. Since evangelistic practices reflect beliefs about conversion, and much of our thinking about conversion is in error, is there any wonder a dearth of genuine effective evangelism exists in the church today, let alone anything approximating a lifestyle of evangelism for most believers such as was exemplified by the first century church.¹

The task of restoring a lifestyle of evangelism to the third millennium church, such as experienced in the first century church, will be neither effortless or simple. Nevertheless, all believers have a responsibility to further the Lord's great purposes in the world. To do that, much more thought and eventual effort, needs to be expended toward the process of evangelism.

Toward that end, I propose that conversion should be conceived as an ongoing process, a journey of spiritual proportions, rather than narrowly construed as a sudden crisis encounter. Based on this premise, I envision effective evangelism as emerging from an earnest reflection on God's activity in the task. How that activity relates to five key aspects of evangelism is the core emphasis of this book.

Five Key Aspects to an Effective Ministry of Evangelism

To develop an effective ministry of evangelism believers must assess each particular method they employ to determine if it is, in fact, dialogical (two-way communication) in method, biblical in basis, spiritual in dimension, communal in context, and holistic in scope. When the task of reaching the lost is understood in this light, it should move churches, and the individuals of which they are comprised, closer toward the realization of a lifestyle of evangelism.

Properly executed, the process of developing a practical theology of evangelism should assure that evangelistic methods will reflect a

¹ Green has noted how lay persons were the key to the spread of Christianity as they went about "gossiping" the gospel in their everyday tasks (cf., Acts 5:20-21, 42), Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1970), 211.

genuine consideration of the activity of God in the midst of the situation at hand.² Also, that such methods have been properly adjusted for each local field, that the necessary criteria to provide for their evaluation and correction have been developed, and most important, they emerge from the life of the church and ordinary believers rather than academia. Such an approach will help bridge the gap between the church and the academy, put the focus on persons rather than results, enlighten overly simplistic views of conversion, and encourage effective evangelism.

The task remains to further spell out the five aspects I have referred to. Chapter One provides an overview of the theoretical considerations that inform these basic tenets regarding conversion and subsequent evangelistic practices. It explains the more difficult terms used in the book and the methodology behind practical theology as an academic discipline. Chapter Two explains the process of framing a discussion about the conversion of souls, first with God, second with the church, and finally with the unbelieving world. Chapter Three delves into the scriptural basis for the belief that conversion is more of a process than a one-time event and its implications for Christian discipleship. Chapter Four focuses on the spiritual dimension of the conversion process illustrating from the scriptures the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers and unbelievers alike. Chapter Five considers how the process of conversion and thus all effective evangelism originates from a communal context transcending mere individualistic encounters. And Chapter Six deals with God's concern for a conversion that goes beyond transforming the entire individual to effect the whole cosmos with its redemptive character. The final segment, Chapter Seven answers the question all theology must face, "How are these principles best applied in the life of the ordinary believer?"

My prayer is that believers who read this book will spend time reflecting on the principles laid out here, seek God for wisdom and understanding concerning their own unique gifting as a anointed wit-

² This is what I have referred to as "discernment of Theopraxis." Groome called this a "shared Christian praxis," whereby God's self-disclosure can be discerned through a "participative and dialogical pedagogy [way of teaching]." See Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 135. The Theopraxis envisioned here has a dual dimension, that of the human coming to know, and recognize the work of God, even as he or she is known by the divine, and recognized by him. For a thorough discussion of this concept see Chapter Four, Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper Row Publishers, 1983).

ness to the gospel, and apply these truths to their own evangelistic practices. If they will do this, through the process of prayer, reflection and application, God will give them the insight to develop and practice an effective lifestyle of evangelism. By taking, and helping others to take, 'one step closer to Christ,' the impact on their own lives, the lives of those seeking to know more about God, and the furtherance of his kingdom may well be immeasurable.

How Theology Can Help

(Reflection about God)

Conversion Beliefs and Evangelism Practices

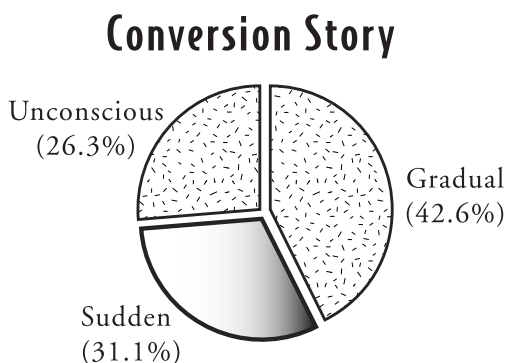
Sudden Crisis Vs. Gradual Process

I spent a good portion of my adolescent and early adult life as a habitual “party animal.” I started smoking dope (marijuana) when I was thirteen, about the same time I lost my virginity. During my stint in the U.S. Army in the early 70’s my buddies and I got our kicks smuggling hashish across the borders of the Netherlands and Germany. I’ve tried all kinds of drugs, some of them intravenously. I spent many of my nights in bars until they closed and then at early morning parties until there was no more booze or drugs to consume. I was nearly 31 years old before I finally committed my life to Christ. Like the country western song of that title, my “*Searching for Love in All the Wrong Places*,” finally had come to an end when I found Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior.

In stark contrast to my experience, my wife committed her life to Christ when she was in pre-school. Her testimony is one of “I’ve always known the Lord.” She never did any drugs, booze, or engaged in any sort of lascivious behavior as I did most of my non-Christian life. Our conversions were on opposite ends of the spectrum of religious experience. As a result, she could never quite understand my zeal for the more intentional and conversational methods of evangelism I often employed. They failed to resonate with her understanding of conversion and seemed out of touch with the reality of her own spiritual walk. This kind of disconnection, between a person’s personal conversion experience and the most commonplace evangelism used in the church today is all too common.

A recent study of 845 adult Christians from 34 different churches investigated the link between conversion experience (Sudden, Gradual, or Unconscious) and evangelism.³ Perhaps the most interesting statistic derived from the study was that nearly 70% of those Christians polled had either a Gradual conversion experience (42.6%) or had always been a Christian (26.3%), compared to less than a third who attested to a Sudden conversion (31.1%)(see Figure 1). This data concurred with numerous other studies of Christian conversion throughout the last century.

Figure 1



These results affirm that there is a significant relationship between one's conversion story and several beliefs about conversion. As might be expected, those with an Unconscious or Gradual conversion place a higher emphasis on conversion as a lifelong process. In contrast, those with a Sudden conversion place a higher emphasis on the belief that Christians are keenly aware of their conversion, and their conversion by definition requires a dynamic spiritual experience.

Furthermore, regardless of the conversion experience, respondents consistently and significantly ranked evangelism as less important than the other spiritual disciplines. The subordination of the importance of evangelism in comparison to other Christian practices would seem to stand the New Testament (NT) on its head. A thorough reading of

³ The complete report is entitled *Statistical Relationships: Conversion Story and Evangelism*, yet to be published in whole, but portions are contained in Brian M. Kelly, "Toward a Practical Theology of Evangelism" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), Chapter III.C.4., 55-99. The Unconscious category is the label given to those who "have known the Lord all their lives," that is, there has never been a time in their life when they were conscious of not knowing the Lord.

the NT texts indicates no less a focus on evangelism than on the need for prayer, fellowship, or respect for scriptural knowledge. If this diminishment of the importance of evangelism is as prevalent as this study seemed to indicate, the contemporary church is in danger of perpetuating a vicious cycle in which the priority of sharing one's faith has lost prominence. Additionally, the scarcity of evidence for what could be considered a lifestyle of evangelism affirms for new converts the relative unimportance of reaching out to the lost as a spiritual discipline.

The data also show that how people come to Christ influences their likelihood of involvement in various approaches to evangelism. Respondents selected choices concerning 25 different methods of evangelism, which were then assigned a numerical value: "Never" = 1, "Not very unlikely" = 2, "Somewhat likely" = 3, "Very Likely" = 4 and then ranked by means from highest likelihood of involvement to lowest (see Figure 2).

Those with a Sudden conversion were more likely to be involved in every kind of evangelism method offered. Why would those who are converted suddenly appear so much more zealous in sharing their faith than those who have been Christians all their lives? Perhaps, the answer has more to do with the evangelism approaches employed in our churches than the degree of zealousness in the believer. For example, those methods that reflect fairly public or intentional evangelism endeavors, such as "sharing a testimony," "using a questionnaire," or "distributing evangelistic literature" in the public sphere are the ones which both the Gradual and Unconscious convert are less likely to participate in, according to the research. Assuming that these more assertive methods of evangelism reflect a concept of conversion as a singular event, it's not surprising that individuals with a Sudden conversion story are much more likely to employ these kinds of methods.

Similarly, those with a Sudden conversion in the survey are much more likely to "pray a prayer of repentance with someone who asked them to" than those from the other categories. Because this type of evangelism is not commonly associated with a more gradual conversion experience, such activities may fail to correspond with the thinking of those whose conversion was gradual and their understanding of how conversion, and consequently evangelism, should take place.

Figure 2

RANK OF MEANS FOR LIKELIHOOD OF INVOLVEMENT IN VARIOUS EVANGELISM METHODS

EVANGELISM METHODS	AVERAGE
Regular prayer for a list of non-Christians	3.51
Distribute food or clothing from the church	3.47
Invite non-Christians to an event inside the church	3.47
Help a new Christian to study the Bible	3.46
Offer to pray with a non-Christian who is struggling	3.45
Attend training sessions about sharing faith	3.35
Talk privately with a non-Christian about my faith	3.35
Invite a non-Christian to an event outside my church	3.31
Attend apologetic training sessions	3.31
Be a part of public worship/prayer meeting	3.22
Invite non-Christians to my home for faith discussion	2.99
Share my personal testimony in public	2.97
Do an evangelistic Bible study with non-Christians	2.95
Distribute evangelism literature in public places	2.71
Poll non-Christians about faith in public places	2.49
Go door to door to pray with people for their needs	2.48
Go door to door to share the gospel message	2.48
Promote a meeting where signs and wonders are primary	2.39
Preach the gospel from a stage in public	2.25

A Message that Resonates

What is needed is a more enlightened understanding regarding conversion and a restructuring of our evangelism approaches in light of it. Too often decisions concerning evangelism in local churches are not based on what I call a genuine Theopraxis,⁴ or attempts to discern

⁴ *Theopraxis* is, simply stated, *the intentional activity of God in the midst of situations.*

the leading of the Spirit. Unless pastors and leaders are willing to do the hard work of seeking God and developing a comprehensive ministry of evangelism specific to their particular evangelism field, they will succumb to the temptation of expediency. Instead, leaders should realize that a stress on tangible results threatens to reduce evangelism to an overly simplistic task, neglects the complex nature of conversion, and makes commonplace the dynamic interactions that occur between the human and the divine in that process.

Perhaps part of the answer lies in training ordinary Christians to recognize more readily the activity of God in the midst of their evangelistic efforts. By helping the ordinary believer develop these ministry skills, the church helps debunk the myth that evangelism is the responsibility of the formally trained. Encouraging this aptitude in believers may also challenge the sentiment that theology is a purely academic discipline having little or nothing to do with the actual day-to-day life of the average churchgoer.

When lay people acknowledge the work of God in their lives and the lives of those outside the faith, unbelievers will get the point as well - the Christian God can be found outside the realm of church services and is wonderfully present within the context of their individual lives.

If a lifestyle of evangelism is to be recovered, the ordinary Christian must embrace and practice a ministry of evangelism that is internalized and self-initiated.

However, focusing solely on the shortage of evangelism tends to cloud the real issue of why people fail to get involved in evangelism efforts in the first place. Not only is there a decided lack of long-term fruit to excite enthusiasm in evangelism efforts, but the methods of evangelism offered to congregations often fail to resonate with the conversion experience of its members or lack enough theological integrity to spur their involvement. By limiting evangelism approaches to those which anticipate a need for crisis to stimulate conversion leaders may unintentionally discourage lay participation. This is especially true within congregations whose constituents more often attest to process rather than event oriented conversions.

In addition, the focus of conversion has been almost solely on the individual encounter, rather than the communal aspects of salvation

and its impact on our global mission. Traditional Protestant understanding of salvation as a singular event which concerns individuals exclusively must be challenged. New models for honoring the long-term gradual process of conversion in the majority of Christians and which anticipates a far-ranging impact beyond mere individuals must be developed.

When the methods we employ in the church for reaching the lost possess a high level of biblical, psychological, and spiritual integrity, many more in the body of Christ are likely to get involved. As the study mentioned before showed, people are most likely to get involved in methods that reflect their own experience. If most Christians experience conversion as a gradual process, then we need to develop approaches to evangelism that are sympathetic with that experience. This will encourage the proactive involvement of believers and insure a relevancy and sensitivity to our message for those outside the faith.

Three Phases of the Spiritual Journey

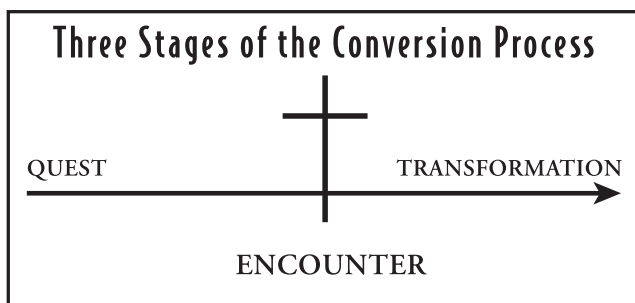
I am convinced that the concept of spiritual *journey* or pilgrimage is the best model for envisioning the conversion *process*. The emphasis must be on the ongoing nature of the experience instead of a too-narrow focus on a crisis event spurring conversion. Thus, the words *journey* and *process* are key to this way of thinking. The workings of God in this divine/human interaction can be described as a multifaceted process that entails three phases: quest, encounter and transformation.⁵ While every human is capable of experiencing all three phases of this spiritual journey, only those who commit their lives to Christ will ever actually go beyond the quest stage; the rest will remain “lost.” Finally, Christian conversion is ongoing, involving a life-long process of transformation (see Figure 3).

The first phase, spiritual *quest*, describes the features of human pilgrimage in which persons seek a deeper knowledge of the reason for their existence. All humans are being drawn by God back to him. While only the Holy Spirit can stimulate movement along this path, Christians can help explain some of the paradoxes of human experience to those uncertain about the next step toward reconciliation. Humans are naturally inquisitive about spiritual experiences and the

⁵ I am deeply indebted here to my mentor, Richard Peace, for his model of the conversion process as a pilgrimage that involves these three stages. For a detailed description of this concept see Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns Publishing Co., 1999)25-27.

realities of life and death. An informed Christian witness will have some explanation concerning these profound issues arousing further interest by the curious. Thus, the essence of evangelism consists of determining where people are on this journey and encouraging them along their path back to God.

Figure 3



The second phase is *encounter*. For some, their concept of conversion is limited to this step in which a commitment is made to Jesus Christ. Significantly, the Spirit of God promotes the realization of God's nearness through a recognition of the atoning work done by Christ at the Cross, which is followed by an obedient human response to that presence stemming from genuine repentance and faith.

The final phase, *transformation* is the natural consequence of an ongoing discovery of the activity of God in the life of the Christian believer. The interaction which ensues is comprised of not only a *quantity* of life (eternally ongoing) but a *quality* of life as well whereby the believer's ongoing personal relationship with Jesus shapes and transforms every other relationship along the spiritual pilgrimage.

All three aspects must be incorporated into the evangelistic endeavor. By neglecting to honor the time needed for people to work through the questions of faith, the encounter phase may be prematurely pressed upon inquirers resulting in a lack of genuine understanding of the full implications of their separation from God. This ignorance concerning the significance and power of Christ's atonement results in a stilted and immature faith, further demeaning the substantial benefits accrued to the life of the penitent through faith. Similarly, an undue focus on encounter alone can lead to the neglect of the serious responsibility of nurturing people along the path of

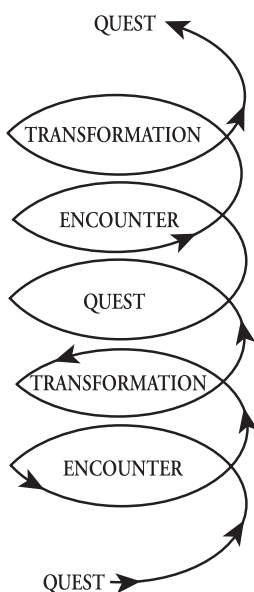
transformation as an intrinsic part of the evangelistic process.

All three aspects of the process should be amply stressed in order to expedite a genuine and meaningful conversion.

In fact, it might even be more helpful for believers to consider the possibility that such a process occurs on a regular, almost daily basis in their lives. This more cyclical rather than linear view adopts the three phases of the process as part of an ongoing cycle in the life of all Christians (see Figure 4). Regularly, believers face certain doubts or challenges to their faith which cause them to quest and seek after God for answers. In that seeking, through prayer and study of his Word, and through insight gained by engagement with the Holy Spirit, they have a renewed encounter with the reality of God's provision through Christ. This encounter results in a profound and genuine transformation once again as their faith in the Lord is strengthened.

Figure 4

DAILY CONVERSION SPIRAL



Evangelism as a Holy Conversation

Since evangelistic practices reflect expectations about conversion, an accurate understanding and perception of God's intentions will move us toward more effective methods for evangelism. If methods are to have the kind of biblical, spiritual and psychological integrity necessary for wholesome conversions, believers must help unbelievers discover their place on the spiritual path that leads either closer or further away from God.

It is also important for believers to understand that God is the evangelist. Indeed, he uses his Spirit as the agent for convincing persons of their spiritual state and has chosen humans to be the means for communicating these truths. The mechanics of this kind of spiritual activity requires that Christians be in constant conversation with God through prayer, responding to the holy dialogue that ensues between them (both God and the believer) and unbelievers. It is a dialogue with God through the church to the world.

Learning the Language

Much of what Christians do, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is similar to the practice of psycho-therapy toward the healing of persons. The role of the psychologist is often one of interpreter, or even translator, for the client. The therapist is able to share the language of psychology in such a way as to bring to light the deep inward processes that are occurring in the human psyche. By sharing a new language or vocabulary, these care-givers help their clients articulate what they may have already known, thereby invigorating powerful insights into the healing process.

In the same way, the evangelistic discussion that occurs between believers and unbelievers is a sharing of language. Unbelievers have had powerful spiritual experiences but are often at a loss to explain their meaning or significance. Believers have the authority and particular insight gained from God's word to guide them in a discussion that can lead to greater spiritual understanding. By sharing spiritual truths they have gleaned along life's journey, they are able to help unbeliever's articulate what they may have already sensed but not yet fully comprehended. By sharing a deeper revelation, the believer is able to affirm that "Yes, God loves all humans, and desires a close personal relationship with them." But even beyond those elemental truths, believers can show unbelievers that a relationship with his son

Jesus is the way God allowed for a divine/human relationship to be initiated and sustained.

In order for that kind of “holy conversation” to take place, there are three imperatives in the life of believers. First, they must ascertain the questions that are being asked in the heart of the hearer by identifying where they are in their spiritual journey. Too often the accusation is true that the church is busy answering the questions that no one is really asking. Is the average unbeliever really concerned about correct doctrine, church history or denominational traditions? Yet, these issues often preoccupy the main concern of churches while they remain seemingly ignorant of ways to communicate the gospel in a way that it can be clearly heard by the lost in the communities that surround them.

Second, this requires an accurate interpretation of the hearer’s culture and a thorough understanding of the language in which the unbeliever can best hear about and begin to understand the implications of his/her faith experience. Only if the church strives to learn the language of the unbelieving culture will it be able to properly communicate the Gospel message to those hearers.

Third, this kind of Spirit-led dialogue requires a truthful translation of the faith story (holy scripture, church tradition, personal testimony, etc.), into a language the unbeliever can hear and understand. Believers must learn to listen to and speak God’s Word for a lost and broken world anxious for redemption.

Living Obediently and Responsibly

This kind of dialogue goes beyond mere talk or a focus solely on pronouncements concerning the gospel. Faithful communication requires obedience and responsibility lived out in the life of the translator. God made it clear in the reality of Jesus Christ’s presence in flesh and blood that a holy life pleasing to him was more than just conversation. He chose to communicate his love through a person, whose life and example could be witnessed by those around him over extended periods. Thus, God’s call to us to live a transformed life carries with it an innate responsibility to obey his commands in faithful relationship with him. In this way, the hearer is challenged by the call of God to go beyond mere confession of belief to a life of obedience and responsibility as well.

The “holy conversation” I have in mind is obviously an enlightened conversation: informed by study of the Word of God, our culture, and an understanding of the spiritual stature of the hearer. Hopefully, further elaboration on these aspects of the process in chapter two will help in the formation of an intelligent, spirit-led, and effective conversation about the gospel.

Discerning Spiritual Gifts for a Lifestyle of Evangelism

If Christians are going to develop a lifestyle of evangelism, they must first discover what the specific gifts are that God has given them toward that purpose. Some gifts are more suitable for specific phases of the conversion process. Hospitality, philosophical discourse, apologetic discussions, the gift of faith, compassionate prayer, discernment of spirits, all of these compliment the quest phase of the conversion process. Others, such as words of wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, tongues and interpretation of tongues are best exercised during the encounter phase of the model. Still others, such as administrating, helping, encouraging, teaching, showing mercy, leading and governing, and giving generously are more often manifested within the transformation phase of ongoing conversion.

While the gifts discussed in the NT documents often defy a rigid categorization, their exercise may likely fit certain aspects of the conversion process. Christians should determine which of these gifts they flow with most readily, then attempt to relate them to the three phases of the conversion process. That way, their efforts in evangelism will resonate with the Spirit’s empowerment in their lives. In doing so they will yield maximum fruit for the kingdom, and create a desire for the ongoing operation of these gifts in the life of the believer.

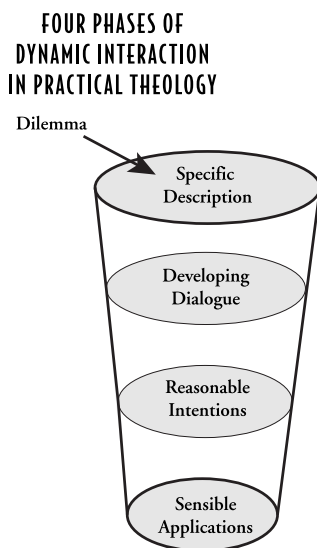
However, spiritual gifts without long-term fruit lead to a hollow witness. The dynamic empowerment believers experience from the Holy Spirit is provocatively expressed in the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control demonstrated in their life before others (Gal.6:22-23). Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit the eyes of a loving Christian, as “windows of the soul” (Mt.6:22) bear witness that the love of God has been shed abroad in the hearts of his children (Rom.5:5). This love, expressed in the power and forgiveness of the Lord toward sinful humanity, is able to transcend any of the worldly limitations for “against such things there is no law” (Gal.5:23).

Toward that end, it is essential that each believer not only discover his or her potential gifts in the task of evangelism, but also understand the Spirit's work to develop genuine fruit in their lives, which is exemplified in a genuine, and supernatural Christian love for the lost.

The Role of Practical Theology in Evangelism

The character and structure of practical theology holds the key to positive change in the way churches approach the task of evangelism.⁶ Through the implementation of four phases of interaction employed in practical theology, churches can develop an effective course of training in the formation, implementation, and subsequent evaluation of evangelism practices. These phases begin with, (1) devising a specific description of the challenges facing the church in evangelism. From there, (2) leaders can encourage a genuine dialogue within the accepted oral and written traditions of that local church body. Also, (3) they can help formulate some reasonable intentions that will flow from these discussions. Finally, (4) specific, sensible applications can be set in motion that ultimately will help resolve the difficulties determined by the discussion.⁷ This framework should be incorporated into the teaching, reflection, and implementation of a practical ministry of evangelism for each specific church situation (see Figure 5).

Figure 5



The remainder of this book will give the reader thorough explanation of each of the five aspects that I think are essential to developing a personal practical ministry of evangelism. Pastors, church leaders and teachers, and lay people alike will find the scriptural basis I provide in this book to be “fuel for the fire,” so to speak, for the discussion that these leaders can facilitate in their own life or congregations. I have tried to provide enough principles derived from the scripture, along with their chapter and verse references, to help initiate the process we call practical theology. Toward that end, I provide here a glossary of terms that might be used to begin the discussion (see Figure 6).

While you read this book, it will benefit you most to take the time to reflect on your own conversion and past experiences in evangelism. As you do so, ask God to reveal to you to how he has gifted you uniquely to be his witness to a lost and dying world.

The process of working through the specific descriptions and conversing with God, the church family and those outside the faith, should inspire some reasonable intentions on your behalf. As you apply them to your situation it will provoke new dilemmas to be resolved through the same process. The degree that you are willing to critically assess each evangelism approach you employ, weighing them in light of the five facets I explain in detail in the following chapters, will be the measure of its effectiveness in helping you develop a lifestyle evangelism. As you continue to work through these issues, you will begin to see a consistency and fruitfulness to your evangelistic efforts. This continuing practice of perfecting the reflective skills necessary to develop a faithful witness by rightly discerning God’s activity in your life is the essence of practical theology.

⁷ Church leaders and educators should see Kelly, *Toward a Practical Theology of Evangelism*, for a thorough discussion of each phase of this approach.

Figure 6

Glossary of Terms

Practical Theology. Reflection about the activity of God in the home, workplace, and church that begins in those spheres and interacts with the biblical, historical and systematic traditions of Christianity.

Evangelism. The process whereby the Christian community, through a spiritual encounter with the Risen Christ, and the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, assists the reconciliation of God's creation back to him.

Conversion. Christian conversion is a complex spiritual process involving three metaphors that explain a believer's interaction with God: quest, encounter, and transformation.

Quest. Aspects of the human pilgrimage in which persons seek after a deeper knowledge of the reason for their existence.

Encounter. Discernment of God's activity expressed in the cross of Christ, followed by obedient response to the presence of God, which results in transformation stemming from genuine repentance and faith.

Transformation. The everlasting change that occurs through personal relationship with Christ that effects every other relationship along the spiritual pilgrimage.

Dialogical. A two-way communication that involves input and feedback in an ongoing interactive conversation

Biblical. That which is based on principles gleaned from sound orthodox interpretation of both Old and New Testament Scriptures.

Spiritual. The dynamic work of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide believers into the will of God for their lives.

Communal. The interaction of persons with other persons to form a community.

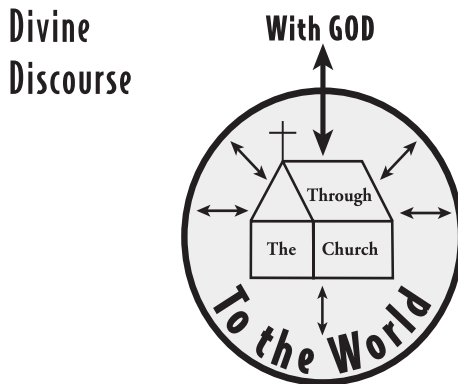
Holistic. An extension of the scope of redemption beyond the sphere of individuals to include the church, the global community and the world.

Methodology. Means or procedures used for attaining an end, the techniques or approaches used to accomplish the task.

Evangelism As A Dialogue Along “The Way”

If evangelism is the interaction of God in the mutual sharing of spiritual journeys between believers and unbelievers, then dialogue is the means whereby that interaction occurs. The expression I’ve used, *“the way,”* is indicative of the relentless movement of creation with God through time toward the final conclusion of all things. Its biblical use is significant and will be addressed further in the next chapter. For Christians, the passage of time takes place in the context of the community of faith toward a restoration of wholeness for all of God’s creatures and creation. It is motion guided by an ongoing divine discourse with God through his church to the world he desires to redeem (see Figure 7).

Figure 7



Conversation with God

Prayer as the Foundation of our Faith

All Christian experience is rooted fundamentally in a meeting with God stemming from his initiative. God enables humans to discover him through the activity of his Son in the world. These truths are revealed by the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people. Divine self-disclosure, seen as a purposeful interaction between God and his people with the intent of transforming individuals, culture, and creation, is the foundation for conversion. It originates in a searching for, and subsequently encountering his presence, resulting in a life-long transformation of the human spirit. This is the objective of the whole conversion process.

Fundamentally, evangelism begins in a relationship with Jesus. As one great preacher said, “before I talk to men [sic] about God, I talk to God about men.” The process of “talking with God” is much more complex than reciting a litany of needs as if God were some sort of cosmic bellhop waiting to serve our every desire. Humans participate most fully in this divine conversation when those persons are willing to listen and act in obedience to that which is heard. Sincere prayer does not ask only that God would act, but actively seeks how the petitioner might best facilitate the activity of God in answering the request.

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The account of Jesus at Gethsemane provides a challenging example of commitment when, even though facing the most extreme hardship, Christ was able to say, “nevertheless Lord, not my will but thy will be done,” (Lk.22:42). This kind of prayerful deliberation can only emerge from a “practice of relatedness,” which results in a discovery of the activity of God and a bending of our wills toward his desires.⁸

⁸ Faithful obedient prayer results in the imitation of God; *Theo-praxis* that leads to *Theo-imitatio*. Parker Palmer defines obedience as “the means to listen with a discerning ear and respond faithfully to the personal implications of what one has heard,” Palmer, *To Know*, 11, 89

Accordingly, all effective evangelism involves a discussion with God from beginning to end. Believers must have this dialogue before they pass on their faith; for only if we have a dynamic relationship with Jesus can we hope to share that relationship with others. If we are truly in prayer while we are witnessing to others, we can be assured of divine assistance in the process. Consequently, whenever possible, it is wise to have partners in the gospel in our evangelistic encounters. Faithful intercession on behalf of the unbeliever is essential to our effectiveness as evangelists.

Because the Lord promised he would never leave us nor forsake us and would be with us even to the end of the age (Heb.13:5, Mt.28:20), as believers, we can go knowing that when we talk with unbelievers we are not bereft of God's help. We walk no streets, preach no sermon, offer no cup of cold water but what Jesus the Nazarene has not already gone before us to soften the hardened heart and make it receptive to his love.

Much of our assurance comes from knowing that God is there to give us the words to speak as well (Mk.13:11, Lk.12:11). And while I am an adamant believer in adequate preparation in both prayer and instruction prior to our engaging the world in evangelism, I am also keenly aware of the need for us to be sensitive to the voice of the Spirit while we are communicating our faith. If the essence of prayer is conversation with God then we must be sensitive to hear his voice at all times in order to bear the most fruit for his kingdom. In this way we can emulate Christ's relationship with the Father throughout his earthly ministry (Jn.5:19).

The Holy Spirit and Philosophy Professors

I'll never forget the time I was witnessing to a Professor of Philosophy while training a couple friends of mine in evangelism. Through the use of a "*Religious Attitude Questionnaire*" and Christian Equipper's "*Two Question Test*" booklet,⁹ which we used to develop a dialogue about the gospel, we started a conversation with this professor on a public street one Saturday afternoon. He tried to convince us of the error of our beliefs by attempting to impugn the authority of the Bible. He was convinced it was written by humans, not inspired by God.

⁹ See Francis Anfuso, "*Are You Going to Heaven?: Two Question Test Reveals Answer*," (South Lake Tahoe: Christian Equipppers International, 1981).

Furthermore, he asserted our convictions were the result of a mass hysteria, or brainwashing of sorts, due to our common belief systems. He maintained that by reading the Bible and participating in large public celebration (worship services) our irrational beliefs were only reinforced. Because of intense peer group pressure, he argued, we were unable to think clearly about such things and consequently were duped into believing in an antiquated and illogical religion with no relevance for modern thinkers like himself.

I was aware that any abbreviated attempts to defend our faith were likely to be unpersuasive and might develop into a full blown argument, so I tried to get him to take a booklet published by the Billy Graham association we were giving away to read later at his leisure. He ignored my attempts to end our conversation and went on with his philosophical argument against Christianity. He was witnessing to us!

