Establishing Christ Community Church as a Sent Community: Initiating Spiritual Conversation with Confidence, Relevance, and Conviction

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By
William Burch

Lynchburg, Virginia
September 2020
Liberty University School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Garry Graves, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Doctor of Ministry Mentor
John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Seth Bible, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Doctor of Ministry Reader
John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS ABSTRACT
William Burch
Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020
Mentor: Dr. Graves

The problem is that Christ Community Church does not see itself as a ‘sent community.’ A ‘sent community’ is one where purpose and forward movement in Kingdom work is embraced. A church must seek to involve itself in the community, delve into the needs, and speak to the emptiness with the Gospel of Jesus.

The purpose of this project is to establish Christ Community Church as a ‘sent community’ by offering a sustentative engagement program which will: 1) describe the mission of Jesus; 2) assess the culture in which the church is situated; 3) answer six frequently asked theological questions; 4) grasp the importance of faith, hope, and love; and 5) equip the people with a greater understanding of the Gospel. This twelve session engagement program will equip the congregation with the necessary tools so they can move forward in this task of being ‘sent.’

The research methods will employ a triangulation of survey, questionnaire, and interview. They will assist in gathering data about why the church, and even further, Christianity, has had less appeal and impact and why people in the church are hesitant to engage the culture.

Christ Community Church, West Chester, PA is a contemporary, non-denominational Christian church situated in the Philadelphia suburbs which currently averages 1100 in attendance on a Sunday morning.

It is the intent of this project to offer an engagement program in which churches might discover theological truths, cultural awareness, and practical methods to engage the culture with the Good News of Christ.
## Contents

### Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................. 1  
Ministry Context ........................................................................... 3  
Problem Presented ....................................................................... 8  
Purpose Statement ....................................................................... 10  
Basic Assumptions ..................................................................... 13  
Definitions .................................................................................. 16  
Limitations and Delimitations ...................................................... 21  
  *Limitations* ............................................................................. 21  
  *Delimitations* .......................................................................... 22  
Thesis Statement .......................................................................... 25

### Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework ................................................. 28  
Literature Review ......................................................................... 28  
  *Culture* .................................................................................. 29  
    Cultural Particulars ................................................................ 29  
    Cultural Engagement ............................................................ 32  
    Cultural Communication ....................................................... 35  
  *Church* ................................................................................... 39  
    Jesus’ Mission ....................................................................... 39  
    Christian Virtue as the Approach .......................................... 42  
    The Thessalonian Church ....................................................... 45  
Theological Foundations ............................................................... 47  
  *The Mission of Jesus and the Church* ..................................... 47  
    The Great Commission and the Great Commandment .......... 49  
    Jesus’ Stated Purposes .......................................................... 51  
    Jesus’ Personal Vision ........................................................... 54  
    Jesus’ Continued Vision ......................................................... 57  
  *Faith, Hope, and Love* .............................................................. 61  
    Connecting Jesus and Faith, Hope, and Love ....................... 62  
    Reproducing Faith, Hope, and Love in Others ..................... 65  
Theoretical Foundations ............................................................... 75  
  *Far Reaching Evangelistic Efforts* ........................................ 76  
  *Churched Evangelistic Programs* ............................................. 78  
  *Faith, Hope, and Love in Evangelism* ................................... 80  
    Faith ..................................................................................... 81  
    Hope .................................................................................... 82  
    Love ..................................................................................... 83  
    Tying Faith, Hope and Love Together .................................. 84  
  *Follow-up Discipleship Material* ........................................... 85  
  *Engaging the Post-Modern Mind* .......................................... 86  
  *Renewed Approach* ............................................................... 87

### Chapter 3: Methodology ................................................................. 91  
Intervention Design ...................................................................... 91
Intervention Design Basics ................................................................. 91
  Introduction ................................................................................ 91
  Choosing Subject Matter .............................................................. 91
  Choosing Right Venue .................................................................. 92
  Developing a Survey ...................................................................... 92
  Developing a Curriculum ............................................................. 92
  Program Needs ........................................................................... 93
  Potential and Possibilities .......................................................... 93

Intervention Plan ............................................................................. 94
  Subject Matter ........................................................................... 94
  Title ......................................................................................... 95
  Format ....................................................................................... 95
  Research .................................................................................... 96
  Approvals .................................................................................. 97
  Personnel and Equipment .......................................................... 97

