



## **Lecture Outline:**

### **1. TEXT: What Is the Gospel?**

- a. The Gospel of Jesus Christ by D.A. Carson
- b. The Gospel in All Its Forms by Tim Keller
- c. God's Plan of Salvation by Mark Dever
- d. Gospel Definitions compiled by Trevin Wax

### **2. PRETEXT: How Does the Gospel Work?**

- a. The Ministry Paradigm of Jesus by Tim Brister
- b. "All Authority Has Been Given to Me" by Tim Brister
- c. Evangelism According to Jesus by Tim Brister
- d. Evangelism's Must-Have's by R.B. Kuiper
- e. Elemental Evangelism by Tim Brister

### **3. CONTEXT: How/Where Do We Communicate the Gospel?**

- a. Missional Margin by Tim Brister
- b. Evangelism in Every Place by Tim Brister
- c. Network Evangelism by Tim Keller/Tim Brister
- d. Cultivating Community Contacts by Tim Brister
- e. Go Into All the World – Deep and Wide by Tim Brister

### **4. SUBTEXT: How Are We Renewed Through the Gospel? (Prayer, Community & Mission)**

- a. The Gospel Centered Life
- b. Gospel and Prayer (Missional Prayer)
- c. Gospel and Community (Total Church)
- d. Gospel and Mission
- e. Gospel and Renewal

### **5. ENDTEXT: Developing Your Personal Evangelism Strategy**

- a. Plan to read and resource yourself on the gospel and evangelism
- b. Practice journaling your contacts and evangelistic opportunities
- c. Pray specifically and regularly for your unbelieving friends and family
- d. Personal margin and personal hospitality
- e. Pattern of living
- f. Places of evangelism
- g. Ponder anew the promises of God
- h. Preach the gospel to yourself
- i. Proclaim the gospel in word and deed
- j. Passion for God's glory

### **6. Resources and References**

### **7. Responses from others**

## The Authority of Christ: The Foundation to the Mission of God's People

At the heart of Matthew's message is that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the Living God" as professed by Peter—a truth that Jesus said was revealed by God the Father. Matthew's Gospel is the most "Jewish" of all four Gospel accounts, and Matthew begins His letter in chapter 1 to the Jewish lineage of Jesus, proving His historicity, culture, and genealogical background. Matthew wants his readers to know and understand that Jesus is the Messiah, the one of whom the Old Testament prophesies and to whom all should look for salvation and deliverance.

While Matthew's gospel has a Jewish audience, there are numerous instances pointing to the universal nature of the Christian message—by universal I mean for all people, not just Jew but Jew and Gentile alike. Most notable, of course, is the Great Commission. I know that it can be a bad habit to read the end of the book before you read the beginning, but I want us to begin with the end, Matthew 28, verses 18 through. Jesus has been raised from the dead and about to ascend into heaven, and He leaves his followers with these words:

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*" Amen.  
Matthew 28:18-20

In this Great Commission, two things are highlighted: the supremacy of Christ as having all authority and the mission to make disciples of all nations. I believe this sums up in a nutshell the whole book of Matthew. Matthew wants you to see the supreme authority of Christ and His proven nature as the Son of God and Messiah, and Matthew wants you to see the mission and message of Jesus and how it has been entrusted to us.

I want to point out two things here before we go any further:

**(A) The mission is impossible without first knowing and understanding the authority of Christ.** If you glance at verse 18 and gaze at verses 19 and 20, you will be seriously hindered in fulfilling those verses. That's why we have the word **THEREFORE** in the text. The Great Commission hinges on that word, pointing us back the foundational basis on which everything stands: the supreme authority of Christ over all things in heaven and on earth. This is supposed to make a HUGE difference in the way we do mission. Those who stress the mission apart from stressing the authority of Christ not only miss the design of Matthew's gospel, but they also handicap believers and do injustice to the mission given to us by our risen Lord.

**(B) Discipleship is never divorced from mission.** This is plain all throughout the book of Matthew and seen quite clearly here. There are three main verbs in the Great Commission: make disciples, baptize, and teach. The last two are participles that are secondary or serve the cause of the primary action—to make disciples. How are disciples on made? **By going!** Discipleship is never to be done insulated and isolated from the world we are seeking to reach. When Jesus first began his earthly mission, he told them, "**Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men**" (Matthew 4:19). The first phrase is that of **discipleship**—being a learner and

follower of Jesus. The second phrase is that of **mission**—becoming the missionary who seeks to win the lost for the glory of Christ. What God has put together, let no man put asunder. Mission and discipleship are intertwined in such a way that should you try to pull one away from the other, you tear the fabric of the Christian faith with which we've been clothed.

I want to make the case from Matthew's Gospel why these two points are so absolutely important. Let's look first at the authority of Christ in relation to the mission by turning to Matthew chapter 1.

What I would like for you to do is to take Matthew 1 through 11 in three sections. The first section is Matthew 1:1 through 4:11. I call this section "**The Preparation of Jesus.**" The second section then would be from Matthew 4:12-9:35 which I call "**The Ministry of Jesus.**" The third section is Matthew 9:36-11:1 which I call "**The Sending of Jesus.**"

### **The Preparation of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-4:11)**

When you begin the New Testament, you are immediately taken back to the Old Testament, and this has great significance for Jesus. Here's the reason why: it proves his Jewish credentials and connects him throughout redemptive history going all the way back to Abraham. The two greatest figures of the Old Testament—Abraham and David---are found in the first verse of the New Testament speaking of Jesus.

The rest of chapters 1 and 2 speak of the incarnation of Christ, but notice the themes of authority and mission. In 1:21, we see that the angel told Mary, "**you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins**" (Matthew 1:21). Bound up in the name of our Savior is the mission He came to accomplish—to bring salvation to His people through His life and death on the cross. But look also in chapter 2 when the wise men came looking for "the King of the Jews" in order to worship Him. Worship a little child? Yes, if He is the Messiah who was to come!

Chapter three culminates in the baptism of Jesus by John who was preaching repentance and talking about the King and His kingdom coming on earth. But notice what happens here. God the Spirit descends on God the Son while God the Father speaks from heaven, saying, "**This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased**" (Matthew 3:17).

God the Father had a son in whom He was not well pleased, called Israel. God called Israel out from the nations to be "His treasured people," to be his "son" in order that they might bear God's name and be a light to the Gentiles by blessing them with Yahweh's reign. All of this was a mighty failure. Instead of bearing God's name, Scripture tells us they played the whore and went after other Gods. Instead of being a light to the Gentiles, they acted like Gentiles wandering in the wilderness and wishing they had been left in Egypt.

Jesus comes on the scene, and immediately upon His baptism, we hear the Father's approval of His own Son whom He sent into the world—a Son who is perfect in character, faithful to His covenant, and committed to the mission He had received to be a light to the nations. Everywhere where the nation of Israel failed, Jesus fulfilled. He is the one true Son of God!

The final scene in the preparation of Jesus was **His temptation in the wilderness**. Unlike Israel who grumbled in the wilderness and gave into the temptation of unbelief and bitterness, Jesus was proven faithful in the midst of temptation by the devil, overcoming by the Spirit's leading and feeding on the Word of God. In every way, Jesus is shown to be uniquely qualified to fulfill the greatest mission the world has ever known—reconcile sinful rebels to a holy God by substituting Himself in their place, defeating death, and raised to life again.

The great Exodus of old where salvation and deliverance of God's people came about through judgment would be but a picture of the greater Exodus on the cross where sinners find salvation and deliverance through the judgment of sin put upon the Son of God that those who enter through His death might find life and enter the promised land. That's the picture Matthew is painting in the preparation part of Jesus' life and ministry.

### **The Ministry of Jesus (Matthew 4:12-9:35)**

The second section I called "The Ministry of Jesus" begins with 4:12. The themes of supreme authority, mission, and discipleship come out sharply in 4:18-22. Jesus calls some to follow Him. This is a call to discipleship. Jesus promises to make them fishers of men. This is a call to mission. But notice how it all goes down. Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. The call of Jesus came with such force, power, and authority that they left everything they had ever known at that time and found Jesus worthy of it all.

The bookends, or what theologians call an *inclusio*, come in 4:23. The other bookend is 9:35. These verses not only serve as bookends but they are summaries of the ministry of Jesus who taught, preached, and healed. Inside these bookends is scene after scene after scene where Jesus is displaying his supreme authority while on mission. He begins by preaching with authority in 4:17 saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). He then spends the next three chapters teaching, at which point the people were astonished for "He taught as one having authority" (Matthew 7:28). Chapters eight and nine transition from teaching to healing with authority, climaxing in 9:1-8 where Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of Man having authority not only to heal but also forgive sins (Matthew 9:6).

What you see in 4:12-9:35 is a man on a mission demonstrating authority equal only to that of God Himself. And throughout His teaching, preaching, and healing, there are lessons in discipleship—discipleship in the context of mission.

This is important because the third section takes the themes of discipleship and mission to a whole new level, but they don't do it without the authority of Jesus. When Jesus turns to His disciples and passes the baton to them, Matthew 10:1 says Jesus gave them authority and power—His own authority delegated to them to do exactly what He was doing. His mission was to become their mission. The sent one has become the sending one.

### **The Sending of Jesus (Matthew 9:36-11:1)**

Matthew is very careful to place chapters 5-9 before 10. Why is that? Because he wants you to see the authority of Jesus in action. The scenes of Jesus are together to provide a panoramic display of the supreme authority of the Messiah over all things in heaven on earth. Chapters 5-9 in Matthew is what Matthew 28:18 is all about. If you don't see Christ in 5-9, you won't understand what it means to be sent by Christ in chapter 10. Just like 28:18 is essential to

getting a grip on 28:19-20, so Matthew 5-9 is essential to getting a grip on Matthew 10. Matthew wants us to have our eyes so fixed on Christ, so rich in understanding of His supremacy over all things and His sufficiency in all things that we are overwhelmed by His greatness. Only with an overwhelming sense of Jesus' power, authority, passion, and commitment to the mission can we go forth into Matthew 10. Simply put, we should be dominated by Jesus!

So Jesus turns to His disciples and says it's time to lead in the mission. To do this you must **see** what Jesus saw (9:36), **feel** what Jesus felt (9:36), and **pray** the Lord of the harvest. As the disciples are sent out, they are to **go** where Jesus went, **say** what Jesus said, **do** what Jesus did, and **live** the way Jesus lived. That's the point of Matthew 10:1-15. Our text, Matthew 10:16-23 comes to where we must **suffer** the way Jesus suffered. All of this is done in the context of the mission of Jesus, the authority of Jesus, and the costly call to follow Jesus as His disciple.

(Evangelism According to Jesus) – Forthcoming  
(Evangelism's Must-Have's) - Forthcoming

## **Elemental Evangelism**

In light of the apparent interest, I thought I would briefly mention **seven elements of evangelism** that I have comprised my efforts in sharing the gospel with others. There is nothing really profound here, but I do think they would be helpful to think about. I suppose they would run in a logical or sequential order, though these elements often overlap. Here they are:

### **1. Missional/Contextual**

As a Christian, I understand that I bear the responsibility of the Great Commission to go as one who is "sent." This means I must know where I am going (context) and why I am going there (mission). Not only am I called to be a good student and exegete of Scripture, but I am also called to be a good student and exegete of culture as well. This means I must learn the thoughts, beliefs, and worldviews of the world around me. I listen to their lives, learn of their interests, ask questions about matters important to them. With each person, I am taking mental notes and being careful to remember the information I have acquired. The importance of doing this is to know how to clearly and effectively communicate the gospel in that given context.

Being missional means that your evangelism is going to be more than a "plan of salvation" or merely four points and a prayer. It means that you will learn of the struggles of your coworkers, asking permission to pray for them in their situation. It means that you show kindness and generosity in serving them in practical ways that show the love and graciousness of God. Finally it means that you demonstrate that you want to be a more permanent fixture in their lives, not just fly-by Christian here to deliver the goods. We are not here just to deliver the mail but also to help them read it (teaching) and know the person who authored it (God).

## 2. Relational/Personal

In the current milieu, evangelism almost by necessity has to be relational and personal. Effective evangelism occurs when you have cultivated a relationship with that person who no longer considers him a prospect and is no longer suspect of your motives. There should be conversations that are taking place about life, hobbies, news, or whatever that is not necessarily spiritual. The two most meaningful places to build relationships with unbelievers is in your neighborhood and at your workplace. This is because you have natural avenues inherent in your daily life where everyday contact is possible. Let me give you a couple of examples in my own life how this has worked.

The first person God sent me to was Dan. Dan is politically liberal, philosophically minded, and loves photography. Through these three avenues (politics, philosophy, and photography), I was able to become good friends with Dan (even though we disagreed on areas in the political and philosophical end). Within a matter of two months, Dan gave his life to Christ, and I gave my free time to photography. Another person at work I was hoping to reach was my supervisor Tony. Tony is a very outgoing guy who is a fantastic bowler (he does the tournament circuit, has the bag, two balls, the whole works). So I happened to challenge Tony to a game of bowling on Friday afternoon. The result of this challenge was that every Friday afternoon for a month, Tony and I spend the afternoon bowling together which eventually led to an early dinner close by. The last two times we went, three other coworkers tagged along – none of them who know Jesus. During that time, I shared my testimony and the gospel with Tony several times, and though he is not a believer (yet), our friendship has become personal and meaningful.