At that point, I was reminded once again that only God could make the difference. So I began to pray, "Lord what do I say to this man? I don't have a clue what to do or say, and he's not open to any real discussion." Within a moment, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and said, "Ask him if he has a peace." I thought, "That's not going to work. Ask him if he has a peace? What has that got to do with refuting his fine sounding arguments?" But instead of arguing with God, I asked the professor, "Well sir, let me ask you one question before you go, do you have a peace about all this?"

To my surprise, and delight, it stopped him cold. His jaw dropped open, and he looked at me quizzically and said, "You know, I never really thought about that." Sensing a new openness in him, I continued, "Well, all those arguments sound good, but the question remains, do they give you a peace in your heart, and not only for yourself, but are your beliefs something that you think would bring peace to the hearts of other people as well?" It was clear that the Holy Spirit had struck just the right chord in his soul. Mysteriously, he softened toward us and agreed to take the booklet entitled "*Steps to Peace with God*" and, in his case, meditate about its contents.

Prayer as the Catalyst to Effective Evangelism

The encounter with the worldly professor illustrates how important it is that we see prayer as the key to all spiritual encounters and especially in evangelism. Paul makes it clear in his discussion about

spiritual warfare in Ephesians chapter six that the essential ingredient is prayer.

How, if not through a dialogue with God are Christians to “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (v.10)? In what other way, primarily, does one “struggle” and “take his stand against the devil’s schemes” (vv.11-12) if not in prayer?

At the end of this passage Paul acknowledges a problem all Christians face when “making known the mystery which is the gospel”: fear (v.19). Here the apostle Paul himself, one of the greatest evangelists of all time, one who authored nearly a third of the New Testament, and a church planter extraordinaire asks for prayer, not once but twice, and in writing, that he might overcome his fear (v.19-20). Six times in three verses, four of them imperatives, he exhorts the hearers to pray.

Just as prayer is the context of spiritual warfare for Paul, it is also the means of overcoming our fears in evangelism.

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And we need to keep praying for those outside the faith, too, especially after we’ve had the opportunity to communicate the gospel, or else “the God of this world” would blind them to the “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2Cor.4:4). Jesus taught in the parable of the sower (Mk.4, Lk.8) that the effect of the Word was contingent on the condition of the hearers’ hearts. If hearts are hardened there will be a barren harvest field. Furthermore, the prophet Hosea makes it clear that humans have a responsibility in the spiritual harvest: “Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you” (Hos.10:12).

How does one break up the unplowed or “fallow” ground as the KJV of the Bible puts it? Prayer. Prayer that is grounded in obedience to God’s instructions is ammunition for the “weapons of our warfare,” making them “mighty through God for pulling down strongholds” (2Cor.10:14). Strongholds of doubt, ignorance and unbelief. These strongholds, built brick by brick over time, are the devil’s foothold in the minds of both believers and unbelievers. Both alike doubt

the validity of God's Word, remain ignorant concerning what it says about salvation, and when apprized of its content, often refuse to believe what it says.

The description in Paul's letter to the Corinthians is about spiritual warfare, but what is the context of this struggle? Words like "arguments," "vain imaginations" in the KJV, "pretension," "knowledge," and "thought" in the NIV, indicate that in Paul's reasoning the place of battle is primarily in the hearts and minds of people (vv.4-5). Prayer is the key that unlocks the hearts of persons to hear the gospel.

We need to be in conversation with God before, during and after all of our evangelism efforts. It is he that will take the seed that is sown and bring it to fruition. Paul noted how he had planted, another watered, but "God gave the increase" (1Cor.3:6). Our task is to be obedient to respond to his prompting when we pray and then look with the eye of faith to the good fruit that will result. For we do not focus on what is seen but what is unseen, for "what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2Cor. 4:18), knowing that "at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Gal.6:9).

Placing prayer, or conversation with God, at the center of evangelism assures that he gets the credit for fruitfulness and not us. He has ordained prayer to be the means whereby he is glorified in our lives. When we pray we are acknowledging our dependence on him, and when he answers those specific prayers, it is he that receives glory. This causes faith to rise in our hearts that God is intimately involved in our lives and desires to interact with his people. Deriving our sustenance from him, generates faith for future provision as well. Because it acknowledges and honors the divine ingredient, prayer is an essential component to any effective evangelism.

Through the kind of divine encounter that occurs in prayer, humans are able to recognize their own and God's identity within the community of creation, and participate in the purposeful redemptive work of God in their midst. These kinds of powerful, spiritual conversations often occur beyond the individual "prayer closet" (Mt.6:6) in the context of the faith community, extending even into the unbelieving world as God speaks his Word to it for its redemption, healing, and restoration.

Conversation with the Church

The Authority of God's Word

The church of Jesus Christ throughout the ages has rightfully focused on the scriptures as the primary authority for belief and practice. The Word of God is more than mere words on a sheet of paper, however. Rather, it is comprised of the revelations of God in history, recounted first in the verbal reporting of those acts and then later encapsulated within the Old and New Testament scriptures. But more than a revealed and written word, the divine *logos* (Greek for *word*), is also a living word, because Jesus Christ is risen and sits at the right hand of God the Father.

Within the biblical accounts is embedded the story of the people of God. The retelling of that story enables persons from every kind of world view and background to relate to the move of God among his human creatures. Through his Holy Spirit, God has inspired, preserved, and continues to illuminate the Holy Bible to all who search its contents with faith in its power to reveal truth and change lives. This story of the people of God, passed down through God's words contains within it the power of salvation (1Cor.1:18). The most remarkable event of the entire narrative is found in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which the apostle Paul saw as the basis for all Christian belief (1Cor.15:14-17). Later, Christians came to rely on the New Testament documents as concrete evidence for Christ's death and subsequent resurrection.

In Pentecostal/Charismatic circles a heightened awareness of the presence of God in the passions of the worship service or altar experience has often led to a degrading of the authority of the scripture under the strong emotions of the moment. But such a subjectivity to personal experience can carry no more weight than Joseph Smith's vision in the garden, the Buddhist's nirvana experienced from trance-like meditations, or the vehement argument of the modern-day pluralist who affirms that "you believe what you believe and I'll believe what I believe." In the latter case somehow, and in spite of obvious and stark polarity, both versions of the truth are deemed "true," as long as one is sincere and faithful to that belief.

But the primary basis for Christian authority must remain with the Word of God and not purely human experience. God's Word to us is grounded in the written revelation, checked by the inward wit-

ness of the Holy Spirit through submission within the Christian community, and is born out in the fruit of righteousness and peace in the circumstances of life (James 3:18). The rich experience of God's presence is not negated by the authority of his word expressed in biblical truths, but heightened by a greater understanding of what God is actually doing in his powerful interactions with his people based on prior understanding and experiences recorded in the Bible.

God's Word to us is grounded in the written revelation, checked by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit through submission within the Christian community, and is born out in the fruit of righteousness and peace in the circumstances of life.

However, in the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition, which comprises my Christian faith experience, this is not always the case. More than once, pastors have been interrupted in the middle of their message because someone in the congregation felt so moved by the Holy Spirit that they could not constrain themselves. When confronted by the scriptures about the inappropriate nature of their outburst, specifically Paul's admonition that everything should be done decently and in order (1Cor.14:40), they appeal to the authority of their experience as the overriding principle. "But pastor, I just couldn't help it, the Spirit prompted me and it was out of my control," is often the reply. Yet, when reminded that the same apostle said "The Spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets," and that "God is not a God of disorder, but of peace," too often the response is "I don't care what the scripture says, I have to be obedient to the Spirit." The church needs to be reminded that the scriptures set the precedent for experience not vice versa. In some circles this issue is used as a defining criteria for the difference between the classical Pentecostal, who "uses the Bible to interpret his/her experience," versus many contemporary Charismatics who "use their experience to interpret the Bible." What is needed is a healthy balance which does not emphasize one without the other, in order "to rightly divide the word of truth" (2Tim. 2:15).

Church Traditions

In addition to the important biblical documents, throughout the centuries the traditions of the church have also carried the weight of authority, especially in reference to interpretation of specific texts of

the biblical tradition. From these interpretations have come the various communal practices of the church commemorating the move of God in their midst. Practices like baptism, communion, worship, prayer, and ministry to the perceived needs of the community serve as poignant reminders of God's ongoing presence and provision within the community of faith.

These practices provide the foundation for an ongoing exchange regarding the story of God's people by supplying a link with the past which informs our present understandings and consequently, shapes the future of the church. The community of faith must continually develop a dynamic dialogue with the various "texts" of those both in and outside the church. By purposefully interacting with the biblical documents, historical traditions, narrative accounts, political practices, generational characteristics, and contemporary scholarly literature (perhaps even the pages of this book can be rightly seen as part of the reader's tradition as he/she reads it and therefore part of the interchange), the "holy conversation" we call evangelism can begin to take place in the community of faith.

Holy Spirit-inspired Consensus

As the church gives room for the Holy Spirit to speak by ascertaining a consensus in respect to the search for truth tempered by the authority of the scriptures, it can begin to discern what it is that God is doing in a specific evangelism context. Effective outreach respects God's voice by shaping its methods and practices in response to his urging as it engages the unbelieving culture. Its through these kind of dynamic interactions that the activity of God in the midst of each particular situation is more readily identified.

This Holy Spirit-inspired consensus can be obtained by first detailing specific descriptions of what is and should be happening in the evangelistic endeavor. The whole issue of definitions is relevant to this deliberation. What constitutes genuine evangelism? And further, what of the various kinds of evangelism? What is the difference between "friendship," "lifestyle," "relational," or "servant" evangelism? Why is the issue of correctly naming them important?

Also, open and extended discussion, spurred by polling participants about their conversion experience and then relating those circumstances to evangelistic practices, can yield good fruit in this regard. If evangelistic practices reflect beliefs about conversion, then it

is essential a correct view of the process of conversion be developed in order to assure effective and worthwhile evangelism can take place.

Similarly, discussion about past involvement in various evangelistic methods, which highlights both the good and bad of those experiences, can help curtail the demonizing of these past experiences, which for some seem to grow more and more diabolical in stature as remembrance fades. Recounting what was beneficial from these experiences, along with a review of the biblical accounts of evangelism can go a long way toward providing the church with a basis for their beliefs about evangelism.

Furthermore, a discussion about the role of personal testimony, including some of the do's and don'ts, with particular emphasis on the cross-cultural nuances that impede good communication, coupled with a warning concerning the use of "Christianeese," or religious slang, is also enlightening. At this point the "non-negotiable" aspects of a viable gospel presentation can also be considered.¹⁰

Finally, addressing what the Bible says we can expect regarding our evangelism efforts exposes unrealistic expectations, helps the community of faith arrive at reasonable criteria for spirituality, elicits faith in the truth of the Word of God and helps us to avoid disappointment when tangible results are not evident. By facilitating this kind of discussion, leaders in the church can help debunk certain myths about conversion, analyze and embrace those methods and practices that are relevant to their congregations, and encourage an ongoing conversation about evangelism that will lead to greater participation (again see the Glossary of Terms in Figure 6 for help in this regard).

Conversation with the World

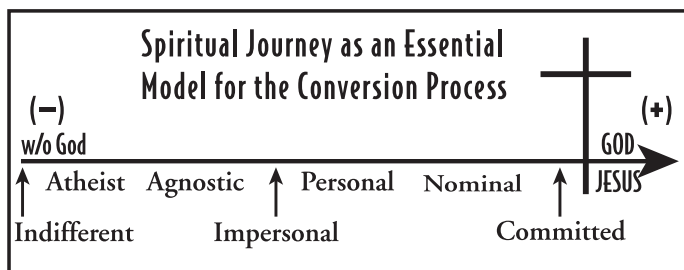
Answering the right questions

The importance of understanding conversion as an ongoing process cannot be overstated. When evangelism is rightly conceived as the sharing of Christian pilgrimage with others, then the ability to comprehend where people are on their passage through life is indispensable. If we understand that people are at different points in their faith walk, we also recognize that the issues they are grappling with

¹⁰ The Bible as the authority and source for Christian principles, the centrality of Jesus as the only way, and the necessity of genuine relationship with him for salvation.

are not all the same. The answer we must give to the atheist or the agnostic is much different than those we would give to those who are nominal Christians in our attempt to bring them one step closer in their relationship with Christ (see Figure 8).

Figure 8



What questions are seekers asking in their heart of hearts? This question is fundamental for those who would wish to be spiritual guides for others in the process of reflecting upon their journey. If the church's actions emerge out of its own agenda rather than from truly listening to those in need of Christ it is in danger of offering answers to questions that no one is asking. "Is the query theologically correct?" "Does it match up with the traditions of the church?" "How will this issue most benefit our local church growth efforts?" While the answers to these questions might be important to Christians, they are fitting examples of irrelevant questions to most unbelievers.

Instead, questions having to do with the basic human quest are much more appropriate. Is there a God? Does he communicate with humans? If so, how? Who am I? Why am I here? What's wrong? What can be done about it? Such pressing questions are much more likely to resonate with the inward struggles people experience in the quest phase of the spiritual journey.

Other questions emerge during the encounter phase. Is Jesus really God? Was he literally raised from the dead? Is a personal relationship with him actually possible? How is this accomplished? What kind of response does God require of me to this good news? Why is it good news?

More questions arise further down the path to spiritual maturity. If I doubt, does this mean God is not at work in my life? How can I

overcome the power of sin? What can I do to cultivate a more powerful relationship with God? Where can I go for answers to difficult questions? Are there people of like faith that I can walk with along this path?

The number and types of questions that can be raised are as diverse as the people and personalities represented in the conversation. Our ability to discern what the real issues are in people's lives is the first step toward communicating with them the truths of the gospel in a way that is both relevant and effective for providing the answers to those inquiries.

Interpretation of the Culture

The process of determining the critical questions being asked by unbelievers also entails a thorough understanding of the fundamental world view through which the hearer comprehends the message. Missions scholar, David Hesselgrave, helpfully has narrowed basic ways of thinking down to three primary world views.¹¹ They are: (1) **Concrete/Relational**; (2) **Abstract/Conceptual**; and (3) **Psychical/Intuitive**. These three ways of thinking dominate, to a greater or lesser degree, the perspective of people all around the world and can be found in various proportions within North American culture.

The (1) **Concrete/Relational** is an approach which perceives society in tribal, not individualistic frameworks. Like Jesus' use of the parables, truth is offered through simple story telling that ties the message to nature, i.e., the parables of the sower, vineyard workers, "the kingdom of God is like," etc., (Mk.4, Mt.20). *Persons with this background prefer to discover the truth on their own.* They may feel their intelligence insulted when truth claims are offered in forceful or dogmatic statements reinforced by logical argument. When sharing the gospel with these folks it is important to use the whole Bible, not just New Testament doctrinal statements. Hearers in this category will likely relate to the stories of Abraham, Sampson, David and other Old Testament accounts as discovery through storytelling is fundamental to their perspective.

In contrast, Western thought is primarily based on a hypothetical (2) **Abstract/Conceptual** way of thinking. This involves a much more

¹¹ For an excellent and thorough treatment of this issue see Hesselgrave, David J. *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*. 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1991).

educational approach to arriving at truth. A proposition is set forth, followed by conceptual reasoning presented in a way designed to convince the hearer of the validity of the argument. The rudiments of what is taught in many college speech classes (introduction, body, and conclusion in public speaking), embodies this approach. "First, I am going to tell you what I am going to tell you, then I'll tell you, finally, I'll tell you what I told you." For the Western thinker, rational argument, a reasoned defense, evidence marshaled from authorities such as the Bible, science, philosophy, theology, etc., all carry a high degree of credibility in persuading them to believe.

Ironically, even as modern thinking in the West continues to progress it becomes more and more open to Eastern influences and the (3) **Psychical/Intuitional** approach to conceptualizing. Rooted in the Buddhistic premise that the physical world is primarily an illusion (*Maya*), and sin is not a personal responsibility but the result of sowing & reaping (*Karma*), the fundamental belief is that of Monism. That is, God and humanity are really "all one," and true spirituality is achieved, as the hippie phrase so prevalent in the sixties implied, when we "become one with the universe." Reincarnation is not the end but only the means. Enlightenment, through yoga exercise, meditation, or chanting of specific phrases (*Krishna, Krishna, Hare Krishna, Hare Hare Hare Krishna*) results in a merging of the Ahtman, the soul in humans, back into the Brahman, the presence and power of God.

For the Eastern mind set, truth is arrived at through the use of one's intuition. Through the use of contemplative meditation which concentrates on impressions, objective thinking takes a back seat to the mystical experience. Religious writings, such as the *Bahgvad Ghita* are not read primarily for the propositional truth contained therein, but for their poetry, whose reading might lead to inner enlightenment. For those with this view of reality, a personal testimony of profound spiritual experience can gain their attention and affirm credibility. An appeal to a personal relationship with the deity of Jesus as a means of true spiritual enlightenment may also resonate with their mystical understanding of the way the universe exists.

This superficial explanation of complex and varied belief systems is meant to challenge the reader to consider carefully the various ways of thinking that exist in the culture at large. It critiques the trite assumption that every person will hear the gospel in the same way,

chiefly in the way the presenter heard it at his or her conversion.

Furthermore, within each world view there are much more complex cultural influences at work as well. Often a blending of various components of the three primary ways of thinking is the norm. In addition, certain generational characteristics, particularly views regarding authority, a person's spiritual felt needs, the role of the media used in presenting the message, and other dynamic cultural hindrances must be considered when attempting to clearly communicate the truths of the Christian faith.¹²

Part of the solution to this dilemma is in cultivating a true dialogue that necessitates a genuine willingness to listen.¹³ Openness, tolerance and humility go a long way in assuring those we would communicate with that we are truly interested in their welfare and not self-absorbed in our own agenda. God is attentive to people not programs. Therefore we must be sensitive to hear what unbelievers are really saying, or asking, before we charge ahead with an assumption of ignorance on their behalf.

Openness, tolerance and humility go a long way in assuring those we would communicate with that we are truly interested in their welfare and not self-absorbed in our own agenda.

I have used many different public questionnaires as a means of beginning a dialogue with people in the marketplace of life. Yet, as mainstream culture has become ever more biblically illiterate, I found it necessary to repeatedly reframe many of my questions. The nature of my inquiries assumed a more thorough understanding of Christian concepts than was present in my hearers. When I ask those with Eastern beliefs questions about Jesus, heaven, or questions that include statements about the final judgement, life after death, etc., they often do not have a clue about what I am talking about. Furthermore, if I assume I know what they mean without asking further questions this raises barriers to fruitful communication.

¹² For more information about these topics, see George Barna, *Third Millennium Teens* (Ventura, CA: The Barna Research Group, 1999); Kevin Graham Ford, *Jesus For a New Generation* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1995); George G. Hunter, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) and Alan J. Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

¹³ See William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989) for a great discussion of openness in dialogue (223-231).

My conversation with one young man on the streets of Minneapolis was a good example of differing views of spirituality shaped by presuppositions. He answered my query, “When you think of God what do you think about?” with the terse reply, “Bright white lights!” When I asked him what he meant by that, he went on to describe in animated detail an apparition that had appeared to him in his bedroom doorway the night of his father’s funeral. Due to a rocky relationship with his rather vicious father, as a way of dealing with his grief the young man had been smoking marijuana all day in his bedroom. Suddenly, the bedroom door flew open and this “bright white light” flooded his room. He reported that he knew, intuitively and frightfully, that the being central to this vision was his father. He had been meditating on that hallucination for the last fifteen years, yet still wasn’t sure what it all meant. When I shared how the Bible states that even the devil can masquerade as an angel of light (2Cor.11:14), to my surprise he agreed with me. Through the help of a neighbor who had been leading him in a weekly study he had been looking into what the Bible had to say about such things.

This experience illustrates how an accurate rendition of the gospel message requires that we first determine the questions being asked, work to frame our answers in language the hearer can understand, and finally, take care that what is heard is truly God’s word for them.

Without my expression of empathy for the significance of the visionary experience the young marijuana smoker had, I doubt he would have been willing to hear the truth of the gospel that I later shared with him. But because I was willing to listen, and expressed belief in the credibility of his vision in spite of his erroneous interpretation of the circumstance, he was willing to hear my side of it. I could tell the spooky presence in his room was a traumatic reality for him and had to be addressed.

Speaking God’s Word to Them

Communication More than Proclamation

Yet, perhaps what was even more influential to the eventual hearing of the gospel by this troubled young man was the willingness of his believing neighbor to work through the questions he had concerning the Bible and God on a long term basis with him; to live out the gospel in the context of his own apartment building.

This brings me to the final point to be made about our conversation with the world. The gospel is communicated much more clearly by our deeds than our words. As Francis of Assisi is reported to have said, "Preach the gospel loudly, boldly, and with strong anointing, and if you must, use words!"

The Holy Spirit seared the significance of this truth in my psyche one day when I was passing out tracts and witnessing to people on the streets of downtown Chicago just a few blocks from Pacific Garden Mission. I was talking to an older African-American who had just exited one of the many bars in that area and came up to my partner and I. It was quite cold. But he was warmed and gregarious, and somewhat inebriated by the alcohol he had obviously consumed.

Although he professed a belief in Christ and attested to a Christian lifestyle, I began to question him about what the Bible had to say concerning drunkenness. "Did he think that drunkenness was a sin?" I asked. This elicited an animated, and I think Spirit-led response, though unbeknownst to him. As he poked his finger at my chest he asked militantly, "Who are you, anyway? I mean, who are you? Who are you in there?" I was somewhat taken aback by his powerful and poignant question. When I told him that indeed was the issue, and my main concern was for his welfare not some legalistic interpretation of Bible verses, he responded with remorse. For I too knew of the ravages of alcohol in my own life and family and the terrible toll it exacted from those in the grips of its addiction.

Nevertheless, throughout our outreach efforts in Chicago later that week, the Holy Spirit continued to use that question to challenge me as an evangelist. "Who are you? Who are you in there?" The answer to this question is most telling when it comes to our motives and actions when we share the gospel.

Who we are speaks much louder than any words we might ever say to those outside the community of faith. This central truth is inherent to what Jesus means when he says "we shall be his witnesses," when the Holy Spirit comes upon us (Acts 1:8). What people want is a witness, an eye witness account that they can touch, feel and see.

Charles Kraft in his book, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* makes the point that God could have shouted the gospel from the clouds and informed us through words his salvation plan. Instead, he choose to reveal it through a personal relationship exempli-

fied by the incarnation of his son, Jesus.¹⁴ In this way we might understand clearly what is the love of God.

Kraft has noted that where there is little eyeball to eyeball relationship, there is a high level of resistance to new or contradictory information to what persons already know and believe. If this is true, then the approach to preaching that incorporates a lecture style, northern European, preachy sermon is perhaps one of the least effective ways of winning converts to Christendom. Because of the high resistance evoked by the dogmatic dissemination of factual information, and the subsequent solicitation for immediate response, this style tends to elicit a negative rather than open response to the new message. But when a close personal relationship has been developed between speaker and hearer, the level of resistance is greatly reduced. Thus, those who respond to “altar calls” might do so more likely as the result of an ongoing friendship with the preacher, rather than in response to any particular thing that he or she might have said in the content of the message itself.¹⁵ In this case, what Marshall McLuhan said is so true, the “medium is the message,”¹⁶ and perhaps the way we communicate is just as, or more important than the specific content of our message.

I am in no way arguing for the elimination of sermons either in or outside the church. They are certainly an effective way of delivering volumes of information important to the faith for those that are open and receptive to these truths. Rather, the challenge is to make sure that our actions are consistent with our speech, and that long term relationship with the family of God is the focus, not quick fixes at the altar.

The impact of meaningful behaviors observed through long term relationship was certainly influential in my own conversion experience. Years before I became a Christian, I got involved with a multi-level marketing business marketing Amway products. I was intrigued with the possibility of becoming a millionaire quickly. But more than the money, I soon became enamored of the lifestyle of my sponsors

¹⁴ See Charles H. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 14-23.

¹⁵ Kraft points out that a misunderstanding often occurs because of a misleading English translation of the often-used Greek word *kerusso* as *proclaimed* or *preached*, when it is much better translated *communicated*, *Ibid.*, 27-29.

¹⁶ See Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967). Indeed, “the means of communication are interpreted as part of the message,” Kraft, *op.cit.*, 44.

and their “up-line.” Not because of their lavish expenditures or acquisition of material goods, but because they managed to have a great time and didn’t have to imbibe mass quantities of drugs or booze to do so! Their sober confidence and joyous optimism aroused my interest.

I attended rallies in Kansas City where the main focus was on making money and being successful, but a clear gospel presentation with an appeal for decision was given every Sunday morning after the rally. I sat through a few of these, not because I was seeking profound spiritual truth, but because these people had a peace and a joy, apart from material success and riches, that I wanted. I only went because I saw in their lifestyle a dedication to God. Eventually I was so uncomfortable with the clear calls to repentance that I made it clear I would attend the rally, but not the Sunday services. Nevertheless, the seed had been sown, and I knew that what I really needed was a change of heart, not a mere change in income.

Even later, when a young neighbor came by my brother’s house to interrupt our evening of worldly pursuits chasing women in the local taverns, it was his impressive athletic ability (he was state wrestling champ at his weight range in the state of Iowa that year) that opened the door for him to be heard. Because I perceived he could easily wrestle me to the ground and snap my neck if he wanted to, I listened to his challenge to be “born again” through a relationship with Christ.

While none of these things by themselves resulted in my immediate conversion, they all added to the weight of evidence that burdened my soul. It was beginning to dawn on me that there was an alternative to my life of partying. People were finding fulfilment, true fulfilment apart from riches, drugs, illicit sex and the full-on pursuit of pleasure for pleasure’s sake that I so passionately embraced. No apologetic for the gospel could do as much for me as the witness that came across in the lives of those Christians who were “living epistles known and read by everybody” (2Cor.3:2).

Sharing in the Greatest Story Ever Told

Let me be clear that I don’t believe people will come to Christ just because we mow our lawns a certain way. While our lives can bear witness to the grace of God at work in us, ultimately we must all be prepared to give a defense “for the hope that [we] have” (1Pet.3:15). The “holy conversation” with the world that is evangelism is essen-

tially a sharing of the greatest story ever told, and an invitation for the hearer to participate in that story.

When we share with others what Christ has done for us we tap into a long tradition of describing the breaking in of God into the history of his people. The stories of the Old and New Testament are our stories. We relate to their depictions of stubbornness, ignorance, worldliness, because these shortcomings are a part of who we are as humans. But the divine side of the account gives us hope as we see how time and time again God's grace breaks through in spite of the wickedness of his people.

But in order for unbelievers to hear our story we must hear their's first. The Bible is full of examples of open dialogue between Christ and unbelievers. Jesus does not shrink back in discrimination when he encounters a woman of a different race and morality at Jacob's well outside Samaria (Jn.4). Instead he engages her in a conversation that leads her to invite the entire town to "come and see a man who told me everything I ever did" (v.29). And apparently the dialogue continued as she asked "Could this be the Christ?"

Jesus encourages conversation with the two on the road to Emmaus because he knows greater belief will ensue (Lk.24). Why do we even know about the many questions that Nicodemus had with Jesus in private unless the Lord himself chose to reveal these central truths about conversion within the context of such a discussion to the other disciples (Jn.3)?

And what of Paul's exchange of ideas with the Athenians in the marketplace (Acts 18), Stephen's discussion with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), or Peter's discourse with the Centurion's household (Acts 10)? There are numerous biblical examples of discussions that took place between those inside and outside the faith. In every instance it appears the believer first attempted to hear from the inquirer as to their spiritual condition before then sharing the good news of redemption through Jesus in a way that their audience could relate to, understand, and then respond to appropriately.

The Bible makes it clear that all those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom.10), but how can they believe if they do not first hear about him, in a language relevant and understandable to them - through the holy conversation we call evangelism?

The Bible As A Travelogue

Just as every belief system sooner or later appeals to mystery as a rational explanation of that which it cannot explain, each of these systems is also grounded on some basis of authority. Whether it is the out-of- body experience of Joseph Smith in the garden epitomized by a “burning in the bosom,” or the empirical data acquired in the laboratory for the modern scientist, each bases their practices on a certain set of derived beliefs. For the Christian church the authority for practice is embedded in the holy scriptures.

The model for practical theology presented in the first chapter calls for the honing of certain interpretational skills in order to reflect more accurately on the presence of God in our midst, toward the restoration of a lifestyle of evangelism for the ordinary Christian. Once the question to be answered is accurately expressed, a dynamic interaction ensues with the honorable traditions of the community in order to effect worthwhile change. Consequently, a theology of evangelism must not only be consistent with the personal experiences of conversion within the Christian community, but must be grounded in the biblical and historical traditions they embrace as well.

A Biblical Example

The apostle Paul’s use of the Old Testament in Romans chapter ten provides a good example of the kind of biblical argument that is expected in the Christian community and reflects a tradition that has been carried on by its theologians through the past two millennia. Not only is Paul’s argument persuasive but the method he uses in

justifying his mission to the Gentiles is instructive. Verses 5-13 in chapter ten contain what is called a *Christian Midrash*, whereby Paul uses quotes from the scripture to explain his position.

In a broader sense the whole NT can be understood as a divinely inspired interpretation of the Old, in that its authors seek to explain Christianity as a fulfillment of the holy scriptures as they knew them. Moreover Paul's central teaching in Romans regarding the confession of Jesus as Lord (10:9-10), is considered by many evangelicals as foundational to conversion.

Affirming that Jesus is Lord, and further emphasizing the universal nature of God's offer of salvation, Paul piles scriptural argument upon scriptural argument, knowing this technique would be familiar to his audience. Using scriptures from Joel, Psalms, and Isaiah to apply to Christ what the OT said about God, he not only challenges the Gentiles in Rome, who thought the Jews were now excluded from salvation history, but witnesses to his Jewish audience of the redemption afforded them in Jesus. Paul's explanation of the scripture is the foundation upon which he built his reasoning about salvation. In like manner, a sound practical ministry of evangelism builds upon principles derived from the Old and New Testaments.

Moreover, the apostle sought to address his hearers at their point of understanding, framing his assertions with an approach common to their own belief system, arguing specifically from the authority of the Hebrew scriptures.

Therefore, the question must be asked: is there a biblical foundation for the idea that conversion, and therefore the practice of evangelism, is best conceived as a spiritual journey? Both the Old and New Testament offer plenty of situations where the concept of journey is an essential part of the conversion story.

The Old Testament Basis for the Journey Model

Abraham's Actual and Symbolic Journey

Nowhere in the story of the early patriarchs is the theme of journey more pronounced than in the promise and blessing inherent to the account of Yahweh's challenge for Abraham "to leave and to go" (Gen.12:1-3). The promises of God encourage movement in their support of the people of God along their way. Similarly, the recurrent theme of blessing associated with their future land and offspring sets

in motion a nation that seems to be on a pilgrimage throughout her history.

The power of the patriarchal covenant rests in its unconditional promises, asking only of the recipients that they rely on Yahweh by journeying in faith with him in trust for the future. Yahweh's promise of provision to Abraham indicates that early Israel's faith was characterized by a confidence in this pledge and the expectation of its impending fulfilment, moving all history toward a climax.

God's covenant with Abraham is the stimulus for his journey with God in both concrete and symbolic terms. For as Abraham literally sets out with his family to journey from the Land of the Chaldeans in obedience to divine instruction, his place and destiny as the patriarch of Israel are continually re-affirmed (Gen.18:18, 22:15-18, 27:27-29, 28:14). These travels are linked to Yahweh's blessing as he is told to "Go, walk (*halakh*) through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you" (Gen.13:17).

Yet, a symbolic understanding is also present in the patriarch's journey. In language similar to Noah's account of obedience, Abraham is exhorted by Yahweh to *walk before me* and be blameless (17:1). Here, Yahweh's call for obedience takes the form of motion. Abraham is to direct his household to keep *the way of the Lord* by doing what is right, thereby fulfilling the covenant (18:19).

