

## ABSTRACT

### Evangelism Training in a Traditional Majority-Hispanic Sunday School in the Rio Grande Valley

Jerry P. Joule

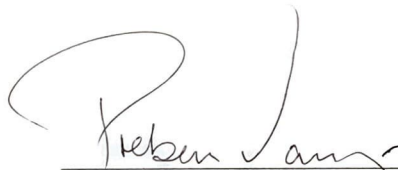
Academic Supervisor: Robert Creech, Ph.D.

This project attempts to address the lack of personal evangelism among Christians in a traditional, majority-Hispanic church in South Texas. Many Christians do not regularly share the gospel as part of their Christian lives. Three Sunday School classes at Conway Ave. Baptist Church in Mission, Texas, implemented a three-part plan for evangelism training and sending as part of their regular Sunday School curriculum. These classes were first instructed on how to use the “3 Circles” gospel presentation. Over the next five weeks, they implemented a time of accountability, practice, and goal-setting as part of the Sunday School class. A pre-intervention and post-intervention assessment was given to ascertain if the plan increased their gospel sharing and helped to overcome common barriers to personal evangelism. This project aimed to find a helpful method of increasing personal evangelism among church members, which could impact similar churches throughout the region.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "R. Robert Creech".

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Robert Creech, Ph.D., Academic Supervisor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Preben Vang".

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Preben Vang, Ph.D., Director of Doctoral Studies

A large, stylized handwritten flourish or scribble that extends from the signature area downwards and to the right.

Evangelism Training in a Traditional Majority-Hispanic Sunday School  
in the Rio Grande Valley

A Culminating Project Submitted to the Faculty of  
George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
Baylor University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the  
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Doctor of Ministry

By  
Jerry P. Joule

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPM – Church Planting Movements

DMM- Disciple Making Movements

NPL- No Place Left



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None of this would have been possible without the love and support of so many people. First among them would be my parents, Gail P. and Jerry Dona Joule. They set an example for me of serving the Lord faithfully through every stage of life. They supported me all the way through. When I was young and didn't make much effort, they always knew that I was capable of more and pushed me forward. Mom was well known among my teachers for telling them to "light a fire under that boy." But even more than this, Mom and Dad always reminded me of God's calling on my life, even from a young age. Without them, none of this would have ever happened. Thanks, Dad and Mom, for leaving me a good name, introducing me to the Lord and truly living a Christian life inside and outside our home.

I am eternally grateful for the love and support of my wife, Cassidy Joule, who took a bigger chance on me than anyone. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to stick with it when things seemed impossible. I love you more each day. Rohayhu.

To my son Daniel, you are God's gift to your mother and me. I was so blessed to get to spend the Covid 19 pandemic at home with you while trying to complete this project. Thank you for your constant encouragement. You motivate me to be the best dad I can be.

As I finish this Doctor of Ministry, I can't help but think of all the teachers who went out of their way to help me grow through the years. Many of you touched my life in ways you will never know. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Bob Garrett at DBU for going to bat for an MK and getting me into a master's program that my college

transcript did not warrant, and encouraging me to push even higher. I would also like to thank Dr. Preben Vang for getting me into Truett. Dr. Kevin Dougherty for his guidance on my research. Dr. Robert Creech, my academic advisor, for being there whenever I needed help. I would also like to mention Dr. Julio Guarneri, my field supervisor. Thank you for all your support.

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I would like to thank my church, The Way Church RGV, for all your love and support through this process. Finally, all praise and thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ. Without him, we can do nothing.

## DEDICATION

To my wife, Cassidy.

To our son, Daniel.

To my parents, Gail P. and Jerry Dona Joule.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### *Topic Statement*

Evangelism training in evangelical churches often centers around a program such as “Evangelism Explosion.”<sup>1</sup> Church members are encouraged to join evangelism training as a separate class or meeting on a weeknight. The program often runs for several weeks, training church members in how to use a basic gospel presentation and then sending them out in small teams to share with people. There is nothing wrong with the methods or tools provided by many available evangelism programs. However, because evangelism training is a separate program, many church members do not attend, meaning that a significant amount of the church membership has not had evangelistic training. In contrast, Sunday School is often considered a vital part of the regular functioning of the church, and all members are invited and expected to participate regularly. By making evangelism training a regular part of the Sunday School, a greater number of church members would receive training, helping overcome common barriers to evangelism and giving the motivation to share the gospel message with others.

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<sup>1</sup> Evangelism Explosion International, accessed May 11, 2023. <https://evangelismexplosion.org/>

### *Problem Statement*

Despite believing that sharing the gospel with others is an important part of the Christian life, only a small percentage of evangelical Christians communicate the gospel message with others on a routine basis. Recent trends imply that while the number of Christians who believe that sharing their faith is the responsibility of every Christian is still high, that number is declining. According to Barna, from 1993 to 2018, the number of Christians who agreed that sharing their faith was every Christian's responsibility dropped from 89% to 64%.<sup>2</sup> In 2018, only 11% of Christians sought out opportunities to share the gospel with a non-Christian.<sup>3</sup> Scott McConnell, director of Lifeway Research, said in 2019, "Sharing the good news that Jesus paid for our sins through His death on the cross and rose again to bring us new life is the mission of the church, but it does not appear to be the priority of churchgoers."<sup>4</sup>

The Rio Grande Valley is predominantly Hispanic, of which the majority are native-born US Citizens.<sup>5</sup> Among Christians in the U.S., Hispanics are the group most likely to believe that sharing the gospel is the responsibility of every believer and the most likely to have spoken to someone about their faith in the last six months, but still, a

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<sup>2</sup> "Sharing Faith is Increasingly Optional to Christians," Barna Group, accessed May 10, 2023. <https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Aaron Earls, "Evangelism More Prayed for Than Practiced By Churchgoers," accessed May 10, 2023. <https://research.lifeway.com/2019/04/23/evangelism-more-prayed-for-than-practiced-by-churchgoers/>

<sup>5</sup> "Quick Facts: Hidalgo County Texas," United States Census Bureau, accessed May 10, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/hidalgocountytexas>

large percentage does not speak of their faith regularly.<sup>6</sup> Cross-cultural interaction is a daily reality of life in this border region. Therefore, gospel sharing will be inherently cross-cultural. It is necessary to overcome the gap for those who believe they should share the gospel yet do not.

### *Overview of the Project*

This project was born from the desire to help local churches address the gap between belief and practice. The goal is to utilize the existing Sunday School as an effective training and launching ground for personal evangelism. Incorporating evangelism training into the Sunday School curriculum eliminates the need to recruit members to attend a separate program and will provide training to a larger percentage of the church.

Before implementing any training, Sunday School members and teachers were given a questionnaire to establish how many times they had shared the gospel during the previous year, how long they had been a Christian, their general attitude towards gospel sharing, and what they considered to be the greatest obstacle preventing them from sharing the gospel more frequently. After gathering this information, the attendees, as well as the teachers of each class, were given a training session learning how to use the “3 Circles” gospel presentation. Each participant had the opportunity to practice sharing the gospel using the *Three Circles* multiple times before the end of the training. Sunday

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<sup>6</sup> Aaron Earls, “Evangelism More Prayed for Than Practiced By Churchgoers,” accessed May 10, 2023. <https://research.lifeway.com/2019/04/23/evangelism-more-prayed-for-than-practiced-by-churchgoers/>

School teachers were instructed on how to incorporate three elements of evangelism training: accountability, practice, and goal-setting into the regular Sunday School curriculum. Each Sunday for the following five weeks, the class began with a time of accountability and encouragement, asking students if they had shared the gospel during the week and to share their stories. Next, each member was given the opportunity to practice presenting the gospel using the *Three Circles* with one another. Finally, after practicing, students were asked to identify at least one person to share the presentation with during the upcoming week. After the initial week of training and five subsequent weeks of implementation into the Sunday School classes, students and teachers were asked to fill out a second survey to determine if the program had aided in overcoming the obstacles identified and increased gospel sharing.

In many ways, Conway Avenue Baptist Church in Mission, Texas, is a typical Baptist church in the Rio Grande Valley. The church currently runs between 50 and 60 people on Sunday mornings and is reflective of the area's general population. Pastor Johnny Mora concurred that most church members acknowledge the importance of evangelism and yet do not often share the gospel. Pastor Mora welcomed the idea of realizing a program to encourage evangelism among church members and recommended that the plan be implemented in the youth, young adult, and Spanish-speaking Sunday School classes. The initial training occurred on February 1, 2023, and ran through March 8, 2023. The project aimed to overcome barriers to personal evangelism and encourage members to share the gospel with greater frequency. On the final day, an evaluation was given, allowing students and teachers to report on the frequency of gospel sharing and how the program had impacted their attitude toward personal evangelism.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Biblical and Theological Foundations

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this project is to increase evangelism in majority Hispanic traditional churches in the Rio Grande Valley. Hence, it is necessary first to establish what evangelism means and to make the case as to why church members should participate in evangelism. First, what is meant by “evangelism?” The simple dictionary definition is “The preaching or promulgation of the gospel.”<sup>7</sup> “Gospel” is defined as “the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, the Christian revelation.”<sup>8</sup> Combining these definitions, we can establish the definition of evangelism as “proclaiming the message of Jesus.” In the New Testament, this proclamation about Jesus was referred to as “gospel” by authors such as Paul and Mark, referring to the preaching of and witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God.<sup>9</sup> Gospel “was a happy choice of word, for ‘good news’ had apart from its general appeal, specific overtones in both Jewish and pagan circles, which made it particularly significant.”<sup>10</sup> This word was particularly powerful in the Greek

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<sup>7</sup> “Evangelism,” Dictionary.com, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/evangelism>

<sup>8</sup> “Gospel,” Dictionary.com, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/gospel>

<sup>9</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 86.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



world as it conveyed the idea of the announcement of victory over hostile forces or communication from a god.<sup>11</sup> The Christian gospel has clearly defined content.

### *The Gospel Message*

Paul's gospel was so clearly defined that he often references the gospel without giving any qualifications. Because it had such a recognizable format, one could announce it, chatter it, teach it, or make it known.<sup>12</sup> In 1 Cor. 15:1-8, Paul summarizes the gospel message he proclaimed:

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Scot McKnight contends that understanding the gospel begins with this passage. Scholars believe this passage to be some of the oldest material in the New Testament, revealing the oral content of Apostolic preaching before it had been written down. Paul states in Galatians 1 that he had received the gospel as a personal revelation from the Lord. But when defining the gospel, instead of appealing to his own personal revelation, he recites the church's Apostolic tradition.<sup>13</sup> The tradition proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah, "and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 46-47.

if Jesus is the Messiah, then his public career and death, and not some other way, is how Israel's God is accomplishing and establishing his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven."<sup>14</sup> Notice that in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul proclaims that "Christ" died for our sins, not "Jesus." Paul proclaims a crucified Messiah. In 1 Cor. 1:23-24, Paul says that this crucified Messiah is foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews, but to those God has called, it is the power of God unto salvation. Paul and the other Apostles made the case that the man Jesus was this Christ, who was spoken of in the Scriptures.

The points of Paul's message center on the person and works of Christ, which were completed according to the scriptures. The main points are that Christ died, was buried, and was raised, which was witnessed by many. Without Christ, there is no gospel. Origen contended that the apostles would not have been able to proclaim the gospel at all unless Christ had first brought the good news to them; the good things Jesus proclaimed were none other than himself. The gospel is truth, but Jesus is the truth. The gospel is life, but Jesus is the life.<sup>15</sup>

Christ's work was according to the scriptures. Therefore "the gospel story of Jesus Christ resolves or brings completion to the Story of Israel as found in the scriptures (our Old Testament)."<sup>16</sup> The story of Jesus did not come out of nowhere. It is connected to one people, history, and scripture, meaning that it only makes sense following and

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<sup>14</sup> N.T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 55.

<sup>15</sup> Green, 81.

<sup>16</sup> McKnight, 50.

completing Israel's story.<sup>17</sup> N.T. Wright states that in reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, one will "discover that they at least think it is important to retell the history of Israel and to show that the story of Jesus is the story in which that long history, warts and all, reaches its God-ordained climax."<sup>18</sup> But one might object, asking what does this have to do with the rest of the world? The story of Israel matters because "the creator of the world has chosen and called Israel to be the people through whom he will redeem the world."<sup>19</sup>

Using Paul's summary, one could conclude that evangelism is the proclamation that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and was raised as a matter of historical fact so that people could be saved. During his life, Jesus made claims, such as in John 14:6, that he was the way, the truth, the life, and the only way to God the Father. His death appeared to have brought this message to naught. However, the resurrection vindicated his life, identity, and claims. Christ's death and resurrection marked the dawn of a new age. The day of salvation has arrived in Christ Jesus, who came to earth, died, and was raised.<sup>20</sup> The gospel is good news; it is proclamation; it is witness. Paul states in Rom. 1:16 that this is the gospel he preaches because this gospel is the power of God by which people are saved. It should be noted that in contemporary evangelical culture, the gospel has

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, 67.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, 73.

<sup>20</sup> Green, 77.

been reduced from a “narrative proclamation of King Jesus” to a less robust plan of salvation.<sup>21</sup>

From what do people need to be saved? In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul asserts that Christ died for our sins. People need to be saved from sin and its corresponding effects. Roland Allen contends that evangelism contains a stern doctrine, the doctrine of God’s judgment and wrath, which makes modern people uncomfortable. This doctrine, he claims, is unavoidable if the church is to truly proclaim the gospel.<sup>22</sup> Leon Morris asserts that the concept of the wrath of God so pervades the entire corpus of the Old Testament that to try to eradicate it would result in irreparable loss, failing to stress the seriousness of sin.<sup>23</sup> God hates sin. “Where there is sin, the Old Testament teaches, there is wrath.”<sup>24</sup> Modern people have been so well taught that God is love that they struggle with the concept of God’s wrath against sin and against sinners. But for the Old Testament writers, it was not difficult to conceive that God could love humanity while also hating evil and severely punishing sin.<sup>25</sup>

Paul preached that people everywhere should repent because God’s day of judgment was at hand. Some understand the wrath of God to mean that God the Father is angry and wants to punish people, and Jesus was able to rescue us from an angry God.

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<sup>21</sup> McKnight, 58.

<sup>22</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., American Edition 1962), 72.

<sup>23</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1965), 174.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

But the Bible does not describe God as angry or his relationship towards humanity as angry. Rather the Bible tells us in 1 John 4:8 that God is love. Likely the most well-known verse of the Bible, John 3:16, says God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. In 2 Pet. 3:9, Peter, speaking of the day of judgment, says that God is being patient, allowing people time to repent because he does not want any to perish. God's judgment is on sin and evil, not on humans themselves. However, those who refuse to turn away from sin will suffer the judgment accorded to sin. In Romans 1, Paul states that God turns people over to the evil they choose. While God's judgment is real and significant, God has sent Jesus Christ to offer salvation to whoever believes in him. Perhaps the most concise statement concerning the need for salvation is found in the oft-memorized verse Rom. 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Salvation refers to the rescue from the human condition resulting from sin. Arn, McGavran, and Arn follow Allen's point expressing, "the conviction should spread that men and women, boys and girls without Christ and the Bible are really lost; and with him, they are a new creation. Without that conviction, nothing will happen."<sup>26</sup>

Because people are truly lost without Christ and headed toward eternal death, the gospel message is indeed good news. Christ's death and resurrection effectively deal with sin. Yet, many today have little understanding of sin or its effects. It is necessary for the evangelist to give at least a summary definition of sin. Grudem defines sin as "any failure

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Arn, Donald McGavran, and Win Arn, *Growth: A New Vision for the Sunday School* (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1980), 123.

to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.”<sup>27</sup> Clayton Jefford, in Eerdman’s dictionary, defines sin as “a reality signifying the broken relationship between God and humanity.”<sup>28</sup> Van De Walle says, “Sin seeks to seize those rights and roles that are rightfully the creator’s alone. Sin is an abuse of the prerogatives given to those who are created in the *Imago Dei*.”<sup>29</sup> It is not necessary to establish a full theological understanding of sin. For the purpose of this paper, it is enough to recognize that sin, as a part of the biblical story, is a refusal to accept God’s reign and rule, instead establishing oneself as the ruler of one’s own existence, resulting in a broken relationship between God and humanity. Therefore, sin is a reversal of God’s proper order, establishing the self as ruler rather than Yahweh. Sin is the failure of human beings to fulfill the purpose of their creation. All of humanity is sinful in both nature and action. Paul expresses this in Rom. 3:23 saying, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The gospel proclaims that Jesus has overcome sin and death through death and resurrection. Those who repent and turn to Christ will be forgiven and made new, restoring them to a right relationship with God, with Christ as Lord.

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<sup>27</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 490.

<sup>28</sup> Clayton N. Jefford, “Sin” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, David Noel Freedman, ed (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 1224.

<sup>29</sup> Bernie A. Van De Walle, *Rethinking Holiness: A Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 101.

*The Believer's Role in Evangelism*

Should every Christian take part in evangelism? This question was prominent in the times of William Carey, who is widely considered to be the “father of Protestant missions.”<sup>30</sup> At that time, many argued that the Great Commission was meant only for the original apostles and was not incumbent upon later Christians. Carey addressed this question in his famous writing “An Enquiry into The Obligation of Christians, To Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens.”<sup>31</sup> He deals with this question through an exegesis of the “Great Commission” found in Matt. 28:18-20. Carey argues that the job of making disciples of all nations applies to all times and not just to the apostles. He argues that if this passage is only for the apostles, then so, too, is the command to baptize; therefore, a church that baptizes would be in disobedience to God if this statement was only for the apostles. It is inconsistent to consider one aspect of the Commission obsolete while others remain valid. Secondly, he argues that any Christians who tried to evangelize unreached people would have done so without a warrant. Thirdly, he addresses the promise in the passage that the Lord will be with them even to the age; if this promise were only for the apostles, then the presence of the Lord would no longer be with the church, or the end of the age would have come during the time of the apostles. However, considering that the promise is to last until the end of the age, one can expect that the Lord intends the entire commission to be binding unto the end of the age as

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Schirmacher, “William Carey’s Postmillennialism and World Missions” accessed May 10, 2023. <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/william-careys-postmillennialism-and-world-missions>

<sup>31</sup> William Carey, *An Enquiry into The Obligations of Christians, To Use Means For The Conversion of the Heathens. In Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, The Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, are Considered.* (Leicester: Ann Ireland, 1792), <https://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf>

well.<sup>32</sup> Finally, he makes the case that the Commission calls the church to make disciples of all nations, which means, in fact all nations of the earth, known or unknown. However, at the time of the apostles, much of the world was still unknown. Therefore, it was impossible for the apostles to reach all nations in their time, necessitating the work of future generations to continue the work.<sup>33</sup> Another argument can be added to Carey's: the Great Commission states that the disciples were to make more disciples teaching them to obey all that the Lord has commanded. Since the Great Commission is a commandment, then it must be inferred that new disciples should be taught to obey it as well. This means that they must also go to all nations making disciples, baptizing, and teaching them to obey. In other words, disciples are to make disciples, teaching them to make more disciples so that they will make more disciples. As for missions, Carey's argument won the day, evidenced by how he is now known as the "father of Protestant missions."