So what's my point here? I took a personal investment in two people. I found out what their hobbies and passions were. For Dan it was photography, so we spent evenings together in the bitter cold in downtown Louisville with him teaching me how to shoot night shots. For Tony, it was bowling, so we spent Friday afternoons at the bowling lanes where we would end up challenging each other to 3-4 games with a dinner to follow. Here's the deal. At work, my dealings with Tony and Dan were superficially connected because it was work-related. However, when our friendship continued outside work, it became more meaningful, and they became more open to hearing the gospel as opportunities abounded. Furthermore, they got to see me outside work, in everyday life, as a follower of Christ. How much exposure of a Christian up close like this had they had before? Have they ever seen the gospel at work in the life of a Christian? Through the time and investment I made with these two guys, the misconceptions they might have had of a Christian were removed, and I was given numerous opportunities in natural contexts to share Jesus in bowling alleys and downtown Louisville.

As a Christian, when friendships are developed with unbelievers in your world, you will begin to love them in a way you could not had you not dwelt among them, ate with them, and spent meaningful time with them. This love is what should saturate our gospel presentations and also break our hearts for their need of Jesus. I may not be a good photographer or a good bowler, but I do want to be a good lover of lost people. I may not be an outgoing person or charismatic person, but I do want to communicate the gospel with my words *and* with my life.

Some of the questions we must ask ourselves are,

- >> “How well do I know and understand the thoughts, worldviews, and feelings of the unbelievers in my world?”
- >> “To whom is God sending me?”
- >> “Who am I building a relationship with for the sake of the gospel?”
- >> “Am I willing to make the personal investment in their lives, even when it doesn’t seem fruitful?”

### 3. Apologetical

As I begin to build a relationship with unbelievers, I piece together their worldview which is based on presuppositions they hold (whether they realize that or not). I have unbelieving friends who are atheists, agnostics, deists, New Age, Hindu, and Roman Catholic. However, many of the people I talk to have only a nominal understanding to what they believe. The purpose of me being apologetical is not to win an argument with my unbelieving friend; rather, I want to win them to Christ! In order to do that, however, I want to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” ([2 Cor. 10:4-6](#)). My goal is to gently but convincingly deconstruct their worldview and expose their presuppositions as dangerously false and perilous. Lest we forget, we are in a spiritual war where our enemy uses the schemes of this world and his lies to “blind the minds of unbelievers” (2 Cor. 4:4). In this war for their souls, the mind plays an integral part, and I make it my goal to present biblical arguments to dismantle their presuppositions (control beliefs) so that they no longer control their thinking anymore.

I should mention here that being merely apologetical is not evangelism, as Mark Dever is correct to assert in his new book, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*. However, apologetics plays an important, preparatory role in getting to the gospel message. If we neglect or minimize this part of exposing the folly or error of their beliefs, there is a real possibility that they will syncretize the Christian message to their beliefs and will continue to be a barrier to understanding the gospel.

### 4. Doctrinal/Biblical

After deconstruction comes *reconstruction*. We must lay a foundation based on the biblical narrative of God, creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. This metanarrative, or big story which explains all other stories, replaces the old understanding of life, man, God, salvation, etc. This is why biblical theology (the discipline) is so important. Don’t get me wrong. I am a big fan of systematic theology, but systematic theology builds on biblical theology. For instance, I cannot talk about sin, depravity, and eternal punishment for sin unless I first talk about God (character), creation, and the Fall. We are living in a day where the categories of sin and justice are no longer in the post-Christian mind. Focusing on the biblical narrative and God’s work in redemptive history creates a framework and re-establishes the categories that have become diminished or discarded through postmodern influences. The error in so many gospel presentations or plans of salvation comes when they fail because *they have the wrong starting point*. We cannot begin with John 3:16 but rather must start with Genesis 1:1. We cannot jump into a discussion about theological truths without establishing a grid through which they are to

rightly understand them. Therefore, the reconstruction entails not only the substance of their thinking but the structure of it as well.

I am also a big fan of teaching and explaining doctrines in my evangelism, and there is considerable biblical warrant for stressing doctrine in our evangelistic practices. Take for instance the parable of the soils. Of the four soils where the seed was planted, only one brought forth lasting fruit. What was the difference? Jesus explained, “As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it” ([Matt. 13:23](#)). All four heard the word, but only one *understood* it. So what is the goal of the evangelist if you want to be fruitful? It is to so present the gospel that unbelievers understand who God is, why they are guilty and condemned through sin, what God has done for them in Christ, and how they are to be saved. Last year, there was a coworker who I had shared the gospel with almost a dozen times. The week before she received Jesus, I spend an hour Wednesday night before work explaining the doctrine of justification by faith and why good works could never save her (she came from a Roman Catholic background). Thursday night I spent an hour talking about regeneration and how the Holy Spirit works to convict us of sin, draw us to Christ, and give us new life. On Friday night, I spent another hour explaining to her what biblical repentance and saving faith is and why this responsibility of turning from sin and turning to God was her responsibility. Sunday night after church, my wife and I took her out for dinner where we talked about the great exchange and the substitutionary atonement of Christ. The next day she came to Christ.

I recognize that the opening of their eyes is solely the work of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit. However, God has ordained a means and instrumentality through the proclamation and impartation of God’s truth revealed in Scripture. The glorious gospel is so rich, enlivening, powerful, and experimental (to use the old Puritan vernacular) that we cannot begin to plunge its depths. Investing our times and energies in understanding the gospel and the doctrines therein becomes a fountain that overflows with joy inexpressible and full of glory. I am reminded of what Tom Wells says in his book on missions: those who know God best are most equipped and responsible to speak well of him (my paraphrase). The greater we know God and his gospel, the more equipped we are to share Jesus with others and the more responsible we are as well.

## 5. Confrontational

Saving faith has historically been understood to carry three aspects: *notitia* (knowledge), *assensus* (assent), and *fiducia* (trust). What doctrinal evangelism through a biblical theological approach does is provide a healthy and rich dose of gospel truths to the minds of unbelievers. Two things I should mention here. There is no such thing as blind faith. God has given us a revelation that is both personal and propositional. Sinners put their faith into the truths they understand, the God who is real and has disclosed Himself to them (revelation) through Scripture (the written Word) and Jesus Christ (Living Word). Secondly, faith is not merely the intellectual acquisition (knowledge) or even agreement of the truths (assent); rather, saving faith is an attitude of dependence and act of trust where we appropriate the truths we have come to understand and agree. Simply put, we make them our own.

It is here where I call my unbelieving friends to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. I remind them that they are no better off for simply having heard the good news of Jesus Christ. It must become good news *for them*. The question Jesus asked in his day, “Who do you say that I am?” is a question everyone must come to terms with, for God is calling all men everywhere to

repent. There were many who followed Jesus for the miracles he could offer or the amazing sermons he could deliver, but only few counted the cost to take up their cross and follow Jesus. This accounting is nothing short of declaring “Jesus is Lord” and experiencing that truth in our hearts and lives. It is an emphatic “YES” to everything that God is for us in His Son Jesus Christ.

## 6. Pastoral

The Puritans often called the work of a minister as a “physician of the soul.” When dealing with a sinner under conviction who has been confronted with their need to trust in Jesus, knowing how to address an illumined mind, wounded conscience, and broken heart is crucial. I want to press the law to expose their need for alien righteousness (that is, from Christ) and appeal to the promises of the gospel that Jesus will not cast out any that will come to Him. Knowing that the Shepherd will call out His sheep, my goal is to put as much Scripture before them as possible, confident that, as they hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, those who are called will follow.

One of the most difficult challenges I see at the point of decision is to not manipulate a sinner or try to force a decision by praying a prayer or any other superficial means. It is tempting to deal lightly with sinners by providing them a false sense of security, that after a prayer or whatever, we quickly say “Welcome to the family of God!” The fact is, I don’t know whether at that moment true conversion had taken place, for only God knows their hearts. If the Spirit has regenerated a sinner to new life where they in turn trust Jesus and turn from their sin, the fruit of that will become evident, but it is not my place to make any priestly pronouncement or appease their consciences. No one would trust a physician who treats cancer patients with Scooby-Doo bandaids. The truth is that the soul of my friend is before me, and the way I handle the gospel and counsel them pastorally has eternal significance.

Lastly, I understand that when a person who I shared the gospel with becomes a Christian, I am personally responsible to help them grow in Christ. Conversion isn’t the end but the beginning. These friends who have watched me live, pray, read my Bible, and witness with others will come alongside me and will do it together. Paul had much to say about being spiritual fathers and mothers to new Christians who are infants in Christ. We cannot expect new Christians to be as mature or sanctified as those who have walked with Christ for years. Therefore, being pastoral in leading them to Christ as well as caring for their spiritual growth should be the natural implications of evangelism and desire of our hearts. To the Thessalonians, Paul stated that he desired to share not only the gospel of God but also his entire life because they had become so dear to him (1 Thess. 2:8). To the Philippians, he speaks how he longs for them with the affection of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:8). To the Galatians, he said that he was who was spiritual in labor until Christ was formed in them (Gal. 4:19). To the Corinthians, he stated that he became a father to them through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). Here is a man, an evangelist who understood that evangelism means much more than making converts. It means making disciples—a task that will require giving our lives for years to come. It is a task where the gospel is central in constant in our conversations in winning them to Christ and also in seeing them grow in Christ. Indeed, the need to be confrontational and pastoral is at the heart of the Great Commission.

## 7. Doxological

The question I must ask myself is, “*Why* do you evangelize?” I can remember a point in my life where I was determined to lead “x” number of people to Christ each year. I was passionate about evangelism, but the beginning and end was always about *me*. It was not long afterwards that I realized that an overwhelming number of those who had “accepted Christ” did not join the church, follow in believer’s baptism, or grow in grace. It was great to report back to the church on those who had prayed the sinner’s prayer, but those celebrations were short-lived as I realized I was making converts who had not really been converted as a follower of Christ. Many of them would at best look back at that time and find that their guilty conscience was appeased and their minds were assured that they would go to heaven when they die with little reference to Jesus Christ.

The way I evangelized began to quickly change as I came to understand that we were created to display God’s glory and worship him with our lives. Evangelism wasn’t simply to help people get to heaven when they die; rather, it was to help them understand that the one life they have to live is to be spent in treasuring the infinite worth of knowing Jesus Christ. We define sin in our evangelistic presentations as sinners “falling short of the glory of God.” That rolls off our lips and seldom do we consider the significance of that statement. Sinners in rebellion against God have made much of sin. They have glorified it with their lives. To fall short of the glory of God is to fail to make much of Christ and glorify him with our lives. Romans 1-3 reveals that this falling short includes all men—Jews and Gentiles alike—who need their lives changed by life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. After another eight chapters of explaining the gospel of justification and new life in Christ, Paul sums up Romans 1-11 by saying,

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!  
 “For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
 or who has been his counselor?”  
 “Or who has given a gift to him  
 that he might be repaid?”  
 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Evangelism that is doxological recognizes that salvation is all of God. The plan of salvation (predestination) of sinners is “*from Him*.” The accomplishment of salvation (atonement) is “*through Him*.” And the goal of salvation is “*to Him*” – that is, to His glory. Therefore, it is my motivation in evangelism that God would be glorified in the advance of the gospel in the lives of unbelievers. It is my evangelistic ambition that sinners who have glorified sin and made much of this world would glorify Jesus and make Him their Treasure. This evangelistic vision is to see that sinners embrace Jesus as *better* than what life can offer *now* and what death can take later.

So practically, how does this affect my evangelism? It means that the goal of the gospel is not simply that one would go to heaven when they die while their entire life is devoid of worship and the glory due His name. No. This cannot be, because God *is* the gospel. The good news is not a free ticket to heaven or walking streets of gold. The good news is Jesus Christ. Therefore, everything I do in presenting the gospel is presenting the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all of his excellencies, promises, offices, and work. I tell sinners that becoming a Christian is a believing in Jesus that rivets our affections, transforms our thoughts, and reorients our lives so that we

display the greatness of Jesus Christ in a world that tries to make him look so small and insignificant. The gospel is inherently doxological because God has shown in our hearts “the light of the knowledge of *the glory of God* in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Peter tells us that we have been saved so that we may *proclaim* the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). So evangelism is a proclamation *of* God grounded in praise *to* God. If worship doesn’t fuel my passion to evangelize, then nothing will. Yet, worship is not only the source of inspiration of evangelism, but it is also the goal of evangelism as John Piper so astutely puts it.

In summary, evangelism is a glorious privilege and task that is nothing short of bringing worshipers before the throne of Jesus who purchased them with his blood. The gospel is radically God-centered, and so is evangelism. It is not about us, as though we could make a name for ourselves by bringing people into the kingdom. It is not about them, as though God was incomplete without them. No. Evangelism and the gospel with which we have been entrusted carries the weight of glory that burdens our hearts for the lost and for a thousand tongues to sing praises to our God and King. I cannot speak and sing enough about Jesus. But with this tongue, I can spread the gospel to others with a passion that they join me in exulting in our Savior with one voice comprised of many tongues that are preoccupied with the worship and fame of His name.