Abraham's pilgrimage at God's bidding, and the expectation of provision to follow, model Yahweh's interactions with his people and underscore the nature of their covenant relationship as a continual journey with him toward the blessing of all nations. In this way, the accounts of the patriarchs convey the sense that journey toward a greater destiny with Yahweh was intrinsically a part of early Israel's belief.

Vocabulary of Travel in the Old Testament

There are many words in the OT that imply travel, indicating its significance as a theme within these texts. One of the more common is the Hebrew word *halak*, which in verb form means *to go, proceed, move, or walk*. In a figurative sense it means the particular path of one's life. Thus as a noun it denotes *a going, or journey*. For nomadic groups such as the patriarchs and early Israel, who lived constantly "on the move," their *halakh* represented the focus of much of their activity. It is likely they understood human life as a way or pilgrimage. But this was not a wandering without purpose or leadership.

Because the success of their journey depended on their conduct, the word *halakh* could also imply following someone or conforming to a norm, or a certain standard of behavior.

Of all the verbs and concepts that can mean or imply travel in the OT, none is more pronounced than *way* (*derek*). Although *derek* can sometimes mean the road upon which one walks, it often signifies an action, the “way” that one takes, one’s course in life or journey. In its noun form it occurs more than 700 times in the OT, the majority in a figurative sense, making it the most common word used to speak of the experiences and course of life. Referring to both conduct and destiny, the word refers not only to a specific stretch of road, but also to the way in which people move toward a destination.

Fundamental to the symbolic meaning of *derek* is its relationship to divine covenant, so that the use of “way” or “road” (*derek*) is a primary image used to express conduct or behavior in the OT. Its use in the scriptures exemplifies the view that the way of a person’s life was not only the course followed but the direction and manner of the undertaking as well. This word involves more than travel according to Israel’s way of thinking. Walking or going was more than a merely physical venture, it also encompassed the purpose for which the journey ensued.

Recently my brother and I went for a walk in the beautiful Santa Cruz Mountains on the Central Coast of California. As we traipsed through the gigantic redwoods and pines, we were in awe of the beauty of God’s creation in this little corner of the universe. Our ultimate destination was the ranger’s kiosk on the other side of the park, where my wife would pick us up after the hike. But, what was paramount was the journey itself. The destination was necessary but really secondary throughout our trek through the woods.

In some ways, life for the Hebrew was similar to that walk. As for Abraham, there was a specific destination for him/her to move in obedience toward “the land I will show you,” with the distinct purpose that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen.12:1-3). But the process of getting there was not neglected for the sake of the goal. For just as a quality control officer knows that the process will ultimately determine the value of the end product, so the manner in which one walks with the Lord is determinant for the quality of a believer’s long term relationship with him.

From study of the OT vocabulary for travel, the diverse modifications and uses of *derek* and *h_lak* throughout the OT canon illustrate how meaningful movement was to the religious and material life of Israel. Salvation History and the Journey Theme

In addition to the weight it places on the way a person walks with the Lord, the OT expresses a concern for the preservation of the past traditions in order that the recounting of these traditions could become a part of the everyday life of Israel to ensure a healthy fear of the Lord and secure his blessing in the land (Dt.6:4,13; 11:18). This orientation toward the future was the driving force for the establishment of the traditions, both oral and written, that shaped the story of God's people. Central to this future orientation is the concept of movement toward a goal, a journey. And the ancient, inspired story of God's journeying with his people, preserved within the OT text, guides its hearers to a greater understanding and response to his perplexing faithfulness.

Since there are many other themes that seem much more conspicuous, it would be a mistake to claim too prominent a place for the journey pattern within the OT. Yet, the recurrence of "salvation history" as a dominant theme is doubtless due to the fact the entire canon can be seen as an accounting of the activity of God with his chosen people on a march through time. We must not assume that the Hebrew mind embraced a strict linear view of time, for salvation history is probably better understood as a number of singular events emphasizing God's acts more than humanity's, rather than a continuous seamless flow of the Israelite people through time. However, the idea of journeying with God toward the future, a journey of redemption, is nearly everywhere within the literature, and thus the world view of the devout Israelite.

The notion of salvation for the Israelite has important implications for the idea of journey. In Hebrew thinking salvation was often thought of as a physical deliverance or rescue, by God as a result of his *loving-kindness* (*hesed*).

The OT places a strong emphasis on "this-worldly" nature of salvation, where material and national prosperity is evident. But the spiritual dimension of God's provision was also important to the Hebrew. The fulfilment of the promise of a continuous relationship with Yahweh meant the restoration of righteousness that allowed the

spiritual blessings to flow. The dynamic that exists between the temporary aspects of salvation, past deliverance and present blessing, and God's future provision, is the incentive for Israel's continual journeying with God in hope.

The nation's response to *salvation history* was an understanding that the saving activity of God extended beyond his present blessings. Nor was it merely limited only to what God had done in the past as a guarantee of his contemporary presence, but the effects of salvation were also understood as proof of Israel's calling to be a witness to God's eventual blessing for the entire cosmos.

Furthermore, the revelation of God in salvation history is also the means of salvation. But for Israel, the provision via the journey through wilderness wanderings, and the blessing of rest in the land of Canaan were conditional, based on obedience to God's covenant, which served as the backdrop of Israel's journey with God toward her redemption.

Likewise for many of the examples of conversion in the OT, the response to God's call, whether to individuals directly or mediated through the re-telling of God's magnificent works, is depicted as an actual journey with God (Exodus) or symbolically (Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations) in the wake of his victory march on the path of redemption history.

Exodus Event: Classic Example of Salvation at Yahweh's Hand

The exodus events are understood by Israel as evidence of Yahweh's grace and as the basis of her relationship and responsibility to him. The importance of the event is attested to by the many references to it throughout the OT, primarily in the form of ceremonial song (Ex.15; Ps.66:6-7; 77:19-20; 78:52- 53; Isa.43:2; 51:10,13; 63:12-13) and especially in the "historical credo" of Moses (Dt.26:5-9).

So begins the physical journey of Israel from her bondage in Egypt which later will be interpreted so often metaphorically in her written history. God fulfilled his promise: "to free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" (Ex.6:6-7). In doing so, *the Lord journeyed with them* as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, *to guide them on their way* (Ex.13:20).

The Exodus account is a prime example in scripture of both promise and fulfilment. The retelling of these events in the scriptures causes

Israel to look to the future with expectation that such a relationship would continue. In this way, each fulfillment of God's promises in the past causes faith to rise for the future. Accordingly, Israel's concentration on the Exodus event in her literature is characteristic of an orientation toward God's provision in the future, where the concrete provision as evidenced in past events is related to the assurance of deliverance from contemporary predicaments.

Pilgrimage and the Conversion of Outsiders

Three pointed examples of OT narrative clearly incorporate a journey motif in their illustration of Yahweh's concern for those outside of Israel's camp.

(1) One of these narratives is found at the end of the conquest account as Joshua finds himself about to go *the way of all the earth*, an obvious reference to the final journey of death (23:14). Joshua's farewell in chapter 23 is full of movement language. Some of this is literal, where Yahweh has driven or pushed the nations he conquered out of their way (23:5,7,9). Some of the language uses a figure of speech, where Israel is admonished to obey "without turning aside to the right or to the left" (v.6), and if they "turn away" these same nations shall become "snares and traps" for the people of Israel (v.13). The chapter is an indication of the challenge to come.

Chapter 24 is nothing less than a full recounting of how Yahweh took their father Abraham "from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan," reciting every aspect of the journey up to the point of their possessing the land (vv.2-13). Joshua uses this account to challenge his audience concerning God's saving acts of the past. The result is a confession from the people: "He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled" (v.17b). Salvation is clearly depicted as a journey of faith that begins with Israel's founder and carries on through to the present.

But it is a pilgrimage that is not over yet, for at the advent of this final stage of conquest a pattern emerges from this description of conversion or recommitment, whichever is the case. The story recounts the mighty acts of God, the people are given a choice concerning their commitment (v.15), they make a confession of faith (v.16-22), and a covenant of obedience with Yahweh is inaugurated (v.23f). Confronted with a literal account of Israel's journey with Yahweh in the past, the contemporary hearers are challenged to participate in a mutual conversion with ramifications that will continue into the promised land.

As indicated by its pivotal place in the closing chapter of Joshua, the writer had an additional intention in mind for his readers: to consider anew the mighty acts of Yahweh represented here and to challenge them as well to “choose you this day whom you will serve” (v.15).

(2) Another example of conversion involving journey is illustrated in Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple in Jerusalem (1Kg.8:22-53). In the fifth of the seven requests enumerated in the prayer, echoes of the mighty works of God can once again be heard. The literal journey to conversion that Solomon anticipates, expressed by the worship of God in his temple, is once again induced as a response to “hearing” about Yahweh’s “mighty hand” and “outstretched arm”(cf., Ex.18, Josh.5:1). Additionally, the response of those converted is also couched in journey language, only this time in a figurative sense. In a repetition of his own father’s (David) deathbed blessing to him (2:3-4), Solomon’s blessing/request of the people of Israel that they would *walk in all his ways* through covenant obedience (v.8:58), becomes a condition of the Davidic covenant in Yahweh’s response (v.9:4).

What begins as an anticipation of a actual journey will find its happy, or unhappy conclusion in a symbolic one. Moreover, the conversion results in further evangelism, “that all the peoples of the earth would know Yahweh’s name and fear him” (v.43).

(3) Finally, the chronicle of Jonah’s voyage provides an example of a formidable journey in response to God’s initiative which seeks the conversion of those outside of Israel. In this report of Yahweh’s compassion for the lost, there are at least four conversions depicted. First of all, the sailors call out for deliverance (v.1:14), see God’s mighty acts (v.15), then fear God and offer up a sacrifice to him (v.16). The second conversion is Jonah’s deliverance from drowning by the provision of the great fish, which inspires his confession “you brought my life up from the pit”(v.2:5), and evokes a covenant commitment “because salvation comes from the Lord” (v.9). The third is the obvious repentance of the Ninevites (ch.3).

But the fourth, and perhaps not so obvious conversion, is the one meant to be prompted from the telling of the story itself, wherein the nation of Israel repents in her attitude toward those outside her tradition. The lesson that Jonah needs to learn, and by comparison Israel as well, is that if Jonah can be moved by pity for a plant, how much more is Yahweh moved by the suffering of humanity.

Thus, conversion involves a turning away from wrath and destruction (v.3:10, 4:2) toward a greater compassion for all those outside of the realm of Yahweh's blessing. As the physical journey of Jonah depicts, what begins in rebellion *against* the will of God, in response to the divine displays of *hesed* (kindness), results in obedience and blessing for those who submit to divine guidance.

The Journey Theme in the Wisdom Literature

The journey concept is also evident in various aspects of what is known as the Wisdom Literature.¹⁷ Within the likely origin of Israel's Wisdom (Deuteronomic code-Deut. 12-26), the phrase *to walk in his ways* is found in numerous places. A sense of movement is ingrained in the covenant and fulfilment theme as vocalized in the command to "walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess" (Dt.5:33).

Because life is understood as a journey in Deuteronomy, to walk in the path of Yahweh is to follow God's commandments in action and conduct. This way of life means to do or keep his commandments, to fear and love him, to obey his voice and to serve him only (8:6, 10:12, 19:9, 26:17, 28:9, 30:16).

Further, in the wisdom tradition literature, in the prayers and praises of Israel preserved in the Psalms, the emphasis of the pilgrimage is subtly transformed. What began as an actual excursion to Jerusalem to celebrate the presence of God in the temple, ends in a spiritual blessing for the person "in whose heart are the highways to Zion" (Ps.84:5)!

While some of the Psalms seem to point to future blessings (Ps.126:6), their primary focus remains on a salvation which involves a day to day journeying with God. The aim of this ethic of everyday life is not toward a specific goal, but rather the exaltation of God in prayer and praise. Along the passage to Zion is where Israel will experience the blessing of God, not so much in the sense of a life-long journey with God through history, but rather in the present day experience of God in his creation. Therefore, the Psalms depict a salvation that is experienced not only in the *act of journeying* with Yahweh toward Zion, but even more so in the day to day *being* of the people of Israel.

¹⁷ Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, certain Psalms, as well as the apocryphal books: Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon are considered to represent Israel's "Wisdom Literature."

In the so-called Wisdom Psalms, the theme of the “way” is prevalent, related especially to God’s guidance for human conduct (Ps.1, 25, 37, 119). These Psalms refer to a movement of people on Yahweh’s divine highway. Through obedience to the Torah (Pentateuch- first five books of the OT), the traveler shapes or experiences life as *one walking in a way that is blameless* (26:1,11; 101:2). But the way is not solo, for these texts nearly always include, in both lament and praise, a longing for Yahweh’s help (cf.,Ps.119). Psalms such as these depict the life of the Hebrew as a conscientious journey with God grounded in truthfulness (26:3,86:11) and one that included worshipping God in the daily experiences of their lives (15:2).

In Proverbs the journey becomes even more down-to-earth. Here the quality of the experience of the journey has become more important than the destination itself. To be on the “way of wisdom” (4:11) is the way to life (5:6, 12:28), righteousness (8:20), understanding (9:6), refuge (10:29), and immortality (12:28). This is in contrast to the path which leads to evil and wickedness (4:14, 19; 12:15, 26; 13:5; 15:9, 19).

A person should walk progressively in the “fear of the Lord,” finding direction not toward a specific goal as much as guidance for the journey itself. To the degree that humans submit to the divine administration of their journey, that is to make straight (3:6, 9:15), prepare (4:26, 5:6, 21), direct or establish (16:9, 21:29), guard or keep (2:8, 8:32) their path, to that degree will be their reward.

Israel’s Wisdom underscores the Hebrew view of redemption as a journey to be taken with Yahweh. It is a passage that is accomplished in the day to day routines of life, one that is more cyclical than linear, in which the pattern of practice becomes the end rather than the means.

The Future Hope of The Major Prophets

In light of the break up of Israel and her eventual exile to Babylon, the prophets of that age brought a message that not only challenged Israel’s recent unfaithfulness but carried with it the promise of a future hope. A brief survey of the writings of the major prophets discloses how foundational the idea of movement away from the tragic contemporary conditions was to their thinking.

Speaking of the Lord’s guidance through the wilderness, Isaiah prophesies the “way of the lord” (43:16, 19, 51:10) as a victory march, which carries the returning people along with it. This highway to

Zion, also called a “way of holiness,” is restricted to those whom God would redeem (35:8f). Here the prophetic word anticipates the new thing that God is going to do for his people. The divine word shapes history (Isa.55:10-11) and is now directed toward the future.

In Jeremiah, Israel is called to forsake her perverted way (Jer.3:21, 17:10), and return to the way of the Lord (5:4), and to peace (6:16). The word of judgment Jeremiah brings is portrayed in the choice of the two paths, either to life in captivity, or to death for those who remain in Jerusalem (21:8). Yet all hope for the future is not lost, for Yahweh will give his people a new covenant in which they will receive a new heart and a new saving *way* (*derek*) of obedience to him (32:39).

In Ezekiel the word *derek* is used 107 times, more frequently than any other book in the OT. It is often used to symbolize the conduct and actions of individuals who have forsaken the ways of Yahweh (7:3-9, 36:17-19, 9:10, 11:21). In a collective sense Israel is admonished to remember its *evil ways* so that it might repent and receive the blessing that Yahweh desires (36:31). This prophet, living in exile, brings a message of salvation to individual and corporate Israel to look forward to their future journey with Yahweh.

The new covenant portrayed in Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31), the new sanctuary in Ezekiel (Ezek.40f), and the new universal compatibility in Isaiah (Isa.65:17-25), *all presuppose a future orientation to their message.*

The hope for a better future which these prophets preached offered Israel little immediate solace. However, the tension stemming from the unrealized promises of Yahweh generated the vision of sanctuary that the nation needed beyond its present day suffering and persecution. For these prophets, what began as a concrete journey into dispersion and bondage when Israel and Judah are taken captive, culminated in a figurative journey for all the peoples of Zion, preserving hope in the heart of Israel.

The Journeys of Individual Converts in the OT

The scriptural accounts of individual conversion within Israel's history often describe literal journeys.¹⁸ However the focus here is on those conversion accounts in which the journey is indispensable to the character of the story.

¹⁸ Naaman journeys to Elisha to obtain his healing (2Kg.5), Nebuchadnezzar professes a faith in the King of heaven (Dan.4:37), and the Queen journeys from Sheba and offers praise to God for his provision to Solomon (2Chr.9:8).

For example, some scholars think the story of Hagar's travels into the desert, initially fleeing from persecution only to be called back into bondage (Gen.16:9-10) foreshadow Israel's pilgrimage of faith. Her journey represents Israel's story to come as in her flights to the desert various movements of salvation are depicted. From her desert experience and confrontation with nothingness she sees the need for salvation which results in a dialogue with God. Acknowledging her disobedience, she is willing to change based on God's direction (Gen.16).

In the Exodus account, a telling of "the good things the Lord has done to rescue his people from the Egyptians" is a stimulant for the worship of Yahweh in the story of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (Ex. 18). Jethro's response to hearing the story of the Israelite deliverance results in a literal journey (vv.8-9), followed by a confession of belief (vv.10-11), a sacrificial offering, and a subsequent sharing in the blessing of God's presence (v.12).

While journey is not central to the story of Jethro's commitment to Yahweh, it is included at Israel's entrance into the Sinai, a pivotal point in the story of Israel. Whether this account is meant to be typical of an unbeliever's response, an example of a clan's reunion, or a model for covenant relationships, it reveals how the continuing presence of God with Israel on her journey effects powerful transformation.

Rahab's conversion is similar. Like Jethro, what began with a hearing of Yahweh's acts of deliverance (Josh.2:10) resulted in a fear of God within the hearts of the people (2:9,11). Rahab confesses the excellence of Yahweh (2:11), her faith is affirmed with an oath (vv.12-21), verified by her good works (vv.4-7,15, cf., Heb.11:31, James 2:25), and culminates in the assimilation of herself and her family into the people of Yahweh (v.23). In light of the subsequent destruction of the city, her conversion was only the beginning of extensive travels to come with Israel. As indicated by the phrase, "and she lives among the Israelites to this day," Rahab's alien status had been significantly transformed into one of acceptance (6:25), and her conversion is expressed in the ongoing saga of Israel's journey with Yahweh.

Finally, the book of Ruth renders a somewhat familiar biblical story of a family leaving a land of lack, famine, and deprivation to move to another of relatively greater prosperity (cf., Gen.12:10ff,

26:1ff). The account provides a picture of conversion in Ruth's oath of commitment to Naomi (Ruth 1:16), whose sojourn begins in emptiness and death. But because of her journey, Naomi experiences a restoration of life and blessing which issues from God's faithfulness (*hesed*) (1:8, 2:20). The narrative portrays no conspicuous supernatural intervention by God, but rather affirms how God often achieves his purposes through ordinary ambitions and events.

The narrative of Naomi's exile in Moab and her subsequent return to the abundance of Bethlehem, depicts for Israel a journey of righteousness, one in which the practice of covenant loyalty expressed through *hesed* is the principle Israel should live by. If God's people will live by this standard, Israel like Naomi, will experience a passage from death and lack to life and fullness.

In conclusion, for the faithful Israelite the blest life most certainly included the concept of traveling with God. From the beginning, he or she would hear of the patriarch Abraham and how he and his descendants traveled in obedience with Yahweh. The retelling of the mighty acts of God in the nation's salvation history, especially of the exodus deliverance, the subsequent wandering in the wilderness, and the journeys of his people in settling the land, would be an integral part of an Israelite family's history when faithfully recounted (Dt.6:7). The symbolic language embedded in the Wisdom literature challenged them to internalize these truths and practice them by walking in the path of righteousness. The future orientation of their spiritual journey, expressed in the yearning of the prophetic literature, would provide hope for their lives. And the examples of conversion in the stories of Hagar, Rahab, Ruth, Jonah, and others demonstrate for them that journeying with God in obedience involves a pilgrimage that requires pain, perseverance, and allows an openness to those outside the faith of Israel.

In all these ways, the idea of journeying with God, often without a clear direction or destination, was foundational to Israel's understanding of her relationship with Yahweh. Yet in spite of the miraculous and prophetic actions of God along the way, the journey for Israel remained unfin-

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Journey Metaphors in the New Testament

Adequate biblical evidence for the concept that conversion is best understood as an ongoing movement with God rather than a singular once-and-for-all event, must include the New Testament. A number of references to the ongoing nature of the Christian walk can be gleaned from these scriptures.

An initial look at the verbs of movement elicits several key assertions pertaining to the recurring theme of journey in the NT. While human life in general can be characterized as a quest for religious truth, Christian discipleship is essentially obedience in movement toward the specific call of God. Certain key concepts illustrate this activity within the community of faith. Genuine discipleship embodies a dual turning, to God through faith in Christ, and from sin and the world. This motion is with purpose and direction toward a final destination, a sharing of eternal life with Christ in the homeland. Each of these dimensions of the Christian "walk" deserve specific attention.

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A God Who Seeks Takes the Initiative

God's active pursuit of his people, a predominant theme of the OT, is exemplified in the NT by a Father who sends his Son into the world to restore relationship with Israel and, subsequently all of creation (Rom.8:22). Jesus Christ, greatest of all apostles, or literally *sent ones*, is the one "whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world" (Jn.10:36). By this act, God seeks a people whom he now commands to *come* and *follow after* him (Mt.19:21). God's determined pursuit of his people is exemplified in the activity of his Son. Divine finding and human returning are seen to be the main mission of the Son of Man who came to seek and to save those who are lost

(Lk.19:10). It is Jesus who assertively pursues those whom the Father calls and draws to himself in order to share eternal life (Jn.6:43). The Son makes it clear that the initiative is with his Father and by reminding the disciples that “You did not choose me, but I chose you . . .” (Jn.15:16).

In Luke’s account of the Jerusalem journey, several parables show that devoted disciples of the Lord, like Jesus, should value seeking and accepting others. Jesus presents himself and his followers as living examples, and by including everyone at his table and using images of fellowship such as food, drink, and home (Lk.14:15-24), depicts the kingdom of God as an open invitation to feast. Similarly, the three parables about the lost (sheep, coin, and son) also teach that those who follow Christ have his mission of seeking the lost as well and like God, should rejoice when lost sinners are found (Lk.15:1-32). These apparent references to seeking and searching make it clear that God is an active agent in the redemption of humanity.

Religious Quest in the New Testament

In the NT the quest for spiritual truth is considered fundamental to human life. While this theme is more apparent in the challenges issued by the Lord (Mt.6:33, 7:7), it can also be recognized in the nature of the stories contained in the Gospels and Acts.

The cultural climate in first century Palestine affirmed the individual’s search for spiritual truth. The large pantheon of Greek gods, along with the abundance of pagan beliefs in that era, are illustrative of a search for a more thorough explanation for existence or as a basis for morals. The spiritual hunger was so great and spiritual pilgrimage such an integral part of Israel, that during feast times the number of sojourners and other visitors to Jerusalem was even greater than the city’s population.

The NT words *to seek* (*zeteo*) and *to find* (*heurisko*), are used 117 times and 176 times respectively in the NT. Their wide use, especially in spiritual contexts (Lk 15:8), emphasizes the prevalence in that culture of human seeking and further highlights the divine initiative to find those in search of religious answers.

In Matthew 2 the Magi provide a striking example of Gentiles who journey in search of a spiritual reward. Such a keen interest in the movement of stars in the heavens, and their possible link to political events, is suggestive of the intensity of religious search in that day.

There are many others in the NT who are seeking after spiritual truth. The prophet Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel,” and the prophetess Anna never left the temple, fasting and praying, seeking after God (Lk.2:25 & 37). The implication in Luke is that such zealous devotion is not only acceptable but honorable within the first century culture.

The account of the disdained tax-collector Zacchaeus who “wanted to see who Jesus was” (Lk.19:3), gives evidence of the spiritual hunger that Christ had stirred among the Jews. Moreover, Zacchaeus’ search was rewarded, for Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house because this man, too, is a son of Abraham” (Lk.19:9).

Finally, Nicodemus conversation with Jesus suggests a popular belief in his divine appointment. But a need for enlightenment spurs Nicodemus to further inquiry and exposes the need within the human heart for explanations of the supernatural.

Yet religious quest goes beyond mere individuals. There are no less than 97 uses of *the crowd* (*ochlos*) in the Gospels and Acts alone. The general public hopes that Jesus as a potential Messiah can provide divine intervention and earthly deliverance from Rome (Mt.15:30). The crowd’s pursuit of spiritual enlightenment is so great that they are willing to travel considerable distances to hear more of the words of Jesus (Jn.6:24).

Such seeking after truth and righteousness by the individual or the crowd is a condition for receiving the blessings of God and is encouraged by Christ (Mt.6:33). The instruction to search after spiritual truths is also given in the context of prayer where hearers are enjoined to ask, seek, and knock in persistent supplication to God (Mt.7:7). Such yearning, depicted as hungering and thirsting, is fulfilled through Jesus where salvation is characterized as eating and drinking at the table of God (Lk.22:30).

In the context of the *I am who I am* (*ego eimi*) discourses in John, what starts out as a search for the messiah turns instead to pursuit of eternal life. The people of early Palestine had a deep yearning to be given real spiritual meat which would satisfy the longing of their souls. And Jesus both affirmed and fulfilled the promise (Jn.4:14, 6:35, 7:38), “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Mt.5:6).

The interest in John the Baptist also depicts the spiritual enthusiasm of the age, as the people were “constantly” coming to be baptized by him (Jn.3:23). Even the Jewish leaders sent inquirers to determine his identity (Jn.1:19).¹⁹ Luke records that John the Baptist sends his disciples to see if Jesus was “the one who was to come” (Lk.19-20). Jesus uses this occasion to spur the spiritual inquisitiveness of the people by repeating the question “what did you go into the desert to see?” (Lk.7:24).

A quest for truth in divine encounters is also evident in Luke’s tracing in Acts of the gospel’s spread from Jerusalem. The crowd’s inquisitive presence in Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:6), Simon the sorcerer’s amazement at the Samaritan revival (8:13), the Ethiopian’s invitation to Philip for an explanation of the scriptures (8:31), and Cornelius’ request for Peter’s presence (Ch.10) all characterize a hunger for a deeper understanding of religious truth. The greater purpose is revealed in James’ speech before the Jerusalem council where he quotes Amos 9:11 & 12, “that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name” (15:17).

The accounts of Paul’s missionary journeys further confirm the theme of spiritual quest. The desire of the proconsul on the island of Paphos to hear the word of God (13:6), the invitation to Paul and Barnabas from the Jews in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch to speak further about spiritual things (13:42), the worship of Paul and Barnabas by the Lycaonians (14:11-12), the heart-cry of the Philippian jailer for salvation (16:29), the Bereans who examine the scriptures daily (17:11), and the Athenians who in “every way” are “very religious” and “want to hear again” from Paul on the subject of the resurrection of the dead (17:22, 32) display a widespread search for truth. More could be said about the fascination of King Agrippa with Paul (25:22) and the deification of Paul by those who saw him shake off the snake on Malta (28:6), but Luke makes the point that the people in Acts all had a religious tendency and were searching for the right spiritual answers. As Paul explained in the Athenian marketplace, God resurrected his son so that “men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (17:27).

¹⁹ While religious leaders sought out the veracity of various spiritual claims, it was often with the intent to expose fraud or to further their own political purposes rather than to worship. When the miraculous required an explanation, they quizzed the blind man by asking “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” (Jn.9:26). Such an impertinent inquiry solicited a challenge from the restored man concerning their quest, “do you want to become his disciples, too?” (Jn.9:27). Apparently, the call to discipleship through miraculous acts was fairly common.

Since the focus in the Pauline and General Epistles is directed toward those in the Christian community, emphasis on the spiritual seeker is not as common as in the Gospels and Acts. Yet in Romans, Paul makes it clear that for those who “seek glory, honor, and immortality” there is the reward of eternal life, in direct contrast to those who are “self-seeking” and seek evil, “whose reward is wrath and anger” (2:7-8). Furthermore, Paul’s argument occasionally diverges into the mysterious, pointing to a God whose path is “beyond tracing out” and whose judgments are “unsearchable” (Rom.11:33). This element of mystery for Paul, which “no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived” (1Cor.2:9), is the opposite of mere human wisdom, and becomes a compelling incentive for his own search.

Finally, the journey concept is found within the book of Hebrews as well. The writer affirms the necessity of spiritual search by reminding his readers that “without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb.11:6).

The biblical evidence suggests a prevalent pattern of movement in search of the sacred by those outside the community of faith in Christ. While not a predominant topic of every NT author, a widespread longing for truth is seen frequently as the start of a spiritual quest back to fellowship with God.

Christian Discipleship and the Movement Metaphors of Faith

Certain key words pertaining to the movement of the people of God signal the prominent place the pilgrimage theme holds in the NT documents. Scholars have noted how, especially in the book of Hebrews, the basic relationship believers had with the world was best described as a “wandering.”²⁰ Also, the recurrence of the stereotypical expressions *the way* (*hodos*), and *race* (*agon*) in Paul’s writings serve as literary signposts for the journey metaphors embedded in the NT writings. The response to God’s initiative is a “walk of faith” that can be seen as a dual turning to God in faith concerning his promises, and from a sinful world where the travelers are both strange and alien. Each of these facets of Christian discipleship portrayed in the NT can give us further insight into the journey of faith which unfolds through continual perseverance along The Way.

²⁰ See Ernst. Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God*, trans. by Roy A. Harrisville & Irving L. Sandberg (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 20.

Faith and Promise in the New Testament

In the NT the promise of God given to Abraham in the OT is fulfilled through a relationship of faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, believers receive the inheritance of righteousness that comes by faith (Rom.3:21f). Thus the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer is the seal of God's promise for salvation and of the reward to come at the end of the journey (Eph.1:13).

Abraham, in obedience to the Lord and in spite of the uncertainty of the journey, "obeyed and went" without knowing his final destination (Heb.11:8). Likewise, the recipients of the Gospel, receive it as a promise of things to come, and for this reason their existence can be described as a course of travel through this world towards the world to come.

Faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb.11:1), is the result of a confidence that stems from the promises of God. Expressed in the tension between the proclaimed promises of God in the gospel to be realized in the end of all things and the realities of earthly life, *faith* (*pistis*) belongs to the realm of signs and wonders as depicted in the so-called "hall of faith" in chapter 11 (11:33-38).

Thus, the very nature of faith requires a vision toward the future which results in movement toward a consummation of *better promises* (Heb.8:6), the realization of which God intends for those who are part of *the promises of the Father* (Rom.9:4, 15:8, 2Cor.7:1, Gal.3:16, 21). The nature of the promise is that it is not fully obtainable apart from "those who would be made perfect" in Christ (Heb.11:40).

This promise is no mere empty pledge or uncertain consolation. Instead it surely involves movement with a specific and ultimate goal. It is a movement that originates in mystery but will find its final fulfillment in the glorification of Christian believers, who through an attitude of faith, "may approach God with freedom and confidence" in the heavenly New Jerusalem (Eph.3:12).

The promise of a blessed future ingrained in the good news of salvation through Christ, produces a confidence in God concerning its fulfillment and rouses a reliance on him to complete that which he has begun in the Christian believer (Mt.24:35, Phil.1:6). Such a hope and confidence in Christ is the consequence of a decisive turning within the heart of believer.

Movement Toward God and Away from Sin

The path of authentic Christian discipleship involves a single course with dual intentions: (1) movement toward God and (2) away from sin.

(1) A turning to faith in God through Christ, is best exemplified in the Greek verb *metamorphoo*, which means simply “to remodel” or “to change into another form.” It is the word from which the English *metamorphosis* is derived. For Paul, the change that occurs is not solely a mystical event, but is better understood as a process by which the reality of future glorification with Christ in the heavenly realm is translated into a concrete reality lived out in the daily life of Christians. This is possible because believers have become one with Christ, and by the power of his Spirit share in his life (Rom.8:10-11, Eph.2:5-6).

