

ABSTRACT

Excited to Share: A Process for Energizing the Practice of Evangelism through Evangelism Sodalities

C. Ross Chandler

Faculty Supervisor: Andrew Arterbury, Ph.D.

Today's church needs a process of evangelism that will energize its faithful practice. The purpose of this research project was to discover what effect an "Evangelism Sodality" intervention would have in helping Christians to be more faithful in practicing evangelism in their daily lives. A sodality, derived from the Latin word *sodalitas* meaning companionship, is a fellowship of people who come together in unity for a shared purpose.

The intervention was based on research gathered from a ten-week "Evangelism Sodality." Seven participants will partake in a ten-week study discussing the "Excited to Share" curriculum, praying for the filling of the Holy Spirit, and practicing evangelism in their daily lives. Using qualitative research methodology, the effectiveness of this "Evangelism Sodality" will be tested to determine if it resulted in a more faithful practice of evangelism in the participants' lives. The data will be collected from interviews before and after the ten-week "Evangelism Sodality." This project is based on biblical and theological foundations.

The project's effects upon the participant's faithful practice of evangelism was immensely positive. The data demonstrated that the participants in the experimental group were energized in their practice of evangelism with five out of seven participants experiencing significant transformation. Conclusive evidence demonstrates a need to expand the length of the project for the local church.

Excited to Share: A Process for Energizing the Practice of
Evangelism through Evangelism Sodalities

A Culminating Project Report Submitted to the Faculty of

George W. Truett Theological Seminary

Baylor University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Ministry

By

C. Ross Chandler

Waco, Texas
May 2016

Copyright © 2017 by C. Ross Chandler

All rights reserved

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
DEDICATION	ix
CHAPTER ONE	
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Problem Statement	1
Purpose Statement.....	3
Rationale for the Project: Understanding Postmodern Culture.....	4
Research Questions.....	10
CHAPTER TWO	
Evangelism in the Biblical Narrative.....	11
The Global Intent of God in the Old Testament	11
The Global Intent of God (Genesis 12 and Isaiah 49)	13
Conclusions from the Old Testament	18
Faithful Witness to Jesus in the New Testament	19
The Holy Spirit as Evangelist (Acts 2:1–21)	20
Speaking in Tongues (Acts 2:4–12).....	22
The Spirit’s Eschatological Power (Acts 2:14–36).....	25
The Significance of Narrative for Evangelism (Acts 2:16–36)	27
A Kingdom Framed Narrative	29
An Invitational Narrative	32
A Witness So People Can Believe (John 3:11–17).....	34

The <i>Kerygma</i> of Witness	36
Conclusions from John 3:11–17	44
Invitational Witness from Unexpected Sources (John 4:28–42)	45
The Tainted Woman Witness (John 4:28–30; 39–42)	49
Conclusions from John 4:28–42	56
An Ethical Witness and Process of Conversion (John 9:13–39)	56
An Ethical Witness (John 9:25)	57
Ethical Witness as Authentic	58
Ethical Witness as Public.....	61
The Ethics of Success	62
Conclusions from John 9:25	65
Theological Conclusions from Evangelism	66
The Power of the Holy Spirit	68
The Holy Spirit and the Kingdom.....	70
Regaining the <i>Arrabon</i>	71
The Spirit’s Work in the Life of Witness.....	74
Evangelism: Narrative Invitational Witness to the Kingdom	77
Stories in Collision.....	82
The Full Gospel Narrative	84
The Invitation to Change Stories	87
Practicing Ethical Evangelism	90
The Nature and Humanity of Authentic Witness.....	90
A Motive that Fits the <i>Kerygma</i>	92

Witness of Living the Kingdom of God	95
Forming an Ethic of Respect.....	101
The old telos of love: conversion.....	102
A new telos of love: respect.....	104
Conclusion of Practicing Ethical Evangelism.....	108
 CHAPTER THREE	
The Intervention.....	109
Introduction.....	109
Description of the Intervention	109
Research Questions.....	110
Description of the Method	112
Role of the Researcher	113
Entering the Field.....	113
Obtaining the Sample.....	113
Collection of Data.....	114
Data Reporting.....	115
Validity and Reliability.....	115
Ethical Issues	116
Conclusion	117
 CHAPTER FOUR	
Statement of Findings	118
Initial Findings from the Pre-Intervention Interview.....	119
Finding One	119

Finding Two.....	122
Finding Three.....	124
Finding Four.....	126
Primary Findings.....	127
Finding One	127
Finding Two.....	131
Finding Three.....	133
Finding Four.....	137
Secondary and Unexpected Findings.....	140
Secondary Finding One.....	140
Secondary Finding Two.....	141
Secondary Finding Three.....	142
Conclusion	142
 CHAPTER FIVE	
Evaluation of the Project.....	144
Theological Reflection: Sustaining Evangelistic Energy	145
Faithful Evangelism Needs the Holy Spirit	146
Faithful Evangelism Is Based in the Story of the Gospel	147
Faithful Evangelism Holds to an Ethical Methodology.....	147
Improvements for the Project.....	149
Significance of the Project.....	149
Individual Significance	149
Ecclesiological Significance.....	150

Conclusion	151
APPENDICES	
A. Philosophical Shifts in Western Society	153
B. The Nature of Blessing in Genesis 12.....	177
C. Evangelism Language in the Biblical Text	185
D. The Identity of the Witness in John 3:11-17	188
E. The Agricultural Metaphor in John 4	191
F. The Conversion of the Samaritan Woman	194
G. The Difference between Discipleship and Evangelism	197
H. Excited to Share Curriculum	198
I. Informed Consent Form	232
BIBLIOGRAPHY	234

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the staff and members of First Baptist Church of Marble Falls. Because of your patience and support, this project has been a success. Thank you, my dear church family and my wonderful co-laborers in the faith.

I would also like to offer a very special thanks to Drew and Dr. Melody Pickle and Larry and Pat Cochran. Your investment into this project was priceless, and your aid in data assessment was crucial. Thank you for choosing to believe in me and in this research from the start.

I would also like to thank the deacons of First Baptist Church Marble Falls. You have a special place in my heart. You decided that this project was good for me, good for the church, and good for the kingdom of God. You not only encouraged me, but you rose to take on new jobs in the church because you were determined that I would make it.

Last, I must offer a special thanks to Kevin Hrebik. I cannot imagine a better editor. You cared about this project as if it were your own. Thank you for working alongside of me to produce a valuable piece of work that hopefully will be used by many churches.

DEDICATION

To my darling wife, Meaghen. You edited, you prayed, you held me together. I could not have completed this without you. I have come to believe that “I can do all things through Christ who gave me Meaghen.” I dedicate this project to you.

And to my beautiful daughters Hannah and Tess. You two girls kept me smiling and laughing through all of this. It is because you gave your “daddy time” away so that I could work on this project, that I also dedicate it to you. You are the most amazing things in my life, and I love you both.

CHAPTER ONE

Statement of the Problem

Problem Statement

There is a lack of participation, interest, and excitement regarding the practice of evangelism in churches today. This is exceedingly unfortunate considering the undisputed biblical basis for evangelism, the heritage of evangelism in church history, and the great need for evangelism in today's world. The issues causing this problem are vast and complex.

Here are some of the reasons there is a lack of evangelistic practice. There are certainly misunderstandings and disagreements of what constitutes a practice of evangelism. For example, some pastors and teachers have placed evangelism into its own compartment, separating it from discipleship. This places on evangelism the undue burden of creating unique language and practices that are distinct unto itself. There is also confusion as to what makes up the primary content of the gospel message, which is represented in the efforts to establish a true *kerygma*.

The issues extend further than content, however, as churches have struggled with methodology as well. There is disagreement as to whether evangelism consists of verbal proclamation and loving witness as two important evangelistic practices, or whether evangelism is comprised of verbal proclamation alone. This debate is prevalent in the polarities of so-called liberals and fundamentalists. To name one more issue, although there are many more, the church has struggled to find a method of evangelism that is both ethical and authentic.

A method of evangelism that does not feel manipulative and flows from a person's own experience can be hard to find. Because of the confusion, it is no surprise that churches misplace their criteria for evaluating the success of evangelism. The criteria by which any effort of evangelism is deemed successful has placed such pressure on people that they simply cannot live up to the unrealistic expectation of "getting people saved." When the success is measured by the numbers of how many people accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, many will struggle with the practice.

The above represent some of the issues producing a lack of evangelism in churches today. Christian people are less likely to engage a faithful practice if they are not sure what a faithful practice looks like, if it feels manipulative, insincere, or unethical, and if it is measured by the number of people converted. The hope of speaking to these misunderstandings in this study is to reenergize the practice of evangelism among Christians today.

Another difficult issue facing the practice of evangelism is the current mood or worldview of postmodernism. The philosophical metanarrative of postmodernism is first, pluralism of beliefs, and second, relativism of truth. Any system that sets itself against these ideas is ascribed labels such as intolerant and discriminatory. This change in culture is producing a new antagonism toward the church's practice of evangelism, and it is unlike anything felt by the church in American history. The church is facing this new era with little experience to help navigate a faithful way forward. In this atmosphere, there is no small amount of emotional intimidation and anxiety about the practice of evangelism. Younger Christians especially fear being accused of intolerance, narrow mindedness, or arrogance. The desire to not offend anyone causes Christians to walk on eggshells in

public concerning their faith. Young Christians are so unlikely to engage in a campaign of blunt, “If you died today where would you go?” evangelism that this study believes if something else is not offered, evangelism could soon be abandoned as a practice of the church. Simply put, old forms of evangelism are significantly less likely to be practiced in today’s relativistic age. If this problem is to be addressed, a thoughtful examination of the nation’s shifting culture is appropriate.

Anyone who has engaged in evangelism with any amount of reflection will readily admit that even in the most fertile of soils, it is a difficult, delicate, and demanding exercise. To help define this problem, one needs to consider how today’s society hears and processes religious information like the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is explored in the section on understanding postmodern culture.

Purpose Statement

The research purpose of this project is to discover what effects the “Evangelism Sodality” intervention has on seven participants regarding the practice of evangelism in their personal lives. The intervention will test the effectiveness that an “Evangelism Sodality” makes in the lives of these seven people. A sodality is a fellowship of people who come together in unity for a shared purpose. It is derived from the Latin word *sodalitas*, meaning companionship. Therefore, an Evangelism Sodality is a small group of people who bind themselves together to study, discuss, practice, and pray for a faithful practice in making disciples of Jesus Christ. The measurement of the study will be internal to the practice itself, rather than via any form of external product(s). The project will measure the effectiveness that an Evangelism Sodality has in helping to increase a faithful practice of evangelism, not how many converts were made.

This project is based on biblical and theological foundations from which the intervention, curriculum, and practice draw its content. Some of the primary theological conclusions shaping this intervention are: moving from proposition to narrative as one bears witness to the Gospel, understanding evangelism as a life practice of the whole church making disciples, allowing for freedom in a process of conversion, but with clear invitation for transformation, and the sustaining filling of the Holy Spirit. The most potential for healthy churches as well as, individual, familial, and societal transformation is when the whole church engages in a faithful practice of evangelism.

Rationale for the Project: Understanding Postmodern Culture

The Apostle Paul proclaimed to the church at Rome that faith comes by hearing the gospel (Romans 10:17). But how do people hear? More specifically, how does today's society hear the gospel? Many things affect how people hear, or rather, how they process what they hear. For instance, if someone has recently experienced tragedy or crisis, then post-traumatic stress issues might affect how he hears and processes information. Also, a person's worldview and life experience will certainly affect how she hears information. If an evangelist desires to be understood, a faithful practice of evangelism will consider how a postmodern generation hears today, which is different from previous generations. The church has valid reason to feel a sense of non-congruence with society at some level; it is not just a figment of imagination or hyper reaction. Research demonstrates how there has indeed occurred a shift in the way Western society, particularly among younger generations, processes what they hear and see.

The nature of this shift is explored in depth in Appendix A, with the intent to clarify the noticeable differences in the new cultural metanarratives that give credibility

to postmodern ideas about life, which contribute directly to the problems and difficulty of practicing faithful evangelism. This exploration helps diagnose the problem being addressed in this project. In the same way that a missionary will study a culture to bear a faithful witness, the church must consider today's culture if she desires to bear faithful witness. This is a noble task, as Leslie Newbigin explains, "In the areas dominated by modern Western culture (whether in its capitalist or socialist political expression) the church is shrinking and the gospel appears to fall on deaf ears. It would seem, therefore, that there is no higher priority for the research work of missiologists than to ask the question of what would be involved in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and the modern Western culture."¹ The challenges of the shifting plausibility structure between the eras of Christendom, modernism, and postmodernism can be confusing to churches.

The term "plausibility structure" refers to the set of interlocking ideas that form the foundational metanarrative on which other ideas are deemed credible in a society. In his book, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Newbigin relies on Peter Berger's idea of a "plausibility structure," which he sees as "a social structure of ideas and practices that create the conditions determining what beliefs are plausible within the society in question."² Many scholars believe that Western society has endured several major shifts in its plausibility structure. Michael Frost describes the shift into what is called the era of Christendom:

Whereas followers of Jesus at one time had met secretly in homes and underground in catacombs, now [with Constantine] they were given some of the greatest temples and meeting spaces in the empire. They were, in a quite literal

1. Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 3.

2. *Ibid.*, 10.

sense, handed the keys of the Roman kingdom . . . By the Middle Ages, church and state had become the pillars of the sacral culture, each supporting the other. . . . It had effectively become the metanarrative for an entire epoch . . . containing truth applicable to all people at all times in all cultures.

Frost would say that ideas of European Christianity formed the plausibility structure for Western society from the fourth century to the Enlightenment. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment created a new plausibility structure based on the idea that intellectual reason was the standard for knowledge, rather than the Church or the Bible. René Descartes had set out to prove Christianity was beyond doubt, but in this attempt, the thinking self—“I think, therefore I am”—was elevated as the tool to determine certainty. Thus, modernity was born.

From the eighteenth to the late twentieth century, often referred to as the “Age of Reason,” the question Christians had to answer was whether their practiced religious behavior or the accepted biblical record could stand to modern reason. Science and the scientific process become the standard bearers for all truth. Consequently, many modern Christian apologists vested their time and effort creating “fool proof” arguments defending the claims of the church using modernity’s standards. Leslie Newbigin presented an effective Christian response to this modernistic challenge.³ As the Age of Reason eroded any religious claims to universal truth, people traded religion for data because it was based on reasonable research. During this modern period, society was optimistic that reason would pave the way to a brighter future. There would be less war, less poverty, less racism, and increased happiness, progress, and freedom. Science would pave the way for such progress—but modernity could not fulfill these promises.

3. In Appendix A, the philosophical apologetics of Leslie Newbigin are offered as a description for how some Christians managed the complexity of Modernity’s plausibility structure elevating science and reason to standards by which all truth is measured.

In postmodernity, reason would collapse as the ultimate standard to obtain objective truth. The “Age of Reason” had two World Wars plus imperialism, and the systemic issues of injustice, racism, and violence were never corrected. Science did not live up to its promises of progress. Africa and India had to throw off the “societies of reason” because Western reason seemed to justify imperialism. Stanley Grenz observes,

In the postmodern world, people are no longer convinced that knowledge is inherently good. In eschewing the Enlightenment myth of inevitable progress, postmodernism replaces the optimism of the last century with a gnawing pessimism. Gone is the belief that every day, in every way, we are getting better and better. Members of the emerging generation are no longer confident that humanity will be able to solve the world’s great problems.⁴

Today, the philosophy of deconstruction has shifted the plausibility structure away from reason to complete relativism, which now seems to be the only absolute. What once were culturally embodied truths of modernity have become relativized by hyper individualism. In this era, the church has struggled to find her footing. Recent studies have showed a drastic decline in religion in the West.⁵ Studies conducted by The Pew Research Center and Barna Research Group agree that the church is in decline, and those who believe in the uniqueness of Jesus as Lord have declined.⁶ Craig Van Gelder, professor of congregational mission at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, writes, “Most [social] theorists work from the premise that the key threshold of change [into postmodernism] took place somewhere in the late 1960s to early 1970s.”⁷ Grenz agrees,

4. Stanley Grenz, *A Primer for Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: 1996), 7.

5. Pew Research Center, “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious” (Nov. 3, 2015), accessed 8/16/2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

6. Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2006), 6.

7. Craig Van Gelder, *Confident Witness-Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 41.

“Although the term [postmodern] was coined in the 1930s, postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon did not gain momentum until three or four decades later. . . . During the 1960s, the mood that would characterize postmodernism became attractive.”⁸

If the movement of deconstruction indeed began in the 1960s, this means it has had half a century to develop, and today the rejection of absolutes is staggering to the modern mindset. In short, no major metanarrative seems to be secure or sacred. In this context, the most common criticism toward evangelism is that it is intolerant and, therefore, unethical in its nature. Today’s quick leap to judgment would even call it hateful. Many believe that there is simply no way to practice evangelism in a way that is good for humanity. This perception causes two problems—Christians would rather not practice something that will bring this accusation, and non-believers have already determined not to listen. This study has found that this phenomenon is currently taking place and is one of the main reasons for a lack of evangelism in today’s churches. This problem forms the center of this project. How does the church practice evangelism today? Even though well underway, postmodernism may be relatively short lived as the dominate plausibility structure.

With some elements of the age of reason still holding on, and the deconstructing of absolutes in full swing, the marginalization of Christianity to the realm of subjective values is a tide unable to be held back. The voice of Christians could end up being so privatized that public truth begins to be controlled by an old religion reborn, as Newbigin speculates, “The result is not, as we once imagined, a secular society. It is a pagan society, and its paganism, having been born out of the rejection of Christianity, is far

8. Grenz, *A Primer for Postmodernism*, 16.

more resistant to the gospel than the pre-Christian paganism with which cross-culture missions have been familiar. Here, surely, is the most challenging missionary frontier of our time.”⁹ In other words, not relativism, but paganism could be the next plausibility structure. Secularism is a religion in itself—specifically, anti-religion—in which anti-Christian faith can be born. Popular atheists like Richard Dawkins have declared publically the dangers of Christianity, stating, “More generally (and this applies to Christianity no less than to Islam), what is really pernicious is the practice of teaching children that faith itself is a virtue. Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument. Teaching children that unquestioned faith is a virtue primes them—given certain other ingredients that are not hard to come by—to grow up into potentially lethal weapons for future jihads or crusades.”¹⁰ This is far from pluralism. If this becomes the plausibility structure of the future, then Christianity will have gone from dominance, to equal, to suspect, to dangerous, the last being a movement that would be applauded by many. Could there be a future movement all the way to unlawful in the West? If so, how might the church demonstrate a faithful practice of evangelism? Young Christians need a form of evangelism that is both biblical and practicable in this context. The problem is truly deep and complex and, consequently, there is a lack of participation, interest, and excitement regarding the practice of evangelism in churches today. As a missionary learns the language of a culture, the church will need to learn the language of its own culture. Based on a biblical and theological foundation, this project’s purpose is to speak to society’s problems by

9. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 20.

10. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2006), 347.

creating a new method of evangelism called Evangelism Sodalities, from which it is hoped that a faithful evangelistic practice can emerge.

Research Questions

To recapitulate, the problem statement for this project reads, “There is a lack of participation, interest, and excitement regarding the practice of evangelism in churches today.” The research question asks, “What effect does an ‘Evangelism Sodality’ intervention have on seven participants regarding the practice of evangelism in their personal lives?” The purpose for engaging this project is to help energize a faithful practice of evangelism in the lives of seven people. The standard of measurement of faithful witness is internal to the witness itself. Therefore, the criteria/principles of a faithful witness are fivefold:

1. The measurement of the quality of the gospel presented: How did the participant attempt to describe the fullness of the story of Jesus?
2. The measurement of the quality of authenticity in sharing one’s own story: Did the participant share witness to how Jesus has worked in his or her life?
3. The measurement of the quality of following the leading of the Spirit: Did the participant obey when led by the Spirit to bear witness? And, did the participant trust in the working of the Holy Spirit?
4. The measurement of the quality of ethical witness in terms of care for the person listening: Did the participant care more about the listener’s dignity and free choice than getting him or her to do something before he or she understood the story of the gospel?
5. The measurement of quality of practice: Did the participant engage in intentional practices of bearing witness in both verbal and living ways?

To measure the faithfulness of bearing witness, the research questions will help create data that will speak to these criteria. Each research question and sub-question points to one of the principles, all of which are outlined in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER TWO

Evangelism in the Biblical Narrative

The Global Intent of God in the Old Testament

In Romans 1:16, Paul says that he is not ashamed of the *euaggelion* (gospel), because it is the power of salvation for everyone who believes. The Greek word *euaggelion* and its verb form *euaggelizomai* (share the gospel) comprise the source of the English word evangelism. The nature of this evangelism encompasses both the substance of the biblical gospel and the methods of offering the gospel to others. There is no expression of orthodox Christianity without this concept; therefore, the significance of evangelism to Christianity is difficult to overstate. Considering this, any study that takes seriously the implications of its theology and practice is worthwhile.

Evangelism has always been a challenge, but lately the practice of evangelism has been complicated by the effects of postmodernism, as explained above. To understand this evangelism, and to practice it in a way that is ethical, faithful, and unashamed can be a struggle. When the church does not understand the gospel (*euaggelion*), much less how to share it (*euaggelizomai*), the emotions of shame, intimidation, confusion, and apathy toward evangelism are likely to increase. As Western society continues its shift away from Christendom, where does one turn to discover a shame reducing, power increasing practice of evangelism with sound theological conclusions? It is the contention of this study that the Bible contains the most effective teaching for a faithful practice of evangelism for today.

The theology of evangelism of the early church, as seen primarily in scripture, ought to be met with increased optimism. The culture in which today's church finds herself reflects more like the Roman empire. Thus, the expectation is a renewed interest in the New Testament narrative precisely because it speaks out of that Roman context. For this reason, it is the belief of this study that the word of God offers the most compelling and exciting teachings on how to evangelize in modern society. Within the biblical evangelists, called the Gospel writers, and the subsequent story of the early church, one discovers the closest context to what today's church might be experiencing. Today's postmodernism ought to drive the church first and foremost back to Scripture.

Missionary to India, Leslie Newbigin, teaches of the boundary of evangelistic exchange where the church, the hearer, and the biblical story come together.¹ Below are selected biblical texts that impact this boundary of evangelistic exchange. First, a brief consideration of texts within the Old Testament, Genesis 12 and Isaiah 49, will create a foundation. Second, building on this Old Testament foundation, an exegetical analysis of four texts within the New Testament, Acts 2:16-39; John 3:11-19; 4:39-42, and 9:17-25, will offer significant incites for developing a robust theological practice of evangelism. From these texts, ideas concerning the role of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God, narrative theology, and the nature of ethical evangelistic witness will be examined. Any theology of evangelism can benefit from a serious investigation of these texts; hopefully, based on this exegetical analysis, a faithful practice of evangelism for today's church can emerge.

1. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 58.

The Global Intent of God (Genesis 12 and Isaiah 49)

Building a case for biblical evangelism must consider how and why evangelism began. God did not suddenly become concerned with the world in the New Testament. Early on in Scripture, one finds that evangelism theology is vested in the heart and purpose of God, but it is not given as a mission imperative until the New Testament. Therefore, a better description for what one sees in passages like Genesis 12 and Isaiah 49 might be the “global intent” of God, rather than words like “evangelism.” In any case, passages such as these develop a biblical framework upon which New Testament evangelism can be built.

God’s election of Abraham to, “Go forth, and in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed” clearly had global implications. Abram was called, not for his own benefit, but so that God could benefit the whole world through him. Victor Hamilton explains, “The election of Abraham is not designed to isolate this family from the other families of the earth. On the contrary, this family is to become the vehicle by which all families of the earth may be reconciled to God. In Abraham and in his descendants ‘all the nations of the earth are to be blessed.’ Thus the selection of Abraham’s family is a means to an end in God’s overall plan for his world.”² Too often, Israelites considered their chosen status as a mark of superiority and exclusion, forgetting that they were called by God to be a blessing. All election is missional in this sense. God elects to use people, often in an undoing of the primogeniture tradition (a major theme in Genesis), to continue

2. Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 52.

his redemptive movement. Keeping God as center is not only accurate for this text but in line with the whole of Genesis.

In this promise of God, the good news of salvation has begun and the seeds of God's global vision have been planted. He is the initiator and founder of the promise and the great hope. He is the evangelist in the text bringing good news to the world that through Abram it will be blessed. At this point in Scripture, the God of Abram is unique among the gods of the world with a heart of blessing and promise. His blessing is certainly a privilege of grace as made clear by the undeserving actions of the patriarchs. But this privilege of grace is given not only for the one on whom the blessing is placed, as Waltke observes, "God blesses Abraham to be his blessing bearer. The procreative intentions of divine blessing are always within the context of loyalty to the spiritual transformation of future generations."³ This text demonstrates a truly unique God beginning to bring his salvific blessing to all the world (see Appendix B for further insight into this concept of blessing).

How were the chosen people to be a blessing for the world? God does not yet give an explicit evangelistic commissioning to Abram or his children, but rather He gives a commission to worship, be holy, and obey the law. The imperative to obey is prevalent in the Old Testament. For Bryan Stone, this "blessing to world" command in Genesis 12 was mostly lived out when the people of God obeyed the more direct commands of devoted monotheistic worship and obedience to the Law. Bryan Stone, Professor of Evangelism at the Boston University School of Theology, sees that in obeying the Law, the people of Israel were fulfilling the great purpose of God to be a blessing to the

3. Bruce Waltke, *Genesis, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 205.

nations. He writes, “In Israel’s story, worship and obedience are each discovered to be impossible without the other, and the two together constitute its witness to the nations.”⁴ It could be that here one finds the first clue that God’s global vision is inseparable from the life of the believer (see Appendix B for further insight into the role obedience to the Law plays in the global intent of God).

This global intent underwent further development in the lives of Israel as they began to return to Jerusalem after the exile. The second part of Isaiah, chapters 40–55, offers interesting remarks concerning God’s redemptive heart for the whole world. Here, one finds primarily a renewed vision for the people of Israel, but some scholars also find a fascinating vision of Yahweh for the nations. The prophet declares, “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 you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:6).

Even here, one must be careful not to anachronistically read New Testament evangelism back into Isaiah. Some feel that this refers to bringing back Israel from the nations, rather than speaking a redemptive mission to the nations. So, it is crucial to read Isaiah in its own historical context and literary form, while still offering a consistent theology from what is discovered in Genesis 12 pertaining to the global intent of God. Isaiah 49:6 is an inspiring text, but it does not stand alone. Without understanding its greater context within the “servant songs” (42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; and 52:13–53:12), within the second part of Isaiah (40–55), and within the Isaiah as a canonized whole, one

4. Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 67.

is liable to overstate a missional mandate in chapter 49. As a caution, Joel Kaminsky and Anne Stewart ask,

Does second Isaiah indeed proclaim the universal mission of Israel to bring salvation to the Gentiles, or does the prophet speak only to the exiled Israelites to give them hope in the promise of YHWH's impending redemption of his chosen people? To determine the most likely intent of Second Isaiah, one must understand these passages not in isolation from the context, but through careful study of Second Isaiah's overarching rhetorical aims. Close attention to the larger collection reveals that Second Isaiah's primary themes include Israel's election and the exaltation of Israel's God.⁵

These authors demonstrate a growing reticence to see a missional mandate in this passage. The caution stems from the overwhelming concern that the greater context has with the exilic Israelite community, rather than with the Gentile nations. To add to the complexity of this text, there are also questions as to the identity of the servant, the role of the servant, and the identity of the nations. Despite these issues, many scholars cannot deny the universal theme of the text, even if it is a somewhat secondary issue. God's global intent is suggested by Goldingay, for whom the servant discovers the surprising "smallness" of restoring Israel. Such a restoration would have seemed like a massive task, one in which the servant had recently felt that his or her effort has not been successful (v. 4). Despite the fruitless efforts, the servant's past calling is labeled as being too "small" (Heb., *qalal*), which Goldingay translates in v. 6 as "light" or "slight." He writes, "Thus something that would count as slight has to be excluded [from the servant's task]. It would be a trivial task, an insult. Yhwh is declaring that for the prophet, a

5. Joel Kaminsky and Anne Stewart, "God of All the World: Universalism and Developing Monotheism in Isaiah 40-66," *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 2 (2006), 139.

servanthood that merely extended to Jacob-Israel would be unworthy in that sense. The prophet's servanthood is being redefined."⁶

Perhaps in the wake of the exile, Israel has discovered the pain of others. In light of this discovery, for Israel's salvific vision to be only for itself would now be unthinkable. Still, this is by no means the only way to understand these verses, as Kaminsky and Stewart point out, "Aside from the puzzling v. 6, chapter 49 overwhelmingly concerns itself with the exilic Israelite community, not the foreign nations." The implication is that the servant may be sent to those Jews who had assimilated into other nations to return.⁷ Brueggemann offers both interpretations, saying, "It is possible that these phrases continue to refer to scattered Jews; it is also possible, however, that in this remarkable phrasing Israel's exilic horizon is pushed beyond the needful Jewish community to a concern for Gentiles."⁸ He concludes that the past calling to Israel alone has now been reversed in a discovery of its largest potential, which is a "vision for a renewed world for all peoples."⁹ Shalom M. Paul finds a two-fold mission in the servant songs: "The first mission is a national one, to be a 'covenant people'; see also Isa 49:8: 'I created you and appointed you a covenant people.'" Then, referring to the phrase "light to the nations," he writes, "The second mission is a universal one; see also Isa 49:6."¹⁰

6. John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40–55* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 372.

7. Kaminsky and Stewart, "God of All the World," 149.

8. Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of Isaiah 40–66* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 112.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–56*, Eerdmans's Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 189.

Shalom Paul sees the second mission being a natural overflow of the first. Many scholars cannot overlook the universal language of Isaiah 49:6, or marginalize it to the point of nonexistence. A possible solution may be that these passages represent a universalism of the sovereignty of God to inspire first and foremost Israel, as clearly taught in the overarching context. Flowing from this primary theme, one might also be able to detect a development in God's global intent for the nations. Rather than deny any missional movement at all, it may be best to acknowledge its presence, albeit as a secondary theme. This study takes this view and finds those arguments that eliminate any vision for the nations whatsoever as unconvincing. While the vision for the nations in chapters 55–66 is an invitation for the nations to come to the Jews, these servant songs could axiomatically present a type of vision for the nations, like the outward movement of light.

Conclusions from the Old Testament

What can be deduced from these texts? There are two major ideas: First, from Genesis 12, one sees how God has always had in mind the salvation of his world through a process of election and calling. God's call of Abram had greater implications than Abram or his great family possibly could have known. Perhaps it was only in looking back at that call that the final editor of Genesis redacted this great purpose to be a "blessing to the world." That God calls out people for universal intent says a great deal about God's character, namely that the whole world matters to God. The people of God demonstrated his global concern and goodness primarily through their obedience to the law. By this exposure, the earth was blessed with a progressive form of ethics and morals.

Second, the global intent of God is further developed in Deutero-Isaiah. In these chapters, and particularly in the servant songs of chapters 42 and 49, a vision for the nations could be revealed. These ideas paved the way for what would later become New Testament evangelism. Beyond any doubt, God had a hopeful plan for those beyond Israel. How this plan would materialize and what role Israel would play was not known at this point, but the context for New Testament evangelism had been created. It is now time to consider how God's global intent began taking shape in New Testament evangelism, and what forms were used to practice it.

Faithful Witness to Jesus in New Testament

In this section, evangelism in the New Testament will be explored. As stated, the English word evangelism stems from the Greek word *euaggelion*, meaning good news, but this is not the only word the New Testament writers used for evangelistic practice (see Appendix C for a significant consideration of these words). Green explores how they approached evangelism by examining their use of various descriptors:

It was no mere message about a carpenter-teacher who had been executed under the Roman procurator. It was nothing less than the joyful announcement of the long awaited Messianic salvation, when God had come to the rescue of a world in need. Small surprise, then, that the content of their message became known as *to euaggelion*, the good news. Only later was this term used of the documents in which the story came to be recorded, the written Gospels. Primarily it was applied to the events themselves, and to the act of announcing them.¹¹

Several valuable conclusions have come from a study of how the concept of evangelism occurred in the New Testament. This study argues that whether one preaches the good news of Jesus, talks casually about the good news of Jesus, argues for the good

11. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 77.

news of Jesus, or lives out the good news of Jesus, it all falls under the category of “bearing witness” to the gospel of Jesus. Moreover, in this broad sense, all evangelism is a witness to the person of Jesus Christ as king. This reality explains why the word *marturein* (to bear witness), rather than *euaggelizesthai* (to tell the good news), or *kerussein* (to proclaim), is the primary word used to explain evangelism in the Gospel of John. When evangelism is understood first as witness, it will then carry its most powerful potential and will be less inclined to unethical forms of practice. Hopefully, these introductory remarks concerning the words used for evangelism will offer the reader a linguistic orientation in the following exegesis and throughout the project.

Four New Testament passages have been selected because of their wealth in evangelistic teaching. First, an exegetical look at the pneumatology of the first major evangelistic movement in the life of the early church, as recounted by Luke in Acts 2:1–21, will be conducted. This is followed by an examination of the narrative evangelism of Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:16–39. The second and third passages of John 3:11–17 and John 4:39–42 will be explored together. Investigating these passages conjointly offers harmonious insights into the nature of witness in order that one might believe. Last, there will be a consideration of John 9 in the story of the man born blind. This passage gives additional insight into the practice of ethical evangelism.

The Holy Spirit as Evangelist (Acts 2:1–21)

Bryan Stone writes that evangelism is first and foremost works of the Holy Spirit, and must in fact be understood as God’s own activity.¹² From the story of Pentecost in

12. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 225.

Acts 2, one gains insight into the pneumatology of evangelism, which is the work of the Holy Spirit regarding evangelism. It is true that the Spirit empowered people in various ways throughout scripture before Pentecost, such as when the breath of Jesus came upon the disciples by the resurrected Christ (John 20:22). The coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 is clearly unique, however, as it arrives with evangelistic intent, church empowerment, and a comprehensiveness unseen in any prior moment. As F. F. Bruce comments, “Being filled with the Spirit was an experience to be repeated on several occasions (cf. 4:8, 31), but the baptism in the Spirit which the believing community now experienced [Acts 2] was an event which took place once for all.”¹³ Luke records a distinctive movement of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, part of which is the evangelistic intent of the Spirit. It is by this filling of the Spirit that the disciples began to preach the gospel. Bruce comments on the unique connection between prophesying and being filled with the Spirit.¹⁴ The filling of the Holy Spirit is seen in this text as the catalyst for the evangelism that spontaneously broke forth on that historic day. It is significant that the Holy Spirit is demonstrated as the true evangelist of Acts 2, and the only person capable of being able to draw people’s hearts to faith in Jesus by transcending barriers of language and culture. The Interpreter’s Bible comments, “But now they [those on whom the Spirit fell] became conscious of the Spirit as power—in accordance with the promise of 1:8—wherein they might go forth to their work of witness-bearing. Accordingly the great central fact of the day was . . . that it marked the beginning of their active missionary work.”¹⁵ Likewise,

13. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 51.

14. *Ibid.*, 52.

15. G. H. C. MacGregor and Theodore Ferris, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Interpreter’s Bible, vol. IX (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1954), 36.

this Spirit infused pattern would become the catalyst for any authentic evangelistic practice in the life of the apostolic church.

Speaking in Tongues (Acts 2:4–12). The Spirit of God had come upon the church and made itself manifest primarily in the speaking of different tongues (*glossolalia*). The *glossolalia* in Acts 2 is different from the gift of tongues seen in 1 Corinthians. The feature most noticeably different is that in Acts 2, *glossolalia* helped people understand the gospel, while in 1 Corinthians it brought confusion until there was a translator. Bruce writes, “As cultivated in the church of Corinth, *glossolalia* was uttered in a speech which no hearer could understand until someone present received the correlative spiritual gift of interpretation. But in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost the words spoken by the disciples in their divine ecstasy were immediately recognized by the visitors from many lands who heard them.”¹⁶

The moment became a wonderment and amazement to the people (Acts 2:12), which was based in the strange fact that they were speaking in languages other than their own. It is perhaps pointless to gain explicit information; the phenomenon is not described in detail. The main miracle seems to be overcoming language barriers for evangelistic intent. It also may have added to the amazement that most Galileans struggled to speak even their own language clearly, as Richard Longenecker notes, “Galileans had difficulty pronouncing gutturals and had the habit of swallowing syllables when speaking; so they were looked down upon by the people of Jerusalem as being provincial (cf. Mark 14:70). Therefore, since the disciples who were speaking were Galileans, it bewildered those who

16. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 52.

heard because the disciples could not by themselves have learned so many different languages.¹⁷ Bruce agrees with Longenecker saying, “The Galilaeen accent was easily recognized, as Peter knew to his cost on an earlier occasion; but these Galilaeans appeared for the moment to share among them a command of most of the tongues spoken throughout the known world.”¹⁸ How Galileans would have come to such abilities certainly would have confounded many, which then understandably caused some to think them drunk.

The Lucan theme in this report is that the Holy Spirit’s work in the giving of tongues was, in and of itself, a witness to the divine. Evidence of the supernatural was both in “what” they were speaking and “that” they were speaking. As John Stott writes, “I conclude, therefore, that the miracle of Pentecost, although it may have included the substance of what the one hundred and twenty spoke (the wonders of God), was primarily the medium of their speech (foreign languages they had never learned).”¹⁹ Bruce has a different take, choosing to focus more on the message than the medium. Concerning the *glossolalia*, he writes,

The mere fact of glossolalia or any other ecstatic utterance is no evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. In apostolic times it was necessary to provide criteria for deciding whether such utterances were of God or not, just as it had been necessary in Old Testament times. . . . The matter is more important than the manner; the medium is not the message. On the present occasion the content of the ecstatic utterances was “the mighty deeds of God” (v. 11), and the range of the languages in which these were proclaimed suggests that Luke thought of the

17. Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 272; (see also Ma 26:73 and Lu 22:59 for references to the peculiar Galilean accent).

18. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 54.

19. John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 67.

coming of the Spirit more particularly as a preparation for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel.²⁰

Bruce is suggesting that the message of Jesus is primary. For him, Luke's intent in recording the miraculous speaking is to hint toward the global evangelism to come. In Acts 2:5, Luke points out that the men were "from every nation under heaven," which is too similar to his statements in 1:8 to be ignored. The moving of the good news to the nations commissioned by Jesus in 1:8 is foreshadowed in 2:5, and will be realized even more fully in the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. Luke's detail of the different languages and different cultures symbolizes what will be the evangelistic witness of the early church. For four verses, he describes the geography of the listeners as coming from the north, south, east, and west of Jerusalem. The movement of God's global intent beginning in Genesis 12 has now exploded into reality.

It is likely that both the miraculous method and the message are important phenomena powered by the *glossolalia*, and in each case, the Holy Spirit is the initiating witness of the gospel. On their own, the 120 believers surely would have failed the evangelistic imperative of 1:8. The Holy Spirit is the responsible catalyst for the evangelism of Pentecost, and even becomes part of the promise of Peter's gospel in that they, too, will receive the "gift of the Holy Spirit" if they repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). This means that the gifts given to them become both the Spirit's commission and empowerment to evangelize. For the observing Jews of the nations, something of both the most profound moments in the past and the prophecies of the future came together in their presence in Peter's proclamation (vv. 14–36).

20. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 52.

In Lucan theology, because the filling of the Spirit was often the power behind speech (Acts 4:8), it was first a practical gift for helping people hear the gospel message. The Holy Spirit is giving the words of the good news to those first believers in languages so others could understand and be saved. Also within this Lucan idea is the symbolism of the cultures being present and responding to the witness. One sees here a moment of foreshadowing the evangelism to come, and a crucial player in the practice of all evangelism, the Holy Spirit. A faithful practice of evangelism must be grounded in such pneumatology today.

The Spirit's Eschatological Power (Acts 2:14–36). In vv. 14–36, Peter explains how this language phenomenon is occurring. He claims it is the result of the outpouring of the Spirit, and by referring to Joel 2:28–32, he is situating these actions within the Jewish eschatological expectation. Bruce comments on the implications of Peter's treatment of Joel saying, "Peter's quotation of his prophecy means that these days, the days of the fulfilment of God's purpose, have arrived."²¹ In so recording, Luke is suggesting that the phenomenon has a telos in the hopeful eschatology of the Jewish people. Luke implies that this Jewish hope has broken forth not only for the Jews but for the nations. In Joel's prophetic text, he speaks of a future hope when the pouring out of the Spirit will come on people who normally and historically did not receive the empowerment of the Spirit. Luke situates this prophecy perfectly in Peter's address, whose introduction using Joel offers an exciting explanation of what the people are

21. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 61.

witnessing. If even Galileans are being empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak in languages, then Joel's prophecy surely must be at hand.

Empowered by the Spirit, Peter is bearing witness that the eschatological prophecy of Joel has arrived. Once explained by the apostle, the evidence was compelling to the listeners, and they also desired to be caught up into the eschatological promise.

Leslie Newbigin suggests this Acts 2 moment demonstrates that God's kingdom reign has finally arrived:

In referring to the promise of the Spirit in Acts 1:6–8, which is given in response to a question about the immediate coming of the kingdom, I drew attention to the word *arrabon*, which Paul uses to describe the Spirit. . . . The Spirit is a foretaste of the messianic feast. The presence of the Spirit is a real presence of the love, joy, and peace that belong to God's perfect reign, but is not yet the fullness of these things. It is a sign that the last things have begun (Acts 2:17); consequently it both assures us of their coming and makes us hope more eagerly for their full fruition. It is in this way that the presence of the Spirit brings a powerful witness to the reality of the reign of God to which the world is otherwise blind.²²

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit's presence and power demonstrated this good news, opening the door to the future and ushering people across the threshold of a spiritual time continuum. In the same way, the Spirit of God is the catalyst for today's evangelism by continuing to announce that the kingdom of God has come. Stone builds on this idea in a defense of a truly faithful and ethical practice of evangelism when he aptly concludes,

Only as eschatologically ordered toward the end narrated by the story of the people of God and from within the context of a new *polis* and new *oikos* created by the Holy Spirit can the practice of evangelism escape the expedient, conquering, and short-sided pragmatism of modern politics as well as the productive and consumeristic logic of modern capitalist economies (both of which provide the platform for much of church growth theory).²³

22. Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 62.

23. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 224.

When evangelism is rooted deeply in what the Spirit is doing in bringing the future kingdom of God into the present by the power of Jesus, the witness becomes internally innocent and pure. The external metrics may be considered but are by no means the focus. The first 3,000 converts discovered that to be placed in Christ was to be placed in the prophecy of Joel, where the Spirit of God has reordered the world. The net effect is that the church trusts that evangelism is the work of God. Stone articulates this well saying, we do not “deny that Christian practice requires faithful obedience, resolute confidence, and a sure direction (not to mention a lot of hard work). It is instead to insist that constitutive Christian practices such as evangelism are first and foremost works of the Holy Spirit and must, in fact, be seen as God’s own activity.”²⁴

As difficult as are the problems facing today’s church, the body of believers can rest in the truth that God’s activity will prevail. The theological conclusions that pneumatology has for the practice of evangelism are significant and vast. Unfortunately, pneumatology is often left out of the practice of evangelism. These ideas will be explored further in the portion on theological conclusions.

The Significance of Narrative for Evangelism (Acts 2:16–36)

The intent of this examination of Peter’s evangelistic message on the day of Pentecost is to consider the possibility of how Peter (or Luke as the editor/compiler), is presenting the gospel. From any point of view, be it form or literary critic, this evangelism has an intentional literary form and structure. The apostolic design of narrative is particularly interesting, as it tells a story, and then invites people into that

24. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 225.

story. In this study of evangelism, Peter's speech in Acts 2:16–36 is explored in terms of this narrative approach.

In Acts 2:16-36, Luke offers a retelling of the evangelism on the day of Pentecost. The day must have been one of the most exciting moments in the life of the early church, because it is obviously remembered as the day 3,000 people were added to their number and those who accepted the message were baptized (Acts 2:41). It is important to first understand that it is not an overstatement to see this Acts 2 speech in terms of its evangelistic nature. Scot McKnight argues that both the content and the forming of the content have evangelistic intent, such as the seven sermons in Acts, including Pentecost: “These seven summaries of sermons in the book of Acts are gospeling sermons. They are, in effect, instances of first-century evangelism.”²⁵

McKnight's endeavor in his book, *The King Jesus Gospel*, is to discover the true *kerygma* of the evangelism of the first generation of apostles. He writes, “Would there be—correct that, could there be—any better source for evangelism than a half dozen or so gospel sermon summaries from the first generation of the apostles?”²⁶ Considering the societal movement in the West to a pre-Constantinian culture, McKnight's comments surely can be appreciated. Arguably, there is no better source for a study of evangelism than the sources describing the evangelism practiced by those within a Greco-Roman context before Constantine.

There is some debate as to the reliability of this text. In any case of form criticism, however, what is discovered in Acts 2:16-36 can be considered based on its literary form

25. Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 115.

26. *Ibid.*, 114.

as narrative witness to the life of Jesus for evangelistic purpose. Luke places this narrative preaching in a historical moment of remarkable conversion, demonstrating that narrative was and can still be a powerful method for evangelism.

A Kingdom Framed Narrative. There are two major points concerning this evangelistic narrative that are important for this project. First, the narrative links the actions of Jesus with the eschatology of the kingdom to form its *kerygma*; second, the narrative is invitational. Regarding the content of the narrative in terms of kingdom *kerygma*, Bruce describes Peter's message as a story, and as he does, he notes that the first element of that story is to link the Jesus movement with the long-anticipated kingdom of God. The content of this good news narrative is that; in Jesus, the ages have come together. He writes,

Peter now takes up his main theme: the proclamation of Jesus as Lord and Messiah. The early apostolic preaching regularly comprises four elements (not always in the same order): (1) the announcement that the age of fulfilment has arrived; (2) an account of the ministry, death, and triumph of Jesus; (3) citation of Old Testament scriptures whose fulfilment in these events proves Jesus to be the one to whom they pointed forward; (4) a call to repentance. These four elements are present in Peter's proclamation here.²⁷ He has already announced that the age of fulfilment has come (v. 16); now he summarizes the story of Jesus.²⁸

This eschatology was well understood at the time. The message of Peter recounted by Luke is placed in the power of the story of Jesus and rooted in the deeply held theology of Jewish tradition based in the Hebrew Scripture. Stott writes, "As Peter summons the men of Israel to listen to him, his first words are Jesus of Nazareth, and he goes on to tell the story of Jesus in six stages: his life and ministry (2:22) . . . his death

27. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 63.

28. *Ibid.*, 63.

(2:23) . . . his resurrection (2:24–32) . . . his exaltation (2:33–36) . . . his salvation (2:37–39) . . . and his new community (2:40–41).”²⁹ Here, Stott is embracing how the gospel is told in the form of story, and that this story has implicit theological and kerygmatic themes. In so doing, he acknowledges the struggle to find the *kerygma* from the sermons of Peter and Paul. The thing that makes the Jesus story good news is its link to the kingdom. All the elements of Jesus’ life, preached by Peter in this retelling, are ensconced in the exciting hope of God’s coming. The good news of the kingdom of God preached by Jesus becomes the good news that the king himself has come.

Jesus contains the fullness of the kingdom, and as McKnight, Stott, and Bruce demonstrate, the King Jesus gospel can be and is often told in narrative form. When placed in historical context with personality and drama, presenting the narrative of kerygmatic themes arguably is the most faithful way to share the gospel. In this Acts 2 sermon, Peter tells that the story of Israel, as she looked and waited for the kingdom of God, is completed in the story of Jesus, as McKnight captures:

If the Story of Israel finds its completion in the Story of Jesus and if that is the gospel, we must find the problem within the fabric and contours of Israel’s Story and not just in my needs in my story. We need to find the problem behind the solution Jesus offered. Jesus’ word for the solution is the kingdom. . . . If kingdom is the solution, the problem was about the search for God’s kingdom on earth and the problem was the absence of God kingdom on earth.³⁰

The way it was told by Luke was not in propositional points in this Acts 2 text, but in the transforming power of narrative. Propositions seem to be incapable of conveying the fullest kingdom kerygma. McKnight contends,

29. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 77.

30. McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 137.

The apostles were not like our modern soterians because they did not empty the gospel of its Story, nor did they reduce the gospel to the Plan of Salvation. It all has to do with how the gospel is framed. Peter and Paul framed their gospeling through the grid of Israel's Story coming to its destination in the Story of Jesus. . . . If we want to get "gospel" right, we will need to remember that in the heart of that apostolic gospel tradition in 1 Corinthians 15 is "according to the Scriptures."³¹

By grounding the kingdom gospel in this expansive narrative, it escapes the bondage of narrowing it to one meaning alone, such as only seeing it from the perspective of the atonement theory. The grand narrative perspective captures many more facets of the gospel, such as its fulfillment of Old Testament promise and covenant. To this point, the emotion produced at the end of Peter's story in the lives of the listeners is noteworthy. Through the narrative, they find themselves in a moral dilemma.

In his book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Robert Alter speaks about the strength of reading the biblical text as narrative in terms of its ability to create transforming opportunities in the lives of listeners by placing theological issues within their lives. He writes, "The implicit theology of the Hebrew Bible dictates a complex moral and psychological realism in biblical narrative because God's purposes are always entrapped in history, dependent on the acts of individual men and women for their continuing realization."³² Stott concurs, "We have no liberty to amputate this apostolic gospel, by proclaiming the cross without the resurrection, or referring to the New Testament but not the Old, or offering forgiveness without the Spirit, or demanding faith

31. McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 117.

32. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 12.

without repentance. There is a wholeness about the biblical gospel.”³³ Stott’s “wholeness” is what this study refers to as narrative.

An Invitational Narrative. Another important feature of this Lucan narrative is its invitational quality. In Acts 2, Peter tells the story of Jesus in a way that beckons the listeners to cry out, “what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter then invites the people to join the coming kingdom through repentance and baptism. This means that evangelism is not simply telling a story, but telling a story as a living narrative that invites the hearers’ participation. The Spirit is continually inviting more actors onto the stage. Stone explains this well:

Instead, “the sequence of ‘yesterday-today-tomorrow’ is transcended” in a Christian eschatology, for “the Spirit is ‘the Lord’ who transcends linear history and turns historical continuity into a presence.” To evangelize, therefore, is not only to transmit a story but to invite persons into that story by inviting them into a future that has been made present in the Spirit. . . . Likewise, to evangelize is not simply to offer Christ as a historical person about whom things are supposed to be believed but to offer Christ as a Spirit-constituted form of social existence, *ecclesia*. To be “in Christ” is a real participation in what is yet to come, an anticipation of the end of history, an embodying forward toward the future that enacts the possibilities of that future here and now.³⁴

There would be no gospel without invitation. The possibility to experience that which Joel prophesied was (and still is) exciting, and at the same time, the possibility for missing out on that which Joel prophesied by rejecting Jesus, was enough to cut the listeners in Acts to the heart. This living narrative approach invites listeners to bring their stories into a higher, timeless story. By using the narrative form, evangelism can help someone see something he or she has not previously seen. Story has many benefits over

33. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 81.

34. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 226.

propositions and bullet points. Arguably, the best understanding of scripture comes from a narrative rather than a propositional reading, especially in the context of evangelism. A narrative perspective sets up the possibilities for seeing oneself in and with the text in a relationship that propositional reading fails to achieve. The process of conversion has the chance then to be more holistic and authentic, an idea that Brueggemann captures well:

The biblical text is the articulation of imaginative models of reality in which “text-user,” i.e., readers in church and synagogue, are invited to participate. The texts continue to be alive and invitational because they refuse to stay “back there,” but always insist upon being “present tense” and contemporary. Thus biblical texts were not simply formed and fixed (either by some once-for-all divine disclosure or by some nameable human author); especially in the practice of worship, but in many other contexts as well. And when the community of faith “uses” a text in its own life and practice it reenacts not only the substantive (moral, doctrinal) claims of the text, but also the dramatic, transformational potential of the text. Thus I propose that such a dramatic, dynamic understanding of the biblical text as imaginative model of reality provides an important interface with the church’s current preoccupation with evangelism.³⁵

The theological lenses of Brueggemann’s understanding of “text as invitational story” is the kingdom of God, into which the story of Jesus becomes an open invitation.

It is reasonable to conclude from Acts 2 that a practice of narrative in telling the gospel can lead to a faithful practice of evangelism. Stott helps conclude this concept:

It is not enough to ‘proclaim Jesus’. For there are many different Jesuses being presented today. According to the New Testament gospel, however, he is historical (he really lived, died, rose and ascended in the arena of history), theological (his life, death, resurrection and ascension all have saving significance) and contemporary (he lives and reigns to bestow salvation on those who respond to him). Thus the apostles told the same story of Jesus at three levels—as historical event (witnessed by their own eyes), as having theological significance (interpreted by the Scriptures), and as contemporary message (confronting men and women with the necessity of decision). We have the same responsibility today to tell the story of Jesus as fact, doctrine and gospel.”³⁶

35. Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Three Storied World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 8.

36. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 81.

This consideration of Acts 2 makes a case for a pneumatological practice of evangelism in the form of kingdom and invitational narrative. This kind of narrative telling has many advantages, the theological conclusions of which will be examined later. This study now moves to examine three passages from the Gospel of John.

A Witness So People Can Believe (John 3:11–17; John 4:39–42)

One of the significant themes running through John's Gospel is the theme of witness. In chapters three and four, the reader notices the witness of Jesus, the witness of John the Baptizer, and the witness of the Samaritan woman. It may not be an overstatement to suggest that the fourth Gospel was understood by the Johannine community as a witness to Jesus Christ. This study seeks to grasp the nature, content, and application of this unique Johannine witness. Some introductory remarks will be helpful in shaping this analysis.

In the final edition of this Gospel, Raymond Brown believes that an epilogue (John 21:24) seems to have been added by one of the members of the Johannine community. Along with others scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann, Brown refers to this person as the redactor of the text whose editing process shapes the form of what would become canon. This epilogue states that the whole Gospel stands as a witness of the "beloved disciple."³⁷ However the final edition came to be, and despite various theories on chapter 21, the text available to the church states, "This is the disciple who witnesses

37. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 1128.

to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his witness is true” (John 21:24). Brown describes an emphasis on offering a true witness throughout this Gospel:

Even if the claim of vs. 24 is taken seriously, we should not let modern historical preoccupations distract us from the Johannine theological understanding of true witness. The witness is true not only because it ultimately stems from an eyewitness but also because it concerns Jesus who is truth (14:6). . . . It is witness not only because it comes from one who was there but also because the Paraclete has expressed himself in the memories and in the theological reflections that are found in the Gospel (25:26). . . . The Johannine notion of true witness goes beyond an eyewitness report of exactly what happened; it includes the adaptation of what happened so that its truth can be seen by and be significant for subsequent generations.”³⁸

Brown’s point is to draw attention to the special role played by the word witness throughout the Gospel. In fact, John’s evangelistic intent might be discovered when looking closely at the usage of the word.

John does not utilize the common words for evangelize found in the synoptics. This might cause one to miss, or even deny, that there is an evangelism theme in the fourth Gospel, but as Green demonstrates, the writer’s use of *maturein*—meaning witness—constitutes his form of evangelism. In contrast to the synoptics, the fourth Gospel seems to intentionally approach evangelism without use of the words *euaggelizesthai* or *kerussein*, which are common in the other Gospels as well as Acts. Instead, this author’s method of evangelism is displayed by his preference of the word *marturia*. Often this word appears with the word belief, so that there develops a connection between bearing witness (*maturein*) by one person, and the ability for the listener to act in belief (*pisteuein*). This is particularly true for the first half of the writing. Brown notes that “most of the uses of *pisteuein* (74 out of 98) occur in chs. i-xii or the

38. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1129.

Book of Signs. This division of frequency agrees with the thesis that in the Book of Signs Jesus is presenting to men the choice of believing.”³⁹ It could be stated that the entire gospel is a witness to the truth of Jesus so that people might believe (John 20:31; 21:24). Craig S. Keener feels that John 20:31 adequately sums the author’s purpose in writing.⁴⁰ John 1:12 and John 20:31 could serve as bookends of the Gospel, each stating the hope that someone might believe the witness. This suggests a way of practicing evangelism for the future church through the art of witness. Brown indicates this, saying the witness will “be significant for subsequent generations.” Keener agrees and comments on this theme of witness throughout the Gospel, arguing that it is introduced in the first chapter with John the Baptist as its prototype (John 1:8), “The writer may thus use the Baptist to introduce his theme of witness; the Word is the ultimate truth for all of the human history, but is made known through witnesses, of which John the Baptist was one historical example.”⁴¹

Thus, witnessing so that others might believe performs as John’s formula for evangelism. For specific consideration, this study will now explore John 3:11–17 and John 4:39–42.

The Kerygma of Witness (John 3:11–17). “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and witness to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our witness” (John 3:11). This passage is an example of the writer bearing witness to Jesus, who in the

39. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 513.

40. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 43.

41. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 391.

pericope is bearing witness to Nicodemus concerning himself. Gerald L. Borchert comments that the themes and motifs of this passage unfold the nature of what it means to bear witness. Writing for the New American Commentary, he notes,

The overall motif of this section deals with the purpose of Jesus' coming and with the importance of receiving or of believing in him. It is brought into focus in v. 11 by referring to speaking (*laloumen*) and witnessing (*martuoumen*), couplets that are based on knowing (*oidamen*) and seeing (*heōroakamen*). All of these verbs represent important themes in John. The statement obviously is intended to be a solemn assertion (*amēn*) about the nature of bearing witness and the fact that adequate testimony is rooted in personal experience.⁴²

First, the identity of exactly who is bearing witness needs to be clarified. There is significant discussion as to the identity of the one or ones bearing witness (see Appendix D for a detailed outline of this discussion). This evidence produces the conclusion that, in this Gospel, the evangelism brought by Jesus is the foundation of the evangelism brought by the Baptist, the disciples, the writers of this Gospel, and the church. They are all grounded in the witness of Jesus himself. The Johannine community would have understood the writer's Gospel to be based on the witness of Jesus, preserved in various sources and in various ways, both oral and/or written.⁴³ If Jesus used this method of witness, and the Johannine community drew upon this source as its own witness, it gives insight into the conclusion that bearing witness ought to be a foundational practice for evangelism in today's church as well.

42. G. L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, New American Commentary, vol. 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 178.

43. There is much discussion on the sources used by the writer of the fourth Gospel. C. H. Dodd's *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, as well as many others, offers a departure from the traditional view that John relied on the synoptics as his main sources. John's usage of independent sources has become prevalent. Both Gail O'Day and Craig Keener believe John's Gospel to have theologically overlapping yet independent sources from those of the synoptic gospels.

As a transition into v. 13, Jesus in v. 11 is witnessing to something that is known (*oidamen*). It is an epistemological discussion with Nicodemus. What did Jesus know that was so significant? To what exactly is being witnessed? These questions obviously deal with the content of the witness—i.e., the content of the gospel—also referred to as the *kerygma*. As this story demonstrates, the *kerygma* is theological, Christological, and soteriological. Starting with v. 13, “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man,” vv. 13–17 help to define the gospel’s *kerygma*.

O’Day explains that throughout the Gospel the writer is demonstrating how Jesus is bearing witness to the incarnation. It is this teaching that connects theology and Christology, she says.⁴⁴ The contribution that this Christological teaching offers to the understanding of the content of the witness is significant. The source behind the text provided a story about what Jesus knew and disclosed to Nicodemus, and which the writer now knows. Heaven has come down; the Word has become flesh, and thus the kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:15). It is important to take notice of the kingdom language with which this story is launched (3:3; 3:5). Here one finds two of the only three occurrences of the kingdom language in John. In v. 3, the kingdom of God must be initiated from above. The Greek word, *ἀνωθεν*, according to O’Day, means both “from above” and “again.” She writes, “The intentional double meaning of ‘*anōthen*’ must be kept in mind when reading this verse in order to discern Jesus’ full meaning and the nature of Nicodemus’s misunderstanding. ‘To be born *anōthen*’ speaks both of a time of

44. Gail O’Day, *The Gospel of John*, New Interpreters Bible, vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 496.

birth ('again') and the place from which this new birth is generated ('from above'). . . .
The Kingdom of God also has both temporal and spatial dimensions."⁴⁵

The long-awaited kingdom was understood as God's prerogative to introduce. In v. 13, the writer is witnessing to the kingdom by the "descending" of Christ from heaven. Keener adds, "John speaks of a descent of a particular person, not merely the souls of humanity or a divine spark within humanity, who is from heaven."⁴⁶ In Jesus, God has revealed himself and revealed the divine kingdom plan. Keener links v. 13 with the kingdom language in v. 3, saying,

[I]n the whole narrative, it does become evident that Jesus is the one from above (3:13), and that Jesus was "born" (18:37). Nevertheless, it is also clear that being "born from above" refers not to Jesus, but to the community regenerated through him who is from above (1:13). The level on which 3:3 responds directly to 3:2 is a summons to a greater depth of insight: by being born "from above," Nicodemus can truly "see," that is, understand, the kingdom of God.⁴⁷

The only way to see the kingdom is to believe the one who bears personal witness to it and is himself from the kingdom. For the Johannine community, the incarnation provides for this conclusion, as no other option is available—Jesus is the way into the kingdom of God. Sadly, and often, the ideas of the incarnation and kingdom are left out of evangelism. Here though, the evangelist Jesus is bearing witness to them as an integrated whole. Moreover, what they can produce will be seen in v. 16 as both life and salvation.

45. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*, 549.

46. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 561.

47. *Ibid.*, 537.

It should be noted that this is not only a connection between incarnation and kingdom, because the writer speaks of ascending into heaven as well. O'Day's remarks are key, "Verse 13 refers to Jesus' ascension in the past tense. This verse thus presupposes an event that has not yet occurred in the Gospel narrative but is a reality for the post-resurrection church. This use of the past tense, like the disciple's remembering in 2:22, makes explicit the post-resurrection perspective from which the Gospel is written."⁴⁸ Thus, there is not only incarnation but resurrection in this story as well. The final edition of the Gospel brings together the fullness of the life of Jesus: birth, life, death, and resurrection. It is important to remember that the listener to the story is not only Nicodemus but the early church, the Johannine community, and others in the late first century, all the way until today. N. T. Wright comments on what it meant for the heavenly kingdom to not simply come down in the incarnation, but to be victorious in the resurrection. Upon hearing this good news content, the early readers of this Gospel would have been inspired with a spark of hope. Wright says,

And this is the point where believing in the resurrection of Jesus suddenly ceases to be a matter of inquiring about an odd event in the first century and becomes a matter of rediscovering hope in the twenty-first century. Hope is what you get when you suddenly realize that a different worldview is possible, a worldview in which the rich, the powerful, and the unscrupulous do not after all have the last word. The same worldview shift that is demanded by the resurrection of Jesus is the shift that will enable us to transform the world.⁴⁹

This undivided incarnation of decent and resurrection of ascent demonstrates the love God has for his creation and how the kingdom has come and what it is accomplishing. How appropriate and compelling this idea could be in bearing witness

48. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*, 551.

49. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 75.

today. Only the full *kerygma* of Jesus offers a compelling hope; and therefore, the faithful witness needs to embody this fullness. Witness is judged as successful, not by the response of the listener, but as to its internal qualities of faithfulness to this kerygmatic fullness. As demonstrated in the next portion, vv. 14–17, love is the answer as to why God would ever perform such a sacrificial and amazing task, which is the true ethical motive behind the witness.

Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:14–17).

At this point, the Gospel of John alludes to the Old Testament reference of Numbers 21:8, “that he who looks on it [the serpent] shall live.” This Old Testament salvific moment is reinterpreted in the coming sacrifice of Jesus. Where the miracle of Moses was only able to rescue a few, however, the lifting up of the Son of Man has the power to save everyone who believes, thus nailing down a theology beginning in Genesis 12. The whole world is finally beginning to be blessed, just as God told Abraham he would do through him in Genesis 12. Brown notices this as well saying, “Abraham was commanded to take his ‘only’ son Isaac whom he loved to offer to the Lord (Gen 22:2, 12); many scholars . . . think this lies behind: ‘God loved the world so much that He gave the only Son.’ Even the mention of ‘the world’ fits in with this background, for Abraham’s generosity in sacrificing his only son was to be beneficial to all the nations of the world.”⁵⁰

50. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 147.

The motivation behind this life-giving global initiative of God is clearly love. The amazing love of God is both the motive of the witness of Jesus in this story, and it is the content of the witness. Jesus wants Nicodemus to understand that God loves. His transcendence is now being revealed by his imminence in the Son's incarnation, life, and death. The revelation is that God is a loving God, and the theme of the love of God continues to take shape throughout the Gospel.

During the last supper, Jesus commands, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34). The witness to the love of God is clearly expressed not only with verbal witness but with loving action. The action of God in giving his Son is a remarkable love indeed. Brown comments on this love, "The verb here is *agapan*; and if Spicq is right . . . we have a perfect example of *agapan* expressing itself in action, for v. 16 refers to God's love expressing itself in the Incarnation and the death of the Son."⁵¹ The *marturia* of Jesus confessed to Nicodemus is that he will be "lifted up," indicating the most loving act in all human history, his crucifixion. This sacrificial love of Jesus is passed on to his disciples, a vital theme that John continues in his epistles as well.

As well, the Old Testament imagery was the forerunner in speaking of Jesus being God's "unique" Son. The Jews in the audience would have immediately understood the link to Abraham's offering of Isaac. The usage of the story of Abraham and Isaac brings strong emotion into the story, showing the writer as striving to bring the utmost pathos. Keener observes, "Nowhere in this Gospel does God say, 'I love you'; rather, he demonstrates his love for humanity by self-sacrifice (13:34; 14:31), and demands the

51. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 133.

same practical demonstration of love from his followers (e.g., 14:15, 21–24; 21:15–17).”⁵²

This implies how a proper and faithful witness includes a verbal expression to the love of God, but it is in no way limited to verbal expression. The life and action of the church bears witness in love as well, which would have been powerful on many levels. The kind of love common to the early church flowing out of this story was strikingly different from the culture’s understanding of love. Keener explains, “Traditional Platonism associated love with desire, hence would not associate it with deity. Most Greek religion was based more on barter and obligation than on a personal concern of deities for human welfare. Homer’s epic tradition had long provided a picture of mortals specially loved by various deities, but these were particular mortals and not humanity as a whole or all individual suppliants to the deity.”⁵³

Thus, the church’s primary motivation grows from this theology. Green comments, “There can be little doubt that the main motive for evangelism was a theological one . . . they did it because of the overwhelming experience of the love of God which they had received through Jesus Christ. . . . In a word, Christian evangelism has its motivation rooted in what God is and what he has done for man through the coming and the death and the resurrection of Jesus. ‘We love because he first loved us.’”⁵⁴ Green also contends that it was love that sustained the evangelism of the church in the second century as well. Using a second-century legend of Peter, he shows how love

52. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 567.

53. *Ibid.*, 568.

54. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 274.

was the primary motivation for evangelism, “That reflection upon the cross as the supreme impulse to costly service for others in the name of the gospel was unquestionably the greatest single element in keeping the zeal of Christians at a fever pitch.”⁵⁵ Witnessing to the love of God and living out the love of God comprised the essence of evangelism in the early church, and one can clearly see this example of evangelism in the life of Jesus in John 3.

Conclusions from John 3:11–17. From these remarks, it can be logically concluded that evangelism was faithfully expressed in John’s Gospel as primarily a witness by Jesus and by the Johannine community. The *kerygma* of this witness is the love of God in Jesus as savior king of the world. This was a relevant witness in that it answers the longing questions of when will the kingdom of God come and how do people become a part of it. The person of Jesus having come from heaven bears witness that he will be lifted up, and by believing in him, the gates of the kingdom are opened for the world.

Today’s church needs to consider the role this kingdom witness can play in faithful evangelistic practice. The kingdom of God as fulfilled in the person of Jesus brings a different life filled with a kind of love that is both sacrificial and satisfying. It will be like being born all over again. The power and significance of witness is clear. It is possible for one to be convinced even without seeing it for oneself. As this Gospel hit the streets in the late first century, the audience needed something (the witness) that could bring someone (Christ Jesus) from the past into the present (the kingdom come) and begin the future (eschaton). Green writes, “But this eye-witnessing to the facts . . . can

55. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 275.

lead the ‘disciple at second hand’ to the faith encounter with Jesus which will produce life; ‘blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.’ They are blessed, because when they believe they do see! Seeing is not believing, in this Gospel; the reverse is true—believing is seeing.”⁵⁶

Theologies of evangelism can emerge from this passage, such as the theology of the kingdom of God for global transformation, and the theology of witness being both proclamation to the love of God and living out the sacrificial love of God. In these, one finds the *kerygma* of John’s *matthein*. In John 4, Messiah Jesus’ encounter with the lowly Samaritan woman at the well will offer more hermeneutical evidence for these theologies. This study will now consider this evangelistic encounter between them.

Invitational Witness from Unexpected Sources (John 4:28–42)

In these verses, the church finds one of the most compelling teachings on evangelism in the Gospel if not the whole New Testament. The setting alone demonstrates God’s missional trajectory started in Genesis 12. Brown affirms that vv. 1–8 offer a setting that gives insight into God’s redemptive plan. He writes that these verses “may have been a pre-Johannine pronouncement story (a story remembered because it was the setting of a solemn pronouncement by Jesus). The pronouncement may have been one assuring the universal character of God’s plan of salvation, including Samaritan and Jew, a theme not unlike that of vv. 19–26.”⁵⁷ O’Day calls the setting a “scandal,” saying, “The setting of this narrative in Samaria is a scandal that may have lost its force

56. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 113.

57. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 176.

for modern readers, but would have been noted by first-century readers. Jesus openly challenges and breaks open two boundaries in this text: the boundary between ‘chosen people’ and ‘rejected people,’ between male and female.”⁵⁸

In short, the evangelistic imperative is now seen as an outward movement; Jesus is seen making outsiders insiders. To be a disciple of Jesus is to do the same, as Keener contends, “The ‘world’ in the Fourth Gospel is sometimes identical with ‘the Jews’ (15:18–16:2), but refers to the Samaritans in the following narrative section (4:42). Jesus as a ‘light to the world’ (8:12) may be Isaiah’s ‘light to the nations’ (Isa 42:6; 49:6; cf. 60:3), so in Johannine theology God’s love for the ‘world’ represents his love for all humanity.”⁵⁹ Therefore, it is quite clear that God’s broadening mission to save the world is being revealed. This missional intent of God is carried out through Jesus, who announces to the woman in this story, “I who speak to you am he [Messiah]”—and therefore Messiah for the whole world. God’s Son thus became the quintessential model for evangelism that shaped the evangelistic endeavor of the early church.

In this story of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritans, the literary structure can be explored in three scenes: First, Jesus’ dialogue with the woman (vv. 7–27), second, the writer’s interjection of Jesus’ instruction to his disciples about his mission (vv. 31–38), and third, the conversion of the Samaritan people initiated by the natural evangelistic witness of the woman (vv. 28–30; 39–42). This study mainly concentrates on the second and third scenes, particularly the writer’s recount of the tradition of the woman’s evangelistic witness to her community that results in a conversion movement toward

58. O’Day, *The Gospel of John*, 571.

59. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 569.

Jesus as Messiah. This text thus offers some insightful conclusions for evangelism, the first of which is Jesus' instruction to his disciples concerning his mission after the woman goes back into her Samaritan village (John 4:31–38).

The conversion of the Samaritan village is interrupted in vv. 31–38. There are many theories as to how these verses were brought into their current form. They seem to mirror a synoptic tradition (Matt 9:37–38; Luke 10:1–2), and Brown speculates that they might be “a group of independent traditional sayings of Jesus that have been sewn together.”⁶⁰ The writer interjects this brief consideration on the nature of evangelism as a significant part of Jesus' obedience to the will of God, demonstrating that the evangelism of the Samaritans is in the will of God. For Jesus, this evangelism is fulfilling like food for the stomach (4:34), and it feels like the celebration and joy of the readiness of the harvest (4:35). In these verses, the evangelistic nature of Jesus' mission is clear. Keener writes, “Into the midst of the account of the conversion of the Samaritans (4:28–30, 39) the text interjects a theological interpretation of how this conversion occurred in God's purposes. Jesus' food, his very life, was to fulfill the Father's will, a mission he then portrays as an urgent harvest (cf. Matt 9:37–38).”⁶¹

By interjecting this tradition, an important theology is taught in this gospel by a noticeable link between God's will and evangelism. In short, it is God's will that the Christ bear witness; God's saving mission is picked up and carried out by his Son. Because the mission implies a sending, the church was beginning to see a more complete evangelistic imperative in this text. Brown explains how the “sending” of the apostles in

60. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 182.

61. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 623.

v. 38 completes the sending of the Son in v. 34, and he also sees this “sending” as having two possibilities: “The sending is the great post-resurrectional mission of 20:21 which made the disciples apostles, that is, ones sent” [or it may be] “a reference to a mission of the disciples during the ministry of Jesus.”⁶²

Thus, Jesus is presented as God’s first missionary to fulfill the Father’s will and work, which clearly involves an evangelistic practice that is outward centered, one which the woman at the well goes on to practice in her relationships, and to which others are sent as well. There is no form of following Jesus that excludes such a practice. A simple but important conclusion is that it is in the will of God to practice evangelism as an outward reach to all people, which reality also yields further insight into understanding the *kerygma*. The content of Jesus’ evangelism in this text is the good news of his messiahship that he proclaimed to the woman (v. 26). Good news that the Messiah had arrived also became the woman’s witness to her own people (vv. 29, 39). Appendix E gives insight into the agricultural language and its implications for evangelism.

Readily apparent in Jesus’ teachings, for example his agricultural references to the extended process of sowing and harvesting, is that it is Father’s will for his Son is to help all people come to God, and according to Jesus, many people are often involved in the process. Some sow and others reap, but evangelism clearly is a great and grand task utilizing the contributions of many. The evangelistic contribution of John 4 is the empowering witness of the church outward to the world. It is essential to help the church understand the significance of everyone’s part. When evangelism is the work of one

62. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 183.

person as the so called “evangelist,” the church stops understanding the evangelistic work of the whole body.

In Jesus’ teaching, the harvest of evangelism is the shared reward of everyone involved in its practice, every step of which is important in helping to foster orientation into the kingdom of God. This outward focused evangelistic imagination brings the church to celebrate that future harvest as intersecting or breaking into the current reality. The conclusion of all history can be understood in terms of a kingdom harvest celebration likened to a wedding banquet (Matt 22:2). The future harvest has broken into Jesus’ season of sowing by the power of God in the arrival of the Messiah. Biblical evangelism thus helps people to be orientated into this new harvest community. If Jesus transformed the pessimistic reality of farming from the acute differentiation of seasons into a new idea of seasonal wholeness, then evangelism must help people imagine the possibilities of such wholeness.

The Tainted Woman Witness (John 4:28–30; 39–42). The theme of witness continues from chapter three and demonstrates its significance in helping people move toward a belief so exciting that one may symbolically leave behind old water jugs in exchange for living water. Three aspects of this encounter are noteworthy for a study of evangelism: the person bearing witness, how the witness occurs, and the nature of response to the witness in a developing belief.

The person bearing witness is remarkable in this text for two reasons—first, that the witness was a Samaritan and second that the witness was a woman. It does not go without saying that Jesus held women in higher regard than the dominate cultural and, unfortunately, the dominate culture of today’s Baptist life (and some other modern

churches). For the recipients of the Gospel, it would have been clear that the role of women in evangelism was significant. The account must have inspired other women leaders to boldness, such as those mentioned in Pliny the Younger's letter 97 to Emperor Trajan before the turn of the first century. The Roman governor writes, "After receiving this account, I judged it so much the more necessary to endeavor to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate in their religious rights: but all I could discover was evidence of an absurd and extravagant superstition."⁶³

It is remarkable to see the diversity of church leadership in this early account. From this letter, it is apparent that women, slaves at that, were among those who were bearing witness to the gospel and even leading the gospel endeavor. It is important to note how Jesus' evangelistic mission brought him to overcome any gender or social status barrier. It should go without saying that this ought to be the case today as well. The mission of God to redeem creation is a mission for everyone, about which Jesus' own disciples were surprised (4:27). Keener details the social dangers in such cross-gender contact of the time,⁶⁴ which exchange was even more dangerous for a Samaritan. The great potential for the mission of Jesus to go forth, however, was obviously too great to be undermined by the cultural and social customs of racism and sexism.

Looking closer, there is also a wonderful kingdom trajectory set forth in such passages that reveal the redemptive movement of God's revelation. In his book, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*, author Richard Webb explains the concept of redemptive movement from which today's theologian can gain some bearing in biblical interpretation

63. Pliny the Younger's letter XCVII, "To the Emperor Trajan," *The Harvard Classics*, vol. IX, 410, accessed 6/29/2016, books.logos.com.

64. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 596.

for establishing contemporary ethics. Jesus' fair treatment of women exposes a divine subversion of the racist, sexist, and unjust ethics of his day. These issues clearly were a hindrance to his mission at the time, and they remain a hindrance to God's mission today. Therefore, if the church is going to have a renewed and energized evangelism, women must be at the forefront alongside men, not behind. Witnessing is a most powerful tool in evangelism because of its ability to bring all believers into its practice.

The second issue of this surprising witness deals with the woman's past and the dishonorable position in which her community might have seen her. In contrast with Nicodemus who failed to believe the witness of Jesus (3:11), the witness in this story is a Samaritan woman with a possible sketchy past. O'Day highlights the word "possible" here, and cautions against casting the woman in too negative a light. She contends against this speculative overreach:

The Commentary on John 4:42 highlights ways in which the woman's role in this text has been misinterpreted because of imported assumptions about the woman's sexuality, intellect, and interests. The interpreter must be very careful to return to the text and discover what the Fourth Evangelist says about the woman, rather than pass on what one has always heard about this text. The Samaritan woman is never judged as a sinner. On the contrary, she is portrayed as a model of growing faith.⁶⁵

O'Day's defense of the woman's character is understandable considering many too quickly assume infidelity on her part. At the same time, some things can be honestly concluded about her character. Keener does not suggest infidelity of the woman but rather considers the cultural context and the evidence brought by the writer. This detail that describes her past and at some cultural level her character could have been redacted but was not. Thus, vv. 17–18 are intentionally retained from the tradition to highlight the

65. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*, 571.

woman's situation. They speak of her marital status, which was not looked upon with favor in that culture regardless of how the situation may have occurred. Keener notes,

It is not clear that the woman who came to the well had been committing adultery, but five husbands had found some grounds to divorce her, and she was now living with a man to whom she was not married (4:17–18). . . . It is not clear here, however, that this man intends to marry her; and very pious Samaritans, like many very pious Jews, probably would have disapproved of the temporary arrangement in any case. In Sychar this story must have been widely known . . . one could probably assume that she came alone because she was unwelcome among the other women of Sychar. The women as a group were, at least in some locations, more apt to draw water much later in the day (Gen 24:11).⁶⁶

Also, the woman's witness to her neighbors, that he "told me all the things that I have done," conveys that Jesus spoke to her past and hints at the idea that the people of Sychar also knew her story. As Keener points out, "Her claim that he revealed all that she had done (4:27) overstates the case, but may suggest that she had defined herself, as much of her society would have, in terms of her past history with men; it also fits Jesus' revelation of people's character when they encounter him (1:42, 47; 15:22)."⁶⁷

Therefore, based on textual evidence, it is fair to surmise that the woman's past marital situation would have been cause for social exclusion, distrust, and judgment. From this position, her witness is even more significant. The astounding conclusion is that such a woman could become such a powerful witness. O'Day writes, "The Samaritan woman's successful evangelization of her town belies the myth of the privileged position of men as witnesses and disciples. Because of her witness, the number of persons who believe in Jesus grows."⁶⁸ Her story demonstrates how the gospel can be given by

66. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 595.

67. *Ibid.*, 622.

68. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*, 572.

everyone, and that its message transcends that of the person bearing witness. In this text, the Samaritan woman co-labors with Jesus in his mission to fulfill the will and work of the One who sent him. She is joining and contributing to the mission through her witness. There are further implications in the witness of the woman which are surmised from a possible transformation. Appendix F explains the implications of transformation in relation to witness and conversion.

It is important to study not only the identity of the witness bearer but how she witnessed. She pointed to her own sketchy past as testimony of how Jesus persuaded her and thus naturally extended an invitation for her people to have their own experience with him. This concept of “invitational narrative,” first discovered in Acts 2, is reinforced here. The witness of the woman in v. 39 links back to v. 29, as Keener details,

John plays on a contrast with the faith of the word of the woman (4:39) and that of Jesus (4:41). Like Nathanael, the Samaritans’ initial level of faith is based on another’s testimony (4:39), which is acceptable for initial faith (15:26–27; 17:20; 20:30–31). Once they “come” and “see” (4:29; cf. 1:46), however, they progress to a firsthand faith (4:42), which characterizes true disciples (10:3–4, 14–15). Thus the Samaritans do not denigrate the woman’s testimony in 4:42; rather, they confirm it.⁶⁹

A significant conclusion of the woman’s witness is that it is both story and an invitation. At this intersection of the wellspring narrative, the woman’s story meets the story of a man, and her life was caught up into his. It is indeed difficult to argue against one’s witness, as the only way it may be proven or disproven is to check it personally. The witness offers a story, and if someone is compelled to determine a story’s truth, accepting the invitation to come and see becomes the only response. This is all that the evangelist

69. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 626.

can hope for. The woman had faith in Jesus to do the rest. If he does for them as he did for her, then they can make up their own minds, to which aspect the project now turns.

Connecting witness and belief is a clear Johannine theme. Belief is a growing and developing phenomenon, but it has a starting point often initiated by a witness. In this story, the movement of belief among the Samaritan people is suggestive. In v. 39, they believe because of the woman's witness, but as they encounter Christ, their belief grows (v. 42). O'Day writes, "Verse 39 notes the faith in Jesus of many Samaritans and explicitly attributes the people's faith to the woman's "testimony" (μαρτυρέω). She, like John the Baptist, is a witness who brings people to faith in Jesus. Also like the Baptist (3:30), the woman's witness diminishes in importance when the Samaritans have their own experience of Jesus (vv. 40-42)."⁷⁰ There is a growing belief based on the witness of the woman, as Brown captures, "The woman who was so important in Scene 1 is recalled because it is on her word that the townspeople believe. But the completion of the Father's work (v. 34), the harvest of the Samaritans, is to have greater durability; for the townspeople come to believe on Jesus' own word that he is the Savior of the world."⁷¹

Witnessing to the good news of Jesus may create a spark that is later fanned into flame through future encounters with more witnesses or, as in this text, the Messiah himself. One may ask, which was the beginning of their faith, when they believed the woman's witness or when they believed the witness of Jesus? Belief has a beginning, but often exactly where that beginning starts is not easily identified. In any case, belief clearly grows, which allows relevance for a kind of conversion that is marked by

70. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*, 570.

71. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 185.

development. Bowen argues for this idea in his book *Evangelism for Normal People*. Considering the agricultural idea of how some sow and others reap to indicate the growth of belief as a natural process in people's lives, he argues, "Everyone in the world is on a continuum of 1–100 in terms of their getting to know God."⁷² For him, fifty is the threshold of belief in Jesus as Lord. His theory implies that perhaps evangelism should consider where someone is on this continuum, and simply help him or her to continue moving toward God. Getting someone to move from five to twenty is an important part of evangelism, even if the person did not step over the fifty mark of conversion. Evangelism is practiced at every level of helping someone move toward God.

There is little point in arguing as to where someone crosses the intangible line, but rather to focus on helping them take the next step. This does not mean that belief has no beginning, but perhaps the identification of the beginning is not as important as some might think. The Samaritans already had an idea of the coming Messiah before Jesus ever came and before the woman's witness. They shared a common religious heritage with the Jewish people; they already believed in the Messiah. Next, they believed the woman's witness in Jesus, and then they believed Jesus was the Messiah for themselves. There are layers upon layers here, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly when the belief began. What is clear is that the woman's invitational witness in Jesus took this belief to a whole new level and helped compel them to Christ. The point of invitation offers people precise moments to identify their conversion process. If this is how belief often works, then the evangelist would do well to understand her or his practice as simply bearing a faithful

72. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 83.

witness, offering an invitation to join the story, and leaving the forward movement of belief to God.

Conclusions from John 4:28–42. Several key conclusions come from this passage. Witnessing to the good news of Jesus is a powerful method of evangelism that everyone can practice. The whole church can have a witness, both individually and corporately. When evangelism is seen as witnessing, it becomes more than a practice of a specialized group of people. Witnessing can set the whole church free to evangelize, and this is the key to energizing a practice of evangelism for today. The whole church must practice sowing the seed of the gospel. In this story, an entire town came to faith by the witness of a non-commissioned, simple woman with a suspect past. Yet the woman’s untrained witness was both narrative and invitational, which ideas can help form promising methods of evangelism for today. Last, if conversion is an ongoing process, then evangelism is making disciples at every level. There is no separation between evangelizing as before one crosses the line, and then discipling after one crosses the line of belief. Evangelism is always being practiced, and it is useful for people at every level of belief.

The study now moves to consider the pure and simple evangelistic witness of the man born blind in John 9.

An Ethical Witness and Process of Conversion (John 9:13–39)

This famous story of the healing of the man born blind is constructed upon the idea of “seeing” to be not only a physical miracle by Jesus but also a spiritual metaphor for knowledge of and belief in Jesus. Brown believes that this story may have existed as a

sermon or part of a sermon of the Johannine community. O'Day writes that the author wove together the narrative and the theology in this text more seamlessly than in any other Johannine texts.⁷³

The inclusion of the statement, "I once was blind, but now I see," is significant in terms of its metaphoric indication of the knowledge that Jesus is indeed from God. First, this phrase will be considered as an example of a truly ethical way in which to bear witness, which adds to the construction of a faithful witness in the overall development of this project. Second, the spiritual conversion experience of the man from blindness to sight will be considered for its conversion movement and faith development.

An Ethical Witness (John 9:25). Only when a person bears witness to his or her own experience is true ethical footing found. Upon the Pharisees' second questioning, the man born blind has a witness (*marturia*) to declare in v. 25, the nature of which is particularly relevant. His witness is that he can be completely sure of one piece of knowledge, that he indeed was blind but is not anymore, and that Jesus is the reason for this wonder. Throughout the story, there is a battle between what the Pharisees "know" and what the blind man now "knows." The questioning of the Pharisees reads as an epic struggle for true knowledge, as Keener notes, "Epistemological terms ('know') dominate the dialogue scenes and probably provide the metaphoric meaning of 'sight' language also prominent in the chapter."⁷⁴

If Keener is correct, then this phrase in v. 25, "I once was blind but now I see," is possibly a phrase signposting that, "I once did not know that Jesus was from God, but

73. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*, 662.

74. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 775.

now I do know.” The word “know” is used seven times in this interrogation scene.

Clearly the issue revolves around what the man has come to believe about Jesus revealed by his witness that he now can see. O’Day writes,

Twice in this interrogation scene the authorities hold their knowledge up to the man and expect him to accept their positions. Each time, however, the man counters with his own knowledge (vv. 25, 30–33). The fact that the man holds his ground in the face of the Jewish authorities gives this interrogation scene a markedly different cast from the preceding two (vv. 13–17, 18–23). The authorities try to intimidate the man with their status and knowledge but he will not be intimidated.⁷⁵

This form of evangelism is less likely to be intimidated because it only seeks to convey what one has experienced rather than seeking to change someone else. The man knows exactly what has occurred, and this eye-opening knowledge has logical implications for the true identity of the person of Christ. His experience speaks for itself; there is no reason for him to exaggerate or manipulate. As he gives witness to his new-found knowledge, three significant characteristics can be identified as further elements to ethical evangelism. His witness is truly authentic, public, and in the end, successful.

Ethical Witness as Authentic. Above, O’Day observes that the man born blind will not be intimidated. His unintimidated evangelism flows from an authentic witness that is confident in what has happened in his own life—he simply witnesses to what he has come to know. When the authorities demand that he “give glory to God,” it is a way of demanding that he must speak only what is true. It might be like someone today bolstering the truthfulness of a story by inserting the phrase, “as God as my witness.” The power of expressing a witness as truth is compelling. Intimidation seems to not be an issue because he is authentically, sincerely, and simply stating what is true for him.

75. O’Day, *The Gospel of John*, 658.

Intimidation comes from many places and undermines the heart of evangelism, but authenticity seems to be a key factor in countering such opposition.

This authentic witness does not require debating all things or winning all arguments. The man simply holds to his experience in the face of those who attempt to cast doubt. In O'Day's words, "The man does not engage the Jewish authorities in the category of their expertise (what constitutes sin according to the law; v. 25a), but instead contrasts their claim with the reality of his experience and hence his knowledge. . . . The man's insistence on what he knows confronts the Jewish authorities with a contradiction inherent in their definition of sin."⁷⁶ This is an example of a faithful and quite authentic evangelistic practice. The witness is so pure, innocent, and truthful that it becomes easy to sympathize with him. Brown offers, "The blind man emerges from these pages in John as one of the most attractive figures of the Gospels."⁷⁷ This incipient disciple of Jesus humbly holds to his experience, while the Pharisees attempt to debate him with their expertise. In the same way, neither does today's evangelism need to establish airtight arguments on everything from evolution to proving God's existence. No doubt, there will always be someone who has far more training in some discipline than does the evangelist. The power of the man's witness lies in what he knows for certain, rather than attempting to apply his experience into fields in which he clearly has little training. The Pharisees clearly would have beaten him in a debate about the Law and the Sabbath, as this was their field of knowledge, their wheelhouse. Rather than getting caught up into the dogma of sinfulness of healing on the Sabbath, the man simply stuck to his own field of

76. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*, 659.

77. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 377.

knowledge, “I do know that I was blind and now I see.” His life experience stands as the evidence, and his witness authentically points to this evidence.

An authentic witness of the kingdom of God can still be as powerful today. As will be shown in the next chapter, a theology of evangelism needs to acknowledge the significance of sharing one’s own story of moving from blindness to sight. The truthfulness of one’s experience is enough to chase away the fear of intimidation from not knowing the answer to every challenge. This kind of witness suggests that something unusual and hopeful has occurred, and it creates the possibility that others could also experience this kind of change. A person’s story does not need to answer all questions; it simply needs to be stated as true. This also can help prevent one from attempting any form of coercion. The objective of the man born blind is to tell the truth about what has occurred and what he believes is the reason for its occurrence. The listener then is forced to reconcile the witness of the evangelist with his or her other held beliefs.

Regular laymen and laywomen cannot be expected to be experts in everything, but they ought to be experts of their own story. John’s use of normal people to bear witness is exciting. Like the man born blind, the woman at the well in John 4 offered an authentic witness. She was not told to bear witness, and she was not taught how to bear witness; thus, the witness overflowed naturally from her experience with Jesus. This is a kind of witness that the whole church can practice without intimidation. All believers thus can be the resident experts of what has happened to in their own lives. The essence of evangelism is simply bearing witness to what one has heard and experienced.

Ethical Witness as Public. A second issue relevant to ethical evangelism in this text is the public nature of the man's witness. He publicly declares his faith in the one who has recently brought good things into his life—this is the heart of evangelism. Ethical evangelism demands a public life and word, and because of this, it must set a person on a trajectory of public witness from the beginning. Often this is not the case in popular evangelism. While modern evangelistic invitations for a person to experience a “personal relationship with Jesus” might be helpful in describing the intimacy of knowing Jesus, this kind of evangelism might fall short in another way. It has contributed to the privatized faith phenomenon.

Certainly, modern evangelism has made a positive contribution to the understanding of conversion in terms of a reconciled “relationship” with God. God has indeed come close to men in the intimacy of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The man born blind was in process of acquiring such intimate knowledge of Jesus. This popularized evangelistic language of relationship, however, has limitations. A possible problem with the phrase “personal relationship” may not lie in the language of relationship so much as in the common definitions and applications of the word “personal.” Today, this phrase carries a connotation of private and individual, in which a personal experience becomes a secret experience. If the knowledge is a secret knowledge, it will not be shared publically. The witness of the man born blind however, “I once was blind but now I see,” was personal knowledge, but he declared it as public truth, not private. What he has come to see and know will be offered as a witness for everyone to see. His personal experience has public relevance in the greater search for knowledge about the person of Jesus.

The kingdom of God has broken into the life of the man born blind and given him sight, which naturally opens the door to his public witness. In this sense, one's public faith serves as a vital part of evangelism. The Pharisees had to deal with the concrete, public reality of his confession. A private knowledge of Jesus is not consistent with the witness of neither this man nor the Samaritan woman. If an evangelist desires to use the phrase "relationship with God," this study would suggest that it must be defined in terms of a public relationship, which by nature becomes public witness. If evangelism is to breed more evangelism, then evangelistic rhetoric will strive to be consistent with the connection between personal knowledge and public witness.

The Ethics of Success. Third, the man's witness is a triumph of success, although the result of his witness may not be considered effective or successful by some who measure success in terms of numbers of converts. The Pharisees were neither convinced nor converted, but they had to deal with his story. His story of what Jesus had done was now out and on the loose. Everything that happens subsequently to this witness is the job of the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees cannot dispute his witness, even though it becomes a witness that subverts their religious structures about sin and Law. In vv. 30–33, the man born blind logically connects the dots of Jesus' identity with what Jesus has done, but it is his story that is most compelling and perplexing. "I know that I was blind, but now I see" is an authentic witness to the kingdom of God, and its success is understood as a practice embodying ends internal to itself. As Stone writes, "Evangelism does not necessarily produce anything, nor is it a means to some other end; rather, faithfulness in witnessing to God's peaceable reign is its end, even if that witness is rejected."⁷⁸

78. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 223.

The witness of the formally blind man must be acknowledged in its potential to subvert the accepted and dominate ideas about Jesus held by the Pharisees. One of the main contentions of this study is that evangelism is most successful when it is rooted in the kingdom of God. Miraculous moments, previously only believed to occur one day in the eschatological coming of the Son of Man, are somehow occurring in the present through the works of the Nazarene. The newly seeing man's witness causes them to debate and defend their system of religion, which opens an opportunity for them to rethink their worn out messianic concepts. He once was blind but now he sees is a phrase that defines a tangibly changed life, and he is simply sharing this good news brought about by Jesus. It does not convert the Pharisees in this story, but they are forced to deal with this new information and new reality in the man's life. Thus, even a simple but authentic testimony of the gospel is evangelistic and causes people to reevaluate. The gospel word rests in the same air as its hearers, and as people naturally inhale some of it, a few laugh at it as foolishness, while others stumble over it, but all who hear it must deal with it—and faith comes through hearing (Romans 10:17).

The changed life of the man born blind is evidence enough to cast doubt on the public's ideas of who Jesus is, and it presents an alternative view. Evangelism through witness thus creates great possibilities; simultaneously, it can be this simple and this powerful. It is successful not in how many people are converted in the moment, but rather in how it is presented and that it is presented. The "how" and the "that" become the measure of evangelistic success. This is not all that the Bible teaches on evangelism or the nature of witness, but what the student of evangelism finds in John 9 is an exciting, effective teaching that ethical authenticity and publicity equals the right kind of success

in witness. By this standard, the man born blind is a hero of evangelism, and his story becomes timelessly embedded in the gospel witness.

In this John 9 story, one can also find a fascinating study on the process of conversion. Examining the nature of conversion will affect the understanding of evangelism and discipleship as either two unique practices or one holistic practice. As in the conversion of the Samaritan village discussed above, there are layers of movement in the confession of the man born blind. The man's process of belief took place in a single day but not a single moment, including a prior experience with Jesus and further development through his pharisaical interrogations. As Keener observes,

John is certain that despite any public display of unity, many of the elite had to know that Jesus really did come from God. The formerly blind man responds positively that Jesus is a prophet; but for this man, the affirmation allows him to be open to a higher Christology, a Christology which develops in the course of the narrative from man to prophet to Son of Man. In this, his faith resembles that of the Samaritan woman.⁷⁹

Here, Keener is pointing out that, as in the life of the Samaritan woman, the blind man represents a movement of growing faith, which can be described as a process of conversion. This does not mean that there is no beginning point to conversion, but for the man born blind, his belief in Jesus as Messiah clearly was evolving. Keener writes, "The blind man himself becomes a paradigm of growing discipleship; when he confesses Jesus openly, he moves from recognizing him as a "man" (9:11), to a "prophet" (9:17), and a man from God (9:33), and with Jesus' revelation recognizes him as "Son of Man" and Lord (9:35-37)."⁸⁰ Brown agrees with Keener: "for his [the evangelist's] real interest is in

79. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 787.

80. *Ibid.*, 775.

the interrogations. In each of these the former blind man gives voice to statements that betray an ever deepening knowledge of Jesus.”⁸¹ The former blind man’s opening and growing knowledge of Jesus contrasts axiomatically with the closing and diminishing of the Pharisee’s knowledge of Jesus. They appear to be progressing in opposite directions; as one becomes increasingly aware of Jesus’ kingdom, the others became increasingly unaware. One moves from blindness to sight; the others move from sight to blindness.

If the biblical narrative of John opens a possibility that conversion is a process, then any method of evangelism that does not consider this possibility would be short-sighted. The potential danger is in not recognizing that there is a natural process in conversion, which happens when a person is too quickly rushed, manipulated, or scared into a decision, any of which can result in a stillborn disciple. Based on this, it is critical to recognize that the Bible demonstrates a developing nature to conversion. The theological conclusions of this teaching will be discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusions from John 9:25. In this hermeneutical examination of the story of the man born blind from John 9, the reader can gain insight into the nature of an ethical practice of evangelism through both the power of witness and the nature of conversion. A faithful practice of evangelism is seen in this text as being authentic, public, and successful. Also, the conversion of the man born blind to the Lordship of Jesus as “Son of Man” did not occur in one moment but evolved over a process of time. This story of evangelism offers a picture of how evangelism can work for both ancient and modern readers. Behind the text, per O’Day, “one can imagine the pleasure with which the

81. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 377.

audacity of the man's witness would have been read by a community who saw its own story being played out in these verses."⁸²

For today's readers, John 9 captures the heart of the Christian who cannot answer every question posed by the evil forces of this world, but it also teaches that he or she does not have to do so. A faithful practice of evangelism occurs in simply bearing witness to what one knows based on what God has done. When offered to the world in humbleness and thoughtfulness, this practice, in and of itself, is faithful evangelism and will be successful in others' evolving conversion stories. This story of the man born blind thus becomes a vital teaching for today's evangelism. In the next chapter, these ideas will be explored to seek their theological significance.

Theological Conclusions from Evangelism

In his book, *The Open Secret*, Newbigin argues for the preeminent witness of God, the Holy Spirit. He asserts, "We know this, we can be assured that the mission of the church is not conducted, nor is its success measured, after the manner of a military operation or a sales campaign. The witness that confutes the world is not ours: it is that of one greater than ourselves who goes before us. Our task is simply to follow faithfully."⁸³ This study has centered its focus on six passages of scripture because of their unique contribution to the theology and practice of faithful evangelism. In the exegetical portion above, these passages were explored to mine their contribution to this project; now, this section will more thoroughly consider three major theological conclusions from these

82. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 659.

83. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 62.

passages. The effort of this study is to gain insight into what exactly are the vital elements needed for a faithful practice of evangelism.

Unfortunately, evangelism is often ignored as a discipline in theological study, and even missiology can be guilty of ignoring it. When it is ignored, it can begin to resemble that which Newbigin condemned, a program where success is measured in the manner of a military operation or a sales campaign. In his book, *The Logic of Evangelism*, Abraham also argues that modern theology gives too little attention to evangelism, saying, “It is virtually impossible to find a critical, in-depth study of the subject by a major theologian.”⁸⁴ Green, whom Billy Graham says has made an immense contribution to our knowledge of evangelism, writes, “Much evangelism today is brash and unthinking; the intellectuals do not usually engage in it. This is our double loss: the practitioners do not know any theology and the theologians do not do any evangelism. In the early church it was not so.”⁸⁵ A renewed theological focus can help create a way of evangelism that is judged as successful based on how it is practiced in terms of witness rather than on what it produces, as Stone maintains,

First, the goods that are realized in carrying out a practice are “internal” to that practice. So closely bound up together is participation in the practice with the goods realized through participation that those goods cannot be arrived at in any other way. As MacIntyre says, “I call a means internal to a given end when the end cannot be adequately characterized independently of the characterization of the means.”⁸⁶

84. William Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 1.

85. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 18.

86. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 30.

Stone is explaining that a true practice is conceived by the actions that constitute it more than what it produces. The ends and means are not mutually exclusive, but to see evangelism in this way is quite a different concept. Stone's conclusion is, "Though it may seem counterintuitive, then, what is needed most in our time is not more attention to 'effectiveness' and 'success' in evangelism (at least as those words have come to be used in the context of production) but learning once again as a church how to bear faithful witness."⁸⁷ Considering the negative images that words like mission and evangelism can bring, witness may be the best word for this endeavor. If Stone is correct, what are some of the internal qualities of this faithful witness? Using the passages in the above section, three principles ought to be considered in any evaluation of a faithful practice. The three major theological themes to be developed are:

- 1) Evangelism will be presented as a Holy Spirit led practice based on Acts 2.
- 2) Evangelism is best practiced as an invitational narrative witness of the kingdom of God based on Acts 2, John 3, and John 4.
- 3) Evangelism is an ethical practice of authenticity in word and life, with respect for the listener based on John 9.

A theory for a more faithful practice of evangelism will be constructed upon these theological conclusions and will be tested through an intervention with seven people.

The Power of the Holy Spirit

Two Greek words are translated Spirit; one is *ruach* and the other is *arrabon*. Newbigin explains that *arrabon* is used in relation to the coming of the kingdom "as cash in advance is related to the full settlement of an account."⁸⁸ The church cannot engage in

87. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 49.

88. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 62.

an evangelism founded in and with the kingdom of God without the one who brings the kingdom, the *arrabon*. This first theological conclusion focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, which was explored in the exegetical portion. From that consideration, it was demonstrated how the evangelistic movement of the early church was not initiated by human effort; rather, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost launched and sustained the evangelism of the early church. This starting point incontrovertibly establishes evangelism as a sovereign activity of God.

Making this point, Stone says that he does not deny that “Christian practice requires faithful obedience, resolute confidence, and a sure direction (not to mention a lot of hard work). It is instead to insist that constitutive Christian practices such as evangelism are first and foremost works of the Holy Spirit and must, in fact be seen as God’s own activity.”⁸⁹ God’s activity is all encompassing in the practice of evangelism. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit’s work was evident in the life of the apostles in their courage to speak boldly, in their communication through different languages, and in the lives of those who heard the message with conviction. This section offers what might be for many (e.g., Baptists or other non-charismatics) a new pneumatology of evangelism but one that is essential to a faithful practice.

Any evangelism that disregards pneumatological considerations or fails to emphasize the potency of the Holy Spirit by repressing pneumatological freedom does not represent a complete theology. Speaking of the Spirit, Abraham writes that it is the Spirit that “makes known the work of Christ and empowers God’s people to live as his

89. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 225.

disciples and to participate in his activity in the world.”⁹⁰ This is truly the case in Acts 2. Thus, to deny the Spirit’s freedom to work is to work against the saving mission of God rather than with him. Scripture amply demonstrates how God speaks through people by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8; Acts 4:25). These conclusions indicate that any effort of evangelism without consideration of this theology needs to be reconsidered.

The Holy Spirit and the Kingdom. It was described in the exegetical portion how the Spirit brings the kingdom of God into the present and orients the church within this kingdom economy. Luke’s recording of Spirit-led events at Pentecost suggests that the phenomenon has a telos in the hopeful eschatology of the Jewish people. Luke implies that this Jewish hope has broken forth not only for the Jews but for the nations. Joel, in his prophecy, speaks of a future kingdom hope when the pouring out of the Spirit will come on people who normally and historically have not received the empowerment of the Spirit. Stone argues that for this idea to truly be grasped and properly practiced, one must understand the Spirit’s work in the theological context of eschatology. He writes, “Evangelism does not necessarily produce anything, nor is it a means to some other end; rather, faithfulness in witnessing to God’s peaceable reign is its end, even if that witness is rejected.”⁹¹ It is the Spirit’s work in eschatology that grounds evangelism in the proper evaluation of both its means and ends, as well as the relationship between its means and ends. Stone argues that the eschatology of God’s kingdom is pacifist, beautiful, holy, and public. The quality of practicing these kingdom concepts becomes part of the

90. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 103.

91. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 223.

measurements of evangelism. For instance, regarding the pacifist work of the Holy Spirit, Stone argues for a type of evangelism grounded in the virtue of sacrifice. Quoting John Howard Yoder, he writes,

The standard by which we measure our obedience is therefore Jesus Christ himself; from him we learn that brokenness, not success, is the normal path of faithfulness to the servanthood of God. This is not to glorify failure or some sort of heroic uselessness, but to claim, as a confession that can be only made in faith, that true “success” in Christian obedience is not to be measured by changing the world I am given direction within a given length of time, but by the congruence between our path and the triumph of Christ.⁹²

For Stone, it is the actions of the Holy Spirit that order evangelism virtuously toward the only correct telos, which is the kingdom of God. The practice of evangelism thus is led by the Spirit toward the Spirit’s own end, which is the peaceable reign of God in human hearts. Therefore, an evangelist can trust that just as the Spirit is moving in the words and lives of those who witness, so the Spirit also moves in the lives of those who listen. Consequently, every result of evangelism is a work of the Spirit. Too often, the evangelist wrongly assumes on his own shoulders the responsibility of the outcome, rather than leaving the outcome to the work of the Spirit. This gives rise to the erroneous guild of “their fate is in my hands.” Evangelism must rest solely on the work of the Spirit to bring the kingdom into people’s lives, an act impossible for anyone else.

Regaining the Arrabon. It may seem inconceivable that all the above about the Holy Spirit is often left out of evangelism. Abraham speaks about the loss of this pneumatology in the church:

In most academic circles it [the Holy Spirit] is not even on the agenda. It is taken as a mark of the critical historian to dispense with this element of the church’s history as myth, legend, exaggeration, hagiography, superstition, and the like.

92. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 224.

Even in conservative Christian circles where there is, in principle, an openness to the miraculous, talk about the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit in healing or guidance is dismissed as a manifestation of credulity. These events are said to have died out with the apostles, or to be no longer necessary now that we have the New Testament canon, or to be attributable to the demonic, or to be part of the standard trickery of the snake-handling, faith healing, cultic evangelist, and so on.⁹³

Modern Baptist churches, as one example, have struggled with the various Holy Spirit movements observed in other denominations. Consequently, the evangelistic efforts in many Baptist churches look less like Acts 2 and more like the sales tactics of Amway. Abraham goes on to contend, however, that even with this hostility to pneumatology, the Spirit's work has never ceased. He traces its continuation among certain groups through history and claims that even as Pentecostals were driven out of established churches they "managed to lay hold of this important aspect of apostolic Christianity."⁹⁴

To Abraham's point, one can clearly see the influence of the Spirit in the global church. In many areas of the world less encumbered by Enlightenment ideology, a theology of the Holy Spirit has allowed open-minded groups to readily appropriate the gospel into their cultures. In Philip Jenkins's book, *The Next Christendom*, he demonstrates how cultures of South America and Africa resonate with a pneumatology as seen in Acts 2. They have a propensity for spiritual metaphysics set deep within their traditions. The power of the Holy Spirit might have been left out of much of Western evangelism, but it is alive and well in other areas. Abraham speaks of the upsurge of Holy Spirit theology in modern Latin America and its prominence in the spread of indigenous

93. Abraham, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 155.

94. *Ibid.*, 156.

Christianity in Africa.⁹⁵ He concludes, “It [Pentecostalism] has now returned this gift to mainline Christianity in a variety of theological costumes and movements.”⁹⁶

An example of a Holy Spirit movement in evangelism from a Western context can be seen in the evangelism of Holy Trinity Brompton in London. HTB, as the church is often referred to, produces a unique approach to Spirit-filled evangelism through their Alpha Course ministry. In their curriculum, three sessions deal with the work of the Holy Spirit. Alpha Course participants are afforded a weekend retreat where they can experience the filling of the Holy Spirit. Nicky Gumbel, rector of Holy Trinity Brompton and author of the Alpha Course, writes, “Every Christian has the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9), but not every Christian is filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18-20)”⁹⁷ He says there are five responses to the Holy Spirit: longing (Acts 2:2-4), receptive (Acts 8:14-23), hostile (Acts 8:1,3;9:1-2), uninformed (Acts 19:1-6), and unlikely (Acts 10:44-47).⁹⁸ An interviewer asked Gumbel questions regarding the pneumatology in the Alpha Course and in the greater theology of HTB. He responded,

We would rather have the power of the Holy Spirit, that does open a door for emotionalism, which we distinguish from emotion, and counterfeit, rather than attempt evangelism by shutting out the Holy Spirit. We would rather have the Holy Spirit and the potential for those things, than to be without the Spirit. In fact, if the Alpha Course and Holy Trinity has been successful at all, it is because we allowed the Holy Spirit to move.”⁹⁹

95. Abraham, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 156.

96. *Ibid.*, 156.

97. Nicky Gumbel, *The Alpha Course Manual* (London: Alpha International, 1995), 53.

98. *Ibid.*, 56.

99. Personal interview conducted with Nicky Gumbel on Oct. 3rd. 2012.

Abraham alludes to Gumbel's pneumatology in the following way, "To be sure, we meet here a kind of watershed decision in theology. We are faced with tough alternatives that have a bearing on our fundamental cosmological and metaphysical conviction. Either we follow through on a robust and full account of the gospel . . . or we adopt one of the revisionist alternatives of the Christian tradition that are currently available."¹⁰⁰ From the earliest moments of the New Testament church until today, and all over the world, the theology of the Holy Spirit is understood to have a central place in evangelism. Therefore, both a thoroughly practical and theological conclusion is that participants in evangelism from all faith traditions can and should engage in laying on of hands and praying for the filling of the Holy Spirit. In such a time as this, the church need not be afraid of the one she needs the most, the Holy Spirit. Based on exegesis and hermeneutics of the work of the Holy Spirit as discovered in Acts 2, this study contends that a fresh and better nuanced pneumatology of evangelism is greatly needed.

The Spirit's Work in the Life of the Witness. The work of the Spirit in the lives of the witnesses in Acts 2 can be seen in two ways. First, the Spirit gave them the gift of words, and second, the Spirit gave them the courage to speak those words. Considering first the gift of words from the exegesis on this passage, it was stated that manifestation of the *glossolalia* appears to be a practical gift to help people hear the gospel message. Throughout Luke's account, this theme that the Holy Spirit empowers speech for understanding is clear. It happens again to Peter in Acts 4 and Stephen in Acts 6:10. At one point in Acts 1:6, Paul's words were prevented by the Spirit. The connection between

100. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 157.

the evangelistic witness and the filling of the Holy Spirit can be seen in several Lucan texts. Bruce speaks about the biblical connection of prophesying and Spirit filling.¹⁰¹

Theologically, it is completely acceptable that to be able to speak a word from God, one would need to be empowered by God. When evangelism ignores this filling of the Spirit, at the least it could be accused of falling short of a true Christian witness. On the other hand, a faithful witness recognizes and relies on the filling of the Holy Spirit for the right words at the right time. The words given on that day in Acts were not memorized or canned; rather, they were spontaneous and personal.

One of the most striking features in Acts 2 is that God's Spirit takes fearful, uneducated, sinful people and fills them with the ability to share the gospel. The Bible describes an emotionally timid and mentally confused state of the first disciples. They are seen locking themselves in rooms and avoiding crowds (John 20:19). The power of the Jewish authorities was a significant threat, and in the shadow of the Sanhedrin and the Romans, these fishermen from Galilee, tax collectors, followers of John the Baptist, and a zealot had little influence. The deck was certainly stacked against them being able to accomplish much, but the changed lives of the apostles offer evidence to the power of Holy Spirit, and it truly keeps the focus of evangelism on God. One of the unique and surprising teachings of scripture is how God has chosen to enact his will through numerous unlikely sources—the unethical Jacobs, the least of all Gideons, and here in Acts 2, the terrified apostles, who were the instruments of God's hand by the power of the Holy Spirit.

101. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 52.

The forces of intimidation are strong in this postmodern era, and without “a Spirit of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7), there is little hope for today’s evangelism. Abraham notes, “Those called to give themselves in active service in the rule of God need some assurance that they do not face the world on their own but that they can face it with hope, knowing that they will be accompanied, led, and used by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰² The courage and power to bear witness come from the Spirit. Green says that Paul stresses the *dunamis* of the gospel, which is the power of moral reformation, breaking the shackles of evil, and that Mark speaks about the acts of *dunamis* by Jesus.¹⁰³ Although this power is a rarely acknowledged part of evangelism, by it, anyone can bear witness to the gospel.

It is ironic that the Spirit can help to reduce fear (2 Tim 1:7), and yet often it is the Holy Spirit whom some Christians have come to fear. The one who can take away fear becomes the thing feared. Some might respond, “We do not fear the Spirit but rather the counterfeits of the Spirit—the wolves in sheep’s clothing.” Like Nicky Gumbel of the Alpha Course, however, would we not rather have the power of the Holy Spirit, although it does open a door for emotionalism and counterfeit, rather than attempt evangelism by shutting out the Holy Spirit, to whom it wholly belongs?

If God’s kingdom mission has been inaugurated, sustained, and advanced by the power of his Spirit throughout history, then it is certainly by the power of the same Spirit that one will be able to join the mission today and going forward. The evangelistic task is too important for anyone to attempt by his or her own natural abilities. As talented as

102. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 159.

103. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 86.

some people may seem, research supports the truism that no one can bear faithful witness outside of the power of the Holy Spirit. The implications of God’s global mission have complexities and challenges that humans cannot address without revelatory discernment. Wright states that the first reality informing his theology of mission is the Holy Spirit, who makes “available to the people of God the same transforming power that energized the life and ministry of Jesus and raised him from the dead.”¹⁰⁴

Evangelism: Narrative, Invitational Witness to the Kingdom

Based on the exegesis of Acts 2 and John 3, evangelism is best practiced as an invitational, narrative witness of the kingdom of God. When the gospel is placed within a kingdom narrative, the exciting possibilities for understanding the full *kerygma* are unlocked to the listener. Because the *kerygma* comprises the kingdom of God made manifest in Jesus as inaugurating king, it is best proclaimed in the form of a story as practiced by Peter in Acts 2. In the exegesis on Acts 2 above, it is explained how Peter tells the story of Jesus. He places the kerygmatic themes within historical context, adds personality and drama, the result of which is a faithful way to tell the gospel story. Peter’s evangelism, by Luke’s recounting, was not in propositional points, but in the transforming power of narrative, as McKnight contends,

The apostles were not like our modern soterians because they did not empty the gospel of its Story, nor did they reduce the gospel to the Plan of Salvation. It all has to do with how the gospel is framed. Peter and Paul framed their gospeling through the grid of Israel’s Story coming to its destination in the Story of Jesus. . . . If we want to get “gospel” right, we will need to remember that in the heart of that apostolic gospel tradition in 1 Corinthians 15 is “according to the Scriptures.”¹⁰⁵

104. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 501.

105. McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 117.

Bowen feels that teaching the church how to share the gospel as a story will result in a more faithful practice. He writes,

Any summary of the gospel, no matter how succinct, is not the same as a story. It may be a useful summary of the story, but it's not the whole of it. After all, when Jesus comes to be the heart of the gospel, his coming is the climax of a story that has been going on for centuries. If we miss the big picture of Jesus' coming—the mountain of which this is the peak—I think we sell Jesus and the gospel short, and as a result we sell people short.¹⁰⁶

As mentioned above, evangelism as narrative witness of the kingdom of God is currently being practiced in an evangelistic movement in England called *The Alpha Course*. Gumbel, the founder, takes time over several weeks to explore the plot of the Christian witness. This material is a good example of narrative, invitational witness and represents a different method of evangelism than practiced by many modern evangelicals.

In contrast, the kind of evangelism often practiced in the latter part of the twentieth century by Baptists and others, some of which continues to the present, is presented in propositional truths rather than inviting listeners into the greater story. For instance, the popular “Four Spiritual Laws” method of evangelism centered on a set of propositions culminating with an invitation to accept Jesus as one's personal Lord and Savior based on accepting the sequential propositions about him. The four steps are: 1) God loves you and has a plan for your life, 2) Man is sinful and separated from God's plan, 3) Jesus Christ is the answer for man's sin, connecting man to God by his loving death on the cross, and 4) by faith receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. The difference between the two types of gospeling is obvious. In the Four Spiritual Laws, Jesus' birth and life are left out. The election of God's people Israel through whom Jesus comes is

106. John P. Bowen, *Evangelism for “Normal” People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 130.

left out. The global movement of God to inaugurate his eschatological kingdom in the present and future is left out. There is no description of the movement people are joining, which is the church. In all, the gospel loses its richness because it is no longer an ongoing, inviting story.

In his book *Live to Tell*, Brad J. Kallenberg argues for narrative evangelism over propositional and other styles. He borrows from the idea of “law-sketch,” developed by Thomas Kuhn, to describe how the Four Spiritual Laws work. He explains how scientific equations are not understood without a background in math and science; thus, without the background, the student cannot fully grasp the equation. Equations are like law-sketches; they are meaningless if they sit alone. In the same way, writes Kallenberg, “A rich history of shared know-how is encapsulated in the law-sketch ‘ $f=ma$ ’ [force equals mass and acceleration]. The same can be said for the Four Spiritual Laws. Just as ‘ $f=ma$ ’ is not self-evident to kindergartners, neither is ‘God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life’ necessarily self-evident to the unchurched.”¹⁰⁷

People today are less likely to give their lives to such ambiguous ideas. In some cases, they might offer cognitive assent or even a prayer saying they believe the idea. This kind of intellectual assent is not the full hope of evangelism. Instead, helping people find life in Jesus by following him is the ultimate hope. Kallenberg argues that narrative evangelism is the most powerful way to help postmoderns appropriate themselves within the movement of God. He adds that an emphasis on The Four Spiritual Laws is based on a “thoroughly modern misunderstanding of how language works [and] cannot help but

107. Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002). 116.

produce despair among kingdom workers when presentations of the four laws appear to be losing effectiveness as they fall on the ears of a culture that has grown increasingly deaf to biblical propositions.”¹⁰⁸ Kallenberg’s point is that in this transitional society where postmoderns are skeptical of propositional absolutes, evangelism needs to embrace some mystery and vulnerability. In this context, narrative storytellers have something valuable to offer, because story brings back the mystery and vulnerability. To this point, McLaren tries to help churches understand how the world hears today, suggesting how they can share the gospel in this new context:

Our words will seek to be servants of mystery, not removers of it as they were in the old world. They will convey a message that is clear yet mysterious, simple yet mysterious, substantial yet mysterious. My faith developed in the old world of many words, in a naive confidence in the power of many words, as if the mysteries of faith could be captured like fine-print conditions in a legal document and reduced to safe equations (propositions). Mysteries, however, cannot be captured so precisely.¹⁰⁹

In other words, because of how people hear and understand today, modern rhetoric needs to depend more on the power of story. Stone also places the practice of evangelism within the “virtuous practice” of retelling the narrative. He writes, “This story, with its various characters, subplots, twists, turns, and surprises, literally ‘makes sense’ out of the Christian life by depicting its beginning, way, and end and thereby orienting us on a journey.”¹¹⁰ This kind of approach seems much more normal to Frost as well, who believes that normal interface between friends does not lead someone into a monologue

108. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 115.

109. Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 89.

110. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 55.

of several points, which then leads to a prayer of salvation. Rather, evangelism that is based in living out the story of Christ and retelling the story feels natural.¹¹¹

Where should the story begin? Bowen feels that many times, when outlining a basic *kerygma*, the problem of sin is left out.¹¹² Conversely, sin has often taken a primary place in twentieth century Baptist evangelism. To illustrate this point, the famous “Roman Road” to salvation begins with Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” In this case, sin is not only a part of the gospel but serves as the launching point for it. If evangelism is to be offered in narrative form, where does the story begin? As a suggestion, starting with Jesus, rather than with a person’s personal problem of sin, might be helpful for today’s hearers. In a *Christianity Today* article, “The Gospel for iGens,” McKnight comments on Peter’s evangelism in Acts 2,

The first step a young man takes toward a woman who he thinks might be his future is delicate. The operative words seem to be “sensitive” and “careful” and “first impressions matter.” As in love, so in “gospeling” (or evangelism). When Peter preached at Pentecost, he opened his sermon with a time-honored citation of Scripture and then sketched, in third person, what happened to Jesus. Only then did he zero in on his audience: “and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death” (Acts 2:23).¹¹³

Neither Gumbel in his Alpha Course nor McKnight believes that starting with sin is the right approach. McKnight’s reasoning is based on the mindset of the audience, contending that decades of cultural indoctrination of self-image teaching to the individual has resulted in a population that is insulated to any claim that they have an inner problem that is not environmentally imposed. Because of this, people are more likely than not to

111. Frost, *Exiles*, 76.

112. Bowen, *Evangelism for “Normal” People*, 129.

113. Scot McKnight, “The Gospel for i-Gens,” *Christianity Today* (Summer 2009): 20.

balk at any talk of the problem of sin. He points to research compiled by Jean Twenge, a professor of sociology at San Diego State University, to validate his thoughts, “She provides raw numbers that are worthy of serious attention . . . She tells us that the American educational system and other cultural forces have so focused on self-esteem that they are producing a generation of potential narcissists. This sentence summarizes her assessment of iGens: ‘The individual has always come first, and feeling good about yourself has always been a primary virtue.’”¹¹⁴

If McKnight is correct in his assessment of such data, younger generations may need a story of evangelism that draws them in before talking about their personal sinful condition of sin. If evangelism begins with sin, Mr. Roberts and Big Bird are likely to come to the defense of the person, reminding him that he is not sinful; he is great.

Stories in Collision. An important opportunity is presented when offering the gospel in the form of narrative witness. The listener will hear the story and naturally notice its distinctiveness from other stories. When this distinctness is grasped, the listener is faced with a decision. This was the catalyst behind the people’s response in Acts 2, “When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” Nicodemus asked, “How can one be born again?” The gospel does not leave people with a neutral option—they either take a step toward it or toward their old stories. When the gospel story is well told, its oddness becomes apparent. In a pluralistic context, the uniqueness of the story of Jesus will become even more evident, and there is much value in drawing out this distinction for the

114. McKnight, “The Gospel for i-Gens,” 21.

listener. When narrating the story of Jesus, the evangelist can naturally bring this story into comparison with other stories of the world. The story of God becomes acutely distinct from the rival stories surrounding it.

Few theologians create the tension of comparison between the stories of the world and the story of God better than Walter Brueggemann. As the church finds herself in a hostile world, evangelism becomes a subversive story. Brueggemann says that an evangelistic announcement is like the announcement “of a successful political coup.”¹¹⁵ The gospel of Jesus is an alternative to the so-called gospels of the day. This contrasting alternative must be brought into the evangelistic strategy. Brueggemann paints the picture of evangelism as stories in conflict by imagining a man listening to the preaching of Joshua in Joshua 24:5-7. For Brueggemann, hearing the story of how Yahweh has acted in the world by defeating the Egyptians, one cannot help but see the stark difference in this story and other stories that had previously dominated life. He pens, “Upon hearing the tale, our company robot [the listener] notices this story defies docility, urges pain to be spoken, dares to break into the tea party of the empire, and gives authority where there has been none. This wearied man noticed that the story is not a pious religious account, but it is about economic power and jobs and security and exploitation.”¹¹⁶ His point is that evangelism presents the story of the kingdom of God in contrast with the kingdoms of the world, and the listener will notice the contrast. When shared as narrative, evangelism is capable to create this is a kind of tension, or cognitive dissonance.

115. Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism*, 26.

116. *Ibid.*, 56.

Propositional points can hardly achieve the same kind of wrenching tension, which is captured in the compulsion behind the listeners' crying out with cut hearts in Acts 2.