## **Missional Margin**

Twenty years ago, Bill Hybels wrote a book entitled [\*Too Busy Not To Pray: Slowing Down to Be with God\*](#). Over one million copies of this book has been sold to a bustling people reminding them that they needed to cultivate a prayer life by slowing down to spend time with God (ironically, they apparently had enough time to read his book!). Hybels’ book is a part of a growing corpus of literature challenging Christians to develop a more spiritually disciplined life, and for that, we should all be grateful. Certainly we could all be more disciplined to pray and slow down to spend more time with God.

During this summer, I have been teaching on what I have called “everyday evangelism.” At the beginning of the summer, I addressed the reasons why we do not evangelize. Along with fear of rejection, perhaps the greatest reason why we do not evangelize as we should is simply because we are too busy. Hybels recognized twenty years ago that we needed to slow down to be with God, and I am recognizing today that we need to slow down to be with the lost.

While staying at a hotel earlier this year, I took a long look at this door hanger. The more I looked at it, the more I realized it was something that could not only be found on the front door of my room, but as a billboard to my life. “**Please do not disturb.**” No thank you. I don’t want to be bothered by you. Has anyone informed you that it’s my life? I have got things to do, places to go, more important people to meet (people like me). You are an interruption not welcomed, a nuisance to my already overly stressed schedule. Please just leave me alone and stay out of the way.

I know that sounds harsh and a bit overdone, but you get my point. For the most part, this commentary could be said of our lives. This door hanger could be hung around our necks. The more important we think we are, the less time we will have for people, especially people who are not like us. The busier we become, the less we think of the lives, hurts, and needs of people



around us—you know, the people we glance at and then look the other way. Whether intentional or accidental, the agenda of our lives is dictated by matters of urgency and prioritized by things most important to us. The result is that little if anything is left over. After all is said and done, we simply hang up the sign that says, “Please do not disturb.”

I believe it is our desire to be “Great Commission Christians.” We want to be on mission for God. We want to see sinners saved. But let’s face it: if we are going to be more involved in the mission of God, if we are going to participate in the work of evangelism, then some things will have to change. Those of us who are too busy not to evangelize need to throw away our door hangers and put up the open and welcome sign. We need to practice personal hospitality which says to a broken world, **“You’re welcome here. Please come and sit a while.”** The first step for us is to repent of our me-centeredness and get on board with God’s program so that it governs our lives. Is this not what [“seek first the kingdom of God”](#) is about? The kingdom of God should be top priority in our lives, period.

There was a time when Jesus was asked about what loving God and loving your neighbor looked like. Jesus responded by [telling a story of three men](#) who encountered a beaten, hurting man on the street. Two of them were deeply committed religious leaders. They thought of themselves really important. They, religiously speaking, had it going on—the position, the prestige, the spiritual performances, etc. But both these men, having seen the hurting man, intentionally took a detour to avoid such an encounter. It was below them to stoop down. It was beyond them to change their plans. But the story transitions to the third figure. A half-breed Samaritan, despised, rejected, and ignored by most in the upstanding Jewish culture. As the most unlikely and religiously unqualified person of the three, you would think that he would have no part in this hurting man either. *But* he had one thing the other two didn’t have—compassion. He had a heart that was open. He had time to give. He had a life that welcomed broken people. As a result,

he did what these two other men did not and could not do. He showed mercy and loved his neighbor.

Jesus tells us to go and do likewise, but how many times do we find ourselves like the priest and Levite looking for a detour because we have determined other things to be more important? Indeed, we miss out on the mission of God because our mission (or minutia) takes precedence. We don’t love our neighbor because we don’t welcome them. It is *disturbing* to us. And we don’t welcome them because we are simply too busy.

In the following post, I will address this a little more, in particular what I am calling missional margin. Jesus had it. Paul had it. And so should we.



Missional margin is all about creating white space in the life of a 21st century Christian who has more than enough distractions to [anesthetize](#) him from the call to be actively on mission with God. Is it any wonder, then, that Paul would admonish Timothy as a good soldier not to “entangle himself in the affairs of everyday life” in order to please his commanding officer ([2 Tim. 2:4](#))? But what do you mean Paul?

I think what Paul means is that we must tune ourselves out from our own agendas and tune into the mission of God. It is setting parameters for seeking first the kingdom of God in a way that it becomes more than a byline or theoretical assertion. It means paying careful attention to the way we live our lives, not allowing ourselves to dance around the mission but dive right into the heart of it. I am reminded of what Robert Coleman once said about Jesus. “There was nothing haphazard about his life—no wasted energy, not an idle word. He was on business for God” (*The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 24). His business was to accomplish the mission for which He was sent.

In the same manner Jesus was sent into the world, so are we. Jesus was tuned into the mission the Father had given Him and committed Himself to the accomplishing it with those final words, “It is finished.” There will come a time when there will be no more races to win, no more battles to fight, no more need to keep the faith, and were it possible to look back, my fear is that our biggest regret would be having not participated more in the mission of God, to feel the weight of the words, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

So how can I cultivate missional margin in everyday life? How can I remove the “please do not disturb” sign with one that says, “you are welcome here”? How can I practice personal hospitality which embraces hurting humanity rather than writes them off? Allow me to offer a few suggestions, and perhaps you could share some yourself.

## 1. Unplug

When you are around other people, take out your headphones, turn off your iPod, and reserve phone calls when you are alone. Tuning out the world around you takes whatever margin in your life and makes it about “me.” Friends, don’t waste that margin!

## **2. Listen**

So many of us have no idea what is going on in the lives of a coworker, friend, or complete stranger we happen to bump into. Around every corner could be someone struggling with hurt, pain, loss, and most importantly life separated from God. How will you know unless you first listen? How will they know you care unless you actively, intentionally choose to make them a priority?

## **3. Love**

By this, I mean compassion tangibly felt. When the heart of Christ ached, He did something. One of the excuses I gave to people who needed or asked for financial assistance was that I never had any cash on hand. I did this intentionally. Now, I make it my goal to carry \$20 cash (in 5s and 1s) that I call “margin money” to be used to bless others. The same could be said for time.

## **4. Pray**

Prayer can become mechanical and reserved, rather than spontaneous and continual. What missional margin does is challenge you to think and pray specifically for specific people you encounter. Cultivate a prayer pattern that coincides with a missional pattern, so that people and places are considered not centers of goods and services, but outposts for the kingdom of God.

## **5. Arrive Early, Stay Late**

If you are the last to arrive and the first to leave, how are you going to be available to minister to anyone? How can you seek the advance of the kingdom in the hearts of men when you are seeking first the door with an exit sign? If it is work, school, church or wherever you might be engaging people, be the first to arrive and the last to leave. Those times of margin before and after “scheduled” times are often the greatest opportunities to sow gospel seed and cultivate relationships.

In our culture today, we have neighborhoods that are gated communities with fenced-in yards full of strangers (with gated lives). Our conversations are reduced to text messages and “pokes.” We are a community that no longer communes. We are a society with a mediated social life (computers, phones, etc.). We want “MySpace” that brings a life without friction and full of ready-made fun.

In such a context, the goal behind all this is to pay attention to God’s heart for people and place ourselves where we can best participate in the mission God has given us. If we could build more margin in our lives and so use it to regularly and routinely tap into and find traction for the mission, then I believe there would be more signposts that point to the open arms of our dying Savior.

The last commentary on the early church and Paul's ministry was:

“He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and **welcomed all who came to him**, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:30-31).

May we welcome all who come to us, proclaiming the kingdom and teaching them about Jesus!

## **Evangelism In Every Place**

### **What Is a “Third Place”?**

As I understand it, Ray Oldenberg developed the idea of “third places” in his book [The Great Good Place](#). Third places are places or environments where people in the community interact with one another outside the first and second places. The first place is that of the home, and the second place is that of a person's workplace. [Oldenberg explains](#) that “third places” are “anchors” of community life and facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction. All societies already have informal meeting places; what is new in modern times is the intentionality of seeking them out as vital to current societal needs. . . . These hallmarks of a true “third place”: free or inexpensive; food and drink, while not essential, are important; highly accessible: proximate for many (walking distance); involve regulars – those who habitually congregate there; welcoming and comfortable; both new friends and old should be found there.

Popular “third places” include coffee shops (such as Starbucks), malls, city parks, exercise facilities, restaurants/pubs, and venues for the arts/entertainment. Personally speaking, Panera Bread has become my dominant “third place” as I spend approximately 15-20 hours of my work week there.

### **Generational Gap and Places**

While recognizing the danger of generalization, I think it is fair to say that the older generation has focused their evangelistic efforts around first places (homes) and the church as their third place. First-place evangelism was seen as going door-to-door and perhaps scheduled through a weekly visitation schedule through the church. The dominant third-place was the church, which came to be in part as a negative withdrawal from a culture increasingly becoming post-Christian and godless. Therefore, churches began developing their own “family life centers”—some of them including their own bowling alleys, playgrounds, and “movie nights.” The point was to make the church the culture center for the family (especially the kids) and therefore disconnect them (“come out from among them and be ye separate”) from the pagan world around them.

The younger generation of evangelicals is finding first-place evangelism, especially door-to-door evangelism untenable and even reprehensible. They haven't entirely given up on first-place for evangelism, though they rarely talk about it. Rather, third places have become the leading evangelistic narrative as living “missional” has challenged people to get out of the Christian subculture/bubble and get back into the community through thinking and living redemptively in these third places. The appeal for third places is a desire to engage the culture rather than merely have a culture warrior stance and live more incarnationally instead of a “drive-by” sort of

evangelism. Also, many third spaces are culture making venues, seeking to redeem the arts, music, and fostering interactive discussion on contemporary issues within a biblical worldview.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

There are strengths and weaknesses in every place, including second place which I have not mentioned. Door-to-door evangelism in first-places is more confrontational and less relational, while third place evangelism is more conversational and more relational. In first places, the gospel is usually brought up rather quickly; in third spaces, not so much. In fact, the danger with third places is that you can become so familiar, so regular, so normal with unbelievers that the urgency and priority of speak the gospel becomes blunted by the routine you hoped would have you “dining with tax collector and sinners.” On the other hand, you can present the gospel immediately with a neighbor in their home through first places and yet not have follow-through because of the absence of a relationship and sense of trust. Furthermore, people can feel uncomfortable with a sense of invasion of their privacy and results in further alienation.

The weakness in second place is finding ways to uphold the Christian work ethic while taking advantage of opportunities to represent Christ in word and deed to fellow co-workers. I believe that one of the most needed discussion is how to employ believers in both worlds (this world and God’s kingdom) with skill and faithfulness. For a paradigm of evangelism in the “second place,” check out my [working paradigm for missional work](#).

### **Evangelism in Every “Place”**

Every believer should have an evangelism strategy or plan for personally carrying out the Great Commission. Good stewardship of the gospel means that we must see how we can “do the work of an evangelist” in every “place” of our lives. We should be competent and opportunistic in every place because “becoming all things to all men” means you will be meeting all kinds of men and women, especially those not like you. If your evangelism is limited to the refined sinners who are within arm’s reach of church building, you will reach a very small number of people and neglect the thrust of the Great Commission. We must go into all the world, that means depth and not just breadth.

While the traditional mode of evangelizing in the first place has been “door-to-door evangelism,” there are certainly other ways to utilize your home as a mission outpost for the kingdom. For instance, you can regularly schedule hospitality evenings for neighbors and invite them into your homes. You can also host a community group on a regular basis that is not primarily focused on a study but on living out the gospel among unbelievers. You can host neighborhood block parties or activities for your neighbors (in my case, I have two buses who stop in front of my house). Finally, you can greet the mailman, garbage collectors, UPS dude, or anyone else and leave with them information about the gospel.

Before you skip to third places, do not forget about second places, because the average person spends more time at work than anywhere else during the week. If you have not considered your workplace as a mission outpost, then you are “off duty” for the greater portion of your week and tuning out of the mission among the people who have the most access to (outside your family).

Finally, discover the third places in your city/community. They aren't the same everywhere. Stay at home mom's will go to the library or Chick-fil-a. College students will likely go to Starbucks or their college campus. Young professionals can be found at Panera Bread or exercise facilities. Families with little kids can be found at the neighborhood park or at the sporting complex. Teenagers at the mall or movie theater. You get the idea. Volunteer at a school. Coach a sports team. Take your office mobile and go to Panera or Starbucks. Take your family regularly to the park. Do these things so that you can show the love of Jesus and have the opportunity to lead them to the cross.

These are just some suggestions I encourage you to consider. A good question to ask ourselves is in what way are we using every place to communicate Christ to a world without Him? Make every place count for the fame of Jesus.

## **Evangelism Through Networking**

17 years ago, Tim Keller [wrote about a form of evangelism](#) that effectively engaged “an increasingly privatized, secular society.” Those of you who know [the recent discussion](#) about door-to-door evangelism and disagree with its use will agree with Keller's assessment and method. Keller intends to explain how evangelism through networking is intended to create “a whole philosophy of ministry based on friendship evangelism.”

Predominant evangelistic methods have changed over the last century, as Keller observes how the 1930's-1960's = crusade evangelism, 1960's-1990's = visitation evangelism, and 1990's-present = network evangelism. Visitation evangelism, [as I explained in my last article](#), focuses on first places and practiced by the older, more traditional evangelicals while network evangelism focuses on third places and is practiced by many in the younger, more missional generation. Keller argues that “the more modern, the more secular, the more urbanized, and the newer cities and communities, the more these traditional programs do not seem to bear fruit.”