In contrast, the life of faith in Hebrews is seen as a focus on the heavenly future, despite present suffering and a delay of the completion of all things. For the writer of Hebrews then, what is a turning toward the future in anticipation of the glory to come, for Paul, is a declaration of the past work on the cross which results in the present day gift of the Holy Spirit (2Cor.4:13). Yet, there also remains in his view of salvation an “already but not yet understanding of existence.”²¹ For instance his use of words translated into English such as *down payment*, *first fruits*, and *seal* all demonstrate this two-fold emphasis (Eph.1:13-14, Rom.8:23, 1Cor.15).

Regardless of one’s perspective, the direction of the turning that takes place in the NT involves a critical decision for total obedience by its human subjects. In fact, the radical demands of Jesus upon the life of the believer call for an unconditional turning both to God, and from all that is against God. Moreover, turning to God encompasses the whole ‘walk’ of those who claim Jesus as their Lord (Gal.5:16-26), and the nature of the “life that is worthy of the calling” is one that continues on toward maturity (Eph.4:13-16).

(2) Consistent with humankind’s turning toward God in faith is a turning away from sin and the world. A call to repentance is foundational to the apostolic communication of the gospel. For example, the epistles to the churches in John’s Revelation (Ch. 2,3) urgently

²¹ Each may emphasize the Spirit either as “the present evidence of future realities or as the assurance of the final glory, or both of these simultaneously,” Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Hendrickson, 1994), 806.

call for repentance. To undergo conversion is not simply to set one's life in a new direction, but, in day-to-day practice, to continually focus on the goal of final salvation by habitually turning away from evil. For Paul, this involved a radical break from the past. Likewise, the revulsion from evil which is essential to conversion is also evident in the sharp distinction between the ways of the world and God's kingdom in John's gospel and epistles. The author draws a clear contrast between light and darkness (Jn.1:5., 3:19-21, 11:9-10, 12:35-36, 46; 1Jn.2:8-10), truth and falsehood (Jn.8:40-46; 1Jn.1:6-8, 2:20-21), love and hate (1Jn.3:10-15, 4:20), life and death (Jn.5:24; 1Jn.3:14, 5:16), God and the world (1Jn.2:15-17, 3:1-2, 4:4-5).

In Hebrews sin is depicted as a "shrinking back," the result of growing cold in love toward God and an indifference to faith (Heb.6:4-6). To stop moving forward in relationship is to turn from the living God, to sin with full awareness, and to be thus subject to eternal judgment (Heb.10:39). In this sense then, sin is a slackening in the pursuit of the final goal. Those on the course towards the "heavenly homeland" are said to be ensnared or weighted down by earthly distractions and the sin that "so easily entangles" (Heb. 12:1). To lose focus of the goal (the throne room of God) is the opposite of obedience and *patience*, for just as faith's character is seen in perseverance, sin's is depicted in shrinking back.²²

The decision that is made is for a life of faith or sin. In addition to turning from sin, faith also involves remaining on the right path toward the eternal reward in the New Jerusalem. Furthermore, it entails a practical appreciation of the alien status believers have in a world which opposes the gospel.

Christian belief involves an estrangement from the World. This stems from a transitory existence born out of discontent, which provides the motivation to keep moving toward a new city, "whose architect and builder is God" (Heb.11:10,16; 13:14).

²² In the fourth chapter, Hebrews holds up as a negative example a generation of wilderness wandering Israelites. Because of their doubt and unbelief, they did not obtain the reward of rest which God had for them (4:11). A rare word *paraptomata* is used by Paul to denote "false step, transgression, sin" (Rom.4:25, 2Cor.5:19), and because it's derived from the root *pipto*, meaning "to walk," it carries with it a sense of motion but in the wrong direction. It is a movement in the wrong direction in unbelief. See W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Trans. by W.F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich; Rev. and Augmented by F.W. Gingrich and F.W. Danker; 2nd ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, s.v. "paraptoma," 621.

Two words in the original language, *stranger* (*paroikos*) and *alien* (*parepedemos*) depict this unique characteristic of the Christian discipline in the world. Just as Abraham is regarded as a *stranger* (Heb.11:8), a similar outsider status is likewise confirmed upon the NT community. For Paul, those who were once strangers and aliens are now fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household (Eph.2:19). However, in 1Peter the "aliens and strangers in the world" are admonished to continue to live in "Godly fear" in such a way as to avert the judgement of the Father, and be on their guard against sinful desires, which "war against the soul" (1Pet.1:17, 2:11).

A further testimony of the movement pattern within the NT is the use of the verb *anastrepho*, which means "to turn back and forth" in response to both negative and positive circumstances in the NT. Paul uses it to characterize the life of the Jews as "walking with those who do not obey" and being those who "walk in deceitful lusts" (Eph.2:3; 4:22). Similarly, it is used in 1st and 2nd Peter of the "vain conversation," "futile ways," and "empty way of life" of the forefathers and those who walk in the ways of the world, not with the Lord (1Pet.1:18; 2Pet.2:17-18).

In contrast to these who take the "broad road to destruction" (Matt.7:13) is the walk of Christians, who are challenged to be holy in all that they do (1Pet.1:15,17). Their walk is to maintain a spiritual concentration, a focus on the one "who knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment" (2Pet.2:9). It is this final goal of faith (the salvation and the glorification of souls) which enables the persecuted to endure the trials they face (1Pet.1:7-8).

This final goal is also the catalyst for action in the New Covenant community, activity characterized as faith upon *the way* (*hodos*) endured by Christian travelers, and the *race* (*agon*) depicted in Paul's writings.

Faith, Movement & the Use of "Way"

By looking at the use of the word *way* (*hodos*), by itself or as part of phrases such as *the way* and *the way of the Lord*, another aspect of the journey concept emerges within the NT. It is meaningful both in its use as a figure of speech and in its subsequent development as a significantly descriptive and clarifying concept.

The sheer numerical use of *the way* (some 101 times in the NT), along with the verb form of *to journey*, *travel*, *proceed*, (153 times), is a

concrete indication of the prevalence of the movement theme within these documents. Of central concern, however, are those places where its use points to behavior or a way of life rather than a literal journey or traveling.

In Luke, geographical distinctions serve as pointers in his story. These are textual keys to movement in his account of Jesus' ministry as he moves along 'the Way of the Lord.'²³ What is significant for Luke is also relevant for the other Gospel writers, but without the conspicuous use of movement through particular physical space that Luke use as a literary device.

Furthermore, Luke's unique use of *the way* in Acts has been spiritualized so that it is now identical with the Way of the Lord and the Way of God (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). The phrase no longer has the figurative meaning of 'conduct' which it had in the OT. It does not mean simply 'walking' but has come to mean a journey, with a definite goal and much suffering, leading to the Kingdom of God (cf., Acts 18:25, 26). Remaining true then to *the Faith*, involves a journey along the *way of salvation* (Acts 16:17). This is the path on which one must travel to obtain salvation, a salvation which is both present and future.

Beyond its concrete connotation as a pathway, Matthew uses literary contrast to depict *way* as a choice. The choice is either God or mammon (6:24); the narrow gate and the hard way, or the wide gate and the easy way (7:13-14); building on rock or sand (7:24-27); being with Jesus or against him (12:30). This sense of *either/or* underscores Matthew's theme of genuine spiritual formation as a matter of choosing the correct alternatives on the *way of righteousness* (Mt.21:32).

Mark purposely uses *way* as a literary device to depict the movement in the disciples as they "follow Jesus" along the way to the cross. Following Jesus, therefore, means journeying on the way with Jesus (8:27, 9:33-34; 10:32), a way that leads to their eventual revelation of him through the cross and the resurrection.²⁴

The use of *way* in John's gospel, while comparatively more sparse than the other gospels is no less prominent.²⁵ Apart from its use by

²³ Literary signposts (Lk.9:51; 13:22; 17:11; 19:28, 41) mark a progression toward Jerusalem in Luke's Gospel.

²⁴ For a more thorough treatment of evangelism themes in Mark's gospel see Peace, *Conversion*.

²⁵ The word *way* (*hodos*) is used 29x in Mt.; 18x in Mk.; 24x in Lk.; and only 9x in John. *Logos* search.

John the Baptist in Isaiah's admonition to "make straight the Lord's highway (Jn.1:23), *way* paradoxically depicts Jesus both as the goal and the means of attaining the goal (Jn.14:6). The goal of salvation is represented by the dwellings of 'the Father's house' and 'the kingdom of God' which are inseparable. While the goal, the heavenly home, is clear enough, the way of getting there is now revealed, for Jesus will take them to be with him (Jn.14:3). The result is a tension between the now and the not yet, as evidenced in the relationship the disciples enjoyed with the Father as they journey with Jesus on the Way (Jn.14:7).

Finally, a relevant consideration of the *new and living way as the way into the sanctuary*, portrayed in the book of Hebrews is worthwhile. Here the Way is mysterious, as the promises of God are fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Heb.10:20). Though the destination of this course is not specific, the focus is on a confident movement (10:19-22). For this promise of a 'way,' of which Hebrews speaks, is the way back to God. In spite of the specific instructions for its pursuit, this fellowship with God in its heavenly dimension remains somewhat elusive. Therefore, believers are exhorted to "hold fast to the hope that (they) profess" along the journey of faith in order to obtain the faithful promise as they see the Day approaching (Heb.10:23-25).

Faithful Perseverance in Running the "Race"

Within the epistles of the apostle Paul a significant image drawn from personal experience is portrayed through his use of athletic terminology to depict the life of faith as a race. Through the use of the Greek word *agon* (1Cor.9:24-27, Phil.3:12-14), which was popularly used to depict an upright moral and ethical life in Greek thought, Paul portrays the Christian belief as a forward movement, "a progression toward a final goal,"²⁶ and implies believers should possess the same zeal as athletes in order to reach it. In keeping with this athletic imagery the pursuit of righteousness in Paul entails sacrifice and discipline. Victory is the achievement of a goal, which for him is the *crown*, or victor's prize (Phil.3:14). The Christian obtains this prize by moving in response to God's call by "sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil.3:10).

²⁶ See Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), 134.

Furthermore, for Paul faith is seen as a perseverance to the end of the race, a staying in tune with the Spirit's keeping power so that salvation will reach its ultimate goal (vv.12-14). Paul argues against the perfectionistic tendency in Philippi by stressing the future consummation of salvation. He is in the process of movement toward a goal, for it is not so much the effort of the runner but the goal which is central. Perfection, then, is not a present possession but the prize to be obtained at the end of the long struggle of faith. This struggle has been depicted as a "daily chastening, the endless war with sin and Satan, the periodic walk in darkness" all for the purpose of learning to hold fast to God along the journey.²⁷

Clearly Paul's view of salvation has taken on a heavenly context, yet one stemming from a past event (the cross) with continuing, ongoing results into the present. Because of Christ's prior action toward him, *having been seized by Christ*, Paul perseveres expecting to obtain *the prize*. The focus on the heavenly dimension coupled with the *race* (*agon*) concept clearly points to the challenge of the ongoing journey in the life of Christians and is reminiscent of the passage in John (14:6), where knowledge of Christ becomes not only the goal but also the means of obtaining it.

The image of the runner is also significant in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (9:24-27). Paul's specialized use of *race* (*trecho*), which implies a foot race in a stadium, is used to show that what matters is perseverance to the end. The race is often described in Paul as being *in vain*, not that he might lose his salvation but because of his concern that he could reach the Judgement Day without the accompaniment of the host of believers whom he has set out to win to the gospel, who are to be his crown and glory (1Thess.2:19-20).

While the Corinthian believers are encouraged to "run in such a way as to get the prize" (1Cor.9:24), Paul does not mean that salvation depends on the exertion level of the believer. On the other hand, it is clear that the life of faith is not motionless nor effortless! Through the gifts of the Spirit, believers are to strive for the extension of the gospel and the deepening of God's gifts in their lives (1Cor.12:7 and 14:12). Believers participate in the one task given to humankind, "to seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt.6:33).

²⁷ See J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 222.

While Paul characterizes the salvation of individual believers as a certain heavenly reality (Eph.2:6), he also portrays it as process. One that may involve, as it did for him, Olympian discipline and sacrifice along the way toward its consummation. Believers, in the face of much persecution and even potential martyrdom, are to set a new course of dependence on and eventual glorification with God. Paul's view of Christian discipleship is clearly one of a journey onward into full relationship with the Father.

Community on the Move

The progression of Christian discipleship, as pilgrimage back to God, is never seen as a strictly individual affair. To be a Christian is to "baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1Cor.12:13) for they "are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal.3:28). The context of the Pauline passage in Phillipians chapter 3, is the writer's attempt to encourage people of like faith to join with others of like faith and put into practice what he has modeled (Phil.3:17, 4:9).

While the context for Christian discipleship consist of individuals within a "wandering" community of faith, they are not a community without a leader. The use of unique terminology for the leader in Hebrews gives us an indication of the dynamics of that kind of leadership. One word refers to Jesus as the *leader, ruler, or prince* who is the originator, or founder, the one who begins. He is *the pioneer of their salvation and the author and perfecter of our faith* (Heb.2:10, 12:2). In addition to its use in Hebrews, Luke also writes of a "prince" or "author", *of life*, who was resurrected from the dead to be exalted at God's right hand as *savior* (Acts.3:15, 5:31). The other term, as one "*going* (lit. running) *before*" is used only once in the NT, of Jesus, who entered the Holy of Holies as the "*forerunner* of his followers" (Heb.6:20). The leadership of Jesus is not passive or inactive, but he is seen as a leader who is 'on the move' in his efforts to bring his followers to their heavenly destination.

Not only are the faithful in the book of Hebrews a community with a leader but they are also a community with a purpose. The broad depiction of the activity of faith in Hebrews is clearly seen as a wandering on this earth (Ch.11), yet the conclusion in chapter 12 is that the goal of this journeying is advancement toward the city of God, because "people who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own" (Heb.11:14). This contrast between present wandering and future goal is reaffirmed where the writer states, "for here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (13:14). Faith's goal

is salvation, and that salvation will only be consummated by the believer's arrival and residence within the heavenly city.

Moreover, this purposeful journey is not an entirely selfish one as the promise of future salvation results in an immediate hunger for righteousness in the midst of an ungodly culture. This necessarily leads to the mission of the church to convey the possibility of a share in such righteousness with all those outside its realm.

Thus the Christian walk, in the context of a community headed toward a new home, evokes a yearning to bring others into the community of faith to travel with them as they follow Jesus toward fulfillment of a blessed hope (Tit.2;13). Such a hope, that "does not disappoint" (Rom.5:5), is the impetus for all believers as they journey in Christian discipleship toward a specific destination, the Homeland.

A number of metaphors depict the arrival of the sojourning believer at the consummate goal of eternal life in unimpeded fellowship with the creator God. While brevity requires a mere mention of the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, the Sabbath-rest, and other images which describe the household of the Father (Jn.14:2), the diversity of images helps to substantiate the importance of this concept in the minds of the NT church.

Inevitably, all of creation will be radically transformed by the presence of the Living God in Jesus Christ. From a human perspective, this is a radical breaking in of God in the present from the future. The metamorphosis resulting from God's presence is so catastrophic that, in effect, it conditions all of history. Thus, every reflection on NT thought should properly point in the direction of the final culmination of events in the future, aligning all past and current events toward its completion. This heavenly homeland becomes the central goal of those who walk in faith.

I have tried to provide evidence of the recurring pilgrimage motif within the NT. I pointed to the importance of spiritual quest as that which is initiated by God but is built-in to mortal existence. The scope of this religious quest in the NT is rooted in the culture of the first century and is evidenced by the religious character of its subjects. The function of journey as a common literary device in the Gospels underscores its significance to the early evangelists. Spiritual yearning is seen in the NT as both an individual and communal seeking after the truth found in God.

The call to Christian discipleship is often portrayed in the language of motion. It begins with an obedient response in movement back

toward a God who seeks those who have been separated. This is a faithful and persistent movement in response to his divine promise of salvation. Such discipleship is also a matter of a Spirit-empowered transformation in movement both to God through Christ and from sin and the world. Movement in the wrong direction is the result of unbelief and results in divine judgment and a loss of the eternal reward.

Two key concepts undergird the presence of the pilgrimage concept in the literature. First, the widespread formulaic use of *way* affirms the perception, among the NT authors, that the Christian life is one of motion. Moreover, Paul's Christianizing of the popular *race* concept, to signify the importance of a focused pursuit toward spiritual goals in the midst of trials, also supports the centrality of pilgrimage in the NT.

Similarly, the spiritual journey takes place among individuals within the context of the Christian community. This community is inspired with purpose and direction in its orientation toward a final goal, the city of God. And it is that specific destiny, the Homeland of the Father, which serves as a compelling force that energizes the journey for the Christian.

While the pilgrimage motif may not be primary to the idea of Christian discipleship, it is certainly notable. The NT focus on the Christian life as movement toward a goal is so pivotal that conversion, properly construed, must be seen in the context of a lifelong process. The NT dictates that devotion to Jesus Christ involves 'following' the Risen Lord, with "footsteps of faith," empowered along this life's course by the Spirit toward the heavenly home all believers will share with him and the Father. An investigation of the biblical traditions of Christianity reveals that in neither the Old or the New Testament, the idea of conversion as an ongoing spiritual journey could be considered paramount to the literature. However, it is evident that the theme is present, perhaps more subtle than pronounced. Nevertheless the frequent recurrence and underlying presence of the pattern supports the premise that a practical ministry of evangelism, which contends that spiritual pilgrimage is an essential model for the conversion process, is congruent with and informed by both the Old and New Testament documents.

Parable Telling from the Bible-Biblically Based Methodology

I have provided this scriptural support to help those involved in the evangelistic task to work through the biblical principles concerning conversion, especially when conceptualized as a spiritual journey.

Not only do the scriptures give us clear examples of conversion that go beyond a simplistic crisis encounter, sometimes exemplified by Paul's Damascus road experience (Acts 9, 26), but they also provide considerable insight as to how the ongoing work of Christian discipleship should take place as the Holy Spirit works to transform lives.

I have also argued that the Bible is the primary authority for Christian belief and practice and an evangelism ministry that is effective should be based on biblical principles. As an example of how this impinges on our evangelistic practices, I teach believers to use the Bible in what I refer to as "parable telling, a means of reaching those outside the faith.

Parables were told in the Bible for the purpose of provoking the hearer to discover a deeper hidden meaning. They addressed the specific issue or situation the teller discerned was relevant to his audience. There are many examples of what the Bible specifically referred to as "parables."²⁸ But what I have in mind is the use of specific stories in the Bible to relate to the situations of those outside the realm of faith.

There are number of benefits derived from such "parable- telling" from the Bible. Not only does it 1) illustrate how the Bible can be a reliable source for divine truths, but it also 2) links the hearer's story with the biblical accounts and salvation history. This approach can be used to 3) answer potential questions in a non-threatening or non-dogmatic way and yet, 4) fits the discovery approach to truth revered by post-modern thinkers. Furthermore, 5) it challenges believers to diligently study the Word of God in order to make it more relevant to their hearers. Finally, 6) it relies on the fact that God's Word is more powerful than personal opinion, for God will anoint his Word to the hearers.

This approach offers the kind of Spirit-led biblical emphasis many believers are looking for in their witnessing efforts by encouraging them to tailor the stories in the Bible to the unique circumstances of life seekers are experiencing. I have provide some examples of how certain stories might be applied to fairly common situations or issues that arise when sharing one's faith (see Figure 9). What powerful biblical stories can you think of that would encourage people to repent and follow Jesus?

²⁸ The classic parable is in Mark 4: where Jesus asks concerning the parable of the sower: "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?" (Mk.4:13), implying that understanding this parable is the key to understanding itself. There are many other examples called "parables" as well: Ezek. 17:2, the eagle and the fruitful vine; 24:3, the cooking pot and impurities, Mt.21:33, parable of the tenants of the vineyard; Mk.7:14, what comes out of a person makes them unclean; Lk.5:36, new and old wineskins; Lk 6:39, blind leading the blind; Lk 12:16, eat, drink and be merry; 13:6 Unfruitful fig tree, 14:7, place at a wedding feast; Chapter 15, lost sheep, lost coin, lost son.

Parable telling from the Bible is just one example of how believer's might apply the aforementioned principle of practical theology, that is, that our evangelism should be biblical in basis. It illustrates how the Holy Spirit might lead us to modify our approaches in evangelism so that they genuinely incorporate the five key factors I refer to in this book in the development of our own practical ministry of evangelism. We have seen how important it is that our approach to evangelism be dialogical in method, stem from solid biblical principles, and allow for the Spirit to accomplish his work in the lives of unbelievers. It is to that work that we now turn, as we continue to reflect on those key imperatives necessary for the development of our own effective ministries of evangelism.

Figure 9

Parables for Situations

WHAT KINDS OF PARABLES WOULD BE MOST EFFECTIVE FOR SPECIFIC SITUATIONS?

1. Spiritual Seeking - Nicodemus, Jn.3.
2. Mystical Encounters -
 - A. Elijah & still small voice - 1Kg.19:9
 - B. Thomas & Jesus after resurrection - Jn.20:24
 - C. Road to Emmaus - Lk.24:13
3. Power Encounters -
 - A. Elijah and Mount Carmel - 1Kg.18:16
 - B. Paul on Road to Damascus - Acts 9
 - C. Phillipian Jailer conversion - Acts 16
 - D. Paul Shipwrecked and bitten on Malta - Acts 27:13
4. Judgment for Opposing God -
 - A. Paul on Paphos, sorcerer blinded - Acts 13:6.
 - B. Ananias and Sapphira - Acts 5
5. Need for Healing - man born blind - Jn.9
6. Need for Miraculous provision - Elijah, the widow & the oil - 1Kg.17:7
7. Need for Guidance - burning bush - Exodus 3
8. Multiple Marriages - woman at the well- Jn.4
9. Sinful situations -
 - A. Addictions - Prodigal son- Lk.13.
 - B. Sexual sin - Woman caught in adultery - Jn.8
 - C. Materialism - Rich young ruler - Mt.19:16
10. Preoccupation with this life - Lk.9:57
11. Trust in human intellect in Athens - Acts 17.
12. Acceptance by God outside tradition- Peter & Cornelius in Acts 10.

The Spiritual Dimension Of Our Passage

Too often in discussions about evangelism, or more specifically the phenomenon of conversion, the spiritual dimension is sorely neglected. Outside of the Bible, most of the literature on conversion emphasizes the human factors involved. Efforts are made to explain *what* happened but don't really deal with *how* conversion came about. The focus tends to be on the human side of the process neglecting the divine initiative expressed through the work of the Holy Spirit.

This chapter accents the divine side of conversion; that is, the role of the Holy Spirit throughout the process of conversion. Christian conversion can best be defined as a life-long process of transformation in which the God of the Universe reconciles individuals, and all of creation, back into re-

demptive relationship with Himself through the atonement of his Son's death on the cross and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit toward the final completion of all things. Throughout the three stages of

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conversion: quest, encounter, and transformation, the Holy Spirit interacts with humans in a most unique and effectual way. An under-

standing of this interaction is essential to understanding the activity of God in his formation of our practical ministry of evangelism.

Conversion is as complex and varied as the personalities of each individual and the intricacies of the Spirit's interactions within that human life. Consequently, it must be readily admitted that there is no one model of understanding that can claim universal application to every conversion experience.

Nevertheless, the three phases of quest, encounter and transformation provide a structure to explain the manner of the Holy Spirit's workings. The first phase involves a spiritual quest upon which every human embarks; as people ponder their reason for existence, a consciousness of separateness emerges in the human heart. The second aspect of spiritual encounter is a distinct comprehension of the incarnation, power, and ongoing presence of the risen Lord which accomplishes reconciliation between God and humanity. Finally, this movement entails a progressive spiritual transformation, embodied in the processes of sanctification and salvation as movement toward a specific destiny. For this model each subsequent phase builds on the former, for the individual cannot move to an advanced phase without experiencing the preceding ones. Yet each phase might include components that remain as remnants of the prior stages.

Jesus' description of the work of the Spirit in John chapter 16 is indicative of the three-fold aspect of his work in the world today. A brief explanation of this passage provides the foundation upon which such a theology of the Spirit can be promoted.

The World on Trial Before God

Jesus' words in John's gospel outline the performance of the Holy Spirit in the conversion process. Each aspect of the Spirit's work as described by Christ, corresponds with an aspect of the spiritual journey as it progresses toward the completion of Christian conversion. A look at the words and grammar

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned (Jn.16:8-11).

used in the text offers insight into how this can be so.

The Courtroom of the Holy Spirit

While there are volumes written about Christian conversion, they rarely, if at all, speak of the "Holy Spirit." Rather, their focus is almost exclusively on the human spirit with its religious impulses, explaining in detail the internal (psychological) and external (sociological) influences on human beings. But the Holy Spirit is the divine agent, the third person of the Triune godhead, who is present and active in the midst of human difficulties. He is the catalyst for God's divine undertaking with His creation and his interactions with humanity. Understanding these interactions are at the core of discerning God's activity in the world. And it is the Holy Spirit who is both the subject and the agent of conviction in John's writing.

But "the one who will come" is previously described as a *parakletos* (v.7), one who helps by consoling, encouraging, or mediating on behalf of humans in need. Because he is the spirit of truth (v.13), he convicts an unrighteous world of its wickedness and deceit. The word *to convict* does not mean only to blame or to reprove, nor to convince in the sense of proof, nor to reveal or expose, but also means to set right, namely to point away from sin to repentance, and in this way involves an educational process. Therefore, the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) not only publicly exposes the world's guilt, but calls it to repentance, and this is done through the process described in John's gospel.

The Oxford English Dictionary's use of the word *expose*, "to put forth, present to view; hence make known, disclose, set forth and unmask, show up an error or misrepresentation" is perhaps the most precise definition.²⁹ The witness of his disciples concerning Jesus is the primary means the Spirit uses to expose the world's sin of unbelief. The fundamental concept is that of the world on trial before God.

In court there is a difference between being convicted and being convinced. So it is, as well, in the spiritual dimension. Convict could mean to prove guilty without admission or confession of guilt, or it could mean to make aware of guilt. Even though the Holy Spirit proves the world guilty through the preaching of the Gospel, both of these results are not achieved in every person who hears the message. Some will be convinced, admit it readily, call upon the name of the

²⁹ J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "expose," (20 vol., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), V.578.

Lord and be saved (Rom.10:13). Yet, experience shows that many, if not most humans, even though their guilt has been exposed or proved, continue in open hostility to the truth and do not repent. So the impact of the activity of the Holy Spirit, depicted in the verb *convict*, is conditioned by the human response.

The object of the Spirit's work to expose guilt is all of the *kosmos*, that is, every part of humanity that can feel the emotion of guilt or responsibility. As the subject, the Spirit serves as a prosecutor, putting the object, the world, on trial, pronouncing it guilty of sin and worthy of condemnation (cf. Jn.14:17, 15:18-26). The "world" is all those forces who oppose, reject, or are indifferent to God and his people. It includes the whole diabolical system stemming from the sins of humans.

Three words, sin (*hamartia*), righteousness (*dikaiosisyne*), and judgment (*krisis*), are used to explain specifically what it is the *world* is being exposed of. These three aspects relate specifically to the Spirit's effort in human conversion and are worthy of further consideration later in this chapter.

While use of certain words and their construction in sentences have considerable bearing on an understanding of this passage, there are also questions raised concerning the placement of these verses within the gospel. This passage represents just one of five distinct "Paraclete" sayings in John.³⁰ John's use of this word is unique to the NT.

The use of this kind of formal sermonizing in John's gospel to convey the teaching of deceased leaders, such as is the context for these sayings, was common in that period and is more evident in John than the other gospels. Rather than focusing on various theories for the compilation of John's gospel, what is important here is the fact that the Holy Spirit superintended the whole process of scriptural inspiration beginning with its compilation, preservation, and the eventual establishment of its final form by the church.

It is significant that what is preserved here is actually what occurred through the writing and the subsequent witness of the evangelist(s) and the church, for indeed, through their actions the world was convicted of their sin. In the Final Discourse in John, the words of Jesus portray a process of conviction to his hearers that they might be encouraged not only by what the Spirit is going to do in

³⁰ Jn.14:14-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11, 13-14.

their midst, but by an anticipation of his ongoing work in the world as well.³¹ This *parakletos* saying furthers the conviction of sin, presents Christ's manifold righteousness and bears witness to God's judgment upon the world system.

The Judicial Comparison in Jn 16:8-11 as a Model for Conversion

There is a supernatural progression in the conviction of the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgement. Foundational to the Spirit's role in conversion is the understanding which he brings to the human mind concerning these three aspects of spiritual reality that are laid bare before the world. All three persons of the Godhead are part of the sequential unfolding of this actuality. It begins with a revelation of human responsibility, unfolds in the divine plan for redemption, and culminates with a vision of the final destiny of all creation.

Initially, a personal awareness of sin as both an action and the unavoidable results that arise from those actions, is a prerequisite to the initial stage of movement toward God in conversion. Sin results in an unrighteousness and lawlessness that extends beyond merely human conditions as it arises from the demonic, resulting in complete separation from God.

Consequently, the Spirit precipitates a new kind of crisis (*krisis*) for the world by uncovering within the human conscience the reality of sin as hatred of God. This reality forces humankind to face the full burden of their responsibility before a holy and just God. Once it is acknowledged, the next stage of conviction becomes much more meaningful and relevant.

Subsequently, the belief or unbelief which earmarks the crisis that ensues for the world, springs from a reaction to the righteousness of God manifested in the traumatic drama of the Cross. The word *righteousness*, or uprightness, can be described as right conduct before God, where the basic relationship to God is stressed.

The events that unfold in the death, burial, and resurrection become the divine stamp of approval upon Christ's life and work. The nature of righteousness is brought to light in that Jesus "goes away" to the Father and his disciples "see him no more" (Jn.16:10). Thus, the lifting up of Jesus on the cross, which in the world's eyes was the demonstration of his unrighteousness, was none other than the means

³¹ Another biblical example of the process is attested to in Acts 24:25 in the life of Paul.

of his exaltation to heaven by the Father. The ramifications of this reality are brought home to the individual conscience through the Holy Spirit. He communicates that Christ's righteousness is the divine answer to the human dilemma of sin brought about through an experience of the ongoing presence, power, and incarnation of the resurrected Christ.

Finally, the Spirit-inspired revelation of the reality of God's divine reversal in the resurrection of Christ to his "exalted right hand" (Acts 2:33, 5:31), sparks the realization of the certain destiny humans face in response to these truths. The positive or negative human response receives a corresponding spiritual result in the finality of all things. It is a crisis of judgment, something "that goes against a person," seen as "condemnation and the punishment that follows."³² It is a distinctive feature of John's gospel that, for both believer and unbeliever, judgment is already present. Because they have already passed from death to life, believers in Christ can have confidence on the day of judgment, an assurance which is reaffirmed throughout the NT.

Similarly, judgment has already been passed on the world. This judgment took place in the hour when the Son of God resolved to sacrifice Himself to the glory of the Father, and God promised to glorify Him (cf., Jn.12:27-31). Already the prince of the world stood condemned (12:31, 14:30) and at the last day this sentence will be made manifest to the entire universe (Rev.20:10). The world, because of its failure to acknowledge Jesus as the rightful Lord of the world, is implicated in the judgment that took place on the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus. Contrary to popular human sentiment, those who refuse to believe have already received eternal condemnation and their redemption can only be obtained through belief in Jesus Christ.

Implications for Christian Conversion and Discipleship

The key images of sin, righteousness, and judgement, when rightly understood in the Gospel of John's context, provide a basis for a pattern of movement from one stage of conversion to another. These movements result from divine interactions between the Paraclete and human personhood.