Fish and Conant point out several statements of Jesus, which he made either just before his death or between the resurrection and ascension and which express the mission of the church. Before his death, Jesus says in Matt. 24:14 that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world before the end comes. And in John 15:27, Jesus tells his disciples that they will be his witnesses. After his resurrection, he gives the Great Commission in Matt. 28:18-20 commanding his disciples to go into all the world preaching the gospel to everyone. Several other passages, including Luke 24:46-48, John 20:21, and Acts 1:8, follow the same theme. Weighing these passages, Fish and Conant

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 10.



conclude that “Each forcefully carries the thrust that witnessing is to be the main task of the whole church in the whole world throughout the whole church age.”<sup>34</sup>

While the Great Commission does not use the term “evangelize,” it must be understood that one cannot make disciples unless one is declaring the gospel message and calling people to follow Jesus as Lord. Evangelism is inseparable from the work of making disciples. This distinction is only necessary because “most of evangelism today is obsessed with getting someone to make a decision; the apostles, however, were obsessed with making disciples.”<sup>35</sup> McKnight adds that in modern evangelical culture, many mistakenly equate gospel and salvation. Evangelicals think of the gospel in terms of “making a decision” for personal salvation. But these are not synonymous.<sup>36</sup> Yet the misunderstanding leads to the creation of a “salvation culture” rather than a “gospel culture.” Salvation culture is concerned with the question of who is in and who is out.<sup>37</sup> Thinking in these terms leads to an incomplete gospel because a “salvation culture does not require The Members or The Decided to become disciplined for salvation.”<sup>38</sup>

The commitment of the entire church to evangelism can be seen in the history of the early church from both biblical and historical testimony. Green says,

The enthusiasm to evangelize which marked the early Christians is one of the most remarkable things in the history of religions. Here were men and women of every rank and station in life, of every country in the known

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<sup>34</sup> Roy J. Fish and J.E. Conant, *Every Member Evangelism for Today* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 5-6.

<sup>35</sup> McKnight, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 33.

world, so convinced that they had discovered the riddle of the universe, so sure of the one true God whom they had come to know, that nothing must stand in the way of their passing on this good news to others.<sup>39</sup>

The early church was so committed to spreading the good news that they were willing to endure all sorts of troubles, indignities, and persecution for the sake of Christ. Beyond the scores of unknown Christians of the time, the Church Fathers such as Tertullian, Clement, and Origen were also known to plead with people, calling them to turn to Christ for salvation.<sup>40</sup> Without any modern communication technology, the early church spread Christianity so successfully throughout the Roman world that within three hundred years, the emperor Constantine accepted Christianity and even presided over Christian councils.<sup>41</sup> Just a few decades later, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. The apostles acted as sort of a catalytic spark, beginning the Christian work in diverse regions, but it was the unsung masses who spread the gospel so thoroughly. Paul testifies to this in 1 Thess. 1:7-8 where he commends the Thessalonian church for being an example to churches in other regions. He says, “The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia- your faith in God became known everywhere.” From this evidence, it can safely be extrapolated that the apostles and early Christians truly believed evangelism was the job of the entire church.

As a final note on the topic, it should be noted that evangelism is a function of the church to which an individual belongs. Roland Allen says, “St. Paul did not baptize

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<sup>39</sup> Green, 273.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>41</sup> “Constantine: First Christian Emperor,” Christianity Today, accessed May 8, 2023. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/rulers/constantine.html>

uninstructed converts apart from a system of mutual responsibility which ensured their instruction.”<sup>42</sup> It is the job of each individual Christian to evangelize, but they do it as a part of the church. The church is responsible for training and instructing Christians so that they would be equipped for service (Eph. 4:11-12). The result of evangelism and discipleship is the expansion of the church; the church, in turn, provides the framework and training for further evangelism and discipleship. As church members evangelize, two results should be either the growth of the local church or the planting of new churches where there is no local church. This was the pattern of the early church, for as the gospel expanded into new areas, new groups of Christians sprang up. But these groups were not left to their own devices. They were formed into churches and empowered to be the church and do the work of the church. Roland Allen says:

The new group was brought into the unity of the Church, and equipped, as its predecessors had been equipped, not only with all the spiritual power and authority necessary for its own life as an organized unity, but also with all the authority needed to repeat the same process whenever one of its members might convert men in any new village or town.<sup>43</sup>

### *Cross-Cultural Gospel*

The Great Commission is, by nature, cross-cultural. The command to make disciples of all nations means that God desires that all people hear the gospel message despite cultural barriers. Pentecost further emphasizes how the gospel will be carried cross-culturally. Acts 2 says that on the Day of Pentecost, devout Jews from around the

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<sup>42</sup> Allen, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1962), 143.

world were in Jerusalem. After the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples in the upper room, they went out and preached in languages they had never learned. People were astonished to hear these people speaking in their own languages. That day the gospel message was communicated in over fifteen different languages, and many people came to Christ.

Throughout the New Testament, the expansion of the church was primarily focused within the Roman Empire. The Pax Romana was a conducive time to taking the gospel across borders since most of the known world was under Roman control and protection with a network of roads and shipping lanes.<sup>44</sup> The Greek language was spoken throughout the empire, making it possible to travel to new areas and still be able to communicate; Greek culture provided a unifying factor across the empire. Early Christians used these cultural and linguistic bridges to spread the gospel cross-culturally.<sup>45</sup>

This chapter deals with the biblical mandate to evangelize from Old and New Testament perspectives. The aim is to convince the average church member at a traditional Hispanic<sup>46</sup> church in South Texas that they are responsible for evangelizing as part of the Christian life. This project will narrowly use the term "evangelism" to

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<sup>44</sup> Green, 30.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>46</sup> There is discussion to be had about the use of the term "Hispanic" vs "Latino." These terms are often used interchangeably, but they each have a different meaning. The term "Hispanic" has to do with the Spanish language, and "Latino" has to do with the geographic region of origin. I have used the term "Hispanic" in this study simply because it is the term preferred by the church and members referenced. A Hispanic pastor pointed out that, at least in Texas, one will often find an "Iglesia Hispana," but not an "Iglesia Latina." Also, the name of for the Spanish speaking Baptist convention in Texas is "Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas."

describe only sharing the gospel message. Many aspects of evangelism could be studied. Still, the purpose of this project is to address common barriers that members have in majority Hispanic Baptist Churches in the Rio Grande Valley. Although evangelism can be defined more broadly, it will not be helpful in overcoming fears that keep church members from sharing the gospel message.

Statistically, Hispanic church members are already more likely to evangelize than the average church member in the U.S., yet 37% still do not share the gospel regularly.<sup>47</sup> Hispanic believers tend to prefer a straightforward hermeneutical approach, favoring a word-for-word literal approach to reading the Bible.<sup>48</sup> The majority of the Hispanic population in the United States is Catholic or has a Catholic background, which affects their thinking about the Bible. Many believe that the Bible is important as an authority of faith, but not all read or study the Bible themselves. Anecdotally, many of the Hispanic Evangelicals that I have encountered in almost two decades in the region, who left Catholicism to become Evangelical, say that reading the Bible was one of the primary factors in that change. Often a friend either began to show them Bible passages or invited them to a Bible study where they began to read the scriptures for themselves. Their own Catholic background led them to believe in the authority of the Bible. Therefore, when they saw conflicts between their Catholic faith and a literal reading of biblical texts, they decided to leave the Catholic Church.<sup>49</sup> This change can create conflict among family and

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<sup>47</sup> “Sharing Faith is Increasingly Optional to Christians,” Barna Group, accessed May 10, 2023. <https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians/>

<sup>48</sup> “Chapter 6: Religious Beliefs 2014,” Pew Research, accessed May 11, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2014/05/07/chapter-6-religious-beliefs/>

<sup>49</sup> “Chapter 1: Religious Affiliation of Hispanics 2014,” Pew Research, accessed May 11, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2014/05/07/chapter-1-religious-affiliation-of-hispanics/>

friends. Because many evangelical Hispanics come out of a Roman Catholic background, they believe that Roman Catholics need to be evangelized. They will attempt to convert friends and family who are Catholic to an evangelical understanding of salvation. This presents an advantage in that Roman Catholics accept the authority of the Bible. Still, it also presents a barrier because there can be a combative relationship between Catholics and Evangelicals. Interestingly, those identifying with no religion have grown to the majority in the area.<sup>50</sup> This implies that the Catholic Church no longer has the same influence in the region that it once had. The secularization of the region seems to be more practical rather than theological. In conversation, one will note that many still believe in God and have at least some connections to a church through the older generations. There appear to be vestiges of faith among childhood Catholics who have left the church.<sup>51</sup> Many retain a general belief in God and prayer, which can create opportunities to share the gospel message. People often demonstrate a willingness to have conversations on spiritual topics once a basic connection has been established.

Albert Rodriguez makes the case that US-born, English-dominant Hispanics/Latinos have much in common with the Hellenized Greeks of the New Testament; he coins the term “Hellenized Latinos.”<sup>52</sup> “Hellenized Jews were ethnic Jews who had acculturated into the Greek-speaking world, thus minimizing their Hebrew or

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<sup>50</sup> “Community Demographics in McAllen, Texas,” Dwellics, accessed May 11, 2023. <https://dwellics.com/texas/community-in-mcallen>

<sup>51</sup> “Chapter 4: Views of Pope Francis and the Catholic Church,” Pew Research accessed May 9, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2014/05/07/chapter-4-views-of-pope-francis-and-the-catholic-church/>

<sup>52</sup> Albert R. Rodriguez, “Transcultural Latino Evangelism: An Emerging New Paradigm.” *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 4 (Fall 2019): 673–83

Aramaic language and identity.”<sup>53</sup> As with the early church, the distinction among those of the same ethnicity, yet accultured to a new paradigm, can cause divisions within the community. In the case of recent immigrants, this often represents a generational divide, meaning that parents identify primarily with their country of origin, while children are more likely to identify with the new culture. A common question faced by Spanish-speaking immigrant churches is how to minister to their children who prefer to speak English. Just because the parents speak Spanish at home does not necessarily mean that the children will be comfortable speaking Spanish.<sup>54</sup>

As generations advance, connection to the country of origin diminishes. Beyond immigration, many Hispanics have Texas roots dating back well before statehood or even Texas independence. These Texans are not likely to identify with Mexico at all but rather with a Hispanic-American culture and heritage all of its own. In many ways, the Rio Grande Valley, with its unique blend of cultures, forms its own third culture. While the majority in the area is ethnically Hispanic, one does not necessarily have to be Hispanic to be a part of the local culture. Many Anglos from the region fit in quite comfortably with the regional culture and may find themselves having more in common with Hispanics from the region than with people of their own ethnicity somewhere else. This means that evangelism in the Rio Grande Valley will naturally have cross-cultural elements, even if the evangelist herself is not aware of them.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> I have personally witnessed this many times with my own friends and church members whose parents do not speak English, and yet they do not feel comfortable speaking Spanish.

Whenever the gospel is proclaimed across cultural lines, a process of translation occurs. Translation happens when an idea needs to be shared with someone who cannot understand it in its original form. The linguistic translation is perhaps the most obvious form, as “the most fundamental element in culture is language.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed the gospel is translated into different languages regularly. The Bible itself was written in multiple languages. “Pentecost is our biblical warrant for saying that God accepts languages.”<sup>56</sup> An evangelist in South Texas might communicate the gospel message in English, Spanish, or a Tex-Mex mixture of the two. A person, even an Anglo, in the Rio Grande Valley, speaking English might casually drop in common terms such as “Órale,” “esta bueno,” or “ni modo.” The purpose of translation is to communicate ideas, not to get the words exactly the same. Moreover, sometimes the exact words would communicate a completely different idea. For instance, if someone were trying to translate the common American phrase “that’s cool” into Spanish using the exact words, it might lead the hearer to believe you were referring to the temperature.

Translation of the gospel cross-culturally is much more than linguistic. Michael Green describes the situation the early church faced in communicating the gospel cross-culturally in this way:

Once Christianity took root in Hellenistic soil, it became necessary to do a tremendous work of translation. Not only words but ideas had to be put into other dress. Without such a task of translation the message would have been heard, perhaps, but not assimilated.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 185.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Green, 165.



As the gospel spread worldwide during the early days, the church translated the gospel message to its audience. Green notes the preaching of Jesus as *kyrios* in Antioch in Acts 11. The idea of lordship appealed much more to the gentile mindset than did “Christ,” which would have had very little meaning in that context. This does not imply that the church stopped using the term Christ. Indeed, it was in Antioch, where they first were called Christians, but it lost its Jewish messianic context. To proclaim Jesus as Lord made sense in the gentile context where they were used to different lords and gods, and it brought Jesus into a confrontation with other “lords” such as Serapis and Osiris.<sup>58</sup>

The reality of cultural translation and contextualization need not be concerning. In fact, as Newbigin points out, “the truth is that every communication of the gospel is already culturally conditioned.”<sup>59</sup> There cannot be a “pure gospel” set apart from culture or language. N.T. Wright explains, “All stories are told from a point of view; without that, you have no principle of selection and are left with an unsorted ragbag of information.”<sup>60</sup> Even the original gospel stories were culturally conditioned. Newbigin writes:

The gospel is addressed to human beings, to their minds and hearts and consciences, and calls for their response. Human beings only exist as members of communities which share a common language, customs, ways of ordering economic and social life, ways of understanding and coping with their world. If the gospel is to be understood, if it is to be received as something which communicates truth about the real human situation, if it is, as we say, to “make

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>59</sup> Newbigin, 142.

<sup>60</sup> N.T. Wright, 109.

sense,” it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them.<sup>61</sup>

Christianity accepts culture as reflecting the image of God and therefore embraces all cultures and welcomes the translation and contextualization of the gospel across cultures. This contrasts with religions, such as Islam, which insists that since God’s word was given in Arabic, it can only be in Arabic.<sup>62</sup>

Paul was an expert in the contextual translation of the gospel, even to the point where one might accuse him of contradiction. As an example, despite arguing forcefully in Galatians that circumcision was not a requirement for salvation or sanctification, Acts 16:3 testifies that he also circumcised Timothy. But to Paul, there was no contradiction; rather, he aimed to remove cultural barriers to receiving the gospel. In 1 Cor. 9:20-23 he describes his methods thus:

To the Jews, I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Paul willingly translated his message and his life according to each context so that the gospel could be received by people of any culture. Note in verse 21 that he is still under Christ’s law, implying that there is a limit to how far the gospel can be contextualized. His gospel is based and centered on Christ. As previously stated, the purpose of translation is to communicate an idea so that it may be received and understood;

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<sup>61</sup> Newbigin, 141.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 185.

therefore, while there is flexibility in the form of communication, the idea must remain intact.

There is, of course, a risk involved in cross-cultural translation of the gospel. “What comes home to the heart of the hearer must really be the gospel and not a product shaped by the mind of the hearer.”<sup>63</sup> Even one who is faithful to the message might make a mistake that could lead to confusion or even an incorrect understanding of the gospel message. There is an opposite danger as well. The messenger sharing the gospel of Jesus must be careful not to be painting a “self-portrait.”<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, if the world is to be reached with the gospel, it is a risk that is worth taking. About this risk, Green says:

If Christ is for all men, then evangelists must run the risk of being misunderstood, of misunderstanding elements in the gospel themselves, of losing out on the transposition of parts of the message as long as they bear witness to him. Christians are called to live dangerously.<sup>65</sup>

The call to take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth or even to neighbors from different backgrounds demand that the evangelist take the risk of contextualizing the gospel while preserving its integrity.

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<sup>63</sup> Newbigin, 141.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Green, 201.

*Old Testament Perspective*

*Genesis 1 - 3*

God's intention for humanity is seen in the first chapters of the Bible. The scriptures demonstrate that humanity was created to be God's image bearer, spreading his glory throughout the earth. As such, God's glory would be multiplied and spread, creating a holy order for all created things. However, that plan was corrupted when all humanity was tainted by sin through Adam. Although the image of God spread through the earth, so did sin and the curse imposed on creation through sin.

Before the creation of humanity, God declares his purpose in creating men and women. Foundational to the understanding of humanity's purpose is recognizing that men and women were to be created in God's image and be his representatives over the earthly creation by reigning over all the previously created beings. Van De Walle states, "The image of God is the essence of human nature. The image of God distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation."<sup>66</sup> In Gen. 1:26-28, God states his intentions for humanity:

Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,<sup>[a]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created humanity in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

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<sup>66</sup> Van De Walle, 77.

Oliver Crisp acknowledges that there has been much debate concerning the meaning of the terms “image” and “likeness,” yet he concludes that “it appears that these two terms refer to the same thing, namely the human person taken as a whole, acting as the divine representative on earth.”<sup>67</sup> Consequently, a foundational principle of humanity is that men and women are created to be God’s ambassadors on earth. Immediately after the creation of men and women, God blessed them with a mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. God’s image would be multiplied across the earth as humans spread and reigned over all other living creatures, with the result that God’s glory, as reflected in his image, would be present and visible throughout the created order. “The Jewish vision of theocracy, of God being in charge, was always one of a rule mediated through his image-bearers, that is, through human beings.”<sup>68</sup> God declared that this established order was good.