Intervention Teaching Notes: [UN]apologetic Teaching Notes .......... 98
  Introduction ................................................................................ 98
  Episode #1: Mission and Vision .................................................... 98
  Episode #2: Continuing the Work of Jesus ..................................... 101
  Episode #3: Understanding Our Culture ....................................... 106
  Episode #4: Our Three Deepest Needs ........................................ 110
  Episode #5: Can we trust the Bible? ............................................. 115
  Episode #6: Does God exist? ....................................................... 118
  Episode #7: Aren’t all religions basically the same? .................... 121
  Episode #8: Did the resurrection of Jesus really happen? .......... 124
  Episode #9: What about the afterlife? .......................................... 127
  Episode #10: Why does God allow evil? ...................................... 132
  Episode #11: Is God good? ......................................................... 136
  Episode #12: Having Spiritual Conversations ............................... 139

Chapter 4: Results .......................................................................... 145
Introduction ................................................................................... 145
Compilation and Implementation .................................................. 146
  Teaching Notes ......................................................................... 146
    Importance of Teaching Notes .................................................. 146
    Conviction and Confidence ...................................................... 146
    Compiling Teaching Notes ...................................................... 147
    Content of 12 Sessions ............................................................ 147
  Captivating an Audience ............................................................ 150
    Basics of Engagement ............................................................. 150
    Social Distancing Regulations ............................................... 151
    Podcast Platform ..................................................................... 151
First Survey Results ......................................................................... 152
  Basic Data ................................................................................ 153
  Specific Data ............................................................................ 153
  Conviction ............................................................................... 154

v
Session 12: Having Spiritual Conversations Workbook Page .........................................220
Appendix C: Twelve Session [UN]apologetic Podcast Link ..............................................222
Appendix D: Vision Statement and Five Year Measurables of Christ Community Church ......223
Appendix E: IRB Approved Consent Form for Survey .........................................................224
Appendix F: Prophecies of Jesus Found in the Old Testament ........................................227
IRB Approval ...............................................................................................................................228
Figures

1.1 Comparison of World Religions Table: Views on Salvation........................................119
1.2 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I know of people in my life who have a
spiritual need.” ........................................................................................................150
1.3 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I yearn to share my faith.” .................151
1.4 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I have invited someone to church on a
Sunday morning.” .................................................................................................152
1.5 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I am currently developing an intentional
relationship with someone with whom I hope to share Christ.” ...........................152
1.6 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I comfortably talk about my faith.” .......154
1.7 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “How confident do you feel in your ability to
initiate spiritual conversation with someone?” ....................................................154
1.8 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “Bringing up issues of faith with a non-
believer comes easily for me.” .............................................................................155
1.9 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I have invited someone into a relationship
with Jesus.” ...........................................................................................................156
2.0 Graph Showing Comparative Results of Survey Question: “How confident do you feel in
your ability to initiate spiritual conversation with someone?” ............................158
2.1 Graph Showing Comparative Results of Survey Question: “Bringing up issues of faith
with a non-believer comes easily for me.” .............................................................160
2.2 Graph Showing Comparative Results of Survey Question: “I confidently talk about my
faith.” ......................................................................................................................161
2.3 Graph Showing Comparative Results of Survey Question: “How confident do you feel in
your ability to initiate spiritual conversation with someone?” ............................162
Chapter 1

Introduction

A church must have a definitive purpose that must be clearly defined and articulates an attainable goal. Once a church can achieve clarity and potential around a purpose, there is hope. Organizational hope is predicated upon two important characteristics: a meaningful task and a contribution to the group potential. Church leaders must be able to articulate both the meaningful task and an acute understanding of the group potential.

A meaningful task to which the group can contribute is predicated upon clarity. Clarity comes by way of understanding the work which needs to be accomplished and the context into which that work must penetrate. If the group has an awareness of the role they play in their specific context and an ability to comprehend the significance of the part they play, then potentiality is obvious. The convergence of task, context, and contribution determines the mission or purpose. Mission defines the reason why a particular organization exists in the first place.

As far as churches are concerned, some call this missional or incarnational. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay have traveled the globe and documented that notion in a book entitled The Tangible Kingdom. Halter and Smay describe missional as a characteristic germane to the current church as it was in the ancient church.

We had spent seven years traveling throughout America and overseas, training church planters, church dreamers, and existing church leaders in the hope that they might become more missional or incarnational. These two words together describe an orientation toward the ancient faith communities described in the Book of Acts and throughout history, who lived a countercultural, communal experience that always influenced the cultures they found themselves in. These missional/incarnational communities were therefore the natural framework God’s church was and must still be

---

built upon if we are to continue their rich legacy of making apprentices of Jesus worldwide. ²

The missional and incarnational aspect of missional churches forms the basis for the purpose of the church in its effort to continue the mission of Jesus. For the purposes of this paper, the phrase ‘sent community’ will suffice to comprise the idea of missional or incarnational church life. The concept of a church continuing Jesus’ mission will be examined in later chapters.