The Full Gospel Narrative. The church must first understand exactly what it is that makes up its gospel and then understand the best method to convey this gospel. As Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom of God recorded in Mark 1:14-15, he was building on a theological foundation immersed within Jewish heritage. The *kerygma* of Jesus' evangelism was predominantly the kingdom of God; he talked more on this subject than any other. John Bright explains how the theology of the kingdom of God can be traced as far back as the Exodus and, from there, developed over time. In his view, even if the people of Israel occasionally confused the kingdom with something far less, they continuously hoped for God to establish his rule and reign among them for the blessing of the world.¹¹⁷

Abraham as well prefers to understand what evangelism is by examining its content rooted in the kingdom of God. He writes, "Any vision of evangelism that ignores the kingdom of God, or relegates it to a position of secondary importance, or fails to wrestle thoroughly with its content is destined at the outset to fail."¹¹⁸ So what are these kingdom concepts? As demonstrated in the exegesis of John 3 above, when Jesus proclaimed to Nicodemus, "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man." Here, the Johannine writer is teaching that heaven has come down, building on his theme that the "Word has become flesh," which explains why the kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:15). The language with which the John 3

117. John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), 67.

118. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 17.

story is launched is ensconced in kingdom imagery (John 3:3; 3:5). In Mark 1, Jesus specifically labels the gospel as the kingdom of God. In parable after parable, he unpacks this gospel with colorful, compelling, and convicting stories.

The crowds were often amazed at Jesus' teaching—and why shouldn't they be, since the kingdom he taught was going to be like the Year of the Lord's Favor (Isa. 61:2). In Luke 4, as Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, he links the theologies of the kingdom of God to the famed Year of Jubilee (often idealized but never truly experienced in the life of Israel). The hope of restoration, shalom, and salvation were part of the Jewish expectation in the kingdom of God. In this idealized year of restoration, the people of God were reordered in right relation to God, right relation to one another, and right relation to their possessions—and there was a longing to inherit this kingdom.

Abraham writes that this kingdom hope is grounded in an imaginative eschatology. This “last things” theology, however, plays quite a different role for Abraham than it does for popular modern evangelical theology. For the latter, the role of eschatology in evangelism is simply the vision of where one will spend eternity. For Abraham, eschatology is the kingdom of God breaking into the present reality. He writes,

For them [the early church] eschatology had to do with events that had recently transpired in their midst; it was intimately related to their experiences of God. It was not just a matter of some future hope that lay out there on the horizon of history and from which they then made certain inferences about a change in life-style. . . . God had moved decisively to establish his reign; the events of the new age were already under way; the kingdom had come already in Jesus Christ; they now experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit in their personal lives, in their corporate worship, and in their service to the world; and they eagerly looked forward to the full dawning of the consummation of God's final act.¹¹⁹

119. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 19.

In Jesus Christ, the rule and reign of God has broken into the world. For Nicodemus to accept this, he had to be “born again” with a new knowledge based in belief. Could it be that if evangelists understand the kingdom of God as only futuristic events concentrating on judgement, heaven, and hell, their message might have less potential to help people be born again? In this case, salvation is detached from the possibility of living with Christ today or joining the mission of God today. At the same time, one cannot imagine that the kingdom is already fulfilled and completed. This idea, understood as “realized eschatology,” does not give credence to those passages of scripture referring to the kingdom as still coming, in the future; nor does it take seriously the current realities of sin in this world. Thus, the kingdom of God most likely to impact a faithful evangelism falls between these two extremes—that in Jesus, God’s rule has dawned but is not yet complete.

Wright brings the eschatological trajectory into the practice of evangelism. His concept of “inaugurated eschatology” is based on the reality that hope has broken forth in this world at the resurrection of Christ. For him, the new creation and the new world have begun, the church is invited to participate, and evangelism is the activity of this participation. He writes, “If we are engaging in the work of new creation, in seeking to bring advance signs of God’s eventual new world into being in the present, in justice and beauty and a million other ways . . . then at the center of the picture stands the personal call of the gospel of Jesus to every child, woman, and man.”¹²⁰

120. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 225.

Wright strongly contends that the gospel is about an announcement that God is God in the current world, that Jesus is Lord today, and the powers of evil have been defeated.¹²¹ By framing the gospel within the theology of the arrival of the kingdom of God, it presents a more relevant and global picture for the world—it is a true gospel of hope for all. It is the belief of this study that this greater gospel will resonate with younger generations. Their concerns for the world, other cultures, and the planet can be met by joining up with this full story of the kingdom of God. Too often, however, the gospel is sadly made much too small when its focus becomes someone's personal escape from this world through an existential connection with God by belief in Jesus. Of course, this is part of the gospel but not the whole of it. Today's evangelism needs a fuller expression. If the kingdom of God, with Jesus as king, constitutes the content or *kerygma* of the gospel, the question turns to what method best articulates this concept. Evangelicals have been inclined to squeeze the immensity and beauty of this message into a few propositional truths. This study finds that this gospel is best retold as a story.

The Invitation to Change Stories. The hope of evangelism is that hearers can change stories, as Stone asserts, Christians become Christians not merely by hearing a story but by being formed bodily into one.¹²² Not all conversations about Jesus can be considered evangelistic. Evangelism is a form of witness that is invitational; for example, in John 4:29, the woman's statement of "come and see" represents the invitation. The

121. Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 227.

122. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 183.

potential that Jesus has for everyone is made available—the secret is now open for all to experience.

Invitation is a crucial element of what makes a practice evangelistic rather than simply a religious conversation. The story of the kingdom of God does not end without invitation. In Acts 2, after Peter tells the story of Jesus, he ends with an invitation for the listener to repent and be baptized. The Greek word for repent, *metanoia*, means to change (*meta*) your mind (*noia*), or turn away from something and turn toward something else. In the method of presenting the gospel in narrative form, this kind of invitation to repent comes naturally. The repenting of the convert is expressed in terms of turning away from one's old stories that defined one's prior life and joining in the hopeful story of Jesus. Bowen writes, "Repentance means turning away from other paths and turning toward Jesus, and so it's actually a very liberating thing . . . We get to turn away from things that would destroy us, and experience God's new life instead."¹²³

Whenever someone hears the story of Christ, they have a decision to either stay their own course or switch their current life's story and become one of the characters enacting the movement of God. Stone calls this "new story reorienting." Excellent evangelism bears witness to the story of God, then helps people imagine their life as a part of it.¹²⁴ To evangelize in this way keeps the emerging disciple from gravitating into an existential belief system that is void of practical implications of that belief.

After being offered a glimpse into what the new life might look like, the convert has a part to play in the story. This is not a health and wealth kind of picture. It is

123. Bowen, *Evangelism for "Normal" People*, 128.

124. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 57.

however, an imaginative picture of a community with habits of generosity, practices of peace keeping, and liberation from the bondage of sin. N. T. Wright describes this kind of invitation in his book, *The New Testament and the People of God*. There he gives an idea of the people of God continuing the unwritten part of the biblical narrative. The church carries the gospel story into the future with its own innovation that is consistent with the plot line.¹²⁵ The evangelist helps the listener connect the dots between the story of Jesus and his or her own story, at which time switching stories becomes full of imaginative potential. How might this look within a real evangelistic exchange? After telling the story of Christ and comparing it to other stories, the evangelist can offer an invitation that could look like this,

Can you picture your life with Christ? Imagine it for a moment. Are you feeding someone who doesn't have anything to eat? Are you singing? Are you joyful? Are you less greedy, less angry, or less violent? Perhaps you are satisfied with what God has given you and set free from the endless desire for more. Are you involved with a group of people who are culturally and racially diverse but joined by a belief in the love of Christ? Are you seeing through the lies in our society claiming that only powerful, talented people matter? Have you found patience with your parents, children, or spouse? How can you be a part of the movement, a part of the story? God wants you to be a part. Let's picture it together! You are invited now to turn away from anything that falls short of this picture, and instead to embrace the story of God in Jesus Christ. Will you? The Bible says this is the kingdom of God, and it is more valuable than anything (Mat 13). Do you think it would be a wise trade to give your life for this and see what kind of life God gives you back? Do you sense God calling you? What else gives hope of real life? Who else offers you real hope?

Any kind of imaginative reordering of life in the kingdom of God is not only true to church history, but it is true to the real possibilities of the kingdom of God presented in the Bible. This kind of verbal telling would not take long, or it could take quite a long

125. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 141.

time. Regardless, it is intentional, faithful, natural, and holds the most hope for being compelling in today's world.

Practicing Ethical Evangelism

The final major theological conclusion is based primarily on the ethical witness of the man more blind in John 9. His classic story defines faithful evangelism. If any form of evangelism is to be tested as faithful, it must pass the test of ethics. Based on John 9, four theological conclusions can be gained concerning ethical evangelism: 1) ethical evangelism is natural or authentic, 2) ethical evangelism flows from a motive of love, 3) ethical evangelism is revealed by the witness of life as well as words, and 4) ethical evangelism strives for respect for the world. These four criteria of ethical evangelism can be stated in question form as follows: Is it authentic? Is the motivation love? Can it be validated by a living example? Is it respectful of others?

The Nature of Humanity and Authentic Witness. The witness of the man born blind, as described in the exegetical portion, is authentic and innocent. In a pluralistic society, evangelism in and of itself is often criticized and characterized as being unethical in its nature. Elmer Thiessen defends evangelism from such sweeping accusations by arguing for a practice of evangelism based in the standards of a culture's morality.¹²⁶ Still, the accusations of intolerance, discrimination, manipulation, and cultural violence are often key words describing all evangelism. Critics will point to dark places in church history such as imperialism and the crusades to bolster their claim. Yet, would one of

126. Elmer Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defense of Proselytizing and Persuasion* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 133.

these critics be inclined to accuse as unethical the witness of the man born blind? Along with Thiessen, this study assumes that critics of evangelism might be less inclined to paint as unethical the evangelism of the man born blind. If this were the case, then to capture the essence of such a witness as seen in John 9 would help to define ethics in evangelism. The formerly blind man's witness is simply too genuine and contains no trace of manipulation.

Why do people evangelize in the first place? The tendency to evangelize may go back even farther than God's command to do so. A theological beginning point for evangelism could simply be natural a reality of human nature. When discussing the ethics of evangelism, Thiessen quotes John Haughey, Senior Fellow, Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University, who declared, "It seems to be endemic to the way we are as human beings to promote with others what we ourselves have come to understand as true and good."¹²⁷ To not share what has been found as valuable is anathema to self. What kind of people stay silent about what they find as good and meaningful? Anthropology suggests how one culture shares with another culture, and in so doing, the transfer of knowledge is a natural occurrence. When Jesus healed people, why did he often ask them to stay silent about the healing? Quite naturally, they would have spoken up about their experience in the form of witness, as in the case of the healing of the leper in Mark 1:45. Jesus' gag order was needed to prevent them from acting in ways authentic to their experience. The entire web phenomenon of *Twitter* is evidence of people's sincere desire to share the events of their lives. Therefore, the evangelist does not need to be embarrassed by the compulsion to bear witness to his or her religious experience—

127. Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 143.

which dynamic goes for all religions. This compulsion does not originate in selfishness, ego-centrism, or arrogance—it is simply who humans are.

Abraham writes, “Given what God had done in and through Christ and the Holy Spirit, it was only natural that Christians should proclaim the mighty acts of God in salvation and liberation, and they should found communities committed to celebrating all that God had done.”¹²⁸ The word “natural” is key. It is a natural part of humanity to talk about what matters most. This demonstrates the absurdity of the postmodern accusation that evangelism per se is intolerant, narrow, and even dangerous. If it is considered intolerant to others to share deeply held religious ideas, which undoubtedly shape much of one’s life, then what is worth sharing in life? Are humans relegated to sharing about things that matter little to them or others? All people will evangelize about something because all people are innately evangelists. It is obvious that the question is not whether to share or not to share, but rather, how one goes about sharing, and what is being shared. Further implications for authentic witness can be found in Appendix X.

A Motive that Fits the Kerygma. One of the core elements found in every kerygmatic picture is that of Christ’s passion. The gospel’s message of the love of Jesus on the cross is possibly the most powerful image in Christianity. What seems counterintuitive is to tell such a loving message with less than loving tactics. Both the content and the approach of evangelism are exceedingly important. When the essence of either one is disconnected from the content of God’s love, it becomes unethical. Emil

128. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 92.

Brunner writes, “For only that faith counts: which worketh through love.”¹²⁹ Jesus declared that people will know Christians by their love (John 13:35). It should not be surprising that when the methods of delivering the gospel are incongruent with its content, people struggle with the message.

It is possible that the healed blind man’s witness was motivated by love. As the Pharisees continue to pressure him to either lie or admit that Jesus is not from God, the man’s love for the one who healed him begins to grow. He does not know everything, but he cannot denounce his healing or the one who healed him. It may not have been simply a fight for truth. It is as if it would be a betrayal of the man who touched his eyes to forsake his witness about him. It would be a fair interpretation of v. 30 to read, “It’s amazing you know nothing about him. I do. He opened my eyes.” The man’s faith turns into full-fledged loving worship in v. 38. The formerly blind man’s evangelism does not arise from a motive to change anyone’s minds through coercion. Clearly, he does not seem to be evangelizing out of selfishness, nor he is trying to gain anything or convert the Pharisees. He continues to speak about Jesus simply because he has new eyes and he cannot be silent about that joyous wonder. If any method of evangelism is to be faithful, it must be ethical, and it cannot be ethical without the motive of love.

In his book, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, Green explores the evangelistic motives in the early years of the church. From the onset of the Christian movement, believers have been driven to share the good news of Jesus Christ. People shared this story at great expense and risk of being killed, robbed, laughed at, disenfranchised, and cut off from family. Why? Green contends that evangelism is foremost the natural

129. Emil Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1950), 85.

response to God's love, which seems to be a reasonable suggestion behind the witness of the man born blind from vv. 30–33. In the early church, Green believes love was the primary motive for living and sharing the gospel, even greater than obedience. He writes, “It is important to stress this prime motive of loving gratitude to God because it is not infrequently assumed that the direct command of Christ to evangelize was the main driving force behind the Christian mission.”¹³⁰ He argues against this assumption and goes on to differentiate between a sense of responsibility flowing from love and the kind of evangelism acted out of legalistic obedience. The latter, he argues, was absent in terms of motive for evangelism in the early church.

The reason this is noteworthy is that if zeal becomes cutoff from the root of love, issues of skewed ethics grow like weeds in evangelism's garden. Consider the variety of weeds or ignoble reasons to talk about the gospel. It has been used to control others, to expand one's own nationalistic objectives, to build a religious empire at the expense of tribal, familial, and individual dignity, and to extort resources, to name a few. Thiessen cites the boundless animosity this brings toward the church.¹³¹ The world is fatigued and angered when evangelism becomes manipulative rather than caring. Paul referenced a regressive kind of evangelistic motivation in his letter to the Philippians saying, “It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will . . . The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing they can stir up trouble for me while I'm in chains” (Phil 1:15–17). Paul does acknowledge that God can still work even through unethical motivations such as “selfish ambition,” but there is no

130. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 277.

131. Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, 3.

question what his preference is for what is healthiest for the kingdom of God. False motives are a sad and destructive reality of evangelism.

In research conducted by the Barna Group, a negative perception exists among younger generations concerning the motivation of evangelism: “Christians are insincere and concerned only with converting others.”¹³² Not only are people turned off by such an approach, but younger Christians are less likely to practice such forms of evangelism. If younger Christians are not offered a better way to bear witness, evangelism will be lost. So, if the church has good news, the church should share it in a good way. In his book, *The Mission of God’s People*, Wright speaks to this saying, “The Bible . . . is passionately concerned about what kind of people they are who claim to be the people of God. If our mission is to share good news, we need to be good news people.”¹³³ The church of Jesus Christ evangelizes primarily out of a motive of loving a God who first loved the church and gave his life up for her. Reasonably, evangelism that is grounded in this theology of the love of God ought to then carry over into a love for others.

Witness of Living the Kingdom of God. In John 9, the man’s witness was based on reality; his transformation was its own witness and validated his words. Ethical evangelism is grounded in a witness that has evidence, without which it is hypocritical and empty. The reality of the man’s open eyes witnessed to a truth that something wonderful had happened. In the same way, the life of the church acts as a significant witness. Sadly, the role that lifestyle plays within evangelism has often been a source of

132. David Kinnaman, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 67.

133. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, loc 272.

great debate. Supported by leaders like Billy Graham and John Stott, the Lausanne Covenant defined evangelism as follows:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God.¹³⁴

In this definition, notice how the life and work of the church, outside of proclamation, is not considered evangelism. Of course, verbal proclamation certainly is key but by itself it is incomplete. Brueggemann expressed the significance of the verbal aspect of evangelism in his book, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism*: “At the center of the act of evangelism is the message announced, a verbal, out-loud assertion of something decisive not known until this moment of utterance. There is no way that anyone, including an embarrassed liberal, can avoid this lean, decisive assertion which is at the core of evangelism.”¹³⁵ In any examination of evangelism in the New Testament, verbal proclamation will rise out of the pages as an imperative practice. Unfortunately, this imperative has often led Baptists and others to understand evangelism as based solely on verbal proclamation, but is this depiction accurate?

This study utilizes the life change of the man born blind to suggest that evangelistic witness is most complete and most ethical when it involves both the words and life of the church. Abraham, however, calls all such definitions as seen in the

134. Lausanne Movement, homepage, “The Lausanne Covenant,” accessed 5/26/2016, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>.

135. Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism*, 14

Lausanne Covenant a “tendency toward reductionism.”¹³⁶ He believes this tendency to limit evangelism to proclamation began with the sixteenth-century Reformers and carried into the modern revivalist period.¹³⁷ If he is correct in saying that verbal witness alone is reducing the gospel, where does this tendency begin? It is entirely possible that reducing evangelism to verbal witness alone may stem from a deeper, ethical issue. Perhaps the reduction begins with how the evangelist views the listening person. Thiessen suggests, “Ethical proselytizing that respects and protects the dignity of persons must always be an expression of concern for the whole person and for all of his or her needs—physical, social, economic, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. To care only for the salvation of the souls of persons is unethical. It involves an objectification of a part of the person, and as such violates that person’s dignity.”¹³⁸

With these thoughts in mind, consider again the witness of the man born blind. Notice how the ethic of his witness seems to be bolstered because it is born out of a miraculous healing event. It can even be demonstrated from this story that Jesus shared the fullness of the kingdom, in that he both healed the man and verbally shared his identity as the eschatological Son of Man. Thiessen goes on to explain, “Failure to care for the whole person when proselytizing is similar to racism or sexism where individuals are identified primarily in terms of a part of who they are, their race or their sex. Racism or sexism is wrong because it fails to treat individuals as whole persons who have value regardless of their particular race or sex.”¹³⁹

136. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 95.

137. *Ibid.*, 92-94.

138. Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, 165.

139. *Ibid.*, 166.

Based on this conclusion, this study argues that when the life of the church is rooted in the kingdom, it offers the crucial evidence of its witness. This is exciting first because this kind of witness becomes a broad practice. In his book, *Evangelism for Normal People*, Bowen claims, “Evangelism is a ministry of the whole body of Christ, not that of a few outstanding individuals.”¹⁴⁰ Like the Samaritan woman and the man born blind, everyone can evangelize because anyone can bear witness by living out the good news.

It is also exciting because when people can see the evidence of the kingdom of God, they will be drawn to it, and a church can practice this kind of evangelism through a great eschatological imagination. Picture what eternity with God will be like, and allow that eschatology to have freedom to move in the present. Then, pray for and live out the Lord’s prayer that God’s will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. Are there people in poverty in heaven? Is heaven a place of racism? Are people in prison in heaven? If heaven is a place where God’s creation is restored, the dignity of humanity restored, and the effects of sin wiped away, then churches can and should begin working toward that end right now. This work is a witness. When the life of the kingdom stands as a compelling witness, a potent centripetal attraction will draw people to God.

Therefore, witness of the kingdom life cannot be detached from the whole *ecclesia*; there is no life of the kingdom without the community. The kingdom encompasses everything in life, and it is embodied in a living *ecclesia*, as Newbigin describes, “The church is the bearer to all the nations of a gospel that announces the

140. Bowen, *Evangelism for “Normal” People*, 206.

kingdom, the reign, and the sovereignty of God.”¹⁴¹ For him, this witness for the kingdom of God will even have political and social implications, without which the witness of the church descends into a safe, private sector where people can enjoy an inward religious experience with no responsibility for others in society. Evangelism is ethical when it can point to and undertake this practical responsibility.

In fact, Newbigin claims that part of the life of the church is to protest anything that sets itself up against the kingdom: “The political order, with its entrenched interests and its use of coercion to secure them, is identified as the enemy, the primary locus of evil. The place of the church is thus not in the seats of the establishment but in the camps and marching columns of the protesters.”¹⁴² Kingdoms, after all, are political institutions with a king, a monarchy, or a republic with a president. Here is where the kingdom begins to be understood as declared by life-giving actions and not simply proclamation.

Earlier, a statement by Brueggemann was used to underline the importance of verbal proclamation, but here his thoughts speak to the witness of living: “The act of announcement, however, is not barren and contextless. I argue here that the announcement itself is the middle term of a three-part dramatic sequence. No reductionist conservative can faithfully treat evangelism as though it were only ‘naming the name.’”¹⁴³ As Jesus alluded to in the Sermon on the Mount, living out the kingdom is light. The witness of kingdom life demystifies the abstract concepts of the gospel in its spoken forms. In other words, the life of the Christian offers something tangible and

141. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 124.

142. *Ibid.*, 125.

143. Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism*, 15.

compelling to which proclamation can point. How does one describe ideas like faith, without someone's life to point to as an example? Otherwise, it is simply an existential religious belief with no practical implications, and this is not Christianity.

Once again, the reason witness was a key consideration in the exegesis of John is because witness carries all forms of evangelism, as Stone attests, "In the first place, we may speak of evangelism as an intrinsic quality of all Christian praxis, or simply as witness (*martyria*), precisely because to live faithfully as Christians in the world is to evangelize by sheer presence. In fact, I should like to argue that the logic of evangelism, whatever else we may want to say about it, is first and foremost the logic of witness."¹⁴⁴ If the Lausanne Covenant goes to such effort to describe the life of a Christian as "indispensable" to evangelism, then why not take the logical next step and admit that living for Christ, as well as proclamation, can help people move toward the kingdom of God? This is the ultimate both/and choice that helps form ethical evangelism.

Perhaps the greatest case to be made for the role of "Christian living" as a major player in evangelism is gathered in the evaluation of current society. Frost emphasizes that because the church has been marginalized in society, the greatest source for evangelism is for believers to live as Christ today by their dangerous stories, dangerous promises, dangerous criticism, and dangerous songs. By seeing the dangerous life of the *ecclesia*, people will recognize the distinctive difference between church and society, and certainly between church and state. This recognition will be more noticeable today than it was several decades ago, making the witness of living more important than ever.

144. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 48.

Forming an Ethic of Respect. Bowen documents the experience of a woman who had a negative encounter with a person trying to convert her. The evangelist asked no questions about her life or tried to understand anything about her but simply launched into a speech. Bowen described the encounter as, “A project, not a person. The verbal message (God loves you) was contradicted by the non-verbal message (you are another project). There was no equality in the conversation, no interest in the other persons’ faith journey, no concern for her pain. In other words, no respect.”¹⁴⁵ Thiessen writes, “It is the dignity and worth of the human being that I believe is the foundation of any adequate ethical theory [of evangelism].”¹⁴⁶ If respect is truly this crucial, how is it formed theologically? It is crucial for the evangelist to understand that without real respect, the message falls flat. The world has grown cynical of hope and is replacing it with an interest in reality. So, any notion of hope detached from reality is neither exciting nor compelling today. Therefore, the hope of God’s reign, when viewed as escaping from the realness of the world into a vague heaven is likely to be met with boredom at best.

In sharp contrast, the evangelism being proposed in this study offers a solution based in the hope that God’s rule is not entirely other worldly. People’s lives matter in the here and now. There are current consequences when one imagines life according to God’s rule and begins to enact it in real time. The Lord’s Prayer that the kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven becomes tangible. It is the arrival of a future hope into the present. This study believes that the ethic of respecting others is formed from the hope of the kingdom. In this sense, when the hope of God’s reign breaks into the present, it can

145. Bowen, *Evangelism for “Normal” People*, 80.

146. Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, 44.

be called evangelism. Consider again John 9. What is one of the greatest hopes of the man born blind? Certainly, it is to be able to see. He imagines that one day in the kingdom of God he would have that respect, no longer begging or groping about in the dust, eating dirty handouts. The reason the eschatological hope is any hope at all is because of the possibility of sight today and the dignity it brings today. In the story, this future hope arrives in Jesus in the present tense. It is completely confirmed that the future has come when Christ admits his identity as the eschatological Son of Man. With his healing and new dignity and respect, it is of no surprise that in the man's subsequent witness to others there is nothing disrespectful or harmful in any way. The ethical witness of the man born blind is formed out of his own eschatological experience. Surely, the hope of the future creates an ethical witness toward others.

The old telos of love: conversion. Another way to understand how this works is through the idea of teleology, which considers what something will be and works toward that end. The motivation of getting people into heaven, and saved from hell, was certainly the most prevalent telos for evangelism in Baptist and other churches of the twentieth century. In many cases, this telos formed an ethic of love for those evangelists. It is also hard to deny that this motivation mobilized great numbers for witness and missions, as C. S. Lewis observed, "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next."¹⁴⁷ This idea played a significant role in the motivation of modern evangelism. Caring Christians did not want others to go to hell; of course, they wanted them to meet God in heaven. Every

147. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), 119.

person seemed worth the effort, worth celebrating, and worth counting; the future hope of heaven was directing the witness.

Although this motivation seemed to work at the time, and God used it, the weaknesses of this telos is now recognizable. If all that matters is where a person will spend eternity, then why not do anything to get them to heaven? If this is the case, there is little theological basis for ethical evangelism. What is to prevent a form of evangelism where manipulation and lying become institutionalized as part of the strategy? The Christian ideal commandment to, “love neighbor as self,” could easily be turned into the justification, “If I really loved someone, I would do whatever it takes to get them to heaven. When she’s in heaven she will thank me. Wouldn’t I want someone to love me that much?” Are the Inquisitions looming in the background? When heaven is all that matters, the ends justifies the means, and that is the opposite of ethical evangelism. Also, if eternity in heaven or hell is all that matters, one is less persuaded to invest in meeting someone’s physical needs. To validate this tendency, one could point out how many churches inclined toward this old telos are less enthusiastic about social justice.

Today’s culture has grown weary of such motives, as Thiessen documents, “The call for this active, very aggressive proselytizing is what I find one of the most repulsive doctrines of Christianity. Astro5 [pseudonym] is even more blunt: ‘Killing is wrong, but Christianizing is just as wrong.’”¹⁴⁸ Could there be a different telos of love for evangelism today? It is possible that by examining a slightly different eschatological promise (telos), evangelism might find fresh wind in a postmodern culture?

148. Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, 4.

A new telos of love: respect. What Jesus brings to the man born blind is something far greater than escape—he brings transformation. In *Evangelism After Christendom*, Stone’s view is that evangelism was and is a practice with a singular telos in mind. As the ultimate hope of something, one’s telos guides one along a trajectory. Respecting others can only come when the evangelist understands what that person means in the heart of Christ Jesus. Only then can the evangelist bring the dignity of heaven to bear on a person’s current life. As C. S. Lewis asserts about people in his book, *The Weight of Glory*, “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature that if you saw it now, would be strongly tempted to worship . . . You have never talked to a mere mortal.”¹⁴⁹ To respect others is nothing short of offering heaven in the present. In this regard, evangelism is not only faith sharing, but “hope sharing.” Telos is not hypothetical, detached, or academic; rather, it creates and re-imagines social realities. Brueggemann suggests these new re-imagined social realities in *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism*. As one practices such evangelism, hopeful possibilities are experienced in the present. This was the original gospel.

In 1 Cor 9:19-24, Paul speaks of his effort to become “all things to all people.” For the sake of the gospel, which he understood to be a transformative gospel, he respects even the Gentiles to the point that he says he becomes one of them. Indeed, this was a shocking statement for any Jew. Just as an ethical American missionary would refuse to push Western ideologies upon an African tribe, so Paul, in good conscience, could not push the Jewish law upon non-Jews and call that evangelism. Because his motivation was

149. C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory: A Sermon,” in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces* (London: Collins Fontana Books, 1965), 109.

the complete gospel, his practice was ethical, taking on himself the brunt of change for the love of people.

In *Surprised by Hope*, Wright teaches about this exciting telos for evangelism. For him, the resurrection of Jesus means that the whole world will be restored. The gospel is more than escaping from this earth into heaven; rather, it is joining God's mission to restore the earth. Evangelism occurs when people can recognize where this restorative kingdom is, hear what it is about, and are invited to participate living it in the here and now. Wright explains, "I simply want to show how the paradigm I have advanced in this book, of the surprising hope we find in the resurrection of Jesus and the New Testament's exploration of its significance, gives a new perspective on what evangelism might actually be and hence how one might go about it."¹⁵⁰ The new motivation to which he refers is hope for our world rather than escape from it. He writes,

And this is the point where believing in the resurrection of Jesus suddenly ceases to be a matter of inquiring about an odd event in the first century and becomes a matter of rediscovering hope in the twenty-first century. Hope is what you get when you suddenly realize that a different worldview is possible, a worldview in which the rich, the powerful, and the unscrupulous do not after all have the last word. The same worldview shift that is demanded by the resurrection of Jesus is the shift that will enable us to transform the world.¹⁵¹

Mainly because it brings sincere respect for others, most people of generation X and the millennial generation will be more excited about this theology of re-creation rather than a theology of escape. Bowen suggests that at the bottom of Jesus' respect for the woman at the well and the man born blind was his understanding that they were made

150. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 225.

151. *Ibid.*, 75.

in the image of God and that one day everyone would see it.¹⁵² For Thiessen, there are five areas of a person's life that ought to be taken into consideration if evangelism is to be an ethical practice: self-dignity, self-care, physical self, psychological self, and social self.¹⁵³ If all of these will be transformed in the kingdom of God, the evangelist can have a deep respect for them and live a kind witness that is respectful of the whole person.

Another vital way to hold fast to an ethic of respect is to understand the commonality of evangelism and discipleship. Some pastors understand them as distinct and separate practices, which consequently leads many churches to make certain ecclesiological decisions. One decision is often to create different programs to achieve each one in isolation from the other. In Rick Warren's, *The Purpose Driven Life*, evangelism and discipleship are painted as separate pictures that help make up the mosaic of the Christian life. Is this what Jesus meant when he said to "make disciples"? This study sees this separation as unbiblical, unnecessary, and a hindrance to evangelism.

It might clear up some contention to recognize that whenever the words disciple or discipleship are mentioned in the New Testament, they refer to the practice of becoming like Christ rather than practicing making disciples. The difference is becoming rather than doing (a word study demonstrating this is found in Appendix G). By examining these words via their usage in the New Testament, one might assume with Bowen that "evangelism never ends."¹⁵⁴ The discipling process starts with helping someone take the beginning steps toward Jesus, and it continues to be the practice of

152. Bowen, *Evangelism for "Normal" People*, 79.

153. Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, 234.

154. Bowen, *Evangelism for "Normal" People*, 208.

teaching the good news of living for and with Jesus. Thus, evangelism is making disciples at any stage in one's spiritual conversion to the image of Christ, as Bowen asserts, "In writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul says a strange thing. He expresses his 'eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in the Rome'" (Romans 1:15). In Greek, "proclaim the gospel" is the term from which comes the word evangelize. But how can Paul say that he wants to evangelize those who are already Christians? He clearly says he wants to evangelize "you," those to whom he is writing, whom he has already called "God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints" (Romans 1:7), that is Christians.¹⁵⁵ Clearly, Paul sees evangelism as a practice that not only helps someone cross the threshold of belief but also helps them grow as disciples of that belief. The church is therefore trying to make disciples, and any kind of evangelism that does not strive for this may leave the new believer experiencing a kind of "bait and switch." Ethical evangelism must respect the person enough to strive toward reducing the possibilities of bait and switch tactics. This explains why marrying the making of disciples with evangelism leads to ethical evangelism. When evangelism is separate from making disciples, it can cause confusion, halfhearted commitment, or even result in people leaving the faith all together.

This section has sought to explain the importance of practicing ethical evangelism. It has demonstrated that this ethic is formed by authenticity, love for God, lifestyle, and respect for others. As each of these is practiced for its inherent good, ethical evangelism ensues. Any evaluation of what makes evangelism a faithful practice must include the quality of its ethics, which can do significant good for evangelism. One of the

155. Bowen, *Evangelism for "Normal" People*, 208.

most profound impacts it can have is helping the church to deal with the criticism that any evangelism is intolerant. This generalization, however illogical, is a terrifying accusation to a church increasingly conscious of what people think. This study believes that the only way to engage the church in a practice of evangelism is by practicing ethical evangelism; otherwise, most Christians will simply not take the risk.

Conclusion of Practicing Ethical Evangelism. This project is intended to address the problem of a lack of participation, interest, and excitement regarding the practice of evangelism in churches today. To address this problem, the project created an “Evangelism Sodality,” the content of which was based on the biblical and theological foundation above. Four passages of scripture have been considered, all of which work together, often overlapping, creating three major principles for faithful evangelism:

- 1) Evangelism is a practice inspired and led by the Holy Spirit of God.
- 2) When evangelism is practiced as an invitational narrative witness of the kingdom of God, it has the best chance of offering the richest and fullest picture of Jesus.
- 3) Evangelism must be practiced ethically. The criteria for evaluating ethics in evangelism are: authenticity, motive formed by love, witness of life and word, and treating the listener with respect.

In sum, faithful evangelism ought to, “Tell the gospel when prompted, tell it well, and tell it with care.” The theory is that if one joins a group of people committed to these three principles, a more faithful practice of evangelism will result. This theory was tested through an intervention with seven people called, “An Evangelism Sodality.” If evangelism is to be evaluated by an end internal to the practice itself, then these qualities are necessary for this evaluation.

CHAPTER THREE

The Intervention

Introduction

This project explores the effectiveness that an Evangelism Sodality had in energizing a more faithful practice of evangelism in the lives of seven Christians. A sodality, derived from the Latin *sodalitas*, meaning companionship, is a fellowship of people who come together in unity for a shared purpose. An Evangelism Sodality, therefore, is a small group of people who bind themselves together to study, discuss, practice, and pray for a faithful practice of evangelism in their daily lives.

The intervention was based on research gathered from a six-week Evangelism Sodality. Seven participants participated in a six-week study discussing the “Excited to Share” curriculum and practicing evangelism in their daily lives. This curriculum is based upon the biblical exegesis of five passages of scripture (Gen 12:1-3; Isa 49:6; Acts 2:1-36; John 3:11-17; John 4:28-42; John 9:13-39) and the theological conclusions of these texts. Using qualitative research methodology, the effectiveness of this Evangelism Sodality was tested to determine if it resulted in a more faithful practice of evangelism in the participants’ lives.

Description of the Intervention

This intervention had two levels of comparison. First, a control group was formed to compare to an experimental group. The experimental group participated in a six-week Evangelism Sodality (stimulus), while the control group did not experience any stimulus.

The effect this stimulus had on the experimental group was then compared to the denial of stimuli in the control group. Second, the answers to a set of pre-interviews was compared to the answers to a set of post-interviews of each group.

The overall intervention took place over a six-week period. There was a set of pre-interviews before the six-week sodality began, and another set of interviews took place after the six-week sodality ended. Each participant in both groups went through the interviews; however, only the experimental group engaged the Evangelism Sodality stimulus.

The experimental group was gathered into an Evangelism Sodality, which met every week for six weeks; each meeting lasted two hours. During each meeting, I taught the curriculum, “Excited to Share” (this curriculum can be found in Appendix H), which was broken into six weekly segments. After the third session, the experimental group was encouraged to actively practice faithful witnessing based on the experience of the sodality.

Research Questions

The standard by which a faithful witness is measured is internal to the witness itself, rather than any external response. This study attempts to discover the effectiveness that an Evangelism Sodality can have in helping a Christian evangelize faithfully, as qualitatively separate from any measurement of the response of the listener. Therefore, the criteria/principles of a faithful witness are fivefold:

- 1) The measurement of the quality of the gospel presented: How did the participant attempt to describe the fullness of the story of Jesus?
- 2) The measurement of the quality of authenticity in sharing one’s own story: Did the participant share witness to how Jesus has worked in his or her life?

- 3) The measurement of the quality of following of the leading of the Spirit: Did the participant obey when led by the Spirit to bear witness? And, did the participant trust in the working of the Holy Spirit?
- 4) The measurement of the quality of ethical witness in terms of care for the person listening: Did the participant care more about the listener's dignity in free choice than getting him or her to do something before he or she understood the story of the gospel?
- 5) The measurement of quality of practice: Did the participant engage in intentional practices of bearing witness in both verbal and living ways?

The research sub-questions helped create data that speak to these criteria and by which the faithfulness of bearing witness was measured. Each sub-question pointed to one of the research questions. In the following, the numbers in parentheses link the substance of each sub-question to one of the major research questions:

- 1) Have you had any prior training in evangelism?
- 2) How often during a typical day do you think about sharing or living the gospel for people to hear or see, and can you explain what these thoughts and feelings are like? (#5)
- 3) Can you please describe the narrative or story of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that is invitational for someone to join that story? (#1)
- 4) Can you please incorporate your testimony, and the testimony of the church, into the story of Jesus? (#2)
- 5) How often do you feel the Holy Spirit's leading that increases your desire and confidence to bear witness? (#3)
- 6) Please describe ways in which you obeyed the Holy Spirit by intentionally engaging people with the gospel lately. The key word here is "intentional." Did you think about what you were doing and who was watching or listening? (#3)
- 7) How do you bear witness in a way that protects the other person from any form of manipulation, getting them to make too quick of life decisions without understanding, or feeling like you do not care, with great respect about who they are? (#4)

- 8) What role does caring about the other person, respecting their beliefs, and not trying to get them to do anything play in your confidence level of evangelism? (#4)
- 9) How did your experience in this program influence the way you think about and practice evangelism? (#5)

Description of the Method

Qualitative research was chosen to ascertain the effectiveness of an Evangelism Sodality. This type of research can be defined as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”¹ Specifically, the method was to interview the control group and experimental group in pre-training interviews and post-training interviews. The only group to receive the training was the experimental group. This allowed for a comparison across groups as well as qualitative changes, if any, within each participant. The primary reasons this method was selected are complexity of the nature of evangelism, a desire to test holistic change, and a need to collect and compare data across multiple participants.

Because the nature of evangelism is complex, Christians often opt to not engage the practice at all. For those who do, however, many options exist to communicate the gospel. A practitioner of evangelism ought to seek the most faithful practice, which requires a specific training and consideration of the transitions occurring in society that have added to the complexity of evangelism. To evaluate the faithfulness of a practice of evangelism in such a context requires a qualitative method of research.

I also had a desire to test the holistic transformation among the participants. As Creswell describes it, “This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the

1. John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed., Kindle ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), loc 405.

many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges.”² The holistic nature of this research involved the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes that may occur during the Evangelism Sodality. It also allows for comparison across groups and individual participants. Qualitative research also allows for diversity in data collection. The data was collected primarily through interviews.

Role of the Researcher

As the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Marble Falls, Texas, I was personally involved in this intervention. All the participants of the study were members of this church, which means that we had a pre-existing relationship prior to the intervention. In this intervention, my role was to conduct the pre-training interviews, teach the curriculum, conduct the post-training interviews, compile and organize the data, and interpret the conclusions of the data.

Entering the Field

The intervention was conducted at the facilities of the First Baptist Church of Marble Falls. I acquired the room to conduct the intervention through a calendar request at the main office. I also informed the Deacon Fellowship and the church staff of the study.

Obtaining the Sample

I gained the sample through a third party. The necessity of this process was due to the fact of the prior relationship that I had with the members of the church. Because of this relationship, the person being asked might feel pressured to agree to the study. To

2. Creswell, *Research Design*, loc 484.

preclude the possibility of this pressure, a third party was enlisted to acquire the samples used for this intervention. This third party asked each possible volunteer to come to a screening interview, during which the volunteer was presented in writing with the concept, requirements, and risks of the intervention that are appropriate to the role the participant will play. When the volunteer agreed, he or she signed a consent form agreeing to the research. This intervention was conducted with a sample control group of seven and a sample experimental group of seven. The samples of each group will correspond in pairs. This means that each group had a generational, ethnic, and socio-economic equivalent in the other group. A copy of the informed consent form can be found in the Appendix I.

Collection of Data

I was the primary collector of data through two primary forms of collection. First, two interviews with each participant was conducted, one pre-training and one post-training. The interviews were based on the questions listed above in the “Research Questions” section. The questions were open ended, and probing questions were used to initiate deeper responses. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. In all written data, pseudonyms were used for the participants. Observational notes were also taken during the interviews. The transcriptions and notes were examined using the five principles of faithful evangelism. These principles also served as a code to decipher the value of the content pertaining to the overall project purpose. The data and statistical analysis were presented in chapter four. The second method of collecting data was based on observational notes taken during the six-week intervention. Throughout the study, the important comments and reflections of the participants were recorded.

Data Reporting

The analytic induction method of data analysis was used. I began with open coding to index the data; then, to identify themes, I will create axial coding based on the five principles of faithful evangelism. The data was then examined using the themes and groupings of data corresponding to the themes. The data was then considered as an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Evangelism Sodality in energizing the practice of evangelism in the lives of the participants.

Validity and Reliability

To protect the validity and reliability in the study, several techniques were employed. Comparison of data was used as the data was collected from three sources: interviews, and observational notes. Each participant had the opportunity to check the transcript of the interviews for accuracy and to check the conclusions drawn to ensure that they reflected the participant's intent. The data and conclusions were also subject to peer review by a pastor from another church who does not know the participants in the study, and the superintendent of the local Marble Falls Independent School District. I was the only one to collect the data, which supplied adequate engagement in the data collection process. The reporting of the results considered the data deeply, mining it for every nugget of substantive information. Using the analytic induction method of data analysis also helped to guard against personal biases since the results were substantiated by the hard data that the participants provide. The data was retained for any future review.