A casual reading of the text leads one to believe that God is concerned with the spread of humanity across the earth. A more careful reading would ask why God wants humans to be fruitful and multiply as well as fill the earth. Genesis 1 makes clear that human beings, both male and female, are created in the image of God. Human beings were created to be the physical representations of God on the earth. As humans multiplied, so would the image of God multiply, filling the world with God’s image and glory. By commanding Adam to subdue and rule over creation, God intends for his representatives to rule the earth as he would rule. The earth would be submitted to the

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<sup>67</sup> Oliver D. Crisp, *The Word Enfleshed: Exploring the Person and Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 52.

<sup>68</sup> N.T. Wright, 169.

authority of God through God's representative ambassadors, his image bearers. Humanity was to be the visible representation on earth of the invisible God; in this way, God's glory would be made manifest for all creation.

Van De Walle expresses this idea, "As creatures made in the image of God, humans – in a relative but still real way – transcend the rest of creation, thus reflecting God's holiness formally. Moreover, humans are invited to participate in the divine nature through union with Christ, thus reflecting God's holiness materially."<sup>69</sup> In Crisp's view, the "image of God" is Christological, meaning that "the image of God is borne by one individual, Christ."<sup>70</sup> Hebrews 1:3 affirms that Christ is the exact representation of his being (the Father). Colossians 1:15 states, The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. And, in Rom 8:29, Paul says that those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. This evidence leads Crisp to conclude that since Christ is the true image of God, "other human beings are made in the image of God to the extent that they are conformed to the likeness of his son."<sup>71</sup> This view is rooted in Christian history; Irenaeus expressed this idea by saying, "It was said that man was created after the image of God, but it was not shown; for the Word was yet invisible, after whose image man was created, wherefore he did also lose the similitude."<sup>72</sup> Athanasius noted the difference between "being" the image of God and

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<sup>69</sup> Van De Walle, 85.

<sup>70</sup> Crisp, 52.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. And trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 544.

being “made in” or “after” the image of God. After sin defaced those made “after” his image, only one who is the Image of God could recreate man after the image.<sup>73</sup> Not only were humans created after God’s image, but they were also invited in Christ to share in God’s own divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4), God’s true image. Nothing else in creation was given that honor, not even the angels.

We must affirm that humanity being made in the image of God does not equate humans with God. Christopher Wright states: “The Bible makes a clear distinction between God the Creator and all things created. Nothing in creation is in itself divine.”<sup>74</sup> Wright contends that creation is presented as being in relation to God, in obedience to God, and subject to God’s commands.<sup>75</sup> As such, humanity created in God’s image is still subject to the rule and reign of God in creation. To reject God’s rule and reign is the essence of sin. So then, one must ask, for what purpose did God create humanity in his image? Here, Wright is helpful again: “We human beings glorify our creator in uniquely human ways, as befits our unique status as the one creature made in God’s image.”<sup>76</sup> One can conclude that humans were made in God’s image to bring God glory in a unique way that nothing else in creation can replicate. The result of God’s image filling the earth is that God would be given glory through his special creation throughout the earth and, in turn, lead all of creation to glorify the creator God.

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<sup>73</sup> Crisp, 53.

<sup>74</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, “Mission and God’s Earth,” in *Perspectives: On the World Christian Movement*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 28.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

God placed the man, Adam, in the garden to enjoy and tend over it. He was indicating that the man, as an image bearer of God and caretaker of creation, is a participant in the rule and reign of God on the earth. God had declared that all he had made was good except for one thing, it was not good for the man to be alone. God tasks Adam with naming all of the animals. Yet, none of the animals were like him. None were made in the *Imago Dei*, and Adam could not find a suitable helper among them. It is important to note what God does not do to cure Adam's loneliness. God does not create another man like Adam. Instead, God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, and he removed a part of his side. Using the part taken out of the man, God formed the woman. The Genesis account continues when Adam awakes and declares in Gen. 2:23, "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man." The author adds in verse 24, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." Van De Walle expresses how both male and female are made together in the image of God, implying that the "*Imago Dei* bears within it the intent of intimate relationship, not only with God but also with one another."<sup>77</sup> Man and woman are both fully created in the image of God regardless of marital status. Nevertheless, the one-flesh union uniquely presents God's image. Just as the persons of the Trinity are fully God in their own right, the Godhead is fully revealed in their oneness. The oneness between husband and wife represents a physical image of God's triune nature.

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<sup>77</sup> Van De Walle, 80.



Regardless, the marital oneness of Adam and Eve was still lacking a key element in representing the image of God, as the traditional Christian teaching affirmed in the Nicene Creed presents God as three in one.<sup>78</sup> Again, Van De Walle is helpful when he claims that one must not look to pre-fall Adam as the human archetype because though Adam was innocent, he was not yet perfected. He states, “Human perfection is far more than just innocence. The goal of human perfection is full and perfect communion with God and his creation.”<sup>79</sup> It must be stated again that humanity was created in God’s image to be his image bearer on the earth. As such, he had to be in perfect and complete union, one flesh, as husband and wife. And the husband and wife’s one-flesh unit was to also be in full and perfect union with God. Ellison states: “God sought to establish man and woman in a wholesome relationship to His sovereignty. He sought to relate to them by love, not coercion. The strength of love is infinitely stronger than that of muscle. With this in mind, He made Adam and Eve partners in His rule.”<sup>80</sup> The man and woman were to be one flesh, sharing in the life of God, and participating in his rule, bearing his image. But they had to choose faithfulness to God freely. Instead, they chose to be like God themselves. This statement, to “be like God,” as the serpent enticed, signifies independence from God. Why would one need to depend on God if one could be like God himself? Rather than embracing the glory and image of God, Adam and Eve sought

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<sup>78</sup> “The Nicene Creed.” Catholic.org, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=495>

<sup>79</sup> Van De Walle, 84.

<sup>80</sup> Stanley A. Ellison, “Everyone’s Question: What is God Trying to Do?” in *Perspectives: On The World Christian Movement*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 18.

to be like God, apart from God. This choice is the essence of sin, which led to brokenness, where there was to be oneness.

In the garden, God had placed many trees of which the man and woman could eat and enjoy. Two specific trees are mentioned in the Genesis narrative, the “Tree of Life” and the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.” God warned Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, for if he did, he would surely die. Yet since the text also identifies the Tree of Life specifically, it must be inferred that eating from the Tree of Life was allowed. Genesis 3:22 explains that those who eat of the Tree of Life will never die and that there is an incompatibility between the two trees. God warned that eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil would result in death; this is an obvious opposition to the Tree of Life. Once the man had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, God said he must not be allowed to eat and live forever. The dichotomous choice of which tree to eat would determine the direction of human history. A leap to the end of the biblical story reveals that in the New Jerusalem, people are free to eat from the Tree of Life. Access is no longer blocked.

The text does not reveal what would have resulted had Adam and Eve eaten from the Tree of Life. However, Jesus makes multiple claims about himself being life. In John 14:6, he says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He claims, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). He affirms, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). What’s more, Christ uses the imagery of eating, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). Considering this evidence, it is reasonable to make a typological comparison between the Tree of Life and Christ. Comparing the statement in Genesis 3, that if they were to eat from the tree, they

would live forever, and Jesus' statement in John 6:54 that those who eat his flesh would have eternal life strengthens the typology and provides a clue as to the result of eating from the Tree of Life. This clue indicates that, in some way, eating from the Tree of Life would have made the eternal life of God a reality in Adam and Eve's lives.

Contemplating this possibility presents another type of the Image of God; a tri-union of husband, wife, and God. This typology can be seen again in the unity of the Father, Christ, and his Bride. Both of these tri-unions would be physical representations of the nature of God.

Unfortunately, the Genesis story does not end well. Instead of eating from the Tree of Life, the man and woman listen to the tempter and eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God had warned the man not to eat of this tree, telling him that he would surely die if he did. The serpent told the woman they would not die but instead be like God. When the couple ate from the tree, their eyes were opened, and they saw they were naked. They were no longer innocent, and worse, they had no glory on their own. Human beings were created to reflect the nature, image, and glory of God. On their own, they had to see their own image rather than that of the creator. While Adam and Eve had been created in the image of God, that image had become corrupted. Not only had the *Imago Dei* been corrupted, but creation also became subject to a curse (Gen. 3:11-19). Van De Walle points out that sin disfigures all of the relationships for which humanity was created. He notes that when sin is introduced in Genesis 3, it is immediately followed by relational breakdown. Adam and Eve hiding from God and their eviction from the garden demonstrates the breakdown of the divine-human relationship. Adam casting blame on Eve reveals the breakdown of human-human relationships.

Finally, the rise of thorns and thistles demonstrates the results of sin upon the creation-human breakdown.<sup>81</sup>

The biblical story declares in Gen. 6:5 that sin and corruption multiplied instead of God's image multiplying and filling the earth. Sin multiplied so thoroughly that God eventually destroyed the earth with a flood to start again. After Noah left the ark, God blessed him again and told him to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. Not long after the flood, the people neglected to fill the earth and instead joined together in one place and began to build a tower to reach heaven to establish a name for themselves apart from God.<sup>82</sup> Seeing humanity in disobedience to his command to fill the earth, God looked down and declared that he would confuse the people's languages, causing them to scatter across the earth. In this way, people filled the earth, but so too did the sin in them. Sin multiplied across the earth, and language confusion led to separate cultures reflecting both God's image and the separation from God caused by sin. Sin had separated all people, cultures, and languages from God. Moreover, reconciliation between humanity and God would require a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic plan.

### *Genesis 12:1-3*

Following Noah's story in Gen. 9-11, God set his redemptive plan in motion with the call of Abram, giving him this command in Gen. 12:1-3 (NLT):

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<sup>81</sup> Van De Walle, 100.

<sup>82</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, "Israel's Missionary Call," in *Perspectives: On the World Christian Movement*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 11.

The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.

John Stott contends that this passage reveals the entirety of God’s purpose and brings a unified vision for the rest of Scripture. This passage reveals that God is not just a tribal deity but the Lord of all and in control of history. God is gracious to make covenant promises, which he will fulfill. He is a God of blessing; his characteristic work is to bless people with salvation. God has promised to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham, that is, through his seed.<sup>83</sup>

God promised to make a name for Abraham. This name would come as a blessing from above rather than one he made for himself.<sup>84</sup> Kaiser points to the purpose of blessing to demonstrate the missionary purpose of God’s call to Abram. God’s purpose in blessing Abram is so that he can be a blessing to others.<sup>85</sup> The purpose of the blessing is to be a blessing. God’s plan for his people was that they would be “missionaries and channels of truth from the very beginning.”<sup>86</sup>

The declaration that all the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham comes just one paragraph after the scattering of nations at Babel. This literary connection demonstrates that though God scattered the nations, he still has plans to bless them all;

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<sup>83</sup> John R.W. Stott, “The Living God is a Missionary God,” in *Perspectives: On the World Christian Movement*, 4th Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 9.

<sup>84</sup> Kaiser, 13.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

however, that blessing will come to them through his missionary people. God does not want to leave the nations alone. Instead, he wants them all to be reached with his blessing through his called people. Samuel Escobar comments on this idea: “God’s saving purpose was universal in its dimension, but he chose one man and one people to accomplish it. Therefore, the God of Abraham and of Jesus Christ is not a local totem who wants to favor one clan for his own sake. Rather, he is the Creator of humankind and wants to bless all peoples within this human family.”<sup>87</sup> N.T. Wright says, “The call of Abraham is the answer to the sin of Adam. Israel’s story is thus the microcosm and beating heart of the world’s story, but also its ultimate saving energy. What God does for Israel is what God is doing in relation to the whole world.”<sup>88</sup>

Abraham responded to God’s call and promise with faith and obedience, and he became the father, not just of a human family, but of a family of faith. Escobar reminds us that Paul declared Abraham the father of all who respond to God in faith, and reminds us that three of the great religions, which have had a great impact on the world, trace their existence to Abraham’s response to God in faith.<sup>89</sup> Therefore the missionary intention of this passage is not simply a Christian interpretation but an implied understanding of God’s purpose.

Responding to God in the faith of Abraham brings people into his family and thus unites them in his purpose. Stott declares, “Now we are Abraham’s seed by faith, and the

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<sup>87</sup> Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003) 86.

<sup>88</sup> N.T. Wright, 74.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 87.

earth's families will be blessed only if we go to them with the gospel. That is God's plain purpose."<sup>90</sup> Those who are a part of Abraham's spiritual family must be about the "family business." God's blessing is upon them so they can be a blessing to the world. Therefore, the missionary nature of God's call to Abraham holds power over all who belong to his family. Escobar reminds us that Abraham's faith included his willingness to walk in the way of the Lord. "Abraham's descendants became a nation constantly called to live a life that would illustrate God's purpose in creating humanity, a life of obedience to the law of the Lord."<sup>91</sup> In living a life of obedience, God's people demonstrate God's plan for humanity. That God would receive glory and that his image would fill the earth. Walking in obedience to God is to walk in blessing and to bless others.

God's blessing is not a simple blessing of prosperity; rather, it is a reversal of the curse brought upon creation by the sin of Adam. It promises the restoration of what has been corrupted. Gallagher and Hawthorne state that in Genesis, there are two ways in which the term "blessing" is used. The first is a pronouncement or speaking of a future destiny declared over or bestowed on a person or entity. The second is the actual fulfillment of what was declared and promised. Blessing then refers to both the declaration and the actual gift received.<sup>92</sup> The first statements of blessing in the scripture are on the fifth and sixth days of creation when God blesses first the birds and the fish and then humans and animals. "Throughout the rest of Scripture, the idea of blessing

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<sup>90</sup> Stott, 9.

<sup>91</sup> Escobar, 87.

<sup>92</sup> Sarita D. Gallagher and Steven C. Hawthorne, "Blessing as Transformation," in *Perspectives: On the World Christian Movement*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 34.

remains linked to the idea of life flourishing toward an intended fullness. When blessing is fulfilled in creatures, people, households, or nations, they are enabled to move toward their intended destiny.”<sup>93</sup> This definition is essential in understanding the purpose of the gospel message. It is a message of blessing, of flourishing towards the fullness of God’s intended destiny for humanity from the beginning. The gospel message is that the *Imago Dei* can be restored, and people can live in the glory God prepared for them in the beginning through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*Exodus 19:4-6*

The scriptural narrative moves from Abraham to Isaac and Jacob, then to Joseph and the Israelites moving to Egypt. While Joseph had been a man of major importance in Egypt, eventually, there arose new kings who did not remember Joseph and his contributions and enslaved the Israelites. Between the time of Joseph and the time of Moses, the Israelites grew from a family to a nation. After 400 years, God raised Moses to lead the people out of Egypt and to the land God promised Abraham. Pharaoh was unwilling to let the people of Israel go, so God brought ten powerful plagues upon Egypt. The final and worst plague was when the angel of death passed through and killed all of the firstborn sons of Egypt. The Lord provided a way to escape the plague by killing a lamb and painting the sides and top of the doorframes with its blood. When the angel of death saw the blood, he would pass over that house. After this plague, the Israelites were allowed to leave Egypt. Before entering the promised land, the Israelites trekked through

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 35.



the wilderness for forty years, and during that time, they continued to see the Lord's provision. The most significant event of the time in Sinai was the reaffirmation of God's covenant and the giving of the law. In Ex. 19:4-6 (ESV) it reads:

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

Kaiser refers to this passage as one of the basic texts that make clear God's missionary mandate for his people: "Israel had always been responsible for communicating the message of God's grace to the nations."<sup>94</sup> God had made covenant promises to Abraham, even telling him that his people would spend four hundred years in Egypt before taking possession of the promised land. Now he had brought them out of Egypt with works of great power. Verse 5 begins with the connecting phrase "now therefore," implying that what follows results from what God has done for them in bringing them out of Egypt. The essence of the faith of Israel is bound to the firm conviction that God had brought them out of Egypt, led them through the desert, and given them the promised land. It is by God's intervention alone that Israel has become a people. Moreover, God has made a covenant with them at Sinai, determining their subsequent history.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Kaiser, 11.

<sup>95</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 17.

God's purpose was that Israel would be his special possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. It was not just Moses or the Aaronic priesthood that was to fulfill this call; it was the entire community. All who were in Israel were called to participate in this purpose. To be holy was to be set apart and wholly dedicated to God.<sup>96</sup> Election is for a purpose. God has chosen his people to be set apart for him, his special possession. The term for special possession refers to valuable commodities such as silver, gold, or jewels, not real estate or property. Possessions of this type are portable and valuable across national borders. Kaiser proposes that this demonstrates God's love for his people is not attached to the land. His people will be his special possession wherever they go.<sup>97</sup> That they are to be his special possession among the nations recognizes the cross-cultural nature of their calling.

Though Israel has been set apart for God, they are still to see themselves in the context of God's global mission to redeem the world to himself. Bosch explains, "The God of Israel is the Creator and Lord of the whole world. For this reason, Israel can comprehend its own history only in continuity with the history of the nations, not as a separate history."<sup>98</sup> Regarding the nations, Israel is to be a kingdom of priests, an idea Peter picks up in the New Testament. Priests are set apart for God, but they also act as intercessors between God and the people. As such, the nation of Israel as a whole and as individuals are to be mediators between God and the nations.<sup>99</sup> The purpose of God's

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<sup>96</sup> Kaiser, 13.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Bosch, 18.

<sup>99</sup> Kaiser, 13.

election is service, representing God as his ambassadors and priests, bringing God's blessings to all nations.

Yahweh is the only God. Therefore, he is the God of all nations, even if they have not heard of him. Though it was clear that God intended to embrace the nations through Israel did not intentionally go out to the nations. Nor did they call the nations to come and embrace Yahweh. Despite the lack of intention, foreigners did come to the Lord, but it must be said that the Lord himself brought them in, despite Israel's lack of missional effort. From this, one can conclude that God himself is a missionary God.<sup>100</sup> But he desires that his chosen people will be the ones to take his blessing to the nations.