³² BAGD, s.v. "Krisis," 452-453. Here, it is a judgement that goes against the world and is interpreted as a judgment on the prince of the world. In Jn.3:19 it has, in addition to the former senses, "the clear connotation of 'separation, division.' The judgment which is operative here and now, consists in the fact that men [*sic*] divide themselves into those who accept Christ and those who reject him," cf. Ibid., 453.

As persons realize their separation from God, the awareness of sin becomes the beginning of a quest which serves as the motivation for a mystical encounter with the Risen Lord. The Holy Spirit, by affirming the truth of the gospel proclamation, additionally confirmed by the resurrection event embedded in history, brings humanity face to face with the righteousness of God manifested in the incarnation, power, and ongoing presence of his Risen Christ. The personhood of God is revealed in every act of the incarnation as preserved in the scriptural accounts of the life of Jesus. The power of God is displayed in the exaltation of the Son from his death on the cross through to his ascension. The ongoing presence of that same person, the Son of God, is made tangible by the power of the Spirit in the mystical encounter that ensues in the spirit of the human person. Upon repentance of sin and faith in the resurrection event, the reality of the Trinity and its intervention in history is affirmed.

The final consequence of the Spirit's convincing efforts is a deep conviction that the future has indeed broken into the present, and the resurrection of Christ is only an omen of the justice of God yet to be displayed. Judgment has been declared on both believers and unbelievers alike and now awaits only the inexorable march of time to fulfill its ultimate destiny. This vision of future justice (either reward or punishment, depending on belief) provides the motivating influence for transformation (2Pet.3:14), a transformation that will only be fulfilled when all of the cosmos is brought to completion on the last day (Rom.8:19-22, 2Pet.3:7, 10, 12-13).

While the text in John references the unbelieving world as the object of the Spirit's conviction, this occurs because of a similar process in the life of the disciples. On a daily basis, they may be convinced of sinful behavior, once again recognize the need for the atonement that comes only through the righteousness of Christ, and face afresh the certainty of divine justice to come. A microcosm of this model of conversion re-occurs as they are transformed daily at the cross of Christ as his disciples. This overarching ideal can be used to explain the more particular work of the Spirit in each phase of the journey known as Christian conversion.

Spiritual Quest and the Realization of Separateness

Humanity and the Spiritual Quest

The journey of life is filled with paradox. No sooner do humans become aware of their abilities to think beyond the limitations of their physicality than they come face to face with the reality of death. Yes, they can soar to the far corners of the universe in their minds, or travel inward conceptually into the depths of the complexities of the human body, but ultimately they are brought up short with the reality of their finite nature. The reality of death inspires in the human heart a longing to surmount physical limitations and obtain immortality. This longing is the incentive for the first step of the spiritual journey as humans come to acknowledge the reality of sin and their separation from the Creator.

By placing his image within humans, God provided the means for the human spirit to experience a taste of the divine. It is this ability to think abstractly that separates humans from the rest of creation and which also provides the basis within humans for the Spirit's most immediate influence.

Remember, according to the scriptures, the origins of creation are generated by God from nothing. This act of God, breathing life into something from nothing (Gen.2:7), serves as a pattern for the work of the Spirit of God upon humans throughout the OT. The activity of the Spirit of God takes on cosmic and yet intimate proportions in its ability to both create and sustain, inspiring Job to declare "the Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4). It is restorative in bringing back to life even the dead bones of the house of Israel as God's breath enters into them (Ezek.37:4-10). In like manner, the barrenness of Sarah's womb issues a son as God promised (Gen.21:1-2). This is comparable to the Spirit's work in redemption, to create newness of life from the spiritual death that results from sin. This same Spirit indwells, infills, and empowers the believer for service to God's purpose. Repeatedly, the Spirit is seen as the primary agent of God's power to move in the lives of his people. These acts of the Spirit allude to the possibility for immortality in the lives of God's people. The OT affirms the Spirit's presence to create and sustain humanity from the beginning.

The Spirit's initial work of revelation in conversion is done within the inner being where the image of God is reflected. The biblical

drama portrays a universal perversion of this image within humans. God works through his Spirit to restore this image, both in the individual and the entire cosmos. The ultimate questions which thinking humans ask reveal the drive within the human personality to search out the true nature of reality.³³ This search for truth, which arises from the vestiges of the divine image in humans, is the catalyst to the Spirit's work to "lead us into all truth" (Jn.16:13), truth found in God's Word.

For Moses, God's appearance in the burning bush account (Ex.3:1-15) was the revelation of a powerful entity beyond himself. Such a revelation is suggestive of the steps the Spirit takes in the human personality to initiate and sustain the spiritual quest. What begins as a human search to soar beyond the limits of our physical space soon becomes the first human inclination that there is more than meets the eye to human existence. It is at this point that humans begin to question who is actually in control. The human psyche becomes painfully aware that it does not contain within itself the intrinsic power of being: the understanding that it neither created nor sustains the reality of the universe around it. This search to soar above it all inevitably leads to the recognition that, as the Alcoholics Anonymous so succinctly put it, "There is a God, and you're not him!"

*In Search of The Holy Other*³⁴

The necessity of something indescribable, something beyond finite human capabilities, something that inherently contains the power of creating and sustaining the universe, begins to dawn in the human conscience. This striving for ultimacy, or yearning for something beyond creaturely existence, is the work of the Holy Spirit within the human conscience to search out the deep things of God and reveal them to the human spirit (1Cor.2:9-16 and Rom.8:27).

Once the human spirit recognizes its cosmic limitations, it is ready for the revelation of God's presence. The presence of such sub-

³³ Each individual world view is formed by these ultimate questions: "Where am I, Who am I, What's God think of me, What is my destiny?" The answer: on earth, a good created being to share in dominion (Gen.2:26-31).

³⁴ I have altered Otto's term 'wholly other,' defined as "that which is quite beyond the spheres of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny,' and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment," see Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1923, trans. by John W. Harvey, (London: Oxford University Press, repr. 1958), 26. I have replaced his with a Christian adjective, "holy," to imply that what Otto refers to in secular terms is, in fact, God.

lime power is affirmed through the works of God in the universe “so that men are without excuse” (Rom. 1:18-20). Human consciousness places great significance on the reality of the spiritual dimension beyond the individual self.

A full recognition of the spiritual dimension in the human condition is not the product of intellect. Beyond rational explanation, it exceeds mere human thinking to touch the emotional and intuitive dimensions. When the reality that some thing or person must exist, mysterious beyond human knowing, is contemplated, considerable awe and perhaps even terror enters the human psyche. This is the foundation for the doctrine of God’s holiness, and recognition of it affirms the limitations of human existence and is the beginning of spiritual awareness.

Secular literature, along with numerous theological works, documents human attempts to apprehend the nature of the supernatural dimension. Yet any explanation of the infinite expanse of God’s existence will ultimately be frustrated by the finite limitation of human understanding. While God can be known, he will never be completely known and is thus beyond finite human understanding. Nevertheless, God desires to be intimately connected with his creation and reveals himself through both general and special revelation in history.

Human Sinfulness Revealed in the Tension Between the Glorious and the Mundane

There is a tension that exists in the duality of God’s relation to humans as seen in the biblical accounts. On one hand, he remains beyond their reach as displayed in the divine attribute of Holiness. On the other, he is close and near through the covenant he establishes and maintains on a day to day basis. God’s desire for relationship with his people is the motivation for continual renewal of the covenant. The Holy Spirit uses the terror evoked by such a close revelation of God to expose to the human conscience its “otherness” from the holy and righteous one. The huge distinction between God’s awesome wonder and the frailty of human existence leads to an acknowledgment of sin in the heart of the believer, and a “realization of separateness” dawns upon the human consciousness.

The result of such awareness in the human conscience is a genuine sense of lostness, the root of the human predicament, what one

scholar called the “vortex of vulnerability.”³⁵ What the Spirit exposes is human responsibility for its moral deficiencies. By disclosing the human accountability for sin, the Spirit is able to convince humankind of the impending judgment that is due and the necessity of a righteousness beyond any human possibility.

What was hidden in the awesome holiness of God in the OT, depicted in the keen sense of his separation from human sinfulness, is thoroughly revealed through intimate encounters with him in the New. As the mediating agent, the Spirit bridges the gap between God’s distant holiness and his grace-filled immediate presence, expressed in his activity through the incarnation, ministry, and passion of Christ. The NT documents record God’s Spirit at work in the lives of people, especially his Son at the cross, and these, as the written Word, become the primary instrument through which the gospel of Christ is proclaimed.

While both God’s distance and proximity are recognizable within the written revelation, it is difficult to explain what this means in the life of the individual, which can only be done by the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit’s work to reveal to each individual what exactly it is that corrupts his/her relationship with God, with one another, and even the inner self of humans. This aspect of the quest phase of the conversion process overlaps with the phase of encounter. The realization of separateness provides the basis for an experience of establishing peace with God. For it is only by encounter with true righteousness, the sacrificial act of Christ on the cross, and God’s subsequent vindication of his son through the resurrection, that the full content of the Spirit’s conviction begins to unfold.

Encounter and the Realization of Righteousness

The intervening presence of God’s Spirit in the crucial stage of encounter communicates three essential characteristics of the Redeemer’s interactions with the world that ultimately result in genuine Christian conversion. The *incarnation* of Christ provides the possibility for divine relationship with humanity. The *power* of Christ is the means whereby the righteousness of God is revealed in the dynamic events of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection for the redemption of the world. Finally, the *ongoing presence* of Christ’s righteousness is

³⁵ See Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xii.

manifested through the work of the same Spirit within the individual, the Christian community, and consequently, the entire cosmos.

A *supernatural encounter* with the righteousness of God, embodied in the *Word of God (logos)*, is critical to true Christian conversion.³⁶ This encounter occurs in the spiritual dimension. Little is explicitly declared in the written Word concerning the Holy Spirit's work in the glorification of God the Father and his Son. Rather, the Spirit's efforts are seen in his effectiveness to inspire the scripture, so that it is considered by Paul to be God-breathed (1Tim.3:16), and furthermore attests to the truth it contains. Thus, the concrete realities portrayed in scripture are interpreted by the Spirit so that they can become the personal realities of human understanding. By faith, persons apprehend the truths given in scripture, which results in a genuine spiritual encounter with the righteousness of Christ.

The Righteousness of God Revealed in the Incarnation

Acknowledgment of the word come in the flesh as the human Jesus is essential to the establishment of a genuine relationship between the human and divine, without which no genuine conversion can occur (1Jn.4:2). Christ's coming in the flesh was God's way of communicating his love for humanity. God could have spoken from the clouds with an impressive display of power and, in fact, did so at different times (Ex.19, Mt.17:5, Mt.3:17). But it is through the person of Jesus that God fully experiences within his own being what it means to be a human.

While it is the Son who through his co-humanity pays the irreversible price for this relation,³⁷ it is the function of the Spirit to assure humanity of the possibility of a personal relationship with God. Moreover, the Spirit-supervised inspiration and preservation of the scriptural accounts provides the central means through which the Spirit testifies to this possibility of a relationship. Just as the human Jesus came to minister to the personal needs of humanity, so the labor of the Holy Spirit, who is to come and remain, is expressed in the per-

³⁶ The view of the *Logos* that I have in mind is not the mystical *logos* of Greek Gnosticism that existed prior to the incarnation, but rather the Word of God as first of all revealed in the acts of God proclaimed in history, inscribed from a narrative story into words, and finally, seen as a Living Word because Christ sits at the right hand of God the Father and through his Spirit continues to reveal himself to the World.

³⁷ Christ was forever altered after his resurrection: he did not return to the same pre-incarnate state from which he came, but now bears the marks upon his body of his passion (Jn.20:27, Gal.6:17).

sonal terms Counselor, Spirit of Truth, Advocate, and Paraclete. The personal attributes and actions of the Holy Spirit depict a divine personality that responds in relational ways to humans.³⁸

The personality of God expressed in the life of Christ was the vehicle through which God displayed his power to redeem and made his love understandable to the human spirit. In the righteousness of God, and through the power of the Spirit, Christ would change forever the way humanity was to view God.

Righteousness Realized in the Power of Christ and the Cross

The ministry of Christ and his disciples as displayed throughout the NT, serves as a powerful reminder of the need for supernatural intervention. Over and over, the loving hand of God is seen in personal, yet dynamic displays of deliverance, healing, resurrection, and other assorted miracles. All of these depict the righteousness of the One who received “the Spirit without limit” (Jn.3:34) and the future redemption certain for all who believe in him (Rom.6:5). The life of Christ and the ministry he bequeaths to his followers also serve as an example of life for those who walk in the power of the Spirit (Jn.14:12). For Jesus “did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth” (1Jn.5:6). God, through the Spirit’s power at work in humans, is able to overcome the human dilemma of suffering and death (Rom.8:2, 37-38).

The Holy Spirit affirms the righteousness of Christ by the power displayed in the death and resurrection of Christ. In spite of a scarcity of specific references to the Spirit’s work in the most trying time of Christ’s ministry, he cannot be considered absent. It was by the Spirit that the sufferings of Christ were predicted “through the prophets who spoke of the grace to come” (1Pet.1:11). And it is clear that Jesus had foreknowledge of many things (Jn.13:1,3), including what was going to happen to him (Jn.18:4). The Holy Spirit revealed such things through a word of wisdom (1Cor.12:8) to the one who had the Spirit “without limit” (Jn.3:34).

Jesus implies that it is only through the Spirit’s work that temptation is overcome (Mt.26:41). Furthermore, Christ relied on the power of the Spirit for the words to respond to his captors and taught

³⁸ He searches all things, knows the mind of Christ, gives life, accomplishes, cries out, leads humans, bears witness, has desires, helps humans, intercedes, works, strengthens, and is grieved.

his disciples to do likewise when confronted with persecuting authorities (Mk.13:11). Only by the Spirit of God can one face such a gruesome death and say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk.23:34). The writer of Hebrews made it explicit that it was through the "eternal Spirit" that Christ would "offer himself unblemished to God" (Heb.9:14).

Scrutiny of the closest possible link that exists between the members of the Godhead always evokes an element of mystery, but the scriptures provide some clues. They indicate that the Spirit, if not the direct agent, then as the power of God is intimately involved in the most important event for Christian conversion: the display of Christ's righteousness in the resurrection. In Romans, Paul refers to the Son as a descendent of David "who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (1:4). Whether or not Paul means the Father or the Spirit raised Christ, it is the Spirit who "declared with power" that Christ is the Son of God in the resurrection. Paul's declaration that "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you . . ." (Rom.8:11), affirms that a contemporary experience of Christ occurs through the presence of the indwelling Spirit. Another reference to the power of God's Spirit speaks of the "mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms" (Eph.1:19-20).

The early Christian hymn in Paul's first letter to Timothy links the mystery of godliness with Christ's "appearance in a body" (v.3:16) and mentions the work of the Spirit who "vindicated" Christ (v.3:3). Again, the Spirit is seen to be an integral part of the witness to the power of God in Christ's resurrection. A more explicit statement is made in 1Peter, that the Christ who died "for sins once for all. . . was put to death in the body, but made alive by the Spirit" (1Pet.3:18). These scriptures support Paul's premise, succinctly stated in his first Corinthian correspondence, that "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1Cor.15:14). The entire possibility for Christian conversion hinges on the reality of the resurrection event, for without it Christian faith is futile and humanity is dead in its sin (1Cor.15:17).

The resurrection, as a display of righteousness and divine might, points to the eventual glorification of all of God's creation at the end of time to come. In addition to the Spirit's involvement as the power

of God to resurrect and testify concerning the crucified Christ, he also works to preserve the NT documents so that they might provide evidence for a defense of the Christian faith. Subsequently, as an indwelling Spirit, he continues to empower the communication of the gospel and validate its claims throughout the history of the church. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the Spirit moves beyond the realm of intellect and authenticates the reality of the resurrection to the heart of hearers. In this way, the righteousness of Christ is conveyed as an ongoing presence which transforms the world through the power of the Spirit.

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Righteousness Displayed in the Ongoing Presence of Christ

Many debates ensue in theological circles pertaining to the order of salvation which describes the inner workings of the atonement within the human spirit. However, whether or not true repentance and faith are possible prior, or subsequent to actual regeneration by the Spirit, the fact remains that redemption is only possible because of the cross event. This is the cataclysmic milestone that shapes all of salvation history.

Regardless of the logical order, the Spirit of God is understood to be indispensable to the whole process. It is only through the Spirit that humans can experience concretely Christ's righteousness and through which regeneration is obtainable for those who respond in belief. The degree to which humans are able to respond to God's grace remains debatable, but all agree that it is only by a divine grace mediated by the Spirit, that one might be saved (Eph.2:8-9). Through the Spirit then, the cross of Christ continues to be present and effective in the lives of humans.

Because it represents the breaking-in of the future into the present, Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit is a sign and guarantee of the future reign of God within Creation. The presence of Christ' righteousness for the individual is both a reality beyond human limits and yet can be experienced in a very personal and tangible way as well.

It goes beyond human boundaries because the majesty of the power displayed at the Cross to justify all believers is beyond mortal understanding. It is a weighty fact, attested to by the presence of the Risen Lord at the right hand of the Father (Eph.2:6-7, Col.2:13-15). Christ's passion and subsequent exaltation confirm the satisfaction he earned on behalf of all the world's penalty and guilt (Rom.3:25-26). Thus, Christ's righteousness is *imputed*, that is credit is given in a judicial sense, to the human account. Humanity can be justified in the eyes of the Creator because of the righteousness of the Savior in which they are now clothed (Rom.4:24, 5:17-18, 6:13, Rev.7:13-14).

In a personal way, the atoning work of the Cross is experienced in the heart of the believer through the ongoing presence of the Spirit of Christ within the spirit of humans. Christ's righteousness, imputed in the legal act of justification, is thereby transferred in a very real and tangible way to the awareness of the believer. It becomes, then, his righteousness *imparted* through the Holy Spirit's sanctification of the human heart (Rom.5:5, 2Cor.1:22, 1Th.5:23, 2Th.2:13, 1Pet.1:2). This begins the restoration of the image of God in the essential core of the human spirit. Sanctification is complete in Christ, but in their daily actions God's people are empowered to holiness so that their heavenly status can have an earthly impact.

Through thinking processes impacted by the Holy Spirit, by faith humans are able to recognize the justification that is wrought on their behalf and tangibly experience the onset of the sanctification process. Righteousness is disclosed to the individual in Christ's work as an intercessor in heaven who shares in the divine glory (Rom.8:34, Heb.7:25). This is experienced as a genuine abiding supernatural presence within the heart of those who believe (Jn.17:22), and attested to by manifestations of the Spirit prompted in the life of the believer similar to those Christ himself experienced.

Yet the work of Christ by the Spirit in the life of the believer, is quite complex and is nearly always experienced in the context of blessings for the entire faith community. These grace-gifts, or *charismata* as the apostle Paul sometimes called them, are displayed for the edification of Christ's Body. The risen Lord's presence is testified to by the Spirit who encourages and preserves unity in the body of Christ (Rom.15:5, Eph.4:3).

The Holy Spirit, as the one whom Christ would send, and who "goes out from the Father" (Jn.15:26) is seen as the fulfillment of the

promises of God to be with his people (Ezek.36-37). For Paul the Spirit is a manifestation of God's presence with his people as they gather for worship. This is illustrated by three metaphors used for the Spirit within the Pauline literature, the seal (Eph.1:13), the down payment (1:14), and the first fruits (Rom.8:23). They speak not only of the Spirit as the fulfillment of the promise, but also a guarantee of future blessings to come. In addition, the Holy Spirit is linked with the Word of God as the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph.6:17), with Christ as the means of "access to the Father" (2:18), and is able to provide "wisdom and revelation" (Eph.1:17). For the community of faith as well as the individual, the Spirit's presence, confirmed by the "signs and wonders" performed under his supervision (Rom.15:9), is an ever-present witness to the reality of their encounter with Christ (Acts 5:32).

Not only does the Spirit manifest himself outwardly, but he works within the human conscience and "testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom.8:16). Thus, believers are able to speak the word of God boldly (Acts 4:31), experience a genuine sense of "sonship" (Gal.4:6), attain the righteousness for which they hope (5:5), wherein they find the power to live holy lives abounding in divine character (5:16, 18, 22-23), and thereby reap eternal life (6:8). Through the accomplishment of this Spirit, the love of God is poured out into the hearts of Christian believers (Rom.5:5).

Through the work of the Spirit, Christians acquire the righteousness of Christ in his incarnation, power and ongoing presence. This, however, is only the inception of an ongoing process of transformation. Awareness of this process affirms the certainty of hope which believer's experience regarding their destiny as joint heirs with Christ and as children of God (Tit.3:7, Rom.8:17, Gal.3:29, Eph.3:6). What began in the quest for immortality progressed to the Spirit's conviction of separateness from God. Yet the reality of God's provision of peace with him through Christ's remedy for sin, continues toward the culmination and transformation of all things in a holy relatedness to God when they are restored through the redemptive process of conversion.

Transformation And Realization of Judgement to Come

The final phase of the conversion process represents the ongoing striving of the Holy Spirit to reunite the believer back into full relationship with the Creator. God takes the initiative to reveal himself through the abyss of terror and fear to encounter the human self. But

it is not a once-in-a-lifetime encounter but a lifelong process of transformation in continual encounters as God and humans move toward a future completion in the end of all ages.

The Judgment as a Catalyst for Holy Living

As the judicial imagery in John portrays, when a believer encounters the Risen Lord, the Spirit witnesses internally to the reality of God's judgment on the world. The judgment which the world is experiencing, or has already experienced at the cross event according to John, is none other than the present day rule and reign of God. The consciousness of this reality links the believer to the future, giving life meaning beyond its everyday routines. This sense of destiny is the principal influence of accomplishing the renewal referred to as sanctification or holy living. As a fruit of the justification that occurred at the Cross, it consists of the Spirit's strengthening in the soul, enabling Christians to live a life in pursuit of holiness.

This process of being changed into the likeness and image of God is intimated by Paul's use of the moniker *the holy ones* often translated *saints*, 26 times to name Christians; the term implies an association with the Holy Spirit. The pursuit of a life pleasing to God is facilitated by four different functions of the Spirit within the human spirit. It is an unsteady upward progress, the rate of which is not controlled by the Spirit's capacity but is dependent upon the zeal and devotion of the human subject. Nevertheless, the draw of the Spirit into full divine fellowship is unstoppable.

First, the Spirit operates as a divine instructor who explains the truth of God's Word, guides in the interpretation, and empowers in the application of these divine principles. The Spirit through his abiding presence is the preeminent teacher and guardian against the spread of falsehoods (1Jn.2:27). As co-equals within the Godhead, the Spirit and the Word work together to affirm the revelation of judgment that the Father has given to the world. Through reading and obedience to the written Word of God, the Holy Spirit affirms God's power to bring life in the face of judgment, for these words "are spirit and they are life" (Jn.6:63). Thus, the power of Christ is made manifest in the life of humans through this same Spirit, by healing the sick, delivering from bondage, acts of spiritual bravery, and various other miracles.

Second, the Holy Spirit is a compassionate companion in prayer. Because only divine illumination can probe the deepest recesses of the

psyche (Acts 15:8, Rom.8:27), the Spirit, through prayerful contemplation searches out the core issues and exposes the human conscience to the desires of God. He also intercedes on behalf of humanity, “with groanings,” in a realm beyond the limitations of mere human language (Rom.8:26-27). Paul makes many allusions to praying or singing in the Spirit and praying in tongues, (1Cor.14:15-16, Eph. 5:19, 6:18). But this goes beyond mere vocalizing.

Prayer is more than verbal or non-verbal communication; it involves human obedience by the empowerment of the Spirit.

WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Spirit:

- *Operates as a divine instructor who explains the truth of God's Word.*
- *Is a compassionate companion in prayer.*
- *As a divine agent forms the community of faith.*
- *Provides the incentive and power necessary for the church to be a witness to the world*

Third, the Holy Spirit is the divine agent of the Trinity that forms the genuine community of faith. The Spirit's attendance is the mark of the divine presence within the hearts of humans (Acts 10:45-47). He is the one who inspires prophecy in the human heart (2Pet.1:21), baptizes the individual into the family of God (1Cor.12:13), and maintains the unity essential to true community (Rom.15:5, Eph.4:3). It is the presence of God's Spirit that sets the Christian community apart from the secular culture within which it exists. The impartation of divine power through miraculous signs and wonders is indicative of the arrival of God's kingdom as he empowers his representative community (Rom.15:16,19). The levels of intimacy and accountability available in the Christian community provide the context for authentic transformation so essential to genuine spiritual growth.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit provides the incentive and power necessary for the church to be a witness to the world of the judgment to come. Thus, the three-fold character of God is revealed whereby the prophecy of Christ is fulfilled through the Spirit, who was promised to assist believers to be witnesses of him, and God's mighty acts through him, to literally the entire world (Acts 1:8). This witness is obvious in the change which the Spirit achieves both within and without the community of faith. From a Pentecostal perspective, this assistance is

a continual filling of the Spirit (Eph.5:18) and should be considered a normal experience for all believers.

Paul's understanding of the role of the Spirit is to work in the believer to effect the righteousness of Christ through inspired words and powerful deeds. Just as the grape is a natural crop of the vine, so does salvation yield righteousness, the fruit of the Spirit's empowering in movement toward glorification, the culmination of salvation in union with God. The response of God's people to his call of holiness, which causes a purifying "from everything that contaminates body and spirit," is to pursue "perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2Cor.7:1). But this spiritual pattern for living is only a shadow of the righteousness to come when all believers shall be like Him when glorified in the hereafter (2Cor.3:18).

The Now and the Not Yet of Salvation

Evident throughout the NT literature, and particularly in Paul (2Cor.3:18), is the "already but not yet" tension between the present day work of the Spirit and the anticipation of that still to come.³⁹ Salvation in Christ is a heavenly reality. Participation in future glory is initiated by the Spirit in the present as he conveys Christ's righteousness to the experience of the believer. It will not reach its completion until the final day when all whom are his will be like him, not only in death, but in the resurrection to come (Phil.3:10-11).

The present yet future orientation in the scriptures indicates that tension exists between the present sanctifying work of the Spirit and the believer's movement toward the future glorification of all things. The realization of life in the Spirit has both aspects. It is in the present and the future that persons will reap what they have sown in the Spirit (Gal.6:8); are being built together with Christ to become the dwelling that God will inhabit (Eph.2:22), and are sealed for the day of redemption (4:30) so that spirit, soul, and body are "kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Th.5:23).

This tension produces in the human spirit a sense of ongoing purpose. The Spirit, as a seal in the heart of the believer, affirms the promise of a future hope (2Cor.1:22) and evokes an ardent desire to

³⁹ "The resurrection of Christ marked the beginning of the end, the turning of the ages. However, the End had only *begun*; they still awaited the final event, the (now second) coming of their Messiah Jesus, at which time they too would experience the resurrection/ transformation of the body. They lived 'between the times'; *already* the future had begun, *not yet* had it been consummated," Fee, 803.

maintain “holiness unto the Lord” in preparation for the eventual consummation of all things as part of the new covenant (Heb.12:14). Indeed, because “the judge is standing at the door” in the life of the Christian (James 5:9), all behavior must be considered in light of the fact that “nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb.4:13).

The Role of the Holy Spirit in the End of All Things

The orientation toward the finality of all things in the Spirit’s work in Christ to bring about the “new creation” of individuals, the church, and eventually the world, is evident in the scripture. Paul links the liberation of creation from its bondage with the first fruits of the Spirit, which produce the hope of redemption for the believer and thus the world (Rom.8:23). The redemption that begins in individuals will have ramifications as the righteousness of God is realized through Christ’s atoning work to impact the entire cosmos (2Cor.5:17f). The result will be the destruction of all diabolical dominion, authority, and power in the undisputed reign of Christ (1Cor.15:24).

Certainly Paul has in mind the perfection of all things as he exhorts believers to follow his example in “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,” so that they too might “press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [them] heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil.3:13-14). The Holy Spirit is not only “the power that enables him [Christ] to bring everything under his control,” but who “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (3:21). What is plain in the work of Jesus in believers and the redeemed world order is presumed to be a part of the Spirit’s work as well.

Elsewhere, it is this same Spirit who was sent from heaven to prophesy of the glory to come (1Pet.1:11-12, 2Pet.1:21, Rev.19:10) and now rests on believers in order to assist them in the midst of their persecution (4:12). Just as Christ is now present through his Spirit in believers, so too, he is present in the world to consummate his judgment upon it.⁴⁰ It follows that if the Spirit is so much a part of the

⁴⁰ As an extension of that which John had already declared concerning the condemnation of the worldly prince and all he represents (Jn.16:11), those who follow the evil one and fail to believe will themselves face the same judgment (Rev.20:11-15).

conviction of the world due to its unbelief (Jn.16), he must also have an active role in the judgment of that unbelief (Rev.21), the destruction of “ungodly men” and “the heavens by fire” (2Pet.3:7,12). In contrast, it will also mean the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness for those who believe (3:13).

The Spirit plays an active role in the revelation of John. When “in the Spirit,” John has a vision of the events that will culminate in the end of time. It is the Spirit who prompts the foresight of the future time when “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth” will give “praise, honor, glory and power, for ever and ever” to the Lamb upon the throne (Rev.4:12). This same Spirit is the one who attests to the divine voice which affirms the blessing and rest for those “who die in the Lord” as a result of the great persecution to come (Rev.14:13). Again the Spirit is the divine agent who unveils for John’s spiritual eyes the great judgment upon the smoking whore of Babylon, symbolic of the kings of the earth (Rev.17:3). This Spirit inspires the vision of the new and Holy City Jerusalem “coming down out of heaven before God” to John (Rev.21:10). And in the symbolic language of John, it is likely that the “river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” whose fruit is the “healing of the nations,” symbolizes the Spirit of God with his miraculous qualities (cf., Jn.7:38-39, Rev.22:1-2). Finally He is the one who, alongside the Bride of Christ, exhorts all those who thirst to come and take freely the gift of the “water of life” (22:17).

The Holy Spirit has various roles to play in the end time phenomena. The tone of certainty to these events in the NT scriptures, portrayed as the eternal destiny for believers and unbelievers alike, helps to shape the process of transformation. Any who take seriously the warnings throughout the book of Revelation and the apocalyptic vision contained therein, would be wise to respond to the Spirit’s calls for restoration of genuine relationship with God, by repenting and receiving the righteousness of Christ for the salvation of their soul.⁴¹

In conclusion, since the initiative for conversion and its ongoing effects rest within the personhood of God, a practical ministry of evangelism must be seen as a matter of understanding and assisting God at work in the world. Jesus’ description of the Spirit’s participation in conversion depicted in John provides a model for divine interactions with humans.

⁴¹ There are over ten references to the word “repent” in Revelation, each making it clear this was the intent of God in his interactions with the world throughout the vision of John.

His teaching reveals a three-fold process at work. Evangelists can determine how they might best be engaged by God in this process.

Some have not acknowledged their separation from God and innate sinfulness. Spirit-led answers to the questions raised by a recognition of the Holy Other may encourage spiritual seekers to take another step closer to Christ on their spiritual journey. Still others have not yet realized that the righteousness of God is accessible through the person of Jesus. The acquisition of Christ's righteousness within the human spirit, an inward work which can only occur by the Spirit and not by human orchestrations, is a pivotal event for the restoration of the image of God in persons. Facilitating powerful encounters between God and humans requires acute sensitivity to the Spirit. The interactions of the Holy Spirit within the human psyche are beyond human understanding.