I was aware of my personal desire to see improvement in the level of faithful evangelism practiced by the seven participants. I was also aware of my own culture, background, and beliefs that may affect the administration and direction of the overall study. In short, I was aware of my own biases, but at the same time, I sought an honest evaluation of the validity of the theory of Evangelism Sodalities. The most valid approach, therefore, involved my best effort regarding the administration and teaching of the “Excided to Share” curriculum. Then I needed to conduct interviews in a way that sought honesty, which involved letting the participants know ahead of time that the best way to help with this project, and to evaluate the true effectiveness of the study, they needed to answer as honestly as possible. My desire then was to evaluate and report the data honestly. If this intervention did not accomplish the desired effects, it was still deemed successful in terms of serving the project, and offering information as to the validity of the intervention, in that no one will continue to use a poor practice of evangelism training in the future.

Ethical Issues

It is ethically important that the participants and I mutually benefit from the project. I desired to see participants who were energized in practicing evangelism in their daily life. Whether this goal was met or not, I worked to protect the participants’ dignity and freedom. Some risks involved in this intervention were, but are not limited to, setting people up for social embarrassment, criticism, and even violence. The nature of evangelism is fraught with certain risks. Also, the participants shared information about their lives that they might not want others to know. To mitigate these risks and conduct ethical research, three methods were employed: 1) the risks were made clear in the

consent form during the screening interview, 2) it was made clear that a participant can withdraw from the study at any time with no questions asked, and 3) the data collected was safeguarded by lock and key in my office, and pseudonyms were used for all participants. The data will be kept for a minimum of three years, and I alone will have access to it.

Conclusion

Every Christian ought to strive for a faithful practice of evangelism in his or her daily life, but believers often struggle toward this task. Some lack know-how; others may lack passion or confidence. The transitions in Western society are a contributing factor to the decreasing practice of evangelism in churches. This lack of participation is a problem, which led to my belief that a possible way to positively impact this issue is through Evangelism Sodalities. These sodalities taught the participants to engage a faithful practice of evangelism by being Spirit led, committed to a comprehensive narrative witness, and committed to ethical witness. Another way to describe this is to tell and live the gospel when prompted by the Spirit, tell and live the gospel well, and tell and live it ethically. My belief is that the evidence, which was collected in the methods listed above, and safeguarded for validity and ethics, demonstrated that an Evangelism Sodality has a positive effect on practicing faithful evangelism in the lives of the participants. The next chapter evaluates the collected data.

CHAPTER FOUR

Statement of Findings

This project proposed a theory to energize a faithful practice of evangelism in people's lives by: 1) bringing participants together in an Evangelism Sodality, and 2) by teaching participants the "Excited to Share" curriculum. The purpose of this project was to test the effectiveness of this theory.

Two groups were selected to evaluate the effectiveness of the project. A control group and an experimental group were each comprised of seven participants. Each group mirrored the other in age, sex, church participation, and race. Both groups had three men and four women. The average age of each group was forty-five. All participants attend worship on an average of three Sundays a month, and all were Sunday School members. No participants in either group were Sunday School teachers, Bible study leaders, deacons, or committee chairpersons. All participants identified as Christians for at least five years. Five out of fourteen participants had previous experience with intentional evangelism training. To maintain confidentiality, participants are referred to with pseudonyms. The control group consisted of Al, Audrey, Carrie, John, Scarlet, Selena, Tom. The experimental group consisted of Adam, Angelina, Arnold, Glen, Hugh, Jennifer, Rhonda.

Both groups took part in a pre-intervention interview with eight to nine questions. The experimental group then took part in a six-week Evangelism Sodality, in which they studied the "Excited to Share" curriculum. After the six-week intervention, both groups took part in a post-intervention interview. Neither group was aware of the existence of

the other group, and the control group was denied any knowledge of the “Excited to Share” content. The following research questions formed the interview questions:

- 1) The measurement of the quality of the gospel presented: How did the participant attempt to describe the fullness of the story of Jesus?
- 2) The measurement of the quality of authenticity in sharing one’s own story: Did the participant share witness to how Jesus has worked in his or her life?
- 3) The measurement of the quality of following of the leading of the Spirit: Did the participant obey when led by the Spirit to bear witness? And, did the participant trust in the working of the Holy Spirit?
- 4) The measurement of the quality of ethical witness in terms of care for the person listening: Did the participant care more about the listener’s dignity in free choice than getting him or her to do something before he or she understood the story of the gospel?
- 5) The measurement of quality of practice: Did the participant engage in intentional practices of bearing witness in both verbal and living ways?

The data collected from the two interviews served as the foundation for the primary and secondary findings. The data was compared at two levels. First, the two interviews of the experimental group were compared and examined to determine degree of change. Second, the interviews of the experimental group were compared to the interviews of the control group to determine degree of variance.

Initial Findings from the Pre-Intervention Interview

Finding 1: The six participants of fourteen who could identify the leading of the Holy Spirit to evangelize experienced an increase in confidence to evangelize, and they were more likely to obey the leading of the Spirit by following through with some form of witness.

I asked the following two questions to help reveal participants’ understanding of how the Holy Spirit impacts their practice of evangelism: 1) “Do you feel the Holy Spirit’s leading to evangelize? If yes, does that increase your desire and confidence to

bear witness?" 2) "Please describe ways in which you obeyed the Holy Spirit by intentionally engaging people with the gospel lately. The key word here is 'intentional.' Did you think about what you were doing and who was watching or listening?"

All participants had some idea of the work of the Spirit in their lives. Six participants explained how the Holy Spirit does lead them to evangelize (Adam, Audrey, Carrie, John, Scarlet, Selena), while the remaining eight (Al, Angelina, Arnold, Glen, Hugh, Jennifer, Rhonda, Tom) offered a vaguer notion of the leading of the Spirit. Except for Adam, the experimental group coincidentally fell in the latter category. The vagueness of the leading of the Spirit can be seen in the following four responses. Rhonda said, "When I feel it, it feels like butterflies, something pitted in my stomach and something that's pushing me to do something. Now if that's the Holy Spirit, I'm not really sure. I don't know how to decipher what it is." Jennifer commented on the leading of the Spirit to evangelize in the following, "I have felt the Spirit before and it's like you're thinking, "Okay, is this really him talking to me?" or "Am I making this up?" I don't feel like I've ever been put in that situation where I feel like I really need to go out to people around me in my daily life to evangelize. Sometimes I've told myself, "Probably I'm just hearing things. It's not really the Holy Spirit." Angelina stated, "I definitely feel a burden to share the gospel and a pressure to do it, like an inside burning. I don't really know how to describe it." Arnold flatly replied, "I don't know."

Linked to the question of sensing the leading of the Spirit is the follow up question regarding the Holy Spirit's effect on confidence to evangelize. All six participants who felt that the Holy Spirit led them to evangelize (Adam, Audrey, Carrie, John, Scarlet, Selena) declared that their confidence increased when they felt this leading.

As an example, Carrie spoke about witnessing to her parents and siblings, “I’ve seen it [confidence] with my parents, especially recently with them getting baptized and being able to talk to my mom about Jesus. With my sisters definitely.” Scarlet clearly suggests an increase in confidence, “The Holy Spirit definitely [helps] with the confidence, because I know it’s not me.” The other eight participants, who described the role of the Holy Spirit in nebulous terms, experienced no increase in confidence to evangelize. Angelina frankly declared that the vague “burning” she might feel to evangelize produces more confusion than anything, “I don’t know if it [Holy Spirit leading] necessarily gives me more confidence.” Arnold, a manager of a local car dealership, said, “I would say that when I actually feel compelled [to evangelize], I think more fear comes over me.” Glen, a widow in her seventies, responded similarly to Arnold, “The Holy Spirit is just back there saying, ‘You better be careful.’” Jennifer simply stated, “I’d say it [Holy Spirit’s leading] creates more anxiety.”

From this small study, it appears that there is a correlation between a clear discernment of the leading of the Holy Spirit and one’s confidence to evangelize.

Responses to the question dealing with obeying the prompting of the Spirit were similar. Of the six participants who said they could feel the leading of the Spirit to evangelize, five (Audrey, Carrie, John, Selena, Adam) declared that they had recently obeyed this leading by witnessing about the gospel to others. Angelina, the only participant who had previously described a more ambiguous feeling related to the leading of the Holy Spirit, said she had obeyed the leading of the Spirit by inviting a friend to church. Eight out of fourteen stated that they had not recently offered any form of witness to others. Jennifer said, “I have not obeyed [the Spirit] too often. I guess I have to step out

of that comfort zone. It really does truly make me nervous. What if I say the wrong thing or what if they don't believe the same way I do, and then it turns into confrontation, which I'm not good with?"

The data seems to suggest that when believers can identify a leading of the Holy Spirit to evangelize, it makes a difference in their confidence level to evangelize and the willingness to obey that divine leading.

Finding 2: Almost all the participants struggled to share a robust story of the gospel in an invitational way.

I asked the following question to help reveal participants' ability to share a more robust form of the gospel beyond a few propositions, and if they could do so in narrative form. "Can you please describe the narrative or story of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that is invitational for someone to join that story?"

An evaluation of the responses was based on: 1) the number of gospel moments shared, 2) utilization of a narrative method, and 3) ability to invite a listener into the story. A gospel moment was defined as any significant occurrence or teaching from scripture that helped develop the gospel. First, to evaluate "gospel moments" shared, each participant was placed into one of four groups: 1) those who shared less than three gospel moments, 2) those who shared between three and five gospel moments, 3) those who shared between six and eight gospel moments, and 4) those who shared more than eight gospel moments. Three participants fell into the first category (Adam, Arnold, Glen), the latter two of whom did not share a single gospel moment. Four participants fell into the second category, sharing between three and five gospel moments (Al, Hugh, Jennifer, Rhonda). Likewise, four participants fell into the third category, sharing between six and

eight gospel moments (Audrey, Carrie, John, Tom). Three participants fell into the fourth category, sharing more than eight gospel moments (Angelina, Scarlet, Selena). Rhonda was the only participant to share inaccurate gospel moments, saying,

Jesus came to earth and created all these things, everything we see, everything we do, sun, moon, everything. And then Adam and Eve come along and Eve wanted to be more like Jesus. . . . And then God was very upset with that, and so God did away with all humankind, and just killed all humankind. Then he only left. . . . I forgot his name now. . . . But he only left one person here, and then he and his wife and his sons were told about the flood and they created the boat, and they brought all the animals.

Second, the concept of “story” also seemed difficult for most participants. I was looking for a communication of the gospel utilizing characters, emotion, and plot line instead of simply listing points. Two examples of participants who did not share the gospel as a story were Al and Audrey. Al replied, “Jesus Christ is the Son of God. We were separated from God because our sins. God sent his only Son to die on the cross for our sins and that we may have eternal life if we believe in Him.” Similarly, Audrey replied, “God sent us Jesus as His son. His birth, His life, and all that He did, His death and burial, His resurrection and ascension, was all for our benefit. It’s for us to know God, to know what He’s like.” While Audrey’s gospel was more propositional than story, which was mostly true for all, half the participants shared the gospel in story form at some level, three of whom were a part of the experimental group (Angelina, Hugh, John, Rhonda, Scarlet, Selena, Tom). Third, only four of fourteen participants offered some form of invitation to the gospel story, all of whom were a part of the control group (Al, Audrey, John, Selena). During this pre-intervention interview, Selena (from the control group) was the only one participant able to share an accurate account of the gospel story with more than eight gospel moments and in ways that were invitational.

Finding Three: Only the participants whose respect for the listener was born from a place of authentic care for the listener felt an increase in confidence to bear witness.

An indispensable piece of the theory proposed in this project suggests that a refined focus on ethics in evangelism will energize a practice of evangelism. I asked two questions relating to ethical evangelism: 1) “How do you bear witness in a way that protects the other person from any form of manipulation, getting them to make too quick of life decisions without understanding, or feeling like you do not care, with great respect about who they are?” 2) “What role does caring about the other person, respecting their beliefs, and not trying to get them to do anything, play in your confidence level of evangelism?”

All participants offered a degree of credibility for the place of respect in evangelism by suggesting strategies for respecting the listener. Fifteen strategies in relative dispersity were suggested by the fourteen participants. For five of fourteen participants, a qualified form of respect for the listener increased their confidence in evangelism (Adam, Angelina, Carrie, Jennifer, Scarlet). It was fascinating how the motives for respect, rather than respect itself, shaped this finding. Some participants felt that respect was important because it earned them the right to be heard; in this case, respect had a utilitarian function. For instance, Selena suggested, “If you want them to respect your beliefs, I think that you have to respect their beliefs, even if you don’t agree with their beliefs. If you don’t show them some kind of respect, they’re not going to ever listen to you.” Al stated, “I respect your belief whatever it is, but my belief is this. I will not talk bad about any other religion, but I will stand up for my religion.” For Al, his respect appears as a *quid pro quo* kind of concept. There is a difference in this motive for respect versus the motive of five other participants (listed above), who suggested a deeper

motive for respect. Jennifer was in this group of five whose respect was emotionally and altruistically motivated rather than utilitarian. After sharing about an unfortunate experience with a Sunday School teacher when she was a girl, she said, “I think for me, pushing the gospel on someone is wrong because I know how that felt. I never wanted to push that on someone else. So, investing time listening to people and how they feel is important. I don’t want to evangelize if it’s going to make people feel uncomfortable, the way it made me feel.” Angelina is another example of one whose respect derives from a quality of care. She said, “I always want them to know I care for them, for sure. So, I think before I actually would bear witness, I would try to have a decent relationship with them, be close with them in some way.” Adam, a 22-year-old single man, added, “I believe that it [respect] is establishing the human connection and saying that, ‘I understand how you feel about this.’” These three participants and two others spoke of respect with language like: “care,” “relationship,” and “connection.”

The reason motive for respect stands out is because it was only these five participants who could also say that respect for the listener increased their confidence in evangelism. As an example, one of the five avowed, “Confidence comes from that intimate human connection” (Adam). Of these five, three were a part of the experimental group (Adam, Angelina, Jennifer). The other four from the experimental group offered little connection between respect and confidence. For example, Arnold stated, “As far as confidence goes, I don’t think respect swayed my confidence one way or the other.” Hugh noted, “I think if you care about people then you’re going to try harder to force what you think is the best outcome.” Later, Hugh added, “It [witnessing] makes me uncomfortable.”

Finding 4: The participants more likely to practice evangelism were those who both claimed to have experienced more thoughts to bear witness, and expressed less evangelistic dysfunction/hang-ups.

To determine the overall tendency to evangelize, I asked, “How often during a typical day do you think about sharing or living the gospel for people to hear or see?” Because evangelism is an intentional practice, thinking about evangelism and considering what one’s participation looks like from moment to moment is crucial. This awareness is the foundation on which evangelism can be built and has the potential to shape one’s aptitude for evangelism.

In this first interview, twelve of fourteen participants claimed to experience some thoughts about sharing or living the gospel for people to see. These twelve can be divided into two groups: 1) those who expressed that the thoughts to evangelize were prevalent (Al, Angelina, Arnold, John, Scarlet, Selena), and 2) those who expressed more moderate thought occurrences of witnessing (Adam, Audrey, Carrie, Glen, Tom, Rhonda). An example of how this distinction was made was based on the language used by the participants. Al stated that he thought about bearing witness to the gospel “all the time,” and Scarlet said, “I think about it at least ten times a day.” On the other side, participants like Rhonda shared, “It’s hard for me, but there’s been instances before in church when I feel something like, ‘You need to talk to these people, you need to do something.’” Two participants (Hugh, Jennifer) were not a part of the twelve because they communicated that they have few thoughts about sharing the gospel. Hugh said, “It doesn't cross my mind very much to try evangelism. For me, not really. My personality is such that generally I am not all that conversational with people that I don't know.” Jennifer contended, “I don’t think too often about witnessing. And I think that’s probably another

reason why. I just never found my niche, my way to talk about it. I may have done it, but it wasn't purposeful." Of the twelve who acknowledged having moderate to high thought occurrences about witnessing, eight expressed how, in various ways, they had recently practiced witnessing (Al, Adam, Angelina, Audrey, Carrie, Glen, Rhonda, Selena).

Not all twelve, however, who claimed to have thoughts about evangelism followed through with those thoughts. Four of the twelve were not able to recall a moment of recent witness (Arnold, John, Scarlet, Tom). Three of these also disclosed their various dysfunctions or hang-ups regarding witnessing. Arnold reflected, "Honestly, I think about it [witnessing] probably three or four times a day. Sadly, I don't really follow through with that feeling. And it's probably just from a lack of knowledge and confidence." Arnold also spoke about a "fear that comes over me of doing it." Nine spoke about some form of evangelistic dysfunction/hang-up, and six of those failed to recall a recent moment of witnessing. The data suggests that the participants more likely to practice evangelism were those who both claimed to have experienced more thoughts to bear witness, and expressed less evangelistic dysfunction/hang-ups.

Primary Findings

Finding 1: Six of seven participants in the experimental group experienced significant change, both in their awareness of the leading of the Holy Spirit to bear witness, and in their confidence and practice to bear witness.

The goal of this intervention was to test the holistic transformation of evangelistic practice, or lack thereof, among the participants. In the previous chapter describing the research method, it was stated that the holistic nature of this research involves the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes that may occur during the Evangelism Sodality. When comparing the pre- and post-intervention interviews, the participants'

transformation in understanding and responding to the leading of Holy Spirit was significant. Six of seven described qualitative change affecting thought, emotion, and behavior. In the first interviews, it was stated that the experimental group (except for Adam) fell into the category of explaining the prompting of the Holy Spirit to witness in “vague” terms. The statistic flipped nearly 100% in the post interviews with all, except Hugh, describing tangible feelings and thoughts about the leading of the Holy Spirit. Rhonda, who had previously described the Holy Spirit in terms of ambiguous unknown “butterflies,” said in the second interview, “Yes, I definitely do feel that something inside of me is pushing me towards evangelism. And I know that I could never do that by myself because I am just a quiet person. There’s definitely something inside of me that can only be described as the Holy Spirit that’s pushing me to act, to walk like God, and try to help the person see God.” Jennifer, an elementary teacher, who in the first interview questioned if she was inventing the thoughts to bear witness and stated that the feeling gave her more anxiety, stated in the second interview,

I definitely feel the Holy Spirit has increased my confidence. I love just knowing that it’s not me who’s going to be doing this, it’s the Holy Spirit. It is him giving me the words to say. It totally takes the pressure off feeling like I have to know exactly what to say. Before, I felt like I needed to know the exact perfect words to say. I think I would sometimes kind of psych myself out. So, now I know that I just need to be natural and just let him [Holy Spirit] totally have control and know that it’s not me who’s doing any of the talking in it. It’s totally him. So I feel much more confident, and I feel like I’m more eager to do it. I’m more aware of it, so definitely more confident and more eager to do it.

Angelina, who had also offered nebulous concepts of the Spirit, and who had frankly stated that the feeling did not increase confidence, pronounced in the second interview,

Yes, I absolutely believe the Holy Spirit leads me to evangelize, and I feel like the Holy Spirit is there with us and I feel that the Holy Spirit is what actually gives us that extra nudge to speak up and say something to someone. When you’re put in a situation with them, and they need to hear about the Lord, and hear the Good

News. The Holy Spirit definitely gives me the confidence now. Before this class, I felt like all the pressure was on me to convince these people that this is what is best for them. It was kind of an overwhelming feeling. I didn't know if I could complete that task from start to finish. And now I really feel more like it's my job to tell the story, tell Jesus' story, and tell about the Good News, and the Gospel, and tell about my own experiences. But I know that the Holy Spirit will be there to step in and take that person's hand and pull him across that finish line when the time comes. And so that really does give me the confidence more now, the pressure's off a little bit, that it doesn't all rest on my shoulders.

Even Adam, who was the only participant in the experimental group to state clearly how the Holy Spirit leads him to bear witness in the first interview, grew in his confidence to bear witness because of increased clarity concerning the Holy Spirit. Thus, six of seven participants in the experimental group admitted to increased confidence to witness because of the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of this finding is that five of the seven participants claimed they had recently witnessed to people in the second interview, while only two of the seven testified to this in the first interview. Hugh and Glen were the only participants in the experimental group who did not say that they had recently witnessed to someone in the second interview. Hugh is an outlying case discussed below in "Secondary Findings."

The transformation experienced in the experimental group was not as dramatic as in the experimental group. This may be because the control group represented the bulk of the participants who stated in the first interview that they did experience a clearer leading of the Holy Spirit to evangelize (Audrey, Carrie, John, Scarlet, Selena). It could therefore be suggested that these participants had less road to travel. Being that as it may, five of six in the control group (Selena did not participate in the second interview) demonstrated no difference in the leading of the Holy Spirit to evangelize or build confidence to

evangelize in the second interview (Al, Audrey, John, Scarlet, Tom). An example of this stagnation can be seen in the comparison of Al's interviews. He had previously offered a vague notion of any specific Holy Spirit leading, saying that "God is always looking at me." He did not move from this thought, giving almost the exact same phrase in the second interview, "I think God is watching all the time." Tom and Al still spoke of the leading of the Spirit ambiguously. John stated that he still had no confidence, even when talking about the Holy Spirit. Carrie is the outlier in this category. Even though she had explained that she did feel the Holy Spirit leading her to evangelize in the first interview, her words were more precise and dramatic in the second interview. She said, "There are times when I know that my thoughts are higher than normal. I feel a stirring that I need to say something, I need to live something." In the first interview, she did not talk about "stirring" or "higher thoughts," both of which she attributes to the Holy Spirit. A possible reason for Carrie's development will be considered in the "Secondary Findings."

It is also discovered in the control group that in the first interview, four of seven (Audrey, Carrie, John, Selena) said they had recently been faithful to obey the Spirit to evangelize, but in the second interview four of six confessed to doing so (Carrie, John, Scarlet, Tom). Audrey said she had "blown my chance to witness when led," thus dropping her out of this group in the second interview. Scarlet and Tom demonstrated a positive movement into this group of "recent testifiers." Tom's reason for bearing witness is shared in the "Secondary Findings" section. Overall, comparing the control group to the experimental group regarding obeying the leading of the Spirit, there was not as much difference. When considering the sensing of the leading of the Spirit and the confidence

that leading builds, however, there was evidence to suggest that more qualitative transformation occurred in the experimental group.

Finding 2: The Experimental group experienced significant change regarding their ability to share a deeper gospel story with an invitation for the listener to join the story.

To analyze the second interviews, I used the same method of analysis used in the first interview. The participants were broken into four groups based on the number of “gospel moments” shared. In the experimental group, six of seven offered more gospel moments in the second interview (Adam, Angelina, Arnold, Glen, Jennifer, Rhonda). Glen, who had previously offered zero, jumped into the eight or more group. Arnold, who had also offered zero, offered five in the second interview. When asked to share the gospel story in the first interview, he said, “I don’t know if I could do that, just really based on a lack of overall knowledge of the Bible.” To the same question in the second interview, he replied,

I would say to somebody, that God sent His son, Jesus, born to Mary with the purpose of dying for our sins, and cleansing everybody’s soul. He gave us opportunity for eternal life in heaven. Even though a lot of people might say, “Well, all that happened before I was even created.” I would say that it’s humanity’s sin in that He died for. And by nature, we’re all sinners. Maybe it comes out in anger or language that we use, or the way we treat certain people.

Another example, Jennifer, had previously offered three gospel moments that were rather vague. Her documentation shows that she also moved into the eight or more group, offering eight robust gospel moments beginning in the Old Testament. At one point, she spoke of “sharing the story of Jesus’ whole journey.”

Also, 100% of the participants offered gospel moments in the form of story rather than proposition. In the previous interview, only three of seven in the experimental group had done so. Four of seven utilized new words like, “journey,” “narrative,” “story,” and

“testify,” not previously used. Hugh referred to the parable of the Lost Sheep to tell his gospel. Adam, who had not mentioned any scripture in his previous gospel account, can be seen here weaving his own story into the gospel,

I reflect upon my own story here, and how I came to know Jesus from a very hopeless to hopeful perspective. In the Bible, there was a man born blind who testified about Jesus to the Pharisees saying, “All I know I was blind, but now I see.” When it comes to the narrative of the Gospel, this is where it gets me because I was hopeless, in despair. I didn’t know what to do. There was absolutely no hope for me in this life. Why am I here? What is the point? And so, when it came to Christ, the narrative of God’s purpose coming to us and fulfilling me, and to know what he had done [on the cross] so that we may have life, it changed my perspective from hopeless to hopeful.”

Last, six of the seven participants in the experimental group offered the gospel with an invitation, as compared to zero of seven in the first interview. Rhonda, who had been the only participant in the first interview to give inaccurate gospel information, offered not only accurate information in the second interview, but also gave an invitation to the gospel story. She declared,

Identify if somebody is going through something difficult, and think of a way that God speaks to it. Then, try to relate it together. If somebody’s having a hard time, relate what they’re going through to a story, a biblical story about God. I really feel it’s relating the stories together that somebody could make the connection. It’s about being natural and relating, because when you can relate to something is when it makes more sense to you.

In the control group, three of six participants offered more gospel moments in their gospel telling (Audrey, Carrie, Scarlet), two of six stayed the same (Al, John), and one decreased (Tom). Three of six offered the gospel in more narrative form (Al, Carrie, Scarlet). Scarlet’s telling was indeed broad and deep. Tom, Audrey, and John, shared their gospel moments in propositional points. As an example, Tom explained, “I boil it [the gospel] down to ABC, 123. It is a miraculous birth. It’s an incredibly, incredibly miraculous life. And then a sad, but hopeful, death and resurrection. And it’s that

simple.” Four of six offered an invitation to the gospel story (Al, John, Scarlet, Tom). Scarlet and Tom offered deeper invitations than they had given in the first interview. While’s Tom’s gospel message was propositional and contained fewer gospel moments than the first interview, his invitation to the gospel by identifying with various biblical characters demonstrated a qualitative difference from his first interview. Carrie and Audrey did not suggest any method of invitation to the gospel. Carrie simply stated, “I think in order for me to just randomly talk to someone, I do think I need to train myself better, because I feel like people listen when you're an expert in something.”

Several members of this control group showed a positive difference in some areas. Scarlet and Tom moved into the group who offered invitation. Audrey moved into the group able to offer eight or more gospel moments. Carrie and Al moved from the proposition group in the first interview, to the group who offered the gospel in more story form in the second group. In an overall evaluation of the control group, however, one finds little qualitative difference in their telling of the gospel as an invitational story.

Finding 3: The experimental group expressed an increase in confidence to bear witness produced by a deep sense of respect for the listener.

After the first interview, it was discovered that three of the seven in the experimental group felt an increase in confidence to bear witness produced by a deep sense of respect for the listener. After the second interview, this statistic increased to 100% of the experimental group who felt that sincere respect for the listener increased their confidence to bear witness. This outcome could be seen in three ways: 1) the qualitative change in the nature/motive of respect, 2) the explanation of confidence, and 3) the number and quality of the strategies suggested for respecting the listener.

First, the nature and motive of respect for the listener changed. In the first interview, Arnold, Glen, Hugh, and Rhonda spoke in shallow and confused ways about the nature of respecting the listener. These participants did not use any word or phrase suggesting an emotional state of care for the listener. For example, Rhonda previously stated that “I’m not sure [how to respect the listener], perhaps not overwhelming someone with information and giving them time.” In the second interview, Rhonda spoke extensively on the subject, saying that the one evangelizing must, “truly care about the other person’s life.” Hugh utilized words such as care, concern, dignity, involvement, self-worth, and value of the listener, as well as treating others as an end rather than as a means. This constituted new ethical language for him. Even the three participants who had expressed a deeper motive for respect in the first interview expounded on the concept in the second interview (Adam, Angelina, Jennifer). One remarkable example is how Angelina created a vital distinction between relational evangelism that she said ought to occur in every evangelistic encounter, and friendship evangelism. She explained, “I really feel like building a relationship with somebody is very important even if it's not somebody that you're going to have the opportunity to be around long term, but I feel like you have to get to know them even if it's just a little bit.” For Angelina, respecting the listener is to acknowledge a desire to have a relationship, even if it is improbable that the relationship will develop into a long-term friendship. For her, ethical evangelism should always be relational evangelism even if it is not friendship evangelism.

Second, in the first interview, three of seven participants in the experimental group said that respecting the listener increased confidence to bear witness (Adam, Angelina, Jennifer). In the second interview, this increased to six of seven (Adam,

Angelina, Arnold, Hugh, Jennifer, Rhonda). Arnold expounded on this confidence in the following way, “Listening to others, and only witnessing to your own beliefs makes it easier to bear witness, and opens the door for it. It takes the pressure off when you don’t have to ‘sway them.’” In the first interview, he stated, “I don’t think respect sways my confidence one way or the other.” Denoting a significant shift, Hugh suggested, “Not everybody feels comfortable with the concept of evangelism, but I think most people are comfortable with the concept of treating people with respect. So, I think it’s easier to share [the gospel] if it’s being done in a respectful way, and not in a forced or predetermined way.” Glen, however, expressed a decrease in confidence when trying to respect the listener. A possible reason as to why will be explored in the concluding chapter.

The last piece of evidence suggesting vast transformation in how the experimental group conceived respecting others can be identified in both the number and quality of the suggested strategies for respecting others. The number of strategies suggested by each participant in the first interview are: Adam-3; Angelina-4; Arnold-4; Glen-1; Hugh-2; Jennifer-3; Rhonda-2. All the numbers increase in the second interview: Adam-8; Angelina-7; Arnold-5; Glen-3; Hugh-4; Jennifer-6; Rhonda-5. Several of these strategies had not been mentioned in the first interview by any participant and were of deeper theological significance. For example, concepts such: “The Golden Rule,” seeing others as an “end rather than the means,” and seeing people “as God sees them” demonstrate a qualitative difference in theology. Jennifer stated, “I felt like if you were to ask me about evangelism before, it was a “You needed to sit down and you needed tell ‘em the ABC’s, and you needed to get them to pray and be done.” So, I love this concept of just spending

time with them, and I think that's whenever you get to really show them that you care, that you're invested in them, you care for them, and you are not just an in and out."

A few things stand out when comparing the answers of the experimental group to those of the control group. In the control group, one of six utilized emotional words conveying a heart of genuine care for the listener (Carrie). This is down from the first interview when two of seven had done so. In Al's statement, one can see an example of how they would talk about offering respect without words or phrases conveying care,

I don't like to be aggressive. I like to answer questions. If somebody asks you, "Why are you different?" You must be honest. Tell them why, "Because I believe in Jesus Christ." So, it's not like, "Why are you different?" "Because I'm a Christian and I believe in the God, now give me your hand, and I'm going to save you right now. Bring me some water. I'm going to baptize you right now." No. The best thing to me is to wait and see how interested he or she is. The listener determines how fast can I go.

While Al offered concepts of respect, the motive for this respect did not appear to have a quality of loving care or concern for the listener. Audrey also spoke of respect but without any concrete words denoting a heart of care, stating, "I think you show respect if you get a common ground by letting them know what I have done in my life." In this category, there was no qualitative change in the control group.

Two of six in the control group suggested an increase in confidence but with a rather qualified understanding of respect (Al, Scarlet). Their confidence was based on the actions of the listener rather than on their approach to the listener, a small but significant difference. The other four in the group did not suggest any increase in confidence. John was clear in his statement, "I think regardless of who the person is I'm never going to be very confident at sharing at this point."

Two of six (Scarlet, Tom) spoke of struggling with respect. Tom's struggle was the result of his desire to "close the deal." Tom had talked about this struggle in the first interview as well, and there seemed to be no qualitative change when he said, "For me, it's a tremendous challenge not to ram it [the gospel] down their throat. I'm a black-and-white guy. I'm a business leader. I make things happen. 'Wait a minute, stop. You listen to this [gospel]? You need to understand what this is. Why wouldn't you accept this?' I've spent my life convincing people to do things they didn't want to do. And that's what you're doing when you're witnessing." At least Tom was aware of this.

Also, the control group demonstrated little increase in both the number and quality of strategies for respect. The number of strategies suggested by each participant in the first interview were: Al-2; Audrey-1; Carrie-4; John-3; Scarlet-3; Tom-2. In the second interview, they were: Al-4; Audrey-3; Carrie-3; John-3; Scarlet-3; Tom-3. In all, responding to the questions dealing with ethical evangelism, the control group offered no emotional, cognitive, or behavioral change from the first interview to the second.

Finding 4: Five of seven participants in the experimental group who experienced the "Excited to Share" intervention seemed to have been energized in their desire and ability to practice evangelism.

Evaluating overall transformation was based on three criteria: 1) a culmination of their movement in the previous categories explained above, 2) their answer to the question, "How often during a typical day do you think about sharing or living the gospel for people to hear and see, and what are those thoughts like?" and 3) their answer to the question, "How did your experience in this program influence the way you think about and practice evangelism?"

Every participant of the experimental group spoke about how they experienced an increase in how many times they thought about witnessing in a day. They used phrases like, “I think I would say I feel that they come very often throughout the day while I’m working” (Adam), and “It definitely goes through my head a lot more” (Rhonda). Six of seven claimed that they thought “often” about bearing witness (Hugh was the only exception). The significant discovery was that five of seven in the experimental group expressed a significant transformation in their attitude toward evangelism and their ability to practice evangelism (Adam, Angelina, Arnold, Jennifer, Rhonda). Their practice of evangelism was indeed energized. When comparing their two interviews, these participants experienced qualitative shifts in every category: they felt more empowered by the leading of the Holy Spirit and obeyed that leading, they considered the story of the gospel in broader and deeper terms, as well as how to offer this gospel with invitation, they thought and acted more ethically out of deep respect for others, they experienced more thoughts to bear witness, they spoke of less dysfunction/hang-ups about evangelism, and they specifically told how “Excited to Share” had helped them. Just two examples of this significant transformation were Jennifer and Rhonda. When asked in the first interview how often she thought about bearing witness, Jennifer simply declared, “Probably not too often.” Her answer changed impressively in the second interview,

I definitely feel much more aware of everything since doing this study. I start off my day driving to school and just praying that I’ll be filled with the Holy Spirit and truly meaning it. Thinking about somebody and then seeing that person, I think, “Oh that was God talking to me earlier today, wanting me to go and talk to them. I don’t look at evangelism as a bad word. Before, when I heard the word “evangelism” I automatically tensed up, and it created so much anxiety in me. Now I just know that it's sharing a story.

Likewise, in the first interview, Rhonda said, “Being the person that I am, at this point I don’t feel like I’m confident enough in the Bible to tell somebody the information to help them learn.” In the second interview, she declared,

Before I came in here I did not even really understand what evangelizing was. I knew the word but did not understand it. I’m a lot more confident now to have that feeling that if somebody needs it, and I see them, I can go up to that person and incorporate what Jesus has done. I can tell his story and how it relates to people. I definitely feel that it let down a barrier of, “Well, what do I say?” It’s more natural and it’s just going come to you by God. I definitely feel tremendously better about it. I feel it was a very good learning experience, just how to talk to people.

In the end, five of seven in the experimental group (Adam, Angelina, Arnold, Jennifer, Rhonda) offered a witness to Jesus Christ to six other people during this study. Adam witnessed to two people. By comparison, in the first interview the statistic was two of seven for this group (Adam, Angelina).

The overall transformation of the control group compared with the experimental group was more modest.¹ In the control group, one of six participants expressed a qualitative difference in her thoughts to bear witness from the first to the second interview (Carrie). This change was attributed to a surprising catalyst that is discussed in the “Secondary Findings.” Four expressed no difference in their thoughts to bear witness (Al, Audrey, Scarlet, Tom), and John expressed a decrease in thoughts to bear witness, stating, “I don’t think I think too many times during the day about sharing the Gospel.” One significant increase was that all six articulated how they had recently practiced witnessing. This was an increase from the first interview where four of seven conveyed a recent practice of witnessing (Al, Audrey, Carrie, Selena). Tom’s movement into the group entitled, “recently offered witness,” was ascribed to a surprising cause that is

1. It needs to be noted that the control group was missing Selena in the final interview.

discussed in the “Secondary Findings.” As can be seen, although there were sporadic qualitative shifts in the control group, the overall transformation among the participants was minimal. A greater level of positive change/healthy practice versus decline/unhealthy practice could only be found in two of six (Carrie, Scarlet).

Secondary and Unexpected Findings

Secondary Finding 1: A brief reflection about evangelism in the interview process caused some participants to become more aware of their practice of evangelism.

Three of seven participants in the control group communicated about how they had reflected more deeply or even grown in evangelism from the interview alone (Carrie, John, Tom). Despite having received no training, these three participants claimed that their understanding and practice of evangelism was energized simply by the interview. John said, “After our last interview, I started thinking about that [respect for the listener]. I think we should try and keep an open line of communication with people even if they reject you.” Tom, who was among those who moved from offering no witness in the first interview to offering witness in the second, shared a story about talking to a neighbor about Christ: “I took that step of sharing, and I don’t think we’d have taken that step if I hadn’t had the previous meeting with you.” Carrie, one of the only members of the control group to experience overall qualitative change, attributed her movement to the first interview as well: “Right now, this study that you’re doing has really rocked me a little bit. Before, I didn’t think about how often I did it [evangelize]. But since this question that you asked me weeks ago, it’s really making me think about and reflect on everything. Honestly, it sounds crazy, but I do think about it quite often now, especially answering this question weeks ago.” It would be an overstatement to say that the

interviews alone had an overall impact; however, some of the only positive shifts that occurred in the control group were attributed to the interview process.

Secondary Finding 2: Certain theological views affected participants' experiences in the study.

Hugh, from the experimental group, explained in the post-intervention interview how his Calvinistic beliefs affected him through this process. He never mentioned these views in the first interview or the intervention, but speaking in the second interview, he explained,

I would say that my understanding of traditional evangelism, as leading people to a confession of faith, is something I'm very bad at. And because I'm very bad at it, I shy away from it. Perhaps, it's because of my Calvinistic leanings. I don't feel like somebody else is going to miss out because of my failure. We are the ones who get to come along and participate, and I could do that, because I don't feel the responsibility for somebody's eternal salvation."

Hugh felt that the curriculum's emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit encouraged his Calvinistic leanings, and while he appreciated the teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of listeners, he was less impacted by all other ideas in the study. In this one case, it appears that Hugh came away with the idea that his responsibility to practice evangelism was relatively small. Although he showed less healthy movement, according to the criteria of this project, than the rest of the experimental group, he experienced modest increase throughout most categories. His theological presuppositions may have hindered his progress. "Excited to Share" did not address evangelism from the perspective of Calvinism.

Secondary Finding 3: Scripture was marginalized in the language of some in the experimental group.

I had no intention of diminishing the value of knowing scripture when I taught that narrative evangelism was more effective than propositions. Based on some responses in the experimental group, however, this seems to be what was heard. Rhonda said, “I know now evangelism is not knowing the scriptures word for word. I can’t say things out of the Bible, but I’m a lot more confident now to have that leading, if somebody needs it, to go up to that person and incorporate what Jesus has done with his story and talk about how it relates to people.” Angelina said,

Before, I didn’t feel like I knew the Bible passages and the scriptures well enough to evangelize. What if someone asked me a question that I didn’t know the answer to and I started fumbling around for it? Then they would start challenging me. How am I going back that up? I’m going look a fool, and I’m going to ruin it all for them, and they’re definitely not going to buy it [the gospel] then. Now, I really feel like I don’t have to know it all. I feel like I can just tell them the story.

These participants came away with a healthy view of many things, but apparently, a marginalized view of scripture had also affected them. Because of this finding, the “Excited to Share” curriculum may need a relook at how it conveys narrative theology and evangelism.

Conclusion

Overall, this project accomplished its stated purpose to energize a practice of evangelism in the lives of the “Excited to Share” participants. The experimental group overwhelmingly demonstrated qualitative transformation involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioral criteria. This group described a process of growth. Among the increases were an increased awareness of the leading of the Holy Spirit, more obedience to that leading, an understanding of the story of the gospel in broader and deeper terms, an

increased ability to offer this gospel with invitation, enhanced consideration of ethical evangelism out of deep respect for others, an increase in cognitive thoughts to bear witness, and a decrease in dysfunction/hang-ups about evangelism, which promotes confidence.

CHAPTER FIVE

Evaluation of the Project

Prior to the intervention, the participants in “Excited to Share” demonstrated relatively unhealthy opinions of evangelism that produced little practice. For various reasons explained in chapter one, this state of evangelism is common among American Christians. To address this problem, I constructed a project that would energize a practice of evangelism. An experimental group of seven people were chosen as a sample to participate in a six-week Evangelism Sodality which studied the concepts in the “Excited to Share” curriculum. To test the effectiveness of the project, the participants were given two interviews. A pre-intervention interview and a post-intervention interview were contrasted to determine if there were substantial transformations. I also created a control group of seven people to serve as a base line. The control group participated in the two interviews but were denied the intervention. At the end of the Evangelism Sodality, the two groups were compared to determine if there was any quality of difference. The project was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) The measurement of the quality of the gospel presented: How did the participant attempt to describe the fullness of the story of Jesus?
- 2) The measurement of the quality of authenticity in sharing one’s own story: Did the participant share witness to how Jesus has worked in his or her life?
- 3) The measurement of the quality of following of the leading of the Spirit: Did the participant obey when led by the Spirit to bear witness? And, did the participant trust in the working of the Holy Spirit?
- 4) The measurement of the quality of ethical witness in terms of care for the person listening: Did the participant care more about the listener’s dignity in free choice

than getting him or her to do something before he or she understood the story of the gospel?

- 5) The measurement of quality of practice: Did the participant engage in intentional practices of bearing witness in both verbal and living ways?

The data revealed significant overall transformation in the experimental group, and moderate transformation for some in the control group. The experimental group was energized in a holistic practice of evangelism that produced emotional, cognitive, and behavioral change. While the data suggests that the project was successful in its purpose, a critical reflection reveals how certain aspects may need to be addressed.