Why should God require a chosen people to be the bearers of salvation? Could not God simply reveal himself to everyone? While God did draw people to himself, he did so through Israel, his covenant people. Even if they did not go out, God brought people into contact with them. Salvation is found in connection with God's people. Newbigin proposes that human life is fundamentally about relationships. The most basic relationship is between man and woman, as seen in Genesis. Then between parents and children. Next, between families, clans, and nations. The Bible speaks about humanity in terms of families, "all the families of the earth." "This dependence on one another is not merely part of the journey toward the goal of salvation, but it is intrinsic to the goal itself. For knowing God, for being in communion with him, we are dependent on the one whom he gives us to be the bearer of this relation."<sup>101</sup> Salvation binds the saved into the

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<sup>100</sup> Bosch, 19.

<sup>101</sup> Newbigin, 82.

community, a community which, in turn, reaches out to others with the message of salvation.

The people of the covenant are to make God's ways known. This idea is later repeated by David in Ps. 67:1-2 when he says, "May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among the nations." David's song functions as a poetic restatement of the covenant promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:2, "I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others." It is also a restatement of the covenant made in Exodus, establishing God's elect as his royal priesthood. Election does not result in a self-contained community but in a missional community that makes God known throughout the earth.

#### *Isaiah 40 - 66*

Years of disobedience and failure to keep the law had led the people of Israel into captivity in Babylon. Isaiah deals with the time of the exile and the return to their homeland. The primary theme of chapters 40-55 is that Yahweh has defeated Babylon, and Judah is now free to return from exile.<sup>102</sup> This section contains several passages, or poems, about the servant of the Lord. Brueggeman writes, "The servant appears to be Israel, but also to have a mission to Israel."<sup>103</sup> Bosch adds that the servant is indeed a paradigm of Israel, but it must be considered that her election and existence are not an

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<sup>102</sup> Walter Brueggeman, *Isaiah 40-66*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>103</sup> Brueggeman, 13.

end in themselves. God is busy with the nations through Israel. The election of Israel is an anticipation. Through Israel, God is reaching his hand out to the world. God has greater plans than restoring the tribes of Judah and returning the descendants of Israel. As it says in Isa. 49:6, “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”<sup>104</sup>

The oracles of Isaiah played a major role in Israel’s and the early church’s understanding of God’s purpose in the world. In Acts 8, when Philip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch, he finds him reading from Isaiah about the servant of the Lord. Philip uses that passage as the starting point to preach the gospel of Christ, resulting in the baptism of the eunuch. The eunuch himself is a demonstration of God’s acceptance of foreigners and eunuchs who will cling to the Lord. Later we will see how Jesus associated himself with the servant in Luke 4:18-19.

Arriving at Isaiah 56, there is a distinct change in the setting of the prophecies. The people have been called out of exile, and now the author of Isaiah presents a fresh vision, reimagining life in the post-exilic community. It was a time of reshaping Israel’s faith into what is now known as Judaism. During this rebuilding period, there was surely debate about how the future should look. In chapter 56, it is God who lays out the vision of what should shape the life of Israel.

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<sup>104</sup> David J. Bosch, “Witness to the World,” in *Perspectives: On the World Christian Movement*, 4th Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 78.

The Lord says that Israel is to maintain justice and do what is right for my salvation is close at hand, and my righteousness will soon be revealed (Isa. 56:1). One might take this to mean that God's salvation is dependent on Israel's action, which would make sense considering it was their lack of justice and righteousness that had resulted in judgment (Isa. 5:7). Yet that is not the intent of this statement. They are not to maintain justice and righteousness to receive God's salvation, but they are to do so because his salvation is near at hand, a call later echoed by John the Baptist in the New Testament.<sup>105</sup> This call and the call to keep the Sabbath are positive exhortations. The point of the Sabbath was not to abstain from work but to be dedicated to God. Observing the Sabbath was thus a sign of one's adherence to Yahweh.<sup>106</sup>

It is essential to notice God's work throughout this passage. Salvation and righteousness belong to God and come from him, and they are near. Yahweh, by unilateral act, "will bring this community to the well-being that Yahweh has intended from the outset."<sup>107</sup> God's act is not dependent on their behavior, unlike the covenant made at Sinai in Exodus 19. Still, this way of life is to be the guiding vision for the community of the Lord. This passage envisions a community focused on living under the guiding principles of justice and righteousness as a response to the gracious coming salvation of Yahweh. A community that unites itself with Yahweh will have a distinct shape and vision. God's community is called to live according to his standard.

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<sup>105</sup> Geoffrey W. Grogan, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 6, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 315.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Brueggeman, 169.

In Deuteronomy 23, strict standards were set out as to who was welcome in the assembly of the Lord, specifically mentioning those with severed testicles and foreigners. It is natural that in reimagining the shape of society, there should be debate over this question. The oracle of Isaiah overrides the commandment,<sup>108</sup> though it is not necessary to see it as a cancellation “but rather as eschatological and belonging to the new order of the future.”<sup>109</sup> The concern in this section is ethical claims concerning the importance of Torah observance by the community. Justice is imperative for those who commit to the Lord and observe the Torah and the Sabbath. Isaiah advocates for inclusiveness in the faithful community of the emerging Judaism.<sup>110</sup> While Deuteronomy excluded those with maimed testicles and foreigners, Isaiah gives a vision of faithful eunuchs and foreigners being accepted into God’s community by binding themselves to the Lord.

As the Lord builds and shapes the new Judaism throughout the latter part of Isaiah, no one who will commit to the Lord faithfully shall be excluded. Hence, there is conditional inclusiveness; all are welcome, but only those who will be bound to the Lord and do right will be accepted. Inclusivity then exists for the Lord and not for its own sake. This is an important distinction that characterizes both Old Testament Israel and Christianity. For Christianity, inclusivity must be a result of the gospel message, delivered cross-culturally to all nations and all walks of life. Inclusivity comes as Christians reach out and share the gospel with all who will listen. William Abraham warns that inclusivism, for its own sake, quickly becomes a form of moralism that is

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<sup>108</sup> Brueggeman, 170.

<sup>109</sup> Grogan, 315.

<sup>110</sup> Brueggeman, 165.

poisonous to the church.<sup>111</sup> Illustrating this concept, Abraham observes, “When we worship together now in mainline corporate settings, the first question before us is not whether God is present but whether the right range of diversity is present.” Inclusion is, therefore, not an end in itself but an outgrowth of the gospel, which is for the entire world.

### *New Testament Perspective*

The New Testament begins with four accounts of the life of Jesus. As mentioned before, Wright believes it is significant that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all make it a point to retell the story of Israel, recognizing that the story of Jesus is the climax of Israel’s story.<sup>112</sup> McKnight observes that Jesus’ story completes Israel’s story. He notes that the early church referred to the Gospels as “The Gospel according to” because each author tells the same gospel story, albeit from a distinct perspective. All four gospels demonstrate the Story of Israel coming to completion in Jesus.<sup>113</sup> In a rabbinic understanding of the Old Testament, the prophets had predicted the coming Messiah and the “days of the Messiah.” They expected that God would visit his people and bring “to a climax his dealings with them in history. The apostles, then, declare that the Messianic

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<sup>111</sup> William J. Abraham, “Inclusivism, Idolatry, and the Survival of the (Fittest) Faithful,” in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 138.

<sup>112</sup> Wright, 67.

<sup>113</sup> McKnight, 80.



age has come...This has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>114</sup>

Not only do the gospel writers and the apostles make these claims about Jesus, but Jesus also made such claims about himself, though not in direct words. All of Jesus' life and deeds were according to the scriptures and in fulfillment of the scriptures. Jesus makes this clear by declaring that he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfill the law in Matt. 5:17. Jesus makes a very shocking declaration in Luke 4:14-30. It starts off well with people speaking well of him but ends with the same people wanting to throw him off a nearby cliff. One Sabbath, in Nazareth, his hometown, he was allowed to read from the prophet Isaiah chapter 61. He read: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” After reading, he announced that this scripture had been fulfilled in their hearing. With this statement, Jesus implies several concepts; he is fulfilling the Scriptures, he is the Lord's servant to whom Isaiah referred, and he is ushering in the Messianic age. Michael Green highlights the significance of this account from the book of Luke. The reading from the book of Isaiah is quite significant because it announces the return from exile, God's anointed messenger, God's victory and rule, and the dawn of a new age. God's day of salvation has arrived, his people are awaiting him, and even the Gentiles can be included.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1962), 21.

<sup>115</sup> Green, 77.

In 1 Cor. 15, Paul connected Christ's death and resurrection to the scriptures. Paul wants the reader to understand that Jesus' death and resurrection are a part of the larger story. Jesus Christ completes the story of Israel, which also applies to Gentiles because Christ died for our sins. Sin is a universal problem. "However we tell the story of Jesus, that story must deal with sins."<sup>116</sup> Paul does not explain, in this passage, a theory of how Christ's death deals with sin. It is enough for the gospel message simply to know that he has dealt with all our sins.<sup>117</sup> Yet, his followers were distraught in the hours between Christ's death and resurrection, and many had scattered. They did not understand that Jesus would die and rise again (John 20:9). According to Green, the disciples must have felt they had been mistaken after the death of Jesus. But the resurrection was "God's vindication of the claims Jesus had made. They saw that he was the designated Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead."<sup>118</sup> Israel's story has reached its goal. Jesus had completed God's covenant with Israel, evidenced by his cry, "It is finished," which Wright translates as "It's all done." Christ has completed God's covenant with Israel by his death; his resurrection ushers in a new covenant, a new creation. The resurrection launches the new covenant, and Jesus' disciples are sent out into the world to bear witness. Israel's story has reached its goal and can now bear fruit worldwide.<sup>119</sup>

Jesus is the Messiah and the climax of the story of Israel, which is good news for the world. Thus, it may seem curious that Jesus focused his ministry in and to Israel, and

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<sup>116</sup> McKnight, 51.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>118</sup> Green, 78.

<sup>119</sup> N.T. Wright, 79.

although there were interactions with Gentiles, Jesus clearly focused on Israel. During an encounter with a Canaanite woman, Jesus told her, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” In Matt. 10:5 Jesus instructs his disciples not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans but to stay among the lost sheep of Israel. However, it would be a mistake to assume that Jesus was not concerned for the nations. This confusion is resolved by recognizing once again Israel’s election and Jesus as the completion of the story of Israel. God has chosen a people through which to bless the world. Jesus came to that people in fulfillment of the scriptures. Having completed Israel’s story, it remains the job of Israel to be the light to the nations. It is the job of God’s people to take his gospel to the nations. While Jesus focused on the lost sheep of Israel, his mission continues, though the resurrection has translated the mission from local to global.<sup>120</sup> Wright describes this change by saying,

It isn’t just that Jesus has lifted a temporary ban on going to the Gentiles. The point is that now, with Jesus death and resurrection, the rule of the king of the Jews has been established over the nations, as in Isaiah 11 and Psalms 2, 72, and 89. His followers are therefore to go and put that rule into effect.

Once Jesus had completed the work of his life and passion, he told his followers that they were to go to the nations. His work was in Israel. Among the people of Israel, he found those who recognized him and prepared them for the ongoing ministry to the nations. God had chosen from the world a people to be his missionaries. Now Jesus had chosen from among Israel those who would be his missionaries. Johannes Verkuyl says, “To speak to this world in the fullness of time, he needed a people.”<sup>121</sup> This is ultimately

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<sup>120</sup> N.T. Wright, 115.

<sup>121</sup> Johannes Verkuyl, “The Biblical Foundation for the Worldwide Mission Mandate,” in *Perspectives: On the World Christian Movement*, 4th Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 43.

the purpose of election, Newbigin says, that to be elect in Christ “means to be incorporated into his mission to the world, to be the bearer of God’s saving purpose for his whole world, to be the sign and the agent and the firstfruit of his blessed kingdom which is for all.”<sup>122</sup>

During the years of his ministry, Jesus called people to follow him as his disciples and focused his ministry on them. Jesus started gathering these disciples before he even began a public ministry. His objective was to enlist those who could be witnesses to his life, death, and resurrection and carry on the work after he had returned to the Father.<sup>123</sup> While Jesus spent time ministering to crowds of people, he focused on the twelve he had chosen. Among the twelve, he focused even more closely on three. Why would Jesus do this? Jesus’ goal was not to impress the crowd but to usher in God’s Kingdom. For this, he needed people who could lead the multitudes. Jesus understood that crowds are fickle. Thus, the way to reach the world in an enduring way was to raise up people who could lead in the things of God.<sup>124</sup>

*Matthew 28:18-20*

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

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<sup>122</sup> Newbigin, 87.

<sup>123</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993), 21.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 28-29.

This passage is usually called “The Great Commission,” and it comes after Christ’s resurrection. Verse 16 states that he had called together his eleven remaining disciples to give them this instruction. This is the conclusion of the Gospel according to Matthew, a mandate for the disciples. The result of Jesus’s story is the sending of his disciples to make more disciples. The outcome of Jesus’ death and resurrection is that he has received all authority in heaven and on earth, which translates to sending his people into the world. Much like God the Father at the creation of human beings intended for his image-bearers to carry his glory throughout the earth, “Jesus intended for the disciples to produce his likeness in and through the church being gathered out of the world.”<sup>125</sup>

Christ’s declaration that he has all authority in heaven and on earth is the declaration that he is king! He is not just the king of Israel but of everything in heaven and earth. As such, he sends out his messengers to tell the good news, bring others into the kingdom, and teach them how to live as citizens of the kingdom. His kingship and authority are, therefore, the reason, the impetus, and the message of evangelism. Since Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth, he must also have authority in the lives of his kingdom people.

“Therefore,” is an important word in the Great Commission. It connects the reason that Christ has all authority with the corresponding action. Because of his authority, he sends, and because of his authority, his people go. This can be understood in two different ways. First, it can be seen as a command of someone of a higher rank commanding someone of a lower rank, as in a military general giving orders to a soldier.

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<sup>125</sup> Coleman, 89.

This is true. The Great Commission must be seen as a command from the king, which his people will and must obey. A second, perhaps better, way of looking at it is to see it as the proper response of kingdom citizens to spread the good news that Christ is king. Because he reigns, his people want to tell the world the good news, bringing others into his reign so they may enjoy the good things of the Kingdom of God. Michael Green appears to support this position. He claims that the Great Commission, while important, as is obedience to the Lord, was not the primary motive for evangelism in the early church. Instead, the early church was motivated by thankfulness, love, and the nature of a God who gives. The Great Commission was not seen as a new legalism with sanctions attached to it. Instead, Christ's authority and promised presence with his people as they go was primary.<sup>126</sup>

The Great Commission gives the command to "go and make disciples." This statement focuses on the imperative "make disciples," but it must be understood that to make disciples, the church must go or be going. In other words, it is the responsibility of the church to reach people by going or as they go. Today the church is often focused on getting people to "come." It is common to hear questions like, "How can we get more youth to come to church?" Churches often plan special preachers, programs, and events to get people to come to church. Almost all church marketing through commercials or billboards is based on trying to get people to come to church. The church would do well to recognize that this is precisely the opposite of the strategy that Jesus gave his earliest disciples. Ying Kai says inviting people to come may be our standard practice, but it is

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<sup>126</sup> Green, 278.

not how the Lord told us to find lost persons. He says, “‘Go’ is a key concept. As long as we ‘go,’ we will be able to do things. If we just stay in one place, people will not automatically come to us.”<sup>127</sup> The work of evangelism is one where Christians go out into the world with the gospel message, not sit in a church building hoping the world will come to them.

Secondly, the Great Commission tells the disciples to go to all nations. Because Jesus has all authority on earth, the entire world is his! Going to all nations is simply taking for Christ what already belongs to him. Israel had a troubled past with foreign nations and did not always want good for them. The story of Jonah testifies to this as the prophet did not want to go and preach where God had sent him because he did not wish that nation to repent. God demonstrated to Jonah that though the prophet might have a prejudice against another nation, God does not. The Great Commission “requires us to stretch our vision. We must go beyond our limited vision to the Great Commission vision God has given us.”<sup>128</sup>

Kai contends that going to all nations includes every individual. Fish and Conant would agree, saying that all nations must include “every Christian’s personal world, for it takes all the personal worlds of all the Christians scattered over the earth added together to cover the geographical world.”<sup>129</sup> Kai says that Christians should not be stingy with the gospel but share it freely with anyone who will listen despite any previously held

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<sup>127</sup> Ying Kai and Grace Kai, *Ying and Grace Kai’s Training for Trainers: The Movement that Changed the World*. (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2018), 6.

<sup>128</sup> Kai, 7.

<sup>129</sup> Fish and Conant, 6.

prejudice.<sup>130</sup> In Matt. 13:1-23, Jesus illustrates this idea with the story of a farmer sowing seed. While some of the seed fell on good ground, much fell on less-than-optimal soil, such as along a path, among the rocks, or in thorns. What is shocking in this story is that a farmer would spread seed in such inauspicious ground. A farmer would have known which part of the soil was good. But this farmer spread seed to every corner of the property.<sup>131</sup> This story indicates that Christians should liberally spread the gospel message to every soul in every corner of God's earth. Some seeds will fall on good soil and produce a great harvest.<sup>132</sup> This does not mean that everyone must be a professional preacher. Yet public and private witness is the main business of the entire church. Fish and Conant propose that all Christians are called to private witness, while there is a special call of the Holy Spirit for those who witness publicly.<sup>133</sup>

The Great Commission focuses on making disciples and includes the instruction to baptize them. If evangelism is meant to bring people into God's kingdom, it requires calling them not just to make a decision but to become disciples. "They must follow the Master's footsteps and learn all the Master's skills until they can complete their training

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<sup>130</sup> Kai, 7.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>132</sup> I saw this illustrated very powerfully on a visit in 2010 to the Eglise Protestante Baptiste Ouvres et Mission Internationale in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. This church has around 250,000 members that meet in cell groups all around the world. The church began in the pastor's home in Abidjan and now has cell groups (which they call "house church"- Eglise de Maison) as far away as Los Angeles and Sidney. One American pastor asked founding pastor Dion Robert about their church's mission strategy. Pastor Dion replied that their only strategy was to train every member in how to evangelize, make disciples, and lead a house church. This led to rapid reproduction of house churches in any place where there were church members. Often church members would move to other places, whether for work, or personal reasons and would continue the pattern in each new place. It should be noted, however, that in Western countries they tend to stay among people of the same or similar cultural background.