Imagine the degree of correspondence that must occur between persons in the evangelism process. Two humans with quite divergent personalities experiencing the whole range of emotions, i.e.; fear, anger, rejection, joy, apprehension, etc., are somehow able to communicate and receive sacred truths that will effect life-changing decisions that literally determine eternal destinies. It becomes readily apparent that the complexity of conversion requires no less than such divine guidance in order for it to come to pass. Such complex interactions necessitate acute sensitivity and flexibility on behalf of human participants in order for the Holy Spirit to have full sway in the repentance and redemption he so earnestly desires for all humanity. What one needs is not a Ph.D. in evangelism though, but a Ph.D. in the Holy Ghost in order to be an effective and faithful witness!

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Finally, following the encounter phase, the Spirit continues to work in the life of Christians to affirm God's justice in judging sinful

actions. The Spirit bears witness to the fact that the earlier phases are only the beginning of the spiritual journey, and each believer has a responsibility to remain open to God's leading all along the way. An openness to divine activity in every aspect of the journey comprises the Spirit-led life and is indispensable to the sanctification process.

Evangelism, as a dialogue between the human and the divine, should not be considered something that Christians *do* but rather an activity which stems from who Christians *are* in the power of the Spirit. Consequently, this requires Christians to throw off worldly constraints and accept the freedom and responsibility they have in the Spirit by acknowledging the supernatural dimension in all their evangelism efforts. By participating in an ongoing "holy conversation" that is biblical in its basis, the spiritual dimension of the conversion process is given credence in the believer's efforts to bring people into the kingdom of God. It must not be neglected.

As an example of how the Spirit works in the process of conversion through ongoing transformation I remember an incident in my life a few months after I had committed my life to Christ. My "party-animal" friends had not given up on me even though their testimony was "Kelly's got religion." They were convinced it was a passing fad so they were zealous in their attempts to get me involved in the bar and party scene which was a major part of my life prior to conversion. One Saturday night I succumbed and actually went with them to one of our favorite disco haunts. That last word was a more appropriate description of the place we were going than I realized. But casting my convictions aside I went with them to a packed dance club where the liquor was flowing freely. I had drank about half a beer when suddenly I began to realize what a mistake it was for me to be there. As I looked intently into the faces of those around me, I was shocked by what I saw. In grotesque caricature I saw drunkenness, lust, and rage on the faces of the club's patrons. Like the freaky changes effected by computer videographics on an actor's face in a horror movie, these attributes were manifested in wolf-like leering, drooling, and bulging eyes. I ran from the club in panic. The Holy Spirit had provided enough discernment for me to know that was not the place for me any longer. I spent the rest of the evening waiting on the hood of my friend's jeep, where I was able to witness to passing acquaintances of my change in heart over the last few months. The horror of the real-

ity of the demonic influences on the lives of those people in that club left a lasting impression I've never forgotten.

But the Spirit was not done with me yet. The next evening I was baptized through immersion in the Pentecostal church which had become such a major part of my life. A visiting missionary loudly spoke a prophecy that was clearly for me if for no one else in that sanctuary: "Do not go back into the darkness! For it is a very great darkness. Do not even look back into the darkness for it is a greater darkness than you could even know. Do not go back into the darkness!" I knew God was speaking directly to me and my propensity to want to check out my old way of life.

The Holy Spirit had come to convict me of sin by exposing the true nature of my old way life. The righteousness of God was revealed anew and afresh to me in that dance club as I realized that Jesus had died to deliver me from a debauched and wicked lifestyle. And the present judgement of God was illustrated by the bondage to sin depicted so clearly in the faces of those who had yielded to the demonic influences in their life. In a very real and concrete way, through the power of the Spirit, the Word of God had become "living and active" in my life, and it had judged the thoughts and the attitude" of my heart (Heb. 4:12).

Sojourning with the Community of Faith

In many years of evangelism work, polling persons in the marketplace and at their doorsteps, I have been surprised at the significant number of individuals who profess faith in Christ but have no real lasting relationships with a local community of faith. Nor do they intend to develop one in the near future. Neither the formal church setting or more informal gatherings such as in-home Bible studies or small group meetings has any appeal to these persons for reasons of past hurt or alienation or just ignorance of their viability. It is certainly of questionable theological accuracy how one can claim to have a relationship with the head, Jesus Christ, but have no relationship with his body, the Christian community of faith here on earth. While the NT offers many diverse examples of what that community might look like, from highly structured organizations to seemingly spontaneous gatherings in homes, it is clearly a common biblical expectation that Christian conversion will result in immersion into a communal relationship with other believers.

In contrast, one of the more distinctive aspects of twentieth-century American society is “the division of life into a number of separate functional sectors: home and workplace, work and leisure, white collar and blue collar, public and private.”⁴² Bellah’s penetrating observation concerning the dismembering of public life on the American continent is both telling and foreboding. Such a division of self has

⁴² Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985) 43.

led to a fractured sense of being in the culture for both communities and individuals. People are questioning who they are or where they belong, and the Christian community in its distinct role as God's redemptive agency in the world is the solution to this widespread identity crisis. This unique community, the Christian church, as a community of loving wholeness, counters the characteristics of loneliness, isolation, and separation within the contemporary culture. It does so by reconciling persons back into genuine communal relationship with God and each other.

Because the very essence of God's existence is communal, any relationship with him must be seen in the context of community. For this reason, all conversion, which is essentially the restoration of a severed relationship with the Godhead, fundamentally occurs in a communal context. This is a reality in the spiritual dimension regardless of the external circumstances surrounding an individual's conversion experience. A practical ministry of evangelism then, embraces the conviction that the community of faith is the ultimate context for all genuine Christian conversion and should not be overlooked. Even those authentic conversions that begin in individual encounters, to achieve the best that God has for the person involved, ends in a hearty relationships within the body of Christ. A relationship with Christ as the head without sincere fellowship with a local body of believers is really an oxymoron and can only result in spiritual dysfunction.⁴³

Since Christ's relationship with the Father and the Spirit is fundamentally one of community, the presence of Christ within his body of believers mirrors such a relationship in community. The community of faith is undeniably tied to the dynamic of the Trinity for its life source and direction, for apart from God it can do nothing (Jn.15:1-6).

Furthermore, the Christian community is by definition an extraordinary community that is thoroughly Christ's. This distinction constitutes the basis for all individual conversion experience and subsequent immersion into his community. In this way all conversion takes place in the context of a journey along with his community of faith. The work of Christ to form the community through his atoning sacrifice, and to direct the community towards its mission of incorporating new members, is foundational to its role as God's redemptive agency in the world.

⁴³ Paul addresses this in 1Cor.12:12f, where he explains that the body is made up of many parts but they form one body. No person can say "they have no need of me" (vv.15-16), or "we have no need of thee" (v.21).

Christian Community That Is Christ-formed and Christ-directed

The community addressed here is a *messianic* community of faith. It is messianic in that it has its roots in, and embraces traditions that evolve from ancient Jewish origins and narratives. The Greek word *christos* is often used to translate the Hebrew term *mashiah* (45 times in the LXX, Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT). It means *anointed* (with oil) and was given to those of special office such as a priest or king. The Gospels' consistency in using this title for Jesus indicates that he was thought of as the messiah for all nations, not just for Israel, and that the early Christians linked their confession of Jesus as 'the Christ' to the Hebrew literature and their hope of a redeemer. The term "*messianic*" is equivalent here with the adjective "Christian" in order to conscientiously link this community of faith in Jesus Christ with the ancient traditions from which it was formed.

The Christian community differs from grassroots political organizations or other such secular entities, in that it is both Christ-formed and Christ-directed. As such, its center is three- fold in that it is directed by Christ and to Christ, while at the same time it exists spiritually in Christ. The work of the messiah to reestablish the supremacy of God among the people is reflected in the three offices held by Christ as priest, prophet, and king.

Christ as Anointed Priest

It is directly through the undertaking of the Spirit of Christ that one becomes a member of this community, for without salvation for the individual no real Christian community may exist (1Cor.12:13). This intervention, a function of the priestly office of Christ, is the result of Christ's atoning work on the cross and his subsequent ascension to the throne of God (Jn.16:5,7). The OT law made it clear that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Lev.4:26ff). Christ, in his office as priest, completely fulfills all the types and shadows indicated there. He is able to save to the uttermost. By the power of an indestructible life, and the offering of himself as the permanent and perfect sacrifice, he atones for the sins of humanity once and for all. Accordingly, he consummates the priestly function and offers a new and living way into the presence of God. Furthermore, as the great high priest of all humanity, Christ becomes the source of humankind's initiation into the Family of God.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ For Christ as the source of salvation, Heb 5:8-9; as priest on the basis of an indestructible life, Heb.7:16-17; our sacrifice who lives forever, Heb.7:27; seen as the final & perfect sacrifice, Heb.9:26b-27; as one who provides a new and living way, Heb.19:22.

The divine priestly sacrifice makes it possible for the presence of God to be bestowed through his Holy Spirit as a result of the proclamation of his Word which brings about initiation into the Kingdom of God. The church does not make this happen. Rather it is the result of the Holy Spirit's action, who empowers the Body of Christ with the grace-gifts that make each individual unique and valuable.

In this "gathering", Christ is not only the central focus but the agent of initiation as well. This community consists solely in what Christ has done for its members. His redemptive work bonds the individual to the community of faith with no exceptions. The individual's baptism into this community through regeneration is complete and with perpetual ramifications (2Cor.5:17). Because it is not the result of any effort by the individual, no artificial rules or standards (beyond the anticipation of Christ's saving acts in the life of others), can become a criteria for admittance to the community. It will always be an "open" community to all new initiates who accept the grace of God with the same faith as those whom God has already touched by his Spirit. This experience serves to bind the members of the community together in a spiritual reality of communion around the throne of God (Eph.2:6).

In contradiction to a popular individualism in the American church, which centers primarily on the individual encounter with Christ, for Paul the Spirit was understood as a shared communal experience. This sense of a reality which is immersed in an entity greater than oneself can be a stabilizing influence when believers recognize they are a part of something divine and glorious beyond their own existence. This perception of "connectedness" to a supernatural entity and subsequent destiny is also what those outside genuine community long to achieve, and functions as an attraction and stimulus for their conversion.

While participants in Christian communities must strive to allow the fruit of the Spirit of Christ to be formed in them, all false hopes of perfect fellowship within these communities need to be exposed for what they are, *an unreachable utopian ideal*. This means a tension exists between realism and idealism, the present and the future. The church must continually focus on the future in anticipation of the sanctification that all believers will eventually experience in the resurrection to come.

In anticipation of these blessings and in light of the present shortcomings, God's constant intervention is required. Because of sinful inclinations, the Christian community remains in need of a faithful

high priest who lives always to intercede at the right hand of God. This priestly role of intercession for the saints is part of the ongoing work of Christ in saving, shaping, and directing his body even while protecting it from the onslaught of its enemies (Heb.4:14-16; 7:25; Jn.17:15). Through his intercession at the throne of God on behalf of the community of faith, Jesus remains involved with his disciples on their continual journey of faith, and empowers their role as his redemptive community to those in need of a savior.

Christ as Inspired Prophet

The Christian community is also directed by Christ through his function as a prophet of divine proportions who provides immediate divine guidance through the living Spirit of Christ. It is he Who is Risen that also gave “gifts to men [sic]” for the purpose of building up and directing his Body toward all the fullness of Christ (Eph.4:7-12). Thus, leadership structures within the church must necessarily flow, through the Spirit, from the authority vested in the Son of God who sits at the right hand of God the Father forever (Lk.11:18-19, Rom.8:34, Heb.7:23-25).

The “good news” is that the Father relates with his world by means of the frail humanity of his Son. The church then, as a part of creation, is a reflection of the being of God in *koinonia*, best translated “partnership.” It is a community which conscientiously ascertains the will of the Lord for every significant decision. This active “coming together” of the saints, or *ekklesia*, provides a way of interpreting the will of God through its functions and activities. Since it is Christ-formed, it is a dynamic community in the process of being developed and directed by him through his Spirit.

The Spirit of Christ blesses his body with various grace gifts for the purpose of edification, encouragement and comfort (1Cor.14:3). These manifestations not only empower, but are also a means of guidance for the community of faith in times of confusion and query for the “common good” (1Cor.12:7-11). Each believer is empowered in a unique way to do the work which God “prepared in advance” for them to do (Eph.2:10, 1Cor.12:28-30).

Part of that work is not only the maintenance of the existing community but its expansion to include those not yet within the household of faith. Through these charismatic activities the community of faith participates in God’s participation with the world. Christ di-

rects his disciples in their efforts to witness to the possibility of community in ways that are uniquely suited to the personality of both speaker and hearer and the life circumstances in which such a “holy conversation” takes place.

Believers experience a dynamic and episodic “coming upon” of the Spirit in their lives as they are faithful witnesses of the works of Christ to those who do not yet have genuine relationship with him. This is part of the conduct of the Spirit in the various stages of the spiritual journey. In this manner, the Spirit uniquely graces and uses members of the Christian community to be the vehicles through which he “brings to remembrance” the work of Christ (Jn. 14:26) and whereby the words of Christ are fulfilled in the lives of believers in the “greater works” that they do (14:12).

One of the goals of God’s formation of the covenant community through Christ and its maintenance and expansion through the gifts of the Spirit is the establishment of peace in the world. This NT reality has its roots in the OT concept of *shalom*, a sense of peace, order, and justice within society. This is not something which is realized only in the heart of the individual but also stimulates harmony in social relationships because God’s reign advances fairness and equality in the public sphere. Peace is the reconciliation of humans with God and fellow human beings. Because Christ has initiated peace for his followers, the concept of “peace-making” is paramount to the activity of his community. In this way, the prophetic office of Christ is administered in the Christian community as a witness to the world through the manifestations of the fruit of the spirit. All of this takes place within the community that Christ has formed and continues to direct.

Christ as Majestic King

The writer of Hebrews exhorts his hearers to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). Christ as king reigns at the right hand of the throne of God and his heavenly presence there provides the Christian community with a “living hope” (1Pet. 1:3). This hope energizes the community’s journey toward an ultimate destination where it will realize, in a tangible and dynamic way, the spiritual reality of its place with Christ at the right hand of God the Father

(Eph.2:4-7).⁴⁵ This “future life” is the focus of the “living hope” that Peter makes reference to in his writing and to which the early church clung through intense persecution and suffering. Thus, the community of life with Jesus is a community with a distinct destiny.

Christ has kingly authority over sickness, demons, and even death itself. He has made a spectacle of his enemies and now rules and reigns from God’s right hand over all “powers and authorities” (Col.2:15). It would be a mistake to understand the miracles of Christ as performed only in sympathy for individuals. Rather, their context is the preaching of the Kingdom of God which focuses beyond individuals to the people of God. *This kind of authority is granted to his church as a manifestation of His Kingdom, whereby those who are part of the Christian community have the same authority over the demonic, resulting in a community-wide thankfulness for their position in the heavenlies* (Lk.10:18-20).

The kingly authority that Christ brings to the community directs the church toward a sharing in God’s holiness (Heb.12:11- 17). A classic example of this is seen in the ominous manifestation of divine activity in the death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter five. The result was a great fear of God that permeated the community. While similar grisly acts of God’s intervention are certainly not desired by the church today, the outcomes (the resulting reverent awe within the culture for the authority of God) would no doubt be welcomed by his followers.

The discipline in the community of faith which flows from a recognition of Christ as exalted “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lords” is really a consequence of the hope that is within the heart of every member of the community. In this manner the community is not only directed by Christ but to Christ as well. It is Christ-directed in that its orientation is based on the proclaimed word of Christ’s presence toward a final destiny and purpose for all humanity.

Since his ascension, Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit, continues to serve as the divine intermediary of God’s word to his people. Because of the resurrection, the Christian community waits in hope for the Kingdom of God. Its corporate life remains open to the possibilities of events, processes, and works of God that are often

⁴⁵ The context of Paul’s exhortations in Ephesians are nearly all first person plural “we, our, us,” underscoring the apostle’s sense of ecumenical inclusion within the community he wishes to convey.

unpredictable and beyond human explanation. The contours of its journey are inseparably bound up with its future in Christ.

The object of this community's hope is not only in Christ's presence now, but in expectation of his advent to come. More than mere wishing for the best, this hope is a reality that is shaped by the promise of future possibilities. This involves a new kind of thinking about the world, an expectancy that shapes the community's concepts of the present and the past. Such a perspective focuses on the extensive accomplishments of God throughout history to ultimately reconcile creation back to himself. The transformation of the world is pictured in his work in the church and begun in them as the community of faith.

*In order to insure that the events of the future are given their proper context, history is best viewed as a present, which reflects on the past in order to make sense of God's promises for the future.*⁴⁶ God's faithfulness is revealed within the faithful community in their obedient response to his covenant. Their heritage of promise and covenant undergirds the Christian hope that what God has declared for the future will come to pass. In Paul's writings, language concerning participation in the resurrection is nearly always conveyed in the future tense.⁴⁷ The interpretation of the resurrection as the beginning of a process which culminates in a promised future is the foundation of the Christian community's hope, a hope which it is called to share with the unredeemed world.

This community proclaims the contemporary presence of the Kingdom of God. It recognizes the reality of both the heavenly and earthly community of believers who focus on the present-day manifestations of God's presence as indicative of a future reality that awaits his impending return. This represents a radical re-orientation of all history from a focus on the past to the future.

While the Christian community is formed out of an understanding of Christ rooted in the past, its horizon is essentially toward the end times. It anticipates the impact of the return of its king and his rule and reign over all creation. It is in view of that glorious future that the Christian community exists with an abiding hope in what Jesus has and will accomplish as Priest, Prophet and soon coming King. And it is this hopeful anticipation that mobilizes the community toward the distinct goal and purpose of the redemption of all creation.

⁴⁶ This concept is dealt with in detail by Jürgen Moltmann who describes God's presence as not only "past tomorrow" but coming toward us in an "arriving future" in *The Theology of Hope*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 227.

Community with a Mission

The Christian community of faith is a community with a distinct mission: to manifest the Kingdom of God. This is not one answer to society's ills; it is the only answer. The challenge presented to contemporary culture due to the erosion of genuine community is being recognized at every level of society. The redemption of the world lies not in religion in general but within the mission of the Christian community of faith. The power of God to renew the individual is also capable of renewing the sinful institutions that are the foundation of diabolical world systems. Once individuals have been redeemed and become a part of the Christian community, they witness to the world of God's redemptive power. Their redemption points to a hope and destiny that is grounded in Jesus Christ. This is the reason the church exists in the world. The early church serves as an example of this witness. Though they themselves were inadequate sinful men and women, they freely recognized that the church existed in order to testify, and that such a witness demonstrates how humans can relate with one another regardless of race, gender, or socio-economic distinctions.

The mission of the Christian community is born out of the authority and responsibility that result from the free gift of God's grace to the community (Matt. 10:8; 28:18-20). Through the exercise of its authority in obedience to its responsibility as God's chosen people, the Christian community becomes a catalyst for change in the lives of individuals and subsequently the communities of which they are a part.

The Church's Missionary Mandate

No doubt one of the primary purposes of the church is "edification, encouragement and comfort" of its members (1Cor. 14:3). Without ministry to one another the community will fail to attract outsiders into a relationship with its members. Unfortunately, Christian communities of faith often fall far short of anything close to the ideals laid out in scripture. Genuinely expressing the love of God for one another in the midst of the daily challenges of church life, represents both the greatest challenge and opportunity for an effective manifestation of the reign of God.

From the outset when Christ said "follow me," he was not advising people to go to church or even attend the synagogue. He was, instead, asking for a life that would sacrifice individual rights and commit to the good of the greater community.

Perhaps the greatest single weakness of the contemporary Christian church is the lack of genuine involvement by its members. This lack of solid commitment is like a military campaign in which there could be no real chance of victory because ninety percent of the soldiers remained untrained or uninvolved. The trouble is that our advancing technology with all its latest inventions continues to add to the number of our engagements until our lives are fragmented. For Christian commitment involves the right use of time. The church avoids its evangelistic responsibility because it recognizes that it comes at a very high price.

Another challenge for the Christian community is to realize that all of its members are called to ministry involvement in some capacity. The mission of the church to be witnesses of Christ (Acts 1:8), is the responsibility of all believers not just those called to ordained ministry. While some may have a specific gift for evangelistic work, all have a responsibility to be a witness to a lost and dying world.

Superficiality, more than sexual infidelities and financial improprieties, has opened the church up to the charge of hypocrisy. Many unchurched people assess the Christian community as insincere. If Christian believers really saw Jesus as the Son of God, actually believed he was raised from the dead, that he literally is alive, that humans really can have a dynamic relationship with him, that he is able to deliver from sin and heal disease, that he really is the answer to all problems, they would have to act like they believe and share such good news with the zeal and urgency that says they believe it. Either they really do not believe it or they do not truly care about those without Jesus. Like unread newspapers yellowing in their packets, the Good news is not news at all if it isn't shared.

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Decidedly then, a genuine involvement in the evangelistic mission to the surrounding culture is a hallmark of the supernaturally charged community. This involvement commences from a relationship with Christ and a concern for a humanity that doesn't yet know him. Through its obedience to him who established it, the church flourishes as an organism that exists primarily for those outside its community, with the intention of somehow including them in the

freedom and joy that come from belief in Jesus.

Unfortunately, due to technological influences and the retreat of religion from the public square into the private sanctuary, the community of faith in the Western Hemisphere is often without a voice in the public discourse. The church's call for reformation of the sinful aspects of the culture and need redemption is then muted and ineffectual. Too often, the church has become immersed in its own Christian ghetto while social conditions remain unchanged. When this is so, Christianity is nothing more than a form of escapism.

Too often, the church has become immersed in its own Christian ghetto while social conditions remain unchanged. When this is so, Christianity is nothing more than a form of escapism.

The Christian community must once again speak a message of hope to those in despair. Salvation is not strictly individualistic but encompasses the realization of justice, which results in peace for all creation and all who would become participants in the Christian community of faith. The distinct mandate to its members is to share such an astonishing possibility, such "good news," to a world desperately in need of its redeeming message.

The love of Christ is the compelling cause of the community's mission (2Cor.5:14). The very nature of love is inclusive and not self-seeking, but seeks the best for others. A burden for the lost involves genuine concern for those without Christ and a deep understanding of the wholeness to be found within the community of faith.

Here is the most noble of all missions: to bring wholeness to all humanity and creation as well. It is a wholeness that is achieved only through the freedom that comes from a right relationship with the Creator and Sustainer of all things, within the community of faith that he has called into being, nurtures with his Spirit, and directs toward a destiny of eternal fellowship.

The Church as a Catalyst for Change

The church has much to repent of in its failures to offer healthy spiritual community to the spiritual seekers of today. Yet, in the face of a mounting skepticism and resulting pessimism, it is able to offer a future hope that is without parallel. To do this, the church must be

more than just a community of fine words. It must become the community of love that Christ envisioned, for “they will know you by the love you have for one another” (1Jn.3:10; 4:7-21). That love is a demonstration of the Spirit’s power that in itself is able to transform and change the sinful heart of humanity.⁴⁸ The church cannot limit itself to either temporal issues of social justice or a too “simple gospel” of that spiritualizes all of existence. It must find an equilibrium of the two and retain its distinction as a community of saving grace. The human heart yearns to be involved in a cause greater than itself. A community commissioned with the monumental purpose of saving the souls of humanity becomes a provocative source of meaning and destiny in comparison to a culture that views life as meaningless and full of despair.

The Christian community of faith becomes the catalyst for change in two ways primarily: as a place of proclamation and witness to the good news that Jesus loves all humanity, and as the center of God’s redemptive power at work in the lives of believers.

*From the four corners of the earth people are coming to
their senses are running back to God. Long-lost families
are falling on their faces before him.*

See Psalm 22, Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995), 676.

A Place of Proclamation and Witness

Inherent to the Christian community as a catalyst for change in the lives of people is the evangelistic nature of this unique community. If this community is really a manifestation of the Kingdom of God in the world, then radical transformation from sinful activities and its impact would be the norm. When the people of God “shine as a sign among the nations,” the world will learn of God’s salvation from his people (Isa.2:1-4).

In this way, the Christian community of faith as it communicates the Good News becomes an important part of God’s redemptive work

⁴⁸ In 1Cor.2:4 Paul makes it clear that it wasn’t persuasive words of humans that made the difference in his ministry but the demonstration of the Spirit’s power. He also notes how through the power of the Holy Spirit, the love of Christ has been spread abroad in our hearts, changing us and those in relationship with us, Cf., Rom. 5:5.

in the world. Inherent in the message itself is the power to change the world (1Cor.1:18). Change begins in the hearts of individuals who become testifying communities to the surrounding culture. Their witness, that God is present in the world to reunite all humanity back to him, is played out in their day to day lives. God has chosen his church to be part of his revelation of the mystery of the ages and a sign of his authority in the world, to demonstrate his dominion over all things through his son Jesus (Eph.1:9-10; 22-23).

If the test of Christianity is seen in its effect upon culture, then it can be argued that the influence of the Christian church is waning in America.⁴⁹ Its basic beliefs are seen as old-fashioned and impractical. By submitting passively to cultural influences, the church community has vacated its position as a place for the exhibition of God's rule. Instead the pagan culture worships pleasure for pleasure sake, created things rather than the creator, and the promotion of many different truths rather than the one true God. The church has shrunk back in intimidation and has downscaled the expectations of its members and the culture in which it is immersed. Too often the church has taken on a kind of *fortress* mentality, "holding out until the end," rather than being a *force* for dynamic change in their communities.

Without a clear communication of the gospel and the consequent expectation of change, there is no environment in which genuine redemption can occur (Rom.10:14-15). The result is a society that is becoming increasingly less religious and skeptical of Christianity.

In order to be an effective agent for transformation in the lives of individuals engulfed in a cynical and antagonistic culture, the church has the responsibility to attest to the redemptive power of God and the place of his absolute authority over all creation. It is by no means clear that all Christians see themselves as essential to the spread of the gospel. Rather, many are content to default the task to those ministries which are most active in the task through various local and national media. In their thinking, communicating the gospel is best left up to professionals and is not the responsibility of the ordinary Christian. This is quite the opposite of the example set by the early church in NT documents and certainly amplifies the challenge facing the modern-day church.

⁴⁹ One recent study contended that since the beginning of the 1990s the proportion of the adult American population that is "non-churched" has risen significantly, to 32 percent from about 25 percent. This is equivalent to roughly 80 to 85 million people. See, George Barna, *Evangelism That Works* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995), 48f.

The Crux of God's Redemptive Power

Since no one is changed without the drawing power of the Heavenly Father (Jn.6:44), liberation from death and the bondage of sin is the direct result of the empowering presence of God (Rom.8:1). Thus, his salvation power is displayed in the community which is formed from the transforming work of the Spirit's activity within each of the community's members. This Christian community is not only the end, but the means of redemption.

The true Christian community is one which allows the Holy Spirit to reveal its imperfections, acknowledges beforehand its shortcomings in light of God's redemptive love, yet continues to "press on towards the goal for which God has called [it] heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil.3:14). It will always be in the process of formation until the perfection of the Lord's return. Without this understanding, utopian ideals of community can lead to a widespread pessimism and discouragement. At the same time, the church strives to facilitate the Holy Spirit's work to achieve some measure of Christ-likeness.

This aim is embodied in the optimism which is created out of the relationship the community has with a dynamic living Lord. It is rooted in the prospect of sharing in eternal life with God as he promises those who believe in him that "he will be their God and they shall be his people" (2Cor.6:16, Heb.8:10, Rev.21:3). The church, as a result of the Holy Spirit's guidance, consists of persons committed to the twin ideals of mission and destiny. And the point at which the church penetrates its surrounding culture is the very place in which God's redemptive power is displayed, fulfilling its true mission and destiny as God's redemptive agency in the world.⁵⁰

The nature of the Christian community and the society in which it exists appear to be at odds with each other posing a ever greater challenge for the church. Following an alarming trend within American culture, there is a tendency to view salvation and a relationship with Jesus Christ as something that is solely individualistic and private. Even though effective solutions to the increasing disintegration of community seem elusive, the Christian community of faith contains the cure; the redemptive power of God for individuals and for

⁵⁰ One study purports that 66% of Christ's recorded ministry in the four Gospels was evangelistic in nature (involving unbelievers) and nearly 56% of disciples recorded ministry in the Book of Acts was also. It could be anticipated that the same would be so for the contemporary Christian community of faith. See Francis Anfuso and Gary Beasley, *Spirit-Led Evangelism* (South Lake Tahoe, CA: Christian Equippers International, 1986), H83 & H142.

the whole of society. When a person begins a journey toward wholeness within a community of love and forgiveness, the culture at large can only benefit. The formidable challenge for the contemporary church is to bring the message of wholeness to a shattered and broken world, where God's redemptive power may be displayed and all of creation may be reconciled to Him.

There is a striking need for a re-focus on community as the context of the conversion process. Moreover, the depletion of genuine relationship among persons in American society has serious implications for evangelism. Perhaps a renewed awareness of the significance of being a part of a viable faith community might make a long term difference among both mature and new converts.

The Lone-Ranger Mentality

The idea that all genuine conversion is ultimately communal in context has significant implications for our practical ministry of evangelism. If it is true, then attempts to evangelize persons without implementing effective procedures for incorporating them into a local body of believers are unsound. There are at least three areas that indicate reformation is needed in the church's and the individual's thinking in this regard.

First of all, those who are used of God to bring people into a powerful encounter with Christ have a responsibility to see to it that new converts receive a sincere open invitation to fellowship with a local body of believers in order to facilitate the ongoing transformation taking place in their life. There can be no artificial gap between evangelism and discipleship or Christian Education as it is known in some traditions. Rather, the task of evangelism leaves off only when the new convert has found a place of fellowship and friendship in a local church and is, by his or her own initiative, regularly practicing the disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and sharing of their new found faith in Christ. Once these holy routines have been established and a place of acceptance within the church is secured, then the function becomes one of discipleship rather than evangelism. Those used of God to bring them into the community are then released to go out and compel others to come in and enjoy the feast of salvation.

Secondly, an understanding of genuine conversion as necessarily involving a community of faith addresses an erroneous lone-ranger mentality in evangelism. There are many in the body of Christ who

have a gift of evangelism but have decided that the church is never going to help them in their efforts. As a result they make little or no attempts to encourage or equip what they see as a carnal or backslidden church in restoring evangelistic zeal. Rather, they operate as lone prophets, not really connecting their efforts to a local church body. The result is an alienation of their gift from the local body who needs it displayed and a lack of spiritual authority or accountability in their lives making them likely targets for the devil's deception. Too many of these are filled with pride concerning their zeal and neglect the development of a sound practical ministry of evangelism in their efforts. Such a lack of theological integrity disparages the work of evangelism in the church as the evangelist is often perceived to be zealous but lacking knowledge (Rom.10:2).

Finally, conversion which is understood as communal in nature challenges the rugged individualism that comprises so much of American thinking. When I was first asked to attend a church a few weeks after the initial encounter I had with Christ, my reply was typical, "No thanks, I don't want to have anything to do with that 'organized' religion. Its just me and Jesus, and we'll be fine." Those who are not a part of a local church community in some form, miss out on the blessing that God intended for Christians as they find a new family in the kingdom of God. Their faith will remain stunted without the intimacy and accountability that comes from sharing life in the community of faith. For eternal life is not just a pie-in-the-sky promise for the hereafter, but also consists of a quality of life in the now that the believer can experience in the communal support and relationships offered only through a Holy Spirit inspired and maintained community of faith.

If our evangelism methods fail to focus on the communal aspect of our witness, this aspect is probably the easiest to rectify, but remains one of the most neglected. Perhaps that is because genuine community takes effort. Effort on behalf of individuals who recognize that without the power of God in our lives, perfection in our relationships with others is nothing more than an unattainable ideal that can only lead to frustration. Nevertheless, those who are truly led by the Spirit of Christ have no option but to pursue the establishment of a community here on earth that mirrors the one all believers will share in when they reach their ultimate goal of eternal fellowship with Christ as his servants who will reign with him forever and ever (Rev.22:3-5).