Let me make an observation here about the SBC—the context in which I serve. Most Southern Baptist churches are in the South and in rural/suburban areas where visitation evangelism is still the leading method. Visitation programs and outreach strategies such as F.A.I.T.H. appeal to a graying denomination in rural America where the front porch is about as “third place” as it gets. On the other hand, the new urban church planting movement in more secular cities recognize the unlikely profitability of methods of the 1960's and instead are networking through relationships in third places. The former is crisis-driven, and the latter is process-driven; the former calls for decision; the latter calls for investment. Therefore, the difference in methodology is *generational* (1960's vs. 2000's), *geographical* (first vs. third), *philosophical* (visitation vs. network), and *practical* (crisis vs. process).

The four basic networks Keller brings out are (1) familial, (2) geographical (neighborhoods), (3) vocational (career/school associates), and (4) relational (friends not necessarily in the other networks). I find these categories helpful because it coincides with developing an evangelistic plan or strategy in the same way of using all there places. For instance, *first place evangelism* would include the familial and geographical networks (you could host neighborhood evangelistic studies or community groups in your home), *second place evangelism* coincides with vocational (work or school), and *third place evangelism* would be relational.

In a network-focused church, Keller says that “you will either be a seeker, a bringer, or a cell leader (follow-up) . . . or you are dead weight!” Unbelievers (seekers) are welcomed because every believer is expected to not only befriend them but bring them. Cell leaders are more mature believers who can assist the bringers in answering questions and assimilating them as they come to faith in Jesus. According to his network philosophy, Keller points out that there is an expectation “that the non-Christian will be exposed to the gospel at least several times on the way to commitment” and that “there are lots of opportunities for the seeker to list his/her questions and concerns, and for those issues to be addressed honestly.”

When I examine my evangelistic methods, I have to say that network evangelism and third places have been the majority practice, although I still do (unprogrammed) visitation evangelism on occasion. In network evangelism, not one relationship is to go untouched by the gospel, and therefore there is never a moment where we are not conscious of both our need for the gospel ourselves and the urgency to share it with others. This morning when I picked up my breakfast at Chick-fil-a with Camille and now talk with Audrey, Tom, and Alyssa at Panera, I am working to show the love of Christ, replace my agenda with seeking first the kingdom of God, and open my far-too-silent mouth to tell of the infinite value of knowing Jesus. Life is too short and Jesus is too glorious to leverage each moment with each person I meet for the advancement of the gospel in their heart and mine. God knows we need it. I just hope I show it.

## **Missional Work**

### **1. Work of the Mind – Exegeting Culture**

Wherever you work, there is a culture to exegete (interpret and understand). There are worldviews, values, patterns of life, and beliefs that constitute the personhood of unbelievers you work with. Exegeting culture is hard work; it takes time and a willingness to listen and learn from others as a student and inquirer. Whether they are young or old, city or rural, black or white—people need to be understood. They might be nominally Catholic, devoutly atheistic, confusedly new age or syncretistic, or they might have no readily presentable religious construct. Why is all this important in the workplace? Because we are presenting a Christian message and worldview that is antithetical to the post-Christian, post-modern world in which we live, and we cannot naively assume that four spiritual laws or five points will effectively communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we are going to be prepared to give an account for the hope that is within us, then we must have our minds always at work.

So as I work, I take notes—literally. With each co-worker, for instance, I would have a separate page in my notebook where I would write down things we talked about, new information I gleaned, beliefs that rose to the surface, and other stuff such as friends, music, and relevant factors. This is incredibly helpful as I will end up remembering stuff they said in the past and use as a topic for future conversation and transitioning into the gospel.

### **2. Work of the Heart – Prayerful Participation**

I regard prayerful participation the work of the heart for two reasons: God gives us a heart for the lost when we pray, and second, prayer opens us up to see how God is working and makes us sensitive to opportunities that come our way. I can say with almost certainly that those who

are not praying for unbelievers have never wept for unbelievers. Their heart is just not in it. They also are not open to what God is doing in their world.

There are times when at work you will not have opportunity to be a student and do cultural exegesis. The times when you are busy or by yourself is an excellent time to pray to God while at work. Don't give away those moments to listening to gossip or entertaining trivial thoughts! Participate in the heavenly work of praying and interceding for those who need Jesus as God has promised to bless the means of prayer in bringing sinners to repentance and faith.

### **3. Work of the Hands – Service to Others**

Perhaps this is the most common or practical work; and yet, I often hear of Christians doing shoddy work when it comes to the work of their hands. A lazy, slothful, and undisciplined Christian worker does considerable harm to the cause of Christ—more harm than we sometimes realize. The work of the hands often opens the door for the work of the lips, while the lack of service to others never lends you the right to be heard.

I am not merely talking about doing your job well and working diligently; rather, I am talking about working well to the point that you can not only do your job with excellence but also allow opportunity to work for others above and beyond what is expected of you. Where I work at UPS, these folks are called “internal customers.” When I do my job well and seek to help others when I have opportunity, I am serving my fellow coworker and letting them know that I care about them and want to help shoulder the burden of their work. The result is that they come to know that I care about them and desire to step in and serve them with the work of my hands.

### **4. Work of the Lips – Gospel Proclamation**

The work of the lips in gospel proclamation is last for a reason. It is very hard to be effective here if you are not faithful in the first three mentioned above. In fact, I doubt that there would be much “work” available in this regard if the work above goes unattended and unaccounted for. And yet this is the most important part of our work, because this is where the life-changing power of the gospel goes forth. It is God's intention that we share the message of Jesus Christ at work, but we cannot do that in an irresponsible and immature manner. In fact, I have come to learn that if you are respected and appreciated the work of your hands, your employer will have less of an issue with the work of your lips, even if they do not agree with the message you are sharing.

The greatest joys I have ever had, and the greatest times of heartache have come through sharing the gospel at work. I have seen co-workers saved, disciplined, and growing in their faith, and I have also seen sinners trample over the glorious message of Jesus Christ as though it was junk mail. Scripture calls us ambassadors for Christ whereby God is passionately making his appeal for reconciliation to hell-deserving sinners through our lives and our messages. As such, our mission (work) is to represent God faithfully by declaring boldly and yet humbling, truthfully and yet gracefully the good news that He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

## Conclusion

So that's my working paradigm for missional work. Let me make some final thoughts. There will be times or days where you will be able to do all four areas of work, but that is not often. Rather, one day you will find yourself given more to the work of the mind in cultural exegesis as you are surrounded by other coworkers; other days, you will be given considerable time alone where you can do the work of the heart in prayerful participation; hopefully, there will be days where you will have opportunity to do the work of the lips in gospel proclamation. But we are to do all four of them and do them well. Do you see the difference between simply showing up for work, doing what is minimally expected of you, collecting a paycheck, and going home—as compared to what I have mentioned above? That is the difference between *work* and *missional work*. The former is meaningless; the latter is missional; the former is wasted; the latter is worshipful; the former is ritualistic; the latter is redemptive; the former is self-centered; the latter is God-centered and others-directed.

This isn't easy work. I am not a perfect model of it in action. But it is something I have put together over the past four years as a way of helping me seek to make a difference and seek first the kingdom of God at work. I just imagined that if I were to spend so many hours in one place with so many people, then certainly God could do something with me. I pray God does great things with all of us at work as we seek to participate in His mission of bringing worshipers to the throne of King Jesus!

## Cultivating Community Contacts

### *Concentric Circles of Influence*

Beginning with our most intimate circles of influence, we start with our **immediate and extended family**. Whether we realize it or not, we bear the greatest influence over those who are closest in our lives, and there are none closer to us than those in our families. Are there any unbelievers among your siblings, cousins, aunts or uncles? While family members are often the hardest to win a hearing for the sake of the gospel, they have the most exposure to our lives, and we who are debtors to grace should pray and work to find avenues to extend that grace to our family members who need Jesus.

Secondly, cultivate community contacts with **friends and regular acquaintances**. It has been said that after two years of becoming a Christian, a new believer will have lost all contact with their unbelieving friends. This should not be so! Take inventory of the friends in your life. Are there any who do not know Jesus? If not, what are some ways to develop friendships with unbelievers? Being on mission with God means that we will not only experience true community among the fellowship of the redeemed, but we will also enjoy meaningful relationships with unbelievers as we seek to demonstrate the love of God and communicate the truths of the gospel to them.

Thirdly, perhaps outside the home, the place where you spend the most time during the week is your **workplace**. It should be natural (and obvious!) that the workplace is a great arena to develop community contacts. You work alongside them, go on breaks with them, perhaps even carpool with some of them. You talk about life, sports, news, and everything important to them. There is an ongoing, perpetual, and inherent relationship by virtue of your occupation and

location, and you will likely spend more time rubbing shoulders with them than anyone else outside your family. It makes sense, then, to think redemptively about your workplace and how your job can be viewed as a mission outpost for the kingdom of God. Do them good through hard work and serve, and give them good news through sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Fourthly, there are places in your city where you encounter **various people on a regular basis**. Have you ever paid attention to the mailman, sanitation workers, or package delivery people who come by your house on a weekly (if not daily) basis? What about the cashier at the gas station, the teller at the local branch of your bank, or the server at your favorite restaurant? Develop a missional pattern by going to the same places for gas, groceries, and eating out and learn the names and faces of those who work there. Start conversations with them and build an ongoing rapport with them. Over time, you will find there to be many opportunities to cultivate a relationship with them that otherwise would not have been possible without intentionally patterning your life around the mission.

Lastly, there are **people you will see and meet randomly**. For instance, if your child plays a sport, you will likely be sitting on a bleacher close to someone who needs Jesus. There are hobbies you have, sports you play, and other recreational avenues you enjoy that all can play a part in cultivating community contacts. See them not only as a means to relax and enjoy life but also as a springboard to help others come to enjoy God forever with abundant life in Jesus Christ!

It is my hope that we will lay hold of the many opportunities before us each day so that as the aroma of Christ, [God might spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere](#) (2 Cor. 2:14)!

### *Missional Patterns*

This week in cultivating community contacts, I want to encourage you in what I call missional patterns. Being on mission for God inherently means that there should be nothing done in life that is random and haphazard. This includes the relationships we enjoy, the places in the community where we benefit from the goods and service of others, and also the regular day-to-day activities that come from other mediums of connecting, such as school, sports, and hobbies.

Cultivating a missional pattern simply means that you seek to develop an ongoing, perpetual movement in the city to connect with and bring the gospel to. For instance, if there is a place where you like to get gas, go to that gas station every time. Learn the names of those behind the counter. Not only go to the same gas station, but try to go on the hours where the same workers are present. The same goes for a favorite restaurant. Go regularly, find a particular server whom you've been able to converse with, and make it a part of your regular routine. There are numerous ways and places where one can develop a missional pattern in the city to maximize your interaction with unbelievers an intentional and incarnational way of life.

The purpose of these missional patterns is to develop community contacts and bring them to the next level. People will be less inclined to listen to the gospel and receive a invitation to church if you are not investing your life in them, and while your investments may be small at any particular moment, over time the repeated investments will communicate to your unbelieving friends that you desire their good.

Do you have a missional pattern in your life? Or are you maximizing your daily schedule for the cause of the Great Commission? As stewards of the gospel and entrusted with the mission, we are to live out our days not for ourselves but for the one who lived and died on our behalf. In the same manner that He was sent by the Father into the world, so are we sent to our world today. This means that we are to be conscious of the “sent” nature of ordinary days in order for extraordinary moments where we can display the glories of Christ to sinners who have yet to make much of Him.

### *Missional Moleskine*

Today I want to simply follow up on that with the encouragement to employ means of gathering and organizing information regarding your labors in the mission. Let me begin by offering my own attempt at doing this.

[Moleskine](#) is a company that (in my humble opinion) makes the best journals in the world, and they have a set of journals called “[cahier moleskines](#)” which are perfect to take with you for recording events and information pertaining to the details of the mission. You can [buy a 3-pack of these journals](#) for only \$7.00 and will serve you greatly in recording information you will want to use in praying, sharing, and using in the future.

In my “missional moleskine,” I record any and all information available after the encounter. Some of the information include:

- \* Name (first and last name if possible)
- \* Where I met this person
- \* When I met this person (including exact time)
- \* What the person was doing (at work, in line at store, sitting at park, etc.)
- \* Particular info that would help me remember them in the future
- \* Particular info from the conversation about their life, worldview, past history, etc.
- \* Particular info for prospective next encounter (work days/hours, schedule, routine, etc.)

Once I have gathered this information, I leave room in my journal for future encounters. For example, if I cultivate a relationship with a server at a restaurant, I will schedule my eating around their work schedule and attempt to connect with them on a regular basis, building on the previous encounters and conversations. Each successive encounter would be dated and filled out, creating a chain of commentary hopefully leading to progress in loving them and leading them to Jesus. The end result is to chronicle the movement around the mission as we cultivate relationships with unbelievers and seek to sow the good seed of the gospel in their lives as a faithful witness and relentless commitment to advancing the cause of Christ. Other benefits include specifics for ongoing prayer and intercession and research/reflection for cultural exegesis, planning, and corporate strategies.