<sup>133</sup> Fish and Conant, 13.



and become a master themselves. This is what it means to be a disciple.”<sup>134</sup> A critical step in discipleship is baptism. Baptism is the normal way that people join the people of God. Baptism identifies the new believer with Christ in his death and resurrection, leading them into a new life as his disciple. Moreover, Baptism is a public testimony of one’s faith in Christ, telling a person’s own story of faith to the broader community. To make disciples and baptize indicates that the work of evangelism is more comprehensive than simply sharing the gospel and asking people to pray a prayer. It is an ongoing work that necessitates sharing the gospel story as part of evangelism, but it must continue beyond only sharing. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a significant number of Christians do not share the gospel story at all. Hence it is vital that Christians be taught how to tell the gospel story effectively; then, they can be equipped to disciple, baptize, and teach.

Next, Jesus says that Christians must teach the newly baptized disciples to obey all which he has commanded. Old Testament and New Testament Israel put great emphasis on teaching. The Shema, found in Deut. 6:4-9, focused on teaching subsequent generations to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength. Rabbis were given a great honor. Jesus himself was a teacher. “Jesus always followed his exhorting and evangelizing with teaching.”<sup>135</sup> Sunday School is often the teaching arm of the local church in modern times. We must heed Jesus’ command, “teach them to obey.” This is quite different from teaching for the sake of knowledge. This type of teaching can also be called training. Good teaching goes beyond knowledge to the application of what is

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<sup>134</sup> Kai, 8.

<sup>135</sup> Arn, Arn, and McGavran, 10-11.

learned in the learner's life. As Christians share the gospel and call people into discipleship, there must be a focus on training them on how to live out a Christian life, applying the teachings of Jesus to their own lives. The Great Commission is also a commandment; thus, it is the job of the evangelist to, in turn, teach new believers how to do what they do. This is further evidence that the Great Commission was not just for the first disciples but to be carried on from generation to generation of Christians, even to the end of the age.

Training is only complete once a new believer is equipped and takes action to train others.<sup>136</sup> Once this happens, the work has multiplied. Now instead of just one evangelist, there are two. "Jesus intended for the disciples to produce his likeness in and through the church being gathered out of the world."<sup>137</sup> Teaching new believers to obey what the Lord has commanded results in reproduction and multiplication, causing the gospel to expand in an ever-increasing fashion reaching multitudes.<sup>138</sup> "The test of any work of evangelism this is not what is seen at the moment, or in the conference report, but in the effectiveness with which the work continues in the next generation."<sup>139</sup> We are evidence of the success of the first disciples. If they had failed to teach others to obey, our churches would not be here today. No mass marketing campaign can have the lasting effect of evangelism which multiplies and expands. There must be no shortcuts or attempts to pass off responsibilities given to every Christian by their Lord.

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<sup>136</sup> Kai, 9.

<sup>137</sup> Coleman, 89.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 95.

Perhaps the most profound aspect of the Great Commission is Jesus' promise to be with his disciples as they go. Green believes that it was this promise which was the greatest motivation for the early church.<sup>140</sup> Because Jesus expected the disciples to reproduce themselves in new disciples, it is understood that his promise is for new disciples also, until the end of the age. To be about Christ's mission of evangelizing and making disciples is to be connected to the real presence of Christ in the world and the life of the believer. His presence is not a reward but a promise and an assurance that Christ's disciples will be able to obey what he had taught. Christ's promise holds true as much today as it did two thousand years ago. Believers who go out evangelizing can rest assured that Christ goes with them. Jesus said in John 12:26, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will also be." With this in mind, perhaps it is less that Christ goes with his servants and more that in going into the world making disciples, his servants are with him. Either way, this promise will remain until the end of the age, that is, the Second Coming when Christ will dwell among his people. As a final note on this topic, we affirm that Christ's presence is through his Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8, Jesus told his disciples they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them. Then they would be his witnesses around the world. The power to do the work of evangelism flows from the Holy Spirit living within the believer.

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<sup>140</sup> Green, 278.

## Acts

The Great Commission implies cross-cultural evangelism. Piper demonstrates that the reference to all nations in the Great Commission is *panta ta ethne*, a phrase used repeatedly in the New Testament to refer to people groups.<sup>141</sup> Despite this explicit instruction, it took a divine vision and an angelic visit to connect the apostles to the first Gentile converts. In Acts 10, an angel appears to Cornelius, instructing him to send for Peter. Meanwhile, Peter had a vision of a sheet full of unclean animals and was told to kill and eat, which he refused to do. A voice in the vision instructed him not to call unclean what God had made clean. Finally, the voice of the Holy Spirit told Peter to go with the men he had sent. Peter recognized that God had instructed him to put his prejudice aside. This was further demonstrated when the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household, which led Peter to understand that Gentiles could be baptized. Even so, many in the church criticized Peter for eating in the home of uncircumcised men (Acts 11:3) until they heard Peter's testimony, at which point they ended their objections and praised God (Acts 11:18).

The gospel was for all people, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free. This was not under dispute after Peter's experience with the household of Cornelius. Yet there was some conflict about how much the new converts must conform to Israel's law and external marks.<sup>142</sup> In Acts, Luke tells how the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire. Though the apostles initially were mainly focused near the vicinity of Jerusalem,

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<sup>141</sup> John Piper, "Discipling All the Peoples," in *Perspectives: On the World Christian Movement*, 4th Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 135.

<sup>142</sup> Green, 161.

the gospel eventually began to spread, sometimes due to persecution. Ironically, Saul of Tarsus, the most zealous persecutor of the early church, became one of its most zealous missionaries, taking the gospel throughout the world to the Gentiles. Paul, now an apostle, went on his first missionary journey spreading the gospel throughout unreached regions of the Roman Empire. Upon his return, there was conflict over the question of the law. A council convened in Jerusalem in Acts 15 to decide the question. After hearing the testimony of Paul and Barnabas, both Peter and James supported the conviction that preaching the gospel to the Gentiles did not require new believers to submit to the Jewish law. The council sent a letter to the church in Antioch telling of their decision, which resulted in gladness and encouragement for the Gentile believers.

Acts 8:26-40 tells the story of an Ethiopian eunuch who had traveled to Jerusalem to worship. He was an important man, the treasurer of Queen Candace of Ethiopia. An angel told Philip to go to the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza; there, he heard the eunuch reading from the book of Isaiah. Philip asked the Ethiopian if he understood what he was reading, to which the eunuch replied that he needed someone to teach him. He was reading from Isaiah 53. Philip began with that passage and told him the good news. Upon hearing the message, the eunuch asked to be baptized, and Philip agreed. This story is significant since this man was one of the first Gentile converts to the gospel of Christ and therefore presents some guidance concerning cross-cultural evangelism. First, one should note both the Spirit's leading and Philip's willingness to obey the Spirit. As mentioned before, the power of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to the work of evangelism in any context. Secondly, the power of personal evangelism is on display. Philip and the Ethiopian were from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but in

conversation, Philip led the man to Christ. Philip made an effort to talk to someone different from himself in obedience to the Spirit's leadership. A one-on-one conversation allowed for an intimate discussion about the gospel message. Next, one must realize that people are not always interested in the questions we think the gospel answers.<sup>143</sup> It is vital to start where the person is and with the questions that they are asking. Finally, it is crucial to base evangelism on the scripture, whether cross-cultural or not.

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch demonstrates the early church's understanding of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish scriptures. Salvation comes from Israel; therefore, Israel's scriptures are essential. Early Christians recognized Jesus as the suffering servant in Isaiah, fulfilling the prophecies. Ultimately the Ethiopian eunuch demonstrates God's fulfillment of Isaiah 56. The foreigner has been welcomed into God's people, and the eunuch has been given a memorial within God's temple.

The stories of Cornelius and the Ethiopian demonstrate the early church overcoming previous cultural bias to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Another factor from the book of Acts, particularly relevant to the reality of evangelizing in South Texas, is the presence of the Hellenized Jews. As early as Acts 6, the tension between Hebrew/Aramaic-speaking Jews and Greek-speaking Jews is documented. In Acts 16, Paul encounters Timothy in Lystra, a young man with a Jewish mother and a Greek father. For the sake of appealing to the Jews in the area, Timothy was circumcised before traveling with Paul. The presence of Hellenized Jews demonstrates how evangelism can be cross-cultural, even among people of the same ethnicity, a topic discussed earlier in

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<sup>143</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 289.

this chapter. As previously discussed, Acts demonstrates the willingness of the apostles to contextualize the gospel message to cross-cultural audiences while traveling throughout the world.

### *Galatians 3*

Three clusters of ideas in Galatians 3 reveal Paul's understanding of God's people as Abraham's descendants. The first is found in verses 6-9:

So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Paul stresses the importance of Abraham's response to God as a critical element of his election. Therefore, those who respond to God in faith as Abraham did are his children.

Salvation comes through Israel, but it is through Israel as the descendant of Abraham.

Abraham's blessing was to bless all the nations of the world. As such, Paul states that

God foresaw Gentiles being justified by faith and so preached the gospel to Abraham.

Abraham's worthiness of God's call came through faith in the gospel. Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham, has not been abandoned or replaced, but by the gospel of

Christ, it has been transformed.<sup>144</sup>

Paul continues to explain in verse 16:

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

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<sup>144</sup> N. T. Wright, 197.

The transformation of Israel is based on Abraham's seed. Paul makes the case that God had only one "seed," not many, in mind for Abraham, and that "seed" is Christ. Christ is the Messiah; he is the fulfillment of all God's promises to Israel. Therefore, Israel's salvation and blessing are found in responding to Christ as did their father, Abraham. Jesus had the same message in John 8:37-47 when he told his opponents that they were not children of Abraham but children of the devil. He claimed that if they were indeed sons of Abraham, then they would have accepted him in the same way Abraham did. Salvation comes through Israel as the descendants of Abraham, but belonging to Israel depends on faith in Christ. In Gal. 3:28, Paul concludes his explanations by saying;

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Herein lies the transformation; membership in God's people is not restricted but is open to all people through Jesus Christ. Green writes that the uniqueness of the early Christian message was the call for both "Jews as well as Gentiles to put their faith in God's Messiah and join the company of his people."<sup>145</sup> The Gentile was called to embrace a new faith, while a Jew must embrace Jesus as the fulfillment and goal of his faith.<sup>146</sup> Both would have to be and could be, baptized into Christ. There are no restrictions on who can respond to Christ in faith like Abraham. God's blessing to Abraham was a blessing for all nations. In Christ, that is a reality.

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<sup>145</sup> Green, 207.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.



For the early church, baptism represented “the mark of incorporation into the Body of Christ.”<sup>147</sup> Within the body, there is oneness. The members are all one in Christ and with Christ, bestowing the blessing of being “Abraham’s seed” on all. “Implicit in the Abrahamic blessing, we find our mandate as well as our message.”<sup>148</sup> As Coleman said, “Men were to be his method of winning the world to God.”<sup>149</sup> God’s purpose for his people is that they would be a blessing to the world, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ wherever they go.

### *Ephesians 4:11-13*

In Ephesians, Paul lists distinct leadership functions in the church and their role. Ephesians 4:11-13 reads:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Paul states that Christ gave the church leaders gifted as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. While there is debate about whether this represents five or four functions, it is irrelevant to this discussion. What can be concluded is that Christ has provided leaders with these functions in order to equip the church to works of service. The church service works of the church can be described as apostolic, prophetic,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 216.

<sup>148</sup> Rick Love, “Identity with Integrity: Apostolic Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” in *Perspectives: On the World Christian Movement*, 4th Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 481.

<sup>149</sup> Coleman, 21.

evangelistic, pastoral, and didactic. As the church grows in these works, it will one day attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Relevant to this discussion is the evangelistic aspect. The entire church must be characterized as evangelistic, though not all have the gift of evangelism. It is implied that those who have the gift of evangelism will train the rest of the church to be evangelistic. It is improper to expect Christians to evangelize without first being trained in such work as a part of the church. Paul expects that teaching church members to evangelize is a normal and assumed work of those within the church who have been gifted as evangelists. We can conclude from this passage that not all have the gift of evangelism, but God has provided those with the gift of evangelism to the church to prepare them for this work of service.

### *Conclusion*

The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate that God loves the world and has, from the beginning, chosen people to be his representatives on earth. While sin has corrupted the image of God on the earth, God still chose to use people to spread his glory throughout the earth. Out of all people, God chose Abraham to be the one through whom he would bring his blessing into the world. Abraham responded in faith when he believed God. God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, which would, in turn, bring blessing to the world. Throughout history, God has revealed himself through Abraham's descendants, Israel. God fulfilled all of his promises to Abraham and Israel through Jesus Christ, "Abraham's true seed." Christ's death and resurrection transformed Israel and opened the way for all people to be received into the people of God. Those who respond to Christ in faith are welcomed into the people of God, but those who reject Christ are

excluded from God's people, even if they are physical descendants of Abraham through Israel. God's transformed people must be about God's work.

The focus of God's work is to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. Jesus has saved and redeemed humankind through his death and resurrection and has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Because of this, his followers have been commissioned to go into the world with the gospel message, bringing others into discipleship and teaching them to do the same. This work will necessarily be cross-cultural. It is the function of the church to equip its members for such ministry, and each member is responsible to do their part.

South Texas has its own unique challenges for a church dedicated to evangelism. It is "in no less need of creative adaptations to one's audience."<sup>150</sup> Upon considering the themes spelled out in this chapter, it is imperative that churches in the Rio Grande Valley train and send evangelists to the community with the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the ultimate goal of this project.

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<sup>150</sup> McKnight, 132.

## CHAPTER 3

### Project Description

#### *Introduction*

Personal evangelism is an essential function of the Christian church. The Great Commission in Matt. 28:18-20 expects every Christian to be trained and participate in making disciples of all nations, which necessarily includes a personal proclamation of the gospel message. It is the job of the church to prepare members for the work of evangelism. Unfortunately, many Christians in the United States do not share their faith regularly, even if they understand its importance. This research project grew from the observation that many Christians do not feel adequately prepared or motivated to share the gospel regularly, despite years of active church participation. Moreover, the researcher recognized this tendency not just among the members but also among church leaders. The purpose of this project was to implement a plan which took lessons from rapidly multiplying church planting movements such as “No Place Left” and incorporate them into a Sunday School program at a traditional Baptist church in the Rio Grande Valley to better train, equip, and motivate church members to share the gospel personally. The Rio Grande Valley is majority Hispanic (93%)<sup>151</sup>. Therefore, it was necessary to select a church that reflects the ethnic makeup of the region.

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<sup>151</sup> “Summary Data for Region: Rio Grande Valley,” RGV Health Connect, accessed May 9, 2023. <https://www.rgvhealthconnect.org/demographicdata>

### *Selection of Test Group*

Upon discussion with Senior Pastor Johnny Mora of Conway Avenue Baptist Church in Mission, Texas, three Sunday School classes were selected to participate in the intervention: youth, young adults, and Spanish language classes. Conway Avenue Baptist Church does not identify itself as a Hispanic church. Instead, the fact that the church is a majority Hispanic-American reflects the actual demographics of the region. This is not an immigrant church; it is an American church where the majority are ethnically Hispanic. It should be noted that English was the primary language for most participants. Even in the Spanish language class, all speak and understand English. Therefore, the intervention was conducted in English, which required participants to do their own translation if they were to present the gospel to a Spanish speaker. Of the participants in the intervention, all of the Sunday School members would be identified as Hispanic, as well as two out of three Sunday School teachers. The only non-Hispanic participant was the teacher of the Spanish language class. All participants would be responsible for translating and contextualizing the gospel presentation to their situation.

### *Description of Intervention*

The intervention had three significant elements. First was a training held during a Wednesday evening meeting concerning how to use the “3 Circles” gospel presentation.<sup>152</sup> The researcher gave a 45-minute walk-through of the points in the presentation and gave several examples of how to present the gospel using the “3 Circles”

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<sup>152</sup> “3 Circles,” North American Mission Board, accessed May 11, 2023, <https://www.namb.net/evangelism/3circles/>

format. Participants were allowed to ask questions and seek further information. Once the participants expressed understanding of the presentation, they were given multiple opportunities to use the “3 Circles” to practice presenting the gospel to one another. The practice time lasted for 45 minutes and allowed each participant to practice sharing the gospel five times before leaving. All class members and teachers participated in this training session. All participants, teachers, and members were taught to use the “3 Circle” tool even if they had previous evangelism training using another method such as the “Roman Road” or “Evangelism Explosion.” Training everyone in the “3 Circles” allowed all participants to have a standard method and to practice together in a focused manner.

Pastor Mora also attended this training and offered leadership and encouragement to the participants. While this was not asked of him, pastoral support convinced church members to embrace and actively participate in the intervention.

After the initial training, the teachers of the three Sunday School classes were given a short orientation on implementing accountability, practice, and goal setting for personal evangelism into their Sunday School class period. Each teacher was asked to give ten to fifteen minutes of their teaching time to training for gospel sharing. To begin the class, the teachers were to ask students if they had shared the gospel with anyone during the week. This creates opportunities for testimonies and encouragement. Those who had shared the gospel would be able to testify to their experience, which could have an encouraging effect on others. Those who had not shared that week were encouraged, not scolded, to look for opportunities the following week. Next, students and the teacher would separate into pairs of two and take turns practicing sharing the gospel with one

another. In the end, each could give feedback about what they had thought went well, or perhaps had not gone well or was unclear. After practice, students were asked to think of someone with whom they might have the opportunity to share the gospel that week. Once all had a turn, the training session ended with prayer, focusing on those who would hear the gospel that week.

### *Project Title*

“Evangelism Training in a Traditional Majority Hispanic Sunday School in the Rio Grande Valley.”