Restoration Along the Path

Beyond Individualism

The two way interaction which takes place between the principles gleaned from the biblical texts and various theological traditions is critical in formulating a healthy practical ministry of evangelism. I will not attempt to thoroughly reconstruct the road through history that brings us to the present predicament concerning the relationship between conversion and evangelism within modern evangelical Protestantism, others have done a better job than I ever could in that regard.⁵¹ Yet unfortunately, the modern American church's journey toward wholeness is often impeded by a persistent evangelical tradition which understands crisis conversion to be the norm. Such a view arises out of a lopsided focus for two centuries whereby the impact of conversion has been reduced solely to individuals rather than embracing its broader implications. Since beliefs about conversion directly impact evangelism practices, it is helpful to look briefly at how this came about. The view of conversion which has developed over the last 200 years within American Evangelicalism is characteristic of the unique nature of the spread of its belief system across the expanding nation. The success of the Revolutionary War validated the colonists' suspicion of authority and the rewards experienced by the colonies as a result endorsed the need for cataclysmic change deep into the American consciousness. Settlement of the wild frontier required mobility and constant change on behalf of the pioneers, who saw themselves as fulfilling the manifest destiny of God in their efforts to settle the land.

⁵¹ For a detailed account of the history of evangelism in the U.S. see Darius Salter, *American Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

The ambitious enterprise to colonize such a vast wilderness resulted in the formulation of certain unique core American values that remain in the public psyche to this day.⁵² Similarly, early American culture went through such constant change in order to adapt to the demands of the frontier that Americans came to expect and embrace enduring change as part of the natural course of things. In addition, the hardships of everyday life called for a rugged individualism that came to be embedded into the American psyche.

The prevailing suspicion of authority and expectation of change had its impact on the religion of early Americans. The Reformers on the European continent had provided the theological momentum that shifted the emphasis in Christian conversion from the sovereignty of God to individual responsibility. This became the basis of an ensuing debate in American Protestantism. The tumultuous nature of the new American society, with its leveling of class distinctions and pioneering spirit required to settle the wilderness was reflected in the shifting attitudes toward the clergy and conventional theology. The seeds of controversy concerning the life of faith were sown as early as the First Great Awakening when Jonathan Edwards, who in spite of his vigorous Calvinism, began to call for a more genuine conversion experience. Subsequently, Finney took a decidedly more Arminian approach to conversion calling for "new measures" when it came to evangelism.⁵³ His methods of revivalism, born in the wilderness camp meetings, refined in the public square, and later adapted in the many new churches that were started from these revivals, had several notable effects on American Protestantism, not the least of which was its influence on much of modern mass evangelism.

The increasingly Arminian concentration on an individual's response to grace versus the more Calvinistic emphasis on the election and sovereignty of God in the conversion process, generated consid-

⁵² William Dyrness in *How Does America Hear the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), contends that there are three "complexes of values:" materialist bias, temperamental optimism, and individualism, that are distinctive of the American middle class. See Dyrness, 19. McLoughlin sees American culture being shaped by the beliefs that: 1) Americans were a chosen people, 2) have a manifest (or latent) destiny to the world to the millennium, 3) all resources, institutions, and morally responsible individuals operate under a body of higher moral law, and 4) the Judeo-Christian personal and social ethic allows the greatest opportunity for individuals to fulfill their potential. See William, G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), xiv.

⁵³ Finney himself addresses the controversy of his methods dealing with three "innovations": anxious meetings, protracted meetings, and the anxious seat. See Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revival and Religion* (New York: Fleming H. Revell and Company, 1868), 248f., for a full explanation of each.

erable controversy within the established denominations and led to the formulation of many new ones. The techniques applied in early revivalism, such as a focus on the individual's response to God's grace, the necessity of a public acknowledgment of sin in "going forward," along with the emotional nature of the preacher's traumatic call for transformation surely resonated with most of its American audience.⁵⁴ These procedures proved to be so effective that they took on a formal order within the formal order of service in evangelical churches over time. Revered leaders within evangelicalism such as Dwight L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham, all have used, with their own modifications, this basic approach to evangelism in their call for a decision on behalf of the unbeliever to be converted.

As the theology changed so did the practice of the convert. The tangible results derived from these methods, reflected in burgeoning church attendance and membership, seemed to attest to their validity, so much so that response to the "altar call" came to be equated with the very act of conversion itself.

The concept of conversion as a response prompted by a crisis, preferably taking place at a singular altar event, came to be viewed as the normal requirement for every Christian. This diminished the importance of the broader implications for the conversion process within evangelicalism. This singular focus on individual conversion may have helped push evangelical churches to the margins of society, fueled the debate between the so-called "social" and "spiritual" aspects of the Gospel, and hampered their influence within American culture as they shrank back from active social involvement.

Contemporary mass evangelists have continued to stress the necessity of ongoing discipleship and church involvement but rarely address the more holistic concerns that will be addressed later in this chapter. In spite of the response by hundreds of thousands of Americans to altar calls, or to pray "sinner's prayers" of repentance, the national understanding of critical Christian concepts continues to be "a mile wide and an inch deep."⁵⁵ The notion that conversion consists

⁵⁴ The public invitation to come forward and accept Christ was unknown to evangelical religion before the 19th century. It began in the frontier camp meetings, where sinners were exhorted to enter the "anxious pens," fenced-in areas in front of pulpits, in order to be "prayed through" to conversion. For Finney this was called the "anxious bench," for Moody, "inquiry rooms," and its modern day equivalent is no doubt the altar call.

⁵⁵ Barna, *Evangelism*, 35.

solely of a one time event at an altar and results in benefits limited merely to individuals is flawed and in need of reform.

Nevertheless, the view that sudden change, or crisis conversion is not only desirable but essential to spiritual growth is reflective of the genuine spiritual hunger in the culture and the God-given yearning that every human has for communion with him. Conversion is a process which includes a genuine supernatural encounter that is life-changing and transforming. This encounter provides the impetus for the ongoing transformation necessary for a broad-based and holistic conversion to come to full realization.

As previously illustrated, conversion involves a community of love such as the world rarely, and never fully experiences. As God-given to that community, individual members have inestimable worth as persons destined to be whole in an eventual restoration of the image of God. This restoration takes place in the essential relationship between the inner character of the human and the personhood of God. The workings of this rejuvenation are expressed in a person's spiritual inward journey toward full fellowship with God. As such, the people of God have a destiny of wholeness; that is to live in health and fullness in the presence of God.

Therefore, conversion is understood to be the process whereby wholeness is restored. It is holistic in that its scope extends redemption beyond the sphere of mere individuals to include the Christian and global communities of which they are a part. Thus, the purpose of the spiritual journey is to recognize and assist God's work in the midst of all creation to restore wholeness to every aspect of its existence.

Humans are not made in the image of God solely as individuals, but rather God's image is communal in character. Additionally, the unconditional love which members share toward one another in the community of faith in Christ is a reflection of the inward communion they experience in relationship with their Creator. The focus in the relationship is not on performance but on the Christ-formed character within each individual who has been touched by God's redeeming love. Such character inspires a love for fellow humans, whether part of the believing community or not. Innate to the formation of this character is a shared quest toward wholeness.

Thus there are several attributes of this venture toward wholeness which make it a desirable one. This seeking after God, is grounded in

historical traditions connected to the biblical and personal stories of faith. It is a shared quest that is unswervingly committed to community as a spiritual reality to be experienced in the world today. Moreover, the wholesome character derived from godly behaviors along the way is expressed in compassionate action. Through participation in this community people find acceptance and forgiveness in a love for Christ which shapes their reality and destiny. Community as expressed through the church's worship, has the power to restore wholeness to broken, isolated persons.

In this way the Christian community is a model to the global community of God's redemptive work within creation. In its separateness from a broken and calamitous world system, this community is a haven of wholeness and offers sanctuary along the path for those drawn by the Spirit into God's Kingdom. The quest for wholeness takes place in three spheres: in the inner person, the Christian church, and the global community.

Being as Community

The triune Godhead is comprised of a community of co-existence between the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It follows that humans created in the Image of God will reflect the essence of that community, succinctly expressed in the scripture, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen.1:27). God, in His providence, created humanity by forming them (plural) male and female (with sexual distinction) in his image. Co-humanity, involvement with others, is thus inborn to human personhood. In the creation account God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen.2:18).

God's original intent for humanity is a wholesome relationship with him and other humans. God is a Person who gives life and enables persons to meet with him and one another.

Yet, paradoxically, humans as persons are defined by their distinction from others. Our human personalities are developed in contrast to others in community. A male's "maleness" is then defined in relationship to the females in his life, and vice versa. This contradiction or otherness is not possible in isolation but can only be revealed by interacting with others in human community. It is here that love is

found and expressed, not as an individual, but in a relationship where others are encountered and accepted for their distinctness as persons created in the image of God.

True relationship requires open communication between the parties. In the case of God and humans, communication is initiated and sustained by God's word. God created humans in his image in order to enjoy fellowship with them. But because he is also wholly Other from his creation, his desire to have relationship with sinful humanity is the epitome of grace.

Sin is set into motion by humanity's impulse to be free from all authority and a striving toward the rule of selfish desire. This act of will puts the individual on a different path from God's intention, severing the relationship that existed between Creator God and the now self-reliant individual. It brings about a distortion of the image of God in humans and the result is fragmentation: the human is separated from wholesome community and the destiny God had intended. Primal relationships with God, self, others and creation are broken and communication is dishonest.⁵⁶ The spiritual journey of conversion is fundamentally a quest to restore this relationship.

The restoration of wholesome relationships is epitomized by Christ, who represents the renewal of God's image in humans. What is central is not the intellect or reason, but love, for this is pronounced in the life of Christ.

Such a restoration of God's image stems from obedience to the communication one has with God in community. In establishing his unconditional covenant, both the *content* and *context* of his revelation are informative for humans. Stated more simply he is not only concerned with the "what" of his communication but "how" his message is delivered. God's message of his love for humanity was lived out perfectly in the midst of fallen creation through the life and ministry of his Son Jesus. He illustrates to humans how God's image can be reinstated in humanity, clear communication can be reestablished, and humans can be reconciled into community.

Wholeness in relationships then, is best exemplified in the

⁵⁶ The brokenness of relationships through blame, shame, guilt, and separation from others is clear in the account of the fall in Gen.3, where it can be seen that it is the nature of sin, due to our guilt: 1) to try to hide it (v.8) ; 2) to deny our responsibility for it (v.12); 3) to blame others (v.13); and 4) that it requires a sacrifice (v.21)- as exemplified in the sacrifice of Jesus for all humanity's sinfulness.

Messiah's perfect human relationship with the Creator. Christ's dependency upon God portrayed in the Gospels (Jn.14:9-11, 31), indicates that those who would communicate the way God communicated should begin by cultivating an intimate relationship with him that entails listening and obeying. As demonstrated in the prayerful, Spirit-led life of Jesus, the search for God's will is essential to the human journey toward wholeness. Bob Mumford's illustration of this is particularly useful for modern-day pursuers of God's will. He explains how a ship's pilot needs to line up three lighted buoys in the proper order off the bow of the ship to attain safe harbor. If he or she fails to pass the buoys in their proper order, the ship runs aground on the rocky shores. For the Christian community, the three buoys are comprised of: 1) the Word of God and its principles; 2) the inward witness of the Holy Spirit;⁵⁷ 3) the confirmation of God's leading through the circumstances of life.⁵⁸ Prayer plays a significant role in the restoration of the image of God that occurs in the life of the believer. It is the beginning point of the believer's submission to the divine plan of peace with God and the inception of the lifelong process of spiritual formation that ultimately effects the wider communities of faith, humankind, and all creation. As the believer realizes the importance of faith formed in the "prayer closet" (Mt.6:6), Christ is able to direct the heart toward wholeness. Dialoguing with God, seeing his hand of provision, and sensing his presence in tangible ways, all serve to confirm the individual's place within the Kingdom of God in the world.

While prayer is important to the formation of wholeness, it alone is not enough. Prayerful recognition of the voice of God as distinct from other voices (i.e.; worldly influences, fleshly temptations, or the demonic realm) requires agreement with the Word of God as well. If left only to the inner realm without some form of objective standard, the guidelines for genuine spirituality soon become relative to each and every individual's interpretation of what is best for them in any given situation. In line with much postmodern thought, the believer, may be tempted to prize independence from others and give priority

⁵⁷ I have in mind here the still small voice heard in prayer and mystical encounters. The best biblical example of this is in 1Kg.19 where Elijah, standing before the Lord, does not find him in the mighty displays of strength (storm, earthquake, and fire) but in the "gentle whisper." Cf., 1Kg.19:9b-13b. This is not solely individualistic but to be verified in the context of the outward community as well.

⁵⁸ This perspective from Bob Mumford. *Take Another Look at Guidance* (Plainfield: N.J.: Logos International, 1975).

of place to the emotional experience over rational thought.⁵⁹ However, the scriptures guide believers toward wholeness, “penetrate soul and spirit” and judge “the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb.4:12). The journey toward wholeness is advanced by comparing one’s personal faith journey with those incidences encountered in the Bible.

The scriptures make it clear that active obedience was the expectation of Christ.⁶⁰ By this criteria, many members of the Christian community might be considered practical atheists, who give affirming nods to the Bible as the Word of God but are unwilling to follow what it teaches.⁶¹ In conformity to the principles gleaned from the Word of God, persons are made more and more into his likeness, for obedient fellowship with Christ yields good fruit and cleanliness in God’s eyes (Jn.15:1-4). By allowing God’s Word to speak to the contemporary issues faced on a daily basis, true maturity in community is developed.

In addition to prayer and the Word of God, the circumstances of life impact the development of the inward spiritual community of the faithful. The circumstances of life may prove to be misleading if they are the only means whereby humans assess the will of the Lord. But coupled with prayer, obedience to the principles embodied in holy scripture, and obtaining Godly wisdom from spiritual mentors, circumstances help confirm the direction of the Lord for the individual. This process of trying and perhaps failing, and trying again until one succeeds, helps people eventually to discern more clearly the path set before them.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ford notes that “postmodernism is not just a new way of thinking. It is a world view that elevates feeling to a level on par with, or superior to, rational thought. The postmodern world view has intuition and emotion at its center, not intellect. The first question asked by a post-modernist is not ‘What do you think?’ but ‘How do you feel?’” Kevin Graham Ford, *Jesus For a New Generation* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 128.

⁶⁰ In the parable of the sower he explains the importance of the receptivity of the heart when it comes to hearing God’s word (Lk.8, Mk.4). But this is more than an intellectual response. Holding to his teaching will result in true freedom (Jn.8:31-32), and genuine relationship with Jesus, “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mt.12:50). The parables of the fruit tree and the wise and foolish builders illustrate the importance of hearing and putting into practice the Word of God (Mt.7:15-27). James notes that to hear the word but not be obedient to it results in self-deception (James 1:22-25).

⁶¹ This is affirmed by recent polls that have shown that 87% of the U.S. population believe the Bible is the Word of God, but only 32% of the population will be in church on any given Sunday.

⁶² The writer of Hebrews understood the necessity for practice in order to go on to maturity in the Lord. “But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Heb.5:14).

God's leading, therefore, is often viewed as journey. The psalmist uses this image when he writes "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps.119:105). By stepping out in faith, spiritual light is cast ahead far enough to reveal the next step in trust. Along this journey of continual seeking and submitting to the will of the Lord the individual within the community of faith will slowly, but surely, begin to achieve the wholeness that arises out of constant communion with him. Moreover, this transition in wholeness is the basis for a tremendous power and authority to bring about change in the world.

But authority without responsibility or accountability becomes tyranny. Since the individual is never totally independent, this authority is not vested in the individual alone, but in the One who forms and directs that community, and imparts that authority to the fellowship of wholeness to which they belong.⁶³ The fellowship of wholeness is not without a price; out of individual wholeness arises a communal authority with both obligation and responsibility. True love always involves accountability, a responsibility to those loved out of covenantal bond. Thus, wholeness in community requires Spiritually-sensitive accountability, especially on behalf of leaders, for the sake of maintaining the healing bonds established within the community.

Because Christ is at work in everyone's life, members are called to submit to one another in recognition of his inherent authority. If the community is allowed to arrive at its own subjective view of authority, one of two problems will likely surface. Either authority is seen as narrowly vested in certain key individuals, resulting in spiritual abuse through the exercise of too much power, or the question of authority is left up solely to each individual to determine in the relativism of his or her "own moral universe," leading to a loss of moral authority within the community of faith. The challenge for the Christian community is to once again ground its authority in the person of Christ rather than humans.

Thus, individuals detect the activity of God in the difficulties of life through prayerful communication with him, obedience to his word, confirming circumstances, and recognition of Christ's authority. This

⁶³ The theme of the authority of the church is repeated at least three times in Matthew whereby the authority of Christ in God's kingdom is imparted to his church. Cf., Matt.16:19, 18:18, and 28:18.

realization of God's activity both informs and inspires the spiritual journey of individuals as their brokenness and isolation is transformed into wholeness within the Christian community.

Christian Community and Wholeness

Christian community is the result of an ongoing dialogue between individuals who live out the principles of the Kingdom of God. The early Christians lived out an existence which was much more communal in scope than is common in American public life today. In comparison, modern acceptance of the credo of rugged individualism that is so widespread in American culture today is a recent innovation in society. This represents a genuine challenge for anyone desiring to interpret and apply biblical principles from the first century to modern day situations.

The church however, can help bridge the gap between individual disregard for responsibility and commitments to the greater community and civic life. It offers a richer understanding of the nature of the individual in respect to the surrounding community. This gathering of the faithful through its common story, finds its roots in the past, its life in the present, and its hope in the future. Through the appropriation of this tradition, the connectedness and wholeness which are sought after all along the spiritual journey are discovered.⁶⁴ The endorsement of these reports of faith within the Christian gathering becomes the stimulus for genuine community and salvation within the Kingdom of God.

Commitment to Community

The notion that redeemed individuals should be committed to genuine involvement with a community of faith is not universally embraced by American Christians. Rather a privatized view of faith, one that emphasizes the individual spirituality of the person rather than the role of organized religion, is the norm. A high percentage of the American populace believe that personal spirituality does not de-

⁶⁴ The concept of pervasive searching after wholeness is supported by Wuthnow's data which shows that though large numbers of Americans are involved in small groups (4 out of 10 adults), most do not believe that their needs for community have been fully met in them. These facts "suggest that nearly everyone in our society desperately wants community, but that most people have trouble finding it in all the ways they would like it to be present in their lives," Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 54.

pend on involvement in any religious organization,⁶⁵ viewing participation in the greater Christian community as an optional supplement to conversion.

The biblical idea of community however, is not the result of societal evolution. Significantly, the individual's inclusion within community is present from the very origins of humanity itself, in God's pronouncement "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen.1:18a). In the seminal story of the creation of woman as a *helper*, God makes his intentions clear for human creation. Humans do not live as isolated entities but only in the context of a shared communal experience.

Believers do not go it alone through this world. Those who belong to a community of faith strive through their weaknesses and doubts, and draw on a strength born in the midst of struggle, temptation, and persecution. For it is often from these shared hardships that a deeper bond is formed in the fellowship of the saints.

Consider the fact that leaders in the church are often called to confront sin within the church community. This is always difficult, as "no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful" (Heb. 12:11). Yet, "later on, however it yields a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). Paradoxically, through the power of the Holy Spirit, such confrontations often result in a closer relationship between the parties involved. A willingness to engage others beyond a superficial level is indicative of the kind of redemptive love which will not sit passively by while sin destroys the lives of people. When we share in the suffering of others that sin has wrought in their lives, we show we are willing to take the risks involved, and as a result often experience a much deeper bond with them.

The exposing of weaknesses through shared intimacy leads to a transparent communion with others and a resultant accountability that serves as a barrier to subsequent temptation. Persons in community receive the emotional, physical, and spiritual (prayer) support they need to carry on in the midst of trial and doubt (1Cor.10:13).

⁶⁵ A 1978 survey showed that 78 percent of the American public agreed that a "person can be a good Christian or Jew if he or she doesn't attend church or synagogue." Ten years later, an equally high proportion (76 percent) still held this view. Also 80 percent agreed that an "individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any churches or synagogue." George Gallup, Jr. *The Unchurched American-10 Years Later*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Religion Research Center, 1988).

In contemporary culture, the abnormality of unbridled *individualism*, in contrast with the tribal forms of previous civilizations, appears at the same time in which the “individual” is vanishing into an ever more private world. While some pockets of community are able to function in spite of the onslaught of individualism, the Christian community remains the most viable correction to turn the course of the culture from isolationism. In Christian community, the individual can make sense of existence, participate in a common search for authenticity and regain confidence in self and society’s institutions. Here the individual realizes that doubt is normal and, as a healthy facet of God’s purpose, motivates a pursuit of deeper truth.

Because of many societal factors that lead to isolation, human existence is no longer inherently communal; rather persons must *choose* to be a part of it. One antidote of rising popularity is small groups. In the small group context, people are gaining a degree of intimacy and accountability that leads to growth as persons within wholesome community. In response to the diverse needs and interests represented within American culture, a wide range of small group communities have become equally diverse. Inclusion in such a group can relieve the doubts created by individualism in its quest for selfish fulfillment. Participants in these groups often make covenant commitments concerning attendance, confidentiality, and accountability, which in themselves become ways of finding community because of their shared concerns.

Involvement in such groups, while part of the solution to isolationism, also represents a challenge because of the accommodation it requires from gospel norms. Relationships take on the tone of a “therapeutic contractualism,” which reformulates the question from “Is this right or wrong?” to “Is this going to work for me now?”⁶⁶ The resultant utilitarian view of community, which exists primarily for the sake of improving one’s solitary life may further impoverish the individual. Because wholesome identity arises from reciprocal relationships within the greater community, without any sacrificial commitment to the greater good of civic life individuals remain isolated in their own unfulfilling selfishness.

⁶⁶ Bellah and his cohorts wonder if “psychological sophistication” has not been bought at the price of “moral impoverishment” for “just as the notion of an absolutely free self led to absolutely empty conceptions of self, complete psychological contractualism leads to the notion of an absolutely empty relationship.” Bellah, 129.

Paradoxically, the more modern technology enables people to retreat within their personal cocoons, i.e.; the Internet, television, and access to multi-media from the privacy of the home; the more this increasing isolation induces a hunger for a more vibrant communal life. Basic to human life is the impulse to share that life with others, an impulse deeply satisfied by linking with a community that sinks its roots into the biblical story of humankind and God's interaction with it. The human drive to search for the sacred in a life suspected to be ultimately meaningless is met in a community connected not only with the past and present, but with God's future and final purpose for human life. Through alliance with others, one discovers the intimacy and accountability necessary to withstand the dehumanizing effects of the secular culture. In this way, the individual's course in life becomes part of a greater journey with the Christian community as it moves toward restored wholeness in Christ.

The message that is proclaimed in the NT is that one cannot serve Christ as the Head and have no relationship with his Body on earth. It emphasizes the individual-in-community through the use of various communal metaphors and motifs, such as, fellowship, body, and family. A NT world view presupposes individual existence to be grounded within community. In the early church it was one's relationship with others that shaped self-understanding within the practices of a shared existence and collective morals. The phrase "one another," in the context of warnings, admonitions, or encouragement, is used extensively throughout Paul's writings and the general epistles (over 39 times). In Romans the key words are "one another" (12:10,16). Individual believers found the meaning to their faith in their co-relation with other believers and the responsible cooperation of their everyday communal life.

Popular American culture, in the content of literature, TV, radio, and art, regularly celebrates community,⁶⁷ yet the nature of television and on-line media actually encourages isolation and self-sufficiency. Modern life is understood as a sharp separation between the public and private world. Fast-paced routines (horrendous daily commutes) are tolerated so long as they help maintain various lifestyle pursuits (new homes and recreational vehicles) which soothe the nagging con-

⁶⁷ Note the popularity of such TV shows as *Cheers*, *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, and *Frasier*, etc. where the characters are rarely alone, and the focus is on the benefits of communal relationships.

cerns that stem from the challenges created by the fast paced routines. The vicious cycle, known variously as the “rat race,” or “the commute,” could be stopped if only one would “get a life.” In this view, an individual’s identity is strictly a matter of personal choice and communal life is a detriment more than a benefit.⁶⁸ So what is the antidote to this ever increasing isolation in our society?

What is needed is the power of the Christian story lived out in the community of faith. The biblical model for community is one which presupposes fellowship with others. Individuals are as essential to community as the community is to the individual for the restoration and sustenance of wholeness. The actualization of such a vision fulfills God’s intention to set aside a people unto himself as the instruments of initiation into his Kingdom.

Narrative and the Journey of Shared Faith

Beginning with the creation of humanity in the Genesis account and ending with a communal wedding feast of the lamb in the Revelation, God’s story intertwines with his people. Although individuals are mentioned and discussed, the intent is that they be seen in the context of God’s people as a whole. The OT itself is the result of a verbal tradition of story-telling for the purpose of passing down the testimony of God’s dedication to his people. The *shamah of Israel*, “hear o’Israel” is a significant mandate found in scripture (Dt.6:4ff). God commands his people to recount continually his actions as a routine way of teaching designed to transmit the story of God’s work toward the realization of his Kingdom on earth.

The spiritual journey of today’s believer is forever linked to this great story. Since, for Americans “leaving tradition behind runs all the way through our tradition,”⁶⁹ it is only by identifying with stories of history contained in the Bible that the Christian community finds its roots in the past, its life in the present, and its hope in the future. This communication, as part of a faith story grounded in age-old traditions, gives individuals within the community a genuine sense of connectedness. Through the repetition of significant reflective rituals past shared memories become a part of the Christian tradition. Two

⁶⁸ This was never more true than in the case of Internet “personae,” where individuals can become many different entities that exist in cyberspace.

⁶⁹ Bellah, 75.

primary rituals, the Lord's Supper and Baptism, and the church's liturgical calendar with its numerous feast days, observances, lectionary references, etc., provide a wealth of powerful reminders which preserve the community's connection with the sacred events of the past.

The sharing of the Eucharist was instituted by the Lord as an act designed to unite the community in a common focus on him as its founder, sustainer and focus for the future (Lk.22:19; 1Cor.11:24). Christ's words, "this is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me" are a remembrance in three ways. He trains the community's understanding of: 1) what he did in the past through the initiatory acts of redemption because of his atoning work on the cross, 2) his continual, empowering attendance in the present through the intervening work of the Holy Spirit within the community, and 3) his complete work in the future, the anticipation of his returning rule and reign at the end of the age. This rite of remembrance finds its fullest expression when shared with the gathered people of God. The "community of memory" in which the ceremony takes place is a demonstration of the kingdom of God because of the concrete and spiritual reality of the messiah's presence within it. These rites not only connect people to the historical, spiritual stories of the Bible, they become a part of the life story of the individuals.⁷⁰

For many, these accounts are so significant that commitment to them is often equated with the very act of conversion. It is argued that either saving or keeping grace is imparted through participation in these rites such as baptism or sharing of the Lord's Supper. The stress on their importance within so much of Christianity only highlights their significance to the spiritual journey of the church and the individuals that comprise it. The faithful re-telling of the spiritual stories is often the motivation for conversion, and therefore integral to all evangelism.

Global Community and the Pursuit of Wholeness

While the holistic scope of the spiritual journey encompasses the recovery of individuals into a healthy Christian community, God intends redemption to extend beyond the confines of the church to the global community as well, to what Paul called "the world." Not only

⁷⁰ While stories may be commonplace, they wield a powerful influence on the lives of people "They shape individuals: as people tell their stories, they become these stories." The stories themselves "become the models we use to shape our subsequent decisions and behavior." Wuthnow, 293-294.

natural creation, the cosmos, is included but also the whole corrupt way of thinking in the political and social structures of culture which Paul refers to as “this age”⁷¹ for the church has a distinct role in its redemption.

Some theologians have argued that Christ came to redeem only the nation of Israel, which others refute on the grounds of the universal nature of his message. When Luke mentions Jesus’ reading of the prophet Isaiah in chapter four, it is evident that he saw the work of the messiah as a historical reality being fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus knew the worldwide ramifications of the work of God in him to manifest his redemption.

While secular culture recognizes the importance of community in maintaining equilibrium in the social world, the disconnected urban social structures which are so deep-seated within modern society may represent the greatest single impediment to reclaiming a sense of global community to the whole of creation.

Diabolical structures are entrenched that keep humans in subservience to the gods of class and ethnic distinction. One has only to visit South Central or Watts in L.A., the Robert Taylor Projects or Cabrini Green in S.Chicago, or any of the dozens of Native American reservations across the country, to sense the oppression that exists in economic systems that perpetuate racial stereotypes, suppress any genuine social or economic development, and hold people in bondage by a total lack of opportunity for financial viability.

Throughout the workplace exploitive capitalism treats human beings as commodities to be consumed as part of a system built for ever-increasing profits. The CEO who built his company on the basis of greed, fraud, and every manner of deception for commercial gain needs Christ. But beyond his personal redemption there is a need for the system he created to experience Godly transformation as well.

Surely, God desires that all of creation be reconciled unto him, and the redemption of Christians is key to his divine plan (Rom.8:18-23). He has called believers to share in the divine stewardship of the environment for the purpose of care-taking not unlimited exploitation.

⁷¹ Paul refers to “world” (*kosmos*) some 47 times in his writings and “age” (*ai_n*) 37 times (eight of these with the preposition *this*).

The church has a responsibility, first concerning other members of its community and then regarding those outside as well. Their focus is on spreading God's message of peace with him (2Cor.5:16-21), and their ministry of reconciliation is serving the world as both a community of contrast and refuge (2Cor.5:20-21).

Faith Community as a "Contrast Society"

In answer to Jesus' prayer and by his power, this community is to be "in the world" but not "of the world" (Jn.17:15-18). It can be described as a "divine contrast-society to the world."⁷² It does not retreat from participation with its particular culture, but maintains a liberating relationship with those in need of its message, through genuine dialogue. Any wholesale withdrawal deprives the culture of any testimony concerning God's purpose to reconcile all creation unto himself. In this way the gospel becomes more than just a word or an announcement but rather takes on the personal character of individual lives.

Christ's saving work is seen most clearly in the contrast between the hope of the Christian community and the hopelessness of contemporary society. The work is not Christ's alone; the disciples are commissioned "to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness" (Mt.10:1, 7-8), and the radiant city on the hill is symbolic for the church as a contrast-society (Mt.5:13-16).⁷³ The church as a contrast-society does not mean being in contradiction to the world for the sake of contradiction. Rather, the Christian community maintains a distance and difference not from the world but for the world, to make clear the distinction between the Kingdom of God and the world's sinful structures. The church's willingness to critique the structures and institutions of society, based on biblical principles, helps transform the world through the process of ongoing dialogue. The validity of their truth claims is based on their consistency with God's

The church's willingness to critique the structures and institutions of society, based on biblical principles, helps transform the world through the process of ongoing dialogue.

⁷² See Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*. Transl. by John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 130.

⁷³ This contrast function is expressed in the images "salt of the earth," "light of the world" & "city on a hill," cf., Matt. 5:13-14.

intention for the blessing of all his creation and is not dependent upon society's approval.

To remain truly different without losing its relevance or viability is one of the bigger challenges the Christian community faces. In seeking to dialogue with the world, the community risks losing its distance, becoming no different than other erstwhile political organizations and being absorbed within such structures. On the other hand, in seeking to be separate, the community risks becoming so distant that its distinctions are seen as irrelevant. The authentic Christian community must struggle with this tension and maintain a balance in its relationship with the surrounding culture. In that way, God's witness of redemption to his creation is not hindered by too much or not enough distance, which might render it invisible and without "saltiness" (Mt.5:13).