### *Parakaleo Spirit*

Cultivating community contacts through a lifestyle on mission for God is, [as we have seen](#), one that is deliberately kingdom-of-God focused in every sphere of life. Our lives should be such that, [like Jesus](#), we should welcome unbelievers into our lives and into homes. I want to

continue by encouraging you to think about the centurion who approached Jesus on behalf of his paralyzed and tormented servant.

In Matthew 8:5, the scene begins:

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.”

A centurion undoubtedly was someone with considerable influence, for better or worse, in that culture. He was a high-ranking officer with delegated authority over a hundred soldiers. But in this scene, we find a centurion not acting as a veteran on the battle field but as a loving master pleading for help. English translations don’t do justice to the force of his request. Perhaps the best way of explaining the centurion’s actions was that he was “beseeching,” or “pleading” with Jesus, much in the same way a beggar pleads for food. The actual Greek word, *parakaleo*, is used when making a very strong request, with a thrust of urgency and desperation. Does it not strike you to find this socially intimidating figure humbly, respectfully, and passionately approaching Jesus?

Notice, too, that he was not making this plea on behalf of himself, but someone else in his realm of responsibility. A servant or slave was typically considered of no greater value or deserved no more care than an animal. Needless to say, a sick servant of typical centurion would not be a high priority or grave concern. Not so with this centurion. He had become close exposure to the anguish and pain of his servant. Indeed, the fact that he came to Jesus was indication that the misery the servant experienced had become his own. Things changed as a result. Life could not go on as normal—no business as usual. He was determined to find the one who could heal his servant.

Do you see the heart of this centurion? Standing between the misery of this boy and the mercy of God in the healing power of Christ was a man with a pleading heart, a passionate cry for help.

And the same is true for you and me.

We live in a world filled with miserable people who have bought into the broken promises and fleeting pursuits of sin. They are frustrated that these broken cisterns can’t hold any water and can never satisfy. These are people in our community who are not within arm’s reach of gospel, and that is why we are here. Missional love refuses to go about life as normal. A pleading heart will refuse to see the brokenness of humanity and not be broken too. The hurting and pain will be shouldered by the love of Christ and a desire for the mercy of God to triumph over their misery, that they may be satisfied in Jesus Christ and the joy of knowing Him.

Is there a parakaleo in your daily agenda? Cultivating community contacts will require a cultivating of missional love—a parakaleo spirit, a pleading heart, a practice of being in the royal priesthood. I pray that, as we seek to engage our lost world with the mission and message of Jesus Christ, we will find ourselves between two worlds with one heart to help others find mercy for their misery and joy for their pain.

### *Cultural Exegesis and Contextual Research*

- \* Determine worldviews and religious beliefs
- \* Discover community and culture centers
- \* Discern idols of the city and idols of the heart
- \* Draw from customs, traditions, and other socially shared ideas
- \* Delineate between the biggest changes, challenges, and needs of community

These aspects are important for the purposes of being conversant with the culture, confronting its idols, communicating the gospel, and connecting with others with the love and compassion of Christ. Having laid out the context, one can connect the text with the context with a philosophy of mission and design of ministry that is unashamedly biblical and unrelentingly intentional.

Doing good cultural exegesis is something that requires considerable time and attention, listening and learning. Paul certainly knew that to be true. He knew the culture of the Jews and the Greeks, the way of life for those under the law and those without the law. He was able to connect with the religious folks in the synagogue and the secular folks in the marketplace. The culture did not dictate his message, but neither did he deny its existence. Within the missional matrix of God, gospel, mission, and church, the culture should be understood and interpreted so that we communicate Christ effectively in our own neighborhood. And this is where I am finding myself as we aggressively pursue the 90+ percent of unchurched across the street.

One of the questions I am thinking about asking the core group in this area is, *"If your job was to be a tour guide around your city and neighborhood, what would you show me, and where would you take me?"* If you've got any observations or good questions to ask regarding cultural exegesis, please pass them on.

### *Holy Worldliness by John Stott*

Of the Son's 'identification' with the world into which He was sent, there can be no shadow of doubt. He did not remain in heaven; He came into the world. The word was not spoken from the sky; 'the Word was made flesh'. And then He 'dwelt among us'. He did not come on a fleeting visit and hurry back home again. He stayed in the world into which He came. He gave men a chance to behold His glory. Nor did He only let them gaze from a distance. He scandalized church leaders of His day by mixing with the riff-raff they avoided. 'Friend of publicans and sinners', they dubbed Him. To them it was a term of opprobrium; to us it is a title of honour. He touched the untouchable lepers. He did not recoil from the caresses of a prostitute. And then He, who at His birth had been 'made flesh', was in His death 'made sin' and 'made a curse' (John 1:14; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). He had assumed our nature; He now assumed our transgressions, our doom, our death. His self-identification with man was utter and complete.

Therefore when He says to us 'go', this is what He means. 'As our Lord took on our flesh, so he calls His Church to take on the secular world'; otherwise we do not 'take the Incarnation seriously'. We are to go as He went, to penetrate human society, to mix with unbelievers and fraternize with sinners. Does not one of the Church's greatest failures lie here? We have disengaged too much. We have become a withdrawn community. We have been aloof, instead of alongside.

“Most people touch the world at three points at least—at work, at home among neighbours, and in spare time activities involving membership of sporting teams, social clubs, political activities and community service. We should welcome the contact with non-Christian people which all such opportunities bring. To go ‘into the world’ does not necessarily mean to travel to a distant country or primitive tribe. ‘This world’ is secular, godless society; it is all around us. Christ sends us ‘into the world’ when He puts us into any group which does not know or honour Him. It might be in our own street, or in an office or shop, school, hospital or factory, or even in our own family. And here in the world we are called to love, to serve, and to offer genuine, sacrificial relationship. Paradoxically stated, the only truly Christian context in which to witness is the world.

Sometimes a Christian’s connection with the world resembles that of a man-made satellite. He is in contact with it, but in orbit outside its atmosphere. And his entry into the world seems to him as difficult and dangerous as a satellite’s re-entry. Indispensable as a genuine ‘entry’ is, it must not be misunderstood, however.”

He continues with two extremes . . .

“There are then two extremes to be avoided. The first is identification without proclamation, sitting alongside people with nothing to say, and with no intention of seeking to win them for Christ. We cannot surrender our God-given duty of proclamation. . . . Equally false is the opposite extreme of proclamation without identification, of offering pat solutions to problems we have never even attempted to understand.”

I think Stott is on to something here, don’t you? Are we living our lives as spiritual satellites, sending God’s signal and transmitting the gospel without ever entering our world? Are we afraid or not willing to take the risk of “re-entry”? Could our failures in proclamation be predicated by an absence of identification? Have we answered the call “to love, to serve, and to offer genuine, sacrificial relationship” with the non-Christians in our world?

“[I]t is no use the Church identifying with the world if in doing so it ceases to be the Church. In a word, identification is not to be confused with assimilation. If the salt loses its saltiness, it is useless. ‘Men throw it away,’ Jesus said. It might just as well have stayed in the salt cellar. The disciple is not above his Master. Like Christ, therefore, the Christian is to be ‘a friend of sinners’ yet ‘separated from sinners’ at the same time. We are called to live in natural surroundings a supernatural life, to demonstrate in this age of life of the age to come.

Certainly nothing hinders the progress of the gospel as much as our own inconsistent Christian lives. Too often we resemble the false teachers in Crete, of whom Paul wrote to Titus: ‘They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deed.’ Since we advance great claims for Christ, boasting that He saves His people from their sins, onlookers are perfectly justified when they demand to see in us some evidence that substantiate our claim to salvation.

As it is, we do not see ourselves as others see us. We do not realize how poor is our commendation of the Lord we love and seek to serve. More often than we know, what people reject is not the true Christ but the Christ they see in Christians—not Christ at all, in fact, but a rather unChristlike Church.”

When I read this, the first thought that came to my mind was what Paul told the Jews. “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Rom. 2:24). This past week we studied in our small group 1 Peter 2:1-12. In that text Peter tells us that we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, living stones—all for the purpose of proclaiming (publishing, advertising) the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness and into light. But the proclamation does not stop there. He continues by saying that we should keep our conduct among the Gentiles “honorable” or “excellent” for the same stated reason as Matthew 5:16, namely that the world would see our good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Proclamation isn’t enough. We must demonstrate before our unbelieving world the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They won’t see such an attractive witness from a distance or on a stage. It must happen where they are, where they live. There is a direct correlation to the proclamation of the excellencies of Christ and the demonstration of the honorable lifestyle of Christians, and lest we think otherwise, we will have fumbled the faith and caused those who should be calling upon the name of Jesus to blaspheme it on account of our lives.

## The Gospel-Centered Life - Forthcoming

(Gospel Gap) 2 Peter 1:3-9 – Forthcoming

## The Then-Now-Then Gospel (Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane)

“The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a ‘then-now-then’ gospel. First, there is the ‘then’ of the past. When I embrace Christ by faith, my sins are completely forgiven, and I stand before God as righteous. There is also the ‘then’ of the future, the promise of eternity with the Lord, free of sin and struggle. The church has done fairly well explaining these two “thens” of the gospel, but **it has tended to understate or misunderstand the “now” benefits of the work of Christ.** What difference does the gospel make in the here and now? How does it help me as a father, a husband, a worker, and a member of the body of Christ? How does it help me respond to difficulty and make decisions? How does it give me meaning, purpose, and identity? How does it motivate my ministry to others?” (4-5)

The gospel gap is what lies between the two “thens”. These questions addressing the “now” of the gospel, I believe, are answered by a full and robust understanding of the centrality and sufficiency of the gospel in life and ministry. According to Tripp/Lane, our inability to see this is due to a “gospel blindness”. They write:

“This blindness is often encouraged by preaching that fails to take the gospel to the specific challenges people face. People need to see that the gospel belongs in their workplace, their kitchen, their school, their bedroom, their backyard, and their van. **They need to see the way the gospel makes a connection between what they are doing and what God is doing.** They need to understand that their life stories are being lived

out within God's larger story so that they can **learn to live each day with a gospel mentality**" (ibid., emphasis mine)

If you've wondered why I'm bringing all this attention to being "gospel-centered," it is because I want us to see the "now" of the gospel and have our eyes opened to behold God's larger story so as to "live each day with a gospel mentality." We are so prone to gospel amnesia, and we need to be reminded daily of the gospel's power to work in and through our lives to advance the kingdom in word and deed.

## **A Snapshot of Gospel Centrality**

***If in Christ we have hope in this life only,  
we are of all people most to be pitied. – 1 Cor. 15:19***

This little verse has massive gospel implications. Paul had built his entire life on the gospel. His every ambition has for the advancement of the gospel. The consequences of his commitment to the gospel resulted in suffering, imprisonment, estrangement, and "the loss of all things." The value he placed on the gospel was "of first importance" such he determined to nothing than "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). When it came to his relationships, he called the Corinthians his "children" and him their father? How did this relationship come about? "Through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). He had no roots or identity in culture or tradition that was not shaped by the gospel. Therefore, to the Jews or to the Gentiles or to the weak, he endeavored to become like them that the gospel might be embraced and that he might "share in its blessings" (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Paul was a man who was obsessed with the gospel of Jesus Christ and centered his life on its glorious realities. His relationships could not exist apart from the gospel. His efforts would not be possible except for the power of the gospel. His sufferings would not make sense except for the vindication of the gospel. His joy and satisfaction in Jesus despite hardship and affliction was fueled by the ongoing work of the gospel. In short, if the gospel was not true and Jesus not raised, then everything in his life was a sham—an utterly pitiable sight.

The radical nature of the gospel caused Paul to live a radical life that confounded the skeptics and condemned the superficial followers of Jesus. If one's life could make sense and seem plausible or normal apart from the gospel and the power of Jesus' resurrection, you were at odds with the gospel tradition established by Paul and His companions. The gospel must central. It cannot be optional. Yet can it be said of us that our life is so wrapped up in the gospel that should you take it's reality from us, our lives should most of all be pitied? How thorough is its work? To what degree is our identity, mission, significance, purpose, and relationships defined and shaped by the gospel?

If we had hoped in this life only is to eat, drink, and be merry—to live a normal life, the good life—just like everyone else who has given a cultural hat tip to Jesus but have not experienced gospel transformation, then what light have we to offer in a world of darkness or what salt to pour out in a world of decay? The hope and confidence we have in the gospel should plunge the depths of our soul and surface in satisfied lives in Jesus who are sent for His glory. The snapshot of gospel centrality in Paul's life should be a reminder of our need for long-exposure in beholding

the face of Jesus and becoming like Him in all ways, in all things, for one goal—the worship of Jesus.

(Sufficiency of the Gospel) – Forthcoming

(Gospel in the churches) – Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Colossians, Thessalonians, Ephesians, Philippians, Antioch (Forthcoming)

## **Gospel and Community**

“Major events have a role to play in church life, but the bedrock of gospel ministry is low-key, ordinary, day-to-day work that often goes unseen. Most gospel ministry involves ordinary people doing ordinary things with *gospel intentionality*. . . . The ordinary needs to be saturated with a commitment to living and proclaiming the gospel. The gospel is a message, and so mission only takes place as we share that word with people. A commitment to mission through community works only if the priority of the gospel is a strong value within that community. Otherwise we simply form good relationships that never go anywhere.”

- Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 63-64.