### *Data Collection Method*

After a discussion with research advisor Dr. Kevin Dougherty, it was decided that the best data collection method would be pre and post-tests. The pretest asked the students to report how many people with whom they had shared the gospel in the previous year and how many years the student had been a Christian. Next, participants were asked to identify how often they had shared the gospel with family or friends in the past six weeks. Participants were asked to identify the greatest factor keeping them from sharing the gospel regularly. The final question asked the participant to score a list of statements from 1 to 5, with one being “does not describe me at all” and five being “describes me very well.” The statements were: “I don’t know who to share with,” “I am confident that I can share the gospel clearly,” “I am confident that I can share the gospel concisely,” and “I feel that it is urgent to share the gospel,” and “I feel motivated to share

the gospel regularly.” The pretest was administered on the night of the initial training before the teaching time.

Between the pretest and the posttest was an interval of five Sundays, in which each class implemented the system of accountability, practice, and goal setting. At the end of the five weeks, all classes were gathered to administer the posttest. The content of the posttest was essentially the same as the pretest, with three exceptions. The first question asked the participant to report the number of people with whom they had shared the gospel over the six-week intervention period. The pretest question concerning how long the participant had been a Christian was removed for redundancy. A final question was added, asking the participant to identify what effects the intervention had on them.

### *Role of the Researcher*

The Researcher conducted the initial training session, where participants learned how to use the “3 Circles” tool for sharing the gospel, and the practice session following the training. The Researcher also instructed the Sunday School teachers on implementing the elements of accountability, practice, and goal setting into their respective classes. Each Sunday, he was present during the Sunday School hour to observe the implementation of the project in each class and answer any questions from the Sunday School teachers. Administration of the pretest and posttest was also his responsibility.



### *Ethical Concerns*

The researcher submitted the required form and project information to the Baylor Institutional Review Board, which determined that the project did not constitute human subject research. Specifically, the research sample size was insufficient to generate generalizable findings. All information gathered in the pretest and posttests were kept confidential, and findings were reported so that no specific answer could be attributed to any individual participant. While the youth Sunday School class had minors as participants, the researcher did not interact with them apart from a group setting where their church leaders or Sunday School teachers were present.

### *Reception of the Project*

The participants generally received the project well, particularly in the youth and young adult classes. The researcher observed excitement over the six weeks as participants began to share the gospel. During Sunday School classes, students were enthusiastic to share their experiences with their classmates and to encourage each other to share the gospel. A sense of “we can do this!” seemed to pervade, and even a small amount of friendly competition between the youth and young adults emerged over who could share the most. The support and leadership of Pastor Mora played an essential role in the reception of the participants toward the project, demonstrating the importance of pastoral leadership in the church.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results of the Project

#### *Introduction*

This project aimed to increase personal evangelism among church members through the implementation of evangelism training and sending within the curriculum of the Sunday School. The researcher's goal was to produce a system that would benefit traditional, majority-Hispanic churches in the Rio Grande Valley. This project was largely informed by the researcher's experience within the local church and statistical data demonstrating that many Christians do not share the gospel regularly. Two books were especially influential in the rationale: Robert Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism* and *Growth: A New Vision for the Sunday School* by Charles Arn, Donald McGavran, and Win Arn. Also significant was the influence of Disciple Making Movements (DMM) and Church Planting Movements (CPM) networks, "No Place Left" in particular. These influences converge on the felt need to train and send lay Christians to share the gospel as part of the regular life of the church. To increase personal evangelism, it was necessary to identify common barriers to gospel sharing and create a system to address them. The intervention would deal with three common barriers: lack of confidence in sharing the gospel message, lack of accountability, and lack of awareness concerning those who should hear the gospel.

Pastor Johnny Mora of Conway Avenue Baptist Church in Mission, Texas, agreed that lack of personal evangelism was common in his church. He decided to have the youth, young adult, and Spanish-language Sunday School classes participate. The intervention plan was to provide one night of training on how to share the gospel using the “3 Circles” presentation, followed by five Sundays implementing the training plan. Before beginning the intervention, all class members and teachers were assessed to ascertain their practices of gospel sharing, their confidence, and what they perceived as their most significant barriers to sharing the gospel. Upon completing the initial training and five weeks of Sunday School implementation, participants were given a post-assessment to measure the project’s impact. This chapter presents the results of these findings.

### *Preintervention Findings*

The participants were divided into Sunday School class members or teachers. The sample size consisted of 11 class members and 3 Sunday School teachers. These were divided into three Sunday School classes. The largest class was the Young Adults class, with six members and one teacher. Next was the Youth class, with three members and one teacher. Finally, the Spanish-language class consisted of two members and one teacher. The small sample size indicates a non-generalizable finding; however, the results may speak to the situation in other churches of the same size in the region.

*Preintervention Finding 1- In the past year, with how many people have you shared the gospel?*

The first question of the preintervention survey asked the participants to identify with how many people they had shared the gospel message over the last year. Two members and one teacher self-reported as not sharing the gospel at all in the last year. Calculating the data, 18% (n=2) of members had not shared the gospel in the previous year. In contrast, 33% of Sunday School teachers (n=1) reported no gospel sharing the previous year. This represents around 21% (n=3) of the total having not shared the gospel in the last year. However, the numbers change drastically when looking at those who reported sharing with one person or fewer. In the case of Sunday School teachers, none shared with more than one person over the course of the year, whereas 4 out of 11 class members reported sharing with one or fewer, or 36%.

There was a gap among the Sunday School class members between those with the highest number of gospel sharing and those with the lowest. Eight members (72.7%) reported sharing with four or fewer people over the previous year, while three members (27.2%) reported sharing with more than seven people over the year. Class members reported a range of 0 to 25 times they had shared the gospel with someone over the previous year, with an average of 5 people hearing the gospel per Sunday School member. This number is skewed by one class member who reported sharing with at least 25 people in the previous year. The member with the highest number of shares (25) had shared the gospel with almost twice as many people as the eight members with the lowest numbers, who combined for 13. The member with the second-highest number of evangelistic encounters reported sharing the gospel with ten people over the previous

year. The third higher number reported was 7. Comparing the top three members in numbers of gospel sharing to the bottom eight members, one finds a difference of 42 to 14. In other words, the top three in numbers represent 76.34% of the gospel sharing by Sunday School members. If one removes the top three gospel sharers, the average number of people hearing the gospel changes significantly. The top three average 14 people hearing the gospel per member, whereas the bottom eight members would average only 1.6 people hearing the gospel per class member.

All three members with the highest total instances of gospel sharing were in the Young Adults class. It should be noted that the two members with the highest reported numbers were also members of the Baptist Student Ministries at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. This organization mobilizes college students to reach their campus with the gospel. The Baptist Student Ministries offers training in gospel-sharing tools and creates opportunities for college students to share the gospel on campus through regular outreach events. While this study is focused on evangelism in the local church, it should be noted that partnerships with Christian ministries, such as campus ministries, outside the local church can positively affect the local church. These two particular students had already been trained in the “3 Circles” gospel presentation and had used it to share the gospel on their university campus.

None of the Sunday School teachers reported sharing the gospel with more than one person over the previous year. Two teachers reported sharing the gospel with one person, while the third teacher with none. The Sunday School teachers shared the gospel with an average of 0.66 per teacher. The indication is that the Sunday School teachers share the gospel on average less often than Sunday School members. One theory on this

matter is that the environmental situation influences how often one shares the gospel. Whereas most of the class members were either high school or college students, the teachers were professionals working jobs. As mentioned, the two class members with the highest instances of sharing the gospel were involved in a campus ministry at their university, presenting them with many opportunities to share the gospel by actively seeking out these conversations in a specific environment. On the other hand, the Sunday School teachers working a job would typically see the same people daily and would have less opportunity to find willing listeners. One could use the example of fishing with nets vs. fishing with poles. The students have wide open waters to cast nets, while the Sunday School teachers must be more strategic and deliberate in their evangelistic efforts.

*Preintervention Finding 2- How many years have you been a Christian?*

The second finding concerns how many years the subject has been a Christian. In the case of Conway Avenue Baptist Church, most of the Sunday School members and teachers have been Christians for many years. Even though the majority of the subjects were in either the Youth or Young Adults classes, most come from Christian families who have been involved with the church for years. The shortest reported amount of time as a Christian was three years. However, this person reported having been in church since childhood while only committing to Jesus three years ago. This implies that none of the subjects in this study were new to Christianity. For Sunday School members, the average time being a Christian was 14.9 years. While for the teachers, the average was 25 years.

*Preintervention Finding 3- What is the greatest factor preventing you from sharing the gospel regularly?*

Among the most common responses to the question, “What is the greatest factor preventing you from sharing the gospel regularly?” the most common answers involved some sort of fear, uncertainty, or lack of confidence. One member stated her reason as “not knowing what to say to certain questions.” Another listed fear of rejection as her primary reason. One young man said, “I don’t know how to initiate the conversation.” Multiple respondents simply wrote “fear” or “anxiety.” Participants were allowed to list more than one answer to this question. Of the eleven Sunday School members, fear or lack of confidence was mentioned eight times, demonstrating that these issues play a significant role in preventing the sharing of the gospel. This finding is not surprising, as it aligns with the researcher’s own experience as a pastor and time as a Sunday School teacher.

None of the three Sunday School members who shared the gospel most often listed either fear or lack of confidence as their primary reason for not sharing more regularly. Two of these three members listed other life factors getting in the way. The member who shared the gospel the most in the last year stated that he had recently gotten married, which had taken a significant amount of his time. He noted, however, that he needed to be more intentional about sharing the gospel, despite adjusting to a new stage in life. The member with the second most instances of sharing the gospel also listed busyness as her primary factor, except in her case, college coursework got in the way. Perhaps the most honest answer came from the member with the third most gospel shares, who simply stated that sometimes he doesn’t want to share the gospel.

Among the Sunday School teachers, there was a greater variety of reasons preventing them from sharing the gospel more frequently. One indicated a lack of opportunities or often being in a primarily Christian environment as their primary reason. Another said that the church did not provide training or accountability regarding personal evangelism. While another simply stated apprehension as their reason for not sharing regularly.

These reports, taken together, indicate the importance of helping church members overcome their fear and lack of confidence in sharing the gospel. As mentioned previously, the top three members in number of gospel shares did not list fear or lack of confidence in their reasons for not sharing more often, while many of those with the least gospel shares did. This confirms the researcher's hypothesis that not knowing what to say or how to share the gospel is likely the most common reason Christians do not share their faith regularly. The practice element of this project was designed to deal with this barrier by helping church members to have greater confidence in their ability to share the gospel by regularly practicing in a protected environment.

#### *Preintervention Finding 4- General Attitudes Concerning Personal Evangelism*

The final section of the preintervention survey was meant to assess general attitudes concerning personal evangelism. Participants were asked to rank a series of statements from 1 to 5. With one being "does not describe me at all" and five being "describes me very well." The first statement they were asked to rank was, "I don't know who to share with." The results of this question were relatively spread out, with 1 being the most commonly selected number. Only two participants said that this statement



described them well. The researcher explained clearly how to rank these statements individually so that there would not be confusion. Among the Sunday School members, the average answer to this statement was 2.27, which indicates that generally, people knew of someone with whom they should share the gospel message. This finding was consistent with the Sunday School teachers, with an average answer of 1.6. Summing it up, it appears that there is an awareness of unsaved people by Sunday School teachers and members at Conway Ave. Baptist Church.

Second, the researcher sought to ascertain the confidence level of the Sunday School members and teachers in their ability to share the gospel clearly. Here there was a clear difference between students and teachers. The question was to rate 1 to 5 the statement, "I am confident that I can share the gospel clearly." Each of the three teachers rated their confidence level at a 5, meaning "describes me very well." At the same time, the students averaged a more moderate score of 3.72. Only two students rated their confidence at a 5, with the lowest score being a 2. This denotes a reasonable level of ability to share the gospel, despite fear or lack of confidence in what to say being rated as the primary reasons keeping them from sharing the gospel more frequently.

Again, the third statement each was asked to rank, with one being the lowest and five the highest, was "I am confident that I can share the gospel concisely." Again, the teachers scored higher than the students, with an average of 4.33, indicating very high confidence among the Sunday School teachers regarding their ability to share the gospel. The class members once again had a more moderate score of 3.45. Comparing this statement to the previous demonstrates that Sunday School members felt less secure sharing the gospel clearly and concisely. Falling in the middle of the field may signal that

the members felt that they had some ability to share the gospel, perhaps from previous experience of training, but were not confident in their abilities to do so effectively.

The following two statements were designed to assess the participant's feelings about the importance of evangelism in their own lives. To the statement, "I feel that it is urgent I share the gospel," the class members ranked very highly with an average score of 4.54, meaning they were convinced of the importance of sharing the gospel with the lost world. In this matter, the class members ranked higher than the teachers, who had an average score of 3.6, which is interesting since the teachers had higher confidence levels in their abilities. Therefore, it could be said that while the teachers felt more confident in their abilities, they did not feel as motivated. As discussed in the first finding, their environment can explain this. A school or college is a dynamic place presenting many opportunities to talk to new people about the gospel. In contrast, someone working daily with the same group of people may feel less urgent since they encounter the same people repeatedly.

The final statement dealt with motivation for sharing the gospel, "I feel motivated to share the gospel regularly." Here the teachers and students were much closer together, having averages of 2.9 and 2.3, respectively. Compared to the previous question about urgency, both groups felt that sharing the gospel was more urgent than they were actually motivated to share. This suggests that a sense of urgency does not necessarily drive motivation to share the gospel.

### *Postintervention Findings*

*Postintervention Finding 1- In the past six weeks, with how many people have you shared the gospel?*

Concerning these numbers, one should consider that they cover a much shorter time: six weeks versus one year. The three Sunday School teachers had more gospel sharing over the six weeks than in the previous year, moving from an average of 0.6 people hearing the gospel to 1.33 people hearing the gospel message. It appears that a focus on evangelism provided motivation for the teachers to set an example for their classes by making an effort to share the gospel more frequently, as they were asking their classes to do the same. On the other hand, the student average was lower than in the preintervention findings, dropping from an average of 5 to an average of 2.9 people hearing the gospel. Yet, this does not indicate a drop in gospel sharing as it is a much shorter period. Adding the total amount of gospel shares demonstrates that the Sunday School members shared with 58% of their previous annual total over the six weeks. If they were to keep up this pace for an entire year, the classes would have shared the gospel with over 250 people, creating an average of about 23 people per member.

Of the class members, the ratio remained exactly the same, with eight sharing with four or fewer people and three sharing with five or more people. However, only one of the original top three kept her place, having shared with five people during the six weeks compared to 10 over the previous year. That does not mean the others in the original top three failed to share the gospel. On the contrary, they appear to have developed regular habits of evangelism, which keep them consistent throughout the year.

The student who had previously shared with 25 people over the year still shared the gospel with one person over the six-week intervention period. This member stated that the circumstances of his life had changed as he had just recently been married and was adjusting to new rhythms of life. Still, he reported the intervention as a good wake-up call to continue seeking opportunities to share the gospel. Also, the third student in the preintervention top three shared with a total of 4 people over the course of the intervention, compared to 7 over the previous year.

The Youth Sunday School class had standout results, with all three class members showing a marked increase in their instances of sharing the gospel. The Youth class consisted of three girls in high school. In their preintervention surveys, they reported sharing the gospel with 2, 2, and 3 people each; however, over the course of the intervention, they shared with 4, 7, and 6, respectively, representing at least a 100% increase in gospel sharing per member. The Youth class had the highest total of instances of sharing the gospel of any class at 17 over the six weeks.

*Postintervention Finding 2- What is the greatest factor preventing you from sharing the gospel more regularly?*

To best ascertain the most significant factors preventing regular evangelism, the question was open-ended. Some participants gave more than one reason. Interestingly, fear and lack of confidence remained the most common answers despite increased gospel sharing. Fear or lack of confidence was listed six times as the most significant factor preventing evangelism, representing a decrease from eight mentions in the preintervention data. A few new answers emerged, including not knowing anyone to talk

to, pride, awkwardness, and not making an effort. The teachers' answers to this question remained largely the same as with the preintervention assessment. One teacher who had said that lack of accountability was the most significant hindrance changed their answer to the fear of what people might think of them. There will always be factors preventing Christians from sharing the gospel regularly. The prevalence of fear or lack of confidence, even after six weeks of training, practice, and gospel sharing, may indicate that the key is not to try to eliminate the fear but to find strategies to overcome it. As the preintervention data showed, those with the most gospel shares did not list fear or lack of confidence as their primary hindrances. Perhaps as one overcomes the fear regularly, it dissipates to where one can face it and share the gospel anyway.

### *Postintervention Finding 3- General Attitudes Concerning Personal Evangelism*

In this assessment section, the same statements were made as in the preintervention assessment, asking participants to rank how well each statement describes them, with one meaning, "does not describe me at all," to five, "describes me very well." The goal of this section was to ascertain how the intervention affected the attitudes of the participants in terms of personal evangelism. The first statement was, "I don't know who to share with." On this issue, the results remained almost identical. The average postintervention score for Sunday School members was 2.36, just slightly above the preintervention score of 2.27. However, this difference is not enough to signify any real change. This suggests that despite having spent six weeks practicing and attempting to share the gospel with people, the participants still felt like they knew more people who needed to hear it. The results were similar among the Sunday School teachers, who

averaged a score of 2, up from 1.6, indicating that they were also aware of people with whom they should evangelize.