Christian Community as Sanctuary

The irony of modern-day culture is that it exalts the grandeur of the individual in such a way that it leaves persons "suspended in a glorious, but terrifying, isolation."⁷⁴ One need only read the daily newspapers to see numerous examples of the rapid deterioration of the fabric of society beginning with the loss of parental responsibility in the family, to the danger that the common schoolyard represents to the very students it serves. To some it may seem hopeless and lead to despair. But the church offers a distinctively hopeful outlook when it comes to giving life real meaning and purpose. Its message is simple: there is a sanctuary from the sinful corruption of this world. God has made this refuge available through relationship with his Son and the church he forms by his atoning work (Eph.2:19-22).

The concept of the Christian community as a sanctuary is comparable to the Temple in Jerusalem and the presence of God. Paul affirms a link between the Temple and the people of God (1Cor.3:16-17; 2Cor.6:16; Eph.2:21). The church as the dwelling place for the Spirit of God is a sanctuary that provides a protective haven of security from the unknowns of the world and performs a purifying function in its expectations for holiness among its members.⁷⁵ It calls

⁷⁴ Bellah, 6.

⁷⁵ Both aspects of this are addressed in 2Cor.6: 16-18, where the scripture says that God is present among his people (providing ultimate protection and comfort) and the result is a call to be separated from the unrighteous ways of the surrounding pagan world.

believers on behalf of the Spirit to come apart and “Be holy, because I am holy” (Lev.11:44-45; 1Pet.1:16).

When Christians love one another as God loved them, enough to die for them, their community becomes a refuge from the loneliness of isolationism. Humans have a God-given longing to be a part of a gracious family that will envelop them in genuine love. Kevin Ford, in searching the soul of postmodern generation-Xer’s, uncovered a general malaise rooted in the lack of genuine self-worth.⁷⁶ The community of faith answers this sense of worthlessness by building up self-esteem through a caring community that supports the God-given value of each person. Moreover, in the worshipping community of Christians, the future certainty of every tongue, tribe and nation giving honor to God is a present reality (rev.7:9).. Perfect community is embodied, although imperfectly, within the Christian community of faith upon the earth. In spite of its inadequacy as a community of relatively wholesome and stable relationships, it is able to offer sanctuary from the insecurity that earmarks worldly associations.

This message of sanctuary needs to be more clearly communicated. In the same way that the church building provides security from the physical elements, the Christian community offers refuge from the stormy blows of life. Demands for perfection have no place where all are recognized as sinners in need of a Savior (Rom.3:23). Everyone is welcomed in with open arms regardless of past or present shortcomings.⁷⁷ And no one here is considered greater than another for each is insignificant in light of the awesomeness of God.⁷⁸ While this idealistic aim seems unattainable, it serves nevertheless, as a challenge to the church. Perhaps such a higher model of companionship is really what most people are searching for, desiring to be challenged to rise above the usual and mediocre relationships experienced in secular society.

The Christian community offers to the world a contrast society that is genuinely optimistic in the midst of prevailing despair and seeming futility. To those bound in isolation and loneliness, it pro-

⁷⁶ “The underlying anxiety of Xer existence is the troubling fear that we are worthless as human beings. We were unwanted and neglected as children. We are marginal and shunted aside by our society. We are achieving nothing of value. We are going nowhere at breakneck speed.” Ford, 148.

⁷⁷ One of the community’s greatest apostles, Paul, saw himself as unworthy (1Tim.1:16) yet was quick to point to the fallibility of others who saw themselves as better (1Cor.6:9-11).

⁷⁸ In the NT literature God shows no favoritism. Cf., Acts 10:34; Rom.2:11; Eph.6:9; Col.3:25.

vides a refuge rooted in a community with a living hope of perfection. Without arrogance, it points forward to a future destiny in the very presence of God, in ways that “no mind has conceived, no eye has seen, no ear has heard” (1Cor.2:9). In this lies the aspiration and destiny of those called to participate in the spiritual journey of redemption.

The spiritual journey to conversion is essentially a journeying toward a restoration of the wholeness that God originally intended. On a fundamental level, conversion strives for a change within the individual that will bring about a thorough recovery of the image of God for humans. God’s intent is to make every aspect of the believer’s life whole, including the spiritual, emotional and material aspects of human existence. But the spiritual journey extends beyond the interactions of God and particular humans. It is based upon and continues as part of the greater narrative of God’s action on behalf of all humans. This bold epic is realized repeatedly in the life of the church as the embodiment of the kingdom of God on earth. As an expression of this kingdom, the journey of the Christian community offers to the world a picture of a contrast society, one that is in the process of being wholly redeemed. This wholeness appears to the world as an inviting sanctuary from the ravages of individualism, isolation, and oppression.

Furthermore, the worldwide scope of the spiritual journey is exhibited in the inclusive nature of God’s redemption. Individuals, the Christian community, indeed, even the entire cosmos, are included in God’s march through time toward the consummate transformation of all things. Therefore a practical ministry of evangelism that is holistic in scope must also extend beyond mere individual conversion to encompass God’s intent for all his creation. This means that our evangelism methods should extend beyond the redemption of individuals to embrace those social justice concerns that were so much a part of Jesus’ radical political incorrectness. For ministry unto the Lord is expressed in a concern that the poor be housed, fed, and clothed; that prisoners be ministered to on a regular basis, strangers are included in the family of faith, and those that are sick are looked after (Mt.25:34-36). Furthermore, God has given us dominion over the earth that we might “be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen.1:28). He has given us this authority for the purpose of

stewardship of our natural resources and our efforts at social justice should embrace a “green” theology of sorts as well.

As we continue our conversation with God within the context of the Christian church community, allowing the Bible and the Spirit to inform our faith and practice, our practical ministry of evangelism will rightly extend to the whole of the earth community as God intended it. By continuing to strive toward a balanced synthesis of these five criteria for our efforts we can be assured that our evangelistic endeavors will be both genuine and effective.

So What?

Answering the question addressed in the title of this chapter is essential if we are to bring our reflection on God's activity down to the practical level of actually engaging unbelievers. Any so-called theology (lit. a "word about God"), or reflection concerning his activities, that cannot be related to the average person on the street is not really theology at all. Because God is concerned about reaching all of humanity with the gospel message, if we cannot communicate the truths about him to these very ones who need it, then we have been merely engaged in some kind of moralizing philosophy, but it is certainly not theology in a true sense.

With this in mind, this chapter will attempt to further explain how our reflection so far can relate each of the five aspects of our practical ministry of evangelism to our actual evangelism practices.

Evangelism as a Holy Conversation

I have maintained from the outset that reflection about our personal ministries of evangelism flows from a dialogue we must

have with God, that in turn, improves our conversation with the church and the world. Dialogue is a two-way conversation. It involves not only speaking but hearing, and the latter is often sorely neglected in all three spheres. If we are truly hearing from God, then we will have a bona fide, Spirit-led sensitivity to the important issues that need to be addressed in the lives of our hearers. If we ardently listen to the church and its leaders we show a sensitivity that will enable us to make our message relevant to each local evangelism field.

Equally important is the ability to hear clearly the concerns of unbelievers as we attempt to communicate God's truth to them.

A true dialogue with the world means we are willing to listen with an openness to what those outside our realm of belief and influence are saying. It's a genuine hearing of their truth claims, not just to further our own agenda and subsequently deliver a clever answer. Rather, it is with a genuine desire to see what realities they might have to share with us. No single human being can claim to grasp all truth. Our finite minds cannot possibly comprehend all there is to know about a holy and infinite God. God has often used unbelievers to bring revelation to his people, frequently when they will not hear it any other way, after all God used Baalam's ass to speak to the prophet.

Common sense tells us that when we have listened intently to other's thoughts about their religious beliefs, we will have earned the right to share about our own. This is part of the genuine conversation that God requires of us as we talk to and hear from others outside the faith. Once we earn the right to speak we can anticipate that God will give us his word to speak to their situation.

Bible Stories from Biblical People

One of the greater challenges Christians must face is their absolute reliance on the Bible as the authority for all faith and practice. This does not mean that other documents have nothing to say about religion, philosophy, or the way a person should live. Rather, all other claims must be weighed against the principles for living we have gleaned from the scriptures.

Furthermore, we must know the Bible to be able to speak from it effectively. This means the whole Bible, both Old and New Testament. Many Christians have become so well-versed in their NT doctrine, and no wonder given the years of preaching and teaching from it they receive on a weekly basis, that they often fail to see the simplicity of the gospel message portrayed in the stories of the OT. Perhaps the profound truth contained in these accounts on their face would have greater impact if we didn't try to clutter them up all the time with our advanced or even fanciful interpretations. The use of complex interpretations in sharing our faith insinuates one must be a Bible scholar to fully understand the implications of the text, and often discourages new converts or unbelievers from even attempting to do so for themselves.

Perhaps as we learn to tell parable stories from the Word like Jesus did we might experience similar fruit in winning converts to relationship with him. Recounting the mighty truths of the gospel contained in the Word enables others to partake in the Greatest Story ever told and become part of that story themselves.

Jesus is Lord

But there is a further challenge to our role as a witness to the gospel in our culture and that is the exclusive claims of Christ, “I am the way and the truth and the life, and no man [sic] comes to the Father except through me” (Jn.14:6). The post-modern culture claims to accept all truth claims even when they are at variance with one another, as if such universal acceptance was the more intelligent option. Regrettably, many who claim an openness to all beliefs are often the most intolerant of any claim that is absolute, especially the claims of one belief system as superior to another. This represents a major challenge to the claims of Christ, whereby Christianity is seen as the only true way to enduring relationship with the Father. Such a premise may not concur with modern human sentiment, but it is certainly the claim of the gospel and loyal followers of Christ must adhere to his direct statements concerning salvation. These are not negotiable just because we as humans don’t like it.

There is much about the gospel that does not agree with modern human sentiment. The very idea that God became a human and was grotesquely executed for the sin of all persons is repugnant to any humanly concocted belief system. Furthermore, a premise that we should give our lives to one who died for us in order to find genuine eternal life is even more preposterous. So the exclusive claims of Christ as the sole means of access to the Father is just as much a stumbling block today as it was among the religious of his day. Yet, it was the radical political and religious incorrectness of Christ that made his message so provocative. He comes into the world to upset the status quo and challenge his followers to a radical reversal in lifestyle and thinking.

Yet, it is not Christ’s exclusivity that we focus on, rather the inclusive universal nature of his invitation. For Christianity takes on all comers, regardless of prior belief or life circumstances. Hindu, Jew, Moslem, Atheist, all have a place at the banquet table of Christ if they will only accept his loving sacrifice on the cross for them. In this

sense it is the universal religion. Class, race, or religious distinctions have no bearing on his willingness to embrace all humanity if they will only acknowledge, as all creation will eventually, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil.2:10-11).

The Bible is the authority of our belief, and Jesus is the only way to obtain a genuine relationship with the Father. This is not to imply there are no truths in other belief systems, but they remain incomplete apart from Christ.

So for those who would call Jesus Lord, our focus on these two aspects of the faith must be uncompromising. The Bible is the authority of our belief, and Jesus is the only way to obtain a genuine relationship with the Father. This is not to imply there are no truths in other belief systems, but they remain incomplete apart from Christ.

Allowing the Spirit to Move

Since evangelism is a “holy” conversation, the Spirit’s leading in the work is given priority not our programs. It is the message that’s sacred not the method. Paul was clear in stating his reliance, which was not “with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power (1Cor.2:4). For as one philosopher stated a person convinced by a clever argument is at the mercy of a clever argument. Therefore if we were able to talk people into belief today, countering forces will see to it that a more effective argument against us is offered tomorrow.

Thus evangelism which is truly effective relies fundamentally on the Holy Spirit to confirm the truth of our communication. Furthermore, because evangelism is really a matter of recognizing the activity of God in the midst of situations, both in the church and the world, understanding the way that God bestows gifts to each of his children differently is essential to honoring him in the process.

Its interesting to note that the words disciple and discernment, or *the ability to separate*, both come from the same related root, having to do with discipline. I have argued that evangelism is primarily a matter of discerning the activity of God in our midst and this is especially true when it comes to determining our specific spiritual gifts in the

process. The role of the evangelist may be mostly a matter of equipping folks in the body of Christ to recognize how God has uniquely gifted every believer to realize their call “to be a witness” for the purpose of winning the lost (Acts 1:8). Because we recognize that God, as the Supreme evangelist, works through humans by means of imparting spiritual gifts attuned to the exact and specific situation, we can trust him for fruit in the harvest. Like Paul and Apollos, we can plant and water but it is God “who makes things grow” (1Cor.3:4). Our obligation is not to concentrate on results but to remain faithful and obedient in our “labors” as we yield to the Spirit’s work in our lives and the lives of others.

Scholars differ as to the definition and function of various gifts in the NT.⁷⁹ Pentecostals and Charismatics like to focus on Paul’s list in 1Cor.12, splitting the nine gifts mentioned here into three sections: the mind, voice, and power of God. Non- Pentecostals emphasize the down-to-earth displays of God’s power in gifts such as hospitality, administration, helps, etc. The role of divine empowerment in the evangelism process deserves much more attention than I can give it here. Yet, believers should attempt to assess their particular God-given aptitudes and apply them to the three phases of the evangelism process in order to be most effective in their implementation for the greater good.

The perspective that spiritual gifts, as “God’s equipment,” provide certain clues to the ways God would use us in the church also has serious implications for our involvement in evangelism.⁸⁰ By prayerfully reflecting on the ways God has naturally and supernaturally commissioned us, we may be more sensitive to the desires of the Spirit to use us in specific ways and more effectively realize his call on our lives.

Because the conversion process is so complex, as individuals and circumstances are changing on an almost moment by moment basis, we must rely on the Holy Spirit to lead us in our evangelism encounters. This should be a very liberating concept, to know that the effec-

⁷⁹ Wagner thinks there are as many as 27 gifts and probably more, see C.Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow: How to Find Your Gift and Use It* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1985), 73, 76-79. For a Pentecostal treatment, See David Lim, *Spiritual Gifts: A Fresh Look: Commentary & Exhortation from a Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1991).

⁸⁰ “In other words, more than any other factors, our gifts determine our call. They are God’s firm, persistent signals to us of his will for our lives,” see David Allan Hubbard, *Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 35.

tiveness of our witness is not based solely on our own abilities or experience. Rather the potency of our witness stems from our sensitivity to the One whose sole desire, coupled with his divine enablement, is to see humans come to be at peace with him. *Excuses such as “I am not good enough, experienced enough, brave enough, knowledgeable enough,” suggest a lack of trust in God’s desire to use humans in evangelism. Instead, the focus should be on the supernatural ability of God to use even the most imperfect vessels for his kingdom sake.*

Finally, there is a common misunderstanding in the church concerning the gift of evangelism and the discipline of witness. Many believers, using the excuses noted above, have found it convenient to dismiss the God-given incentive to share their faith because they do not have the so-called “gift” of evangelism. It may be true that only 10-13% of the body of Christ truly feel evangelistic work is their primary gift, but nowhere near this number seem to be exercising it. However, all in the church have a responsibility to be a witness in some manner. Nowhere in the NT

can it be shown that there is a unique few who are solely responsible for reaching the lost. Instead, it’s much more obvious that a witness to Christ as Lord of their lives, both verbally and by example of holy living, was considered the norm for the first century believers. Such a lifestyle of evangelism, whereby his followers were consistently inviting people to faith in

The loss of a lifestyle of evangelism that can be modeled within local church congregations is a fatal precedent that could forebode the end of any substantial church growth in America unless reversed.

Jesus and witnessing of his mighty acts and sovereign reign, seems to be wholly lost to the modern American church. The loss of a lifestyle of evangelism that can be modeled within local church congregations is a fatal precedent that could forebode the end of any substantial church growth in America unless reversed.

The Devil's Desire

Perhaps nothing would do more to discourage people from becoming Christians than for them to encounter people of faith in Christ that are living lives of despair and loneliness. A solitary faith is a weak and anemic faith. That’s why it’s such a pity to see those, who for reasons of past personal hurts or discouragement have abandoned any

attempt to find a lively fellowship of other Christians to share in their life's journey.

If, as I have shown, Christian conversion rightfully takes place in the context of community, then believers will see the immersion of new converts within that community as an essential aspect of evangelism. Without the loving support of others of like faith, the evil one will sift them like wheat. He will do everything in his power to discourage them from involvement in a wholesome church community because he knows it's within the church that broken relationships are restored, support is given through times of trial and temptation, and God's love is tangibly manifested here on earth.

When the task of incorporating new converts is seen as a separated step beyond evangelism, there often exists a broad gap between the encounter at the cross of Christ and the essential ongoing transformation needed to cultivate an ongoing relationship with Jesus. Instead, those who are used of God to bring people to encounter must take seriously their role in helping incorporate the new convert into a community of faith and a lifestyle of service and devotion to God.

When we become the hand of God extended to those outside the faith as we practice the ministry of reconciliation he has called all of to (2Cor.5:20), the invitation to become a part of the household of faith has serious implications for us. It's as if we are inviting the homeless to come to our houses, sleep on our couches and have breakfast, lunch, and dinner with us. Literally, when we share the gospel, we are inviting them into our family. We are saying, "Come, and be my brother, my sister, for the rest of eternity. Come and become a part of the family of God!" Because intuitively, we know this to be true, it may cause us to shrink back from the invitation. But God has promised to empower each of us to accomplish the task, and we must compel them to come into our fellowship even if they are not the guests we would normally expect (Mt.22:8-9).

Once they have professed faith in Christ, like the adopted children many of us were when we first came to the Lord, we have a responsibility to see to it that they find their place in the family. Sure, people can have a relationship with Jesus apart from a church, but it is only part of what he has in mind for his people. Is it possible to serve Jesus as the head and have no relationship whatsoever with his body? God, who exists in community, created humans to exist likewise in wholesome community. It is the obligation of those who are encour-

aging new converts in the faith, especially if God has used them to be a part of the previous stages of their journey, to see to it that they are solidly incorporated in a local church body before turning to others in need.

It may be that no church is perfect, and if it were, and we were to go there, it would no longer be so. Because this side of glory, we are only human, full of human frailty and weakness, our fellowship will always have flaws. That's the very reason why we need God's grace. We often find in church, apart from what Christ has done for us on the cross, we have very little if anything in common with those who worship alongside of us. Therein is the beauty of God displayed. He takes people from every tongue, tribe, and nation across the globe and gives them a common experience in him. His miracle-working power is displayed in the Spirit's ability to give us all one kindred spirit so that we might actually have sincere and genuine fellowship with one another in spite of language, class and race barriers. Through the Great Equalizer of all things, the dividing wall of hostility is torn down and we can be who he has really called us all to be: humanity created in his image to have fellowship with one another and our creator. Those who neglect this fellowship, ignore to their own detriment one of the most blessed aspects of salvation, the fellowship of the saints here on earth as a foretaste of the eternal fellowship we will all eventually experience around his throne (Rev.5:11, 13).

More Than a Prayer

First and foremost humans need a relationship with God to be whole. But salvation goes beyond the praying of prayers. In both the Old and New Testaments, the activity of God entailed physical as well as spiritual provision along the path of redemption. It is not enough to say, "God bless you, go your way and be well fed" (James 2:15-16). This would be akin to seeing a newborn babe on the sidewalk without adult support and hurrying by with a blessing and a prayer. Yet, many of our new converts are little more than spiritual babes in the woods, so to speak, who need and desire our assistance as they learn to walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rather, genuine and effective evangelism seeks to minister to every aspect of the individual's needs. Many have prayed a sinner's prayer and never gone further to cultivate an ongoing relationship with Christ because the focus was almost solely on the encounter phase of their

journey. In the same manner, many have not seen the church as relevant to their earthly existence because it has centered solely on their need for a spiritual encounter without going further to meet basic physical needs as well.

God's concern is not limited merely to the spiritual well-being of his children. Modeled in his careful provision for Israel during their Exodus journeys, its clear he takes an active role in seeing to it that people have a dry place to sleep, are well fed, and have adequate clothing. Rather, when a believer's devotion remains on the kingdom of God, the scriptures affirm that temporal needs are also met (Mt.6:31-33).

The evangelism I have in mind also goes beyond the scope of the individual. As important as it is that people as individuals are redeemed, there are also entire diabolical systems that need rejuvenation as well. When the exploitive CEO, who encouraged a culture of greed and exploitation in his company comes to Christ, the corrupt system he promoted is not automatically transformed as well.

There are whole classes and races of people held in bondage to evil oppressive structures around the world. From the genocide in Northern Africa, the suppression of women rights in Moslem cultures, the oppressive welfare system and gang cultures of America's inner cities, the systematic racial discrimination in that nation's real estate markets, the sexploitation of the female body in the media markets, to the abuse of the environment for the sake of rampant capitalism, example after example of corrupt structures devised and sustained by unregenerate humans can be supplied. These corrupt influences within our culture also cry out for God's redemption.

Throughout the scriptures there is a prevalent theme: God is on the side of the poor and the downcast. He is quick to defend the defenseless and social justice is near the top of his agenda. As deliverer and judge, he will right all the wrongs in the cosmos. But what begins in the individual should not stop there. Instead the church must move beyond ministering solely to individual needs to active involvement in those causes that promote justice for all humankind. This means taking a stand as a contrast society, to change those laws or traditions that hold persons in bondage, so that all humanity, indeed the entire cosmos, might experience the emancipation that God desires for it.

Critique of Methods

We have seen how crucial all five aspects that form the basis of practical theology are toward implementing an effective ministry of evangelism. But exactly how might this impinge on any particular method? I want to offer some specific application of these principles to a few selected for the sake of further discussion in the church.

Observe at the beginning that every method will come up short in its effectiveness in any given situation as the participants and circumstances change in time. That's why a more comprehensive understanding of the theological basis for evangelism is needed. Equipped with this understanding, we are able to grasp how the particular situation fits into the greater rule of the kingdom of God. We can then move to come alongside what God is doing in the lives of persons he is striving to reconcile back into relationship with him.

Each particular method will have strengths in some areas and weaknesses in others. Our task is to evaluate the method, the participants, and the unique circumstances on the basis of our theological reflection. Is the approach we are using dialogical in method, biblical in basis, spiritual in dimension, communal in context, and holistic in scope? And if not, how can we add to it to make it so?

Marketplace Evangelism

I have often used questionnaires and booklets to train others in evangelism and to share the gospel in many public places, such as flea markets, shopping and pedestrian malls, door to door, in park out-reaches, etc. But how does this mode of witnessing fare when critiqued on the basis of our practical theology?

Reaching out into the surrounding community through this kind of intentional evangelism has long been a cost effective and seemingly simple way of sharing the Gospel. The intentionality of reaching out to those in our own backyard and neighborhoods fulfills a biblical mandate to penetrate the culture with the gospel message. But what is the message portrayed? Care must be taken that evangelism is not seen as simply mere proclamation. The use of booklets, tracts, fliers, and the like make it too easy for a gospel presentation to lack the two-sided nature of genuine dialogue. The use of questionnaires and surveys, so far as they involve a genuine openness to what respondents have to say, may help overcome this shortfall.

Another problem with this approach is the tendency to “dumb down” conversion, portraying it as an easy step by step contract with God. The respondent is asked to merely pray a brief prayer, and are coerced by the promise that if they do so God will uphold his side of the bargain by imparting eternal life. While the prayer of faith is efficacious to save, this consists of little more than a magical formula, “abracadabra, you’re going to heaven!” If that’s the case its just so much Christian hocus- pocus. In order for this method to reflect a sound biblical basis, the concept of conversion as a spiritual journey, with its emphasis on the necessity for ongoing transformation, must be part and parcel of the gospel presentation.

In recognition of the spiritual dimension of the conversion process, there must be a willingness to abandon all preconceived notions of what must take place and yield to the Spirit’s guidance. This may mean setting aside booklets, questionnaires, or any other rigid formulas and allowing God to lead the conversation as he see fit. Its often the case that only a small number of believers in any given church setting are likely to participate in this kind of evangelism. Yet, such intentional approaches are frequently held up to be the more mature or self- sacrificing form of spiritual witness by it practitioners. This attitude is divisive and mistaken, since it is the message and not the method that is sacred.

Efforts to invite, pray for, or further serve the surrounding neighborhood represent only the initial offer of an invitation for persons to experience a long-lasting fellowship with the community of faith. For this reason, marketplace and home visitation evangelism should take place on behalf of a local church community and participants should clearly identify themselves as part of that community, including all pertinent information such as name, address, service times, and additional ministries offered. Furthermore, it should be clearly communicated that this initial contact is only a partial extension of the church’s willingness to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of the hearer. An open invitation to additional spiritual discipleship and material care should be evident in any offer extended. The church must be prepared to go beyond the initial visit to follow up with additional support and resources which will adequately and genuinely minister to the needs encountered.

Mass Evangelism Crusades

Crusades held in public auditoriums and coliseums are a favorite evangelism method among many Christians because they anticipate rather passive involvement by the believer's who participate in them. The nature of the invitation in such crusades is by necessity individualistic. Furthermore, crusade invitations often imply that conversion is an event brought about by human decision leading to an emphasis on the human will rather than the saving grace of God. The words of the invitation should reflect to the hearer a reliance on the Holy Spirit to do the work of conviction, rather than on emotional manipulation or group pressure to respond. Additionally, the ongoing nature of the commitment, emphasizing the spiritual disciplines and a life of holiness should also be communicated in order to ensure the biblical validity of the method.

Another challenge for those who employ crusade evangelism is maintaining spiritual sensitivity. This is often diminished as the message and approach become increasingly stylized through frequency of use. The nature of these large meetings and the considerable organization necessary for their effectual implementation causes services to become regimented in order to eliminate potential mishaps. One key to sustaining the spiritual dimension is the utilization of lay altar counselors. Altar workers can be trained to assure the opportunity for a genuine two-way conversation and an accurate Gospel presentation that encourages a relationship with God that extends beyond an encounter with him in the moment.

These counselors also link the effort with local church communities for further discipleship. The lack of continuity between altar call responses and ongoing discipleship in local church communities is perhaps the greatest shortfall of this type of evangelism. Small local churches cannot produce the sizeable budgets, famous names, professional music performances, and extensive organizations that are usually involved in the large crusades. Moreover, new converts may get the false impression from this example that the Christian community should always be so scintillating, creating an expectation for the local church that will lead to disappointment.

A further difficulty with the atmosphere of large Christian meetings is that they tend to be politically conservative, embracing an uncritical preservation of the status quo. Crusade convocations are used rarely to rally Christians to challenge existing oppressive structures or

to become more involved in social justice concerns. Such meetings also are inclined to focus exclusively on spiritual rather than material or social issues, leaving little room for the holistic aspects of conversion to be addressed. A more holistic use of crusade evangelism would allow for display booths, announcements, actual food or clothing distributions, or other innovations to link local churches and social organizations to the immediate physical needs of participants.

Seeker-sensitive Sanctuary Evangelism

Perhaps one of the most effective forms of presenting the Gospel message to unbelievers today is the “outreach service” sponsored by local churches in their own sanctuaries. A great benefit of this approach is it works hard at tailoring the gospel message for that local context making sure it is given in a language the locals of that community can understand. From a biblical standpoint however, the content of the gospel portrayed must be examined. Since the medium itself influences the message so greatly, care must be taken in choosing the way the gospel is presented.

The danger is making the Gospel message too indulgent and simplistic. There is a tendency to “dumb down” the message to its lowest common denominator for the audience, often expressed by a popular cliché or catchy phrase, and thus remove the mystery and awe that characterize God’s grace. Similarly, by accommodating every aspect of the service to the comfort of an unregenerate audience, the sanctuary can be wrongly construed as a place of entertainment rather than worship. The subtle implication is that the essence of the gospel is blessing for the

believer rather than service unto the Lord. Thus, seeker-sensitive churches must endeavor to develop a long term commitment to discipleship in the hearts of their constituency. The use of altar counselors, as with mass crusade evangelism, rectifies many problems with this method as well. The interactions they offer the audience provide access to the community of faith. Through Spirit-led conversations with believers, genuine conversation can occur, a faithful gospel presentation made, and offers for holistic ministry extended.

The challenge remains for these churches to be prepared to feed, clothe, and counsel, as well as establish referral networks with other care-giving organizations in the community in order to minister to the entire person. Furthermore, in keeping with biblical tradition,

affluent churches practicing holistic evangelism must work at extending an open invitation to the poor and oppressed in the community. This involves a willingness to take risks on behalf of those outside the status quo and a desire to see every aspect of the community in which they live be redeemed.

These observations are examples of the kinds of critique that an effective practical theology of evangelism might evoke. They obviously are not as comprehensive as they need to be, but that task is left to each believer in their discussions within local church bodies. For a genuine practical theology must, by definition, extend beyond mere theoretical considerations written in this book to the actual practices within the reader's life.

CONCLUSION

Dorcas went down to the river that day as she did nearly every day. As usual the others were there: Damarus, with her limp, getting water for her household chores; Tryphaena, with her three kids, doing her laundry; Bernice, who seemed to stoop over further and further with each passing day, trying to sell bread from her oven. Bernice smiled as she approached, Damarus waved. Tryphaena shouted out, "How's it going, Dorcas?"

They knew her well. Each, at one time or another, were part of a private discussion with Dorcas. They knew she was the strong silent type, yet not afraid to explain the reason for her confidence in life. They didn't consider themselves as religious as Dorcas, but found her faith in the God the Jews called the Messiah attractive. They knew Dorcas was telling the truth when she said she prayed for them regularly. They could see it in the sparkle in her eyes and feel it in the warmth in their hearts when she spoke with them.

They knew she cared. For not only did she pray with them individually, but she had sold some of her clothes and offered to pay for a doctor to look at Damarus' leg. Trypheana had showed the others the colorful outfits Dorcas had made for her children and told them how she had refused payment for the costly fabric. And when she brought that expensive medication to ease Bernice's pain, they all tried to tell her how good and kind she was, but all she could say was, "Just thank the Lord for his loving kindness for he is the one who provides for all of us."

Dorcas went down to the river that day. And sickness and death came to her as it does to all humanity, but the river of life that flowed from the throne of heaven would not be stopped. And the river of the water of life that flowed through Dorcas became as a "river of living water" which brought physical and spiritual healing to many in that region. For Dorcas knew that the river next to her city was only a concrete symbol of the greatest river of all - the river that flowed from the throne of God himself and the Lamb. It's the river that flows out from the middle of the great street of a heavenly city through his servants to the people that God created to be with him for eternity.

My hope and prayer is that believers will take the principles I have shared in the words of this book and apply them to their own lives. When they do so, I believe the church can anticipate, one by one, a restoration of a lifestyle of evangelism to the ordinary Christian. This will provide a visible model to new believers for sharing their faith and help jump start a healthy cycle of effective witness within the church community.

In addition, I pray that this book, along with the biblical texts, other books on evangelism, and the church traditions themselves will be used to facilitate further discussion concerning the vital work of evangelism in local church settings. When this happens, the conversation that ensues will encourage the church to listen more closely to God, empower its members to rightly discern his activity in their midst, and encourage a multitude of unbelievers to take one step closer to an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ.

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ONE STEP CLOSER TO CHRIST

Most Christians admit to needing help when it comes to sharing their faith. We often have the "want to" we just don't have the "how to." With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this book can help equip you to be an effective and faithful witness. Instead of focusing on the techniques of "witnessing" it will challenge you to discern more clearly how God is at work in the midst of your personal situations and those you encounter who have yet to experience deeply the love of Christ.

It is imperative the church take a fresh look at the task of evangelism. This book will help pastors, lay leaders and ordinary Christians to work out their own personal practical ministry of outreach. The most effective evangelism is biblical in basis, dialogical in method, spiritual in dimension, communal in context, and holistic in scope. Readers who apply these principles as outlined in this book will find themselves practicing a lifestyle of evangelism that prayerfully will bring multitudes one step closer to Christ.

.....
"What one needs is not a Ph.D. in Evangelism, but a Ph.D. in the Holy Ghost to be an effective and faithful witness."

Dr. Brian M. Kelly



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