“We cannot reflect all of Christ in our own life. We need all of our fellow Christians to be able to show his grace and power. People will see only a fragment of all that Christ is able to do when they look at us. But when they are drawn into the fellowship to which we belong, then they may find how fully Christ is able to save and keep those who trust in him. They will recognize that our witness to Christ is much more than merely a different standard of living. It is rather the direct result of the presence of Christ in our lives and among his people.”

- Sinclair Ferguson, *Grow in Grace* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1989).

“The more I experience the gospel, the more there develops within me a yearning affection for my fellow-Christians who are also participating in the glories of the gospel. This affection for them comes loaded with confidence in their continued spiritual growth and ultimate glorification, and it becomes my pleasure to express to them this loving confidence regarding the ongoing work of God in their lives.

Additionally, with the gospel proving itself to be such a boon in my own life, I realize that the greatest gift I can give to my fellow-Christians is the gospel itself. Indeed, I love my fellow-Christians not simply because of the gospel, but I love them best when I am loving them with the gospel! And I do this not merely by speaking gospel words to them, but also by living before them and generously relating to them in a gospel manner. Imparting my life to them in this way, I thereby contribute to their experience of the power, the Spirit, and the full assurance of the gospel.

By preaching the gospel to myself each day, I nurture the bond that unites me with my brothers and sisters for whom Christ died, and I also keep myself well-versed in the raw materials with which I may actively love them in Christ.”

- Gospel Primer

(Communities of Light, Communities of Love) – Forthcoming

## **The Gospel Indicative and Community Imperative**

In the Sermon on the Mount is contained what is universally known as “**The Golden Rule**” popularized in the phrase, “*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*” This is a teaching that, to some degree, is that in all major religions of the world as a universal ethic for any society. It is “Golden” because it teaches us to value others not as people to cash in on, but those who deserve the same treatment as we would like to be treated.

While it is true that our Savior rendered those words in His teaching, what we find in the Christian community is something much more profound than the Golden Rule. This rule does not have as its motivation as what “you would have them to do unto you” but rather **what “Jesus Christ has already done unto you.”** This is what I am calling **the Gospel ethic** or the platinum rule that should govern and guide all human relationships as we seek to live in community with one another.

In Scripture, you will find nearly 100 references alone in the New Testament of “one-anothering” passages that speak of how Christians are to relate to one another, and all of these commands are to be considered as “**community imperatives.**” Such community imperatives are not inspired, motivated, or met by a means found in looking to ourselves; rather they are motivated and met **only through a gospel-centered perspective on life** and, more specifically, living together as a redeemed community.

The way we should see the community imperatives, then, is through the lens of **the gospel indicative.** The imperative tells us what we should do as a new covenant people; the gospel tells us who we are as a new covenant people. We cannot and will not effectively or genuinely live out the community imperatives unless we first understand the gospel indicatives—that is, understanding who we are in light of what God has accomplished for us in the life and death of His Son.

What you will find in Scripture is both through the text and context the emphasis laid upon the **gospel indicative as the foundation or fountainhead to all community imperatives.** This truth is to show us that whatever community we experience as brothers and sisters in Christ must necessarily and thoroughly be filtered and funneled through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We commune together because of **what Christ has done** through the gospel; we commune together because of **what Christ will continue to do** through living out the gospel; and we commune together because of how **Christ will work the gospel through His people** to reach world lost and undone outside of Christ.

To sum of the point of this message of which I am entitled “The Gospel-Driven Community,” consider this simply exhortation:

***“You should do unto one another as Christ has done unto you.”***

That’s the Gospel ethic, the Gospel indicative. “As Christ has done unto you, that very thing should be done unto one another through the community imperatives of “one-anothering.”

I want to take you briefly through the contexts and then to some specific texts to show how Scripture makes this kind of gospel-driven community plain. The church of Jesus Christ should

be a counter-cultural Kingdom community whose allegiance to the King is not just found in their faithfulness to the King but also to the King's ethic.

### **Four Cases of Gospel-Driven Community**

#### ***(A) Romans 1-11 | Romans 12***

Romans 1-3 - Man's Sin  
 Romans 4-5 - God's Justifying Sinners Through Christ  
 Romans 6-8 - Our Position in Christ (union with Christ)  
 Romans 9-11 - God's Purpose of Redemption

Romans 12 – THEREFORE . . . offer your lives as a living sacrifice to God (what does that look like?) see the 31 commands in 21 verses!

#### ***(B) Ephesians 1-3 | Ephesians 4-6***

Ephesians 1: The Grand Picture of Redemption  
 Ephesians 2: The Gospel in Plain View  
 Ephesians 3: The Mystery Revealed Through His Church

Ephesians 4-6: therefore, walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called (how?) see the 69 commands in 89 verses!

#### ***(C) Philippians 2:5-11 | Philippians 2:1-4***

Philippians 2:5-11 – Incarnation, death and resurrection, glorification (hymn they sang)  
 Philippians 2:1-4 – Life together based on the death of Christ

#### ***(D) Hebrews 10:1-18 | Hebrews 10:19-25***

Hebrews 10:1-18 - God's Perfect Atoning Sacrifice in Jesus Christ  
 Hebrews 10:19-25 - A New Way of Living in Community

### **One Case of Gospel-Driven Confrontation**

There is a dramatic instance in Scripture that reveals the true nature of gospel community and how important it is that we live together as those firmly committed to the Gospel.

Peter was considered first among the chosen apostles. He was the one who seemed most passionate—who ventured to walk on water, who told Jesus that he would never deny him—who went up on the Mount of Transfiguration to behold the glory of Jesus. This Peter was the one who made the good confession as revealed by the Father that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” It was Peter whom God used to preach the first sermon at Pentecost and see thousands repent and believe the Gospel. It was Peter who not just preached in Jerusalem but was the instrument God used to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles through the conversion of Cornelius and those who were with him.

11 Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that **they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel**, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?”  
Galatians 2:11-14

**ESV:** “But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel . . .”

**NIV:** “When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel . . .”

**KJV:** “But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel . . .”

### **Alternative responses**

*Sin Management/Sin Allowances:* What the church did

*Gospel Immunity:* Paul could have done this

*Sinful Pride:* Peter could have done this

### **Applying the Gospel to Community**

Having seen the context—the big picture of the gospel ethic and indicative behind the community imperatives—let us sweep across the pages of Scripture at particular ways we are to be “one-anothering” and how they reveal the heart of the gospel.

#### *Love One Another*

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; **as I have loved you**, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34-35

12 This is My commandment, that you **love one another as I have loved you**. 13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

John 15:12-13

**Be kindly affectionate to one another** with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

Romans 12:10

**Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth** through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, **love one another fervently with a pure heart**,

1 Peter 1:22

And above all things **have fervent love for one another**, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”

1 Peter 4:8

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that **we should love one another**, . . . 16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life **for us**. And we also ought to lay down our lives **for the brethren**.

1 John 3:11, 16

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested **toward us**, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us** and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, **we also ought to love one another**.

1 John 4:7-11

### *Forgive One Another*

32 And **be kind to one another**, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another**, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 **bearing with one another**, and **forgiving one another**, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Colossians 3:12-13

### **Serve One Another**

13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, **but through love serve one another**. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Galatians 5:13-14

### *Welcome One Another*

7 Therefore **receive one another**, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

Romans 15:7

### *Bear One Another's Burdens*

2 **Bear one another's burdens**, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2

1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, **bearing with one another in love**, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:1-3

### *Exhort One Another*

12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but **exhort one another daily**, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 **For we have become partakers of Christ** if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,  
Hebrews 3:12-14

### *Consider One Another*

19 **Therefore**, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 **let us** draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 **Let us** hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And **let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works**, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but **exhorting one another**, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.  
Hebrews 10:19-25

### *Speaking and Submitting to One Another*

18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 **speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.  
Ephesians 5:18-21

Yes, all of you **be submissive to one another**, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."  
1 Peter 5:5

### *Confess Your Sins to One Another and Pray for One Another*

**Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another**, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.  
James 5:16

### *Have Compassion for One Another*

Finally, all of you be of one mind, **having compassion for one another**; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;  
1 Peter 3:8

### *Be Hospitable to One Another Without Grumbling*

**Be hospitable to one another** without grumbling.  
1 Peter 4:9

### *Teaching and Admonishing One Another*

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, **teaching and admonishing one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.  
Colossians 3:16

### *Comfort and Edify One Another*

6 Therefore **let us** not sleep, as others do, but **let us** watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But **let us** who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint **us** to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for **us**, that whether we wake or sleep, **we** should live together with Him. 11 Therefore **comfort each other and edify one another**, just as you also are doing.  
1 Thessalonians 5:6-11

### *Minister to One Another*

As each one has received a gift, **minister it to one another**, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.  
1 Peter 4:10

## **NEGATIVELY**

### *Do Not Grumble Against One Another*

9 **Do not grumble against one another**, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!  
James 5:9

### *Do Not Lie to One Another*

**Do not lie to one another**, since you have put off the old man with his deeds  
Colossians 3:9

25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are **members of one another**.  
Ephesians 4:25

### *Do Not Bite and Devour One Another*

15 But if you **bite and devour one another**, beware lest you be consumed by one another!  
Galatians 5:15

### *Do Not Provoke and Envy One Another*

26 Let us not become conceited, **provoking one another, envying one another**.  
Galatians 5:26

## Missional Prayer

In his excellent book, *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, John Piper begins his chapter on prayer saying:

“Life is war. That’s not all it is. But it is always that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. **Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church** as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world. Prayer thus gives us the significance of frontline forces and gives God the glory of a limitless Provider.”

For the past week or so, I have been spending a significant portion of my personal study considering the role of prayer specifically in the context of the mission of God and the advance of the gospel as understood in Scripture. There’s a lot of talk these days about being a missional church (most of which I like), but one can quickly discover the thrust of the missional church by how they pray and what exactly they for. I’m sure you have heard of the line that far too many prayer meetings are consumed with requests to keep loved ones out of heaven rather than pleading with God that many more might go to heaven (or variation of that thought).



When we as a church began a two-month season of praying about the new church planting initiative, I chose to preach a series on the prayers of Paul as a means to instruct and encourage our members to pray about the kind of things we find Paul, the greatest church planter, praying for. Here was a man who had been abandoned in Asia, beaten several times with whips, shipwrecked, left homeless, stoned, and a host of other incredible things we have never experienced. If ever there was a person to ask for prayer about himself or physical needs, it was him. Could you imagine Paul praying to the Ephesians, “Please pray for my back. I was just beaten in Lystra the other day before coming here.” Or to the Corinthians, “My eyes are going bad. Could you pray that I may see better?” Who knows, Paul may have indeed made these requests, but it is no small thing that nowhere do we find such prayers being

offered. He was crucified with Christ. He didn't want anyone to bother him, for he bore in his body the landmarks of Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:17).

Paul and the early church prayed in accordance with the Father's will, for the glory of Jesus, and because, as Piper explained, prayer was "primarily a walkie-talkie for the mission of the church." A church with a domesticated prayer life will inevitably be a church in maintenance mode rather than in missional mode. Simply put, if you want to know if a church is on mission, listen to their prayers and feel their hearts.

Absorb yourself in the prayer life of Jesus and the prayers of Paul for the churches and consider prayer in a new light—not just a spiritual discipline but *missional devotion*. Our alignment and involvement in the mission of God is governed and guided by the prayer of faith from a fervent heart.

I don't know about you, but I want to have a good handle on this walkie-talkie in the life-long war of proclaiming Christ, rescuing sinners, and building His church! When you give me call, make sure it is about our King and His kingdom.

### *Missional Prayer: The Life of Jesus*

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.  
Hebrews 5:7

The mission of Jesus was bestowed upon Him by the will of the Father (John 6:40). He was the one "whom the Father has sent"—a description entitled to Jesus some 39 times in the gospel of John. Jesus said that He did nothing on His own but rather only what He sees the Father doing (John 5:19), for He came in His Father's name (John 5:43). He speaks only of what He has seen with His Father (John 8:38). In sum, Jesus' mission is clearly understood in the context of His relationship with His Father in heaven.

Therefore, it makes sense to see Jesus constantly in prayer. Think of it. If ever there was a person not in need of prayer who would have ever justifiable reason not to pray, it would be the Son of God. Yet throughout His life, and especially in crucial moments in the mission, we find Jesus absorbed in prayer. Beginning with His baptism, Luke records:

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also **had been baptized and was praying**, the heavens were opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22).

The Father's delight in His Son at the inauguration of His earthly mission came at a time when Jesus had been baptized and was praying (notice the present, continuous nature – "praying"). As Jesus began ministering, preaching, and healing, Mark adds:

35 And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and **there he prayed**. 36 And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, 37 and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you."

38 And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for **that is why I came out.**” 39 And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons (Mark 1:35-39).

The relationship between verse 35 and 38 cannot be overlooked. Here we find the direct relationship between Jesus in prayer and Jesus on mission. The missional engagement was initialized by the priority of prayer. Jesus received His marching orders from the Father (see John’s account above), and thus prayer served not only a means of intimacy but also orientation and alignment around the Father’s will. The town He visited and the message He preached was derivative of what He received from the Father in prayer. Jesus example reveals that our participation in the mission of God is directly related to our participation in prayer.