Theological Reflection: Sustaining Evangelistic Energy

Is the theory a short-term fix? The problem of a lack of evangelistic practice is so deep that it seems unlikely a temporary program can offer a long-term solution. The project did not consider the sustainability of Evangelism Sodalities, and even an expanded version of the “Excited to Share” curriculum would not last forever. This being the case, there is a high probability that a practice of evangelism would be energized for a season and then fall back to marginal levels when the sodality is completed. One conceivable solution is that a continuing Evangelism Sodality could parallel an ongoing “life group” kind of dynamic. After the initial curriculum ends, the group could continue to meet and share with one another how the Holy Spirit continues to work evangelistically in each of their lives. As productive as this might be, the church would be committing to Evangelism Sodalities perpetually, and without a guiding curriculum, this solution would become impractical. Therefore, when sodalities come to an end, evangelistic sustainability would more than likely revolve around the ongoing practice of three major theologies: 1) Holy Spirit empowered evangelism, 2) the story of the gospel

as the basis of evangelism, and 3) care for people as the guiding motive in evangelism. Without a sustained desire and strategy for these three theologies, this project is likely to be a short-term fix for an unrelenting problem. Thus, a new series of studies would need to be created around the core themes of the project, which are summarized next.

Faithful Evangelism Needs the Holy Spirit

There were three major theological components to this project. The first is that evangelism needs the Holy Spirit if it is to be energized. There is validation for this concept from both the research and the experiences of this project. Angelina's reaction to this theology was typical for the experimental group, "I feel like the Holy Spirit is there with us and I feel that the Holy Spirit is what actually gives us that extra nudge to speak up and say something to someone." Her response fits Luke's story of the apostles at Pentecost in Acts 2. This project offers these as support for the theory that evangelism must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

As in all theologies, however, pneumatology can be abused, misunderstood, taken to extremes, ignored, overstated, or any number of imbalances. This project seemed to open the door for one imbalance regarding the work of the Holy Spirit. In the section "Secondary Findings," it was reported the Hugh felt encouraged to believe that he had little to do with evangelism. There was such a strong emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit, that apparently, he came away with the idea that evangelism was almost an optional opportunity for Christians. Clearly, Hugh's view ran counter to the goal of the project. To prevent such misinterpretations in the future, the pneumatology in "Excited to Share" needs to be refined so that the participant has a clearer understanding of the

Spirit's empowerment of one's personal role in evangelism, rather than forsaking this role.

Faithful Evangelism Is Based in the Story of the Gospel

The second major theological component to this project dealt with the narrative nature of the gospel. "Excited to Share" contends that faithful evangelism paints the most vibrant picture of the gospel when it is narrative in form. Jennifer harmonized,

I love the idea of telling the whole story. That was something I really got out this. Knowing that I need to start at the beginning and go to the end, tying in stories of his [Jesus'] miracles, stories of people's lives, and knowing that it's okay to not have all the answers but simply sharing the wonderful story. I have loved this experience, and I feel like I'm so much more confident in that I want to share it.

At the same time, the data demonstrates that participants can be confused into thinking that knowing scripture does not matter. Participants like Rhonda practically suggested a liberation from the Bible. One certainly does not need to quote Bible verse after Bible verse to bear witness, but it is important to know the gospel story through the lenses of the text. Scripture is the key to deepening the story. The marginalizing of the biblical text seemed to be an unfortunate and unintended response. The fact that it is Scripture that reveals the story may not have been as clear in the study as I had hoped, and this may need to be addressed if the curriculum is used in the future.

Faithful Evangelism Holds to an Ethical Methodology

The third major theological component explored in this project dealt with ethics. It was taught that only an authentic heart of care and respect was appropriate for faithful Christian evangelism. Through observation during the intervention, and in evaluating the data, three issues involving ethics did not seem to come across clearly, and occasionally

the balance tipped in unhealthy directions. First, although it did not appear in the interview data, there was some reluctance to help a listener cross the threshold of belief. To avoid being “too pushy,” as revealed in the data, some participants suggested a hesitance to “lead someone to Christ.” The participants seemed to fully grasp and appreciate how to share the gospel with respect and care, yet struggled helping a ready and willing person take a step of faith. “Excited to Share” may need deeper teaching on how to offer a listener a way he or she can express commitment of repentance and faith to Jesus as Lord in an ethical way.

Another issue involving ethical evangelism dealt with the question of what constitutes evangelism. Even though certain things are ethical, they may not be evangelism. For instance, not every conversation about God or Jesus is evangelistic, yet on several occasions, the data showed strategies of respect that reflected a simple conversation. Conversations can be evangelistic, but not all are, and the same is true for many actions. It was taught that evangelism consists of those acts that intentionally reveal the good news of God and invite people into that good news. The desire of this project to form methods to accomplish this in an ethical way may need further clarification.

Last, the theology of ethical evangelism was a struggle for Glen, the oldest member of the experimental group. Generational worldviews and traditions seemed to come into play, pointing to future research topics. Glen was the only participant in the experimental group who did not say that respecting the listener increased confidence in the second interview; in fact, she stated that “respect decreased confidence.” Thus, “Excited to Share” may need a reboot for senior adults, who were mostly raised with methods of evangelism created to get someone to do what is desired. Although this

modernized way of evangelism was addressed, and all younger participants appreciated the new approach, Glen apparently struggled. A new method where the end is evaluated by the practice rather than the response needed more unpacking for Glen. The project admits to a bias of trying to energize a practice of evangelism for younger Christians who are thoroughly postmodern in their thinking; therefore, it may need some reworking to help energize an evangelistic practice for older Christians.

Improvements for the Project

The intervention lasted six weeks, and each session lasted approximately one-and-half hours, sometimes less. Some of the theological issues listed above could have been treated if the project were expanded to more and/or longer sessions. Because of the weightiness of the subject and depth of the theology, expanding the length of study would be appropriate on many levels. This would give the administrator ample time to unpack the concepts more fully, as well as offer more time for crucial discussion. Sadly, many moments for discussion in the curriculum were skipped. Some of the intended discussions were important to the development of the participants, such as weekly discussions on Spirit-led encounters with others during the week. As it was, the time always seemed far too short. The data reveals some issues that could have been addressed with a little more time. In sum, the curriculum was too large for the time allotted.

Significance of the Project

Individual Significance

At the most foundational level, this project successfully energized a practice of evangelism in the lives of the participants. Today, seven people have experienced an

evangelistic transformation that has affected many other lives. Five of the seven participants intentionally witnessed to others. Arnold witnessed to a person at work, who now with his whole family is attending worship at First Baptist Church Marble Falls. These participants often discussed what they were learning with their families, causing several spouses to be interested in evangelism as well. The children of participants were significantly impacted as the participants regularly witnessed to their children using techniques learned in the study. Jennifer talked about witnessing both to her children at home and extended family.

Many members of the church became interested in learning “Excited to Share” because of the witness of the participants. On several occasions, the church staff would ask them what they were learning, and as they listened, the staff became inspired and began asking for the entire study to be offered church wide. This is not the result of my plan, but rather the result of the participants being energized in their practice of evangelism. One can only wonder what a group of 800 (average attendance of the church) might do if they were all energized with a practice of evangelism.

Ecclesiological Significance

This project could be extended to churches all over the state and nation. It is significant because of its possibilities to be used by God at an exponential level. The greatest type of evangelistic movement will not happen because of a revival but because Christians offered a faithful witness. This method could solve many issues that normal Christians, particularly younger, have with evangelism. Churches everywhere could be energized to practice evangelism. Communities of faith everywhere could be energized

with the power of the Spirit, the depth of the gospel, and a care for humanity. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ could be propagated through “Excited to Share.”

Conclusion

Churches will always struggle with evangelism, but for this time and place in the history of Christianity, there is a biblical method for evangelism that can help in the struggle. Creating Evangelism Sodalities and giving them the “Excited to Share” concepts would help address the problem of a lack of evangelism in churches today. Hopefully, the exegetical and theological work is not only informative but inspirational to the practice of evangelism. After being weighed and tested in the intervention, the theory was found to be practical and practicable. The contributions this project can make for the kingdom of God are limitless. For a church, this project makes sense for many reasons. It is not expensive, it requires no technology, it can be taught in almost any setting, it is grounded in Scripture, it is communal in nature, it produces real change in the lives of participants, and it has exponential force to impact people outside the church with the message of the gospel. After all, why shouldn’t the church be excited to share the gospel? It is, always has been, and always will be good news.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Philosophical Shifts in Western Society

It first needs to be mentioned that if Western culture indeed has shifted to new ways of understanding, this shift should not create hopelessness in the church. On the contrary, Paul explained to the men at the Areopagus, how God “made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27). This teaching ought to give hope to the evangelist of every age and every season. Regardless of the movements in culture, God can always be found. No culture is beyond belief in God, regardless of how they hear the gospel. This theology is clearly seen in history. For more than 2,000 years, nations all over the earth have responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today there exists a Christian presence in cultures far removed from its humble middle eastern genesis.

In his book, *The Open Secret*, Leslie Newbigin comments on this fact, “One more key fact in the new situation of the Christian world mission remains to be stated. It is, of course, that the church now exists as a global fellowship present in almost every part of the world and is increasingly conscious of its universal character. . . . Whatever criticisms we may have to make of that work, nothing can take away from our sense of wonder and thanksgiving as we contemplate this new fact.”¹ This is hopeful news for today’s

1. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 7.

evangelism. As the church discovers how society has shifted, there is no reason for despair; the incarnation comes to all humanity in its time. This shift, though it is a challenge for the church, is not out of reach for God. As he has in every time and culture, God will continue to draw young postmoderns to himself.

At this point, a note concerning the issue of “contextualization” of the gospel needs to be made. For those who might challenge any form of contextualization of the gospel, it must be remembered that all forms of evangelism already stem from a culturally adapted form of the gospel in the mind of the evangelist. Newbigin reminds churches that before criticizing all methods of adapting the gospel for a certain culture, one must realize the short sightedness of such criticism in that,

It tends to obscure the fact that the gospel as embodied in the missionary’s preaching and practice was already an adapted gospel, shaped by his or her own culture. . . . Neither at the beginning, nor at any subsequent time, is there or can there be a gospel that is not embodied in a culturally conditioned form of words. The idea that one can or could at any time separate out by some process of distillation a pure gospel unadulterated by any cultural accretions is an illusion.²

As the gospel flows from one culture to another, there is no escaping the reality of an enculturated gospel, meaning interpreted from within the culture in which it resides. Even the gospel itself was born in a specific moment of history, within a Jewish people group, and with a language and heritage unique to itself. This is not to say that the gospel has nothing to offer a culture, or that it is wholly syncretized with those ideas already in culture, even if at some level that might be the case. On the contrary, the gospel is a unique story that challenges every culture, calling into question certain dehumanizing societal practices and proclaiming the singularity of Christ, all the while, being embodied within the current culture of the time. Therefore, the primary issue being addressed here

2. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 2.

is not the arguments of enculturation, syncretism, or adaptation, but rather a focus on how today's church can exegete a Western postmodern culture in order to offer the most faithful witness possible. This is a noble task. As Newbigin contends, "In the areas dominated by modern Western culture (whether in its capitalist or socialist political expression) the church is shrinking and the gospel appears to fall on deaf ears. It would seem, therefore, that there is no higher priority for the research work of missiologists than to ask the question of what would be involved in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and the modern Western culture."³ In this chapter, several challenges of postmodernism are identified. Based on this understanding of today's Western culture, the goal is to present a fresh perspective for the sake of a faithful practice of evangelism. How does the emerging Western society hear the church share the gospel message today?

The Shifting Plausibility Structure

How does a culture choose which ideas will be publically true and which ideas will be publically false, or relegated to the sphere of private subjective opinion? Understanding a culture's "plausibility structure" may be the key to understanding how a society hears. This is the set of interlocking ideas that form the foundational metanarrative on which other ideas are deemed credible. In his book, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Newbigin relies on Peter Berger's idea of a "plausibility structure," which he sees as "a social structure of ideas and practices that create the conditions determining what beliefs are plausible within the society in question."⁴ Many believe society's plausibility structure has shifted. If this is truly the case, old forms of evangelism based

3. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 3.

4. *Ibid.*, 10.

on past belief paradigms in Western society will simply not be a faithful practice in today's culture. In order to understand today's culture, one has to understand the paradigm shifts in how people hear. As well, in the context of evangelism, one must learn how the current culture hears the gospel.

The Era of Christendom

The shift in Western society's plausibility structure has occurred primarily out of the transitions from Christendom, to modernity, to postmodernity. These transitions overlap one another, with decades of one slowly fading, and the next slowly growing. Christendom refers to Western society's structure from the time of Constantine to the Enlightenment, which then slowly began to fade away. In the last few decades (1980s to 2015) Christendom's dissolution has greatly sped up. The nature of Christendom deals with the sociopolitical reality and nature of the dominance of the Christian religion in all aspects of Western society. Michael Frost writes,

Whereas followers of Jesus at one time had met secretly in homes and underground in catacombs, now [with Constantine] they were given some of the greatest temples and meeting spaces in the empire. They were, in a quite literal sense, handed the keys of the Roman kingdom . . . By the Middle Ages, church and state had become the pillars of the sacral culture, each supporting the other. . . . It had effectively become the metanarrative for an entire epoch . . . containing truth applicable to all people at all times in all cultures.

Frost would say that Christendom was the plausibility structure for Western society from the fourth century to the Enlightenment. During this time, the dominate ethics and morals of society on the one hand, and the Christian church on the other, were like railroad tracks, mirroring one another. Christianity had a privileged position, while other views outside of Christianity took a back seat. Ideas were plausible if the church-state said they were. Today, this structure has collapsed in society, although certain

groups still fight for this model of society. The Moral Majority, for example, was an organization created by the late Jerry Falwell in the 1980s. This group attempted to rally evangelical Christians and others to support conservative political ideals. Some of the ideas of Christendom would sit well with the ideas of many followers of such movements. Frost cites G. K. Chesterton who is noted to have said, “The coziness between church and state is good for the state and bad for the church.”

Regardless of the implications and consequences of Christendom, which is outside the scope of this project, it is common knowledge that it is quickly dying. The eroding effects of the Enlightenment have taken their toll. Frost reports,

When Roy Moore, chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, placed a 2.6-ton granite monument to the Ten Commandments in the rotunda of the Montgomery state judicial building, he had no idea how dead Christendom was, even in the South. Sure enough, two years later U.S. district court judge Myron Thompson ruled that the monument violated the U.S. Constitution’s principle of separation of religion and government.⁵

The plausibility structure of Christendom would have given credibility to issues such as prayer in public schools and so-called “blue laws.” The evangelism of Christendom was certainly geared toward that society, but today this has all changed.

The Era of Modernity

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment created a new plausibility structure based on the idea that intellectual reason was the standard for knowledge, rather than the Church or the Bible. René Descartes had set out to prove Christianity was beyond doubt, but in this attempt, the thinking self—“I think, therefore I am”—was elevated as the tool to determine certainty. Thus, modernity was born. From the eighteenth to the late

5. Frost, *Exiles*, 5.

twentieth century, the question Christians had to answer was whether their practiced religious behavior or the accepted biblical record could stand to modern reason. During this time, the reasonable practice to obtain certainty in knowledge utilized the tools of the scientific method. Methods of observation and experimentation became the new liturgy. If an idea was espoused as truth, the new ministers of science would ask whether it was provable by their tools. As Christians could not scientifically prove their claims, society downgraded the religious ideas to the marginal position of subjective personal values or beliefs. In modernity, belief is miles apart from the realm of facts. According to the standards of human reason and its newfound scientific method, Christian ideas did not have the provable evidence to be declared universal truth. Truth had to be certain, beyond doubt. Society had to become plural in its acceptance of religion, but absolute in its acceptance of the claims of science.

Contesting this point, Newbigin argues that “reason does not operate except within a continuing social tradition which cannot be understood as a purely cerebral operation unrelated to the ongoing experiences of the community which carries this tradition forward.” In other words, assumptions were formed, not based on proof or certainty, but because they were an accepted part of an established tradition within society. The possibility of doubt within the foundational assumptions of science existed, but it was ignored. Science is a culturally bound practice, not a universally accepted authority. Again Newbigin explains,

On what does the authority of this tradition rest? Obviously on nothing outside itself. Like all vision of ultimate truth, science is necessarily involved in a circular argument. It has to assume from the beginning the truth of that which it seeks to prove. It begins from the conviction that the universe is accessible to rational understanding, it refuses to accept as final evidence that which seems to contradict this faith, and it seeks with a passion which is one of the glories of

human history to prove that the faith is true. It can only pursue this task within a tradition which is authoritative.⁶

This means that the role of reason in society was not objectively reasonable but rather traditionally reasonable. It was a faith tradition. Modern society had come to believe, without careful examination, that the facts of science are beyond doubt, that they are certain. The truth, however, is that science took leaps of faith, too, and an honest look at the processes of how a scientist actually works reveals the possibilities of doubt innate within the practice. From within the scientific community, the Hungarian scientist Michael Polanyi, helps the scientific community come to terms with the reality that their practice involves certain presumptions, without which one could not conclude that a problem exists. As a scientist sets out to find an answer to a problem, there first must be an intuition that there is something hidden in the reality, waiting to be found. This intuition is based on what Polanyi called “personal knowledge” based on the presumed ideas, the tradition, which serve as starting points to make assumptions. The scientist must trust these ideas in order to focus on what might be a problem. If she were to have no basis to trust anything as true, she could not take off from anywhere. The starting points could be doubted, but to fixate on whether or not this is so would hardly get the researcher to the next step. Taking Polanyi’s claim that even science has foundational ideas that could be doubted, but that are trusted, Newbigin claims that all knowledge is a risky leap of faith.⁷ If this is true, then claims by religion are no more subjective than claims by science. The so-called certainty of anyone’s claim can only be made by living

6. Leslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 48.

7. Leslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 39.

out the claims with universal intent, which both the faithful scientist and the faithful Christian attempt to do.

Stanley Grenz agrees, “this [scientific] method exercises an absolute faith in human rational capabilities. The Enlightenment perspective assumes that knowledge is not only certain (and hence rational) but also objective.”⁸ Thus, it was actually a kind of leap of faith that human reason was a better starting point to gain truth, even though the plausibility structure acknowledged it as a universal fact. The so-called facts of science could indeed be doubted, which meant that the scientific tradition that claimed facts was no more “factual” than the beliefs of the Christian tradition. Each needed a community to give it validation.

Be that as it may, modernity’s plausibility structure that science was the only avenue to objective truth and that religion was subjective belief, became so embedded that few challenged the assumption. Reason was superior to revelation in determining what was true. At this time, pluralism and relativism had not taken over every area in society but only ruled the realm of beliefs. Science was exempt from pluralism, it seemed, but this also would shift.

The philosophical confidence for evangelism is further advanced by the logical role that revelation plays in the acquisition of knowledge. If both reason and revelation are based on faith, as demonstrated above, a significant question arises as to which is actually a better starting point to gain knowledge, reason, or revelation. The former can be stated as, “I have observed,” while the latter can be stated as, “God has revealed.” There is a significant difference between these two worldviews. The latter worldview

8. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 4.

believes that ultimate reality is personal and so can only be understood by a relational kind of knowledge, but the first worldview assumes ultimate reality is impersonal and can be understood by the objective observer. In this case of competing ideologies, there is no disembodied objective “reason” that can officiate between the contradicting traditions.

Who or what settles the matter?

Newbigin points out one logical place where man’s scientific method will inevitably fall short, regardless of how advanced the techniques of discovery become. In the realm of interpersonal relationships, the “I have observed” position of the scientist at his microscope is incapable of real knowledge. When knowledge begins with “I” as in, “I will study this thing,” or “I will figure out this person,” it assumes a posture of autonomy, objectivity, unbiased sovereignty, and hierarchy. This posture is not likely to produce an authentic knowledge in relationships. How can I “know” what friendship feels like without personal vulnerability of investment? In the knowledge of relationships, objectivity must be relinquished. How can I “know” who a person truly is? Newbigin claims the answer to such a question comes only when the tables are turned and the scientist leaves his position of autonomous power and begins trusting and listening. Knowledge in intimate relationships cannot be grasped through the scientific method. Therefore, some knowledge must begin with the other person revealing, rather than with the rational self.⁹ In his book, *Proper Confidence*, Newbigin explains it like this,

There is a radical break between these two kinds of knowing: the knowing often associated with the natural sciences and the knowing involved in personal relations. . . . In this [latter] kind of knowing we are not in full control. We may ask questions, but we must also answer the questions put by the other. We can

9. Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 60.

only come to know others in the measure they are willing to share. The resulting knowledge is not simply our own achievement; it is also the gift of others.¹⁰

If Newbigin is correct, then only as people “reveal” themselves can knowledge of the intimate be gained. Truth can come from revelation as one takes the risky leap of faith to trust. One trusts not in his own powers of reason, but in the reliability of the one who speaks. Why then is the scientific method the best way to obtain knowledge? The tradition flowing out of the Enlightenment took a leap of faith to say that it was; thus, evangelists have a logical and philosophical leg to stand on to suggest otherwise.

Unfortunately, the evangelical response to the Age of Reason could be characterized by the forming of fundamentalism and liberalism. Fundamentalism strove to draw out objective propositions from the Bible by which one would experience absoluteness and certainty of knowledge. In this view, the Bible became the absolute science book, history book, and an all knowledge book for certainty. Modern apologetics grew out of this effort. Josh McDowell’s *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* is only one example of the kind of apologetical efforts used in modernity to defend Christianity’s “reasonableness” to a modern culture steeped in the scientific method. Liberalism attempted to respond by accommodating to reason, as Newbigin observes,

We are familiar with the kind of liberal theology so characteristic of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries in which the boundaries of what is possible to believe were firmly fixed by the axioms of the Enlightenment, in which it was taken for granted that the modern scientific world-view provides the only reliable account of how things really are, and that the Bible has to be understood only in terms of that account.¹¹

10. Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 10.

11. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 45.

The emergence of biblical criticism was a natural occurrence during this time. Despite these efforts, the religious ideas once accepted as public facts in Christendom were increasingly deemed as nothing more than personal values. What kind of faith is capable of existing in only a private realm, while being repudiated in any public application and increasingly considered a poor substitute for real knowledge? Such a faith would prove so weak that many Christians would soon begin to abandon it altogether.

More of this dynamic is precisely what is occurring today. Recent studies have showed a drastic decline in religion in the West.¹² Studies conducted by The Pew Research Center and Barna Research Group agree that the church is in decline, and those who believe in the uniqueness of Jesus as Lord has declined.¹³ As the Age of Reason eroded any religious claims to universal truth, people traded religion for data because it was based on reasonable research. During this modern period, society was optimistic that reason would pave the way to a brighter future. There would be less war, less poverty, less racism, and increased happiness, progress, and freedom. Science would pave the way for such progress—but modernity could not fulfill these promises.

The Era of Postmodernity

In postmodernity, reason would collapse as the ultimate standard to obtain objective truth. The “Age of Reason” had two World Wars and imperialism, and the systemic issues of injustice, racism, and violence were never corrected. Science did not live up to its promises of progress. Africa and India had to throw off the “societies of reason” because Western reason seemed to justify imperialism. Stanley Grenz observes,

12. Pew Research Center, “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious.”

13. Frost, *Exiles*, 6.

In the postmodern world, people are no longer convinced that knowledge is inherently good. In eschewing the Enlightenment myth of inevitable progress, postmodernism replaces the optimism of the last century with a gnawing pessimism. Gone is the belief that every day, in every way, we are getting better and better. Members of the emerging generation are no longer confident that humanity will be able to solve the world's great problems.¹⁴

Today, the philosophy of deconstruction has shifted the plausibility structure away from reason to complete relativism, which now seems to be the only absolute. What once were culturally embodied truths of modernity have become relativized by hyper individualism. Even Newbigin could not foresee the full power of what relativism would become as he observed it in its modern infancy. He would be surprised to find that pluralism, which he claimed did not apply to the field of science, now has infiltrated even this field. Grenz cites Jean Francois Lyotard to describe the future of science in postmodernism,

But Lyotard's chief concern is with that dimension which has exerted a more significant formative influence than any other in the modern era—the scientific enterprise. Postmodernism, he says, marks the end of science. Modern science arose in part out of a desire to dispel from the realm of knowledge the “prescientific” beliefs, myths, and stories that primitive peoples use to speak about the world. At the heart of the scientific method is the undermining of any appeal to such narratives in order to legitimate knowledge. Postmodernism marks the end of this attempt.¹⁵

The power of this relativism is the idea of deconstruction. In the late twentieth century, Newbigin argued that language was culturally embodied, “Language embodies the ways in which a continuing community has learned to grasp its experience in a coherent way. It expresses the concepts which give shape to its understanding.”¹⁶ His thoughts on language represent the typical modern structuralism of his time, in which words took on an objective definition outside of the individual—words shaped

14. Grenz, *A Primer for Postmodernism*, 7.

15. *Ibid.*, 47.

16. Newbigin, *The Gospel in Pluralist Society*, 53.

understanding. Today, this theory is claimed to actually be reversed. Deconstructionists assume that all language is only understood as the listener associates the word with some experience he or she has had. Everything is up for interpretation by the listener, as Grenz explains,

Structuralists argue that language is a social construct . . . and that all societies and cultures possess a common, invariant structure. The deconstructionists (or poststructuralists) reject this last tenet of structuralism. Meaning is not inherent in a text itself, they argue, but emerges only as the interpreter enters into dialogue with the text. And because the meaning of the text is dependent on the perspective of the one who enters into dialogue with it, it has as many meanings as it has readers (or readings).¹⁷

If this is true, concepts do not give shape to understanding as most modernists thought, rather, it is understanding that gives shape to words. This means all language is relative. In postmodernism, this deconstructionist idea is now being applied to everything.

Today, many of the so-called facts of the modern period have now been deconstructed or doubted. Even the idea that something could be elevated to objective universal truth or absolute is dead. Brian McLaren qualifies this postmodern characteristic in the following way, “When they [postmodernists] answer no to the question, Do you believe in absolute truth? this is what I think they actually mean: ‘Well, of course there is absolute truth out there. I don’t doubt that. I just doubt your ability, or my own for that matter to apprehend that truth.’”¹⁸ Michael Green writes this about postmodernism,

[It places] far less emphasis on the omniscience of reason and opens the door for personal insights and the possibility both of the supernatural and the occult . . . and is persuaded that we must “deconstruct” all ideas of objectivity in history, science and philosophy, and cultivate an attitude of radical openness to insights

17. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 7.

18. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, 166.

and impressions from whatever quarter. Structures are out; perceptions are in, and they must all be respected. Relativism in morals and pluralism in belief are all part of this newer worldview.¹⁹

Perhaps the difference can best be examined from the point of view of different atheists. In the modern age, an atheist might claim that he has chosen non-belief because it is more reasonable based on the lack of scientific evidence to back up claims from Christianity. She will argue that Christianity is an unintellectual perspective based on dangerous myths rather than the facts at hand. Younger atheists, however, are arguing for non-belief, not because it leans on a set of objective scientific facts; rather, because it frees them to establish truth as they see fit.

Even if science produced evidence giving credibility to Christian claims, it makes little difference. Postmoderns have seen scientific discoveries come and go so often that it makes little sense to base truth on something that is likely to be adjusted in the future. New scientific theories of late modernity and early postmodernity have brought instability, as Grenz explains, “Like relativity theory, quantum physics reveals some startling features of the universe that undermine both the modern mechanistic model of the world and the modern assumption of scientific certitude.”²⁰ These dynamics have significant implications for evangelism. For the evangelist, modern forms of apologetics are likely to fall on deaf ears. People doubt proofs and see them as silly. Rather than trying to prove Christian claims to be certain, evangelists might fare better by honestly acknowledging the possibility of doubt. This honesty opens a door for authentic communication.

19. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 12.

20. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 51.

For postmoderns in a world where everything changes, why create any absolutes?

This shift from the Age of Reason to deconstruction postmodernism began toward the end of the 1960s. Craig Van Gelder, professor of congregational mission at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, writes, “Most [social] theorists work from the premise that the key threshold of change [into postmodernism] took place somewhere in the late 1960s to early 1970s.”²¹ Grenz agrees, “Although the term [postmodern] was coined in the 1930s, postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon did not gain momentum until three or four decades later. . . . During the 1960s, the mood that would characterize postmodernism became attractive.”²²

If the movement of deconstruction indeed began in the 1960s, this means it has had half a century to develop, and today the rejection of absolutes is staggering to the modern mindset. In short, no major metanarrative seems to be secure or sacred. While society will see how extreme this becomes, for now, one extreme example of the relativistic shift from modern society to postmodern can be seen in the acceptance of the idea that biology does not determine sex. Gender is bending, people say, and who is anyone else to deny this? This is the epitome of a relativistic society. Modernity would not have imagined a culture where basic terms to describe humanity, such as male and female, would be considered too narrow and even offensive, and that the terms themselves would be rejected. The claims of government, politics, business, corporations, or religion to have the “right” answer for society is greatly doubted by young postmoderns. Wars, corporate greed, and clergy abuse have desensitized people to the

21. Van Gelder, *Confident Witness-Changing World*.

22. Grenz, *A Primer for Postmodernism*, 16.

great claims of truth. The marketing that touted the next and newest piece of technology as “the must have device” is outdated as soon as it gets home. Everything is bending, not just gender.

While there is much evidence of this shift in pop culture, one example may suffice. The popular group, Mumford and Sons, has a line in their song, “I Gave You All,” which states, “How can you prove your truth is better than ours.” It is a slam on society’s ability to prove anything. Grenz writes, “The postmodern ethos resists unified, all-encompassing, and universally valid explanations. It replaces these with a respect for difference and a celebration of the local and particular at the expense of the universal.”²³ McLaren identifies five core values of postmodernism: skeptical of certainty, sensitive to context, leans toward humorous, highly values subjective experience, and togetherness is a rare and precious experience.²⁴ The age of information, according to Grenz, brought the global community together in a way that fostered the postmodern advance, and now it is not a universe but a multiverse.²⁵ In such a context, how can a Christian evangelist speak of the gospel of Jesus Christ as being true or right?

It is not difficult to see how in such an environment many problems could arise; for example, the conflict between one person’s freedom and another person’s freedom. This natural conflict is increased where there is no standard of ethics or morality. How do relativism and political correctness coexist? Relativism claims that people can define what is true and that society must acknowledge their truth, but what if their truth is

23. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 12.

24. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, 162.

25. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 17.

offensive? What if it is not politically correct? Society will have to choose between competing claims. What wins between the freedom of religion versus the freedom from discrimination, or the freedom of one person's speech versus the freedom of another person's speech? Theoretically, relativism says that everyone wins, but this is practically impossible because reality demands a winner. Conflicts of such nature will erode relativism as a plausibility structure, and a new standard will arise out of the vacuum of a centerless society. As this tension between competing freedoms plays out over and over again, society inevitably will make its choice.

In this context, the most common criticism toward evangelism is that it is intolerant and, therefore, unethical in its nature. Today's quick leap to judgment would even call it hateful. Many feel that there is simply no way to practice evangelism in a way that is good for humanity. This perception causes two problems: one, Christians would rather not practice something that will bring this accusation, and two, non-believers have already determined not to listen. This study has found that this phenomenon is currently taking place and is one of the main reasons for a lack of evangelism in today's churches.

This problem forms the center of this project. How does the church practice evangelism today? Ironically, pluralism has an inherent intolerance in itself, as David Kinnaman observes, "When we asked outsiders what the most important factor is in their faith, they said it is something that 'feels right to them personally' (69 percent of outsiders said this was an important facet of their spirituality.) . . . Among young people, whether we like it or not, their sense of individualism, their loyalty to peers, and their emotional and experiential outlook on life guide their spiritual pursuits."²⁶ The

26. Kinnaman, *UnChristian*, 72.

subjectivity is obvious, and in such a context, any claims to absolute truth are an affront to the whole system. This produces the postmodern paradox, when non-believers accuse Christians of being intolerant in any practice of evangelism, but doing so shows themselves as being intolerant of a belief. Abraham says of such loose definition, “It is simply a matter of logic. One cannot believe two contradictory statements at the same time unless one is blind, muddled, or inconsistent. So if one believes that Jesus uniquely reveals God, one cannot simultaneously believe that he does not uniquely reveal God. To turn this kind of intellectual competence into a species of intolerance is odd in the extreme, for it cannot be a moral fault to be consistent in one’s beliefs.”²⁷ If secular pluralism creates an environment where almost any claim to a unique absolute truth is not tolerated, how does evangelism move forward? Regardless of its self-defeating essence, when intolerance is applied to any and every kind of evangelism, the church is left in a difficult position.

This problem may be well addressed in developing a practice of ethical evangelism. William Abraham, at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, offers one solution. “Intolerance has been fueled by many convictions and motives that have little to do with belief in the uniqueness of Jesus, and, even if it has been initiated by such belief, there is no reason why it may not be purged and overcome. The crux of the matter, then, is semantic. We use the word intolerance loosely to cover a variety of actions and attitudes. Strictly speaking, it means a lack of respect for the beliefs and practices of others.”²⁸ The problem in a pluralistic society is trying to come to a

27. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 226.

28. *Ibid.*, 226.

common definition of intolerance as disrespect. When this is acknowledged, the church can then work toward an ethical form of evangelism that seeks respect. Respectful evangelism is possible, ethical, and logical.

What is needed therefore, is not an abandoning of belief in the uniqueness and absolute truth of the gospel, but rather a respect for the beliefs of others. If the church does not consider its response, the problem can only get worse. If any and all evangelism is wrong because it is intolerant, then the only solution would be for everyone to give up their claims to absolute truth and embrace complete relativism and its supposed intellectually superior agnosticism. Newbigin claims that when society gives up on the belief of absolute truth it leads to nihilism and hopelessness. The way forward can only be in practicing a form of evangelism that is highly ethical and respectful.

The Next Era of Neo-Paganism

Even though well underway, postmodernism may be relatively short lived as the next plausibility structure. With some elements of the age of reason still holding on, and the deconstructing of absolutes in full swing, the marginalization of Christianity to the realm of subjective values is a tide unable to be held back. The voice of Christians could end up being so privatized that public truth begins to be controlled by an old religion reborn, as Newbigin speculates, “The result is not, as we once imagined, a secular society. It is a pagan society, and its paganism, having been born out of the rejection of Christianity, is far more resistant to the gospel than the pre-Christian paganism with which cross-culture missions have been familiar. Here, surely, is the most challenging missionary frontier of our time.”²⁹ In other words, not relativism, but paganism could be

29. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 20.

the next plausibility structure. Secularism is a religion in itself, namely that of anti-religion, in which anti-Christian faith can be born. Popular atheists like Richard Dawkins have declared publically the dangers of Christianity, stating, “More generally (and this applies to Christianity no less than to Islam), what is really pernicious is the practice of teaching children that faith itself is a virtue. Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument. Teaching children that unquestioned faith is a virtue primes them—given certain other ingredients that are not hard to come by—to grow up into potentially lethal weapons for future jihads or crusades.”³⁰

This is far from pluralism. If this becomes the plausibility structure of the future, then Christianity will have gone from dominance, to equal, to suspect, to dangerous- a movement that would be applauded by many. Could there be a future movement to unlawful? In a 2013 article on *Time* magazine’s website, “Can Your Child Be Too Religious?” the author speaks on the negative ways that religion could affect children. She writes that children with obsessive-compulsive disorder might strictly repeat scripture or focus on other rituals. If so, such ritualistic behavior “in reality could be no more spiritual than fanatical hand washing or dreading to walk on cracks.” Other children, it claims, suffer from “scrupulosity,” which involves shame and guilt. The reader is told that “fastidiousness to religious practices may not seem so harmful,” but could lead to “extreme behavior such as delusions or hallucinations.” The article recommends that parents “be alert to a sudden and pervasive shift in religious practice” and “model a healthy balance between religion and life.” They should show children “how religion can co-exist with enjoying life.” The article argues that the goal of the

30. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 347.

parent should be to help religion become “a comfort and a joy,” since “that’s the role that religion should have for people of faith.”³¹

Of course, the Christian tradition believes Jesus to be far more than “a comfort and a joy” in life; indeed, he wants to be King and Lord of every day (Luke 9:23). The *Time* article is symptomatic of a shifting cultural bias against true Christianity that seems to see faith as a shackler of joy rather than a generator, and a producer of meaningless rituals rather than resident freedom. Based on these ideas, religion in moderation seems to be acceptable, but surrendering every dimension of life to Jesus is too extreme. Certainly religion at its worst bolsters such sentiment, and religious extremism has often been associated with violence. In such a context, devoted Christians are likely to be suspect.

While there is some evidence pointing in a neo-pagan trajectory, it still remains that Christianity comprises the majority of the American population. The church ought not overreact. The sky is not falling, or at least not in the sense that some feel. Opponents of the faith will claim that Christianity still has a firm hold on all of society as well. Atheist, anti-religious, and agnostic movements continue to claim that discrimination and inequality persists from Christians far more than to Christians.

Based on such evidence, it is important for Christians to not overstate the demise of Christianity in the West. The Christian church has certainly not lost all her influence. Nevertheless, Christians who claim, with public intent, a uniqueness in Jesus Christ are often shackled with the label “intolerant.” It is not a stretch to imagine how being seen as intolerant could be a step toward not being tolerated in the future. If the current trend

31. Francine Russo, “Can Your Child Be Too Religious?” *Time* (March 28, 2013), accessed 5/4/2016, <http://healthland.time.com/2013/03/28/can-your-child-be-too-religious/>.

continues, Christians are likely to become a minority religion in Western culture. One can only hope that the new majority will treat a Christian minority better than some Christians have behaved when they were the majority. It is a guess whether or not history will be kind to the Christian church. Hopefully, from this section, one can begin to comprehend the complex situation in which the church finds herself today. Today's society hears the church quite differently, indeed.

As she begins to understand how today's society hears and interprets her message of the gospel, it is crucial for the church to then respond in faithful evangelism. So far, this societal transition has proven to be a difficult challenge for each generation. For much of its history, Christendom was the defining self-understanding for many churches in the U.S. Today's Christians who are of the Builder generation, the Silent generation, or the Greatest generation (all referring to those born before World War II), were formed societally and ecclesiologically as Christendom was taking its last deep breaths. Being influenced the most by Christendom, this generation predictably will struggle the most in a society where Christian beliefs, ethics, and morals have been marginalized.

The fact that society may care little for the voice of the church is particularly confusing and frustrating for this generation. They have never had to have faith without the support of society. To make matters worse, when it appears that a church attempts to adapt ecclesiological methods in order to minister in this shifting society, this generation struggles all the more. Books like *Who Stole My Church?* by Gordon MacDonald speak to this anxiety within the builder generation. MacDonald comments on this issue saying,

Those who like to label the generations call most of us builders, sons and daughters of the silent generation. We builders have always been an optimistic bunch of people who have enjoyed starting organizations and programs, building buildings, and keeping things faithfully running and growing . . . whenever the

church opens its doors, builders have always shown up. That is, until lately. Now something may be changing in our generational ranks. Faithful people who always used to be as dependable as the ocean tides . . . are beginning to signal a bit of annoyance with their churches. And their gifts and their faithfulness in attendance are beginning to fray at the edges.³²

He goes on to describe the struggling sentiment among this generation as they deal with change. On the other hand, younger Christians, tired of fighting against this older generation, often choose to leave the traditional church, opting for new movements. In these new movements, however, evangelism is rarely practiced. Intimidated by the threat of being labeled intolerant or narrow minded, younger generations have grown increasingly silent about the gospel. Kinnaman comments on this,

Realize that skepticism [in postmodern culture] has both positive and negative implications. One of the favorable outcomes is that Mosaics and Busters are reluctant to be “salesperson pushy” about their faith and are highly sensitized to what other people think and feel. Yet this also means young Christians are less likely than older adults to feel compelled to share their faith in Christ with others. Young people are also more likely to believe one can live a meaningful life without accepting Jesus Christ.³³

In other words, young Christians need a form of evangelism that is both biblical and practicable. The problem is truly deep and complex and, as a result, there is a lack of participation, interest, and excitement regarding the practice of evangelism in churches today. In all cases, Christians are exiles, according to Frost—exiles from the way things used to be when the values and beliefs between church and culture were in sync. From this unfamiliar position, the church will have to learn to speak and live the gospel anew, and to do so within an increasingly skeptical and even oppositional society. As a

32. Gordan MacDonald, *Who Stole My Church?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), xvi.

33. Kinnaman, *Un Christian*, 68.

missionary learns the language of a culture, the church will need to learn the language of its own culture.

APPENDIX B

The Nature of Blessing in Genesis 12

The nature of blessing in the Old Testament may encompass more theology than one might think. It's cultural and theological complexity is explored by many. Bruce Waltke sees "blessing" as a theme in these verses.¹ He points out that the word "bless" is used five times in these three verses, which perhaps links these verses with the first eleven chapters of Genesis where bless is also used five times. Quoting the German scholar F. Horst, Waltke points out how significant being blessed truly is, "Blessing brings the power for life, the enhancement of life, and the increase of life."² Without the blessing of God, the earth and her people are certainly doomed. Genesis presents a picture of a world longing for and desperate for blessing, such as in the pleading of Esau to his blind father, "When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, 'Bless me, me also father!'" To this, the heartbreaking reply comes, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing" (Gen 27:34–35). There were salvific implications in blessing, so much so that the wounded Jacob would cling to the foot of the epiphanous angel declaring to never let go until he was blessed (Gen 32:26). As God declares his desire to bless Abram in order to bless the world, the nature of this blessing was to restore life. To see Genesis as a whole will place this promise, as well as other promises, in a theological movement in the divine plan to fix the problems of Genesis 3. Victor Hamilton describes,

1. Waltke, *Genesis, A Commentary*, 203.

2. *Ibid.*, 205.