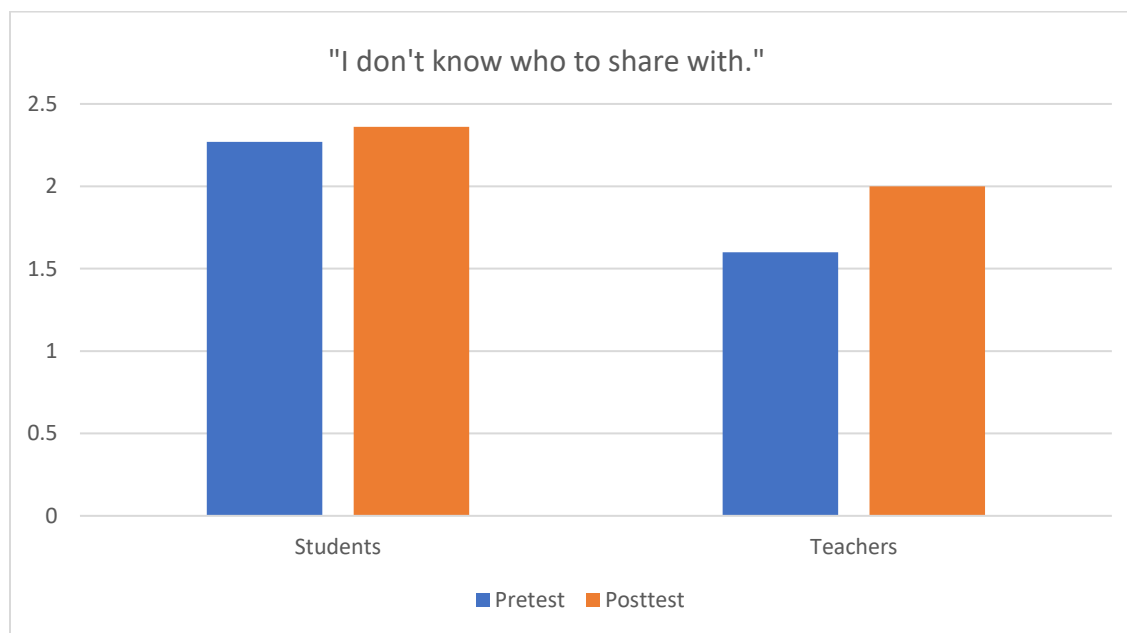


Figure 1

The subsequent two statements concerned the participant's confidence in their ability to share the gospel. The results were interesting in that the students' confidence increased while the teachers' confidence decreased. Regarding the statement, "I am confident that I can share the gospel clearly," the students ranked themselves at an average of 4.27, up from 3.72, implying that the intervention had increased their confidence in their abilities. This increased confidence is seen in the increased numbers of people with whom the students shared the gospel during the period of the intervention. On the other hand, the teachers had given themselves a perfect rating on the pretest, with all three choosing 5, meaning that they felt very confident in their ability to share the gospel clearly. Yet, in the postintervention assessment, their average dropped to 4. Only

one of the three teachers maintained complete confidence in their ability to share the gospel clearly after the intervention.

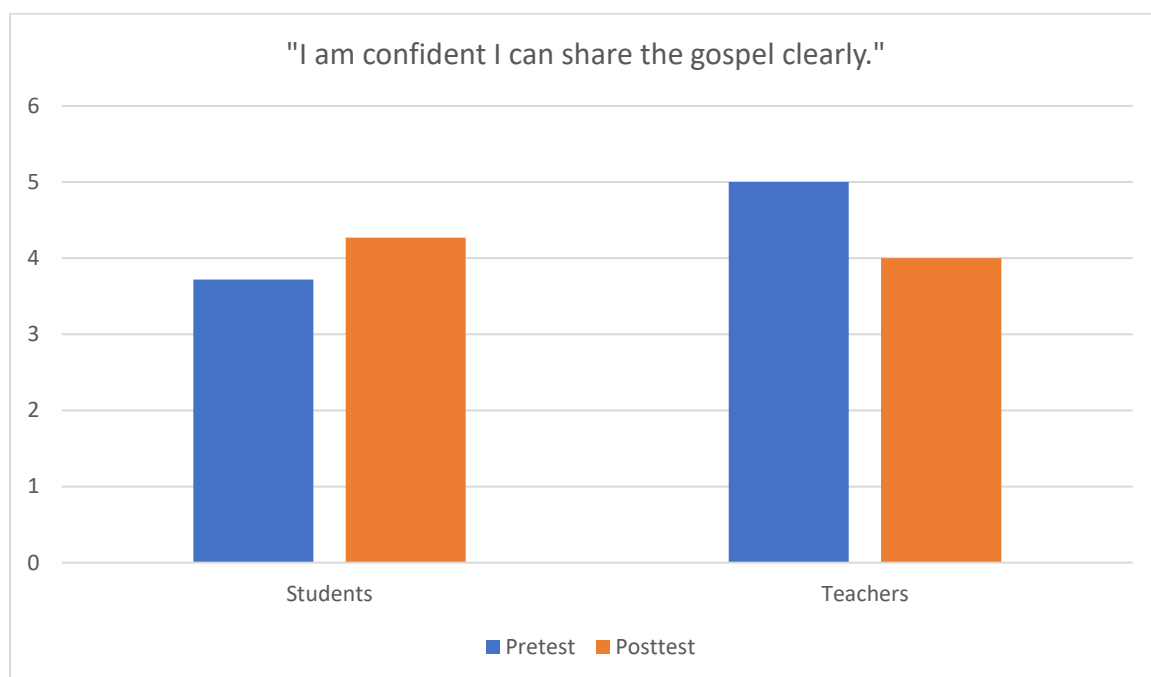


Figure 2

One teacher wrote in the final question of the postintervention assessment, which will be discussed later, that this intervention “showed me how deficient I am both in sharing the gospel and in being prepared to share the gospel.” It could be argued that regular practice and sending to evangelize both empower and humble the evangelist. One with too little confidence may shrink back from sharing the gospel, while one with too high of confidence may depend too much on their own abilities rather than relying on the work of the Holy Spirit. These results represent a healthy balance of confidence and uncertainty in one’s abilities to evangelize clearly.

The results for the following statement, “I am confident that I can share the gospel concisely,” reflect a similar trend. Again, the students’ rankings increased while the

teachers decreased. The students began with an average score of 3.45 and grew to an average of 4.18, revealing the power of practice in boosting confidence. The teachers, on the other hand, saw a decrease from an average of 4.33 to 3.33. The results around these two statements in both the pre-and post-assessment indicate how practicing has a healthy effect on confidence by raising confidence where needed while avoiding overconfidence.

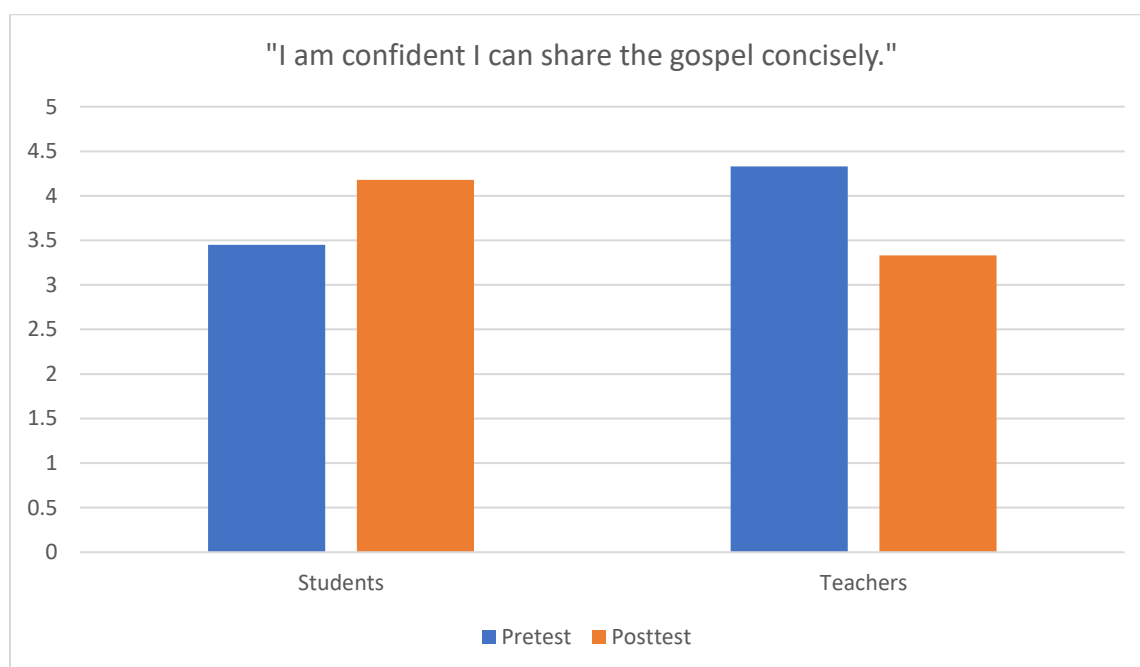


Figure 3

The following two statements evaluated the participant's motivation to share the gospel. The statement, "I feel that it is urgent that I share the gospel," was ranked from 1 to 5. Among the students in the Sunday School, there was a slight dip, down to 4.27 from 4.54. Whereas among the teachers, there was a slight increase from 3.6 to an average of 4.



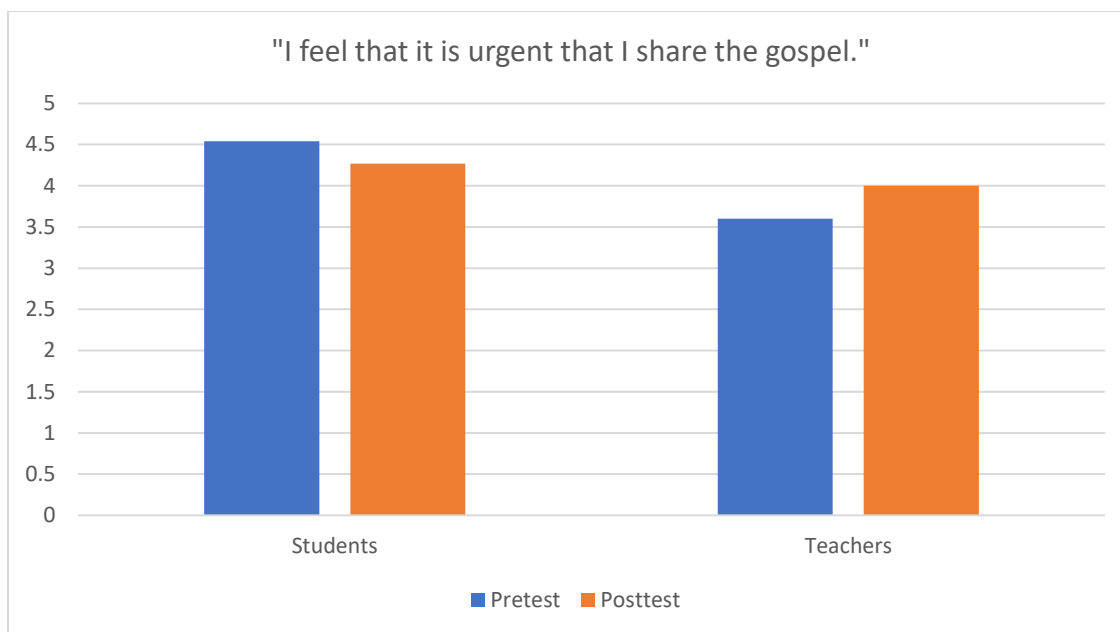


Figure 4

Overall, it can be concluded that the intervention did not significantly affect the urgency the participants felt in sharing the gospel. The sense of urgency remained high among students and teachers, meaning that they thought it incumbent on them to share the gospel with the world around them.

Finally, the assessment broached the topic of motivation to evangelize with the statement, “I feel motivated to share the gospel regularly.” Among the students, the average rating increased from 2.9 to 3.18, while the teachers saw an increased average from 2.33 to 3.66. These results appear to indicate that the intervention's goal-setting and reporting elements resulted in increased motivation to share the gospel with regularity.

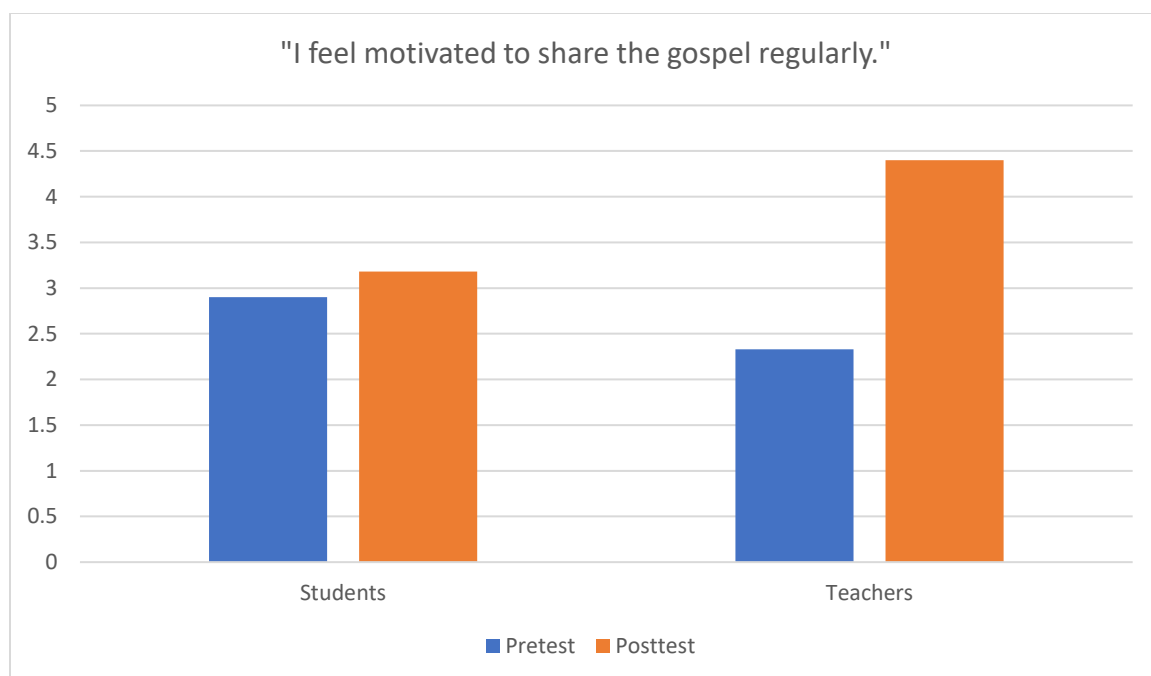


Figure 5

Comparing the preintervention and postintervention reports reveals that the intervention successfully moved the needle towards healthier attitudes concerning personal evangelism, particularly among the Sunday School class members. Most encouraging were the results among the Youth Sunday School class. This class was made up of three girls in high school. They showed a drastic improvement in their confidence in their ability to share the gospel. Two of these girls rated their ability to share the gospel clearly at three before the intervention, but both rated themselves at a five post-intervention. These same girls both rated themselves at a 2 in their confidence that they could share the gospel concisely, and again both reported a five at the post-intervention. As further evidence that the intervention was successful, both girls demonstrated a significant increase in personal evangelism, having shared the gospel with a combined eleven people throughout the project.

*Postintervention Finding 4- In your own words, what impact did this evangelism training have on you?*

For the final post-intervention survey question, participants were asked to describe the impact the training had on them in their own words. One of the Youth members said, “It made me feel more confident to share and to know what to say.” This was evidenced by the fact that she reported the highest total of instances of personal evangelism throughout the entire project. Another youth said, “I have more confidence now, and I know what to say and how to explain it.” Several others reported increased confidence, leading to the conclusion that practice delivering a gospel presentation as part of the Sunday School increases the confidence levels of Christians in their ability to share the gospel. However, one who reported increased confidence expressed that taking the first step to share the gospel was still difficult.

Others reported that the intervention helped to keep them aware of the need to share the gospel regularly. One said, “I think about it more, so I feel the urge more.” While another wrote, “It helped keep it in mind so that I would look for opportunities to share.”<sup>153</sup> Others reported feeling increased accountability. These statements lead to the conclusion that a focus on evangelism in the Sunday School positively impacts both the class members and teachers in improved confidence, more awareness of the need to evangelize, and in actual instances of personal evangelism attempted by the participants.

However, one participant reported that the intervention gave her anxiety to the point where she did not want to go to Sunday School, where she would have to report on

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<sup>153</sup> This survey was filled out in Spanish; therefore, this statement is a translation of the original. Translated by the researcher.

her evangelistic activities and be challenged to share the gospel frequently. While implementing regular evangelism training, goal setting, and reporting will have a positive effect, there will be some who struggle with the challenge. It is incumbent on the pastor and the Sunday School teachers to encourage these members gently to not fear or withdraw from participation. In Luke 10, Jesus sent out his disciples two by two. Those who have anxiety about personal evangelism should be encouraged to participate, as it is their Christian responsibility, but they do not have to do it alone. Going together with someone else could be an excellent way to help those who are anxious or unsure overcome their fear. It could be a temptation to refrain from implementing a program like this into a Sunday School program for fear that it will push away those with anxiety. However, the results show a positive impact on the majority. Evangelism is a function of the church and the responsibility of every Christian; therefore, one cannot let those with fear or anxiety cancel out what God has called the church to do.

## CHAPTER 5

### Evaluation and Significance of the Project

#### *Overview*

This project was conceived to address the reality that many church members do not actively participate in personal evangelism. The goal was to utilize the already established Sunday School as a catalyst for training and launching church members for the work of evangelism. Commonly, evangelical churches teach that sharing the gospel is an integral part of the Christian life and encourage members to do so. However, most church members do not. Churches may implement an evangelism program as a part of the church, but this is often optional and is held at a time other than Sunday morning when most members attend church. By incorporating gospel training and sending as part of the Sunday School, the church can increase the number of participants in the program. Moreover, regularly practicing how to share the gospel and identifying people with whom to share could help overcome common barriers that Christians face in personal evangelism.

The findings of this project demonstrated that implementing a system of evangelism training in the Sunday School can move the needle in terms of how many church members share the gospel with others and how often. Senior Pastor Johnny Mora of Conway Avenue Baptist Church in Mission, Texas, allowed me to implement my plan into three Sunday School classes. These classes were the youth, young adults, and Spanish language classes. Eleven Sunday School class members and three teachers

participated in the program over six weeks. In the end, participants in the project showed a significant increase in confidence in their abilities to share the gospel clearly and concisely. At the same time, Sunday School teachers developed a greater awareness of their need to practice regularly to improve their skills in sharing the gospel. Actual instances of gospel sharing increased significantly over the course of the project. The church's evangelistic efforts were spread more evenly among participants, suggesting that more people were sharing the gospel more often. Participants demonstrated an excitement for sharing the gospel, even when people did not respond affirmatively. Most felt that sharing the gospel was an essential part of the Christian life. While fear or other factors may have stopped them from sharing, there was a recognition that it was something they were called to do. Therefore, actually sharing the gospel felt satisfying and exhilarating to the participants and demonstrated a contagious effect as others wanted to feel the same satisfaction.