Jesus’ earthly mission was eventually going to be entrusted to the men He chose to follow Him. Those whom He called was no small matter. Consider Luke’s account of His decision-making process:

12 In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and **all night he continued in prayer to God.** 13 And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: 14 Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, 15 and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, 16 and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor (Luke 6:12-16).

It was common practice for Jesus to depart and pray to the Father (see Matt. 14:23; Luke 5:16; 9:18; 9:28; 11:1). However, on this occasion, he spent the entire night in continuous prayer because He was about to make one of the most important decisions regarding the mission—the selection of those who would ultimately be entrusted with the gospel message. To what degree is the importance of the mission God has called us? Personal and persevering prayer does not leave you in the closet. It thrusts you out with passion for the mission.

Similar to the occasion of Jesus’ baptism, the Father on the mount of transfiguration told Peter, James and John, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” (Luke 9:35). The Father’s disclosure and declaration came at a time when “**and as he was praying**, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white” (Luke 9:29). The exchange of Jesus in prayer with the Father became an open manifestation of His eternal glory. The Father was listening to His Son, and in turn tell Jesus’ disciples to listen to Him!

Apparently the disciples did listen to Him, not only in His preaching and teaching, but also His praying, for Luke tells us that Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). Not teach us to baptize, to preach, to perform miracles, but to pray. He taught them to pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This was the mission of Jesus—the will of the Father and the advent of the kingdom of God on earth. Prayer delivers us from our agenda and sets us on God’s agenda, moving us from seeking our will and ruling our lives (kingdoms) to living in light of God’s will and rule.

That is what the Mount of Olives was all about. In the gospel of Luke we read:

39 And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. 40 And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "**Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.**" 43 And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. 44 And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. 45 And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, 46 and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:39-46).

It was Jesus' custom to go to the Mount of Olives to pray. He had his "place" of prayer a stone's throw away. His short prayer summed up His commitment to the mission of God. *Not my will, but yours, be done.* He knew He was about to be beaten, whipped, spat upon, crucified, condemned, and cursed. The fulfillment of the mission is at hand, and the temptation was to look for a way out. Yet prayer confirmed the mission of God. Have you ever thought about what temptation Jesus was warning the disciples about? Was it not to do their own will and not God's? To abort the mission? To deny Jesus? To have a post-confession moment like Peter when Jesus responded, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Matt. 16:23)? They were sleeping and sinking into an "abort the mission" mentality which left Jesus alone at the cross.

The great news is that Jesus is still praying for the mission. He is our Great High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for His people (Heb. 7:25). He has promised to build His church. Even when Satan sought to sift Peter like wheat, Jesus told him, "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32).

*I have prayed for you.*

That's Jesus. No one is more committed to the mission than Jesus. No one is more committed to prayer than Jesus. In His "high priestly prayer," Jesus said to the Father, "I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours" (John 17:9). In that same prayer where He prays for us, Jesus brings the mission to bear on our lives the same what the Father brought the mission to bear on His life. Jesus prayed, "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). It is impossible not to see the missional prayer life of the one whom the Father has sent. Jesus was sent, praying, and praying, He was sending.

His earthly ministry began with praying after His baptism, continued with all night in prayer with the calling of His disciples, then on to Gethsemane where His sweat became like drops of blood and ultimately to the cross where His prayers were soaked with blood as He prayed, "Father, forgive them."

Even now, Jesus is praying for His people, building His church, and advancing the mission. May we join Him in the front line work of the mission that advanced on our knees.

### *Missional Prayer: The Early Church*

When I speak of the “early church,” I am referring in particular to the church in Acts in relationship to the mission and prayer. Jesus, God incarnate, had died, was raised, and ascended into heaven. What now? Where do we go from here? Now that their leader has left the scene, what’s going to happen with the mission? Surely these thoughts had to be going through the minds of the apostles.

They began by getting together and praying. The mission was going to be determined by the their imaginations, their culture, or anything else but God. They were, as Luke reveals, “with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). This began a pattern for the early church. After Pentecost, the thousands of new believers in Christ had “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Furthermore, this church, when their elders were released, prayed together such that “the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). At a later time when Peter had been imprisoned, Luke records that “earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church” (Acts 12:5) such that when he was miraculously released, he found them still “gathered together and were praying” at the house of Mary (Acts 12:12). The church in Jerusalem was a praying church. God had created a culture of His nearness to them through the means of prayer on a perpetual basis.

But how and where does the mission come in the context of this praying by the early church? The first instance of missional prayer was seen in Acts 1 when they were selecting the one who would replace Judas as the twelfth apostle. Luke writes,

And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place” (Acts 1:24-25).

They had learned from Jesus who had spent all night in prayer to the Father prior to the calling of His disciples that they should likewise commit this process first and foremost to God. When problems arose with unmet needs in the church, the apostles clarified their calling to “devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). The office of the deacon was established as the congregation set the chosen servants before the apostles who “prayed and laid hands on them” (Acts 6:6).

From Jerusalem, the next movement of the mission was to be to Judea and Samaria (Act 1:8). As Phillip and other believers began to preach the gospel, Peter and John “prayed for the believing Samaritans that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:15). The man whom God would use to continue the mission throughout the Gentile world would be identified as one is praying (Acts 9:11). When the church Antioch sent out the first missionaries (Paul and Barnabas), they commissioned them by “fasting and praying” (Acts 13:3). As they continued on the mission, in every city churches were planted and elders were appointed “with prayer and fasting, committing them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23).

Prayer played a vital role in the mission of the early church. Prayer was instrumental in the selection of an apostle, the commendation of deacons, the commissioning of missionaries, and

establishing of elders in all the churches planted. The missional fulfillment of Acts 1:8 was saturated in prayer, whether it was the believers in the upper room at Pentecost, Peter and John with the Samaritans, Cornelius praying, the assimilation and commissioning of Paul, and the future generation of leaders in the Gentile world.

The implications of missional prayer cannot be overstated. If we are going to embrace the mission of God, then we cannot neglect prayer to God. Prayer is not an inner discipline divorced from the outworking of the mission; prayer is the inhalation of God's heart that is exhaled in the mission of God's people.

### *Missional Prayer: The Life of Paul*

While Acts provides us with a glimpse in the journeys of the Apostle Paul and how prayer impacted his mission, his letters reveal a powerful exchange of intercession and request among the churches wherein he labored. Before his mission began, you might recall the instruction Jesus gave Ananias, which was to "look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying" (Acts 9:11).

Although his name changed, the fact that he was praying did not. His exhortations to prayer was everywhere. To the Romans, Paul encourages them to "be constant in prayer" (Rom. 12:2); to the Ephesians, "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Eph. 6:18); to the Philippians, "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6); to the Thessalonians, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17); and to the Colossians, "continue steadfastly in prayer" (Col. 4:2). It is evident that the call to fervent, continuous prayer was expected among all believers everywhere, and in no less than five churches, missional prayer was demonstrated in the life of Paul. Let's consider his letters to the Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians.

#### **1. Rome**

In the introduction of his letter to the Romans, Paul writes "that **without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers**, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you" (Rom. 1:9-10). His desire to come to them not only was a cause of continual intercession for the Roman believers, but also an appeal for their prayers. Toward the close of his letter, he writes,

"I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to **strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf**, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company" (Rom. 15:30-32).

Paul's intercession and the grounds of his appeal to the Romans for prayer was for God's will in his deliverance for furthering the mission and service to the saints. In a letter so filled with the meat and marrow of the gospel, like book ends, these references show Paul's heart for the mission through prayer.

## 2. Ephesus

After articulating the benefits, privileges, and blessings of being “in Christ,” Paul “did not cease to give thanks for you, **remembering you in my prayers . . .**” (Eph. 1:16) because they had “heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him . . .” (Eph. 1:13). His reason for praying for them was motivated by the gospel and their response of faith and repentance. The more the mission advanced, the more he prayed. And this is why Paul also requested prayer from the Ephesians. He requested that they would

“[pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth **boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel**, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:19-20).

Paul could of requested any number of personal prayer requests, but his requests are exclusively centered on the mission Christ had given Him and the proclamation of the gospel. The requests focused on the proclamation of the gospel, and Paul’s intercession was a result of the triumphs of the gospel.

## 3. Philippi

While imprisoned, Paul wrote to the Philippians,

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, **always in every prayer of mine** for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil. 1:3-5).

While it was the *reception* of the gospel among the Ephesians that motivated Paul to pray, for the Philippians it was their *partnership* in the gospel. They had join him in the mission of both advancing and defending the gospel (Phil. 1:12-18). Following a powerful acknowledge of God’s providence in His imprisonment, he shares his confidence that “**through your prayers** and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance” (Phil. 1:19). His understanding of providence as a means for encouraging brothers to be courageous also included the prayers of believers as a means of grace to serve as a cause for his deliverance. Either in prison because of divine providence or deliverance because of their prayers, the mission continues with their partnership in the gospel.

## 4. Colossae

To the Colossians Paul again intercedes for the believers on the foundation of their reception of the gospel. He writes,

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **when we pray for you**, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth . . . And so, from the day we heard, **we have not**

**ceased to pray for you**, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding . . .” (Col. 1:3-6, 9).

Between the two references of continual prayer in this passage is again the gospel and how it has worked in the lives of the Colossians as it has around the world. As he came to the close of his letter, Paul continues to ask for prayer:

“**pray also for us**, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak” (Col. 4:3-4).

Paul is starting to sound like a broken record, is he not? Pray for me. Pray for the gospel. Pray for the mission. Pray for an open door for the word of God to advance. This is Paul in prayer. This Paul on mission. But we are not done . . .

## 5. Thessalonica

In both of his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul is found interceding for them. In his first letter, Paul gives thanks to God

“**always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers**, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thess. 1:2-5).

In his second letter, Paul writes:

“To this end **we always pray for you**, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:11-12).

The Thessalonians had become an example of what true faith and repentance looked like, having received the gospel with power, conviction, and the Holy Spirit. The good of the gospel was to continue among these believers among whom God would make worthy of being called-out ones, set apart for the glory of Christ and satisfied by the grace of God.

Paul makes two simple requests to these believers. In his first letter, he concludes by exhorting, “Brothers, pray for us” (1 Thess. 5:25). In his second letter, Paul again brings the mission and the gospel to bear in his request. He writes:

“Finally, brothers, **pray for us**, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith” (2 Thess. 3:1-2).

How was the word of the Lord honored among the Thessalonians? They did not receive it as the words of men, but the word of God. It was attended with the Holy Spirit and power, bringing

genuine conversion and conviction in their hearts. But more than that, the word of the Lord “sounded forth” from them to Macedonia and Achaia and their faith in God has “gone forth everywhere.” The fruit of the gospel and focus on the mission among the Thessalonians a cause for gratefulness and a call for continued prayer for greater things to be done.

## Summary

Having considered Paul’s correspondence, one would not have to ask Paul, “How can I pray for you?” Sure, Paul had a lot of things that warranted prayer—just consider the opposition he faced, the persecution he endured, the abandonment of others he experienced, and so on. Yet his circumstances, pain, and the rest were not matters of great concern for Paul. For him to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Living = Christ, so let’s get on with the mission and the gospel, and if you pray for Paul, make it about those things. In spite of the fact that he bore in his body “the brandmarks of Christ Jesus” (Gal. 6:17), Paul wants to leave a mark for the glory of Christ’s name on the earth. It is evident that this mission would not have been possible apart from prayer, and not just any ordinary kind of prayer; rather, it was grand, sweeping prayers where the gospel transformed lives and the mission triumphed over cities. The reports of these men upsetting the earth and “turning the world upside down” was effected because heaven was being opened through prevailing mission-saturated prayers continually offered according to the will of God. God have mercy on us to so believe, preach, and pray with the gospel and mission as our magnificent obsession.

### *Missional Prayer: Concluding Thoughts*

To conclude my series on prayer, I would like to take us back to John Piper’s wartime analogy as he explains why prayer malfunctions. If you can remember, Piper stated that “God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world.” We have seen this to be true in the lives of Jesus, the early church, and the Apostle Paul.

And yet.

We are living in a time where it seems that prayer is malfunctioning on a daily basis. Consider what Piper has to say:

“Probably the number one reason prayer malfunctions in the hands of believers is that we try to turn a wartime walkie-talkie into a domestic intercom. Until you know that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for. Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission. It is as though the field commander (Jesus) called in the troops, gave them a crucial mission (go and bear fruit), handed each of them a personal transmitter coded to the frequency of the General’s headquarters, and said, ‘Comrades, the General has a mission for you. He aims to see it accomplished. And to that end he has authorized me to give each of you personal access to him through these transmitters. If you stay true to his mission and seek his victory first, he will always be as close as your transmitter, to give tactical advice and to send air cover when you need it.

But what have millions of Christians done? We have stopped believing that we are in a war. No urgency, no watching, no vigilance. No strategic planning. Just easy peace and

prosperity. And what did we do with the walkie-talkie? We tried to rig it up as an intercom in our houses and cabins and boats and cars—not to call in firepower for conflict with a mortal enemy but to ask for more comforts in the den.”

Over the course of this mini series, I have sought to argue the reciprocal nature of mission and prayer. The more we participate in the mission, the more we will realize our utter dependency upon God in prayer and call upon Him for protection, provision, and power to advance the cause of the gospel. The more we participate in prayer, the more mission-oriented and aligned to the Father’s will we will become as the trajectory of our lives is dictated by the glories of heaven, not the realities of earth.