“This family [of Abram] is to become the vehicle by which all families of the earth may be reconciled to God.”

Thus, in this promise of God, the good news of salvation has begun and the seeds of God’s global vision have been planted. God is the initiator and founder of the promise and the great hope. God is the evangelist in the text bringing good news to the world that through Abram it will be blessed. Keeping God as center is not only accurate for this text, but in line with Genesis as a whole.

Textually, there are questions as to the precise meaning of “shall be blessed” in v. 3. The Niphal use of the verb *barak* can be translated as either reflective or passive in force. If understood as reflective, the translation would become “shall bless themselves” or “shall ask blessings themselves” of Abram. On the other hand, Niphal can be passive as well. In this case, the translation would be “shall be blessed.” Hamilton observes, “This is not a point of esoteric grammar. Speiser is right when he says of these two translations: ‘the distinction may be slight on the surface, yet it is of great consequence theologically.’ If the verb in question has passive force, then 12:3 clearly articulates the final goal in a divine plan for universal salvation, and Abram is the divinely chosen instrument in the implementation of that plan.”³

Hamilton is suggesting that if the verb is not understood as passive, by translating it in harmony with its reflexive Hithpael occurrences in Genesis 22:18; 26:4, then there is a chance that this promise is only for Abram and not the families of the earth. If this were the case, then this passage may not be offering a glimpse into the global intent of God at all. After considering several points of view, Hamilton questions the reflexive argument.

3. Waltke, *Genesis, A Commentary*, 374.

First he argues that even Hithpael can carry a passive force, and second, that blessing one's self is not only abnormal in scripture but illogical. He writes, "In view of all these factors, it is best to retain the passive force of 12:3, and to see in this last of seven phrases, with its emphatic perfect, the culmination of this initial promise of God to the patriarch."⁴ Waltke's perspective is that it does not affect the outcome as much as Hamilton believes, as long as the reflexive means that the "nations bless themselves by mediating blessing through their prayers for Abraham. In either case, God mediates his blessing to the nations through Abraham."⁵ In his article on this subject, Benjamin J. Noonan explains,

First, there is no basis for giving the Hithpael preference over the Niphal. If the claim is going to be made that the Niphal and Hithpael have the same meaning, one could just as easily argue that the Hithpael should be interpreted in light of the Niphal rather than vice versa. In any case, it is wrong methodologically to assume that the Niphal and Hithpael stems have the same diathesis simply because the different formulations of the patriarchal promise of blessing are similar and because the Niphal and Hithpael stems often appear to overlap semantically. . . . Moreover, as already argued, it is unlikely that the Niphal is reflexive or reciprocal because there are no clear analogies in the Hebrew Bible of the Niphal being used in such a manner . . . These two observations make the reflexive translation of "bless themselves" very unlikely, leaving a medio-passive diathesis as the most plausible option.⁶

In concurrence with Hamilton and Noonan, this study contends that the Genesis 12:3 blessing is for the world through Abram. In Hamilton's words, "The blessings of God are not all to be turned in on Abram. A great nation, blessed, a great name—yes. But Abram must be more than a recipient. He is both a receptacle for the divine blessing and a transmitter of that

4. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 375.

5. Waltke, *Genesis, A Commentary*, 206.

6. Benjamin J. Noonan, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Reexamination of the Niphal and Hithpael of in the Patriarchal Narratives*, Hebrew Studies, vol. 51 (Milwaukee: NAHP, 2010), 75.

blessing.”⁷ It can also be noted that the majority of the translations opt for the passive force (NRSV, NIV, TNIV, NASB, NKJV, ESV, ASV, CEV, NAB), while only four major translations choose the reflexive force (RSV, NJB, NET, NJPS).

Along with this blessing, a curse is also noticed in v. 3, by which it is possible to see God giving both cursing and blessing with little care as to which one humanity receives. In fact, he might appear to be like pagan gods who were understood to bless and curse arbitrarily, or even out of spite and vengeance. The picture here, however, is quite different. By the syntax of the grammar, one identifies that the God of Abraham is different, and his desire is to bless rather than curse. Waltke points out, “The extent of God’s gracious desire to bless rather than curse is indicated by the grammatical differences of the two phrases in Gen. 12:3. First, the statement is in a form indicated resolve (“I will bless”), intentioned toward plural recipients (“those who bless”). Second, it shifts to a simple statement of fact (“I shall curse”) and a singular recipient (“whoever curses”; see also 27:29; Num 24:9).”⁸ The text teaches a theology of a unique God who desires to bless the whole world rather than curse.

Blessing Through Obedience and Holiness

How were the chosen people to be a blessing for the world? In what way would God begin to achieve this global blessing? God does not yet give an explicit evangelistic commissioning to Abram or his children, but rather God gives a commission to worship, be holy, and obey the law. The imperative to obey is prevalent in the Old Testament. For Brian Stone, this “blessing to world” type of vision in Genesis 12 was mostly lived out when the people of God obeyed the more direct commands of devoted monotheistic

7. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 373.

8. Waltke, *Genesis, A Commentary*, 206.

worship and obedience to the Law. Bryan Stone, Professor of Evangelism at the Boston University School of Theology, sees that in obeying the Law, the people of Israel were fulfilling the great purpose of God to be a blessing to the nations. He writes, “In Israel’s story, worship and obedience are each discovered to be impossible without the other, and the two together constitute its witness to the nations.”⁹

It could be that here one finds the first clue that God’s global vision is inseparable from the life of the believer. To illustrate, the sojourner in the Holy Land could not help but notice the peculiar dignity given him by the people of Yahweh when they obeyed the command to give justice even to aliens (Deut. 24:17). From the fairness in criminal justice (Ex 21:24), to the treatment of women (Deut. 22:13–19), the Law of God was a major step forward in sociological progress, even if it did not yet offer a realized vision of God’s ideal.¹⁰ For its time, and in its context, the Law was exceedingly progressive compared to foreign nations. Other people groups surely would have been blessed by the obedience of the chosen people to God. Thus, their specific calling to obedience had global implications.

To take this idea one step further, John Bowen contends that without the Old Testament Law, there would be no practicing community. The Law practicing community of Israel was a significant blessing to the world. Bowen says, “Each command indicates a particular way that Israel’s God is holy—Yahweh cares for people who are poor, or disabled, or elderly, or refugee, and so on—and so a people being

9. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 67.

10. Richard Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

remade in the image of their Creator will imitate God's concerns."¹¹ If Bowen is correct, then God was revealing himself and his blessings to the world through the obedience of the community of Israel. One thus could see the precursor for the coming New Testament church.

If God had wanted all of his creation to know him and be blessed according to Gen. 12, why not quickly send out missionaries and evangelists to tell people about the care and blessing of God? Why wait to give the Great Commission? Blessing the world through Abram was good news, but perhaps the world had become so sinister that there was no concrete place the evangelist could present an example of God's care and blessing. Moreover, the words of good news would have been shallow without any locus of that blessing. Therefore, the community of blessing had to be established before the message of blessing.

Without the new community of Israel, evangelism would have been little more than theoretical or spiritual belief having no basis in reality. This may be one of the reasons why there is little to no evangelistic development or practice in the Old Testament. Through the Law, the people of God became a community who lived differently—they were holy. The hard commands to obey the law, never forget them, teach them to their children, talk about them all the time, and write them in plain sight, had great implications for the world. While they did not always do a great job with obedience, and sometimes unfaithfully adapted to their pagan environment, yet they always retained a distinct identity.

11. Bowen, *Evangelism for "Normal" People*, 31.

This communal identity had concrete practices that were often far more loving and caring than their neighbors, and their worship was different as well. For example, their neighbors would notice that they did not sacrifice children in worship (Duet 18:9–10). This holy lifestyle embodied a living witness to the nations, pointing to a God who was exceedingly different from his pagan counterparts. This God not only showed up powerfully in moments of war but was different in his ways. Even slaves began to have certain rights, beginning a movement to demonstrate a slave’s innate worth before God, which were important steps toward full liberation.

If such concrete and tangible acts of morality, ethics, politics, and care demonstrating God’s character had not existed—if there had been no Law or obedience to it—then evangelism could only have been an existential belief. The holy life of Israel had to be established before verbal evangelism in order to bear witness to and give substance to the words of the gospel that would follow. Deuteronomy 4:5–8 demonstrates this well,

See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the people, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!” For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statues and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?

Bowen claims that this command to obey is like a “scarlet thread” running through scripture. He writes that even though evangelism may not be seen as a dominate teaching in the Old Testament, the teaching on communal “obedience and holiness” acts to draw in other nations.¹² One could also argue, counter to Bowen, that obedience to the

12. Bowen, *Evangelism for Normal People*, 32.

law was intended to separate the Hebrews from other people groups. Perhaps Bowen's point is that the intent of this holy separation, was not simply for themselves, but for the world as well. The blessing of God is declared to Abram in Genesis 12 and then perhaps later, through the Mosaic Covenant, it is fleshed out through the obedience of a holy people.

APPENDIX C

Evangelism Language in the Biblical Text

Several valuable conclusions have come from a study of how the concept of evangelism occurred in the New Testament. Michael Green points out that Scripture uses three words for proclaiming the Christian message, *euaggelizesthai* (to tell the good news), *marturein* (to bear witness), and *kerussein* (to proclaim). Mark and Paul utilize the noun form of *euaggelion*, while Luke, possibly borrowing from the Hebrew usage, utilizes the verb form.

The occurrence of the word *kerussein* (to proclaim) has often created a significant discussion as to what exactly it is that must be proclaimed in regard to Jesus. Is it only his death and resurrection? The content, or as some refer to it, the “kerygma” of this speech begins as the kingdom of God in Mark, but in Peter and Paul the content primarily centers on vastness of the king himself, Jesus Christ. Green suggests that this kerygmatic shift may be the result of Paul not wanting to stir up unnecessary trouble among the Romans. He writes, “They [Christians] proclaimed the good news about the kingdom, as Jesus had done. But this could very easily be misunderstood in the Roman Empire, as it was for instance, at Thessalonica; so it is not surprising to find them more frequently preaching simply the person and achievement of Jesus as the good news.”¹ Granted, Jesus is the content of the *euaggelion*, the good news, but what exactly about him is good news?

1. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 782.

Questions abound as to whether the kerygma was a fixed set of propositions or whether it was fluid. Scholars such as C. H. Dodd, A. M. Hunter, and others see the gospel as a set of concrete points, though they differ on what exactly are those points. Other scholars, such as Rudolf Bultmann, do not see any benefit in a fixed theology, considering that faith comes from a supernatural encounter with God at the moment of proclamation. This study will consider some of these issues with an underlying belief that although form criticism does not necessitate going as far as Bultmann, one can get lost staying behind the text for too long. Green writes that many others such as H. J. Cadbury and C. F. D. Moule contend that rather than having a fixed kerygma, it is more likely to see the content of the Gospels and Acts as a dynamic set of words about Jesus that take shape within the context of the listeners. In this view, the word for proclaim (*kerussein*) has held on its shoulders the debate of what exactly is the content of that good news.

The last word for communicating the Christian message is found in the word *marturein* (to bear witness). Through an exposition of three passages in John, the nature of this word will be a major emphasis in this study. While the other words used for evangelism might refer solely to verbal expression, John's use of witness carries over into the works of the Christian life. John Bowen might acknowledge this differentiation when he writes, "There are three Greek words in the New Testament that relate to evangelism: 1) the word for gospel or good news, 2) the verb to preach good news (or to evangelize), and 3) the person who evangelizes (the evangelist). All three of these items relate to words and to speaking. None of them even hints that actions can be a form of evangelism."² Bowen is pointing out the direct derivatives of *euaggelion*, and while he

2. Bowen, *Evangelism for "Normal" People*, 56.

may be correct in his assessment of *euaggelion* as only a verbal witness, he leaves out John's usage of the *marturein* as it relates to evangelism. This study argues that, whether one preaches the good news of Jesus, talks casually about the good news of, or lives out the good news, the Greek word *marturein* encapsulates the entire evangelistic enterprise.

APPENDIX D

The Identity of the Witness in John 3:11-17

It can be helpful to consider the identity of exactly who is bearing witness in John 3. It is obvious that Jesus practices the art of witnessing in verse 11, and considering that he is the only other person in the story, other than Nicodemus, the plural “we” may seem rather odd. Could Jesus be referring to himself and John the Baptist, or even the disciples? Gail O’Day makes this claim saying,

The first-person plural of v. 11 has another function. Jesus’ words in v. 11 are all words of witness: we know; we see; we speak; we testify. In its immediate context, Jesus’ “we” speaks for John the Baptist and the first disciples who have already borne witness to what they have seen. Jesus speaks for all those who have testified to this point in the Gospel narrative. In a broader context, however, Jesus’ “we” speaks for the witness of the early church. This “we” stands in contrast to the “we” for who Nicodemus speaks: the synagogue . . . Nicodemus and his community are representative of all who do not receive the church’s witness.”¹

In O’Day’s view, it seems that the witness of the Jesus community is standing in contrast to the witness of the Jewish rabbinic community. The context presents the Baptist as a witness to Jesus in the narrative immediately following this one (John 3:26), and this idea certainly corresponded to chapter one (John 1:8). In fact, the usage of the word “light” in 3:19 works well with 1:8.

Because of the apparent break in stories, however, with the *meta houtos* (after these things) in v. 22, and because of the theological composition, it could be that Jesus’ “we” in v. 11 is not referring to the Baptist or disciples. Craig Keener believes the “we” refers to Jesus and the Father: “Jesus and the Father testified, but Nicodemus and his

1. O’Day, *The Gospel of John*, 551.

allies did not receive their witness.”² This view could be substantiated by the *kerygma* of Jesus in this pericope, which fits with the theological content. Verse 13 offers a connection between God and the “Son of Man,” who with privileged access as God’s Word in the flesh, had come from heaven bearing the heavenly witness of Father and Son. O’Day even acknowledges the joint witness of Father and Son in her introductory remarks on the theological themes in John: “This identification of God points to the union of God’s and Jesus’ work in the world.”³ Keener observes, “Only one born from above (3:3) could “see” God’s kingdom, and only he who came from above (3:13) could testify firsthand about heavenly realities (3:11) and so reveal heavenly things (3:12).” If Keener is correct, then the identity of the witnesses are indeed the Father and Son, because neither the Baptist nor the disciples can bear the first-hand witness to Nicodemus of what is known and seen about God. Only the Messiah himself can bear such witness. In this case, as considered in the pneumatology of Acts 2, the origin of witness is found in God himself, and the evangelistic witness of the church flows out of the witness of God.

O’Day also observes,

English translations of v. 11 mask the Greek word order. The translation “we speak of what we know” is smooth English, but the sentence literally reads, “what we know we say” (ὃ οἶδαμεν λαλοῦμεν). This word order is important because it means that the beginning of Jesus’ discourse and Nicodemus’s opening words to Jesus (v. 3) are the same: “we know . . .” It is possible to read Jesus’ words as a continuation of the irony of v. 10; Jesus parodies Nicodemus’s assertion of his knowledge.”⁴

2. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 560.

3. O’Day, *The Gospel of John*, 496.

4. *Ibid.*, 551.

Raymond Brown concurs with O'Day saying, "Jesus picks up the 'we know' from v. 2 and turns it against Nicodemus. Thus, the use of 'we' is a parody of Nicodemus' hint of arrogance."⁵ When Jesus witnesses to what he knows and has seen, in contrast to the smallness of what Nicodemus and his community know, the two knowledges can hardly be held as parallel. Jesus' knowledge is vast beyond measure, and yet he reveals it to Nicodemus. In turn, the writer reveals this witness to the world as his own witness.

Gerald L. Borchert takes a step back from the text and considers whether the inserting of the plural is the result of the Johannine community engaged in the continuing struggle between the emerging church and the Jewish synagogue. If this is the case, much of the conversation could have been written out of the tradition of the Johannine community and used as an apologetic against the synagogue. Even if the plural witnesses were a part of a later edition, however, Borchert contends that as the writer selected sources, edited those sources, and compiled them into streams of theological cohesion, the purpose was that, "All the words are directed at fulfilling John's purpose of leading the reader to believe in Jesus and experience life."⁶

5. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 132.

6. Borchert, *John 1-11*, 179.

APPENDIX E

The Agricultural Metaphor in John 4

As Jesus teaches his disciples about his mission to fulfill the will and work of the One who sent him, he uses the agricultural image of sowing and harvesting. Throughout scripture, both Old Testament and New, the images of sowing and harvest are used (e.g., Lev 26:5; Amos 9:13; Ps 126:5–6). Keener notices the evangelism implicit in the illustration saying, “Sowing undoubtedly refers to sowing God’s message, as elsewhere in the Jesus tradition (Mark 4:3; 12:1–12; Matt 13:24)...The ‘fruit’ here probably refers to new believers (12:24) rather than behavior 15:2–16).”¹ From the harvest illustration, there is an implied readiness in the hearts of Samaritan people to believe the witness.

Jesus is teaching his disciples of the shocking reality that response may come from unexpected places and unexpected times, a foreshadowing of what was to come in the early church, and he was helping the late century reader understand his or her place in the Jesus tradition. The trajectory of the harvest is not months away; it is now, as in Mark 1:15, “The Kingdom of God is at hand.” This idea sets the tone for the whole encounter between Jesus and the woman and even the greater world. When people come to believe the witness of the gospel of Jesus it is reason for joy and celebration, as would be the case during the harvest. This evangelistic theme of fulfillment, readiness, and joyous celebration would have framed the excitement of new converts coming to faith during the late first century. (Another option is that this tradition might even have come from a late

1. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 626.

source after the Samaritan revival, brought by the evangelism of Philip in Acts 8:5 where he “proclaimed the Christ.”)

What is readily apparent in this teaching is that it is the Father’s will for his Son to help all people come to God, and according to Jesus, many people are often involved in the process. Some sow and others reap, but obviously evangelism is a great and grand task utilizing the contributions of many. The evangelistic contribution of John 4 is the empowering witness of the church outward to the world. It is essential to help the church understand the significance of everyone’s part. When evangelism is the work of one person as the so called “evangelist,” the church stops understanding the evangelistic work of the whole body.

What has changed in this agricultural metaphor is that the seasons have supernaturally been brought together, as Brown observes, “So now in Jesus’ preaching the harvest is ripe on the same day on which the seed has been sown, for already the Samaritans are pouring out of the village and coming to Jesus.”² In and of itself, this idea is good news. Jesus may be turning on its head what Brown calls a “pessimistic reflection on the inequity of life.”³ It was common that the sower would not share in the reward of reaping, but now something significant has changed. Keener observes that “In any case, the sower and reaper share the same reward as if each had done all the labor, a concept that should have been readily intelligible in early Jewish rhetoric.”⁴ This means that another conclusion for evangelism is the shared reward of everyone involved in its

2. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 182.

3. *Ibid.*, 183.

4. *Ibid.*, 626.

practice. Every step is important in helping to foster orientation into the kingdom of God. Therefore, one who shares a witness to the gospel at the genesis of someone's initiation into the faith can imagine what that future conversion might mean, both for that person and for the greater church.

This evangelistic imagination brings the church to celebrate that future as if it were breaking into the current reality. The conclusion of all history can be understood in terms of a celebration. The kingdom of God is like a wedding banquet (Matt 22:2). The future harvest has broken into the season of sowing by the power of God in the arrival of the Messiah. Biblical evangelism then helps people be orientated into this new harvest community. If Jesus transformed the pessimistic reality of farming from the acute differentiation of seasons into a new idea of seasonal wholeness, then evangelism must help people imagine the possibilities of such wholeness.

APPENDIX F

The Conversion of the Samaritan Woman

If the woman did suffer from a difficult past, there might also be a hint of the transformative nature the gospel. While the text does not tell of any such moral or ethical transformation in the woman, much has been sermonized concerning the leaving behind of the water jar. O'Day writes, "The woman's jar will stand before Jesus and his disciples as they speak. Yet the detail also has meaning on a more theological level. The abandoned jar suggests that the woman's concern of v. 15, the desire for miraculous water, has been superseded by the revelation of Jesus' identity."¹ Certainly some things have begun to change for the woman in the messianic encounter. Her priorities, her understanding, and her life have taken an exciting turn. What is at stake is worship and even salvation as v. 22 suggests, and everything is now different. Without making too much of the aorist tense of the verb "have done" in v. 29, suggesting that her past actions are not in process, but rather have been turned into a testimony of a past snapshot of her life, it cannot be completely ruled out that her experience with Jesus has been transformative on many levels. It could be that her past life, by which she defined herself and by which the community might have judged her, is no longer the defining factor of her life. Things have changed. It could be that a similar encounter is inserted into some editions of the text in chapter 8 where the woman caught in adultery is told to "go and sin no more."

1. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*, 569.

Apparently, in some editions of the Johannine community, the idea of ethical transformation after an encounter with Christ plays a role in the power of the witness. The late readers surely were struggling to apply the new lifestyle of the church to their old ways of behaving. At whatever level the woman begins to experience transformation, it is clear that the transformed lives of the early church served to substantiate the claims of the gospel. At this point, many in the late first century would have resonated with the Samaritan woman, as Green posits,

Deliverance from the guilt and power of evil has always been a major impetus to conversion. It was so with St Paul; it was so with St Augustine . . . Justin tells us of the dissolute wife of a dissolute husband, who was converted in the Rome about AD 150. Apparently it was through the lives and words of her Christian friends. . . . In all probability, it was the temperate lives of her Christian friends, contrasting so sharply with her own, that made her feel guilty, and was the main factor in leading her to the one who could both cleanse and empower.”²

Green then offers the witness of Cyprian to explain the role that changed lives played in conversion and evangelism. In Cyprian’s witness to Donatus about his own life, he writes, “I used to wander blindly in the darkness of night, buffeted this way and that in the sea of the world . . . ignorant of my own life, and a stranger to the truth and the light . . . the water of regeneration washed away the stains of my past life. A light from above entered and permeated my heart, now cleansed from its defilement.”³

Obviously, in the case of the woman in John 4:29, such a transformation is not explicitly written, but the witness of the woman is at least as honest as Cyprian’s. Her words also open the possibility of more ridicule and isolation, “Come, and see a man who told me all the things I have done”; her witness is a risk. She reveals a part of her life,

2. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 230.

3. *Ibid.*, 231.

which she surely would rather have kept hidden, in order to demonstrate the power of the one who may indeed be the Messiah, the teacher *Taheb*.⁴ Her life was laid out as a part of the witness, as if ugly things once hidden are now laid out in new light and new possibility. The transformed lives of those who believe is itself a witness. The woman's story certainly includes a moment of self-disclosure, and therefore the great possibilities of transformation became a part of her timeless witness. An encounter with the Messiah opens the doors of new life. Today's evangelism would do well to attest to the great transformative potential of encounter with Jesus. One tells of this possibility through the power of witness.

4. For the Samaritans, the coming Messiah would carry the title *Taheb*. O'Day comments that the *Taheb* would be the one who returns as a teacher. This would be a difference from the messianic expectation of the Jews who were rather looking for a warrior king kind of figure.

APPENDIX G

The Difference between Discipleship and Evangelism

There is a difference between discipleship and evangelism, but this difference may not be what is commonly thought. The difference is not, as some believe, that evangelism is getting someone to take the first steps in the faith, and discipleship is helping someone to become a disciple of Jesus.

Whenever the words disciple or discipleship are mentioned in the New Testament, they refer to the practice of becoming like Christ, rather than practicing making disciples. The difference is becoming rather than doing. The Greek word for disciple, *mathetas*, does not exist in the genitive form as does the word for evangelist, *euangelistes*. In the nominative case, the disciple is typically in the act of becoming. The influence of the evangelist is helping another person become a disciple from any level. Thus, the true distinction between evangelism and discipleship is that evangelism is what is practiced to make disciples. There is not a word for a disciplist or discipler. One might contend that teacher, *didaskalos*, works in the way that a discipleist might. The process, however is more nuanced—it is the good news (*euangelion*) that is lived out and proclaimed by the evangelist (*euangelistes*) in order to help someone become a disciple (*mathetas*). By examining these words in light of their usage in the New Testament, one might assume with Bowen that “evangelism never ends.”

APPENDIX H

Excited to Share Curriculum



By Ross Chandler

Today's church needs a process of evangelism that will energize its faithful practice. Studies conducted by The Pew Research Center and Barna Research Group agree that the church is in decline, and those who believe in the uniqueness of Jesus as Lord have declined. Evangelism is needed, but it faces many challenges. In today's context, the most common criticism toward evangelism is that it is intolerant and narrow and, therefore, unethical in its nature. Today's quick leap to judgment might even call it hateful. Many believe that there is simply no way to practice evangelism in a way that is good for humanity. This perception causes two problems—Christians would rather not practice something that will bring this accusation, and non-believers have already determined not to listen. "Excited to Share" presents a new evangelistic approach for today that is biblical, natural, communal, and ethical.

EXCITED TO SHARE

Introduction

Welcome to *Excited to Share*, a six-week focus to energize a practice of evangelism in your life! You are engaging in one of the most fundamental, biblical, historical, and life giving practices of the church. Whether you know a lot about evangelism or very little, this experience will help you take a step forward in faithfulness to bear witness to the kingdom of God (1 Peter 3:15).

You may have experience in other methods of evangelism, but this study is unique in four ways.

I. The Theology of Evangelism

First, the content of *Excited to Share* is likely to be a little different from other evangelism studies. The theology of evangelism needs to be considered, because it's not simply "how do I get someone to say the sinner's prayer."

This content focuses on three major theologies which are vital for a biblical and practicable method of evangelism.

- (1.) What it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit;
- (2.) What it means to bear witness to the kingdom of God, like a great story teller;
- (3.) What it means to bear witness that is ethical and respectful of others.

These ideas will help you "Tell the gospel when prompted, tell it well, and tell it with care." All three are essential for a faithful practice of evangelism, and each one will be explored.

II. The Evangelism Sodality

Second, the Evangelism Sodality that binds you together in this experience may be unique from other approaches. Practicing evangelism is an activity of the church. You are not alone. However, this does not mean pairing up and going door to door.

A sodality is a fellowship of people who come together in unity for a shared purpose. It is derived from the Latin word *sodalitas*, meaning companionship. Your Evangelism Sodality is the people who are joining with you in evangelistic passion, prayer, accountability, study, rehearsal, and sharing. This is your evangelism family through which you can lean and be sharpened.

So, a sodality is not a bible study group or a discipleship class. You are engaging in an evangelistic practice with others, not simply studying about it. This means you are more like a football team than a study group. Like any team, there will be felt defeats and wonderful victories. Each of you need one another.

III. The Day of Empowerment

Third, this study builds to week three as the tipping point. Week three launches the “Pentecost Day” of *Excited to Share*.

Just like the early church in Acts, we will prepare for evangelism by prayer and relying on the Holy Spirit to lead us. In the first three weeks, we will prepare our minds and hearts to practice evangelism. At the end of session three, we will experience a special time of prayer and anointing for the Spirit of God to empower us to practice evangelism in our daily lives.

IV. The Proper Evaluation of Evangelism

Many people feel that the way to evaluate the effectiveness of any method of evangelism is by counting how many people make a decision to follow Jesus Christ. In some methods of evangelism the person who leads the most people in the “sinner’s prayer” might be labeled the most successful evangelist. Others might contend that the way to evaluate the effectiveness of evangelism is by how much “seed” (gospel) was spread. In this type of evaluation someone might be labeled as successful if he or she shared Christ with X number of people.

In *Excited to Share*, what will be evaluated is how a person practices evangelism, not in how many people respond. This creates a way of evangelism that is judged as successful based on how it is practiced in terms of witness, rather than on what it produces. The “product” of evangelism is not the listener, but rather the product is realized through participation in its practice.

A true practice is contemplated by the actions that constitute it more than what it produces. The ends and means are not mutually exclusive, but to see evangelism in this way is quite a different concept. “It may seem counterintuitive, but, what is needed most in our time is not more attention to ‘effectiveness’ and ‘success’ in evangelism (at least as those words have come to be used in the context of production) but learning once again as a church how to bear faithful witness.”¹

Sodality Discussion

- How do you feel about these four concepts?

1. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 49.

EXCITED TO SHARE

“Part 1: Evangelism is the Activity of God”

I. Preparing Your Heart

Silent Prayer

We are going to spend the next few minutes praying silently. Please pray for openness to the leading of God. If you need to clear your mind from the business of the day, ask for forgiveness, deal with some pressing spiritual issue, or simply center yourself in Christ, this is the moment. Now please find a comfortable position and let’s pray silently? (3 min.)

Kick Off Questions

- What do you think evangelism is?
- Do you have a story about evangelism you could share?
- What is the most difficult thing about evangelism?

II. The Meaning of Evangelism?

The word evangelism means “good news,” or “gospel.”

When evangelism is in the form of an action, it consists of those acts that reveal the good news of God, and invite people into that good news.

The Roman world had its evangelism too. Throughout the empire, Caesar’s evangelists would proclaim the good news of Caesar. They would preach how Caesar had brought *Pax Romana* (peace throughout Rome), good roads, and security among other things. Emperor worship would then begin, and people would shout out, “Hail Caesar. Caesar is Lord.”



Exploring Scripture

God’s good news was born into this Roman context, but God’s good news was very different. The Bible describes God’s good news in many ways: kingdom of God (Mark 1:15), light (John 15:6), life, (John 10:10), power of God for salvation (Romans 1:6), but primarily it is Jesus himself who is the good news (Mark 1:1; Eph. 3:7; John 14:6).

In Luke 2:1-7, Luke intends on presenting a comparison of the two gospels, that of Rome and that of God. The power of Caesar Augustus versus the humbleness of the baby born in Bethlehem. The latter seems like a laughable gospel for the world, but verse after verse and story after story, Luke makes his case for Jesus as Lord of the world. Luke ends his writings with Paul preaching the good news of Jesus in Rome (Acts 28). The good news of Jesus had spread!

Sodality Discussion & Application



- What stands out to you here?
- Share with the group how the good news came to you?

III. The Source of Evangelism

Throughout scripture, the primary agent of revealing this good news was not Paul or any of the apostles. It was not even the church. It was God himself. No one can practice a faithful method of evangelism unless God is moving in his or her life.



Exploring Scripture

God the Evangelist

One of the first moments in Scripture where God can be seen as the agent of good news is Genesis 12:1-3.

(Read Genesis 12:1-3)

God's election of Abraham to, "Go forth, and in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed," clearly had global implications. Abram was called, not for his own benefit, but so that God could benefit the whole world through him.

One commentator explained it like this, "The election of Abraham is not designed to isolate this family from the other families of the earth. On the contrary, this family is to become the vehicle by which all families of the earth may be reconciled to God. In Abraham and in his descendants 'all the nations of the earth are to be blessed.' Thus, the selection of Abraham's family is a means to an end in God's overall plan for his world."²

In this promise of God, the good news of salvation has begun and the seeds of God's global vision have been planted. For God so loved the world has been revealed! God is the initiator and founder of the promise and the great hope. He is the evangelist in the text bringing good news to the world, that through Abram the world will be blessed.

God's Spirit Empowering Evangelism

The evangelism of the New Testament did not begin with brave people going out and sharing the good news of Jesus. As in Genesis 12, good news begins as a movement of God.

2. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 52.

(Read Acts 2:1-4)

From the story of Pentecost in Acts 2, one gains insight into the *pneumatology* of evangelism, which is the work of the Holy Spirit regarding evangelism. *Pneumatology* is the study of the Holy Spirit.



Sodality Discussion & Application

- At this first look in Acts 2, is there anything that stands out?
- Now why would a study of the Holy Spirit be important for evangelism?

Author of *Evangelism After Christendom*, Brian Stone, writes that evangelism is first and foremost works of the Holy Spirit, and must in fact be understood as God's own activity.³ It is by this filling of the Spirit that the disciples began to preach the gospel. They couldn't do it on their own.

The filling of the Holy Spirit is seen in this text as the catalyst for the evangelism that spontaneously broke forth on that historic day. It is significant that the Holy Spirit is demonstrated as the true evangelist of Acts 2, and the only person capable of being able to draw people's hearts to faith in Jesus by transcending barriers of language and culture.

From Acts 2, it is demonstrated how the evangelistic movement of the early church was not initiated by human effort; rather, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost launched and sustained the evangelism of the early church. With this in mind, it is vitally important for churches to remember that they could create the best evangelistic strategy in the world, but if it does not have a strong emphasis on the reliance of the Holy Spirit and filling of the Holy Spirit, it is less likely to be a faithful practice.

This starting point establishes evangelism as a sovereign activity of God.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament offer a picture of evangelism that has God as the main champion. When the gospel has changed our lives, our desire is to share it and God calls us to participate with Him in evangelism. When we practice evangelism, the only way this practice is faithful is by the filling of the Spirit.

IV. Getting Ready for Evangelism

What can Christians do to place their practice of evangelism in the power of God?

(Read Acts 1:4-5; 2:1)

3. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 225.



Exploring Scripture

Scripture reveals a time of waiting, hoping, and possibly even praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit. One of the unique things in these verses is the portrayal of togetherness. They are not waiting for the Holy Spirit in isolation. Notice how there is a sense of oneness and unity as they waited. And when the Holy Spirit filled them and empowered them, it was not a picture of individualism or isolation. The Spirit didn't fill them at different moments and in different places. Chapter two says that the Spirit arrived when they were together.

The work of the church is a togetherness work. This is why an Evangelism Sodality is important. God moves among his people when they come together to seek Him and wait for Him. God moves among his people when they desire for God to work and study the task before them.

Consider the evangelistic work of Paul and Barnabas. God spoke to the church when they were together worshiping and fasting about sending out Paul. It seems like significant movements of the Spirit occur when God's people come together with desire. There can be supernatural movements and empowerments when a group of believers come together to pray and seek God for evangelism.

The word "wait" in Acts 1:4 is the same root word (*meno*) used in the *Septuagint* (Greek translation of the O.T.) in Isaiah 40:31, "But those who wait/hope in the Lord, he will renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles." God is mover in the words of the one evangelizing and the hearts of the listener.



Sodality Discussion & Application

- What comes to your mind as you read Acts 1:4?
- Have you ever considered the role of the Spirit in your evangelism?
- If evangelism is initiated by God, why do Christians attempt to practice evangelism without waiting on God to fill them?
- If you have ever wanted to practice evangelism but for some reason did not, or could not, is there a possibility you attempted it without the filling of the Holy Spirit?

V. The Practice

Our Evangelism Sodality is going to wait on, and pray for the filling of the Spirit. Begin praying for God to move in your heart. Ask Him to give you a desire to offer witness to the good news.

Excited to Share

“Part 2: A Desire for Holy Spirit Filling”

I. Preparing Your Heart

Silent Prayer

We are going to spend the next few minutes praying silently. Please pray for openness to the leading of God. If you need to clear your mind from the business of the day, ask for forgiveness, deal with some pressing spiritual issue, or simply center yourself in Christ, this is the moment. Now please find a comfortable position and let's pray silently? (3 min.)

Kick Off Questions?

- Did last week's lesson come to mind at all during this last week? And if so, what did you think?
- Why is this a valuable study for you?

II. Challenges Facing Evangelism Today

This is the second week to consider the imperative work of the Holy Spirit in evangelism. One of the most obvious ways to identify the need for the Holy Spirit is to identify the various challenges facing any practice of evangelism today. There are certain challenges that, on our best day and with our best people, we simply cannot figure out.

1. The Challenge of Our Society

Recent studies have shown a drastic decline in religion in the West.⁴ Studies conducted by The Pew Research Center and Barna Research Group agree that the church is in decline, and those who believe in the uniqueness of Jesus as Lord have declined.⁵ Many researchers have suggested reasons for this decline. One reason is the current philosophical shifts taking place. Postmodernism is a broad word describing many changes today. One of the characteristics of postmodernism is called *deconstruction*. Deconstruction refers to the energy put into questioning all ideas which society once held as absolute.

Until society can come to some agreement about what is absolute truth, the idea of plural truths and relativism will persist. Where there is little agreement, people will either fight or tolerate each other. Our society is currently trying to figure out how to tolerate everybody's idea of truth, and most of the time, this means keeping all claims to truth on the same level. If anyone proposes that their view is of greater truth, then people with opposing views might rise up in

4. Pew Research Center, “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious.”

5. Frost, *Exiles*, 6.

offense. Postmodern society feels like a boat, where everyone is trying not to rock the boat too far to any side.

Stanley Grenz feels that, “During the 1960s, the mood that would characterize postmodernism became attractive.”⁶ If the movement of deconstruction indeed began in the 1960s, this means it has had half a century to develop, and today the rejection of absolutes is staggering to the modern mindset. In short, no major metanarrative seems to be secure or sacred.

In this context, the most common criticism toward evangelism is that it is intolerant and, therefore, unethical in its nature because it attempts to share what the evangelist believes is an absolute truth.

N. T. Wright suggests, “The word evangelism still sends shivers down the spines of many people. There are various reasons for this. Some people have been scared off by frightening or bullying harangues or tactless and offensive behavior or embarrassing and naïve presentations of the gospel. Others have never suffered such indignities but heard or read about them and are glad to have a good excuse to pour scorn on all evangelism—as though, because some people do it badly, nobody should ever do it at all.”⁷

Sodality Discussion and Application



- Do you see any opportunities for evangelism in our society?
- Is the answer to simply move forward and tell people about Jesus even if they get mad, because, as the Bible says, the seed will fall on all kinds of soil (Matthew 13)? Or Is the answer to be quiet and stop telling the good news?

2. The Challenge of our Own Ability

There is yet another difficult issue facing evangelism. Not only can today’s society be a difficult context for evangelism, but furthermore, we as a church cannot claim a great deal of competency for evangelism.

For instance, how do we find the apostles after Jesus’ resurrection? (Read John 20:19)

Exploring Scripture



The Bible describes an emotionally timid and mentally confused state of the first disciples. They are seen locking themselves in rooms and avoiding crowds (John 20:19). The power of the Jewish authorities must have been a significant threat, and in the shadow of the Sanhedrin (Jewish ruling council) and the Romans, these fishermen from Galilee, tax collectors,

6. Grenz, *A Primer for Postmodernism*, 16.

7. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 225.

followers of John the Baptist, and a zealot had little influence. The deck was certainly stacked against them, and they felt it.

The fact is simple. Even though they had walked with Jesus, and even though most of them had seen the resurrected Christ, they did not have the ability to practice evangelism. Not on their own. The implications of God's global mission have complexities and challenges that humans cannot tackle alone.

As talented as some people may seem, research supports the truism that no one can bear faithful witness outside of the power of the Holy Spirit.



Sodality Discussion & Application

- What all was keeping the disciples from going out and proclaiming that Jesus had risen?
- What all might be keeping today's Christians from evangelizing?

3. The Challenge of the Heart of the Listener

There are many more challenges facing our ability to practice evangelism such as, spiritual forces of evil, different methods of communication, and a lack communal connectedness. Many of these could be discussed, but let's discuss just one more reality. We cannot change people's hearts. A friend of mine told this story.

There was a moment when my daughter was about 9 months. As I was feeding her she would continue to stand up in her high chair. Obviously, it was dangerous and I didn't want her to fall. So, I asked her to sit back down. But she continued to stand. Then I lowered my voice, and instead of asking her, I told her to sit back down. She continued to stand with that special little look of defiance. So took her by the shoulders, sat her down, and buckled her into the chair. Her little eyes filled up with tears, not because she was sad, but because she was mad. She glared at me as if saying, "I may be sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside."

It is important to keep in mind that we cannot make people love God with their heart. Consider the implications of this challenge. Is there anyone you sincerely care about, and he or she does not believe in Christ? Would you share with the Sodality the first name of the person on your mind and how long you've known him or her?

Now, if we cannot change his or her heart, the question is, how can your loved one find life in Christ?



Sodality Discussion & Application

- Which one of these challenges most concerns you?

III. What is Impossible with Man is Possible with God- Luke 18:27

1. The Spirit's Work in the Life of the Witness

When these challenges are stacked up, it appears that evangelism has little chance to succeed if God does not engage. The forces of intimidation are strong in this postmodern era, and without “a Spirit of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7), there is little hope for today’s evangelism.

So, God sent his Spirit as the evangelist to breath evangelism into the lives of the church that they will be His witnesses, and it worked! People began believing, and changing.

William Abraham notes, “Those called to give themselves in active service in the rule of God need some assurance that they do not face the world on their own but that they can face it with hope, knowing that they will be accompanied, led, and used by the Holy Spirit.”⁸

By the Holy Spirit, *anyone* can bear witness to the gospel. You can too!

N.T. Wright states that the first reality informing his theology of mission is the Holy Spirit, who makes “*available to the people of God the same transforming power that energized the life and ministry of Jesus and raised him from the dead.*”⁹

How does the Spirit empower us? There are many ways, but here are two.

(Read Acts 2:1-18; 4:8; 4:25)

Examining Scripture



Scripture amply demonstrates how God provides the words of evangelism. In Acts 2, the Apostles’ ability to speak in tongues was clearly an ability to communicate the good news in a way that people understood.

The Spirit can also be seen empowering the Apostles with courage. The terrified Apostles became a powerhouse that defied all who would seek to silence them. Scholars feel that there is simply no other way to explain the life change of the Apostles than a supernatural act.

2. A Spirit's Work in the Life of the Listener

8. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 159.

9. Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 501.

Once again, consider the evangelism in Acts 2.

(Read Acts 2:1-5)



Exploring Scripture

Do you see what's happening here? In this passage the Holy Spirit is not only working in the life of the Apostles bearing witness, the Spirit is also working in the life of the listener.

Scripture has many stories of people's response to the message of God which could only be explained as a work of the Spirit in the lives of the hearers. Jonah's message consisted of a simple threat (Jonah 3:4), and the whole city turned to God. The Samaritan woman's message about Jesus was by no means polished (John 4:29), yet many Samaritans believed.