### *Implications for Ministry*

The results of this project indicate that the Sunday School in traditional, majority Hispanic churches in South Texas has the potential to be at the forefront of the church's evangelistic activity. While the key elements of accountability, practice, and goal setting should remain constant, plenty of variables could be changed without sacrificing the program's integrity. This same strategy could be implemented without complication in English, Spanish, or even bilingually, making this project highly relevant to this particular geographic region. Further, the gospel presentation could be replaced with many other gospel presentations, such as the "bridge illustration." The gospel

presentation itself is less significant than the element of practice. Many easily reproducible and effective gospel presentations are available, and a church could choose which would fit best within its own cultural context. What matters most is not which gospel presentation is chosen but that it is shared!

This project focuses not on the presentation used but on regular practice so that Sunday School participants can grow into competent evangelists. It is well understood that regular practice is vital to mastering almost any skill. Athletes at the top of their sport dedicate much of their time to practice in order to master their game. Teams come together to practice so that they can be successful when they compete. Why should the same concept not apply to the church? Often the church allows members to be passive, simply sitting under the teaching of their pastors. But would anyone imagine a championship team that only sat and listened to their coach explain the game rather than practicing themselves?

Implementing this program in the Sunday School requires no extra financial obligation. Churches often create events to connect with the community in an attempt to reach the community with the gospel. This is good; however, the church is limited by available resources on how effectively their outreach events can connect people with the church. Even so, attracting new people without a personal connection can be difficult. Focusing the church's evangelistic efforts on the Sunday School rather than on events can save a church a large amount of its budget. Further, utilizing Sunday School encourages evangelism through personal connections. Sunday School members and teachers at Conway Avenue Baptist Church shared the gospel with 36 people over the six weeks. All of these were with people the participants already knew. Beginning with existing contacts

removes the need to “cold call” and will likely be more fruitful in the long run. Finally, church-sponsored evangelistic events often rely upon the pastor or leaders to share the gospel while members run the event. Empowering the Sunday School to evangelize spreads the work of evangelism among church members, encouraging all members to share the gospel within their own relational networks. In addition, implementing the programs creates no financial burden for the church. While it may mean shortening the lesson time by a few minutes, it is important to remember that in the Great Commission, Jesus said that new believers should be taught to obey, not to “know.” While Bible teaching is of utmost importance, knowledge of the Bible should never replace obedience as the mark of maturity in a believer. The application of this program allows the Sunday School to promote both knowledge and obedience.

Furthermore, the church may be surprised by who responds positively to such training. In the parable of the sower found in Mark 4, Jesus gives the example of a farmer spreading good seeds. Some seeds fell on the road, others on rocky ground, some among the thorns, but some fell on the fertile soil and produced an exponential crop. What is surprising in this parable is that the farmer spreads so much seed on the less-than-ideal ground in search of good soil. An experienced farmer would know how to recognize good ground. But according to Jesus, a kingdom worker spreads seeds everywhere and lets God determine which is the good soil. While this passage is about how people respond to evangelism, the same principle can be applied to evangelism training. A church that trains as many people as possible will likely find that God has people in the church with the gift of evangelism that the church has not recognized or empowered, who will produce a harvest. At the same time, some whom the church thought were the most



likely to embrace the training and put it into practice will not respond at all. God knows who will respond. Therefore, the church must not be selective in whom we train for evangelistic work and instead, train everyone.

Implementing this process of accountability, practice, and goal setting may result in some Sunday School members expressing resistance towards participation, leading them to stop attending Sunday School. Using this reason as an argument against implementing the program would be a mistake. First, as expressed in Chapter 2, evangelism is the responsibility of the entire church, and every Christian is called to share the gospel. Therefore, participation in personal evangelism must be a basic expectation of every church member. Refusing to implement a plan for evangelism because it makes some church members uncomfortable is antithetical to the church's calling and commission. Second, over time, more evangelism will result in more people coming to Christ and joining the church. If the church were to lose a few members who do not want to participate, they would eventually be replaced by new members who do want to participate. Because the church may encounter resistance, the Senior Pastor, in particular, and the entire leadership of the church must demonstrate their support for the program.

Ultimately the church does not need the members' permission to do what God has told his church to do. Ying Kai, emphasizing the importance of not asking people's permission, tells a story that changed his approach. During his time in Taiwan, he and his wife would eat breakfast at different food stalls. When the stall owner asked if he wanted to add an egg to his breakfast, he always said no because he did not want to pay extra. But one day, a stall owner asked a different question, he asked "one egg or two?" Without thinking, Kai said he would have one egg and paid more for his breakfast. Kai

realized that the stall owner had not asked if he wanted an egg but how many eggs. Kai states that this experience changed his perspective on asking permission, which increased his results' fruitfulness.<sup>154</sup> When the church is teaching Christians to obey the commands of Christ, it is not necessary to get their approval. Pastors must tell them what Christ expects, train them, and send them out.

Evangelism training in the Sunday School can be applied across every age or affinity group in the church, creating a multi-generational unity and approach. Communicating expectations, training, and sending young people can result in lifelong gospel-sharing habits. Among older believers, this training could ignite, or reignite, a fire they once had. Additionally, multi-generational implementation can create opportunities for the older and younger generations to work together, offering mentoring and inspiration in the church's evangelistic mission.

Some churches no longer have Sunday School. Since the Covid 19 pandemic, some churches have struggled to bring people back to Sunday School and are considering different options. The approach taken by this project is not limited to a formal Sunday School but could be implemented in practically any small group situation.

### *Theological Significance*

The fundamental theological significance of this project is found in addressing a disconnect between the role of the church and the responsibility of the believer in relation

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<sup>154</sup> Ying Kai and Grace Kai, *Ying and Grace Kai's Training for Trainers: The Movement that Changed the World*. (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2018), 28-29.

to evangelism. Churches do very well with many aspects of Christian discipleship. Still, the startling reality that only a minority of Christians share the gospel with any regularity exposes a weakness in the ministry of many local churches. Preaching and teaching the scripture does not translate into the proclivity to share the gospel. The failure to evangelize represents a failure to fulfill the primary purpose of creation, to bring God glory. The church's failure to train and launch every believer in evangelism represents a failure to comply with Christ's Great Commission.

In Chapter 2, we established that God intends to fill the earth with his glory through human beings who bear his image. The image of God is complete in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the visible image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). Human beings were created after the image of God. They were to be his ambassadors to all creation, reflecting his glory. Sin corrupted God's image in humanity. But through unity with Christ, the *Imago Dei* is restored. This was made possible by Christ's death and resurrection, which was according to the scriptures. Reminiscent of God's mandate that human beings be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, Christ commissioned his church to go to all nations making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey all his commandments.

A careful reading of the Great Commission reveals several relevant implications. First, the Great Commission is for every disciple of Jesus Christ. It is not for a special priestly class but for all believers. Christ was speaking to all of his disciples when he gave the commission. Also, the commission expects new disciples to be taught to obey Christ's commandments, including the Great Commission. Therefore, one can conclude that Christ expects all of his disciples to make disciples who will make more disciples.

This is a necessary work of the church and each church member. Secondly, making disciples of all nations implies the necessity of cross-cultural evangelism. The application of this principle is seen throughout the New Testament as the gospel spread beyond Jerusalem throughout the world.

Finally, obedience to Christ must be taught. Believers cannot be expected to learn to obey Christ's commands, including evangelism, without someone to teach them. Ephesians 4:11-13 teaches that Christ has gifted the church with evangelists to equip the rest of the church to evangelize. The church's job is to train and send its members for the work of evangelism, based on the promise that Christ has provided the church with capable evangelists who can teach the church. This project was inspired by worldwide disciple-making movements (DMM) and church planting movements (CPM). A critical difference between DMM and traditional church structure is the emphasis on equipping every believer to share the gospel in their personal lives. The fact that so few Christians regularly share their faith exposes a blind spot towards evangelism training in many churches. This project sought to address the failure of the local church to prepare members and launch them as evangelists. Results indicate that including evangelism practice and accountability as part of the regular curriculum of the Sunday School effectively produces members confident in their abilities to share the gospel and mobilize them to the work of evangelism. Therefore, applying this method can bring the church into fuller obedience to Christ's commission. Further, such obedience produces great joy, which was observed among the participants at Conway Avenue Baptist Church when they shared the gospel during the week. There is joy when one lives in obedience to

Christ and works alongside him to reach the world by regularly and generously scattering gospel seeds.

### *Possibilities for Future Research*

This study has demonstrated that incorporating three elements of equipping for personal evangelism - accountability, practice, and goal-setting - can positively move the needle in forming a church where members share the gospel regularly. This study was directed at the cultural context of the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas, seeking to establish an effective method of evangelism training for traditional, majority Hispanic churches in the region. Availability dictated that this study would be focused primarily on youth and young adults. The positive results of this study indicate that similar churches in the region could apply a similar method and achieve comparable results. However, further investigation would be necessary to ascertain if the program would have comparable results among different age groups within the church. It would be interesting to conduct the same experiment with an entire church rather than with a selection of Sunday School classes.

At Conway Avenue Baptist Church, the majority are Hispanic Americans, not recent immigrants, and English is the primary language of the majority of the church. Further research is necessary concerning the application of this program in majority Spanish-speaking churches in the region. Such analysis would reveal if there were any differences in the effectiveness of the program among different populations. Churches in the region that primarily speak Spanish tend to comprise mostly first-generation immigrants. Would recent immigrants be more or less open to the process? Relatedly,

this same program could be applied in churches of other ethnic backgrounds in diverse areas to determine the usefulness of this format in different contexts.

This project was implemented over six weeks and demonstrated positive results over that period. Further research would determine how to maximize the program's effectiveness over the long term. Would the church be better served to apply the program year-round, or would it be better to create cyclical rhythms of evangelistic emphasis and rest?

Finally, churches that no longer utilize Sunday School could apply the same principles in any small group or adapt the system to be used in a large group context. In a large group, the pastor could teach the church how to use a gospel presentation and take time during the Sunday Service to have church members practice sharing the gospel with one another. Either of these options would require further research to discover their effectiveness.

### *Conclusion*

Giving testimony of one's faith is an expectation of every Christian. Equipping believers to do every good work, including personal evangelism, in obedience to Christ is the responsibility of every church. Hence, utilizing Sunday School as a platform for equipping and launching believers to the work of evangelism is a reasonable endeavor. Churches cannot be selective in whom they train for evangelism but must attempt to train everyone. The church does not need permission to do what Christ has commissioned the church to do. Rather than creating a separate program for evangelism and recruiting

members to participate, churches should incorporate equipping for evangelism into the regular meeting of the church. Further, such a plan requires no greater financial or service investment since it utilizes an already existing structure and already existing teachers and encourages a balance between knowledge of the Scriptures and obedience to Christ.

Common barriers to sharing the gospel include lack of accountability, fear, lack of confidence in one's ability to share effectively, and lack of awareness of with whom one should share. This project sought to overcome these barriers by including three elements of equipping for evangelism in the regular curriculum of the Sunday School. Reporting weekly as to their evangelistic activities, members become accountable to the church for their efforts. Sharing testimonies encourages others and addresses the fear that many feel by presenting an expectation of how one might be received. Regular practice in sharing the gospel helped overcome a lack of confidence in their ability and assisted in overcoming their fear. Finally, setting weekly goals maintains an awareness of the importance of sharing the gospel and the people who need to hear the gospel.

This project has demonstrated the potential of the Sunday School to be a launching pad for lifelong evangelistic habits. Participants reported feeling better equipped to share the gospel and demonstrated a willingness to do so if they were sent. Long-term application of the method established in this project could result in a church culture characterized by personal evangelism, resulting in positive church growth. God intends to bless the world through his people and bring glory to his name as his image, the *Imago Dei*, fills the earth. This project represents a positive step towards that goal.

## APPENDIX A



## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD – PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH

**NOTICE OF DETERMINATION OF NON-HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH**

Principal Investigator: Jerry Joule  
Study Title: Evangelism Training in a Traditional Hispanic Sunday School in the Rio Grande Valley  
IRB Reference #: 1974750  
Date of Determination: November 01, 2022

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The above-referenced research project has been determined to not meet the definition of human subject research under the purview of the IRB according to federal regulations at 45 CFR 46.102(e) & (l). Specifically, the sample size is insufficient to generate generalizable findings.

The following documents were reviewed:

- Non-Human Subjects Research Determination Form, submitted on 10/31/2022

This determination is based on the protocol and/or materials submitted. If the research is modified, you must contact this office to determine whether your modified research meets the definition of human subject research.

If you have any questions, please contact the office at (254) 710-3708 or [IRB@baylor.edu](mailto:IRB@baylor.edu)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Deborah L. Holland'.

Deborah L. Holland, JD, MPH, CHRC, CHPC  
Assistant Vice Provost for Research, Research Compliance



## APPENDIX B

**Pre-Evangelism Training Survey:**

1. In the past year, with how many people have you shared the gospel?

2. How many years have you been a Christian?

3. How often did you participate in the following religious activities last 6 weeks?

Witnessing/sharing your faith with friends

Witnessing/sharing your faith with strangers

4. What is the greatest factor that prevents you from sharing the gospel more regularly?

5. How well do the following statements describe how you feel about sharing the gospel?

From 1 to 5. 1- does not describe me at all, 5- describes me very well.

a. I don't know who to share with.

1   2   3   4   5

b. I am confident that I can share the gospel clearly.

1   2   3   4   5

c. I am confident that I can share the gospel concisely.

1   2   3   4   5

d. I feel that it is urgent that I share the gospel.

1   2   3   4   5

e. I feel motivated to share the gospel regularly.

1   2   3   4   5

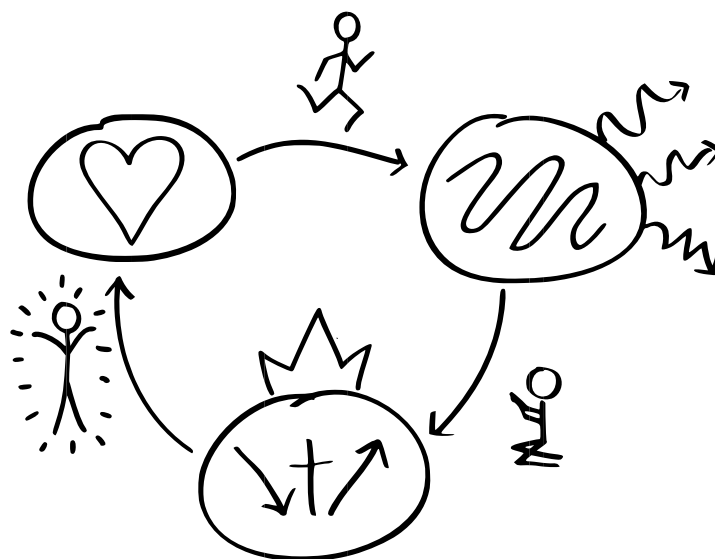
## APPENDIX C

**Post-Evangelism Training Survey:**

1. In the past six weeks, with how many people have you shared the gospel?
  
2. How often did you participate in the following religious activities last 6 weeks?  
     Witnessing/sharing your faith with friends  
     Witnessing/sharing your faith with strangers
  
3. What is the greatest factor that prevents you from sharing the gospel more regularly?
  
4. How well do the following statements describe how you feel about sharing the gospel?  
     From 1 to 5. 1- does not describe me at all, 5- describes me very well.
  - a. I don't know who to share with.  
     1    2    3    4    5
  - b. I am confident that I can share the gospel clearly.  
     1    2    3    4    5
  - c. I am confident that I can share the gospel concisely.  
     1    2    3    4    5
  - d. I feel that it is urgent that I share the gospel.  
     1    2    3    4    5
  - e. I feel motivated to share the gospel regularly.  
     1    2    3    4    5
  
5. In your own words what impact did this evangelism training have on you?

## APPENDIX D

## 3 CIRCLES GOSPEL PRESENTATION



1. We live in a broken world. We see the brokenness all around us. We see brokenness in suffering, violence, injustice, or death. This bothers us because we feel like it's not supposed to be this way. So, we look for ways to make life work.
2. In contrast to brokenness, we see beauty and purpose. That is because when God created the world, he made everything good and in its proper place. Everything was made to fit together in harmony. (Gen. 1:31)
3. As humans, we insist on doing things our own way. That is just what the very first humans did. When we insist on living our own way instead of God's way, this is called sin. It was sin that led to brokenness in our world. (Rom. 3:23, Rom. 6:23)
4. We try to find a way out of our brokenness. We go in many directions, trying different ways to heal our own brokenness. But ultimately, none of these work, leading us to recognize that we need something greater than ourselves. (Rom. 1:25, Pro. 14:12)
5. Because of his love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. God sent his son Jesus in human flesh to the earth, where he lived a perfect life according to God's perfect plan. He died on the cross, taking our sins and shame. Then he rose from the dead, providing a way for us to trade our brokenness for a new life with God. (John 3:16, Col. 2:14, 1 Cor. 15:3-4)

6. In order to receive new life from God, we must repent, or turn away from our sin, and turn to Jesus Christ. We must ask him to forgive us of our sins and put our trust in Jesus Christ. By repenting and believing in him, we receive new life, and God gives us a new direction and a new relationship with him. (Mark 1:15, Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 10:9)
7. When God restores our relationship with him, we can begin to pursue God's design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover his design and assures us of God's presence in our lives. (Phil. 2:13, Eph. 2:10)
8. Questions: Where are you living now? Are you still living in brokenness, or have you repented and turned to Jesus Christ? Would you like to turn to Christ?

These points represent a basic outline of the "3 Circles" presentation as created by the North American Mission Board. As a person gets comfortable using this plan, they will naturally use their own words and examples.

For more information on how to use this gospel presentation, go to <https://www.namb.net/evangelism/3circles/>

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