Jesus tell us that problem in the mission is not the harvest but the laborers, and the solution to that problem is not a new recruiting strategy or campaign but rather praying to the Lord of the harvest. He shows, consequently, that prayer is a divinely appointed means of living as “sent” laborers in the harvest field (mission). God will change the hearts of those living in the den seeking more comforts to be laborers on the front lines in the battle, and He chooses to do so with an open ear to the pleading hearts of those asking, seeking, and knocking for triumphs of the gospel in the hearts of men.

May God transform our lives with prayers that transcend our lives. There’s a mission to embrace, a gospel to proclaim, a Savior to treasure. There’s nothing the enemy would want more than for us to use our correspondence with the Father on matters not pertaining to his defeat. Prayers soaked in the gospel and singed by God’s glory cannot but produce a heart emblazoned for the mission of rescuing sinners ensnared by the devil to do his will. Those solemn words, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done . . .” is missional reminder that life is war, and this is, as Piper rightly argued, what prayer is ultimately for.

## **Gospel-Centered Renewal**

I believe one of the defining theological marks of my generation is a passionate commitment to the centrality and sufficiency of the gospel for all of life. Some of this could be understood as a corrective to a truncated or shelved gospel, but I am more inclined to believe that God is awakening His people to see all of life through the lens of the gospel and apply it to every area of the Christian experience, from beginning to end.

Along these lines, I want to share how renewal in the Christian life is grounded in the gospel as those who have been saved (justification), are being saved (sanctification), and will be saved (glorification). In terms of renewal, it could be stated that *I have been made new* (justification), *I am being made new* (sanctification), and *I will be made new* (glorification). In this post, I will address justification and follow up with subsequent posts to round out what I hope to be a robust understanding of gospel-centered renewal.

### **Justification says, “I have been made new”**

To a rebellious, hard-hearted people, God promised to make **a new covenant** (Jer. 31:31). This was a covenant that would be everlasting and established by God not only dwelling among His people but *in* His people. It is a new covenant in that God promises to “give them one heart, and **a new spirit** I will put within them” (Ez. 11:19). Not only will they receive a new spirit, by

God continues with giving them “**a new heart**” (Ez. 36:26) thereby removing the heart of stone and grant a heart of flesh. To put this in New Testament terms, God saved us “by the washing of **regeneration and renewal** of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5).

Unlike the sacrifices of old which were repeated and could never “make perfect those who draw near” (Heb. 10:1), Jesus offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins by which He has perfected for all time those who come to “**the new and living way**” which He opened up for through His flesh (Heb.10:12, 20). Only through the purchase on the cross can sinners be made new, that is, have new life. And this newness is secured by an accomplished mission which has continuing effects in bringing renewal until the work of Christ is brought to completion (Phil. 1:6).

Union with Christ is the fountainhead of Christian renewal, and insofar as we appropriate and experience all that it is to be “in Christ,” we will appreciate the immeasurable riches of God’s grace towards those who believe. And this is precisely the reason why any and all lasting renewal emanates from the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Simply put, if anyone is in Christ, he is **a new creation** (2 Cor. 5:17). This is the heart of the Christian experience. We are made new by promises made by our Father, fulfilled by our Savior, and applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit.

The countervailing approach to renewal in the times of the early church was the practice of circumcision. Paul encountered a faction in Galatia who thought that it was necessary to find renewal outside the gospel. He frankly asks, “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh (Gal. 3:3)? At the heart of his letter was the defense of **justification by faith alone**. If circumcision is accepted, Paul says “Christ will be of no advantage to you” (Gal. 5:2). At the conclusion of his letter, Paul left his readers with the following words, “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but **a new creation**” (Gal. 6:15). We who have “begun by the Spirit” have been made “a new creation” in the work of God justifying sinners on the basis of Christ’s merits alone appropriated by faith in His finished work. To go anywhere else to be made new is wasting our lives with broken cisterns that cannot hold any water.

Justification says “I have been made new” because God has given a new spirit and a new heart through a new a living way in the substitutionary death of His Son. We have been saved by the regenerating and renewing work of the Holy Spirit which amounts to nothing short of a new creation in Christ. The blood of the new covenant will never lose its power, and because we have been saved to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25) by its Mediator, we can come to Him for renewal as one who is the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

It makes sense, then, to hear Peter preach the gospel and call sinners to repentance attaching the results of justification and renewal/refreshing thus:

“Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, **that times of refreshing may come** from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (Acts 3:19-21).

## Justification and Sanctification

We are made new by the justification of God where the new covenant promises of the Father are fulfilled in new and living way of Christ's atoning death through which we experience regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. This work of renewal continues as those who are being saved continually repent and believe the good news which is forever theirs in Christ Jesus. God is committed to perfect a people for Himself by reversing the curse of sin through the Fall as His people are changed into the likeness of Christ, the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15).

In justification, we are made a new creation in Christ by the sovereign work of God in bringing those who are dead in trespasses and sin and making them alive (Eph. 2:1-5). The continuing work of this resurrection power is seen as "the old passing away as all things become new" (2 Cor. 5:17b). We are being made new (sanctification) only because we have been made new (justification). Those who seek renewal upon spiritual performances and not the gospel are trying to be made new without having been made new, thereby replacing justification with sanctification. This deathly treadmill is a cycle which does not breed new life but new despair in the heart of those whose hopes are in what *they* can do for God rather than what *God* has done for them.

The goal of the gospel's work is seen in the "golden chain of redemption" where, for everyone in Christ, God has foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified (Rom. 8:28-29). The goal in all of this is so that we may be "conformed into the image of His Son." The in-breaking of the kingdom of God established in our hearts results in the outworking of our salvation with fear and trembling in a process called sanctification where the image of Christ is daily being formed in the new man God has created having been united with His Son.

### Sanctification says, "I am being made new"

The relationship between having been made new and being made new is spelled out for us in Ephesians 4:17-24 where Paul writes:

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. **20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,** 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:17-24

The pivotal moment from what we read in verses 17-19 about life outside of Christ and verses 22-24 about being made new through a ongoing basis is verses 20-21 which speak of "learning Christ" and the change it brings. There is to be a sharp contrast between those who are "alienated from the life of God" and those who are "created in the likeness of God" through the

process of being “renewed in the spirit of your minds” and “putting on the new self.” Without daily renewal through the gospel, there will be little distinctiveness between the two kinds of people in this text (the old man vs. the new man).

But notice also how we are to regularly be renewed—“**in the spirit of your minds.**” Those outside of Christ walk “in the futility of their minds” with a “darkened understanding” while those who are being sanctified are not being conformed to such thinking but are “being transformed by the renewing of their minds” (Rom. 12:2). Consequently, we “learn” Christ by being “taught” in him because the “truth” is in Christ Jesus. The role of the mind in apprehending biblical truth by the illumining work of the Spirit is essential as such knowledge is intended to help form the character of Christ who has been revealed in our hearts. Becoming *like* Christ is impossible without intimate knowledge of Christ. Being renewed into His image is preceded by a genuine understanding of His character (“true righteousness and holiness”).

The means by which we are conformed into the image of Christ is through the daily renewal of Spirit-inspired, Spirit-illuminated biblical truth whereby the pattern of our lives is programmed by the gospel of Jesus Christ and nothing else. Everyone united with Christ are in the process of becoming like Christ, and everyone of us have been gospel truths to learn, meditate, pray through, and enjoy as our satisfaction of what Christ has done our behalf overflows with joy inexpressible and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:8).

According to Scripture two things are happening simultaneously. Outwardly, we are “wasting away” while inwardly we are “being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). This body Paul calls a “jar of clay” has in it “this treasure” of the gospel of the glory of Christ. And it is because of this treasure that we both experience “momentary afflictions” and one day “an eternal weight of glory.” Without the centrality of the gospel, neither of these realities would be known.

### **Beholding Christ and Being Made New**

The way in which we are being made new is seen in 2 Cor. 3:18 which says:

And we all, with unveiled face, **beholding the glory of the Lord**, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

This little verse packs glorious truths of how we are being made new and what God is making as the Potter upon these jars of clay. The means of renewal is “beholding the glory of the Lord.” Sounds quite abstract, doesn’t it? But Paul makes it plain what, rather who, we are to behold in 2 Cor. 4:4, 6. We are to behold (vs. 4) “the light of the gospel of **the glory of Christ**” and again (vs. 6) “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in **the face of Jesus Christ.**” The gospel is the eternal spotlight on the glory of Christ, so if we want to know the glory of God, we must look supremely upon the face of Jesus Christ.

The effects of beholding Christ is that we might be renewed (transformed) into the image of God from one degree of glory to another. We are *being* transformed because this process of being made new is so glorious that we cannot handle it but in degrees! The image of God marred by sin is to be recreated in the new man being perfected for glory. Paul tells the church at Colossae that they have put on the new self, which is **being renewed** in knowledge **after the image of**

**its creator**" (Col. 3:10). The image which God is committed to renewing comes from the knowledge found in the gospel which leads us to see and savor Jesus Christ who is our hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

What this means for you and me is that renewal in the Christian does not come by growth steps but by gospel sight. It is not what we do for Jesus but what we see in Jesus that brings us into greater conformity to His image. A failure to center your life on the gospel and embrace the supremacy of Christ has tragic implications because this is precisely the means of renewal we need to experience the eternal weight of glory that awaits us. Each degree of glory in our daily renewal and transformation are like birth pangs when **we shall be like Him** fully, for **we shall see Him** as He is (1 John 3:2).

And oh, what a glorious day that will be!

**Glorification says, "I will be made new!"**

What we often fail to consider is the eschatological hope of renewal in the glorification of the saints—the future tense of the gospel. As those who enjoy the good of the gospel through repentance-driven renewal, we are "waiting for new heavens and a new earth" according to His promise (2 Pet. 3:13). We who have been made new through the promise of the Father in the new covenant, purchased by the Son in His death, and applied by the Spirit in His regeneration, are awaiting the day where we will be changed so that mortality will be taken on immortality and corruption will be taken on incorruptibility (1 Cor. 15:52-54).

This is only possible because the "second Adam" brought new life where the first Adam brought death (Rom. 5:12-21). Where sin brought death and condemnation, grace brought life and acceptance in the beloved—and it is this reign of grace that will persevere to glory and usher us into His presence. Paul tells that the first Adam was merely a living creature, but the "last Adam" is a life-giving spirit because of whom those bearing "the image of the man of dust" will also bear "the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor. 15:45-49). This is a picture of the progressive renewal of the image of God in man through the application of the gospel in apprehending our union with Christ which satisfies the heart of the one who treasures Jesus.

In the meantime, we join with creation with an eager longing for the coming of our Lord and the "revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19-22). The whole creation is groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now, and so are those who have received the Spirit of adoption and are seeking to see Christ formed in them (Gal. 4:19). It is not only what has happened to us in the past (having been made new) that should inspire continual renewal but what will happen to us when our Lord comes and changes us, renewing us fully for eternity in His glorious presence.

The covenantal union of Christ the husband with His bride the church shall continue in the new heaven and the new earth, as John describes in Revelation 21:1-5.

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "**Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself**

**will be with them as their God.** 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, **“Behold, I am making all things new.”** Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Jesus Christ, seated on the throne where there is no more pain, sickness, sin, or death, wants us to know that even still he is “making all things new.” God Incarnate came to dwell with us in humanity, and in the new earth we, His new humanity, will dwell with Him in glory.

To know that we have a Savior who is the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2), to know a Father who began this “good work” in us and will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6), and to know a Spirit who breaths new life in us (Titus 3:5) and empowers us each day should dominate our lives as we dedicate them to His glory. If you want to experience continuous renewal in your spiritual life, do not look to yourself. Look to Christ as He is seen in the gospel and know there is where God is *for* us, Christ is *with* us, and His Spirit is *in* us solely on the basis of His passionate and perfect work on the cross to make us new.

### **Jonathan Edwards on Renewal**

“As it is with spiritual discoveries and affections given at first conversion, so it is in all subsequent illuminations and affections of this kind; **they are all transforming.** There is a like divine power and energy in them as in the first discoveries; they still reach the bottom of the heart, and affect and alter the very nature of the soul, in proportion to the degree in which they are given. And **a transformation of nature is continued and carried on** by them to the end of life, until it is brought to perfection in glory. Hence the progress of the work of grace in the hearts of the saints is represented in Scripture as **a continued conversion and renovation of nature**” (270).

## **Resources**

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Of First Importance – [www.firstimportance.org](http://www.firstimportance.org)

Gospel-Driven Church (Jared Bridges) – [www.gospeldrivenchurch.blogspot.com](http://www.gospeldrivenchurch.blogspot.com)

Irish Calvinist (Erik Raymond) – [www.irishcalvinist.com](http://www.irishcalvinist.com)

**Websites:**

The Gospel Coalition – [www.gospelcoalition.org](http://www.gospelcoalition.org)

Together for the Gospel – [www.t4g.org](http://www.t4g.org)

Soma Communities – [www.somacommunities.org](http://www.somacommunities.org)

Desiring God – [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)

The Resurgence – [www.theresurgence.com](http://www.theresurgence.com)

Monergism – [www.monergism.com](http://www.monergism.com)

9 Marks – [www.9marks.org](http://www.9marks.org)

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