Even if the disciples were capable of speaking the gospel on their own, which they were not, the people never would have been able to hear it, understand it, or respond to it without the Spirit. *The Spirit is seen conquering every evangelistic challenge.* What is impossible with man is possible with God.

A Word of Caution: When the Holy Spirit's role is ignored it can lead some Christians to approach the listener with the unbiblical mindset that their purpose is to save the listener. They take on the role of the Spirit. Anyone wishing to practice evangelism needs to understand what he or she can do, but perhaps more importantly, what he or she cannot do.

Only the Spirit can change a life. This means that whenever anyone attempts evangelism *without* a strong emphasis on the role of the Spirit, there will be a tendency for the evangelist to take on that role.

An important note here, we don't do a good job as the Spirit. We may even hurt people when we try and play that role! History attests to abusive methods of evangelism.

One scholar noted, "This is not just a matter of getting the word out to all who will listen, using any means of communication that comes to hand. It is a matter of the power of the living God, unveiling himself to the minds and hearts of the listener as the gospel is taught and made known."¹⁰

A person led to offer the good news needs to trust that the Holy Spirit is working in the lives of their hearers so that the person doesn't take on too much. We leave the transformation in the hands of God.

Therefore, in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit's work was evident in the apostles' ability to speak the good news, in their courage to speak the good news, and in the lives of those who listened by enabling them to hear and understand the good news.

10. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 60.



Sodality Discussion & Application

- Do you have any story of a time when someone seemed to take on the role of the Holy Spirit?
- What can the church do at this point?

V. Seeking the Filling of the Spirit

Many Christians are afraid that the Holy Spirit will make them act in silly ways or say odd things. In many Christian circles the Holy Spirit is not much of a focus because of the perceived abuses of the Spirit, of which there are many. However, it also could be pointed out that grace is often abused, but we do not marginalize grace.

The point is, too often the fear of the Holy Spirit has led many churches to diminish the role of the Holy Spirit, which consequently, is the only one who can achieve evangelism. So, let's take the risk and allow the fullness of the Holy Spirit to be realized!

Let's not be afraid of the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that the Apostles were filled with the Spirit and began to speak the tongues. The church needs this same filling today for evangelism. The filling of the Spirit can be understood as being exceedingly sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, or the realization of the Spirit which already indwells the Christian. There is also a chance that the filling of the Spirit may occur at different times in a believer's life.

These conclusions indicate that any effort of evangelism without consideration of this theology needs to be reconsidered. This Spirit infused pattern can become the catalyst for any authentic evangelistic practice in the life of the apostolic church.



Sodality Discussion & Application

- If we are to practice evangelism what should we do to be filled with the Spirit?

V. The Practice

Let's pray for the Lord to fill us with his Spirit in order that we may be given everything we need for the practice of evangelism in our lives.

Excited to Share

Part 3: Sharing the Gospel as the Kingdom of God

I. Preparing Your Heart

Silent Prayer

We are going to spend the next few minutes praying silently. Please pray for openness to the leading of God. If you need to clear your mind from the business of the day, ask for forgiveness, deal with some pressing spiritual issue, or simply center yourself in Christ, this is the moment. Now please find a comfortable position and let's pray silently? (3 min.)

Kick Off Questions?

- Have you had any thoughts from last week?
- How are you feeling so far?

I. The Kingdom of God

We are beginning the second major section, that is based on the idea of the kingdom of God, and how to share the kingdom with others. What evangelism is trying to do is present the good news. In Mark 1:15, Jesus said that the “*kingdom of God was at hand, repent and believe the good news.*”

There is an old debate about the good news. Scholars have argued as to what parts of the Bible is the true essence of the gospel. Sometimes they call this gospel essence the *kerygma*. Is it only Jesus' death and resurrection that is the essence? Or is it more than that? Is Jesus' life and his triumphant reign and return part of the essential gospel? What about God fixing the world and setting it right through Jesus? What about getting to be a part of the church and live as a disciple of Jesus? What part really needs to be included in the good news?

If someone is going to give their life to the gospel, evangelism needs to try and offer the fullest picture of that gospel possible! For one reason, it's amazing. After all, what good would it be to have a beautiful painting like Rembrandt's "Return of the Prodigal Son," but only get to see a small portion of it? For another reason, you want people to understand what they are getting involved with.

The concept of the kingdom of God offers a deep and broad picture of the good news of Jesus. There is something compelling and proper in defining the good news as the kingdom of God. First, it is the number one thing Jesus talked about. (Jesus speaks about the Kingdom 37 x in Matthew, 15 x in Mark, 26 x in Luke, and 2 x John.) Second, Jesus himself is the king.

(Read John 3:3-17)



Examining Scripture

In this story, we see Jesus is witnessing to Nicodemus about something that is known (v. 11). What did Jesus know that was so significant? In other words, to what exactly is Jesus witnessing?

Now, if we could figure it out, it would help give us clues to the content of the gospel—also referred to as the *kerygma*. Then we can know what we need to tell others.

Notice the kingdom language that launches this story (vs. 3:3; 3:5). It says that the kingdom of God is given to people who are born again.

Then in v. 13, it talks about the “descending” of Jesus Christ from heaven. For early Christians, the incarnation (Jesus’ birth) provides for this conclusion, as no other option is available—Jesus is the way into the kingdom of God because he came down from God. So, his birth is important. Sadly, and often, the ideas of the incarnation (birth of Jesus) is left out of evangelism.

Jesus also speaks of ascending into heaven as well. Notice v. 13. “No one has ever gone up into heaven...” (ascension) except he that came from heaven, (incarnation). So, there is not only incarnation but resurrection and ascension in this story as well. This is Jesus’ witness to Nicodemus.

Now look at how v. 14 alludes to the death of Jesus on the cross by utilizing a famous story in the life of Moses (Numbers 21:8).

Now, put it all together. The Gospel of John seems to unite the fullness of the life of Jesus, birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. And in v. 16 this undivided descent and ascent of Jesus demonstrates the love God has for his creation and how the kingdom has come and what it is accomplishing. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.”**

This is the gospel, and there is power in its fullness. Only the full *kerygma* of Jesus offers a compelling hope for the world, not just the individual. So, if our witness is going to be faithful it needs to embody this fullness.

Instead of making the gospel as simple as possible, let’s try telling it right.

Witnessing to the gospel (evangelism) is judged as successful, not by the response of the listener, but as to its internal qualities of faithfulness to this kerygmatic fullness, meaning all the elements are there. **When you evangelized, did you tell it in its fullness?** That’s what God wants.

Tell the fullest story possible!

Jesus is amazing and it comes from an amazing history of God moving in the lives of a people called the Jews. One day he is coming back and we will all be resurrected with him and everything will be set right. We are invited to begin living this resurrected hope as a part of His church right now. God will set our world right by completely establishing his kingdom, and through Jesus he wants us to begin that kingdom in our lives today.



Sodality Discussion & Application

- Can you think of a method of evangelism that sells the full good news short?
- What are some of the most exciting things in the Bible that you think are worthy of sharing?
- What are some passages of scripture that help tell the full story?

II. The Spirit's Ability to Bring the Kingdom

Consider now the relationship between the good news and the Holy Spirit.

Two Greek words are translated Spirit; one is *ruach* and the other is *arrabon*. Missionary and theologian Leslie Newbigin explains that *arrabon* is used in relation to the coming of the kingdom of God “as cash in advance is related to the full settlement of an account.”¹¹

The kingdom of God is God's wonderful rule and reign on this earth as it is in heaven. Therefore, whatever is good news about heaven, the Spirit is ushering in part of that good news now.

It is the Spirit or Arrabon who brings the kingdom of God breaking into our world and defeating the strongholds which have set themselves up against the kingdom of God. The Spirit leads transformation in this world where people are healed of addictions, wars are stopped, people in poverty are given a chance at life, marriages on the brink of divorce are held together, and so many other wonderful things. It's all the work of the Arrabon!

When God's rule and reign broke into this world in Jesus Christ, people were healed. The Spirit continues that work today! That's the good news. People can be healed and transformed. Evangelism is grounded in such terms in **Matthew 25:31-46**. In this parable, Christians are held accountable for a kingdom kind of evangelism.

The church cannot engage this good news, founded in and with the kingdom of God, without the one who brings the kingdom, the *Arrabon*.

You need the Spirit to bring the gospel into your life, and you need the Spirit to help you bear witness to this good news for others to see.

11. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 62.

Sodality Discussion & Application



- If evangelism means “good news” or “gospel” and it is the Spirit that brings this good news, then how can we ground our evangelism in this powerful Spirit?
- If the good news can help the loved one you pictured in the last session, and the Spirit is the key, where do you come in?

III. The Practice

Now, you know two important things.

First, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. By his power we can proclaim the good news. Second, the story of Jesus is grander and deeper and more compelling than we ever imagined. This story can be used by the Spirit to transform anybody.

Pentecost Day

If the Holy Spirit is crucial, then if we are to practice evangelism, let’s humbly ask God.

This is the Pentecost Day of *Excited to Share*. If you are ready, let’s pray for each other before we go. Let’s lay hands on one another and pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit, that we may be led to moments of evangelism.

Excited to Share

Part 4: Why Does “Story” Matter

I. Preparing Your Heart

Silent Prayer

We are going to spend the next few minutes praying silently. Please pray for openness to the leading of God. If you need to clear your mind from the business of the day, ask for forgiveness, deal with some pressing spiritual issue, or simply center yourself in Christ, this is the moment. Now please find a comfortable position and let’s pray silently? (3 min.)

Kick Off Questions?

- How are you feeling so far?

II. What is the Narrative Gospel?

In the previous lesson, you learned about telling the gospel in fullness and beauty, as embodied in the kingdom of God. There are many moments in scripture that can help the gospel come alive. You now need to consider a great method to share this exciting expansive gospel.

If you want to get somewhere, you need a good vehicle. What is your vehicle to offer the gospel?

1. Propositional Evangelism

Obviously, if the gospel has many deep elements, then a few points may not be sufficient. Remember, we are judged by our practice, not by how many people make decisions, that’s the Spirit’s work. Another name for a point of truth is called a “proposition.” Sometimes propositions are used to tell the gospel.

One of the shortest methods of evangelism is often referred to as the ABCs. A-Admit to God you are a sinner. B-Believe in Jesus as God’s Son. C-Confess your faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

These points can be derived from many passages of scripture which teach these truths. Romans 6:23 teaches that we are sinners headed for destruction, but God saves us through Jesus Christ. Romans 10:9 says that if we “confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that Jesus rose from the dead, we will be saved.” These points and passages represent a significant picture of the gospel, but probably not the fullest picture of it.

In his book, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age*, Brad Kallenberg explains that offering a few propositions of truth are not understandable without proper background.¹² The concept of “B-Believe in Jesus as God’s son,” needs some context behind it. The ideas, though very true, can come off as somewhat ambiguous and can leave people without a sufficient understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

(Read Matthew 28:19)

We are commanded in this text to make disciples of Jesus. Witnessing to the gospel must take into consideration the depth of following Christ as a disciple. Therefore, we need to share the gospel in a way that sets people on the path of discipleship.



Sodality Discussion & Application

- What are some important “Bible moments” that you feel like would be very helpful to share with people, but that the ABCs might leave out?

Here is another good example of what we are talking about. The popular “Four Spiritual Laws” method of evangelism centered on a set of propositions (points) culminating with an invitation to accept Jesus as one’s personal Lord and Savior based on accepting the sequential propositions about him. The four steps are: 1) God loves you and has a plan for your life, 2) Man is sinful and separated from God’s plan, 3) Jesus Christ is the answer for man’s sin, connecting man to God by his loving death on the cross, and 4) by faith receive Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Notice that in the “Four Spiritual Laws,” Jesus’ birth and life are left out. The election of God’s people Israel through whom Jesus comes is left out. The global movement of God to inaugurate his kingdom in the present and future is left out. There is no description of the movement people are joining, which is the church. This kind of evangelism may help someone do something, but it may not be the most effective way to help him begin a life as a disciple.

In all, the effort to simplify the gospel might actually strip it of its richness. Even though it’s simple, it may not be as compelling or understandable. Also, if the continuing movement of the Spirit’s kingdom work is left out, the gospel seems stuck in history rather than alive and active today.

2. Narrative Evangelism

When sharing the full gospel; what if, instead of highlighting a few points we rather tell the gospel as a story. Story has the capacity to carry more of its grandness. Let’s try to move from proposition points to story.

When my girls were little they would jump up onto my lap and say, “Daddy, tell us a story.” They never said, “Daddy preach us a sermon.” Story has great potential to capture the heart

12. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 116.

and imagination of people in a way that propositions do not. Let's see how the apostles practiced evangelism.

(Read Acts 2:17-36)

Sodality Discussion & Application



- What all do you notice about Peter's witness?
- Does he begin with talking about personal sin?
- How does he use the Old Testament?
- Peter makes a lot of points, but he tells them in what way?

Another word for story is narrative. The "narrative gospel," refers to a fuller gospel picture. It's told in such a way that the plot and characters seem to rise to the surface. In **Appendix I**, you can find an example of narrative gospel.

Brad Kallenberg also points out that in this transitional society where postmoderns are skeptical of propositional absolutes, evangelism needs to embrace some mystery and vulnerability. In this context, narrative storytellers have something valuable to offer, because story brings back the mystery and vulnerability. To this point, Brian McLaren tries to help churches understand how the world hears today, suggesting how they can share the gospel in this new context:

Our words will seek to be servants of mystery, not removers of it...as if the mysteries of faith could be captured like fine-print conditions in a legal document and reduced to safe equations (propositions). Mysteries, however, cannot be captured so precisely.¹³

In other words, because of how people hear and understand today, modern rhetoric needs to depend more on the power of story. Story is not only more capable of holding on its shoulders a fuller gospel, but people are more likely to comprehend it and as the Spirit leads, give their life to it.

Brian Stone places the practice of evangelism within the "virtuous practice" of retelling the narrative. He writes, "This story, with its various characters, subplots, twists, turns, and surprises, literally 'makes sense' out of the Christian life by depicting its beginning, way, and end and thereby orienting us on a journey."¹⁴ This kind of approach seems much more normal to life.

It is as simple as this, people can relate to a story, and they can see how their lives fit into a story.

13. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, 89.

14. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 55.

Sodality Discussion & Application



- What do you think?
- Have you ever thought of evangelism as story telling?

III. Comparing the Gospel Story to Other Stories

Another important opportunity is presented when offering the gospel in the form of narrative witness. The listener will hear the story and naturally notice its distinctiveness from other stories. When this distinctness is grasped, the listener is faced with a decision, “Which story will I follow?”

This was the catalyst behind the people’s response in Acts 2, “When the people heard this [Peter’s narrative witness] they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”

As the church finds herself in a hostile world, evangelism becomes a subversive story. Walter Brueggemann says that an evangelistic announcement is like the announcement “of a successful political coup.”¹⁵ The gospel of Jesus is an alternative to the so-called gospels of the day, undermining their power and offering a different way to life. This contrasting alternative must be brought into the evangelistic strategy, and story has this potential.



Sodality Discussion & Application

- What do you think Brueggemann means when he says that the announcement of the gospel is like the announcement of a “successful political coup?”

IV. Invitational Story Telling

The hope of evangelism is that hearers can change stories, as Stone asserts, “Christians become Christians not merely by hearing a story but by being formed bodily into one.”¹⁶ This means that not all conversations about Jesus can be considered evangelistic. Evangelism is a form of witness that is invitational; for example, in John 4:29, the woman’s statement of “come and see” represents the invitation. The potential that Jesus has for everyone is made available—the secret is now open for all to experience.

15. Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism*, 26.

16. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*.

Invitation is a crucial element of what makes a practice evangelistic rather than simply a religious conversation. The story of the kingdom of God does not end without invitation. In Acts 2, after Peter tells the story of Jesus, he ends with an invitation for the listener to repent and be baptized.

Examining Scripture



In Acts 2:38, the Greek word for repent, *metanoia*, means to change (*meta*) your mind (*noia*), or turn away from something and turn toward something else.

In the method of presenting the gospel in narrative form, this kind of invitation to repent comes naturally. The repenting of the convert is expressed in terms of turning away from one's old stories that defined one's prior life and joining in the hopeful story of Jesus. John Bowen writes, "Repentance means turning away from other paths and turning toward Jesus, and so it's actually a very liberating thing . . . We get to turn away from things that would destroy us, and experience God's new life instead."¹⁷

Whenever someone hears the story of Christ, they have a decision to either stay their own course or switch their current life's story and become one of the characters enacting the movement of God. Stone calls this "new story reorienting."

Excellent evangelism bears witness to the story of God, then helps people imagine their life as a part of it.¹⁸ To evangelize in this way keeps the emerging disciple from gravitating into an existential belief system that is void of practical implications of that belief.

N. T. Wright describes this kind of invitation in his book, *The New Testament and the People of God*. There he gives an idea of the people of God continuing the unwritten part of the biblical narrative. The church carries the gospel story into the future with its own innovation that is consistent with the plot line.¹⁹ The evangelist helps the listener connect the dots between the story of Jesus and his or her own story, at which time switching stories becomes full of imaginative potential. How might this look within a real evangelistic exchange? After telling the story of Christ and comparing it to other stories, the evangelist can offer an invitation that could look like this,

Can you picture your life with Christ? Imagine it for a moment. Are you feeding someone who doesn't have anything to eat? Are you singing? Are you joyful? Are you less greedy, less angry, or less violent? Perhaps you are satisfied with what God has given you and set free from the endless desire for more. Are you involved with a group of people who are culturally and racially diverse but joined by a belief in the love of Christ? Are you seeing through the lies in our society claiming that only powerful, talented people matter? Have you found patience with your parents, children, or spouse? These types of things are a

17. Bowen, *Evangelism for Normal People*, 128.

18. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 57.

19. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 141.

part of God's kingdom. How can you be a part of the movement, a part of the story? God wants you to be a part. You are invited to turn away from anything that falls short of this picture, and to embrace the story of God in Jesus Christ. Do you feel led to? The Bible says this is the kingdom of God, and it is more valuable than anything (Mat 13). Do you sense God calling you?

VI. The Practice

Let's try to practice this idea of telling the gospel as a story.

1. Everyone get a partner.
2. Write down some of the important things in the Bible that you believe are really important and excited that people need to hear.
3. How could you string these together in the historical movement of scripture? Which happened first, second, and so forth? Who are the main players and what happened to people's lives in these moments? Tell it.
4. How is this story still powerful today? And how is it different from other stories?
5. Now bring your story into it.
6. Last, offer the story as an invitation; others are welcome to join it too.

Excited to Share

Part 5: Ethical Witness through Living and Authenticity

I. Preparing Your Heart

Silent Prayer

We are going to spend the next few minutes praying silently. Please pray for openness to the leading of God. If you need to clear your mind from the business of the day, ask for forgiveness, deal with some pressing spiritual issue, or simply center yourself in Christ, this is the moment. Now please find a comfortable position and let's pray silently? (3 min.)

Kick Off Questions?

- How are you feeling so far?

II. The Living Witness

We are beginning the last major section of *Excited to Share*. The next two sessions will focus on the idea of ethical evangelism. This is an idea rarely discussed in evangelism. In the history of evangelism there has been a covert idea that “anything goes” to get someone saved.

Many Christians today are less inclined to practice a form of evangelism where “anything goes.” Simply put, they don't want to be a jerk. Have you ever encountered a sales person who was so pushy that you would never go back to him or her again? Is there a way to practice evangelism without being a jerk?

Perhaps this has already crossed your mind during this study. Two important aspects of ethical evangelism are, what is your lifestyle communicating, and can you honestly share how the gospel has impacted you.

First, verbal proclamation is not the only way to practice evangelism. By understanding evangelism in terms of bearing witness to the good news of the kingdom of God, we open the door for evangelism to include anything than points people to the kingdom of God and invites them to join the movement. In other words, the way you live can be evangelism too.

(Read John 9)

Examining Scripture



In John 9, the man's witness was based on reality; his transformation from blindness to sight served as a witness to Jesus. His life was changed, and this was a crucial part of his witness.

Ethical evangelism is grounded in a witness that has evidence, without which it is hypocritical and empty. The evidence is the life of the church. The reality of the man's open eyes

witnessed to a truth that something wonderful had happened. Hopefully, we can point to real wonderful movements of God as well.

Jesus healed people over and over. It can even be demonstrated from John 9 that Jesus shared the fullness of the kingdom, in that he both healed the man and verbally shared his identity as the eschatological Son of Man.

As Jesus alluded to in the Sermon on the Mount, living out the kingdom is light to all people. The witness of kingdom life demystifies the abstract concepts of the gospel in its spoken forms. In other words, the life of the Christian offers something tangible and compelling to which proclamation can point.

How does one describe ideas like “faith,” without someone’s life to point to as an example? Otherwise, ideas like “faith” are simply an existential religious belief with no practical implications. That is not Christianity!

(Read Matthew 25:31-46)

This parable is about the kingdom of God. Notice how the real citizens of that kingdom enacted their witness. They showed the good news by bringing it to reality in people’s lives!

In the same way, the life of the church acts as a significant witness. We picture what heaven is like and begin bringing that picture into our world. So, when our church engages our mission, demonstrating loving kindness, these actions help validate/authenticate/demonstrate/ our verbal witness. People can only understand what we are meaning by showing them an example. When the life of the church is rooted in the kingdom, it offers the crucial evidence of its words.

Sadly, the role that lifestyle plays within evangelism has often been a source of great debate. This study utilizes the life change of the man born blind to suggest that evangelistic witness is most complete and most ethical when it involves both the words and life of the church.

It is entirely possible that reducing evangelism to verbal witness alone may stem from a deeper, ethical issue. Perhaps the reduction begins with how the evangelist views the listening person. In his book *The Ethics of Evangelism*, Elmer Thiessen suggests, “Ethical proselytizing that respects and protects the dignity of persons must always be an expression of concern for the whole person and for all of his or her needs—physical, social, economic, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. To care only for the salvation of the souls of persons is unethical. It involves an objectification of a part of the person, and as such violates that person’s dignity.”²⁰

So, living out the gospel in ways that are life giving to others is very evangelistic. Like the man born blind (John 9), everyone can evangelize because anyone can bear witness by living out the good news. His good news was his sight. What is your good news? It’s to this question that we turn in a moment.

20. Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, 165.

Sodality Discussion & Application



- Do you feel that your life can be a witness to the kingdom of God?
- When and where have you seen this demonstrated in the life of a Christian or church?

III. The Authentic Witness

If you are going to practice faithful evangelism, it must be ethical. One of the most ethical forms of witnessing is not only to live out the good news, but to share your own personal story honestly.

(Read John 9:15-25)

Examining Scripture



Did you notice how the man born blind offered his witness and was not a jerk when he did it? He was not intolerant; nor was he narrow. He simply told his story. This is a great example of ethical evangelism, and you can do this too. You can tell your story authentically.

The man's witness is a triumph of success, although the result of his witness may not be considered effective or successful by some who measure success in terms of numbers of converts. The Pharisees were neither convinced nor converted, but they had to deal with his story.

His story of what Jesus had done was now out and on the loose working in their minds and hearts. Everything that happens subsequently to this witness is the job of the Holy Spirit.

“I know that I was blind, but now I see” is an authentic witness to the kingdom of God, and its success is understood as a practice embodying ends internal to itself. Let's judge our evangelism by how we practice it and what we say. Did we tell about our life in the gospel?

Sodality Discussion & Application



- Do you feel there is anything wrong with someone sharing their story?
- Did you know that telling your own story is not intolerant or unethical, in fact, it is completely human? What do you think?
-

A theological beginning point for evangelism could simply be natural, a reality of human nature. When discussing the ethics of evangelism, Thiessen quotes John Haughey, Senior Fellow, Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University, who declared, “It seems

to be endemic to the way we are as human beings to promote with others what we ourselves have come to understand as true and good.”²¹

To not share what has been found as valuable is anathema to self. If sharing one’s story was intolerant or unethical we would not have *Twitter*. What kind of people stay silent about what they find as good and meaningful?

This is huge because none of us want to be intolerant of others. How do we share the gospel without being intolerant? By sharing how the gospel has impacted us? Most people like a good story. If the good news has touched your life, then you ought to have a good story to tell.

The word “natural” is key. It is a natural part of humanity to talk about what matters most. This demonstrates the absurdity of the postmodern accusation that evangelism in and of itself is intolerant, narrow, and even dangerous.

If it is considered intolerant to others to share deeply held religious ideas, which undoubtedly shape much of one’s life, then what is worth sharing in life? Are humans relegated to sharing about things that matter little to them or others? All people will evangelize about something because all people are innately evangelists. It is obvious that the question is not whether to share or not to share, but rather, how one goes about sharing, and what is being shared.

Your story in Jesus is key to your practice of evangelism.

Sodality Discussion & Application



- Do you think, by the filling of the Spirit, you could share your story of what Jesus means to you?
- What is one part of your story that is worth telling?

IV. The Humble Witness

One of the most important things we learn from John 9, is that we do not have to know everything in order to evangelize. Hooray!

(Read John 9:24-25)

Examining Scripture



Upon the Pharisees’ second questioning, the man born blind has a witness (*marturia*) to declare in v. 25. His witness is that he can be completely sure of one piece of knowledge, that he indeed was blind but is not anymore, and that Jesus is the reason for this wonder.

21. Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 143.

Throughout the story, there is a battle between what the Pharisees “know” and what the blind man now “knows.” The questioning of the Pharisees reads as an epic struggle for true knowledge, as Craig Keener notes, “Epistemological terms (‘know’) dominate the dialogue scenes and probably provide the metaphoric meaning of ‘sight’ language also prominent in the chapter.”²²

If Keener is correct, then this phrase in v. 25, “I once was blind but now I see,” is possibly a phrase signposting that, “I once did not know that Jesus was from God, but now I do know.” The word “know” is used seven times in this interrogation scene.

Why is this idea of “know” significant? Because, you know something too! You know your story and people cannot take that away from you. This should build your confidence in evangelism. But there is a lot you don’t know.

So stay humble! Like the man born blind, we speak about what we know not about things we don’t know.

Look at how the man born blind simply holds to his experience in the face of those who attempt to cast doubt. In Gail O’Day’s words, “The man does not engage the Jewish authorities in the category of their expertise (what constitutes sin according to the law; v. 25a)...”²³ This emerging disciple of Jesus humbly holds to his experience, while the Pharisees attempt to debate him with their expertise.

In the same way, neither does today’s evangelism need to establish airtight arguments on everything from evolution to proving God’s existence! Yea! No doubt, there will always be someone who has far more training in some discipline than does the evangelist.

The power of the man’s witness lies in what he knows for certain, rather than attempting to apply his experience into fields in which he obviously has little training. The Pharisees clearly would have beaten him in a debate about the Law and the Sabbath, as this was their field of knowledge, their wheelhouse. Rather than getting caught up into the dogma of sinfulness of healing on the Sabbath, the man simply stuck to his own field of knowledge, “I don’t know about those things. All I know is that I was blind and now I see.”

This humble witness of the man born blind does not require debating all things or winning all arguments. This is an example of a faithful and quite authentic evangelistic practice, but it is also ethical. It is flat out a lie to pretend that we have every answer to everything. There is much mystery, and we must embrace that mystery with humbleness.

Most people would be interested in hearing a real story about Jesus’ impact on someone’s life, as long as the person doesn’t pretend that their story is a proof text for everything in the world. Let’s stop pretending and allow some mystery. This will be more compelling.

22. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 775.

23. O’Day, *The Gospel of John*, 659.

And remember, people today are skeptical about anyone who claims to have all the answers anyway. In fact, trying to give an answer to everything will actually undermine your witness. It's like you went too far. Someone might think, "I was interested until they started giving shallow answers to every hard question."

The truth is, there is a great deal we don't understand about how it all works, (like the man born blind) no one does, but that does not have to intimidate us from bearing witness to what we do know.



Sodality Discussion & Application

- Does this makes sense to you?
- How might it decrease your level of intimidation in bearing witness if you don't have to argue everything or know everything? Your witness can be successful without having every answer.
- Do you think intimidation plays a role in people not bearing witness?
- What are the things you wish you knew, and which the lack of know have possibly intimidated you from bearing witness?

V. The Practice

Let's practice sharing our stories with each other.

1. Get a partner
2. Share your story in Jesus. (Share how your life has been caught up into the great story of Jesus Christ.)

Excited to Share

Part 6: Ethical Witness Through Respect

I. Preparing Your Heart

Silent Prayer

We are going to spend the next few minutes praying silently. Please pray for openness to the leading of God. If you need to clear your mind from the business of the day, ask for forgiveness, deal with some pressing spiritual issue, or simply center yourself in Christ, this is the moment. Now please find a comfortable position and let's pray silently? (3 min.)

Kick Off Questions?

- How are you feeling so far?

II. Learning Respect

Last session! John Bowen documents the experience of a woman who had a negative encounter with a person trying to convert her. The evangelist asked no questions about her life or tried to understand anything about her but simply launched into a speech. Bowen described the encounter as, “A project, not a person. The verbal message (God loves you) was contradicted by the non-verbal message (you are another project). There was no equality in the conversation, no interest in the other persons’ faith journey, no concern for her pain or perspective. In other words, no respect.”²⁴

Thiessen writes, “It is the dignity and worth of the human being that I believe is the foundation of any adequate ethical theory [of evangelism].”²⁵



Sodality Discussion & Application

- How does this make you feel?
- Have you ever had a negative encounter with a Christian like this?
- Where does our respect for the listener come from?

In *Evangelism After Christendom*, Brian Stone’s view is that evangelism was and is a practice with a singular telos in mind. (Telos is the ultimate end, aim, or hope of something that affects how that thing is approached in the present.)

24. Bowen, *Evangelism for Normal People*, 80.

25. Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, 44.

As the ultimate hope of something, one's *telos* guides one along a trajectory. *Pretend that you know something great was going to happen in your future. It was somehow revealed to you. Now, it is your job to live in such a way that you move toward that end. That's telos!*

Ok, respecting others can only come when the evangelist understands the *telos* of a person; meaning, what that person ultimately means in the heart of Christ Jesus. Only then can the evangelist bring the dignity of heaven to bear on a person's current life.

As C. S. Lewis asserts about people in his book, *The Weight of Glory*, "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature that if you saw it now, would be strongly tempted to worship . . . You have never talked to a mere mortal."²⁶

To respect others is nothing short of offering heaven in the present. In this regard, evangelism is not only faith sharing, but "hope sharing." We respect him or her because of the **hope** of everything they are, and will be in kingdom of God.

The gospel is more than escaping from this earth into heaven; rather, it is also joining God's mission to restore the earth. Evangelism occurs when people can recognize where this restorative kingdom is, hear what it is about, and are invited to participate living it in the here and now.

John Bowen suggests that at the bottom of Jesus' respect for the woman at the well (John 4), and the man born blind (John 9), was his understanding that they were made in the image of God and that one day everyone would see it.²⁷

For Elmer Thiessen, there are five areas of a person's life that ought to be taken into consideration if evangelism is to be an ethical practice: self-dignity, self-care, physical self, psychological self, and social self.²⁸

In John 9, the man born blind does not seem to be trying to convert anyone, or get them to make a decision. He certainly respects who they are and dares not overstate his case or tell them how wrong they are. In verses 30-33, he does attempt to connect some dots out of his story, but overall, he is simply telling his story authentically and unapologetically.

Remember, if people convert that is the work of the Spirit. Leaving salvation and response to the Holy Spirit, could be one of the most respectful and ethical things we do.

Imagine now, if you could be free to share your story with absolutely no pressure to get them to convert. You could respect them enough to allow them the dignity of converting in God's timing.

26. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 109.

27. Bowen, *Evangelism for Normal People*, 79.

28. Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, 234.

Sodality Discussion & Application



- What are some other ways to respect the listener?
- How might respect for others, affect your confidence to bear witness?

III. You Can Make Disciples

Another vital way to hold fast to an ethic of respect is to understand the commonality of evangelism and discipleship.

(Read Romans 1:15)

Examining Scripture



Evangelism is making disciples at any stage in one's spiritual conversion to the image of Christ, as John Bowen asserts,

“In writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul says a strange thing. He expresses his ‘eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in the Rome’” (Romans 1:15). In Greek, “proclaim the gospel” is the term from which comes the word evangelize. But how can Paul say that he wants to evangelize those who are already Christians? He clearly says he wants to evangelize “you,” those to whom he is writing, whom he has already called “God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints” (Romans 1:7), that is Christians.²⁹

Isn't that interesting? Clearly, Paul sees evangelism as a practice that not only helps someone cross the threshold of belief but also helps them grow as disciples of that belief. This idea can transform our understanding of evangelism. Evangelism occurs at every level of understanding.

The church is therefore trying to make disciples, and any kind of evangelism that does not strive for this may leave the new believer experiencing a kind of “bait and switch.” For instance, when evangelism and discipleship are separated, evangelism could be seen as doing anything it needs to do to get people in the door, and then through discipleship the new convert can learn about what is on the other side.

Let's introduce people to the hope of the other side early on.

Ethical evangelism must respect the person enough to strive toward reducing the possibilities of bait and switch tactics. This explains why marrying the making of disciples with evangelism leads to ethical evangelism. Evangelism is interested in what someone is becoming in the end (telos). When this idea is missing, evangelism can feel like a sales pitch. Therefore, the

29. Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, 208.

job of the evangelist is never finished. There is no handing a person off to someone else to teach. It's all evangelism from the beginning to the end.

Sodality Discussion & Application



- How could it change your approach to someone if you are looking at their life as a future disciple far down the road?
- How could this help the evangelist invest in true transformation in someone's life?

IV. Helping Someone Cross the Threshold of Belief

If a person says they want to join the story of God, that's great, but then what do you do? It's also unethical to deny someone entrance into the kingdom of God.

If he or she is interested in the invitation of the story, then you can ask him or her to tell you what they believe and what they want to do with their life. A series of questions can be useful. Remember, questions help people think and allows them the dignity of their own freedom of will. This prevents coercion. Would you rather be asked a question or told?

Helping someone cross the threshold of belief can be started by letting them know that they are invited to be a part of the story. You could say, "If you feel drawn to this story and something inside feels that it is true, know that you are invited to be a part of it. Would you like to be?"

If yes, then you could ask questions like:

1. What do you believe about the story of Jesus?
2. What do you believe about God?
3. What do you believe about the world and yourself?
4. What do you believe God wants you to do with your life?
5. Are you prepared to repent from your old ways and try to turn to God?
6. Would you confess that you are giving your life to follow Jesus as Lord?
7. Are you prepared to symbolize your new life in Jesus through baptism?

You can go back to the story at any moment. As they offer a witness to their belief, if it is a belief in the story, then let them know that based on this confession, they are giving their life to Christ and he is saving them.

You can help them say their first prayer as a believer thanking God for his kingdom and salvation. If at all possible, stay in their life and continue to help them to become disciples, in a community of faith with a public baptism.

IV. Conclusion

Let's try and summarize *Excited to Share*.

Evangelism is about bearing witness to the good news of Jesus. It is a movement of the Holy Spirit of God. Through this Spirit, anyone can bear witness. The Spirit does all the saving. Therefore, the true objective in evangelism is to bear a faithful witness to the good news. Faithfulness means following the leading of the Holy Spirit. It means trying to tell the fullest story of the gospel in a way that is exciting and invitational. It also means telling the story in a way that is ethical. To bear an ethical witness is to offer your life as a witness to the gospel, and then offer your personal story to the gospel. You can simply share what you know; you don't have to be an expert in all things. And as you bear witness, always respect the other person.

Let's always remember that faithfulness in evangelism is measured by:

- When you felt the Spirit tell you to speak or act, did you do it? If not, why?
- Did you attempt to describe the fullness of the story of Jesus with invitation? If not, why?
- Did you care about the person by being authentic, giving them respect, and giving them space to move according to the leading of the Spirit? If not, why?

We evaluate our evangelism based on how well we do these things.

Sodality Discussion & Application



- Do you believe that you can practice this kind of evangelism? Share Why or why not?

V. The Practice

1. Now practice your witness filled with Holy Spirit!

APPENDIX I

Informed Consent Form

January 29, 2017

Excited to Share is a research experiment conducted under the authority and accountability of the Institution Review Board of Baylor University and George W. Truett Theological Seminary. The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the Excited to Share experience. We are asking you to take part in this study because you have several personal attributes, including but not limited to life experience and personality, that fit the focus of this study.

If you choose to participate in this study you may experience up to two interviews, and you may be exposed to study material on evangelism. It may be possible that some of the interview questions may cause stress. You do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable, and you can ask the interviewer at any time if you need to take a break.

As part of this research, you may not be told about some of the study details. If you were told these details at the beginning of the study, it could change the research results. If you decide to be a part of the study, you will be given an explanation of what information was withheld from you at the end of your study participation.

There are no benefits to you from taking part in this study, and you will not be paid for taking part in this study. Others may benefit in the future from the information that is learned in this study.

A risk of taking part in this study is the possible of a loss of confidentiality. The researcher asks that you do not share with people outside of the group what is said inside of the group. However, the researcher cannot guarantee that everyone will keep discussions quiet. Loss of confidentiality includes having your personal stories shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality. Your name will be hidden in all reporting, and pseudonyms will be used in all reporting.

You can call us with any concerns or questions about the research. Our telephone numbers are listed below:

Dr. Preben Vang: (254) 710-3755
Director of the Doctoral Ministry Program

If you want to speak with someone not directly involved in this research study, you may contact the Baylor University Institution Review Board through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at (254) 710-1438. You can talk to them about:

Your rights as a research subject

Your concerns about the research

A complaint about the research

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to stop at any time for any reason. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. Information already collected about you cannot be deleted.

By continuing with the research and completing the activities, you are providing consent.

Name: (please print) _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abraham, William J. *The Logic of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.
- Blake, Aaron. "Putin: America is Not Exceptional." *The Washington Post* (Sept. 12, 2013). Accessed 8/2/2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2013/09/12/putin-america-is-not-exceptional/> 2013.
- Borchert, G. L. *John 1–11*. New American Commentary, vol. 25A. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996.
- Bowen, John P. *Evangelism for "Normal" People*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.
- Bright, John. *The Kingdom of God*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953.
- Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.
- Brown, Raymond E. *The Gospel According to John*. Yale University Press, 1966.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Isaiah 40-66*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.
- . *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Three Storied World*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.
- Brunner, Emil. *Christian Doctrine of God Dogmatics*, vol. 1. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950.
- Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah, A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed., Kindle. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Boston: First Mariner Books, 2008.

- Frost, Michael. *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2006.
- Goldingay, John. *The Message of Isaiah 40-55*. London: T&T Clark International, 2005.
- Green, Michael. *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Gumbel, Nicky. *The Alpha Course Manual*. London: Alpha International, 1995.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990.
- Jeffery, M. Jones. "Young Americans' Affinity for Democratic Party Has Grown" (March 28, 2014). Accessed 8/31/2016, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/168125/young-americans-affinity-democratic-party-grown.aspx> 2014.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Kallenberg, Brad J. *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002.
- Kaminsky, Joel, and Anne Stewart. "God of All the World: Universalism and Developing Monotheism in Isaiah 40-66." *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 2 (2006): 139-63.
- Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Kinnaman, David. *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.
- Lewis, C. S. "The Weight of Glory: A Sermon." In *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces*. London: Collins Fontana Books, 1965.
- . *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 9. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.
- Lausanne Movement homepage. "The Lausanne Covenant." Accessed 5/26/2016, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>.
- MacDonald, Gordon. *Who Stole My Church?* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

- MacGregor, G. H. C., and Theodore Ferris. *The Acts of the Apostles, The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 9. Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1954.
- McKnight, Scot. *The King Jesus Gospel*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- . "The Gospel for iGens." *Christianity Today Leadership Journal*, vol. 30, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 20-24.
- McLaren, Brian. *The Church on The Other Side*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Moltmann, Jurgen. *God for a Secular Society*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Open Secret*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.
- . *Proper Confidence*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.
- . *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- . *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Noonan, Benjamin J. "Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Reexamination of the Niphal and Hithpael of in the Patriarchal Narratives." *Hebrew Studies*, vol. 51. Milwaukee: NAPH, 2010.
- O'Day, Gail R. *The Gospel of John*. The New Interpreters Bible, vol. 9. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- Page, Susan, and Paul Singer. "USA Today/Roll the Vote Poll: Millennials' Agenda for the Next President" (Jan. 11, 2016). Accessed 9/26/2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.
- Paul, Shalom M. *Isaiah 40-56*. Eerdmans' Critical Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Pew Research Center. "U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious" (Nov. 3, 2015). Accessed 8/16/2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.
- Pliny the Younger. "To the Emperor Trajan," Letter XCVII. *The Harvard Classics*, vol. IX. Accessed 6/29/2016, books.logos.com.
- Russo, Francine. "Can Your Child Be Too Religious?" *Time* (March 28, 2013). Accessed 5/4/2016, <http://healthland.time.com/2013/03/28/can-your-child-be-too-religious/>.

- Sanneh, Lamin. *Whose Religion is Christianity?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Still, Todd, and Dennis W. Tucker. *Image and Word*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009.
- Stone, Bryan P. *Evangelism After Christendom*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Acts*. The Bible Speaks Today, vol. 17. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1990.
- Thiessen, Elmer John. *The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defense of Proselytizing and Persuasion*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011.
- Van Gelder, Craig. *Confident Witness—Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Walt, Stephen M. “The Myth of American Exceptionalism” (Oct. 11, 2011). Accessed 8/2/2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/the-myth-of-american-exceptionalism/>.
- Waltke, Bruce K. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Webb, Richard. *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God’s People*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- Wright, N. T. *Surprised by Hope*. NY: Harper Collins, 2008.
- . *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.