One must not forget, however, that individuals make up the whole. The sum of the parts together introduces the concept of group potential. A concern for the individual must remain a priority. Without care, direction, and encouragement for the individual, the group is in jeopardy. Everyone has a critical place in the group. The apostle Paul summarized, “So it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other” (Rom 12:5 NLT). Every person is made in the image of God and has a legitimate place in His work.

A church must also have a clear understanding of what difference this ‘sentness’ will make within a boundary of time. Methodology enters the picture at this juncture. In other words, group potential comes into play as the implementation of the project progresses. The establishment of goals and strategies give methodology an orientation. When deciding what specific strategy will be employed to accomplish the missional goals, a precedent model is beneficial. If the precedent model is a biblical one, then the church has a plausible and proven touchstone which it must emulate. The book of Acts and Paul’s letters to the churches throughout the Mediterranean give such a model. The purpose, understanding, and direction must center on the design given us in Scripture and modeled for us by Jesus. While it is critically important to have a direction, it is even more so to have the right direction. When a church is lacking in

purpose, understanding, and direction it stalls. The sails, which express potential movement, pining for service, hang limp on the masts. Such is the case for far too many churches.

**Ministry Context**

Christ Community Church in West Chester, Pennsylvania is a non-denominational Christian church situated in the Philadelphia suburbs. The church began as a plant thirty-five years ago as an offshoot from nearby Church of the Savior, also located in the Philadelphia suburbs. Currently the church averages 1100 on a Sunday morning.

According to the United States Census bureau, Chester County, in which West Chester is the county seat, is a growing county with a current population of 522,046. The demographics list Caucasian at 85% of the population with a very high cost of living compared to the rest of the United States. The fastest growing age demographics in Chester County are those with a median age of twenty-five and a median age of sixty-five. The Indian and Pakistani population is the fastest growing ethnic group in the Chester County area. West Chester has an unusually large percentage of people with graduate degrees per capita. The high level of education is primarily due to the nearby tech, medical, and pharmaceutical industries. The median value of owner-occupied housing is $338,200. The median household income is $92,417. The high level of income does not mean that poverty is non-existent. Six percent of the population in Chester County lives in poverty, and those are in concentrated areas rather than dispersed throughout the county.  

West Chester proper is a quaint, family friendly historic town with a lively night life and host to a wide variety of restaurants, cafes, and bars. Listed as the second ‘hippest’ town in

---

Pennsylvania, it is a desirable place to live if one has the financial means. The school districts within a seven-mile radius of West Chester are continuously ranked nationally in academics scoring 10/10 in college readiness. The population is still on a growth trend, as a new school and several large developments and apartment complexes are currently under construction.

Given that the church reflects the culture, Christ Community Church is a predominantly white, middle to upper middle-class church with only ten percent diversity. The regular attenders are generous when asked (i.e. special missions project, Christmas season community outreach programs and families in need) but lack a healthy percentage of per household giving and number of giving units. The lack in giving is likely due to three elements: lack of education regarding biblical giving, lack of obedience once learned, and lack of a compelling vision toward which one might give. Volunteerism is also declining as families become more involved in sports and academic endeavors for their children.

Christ Community Church owns a building with a multi-purpose room that also serves as a gym and worship center with twenty classrooms and a large lobby area. The ministries offered include children, student, college, men’s, women’s, care (Celebrate Recovery, Grief Share, coaching), welcoming, and contemporary worship. The Lead Pastor generally teaches a series anywhere from four to seven weeks in length. At times, the pastor teaches through a book of the Bible for up to thirteen weeks. Christ Community Church currently employs twenty-one (part time and full time) men and women.

The largest percentage of growth for Christ Community occurred from 1989-1996. The largest number of people present on a regular Sunday morning service occurred from 2012-2014 when the church peaked at 1400. This plateau raises questions. Why has the church plateaued

---

over the last fifteen years? What are the reasons for the temporary increase? What are the hindrances to growth? When an increase in attendance occurs, why does it seem unsustainable? What would make it sustainable? If Christ Community Church is perfectly suited for the results it is getting, what are the dynamics causing those results?

The average age of the regular attender (not including anyone under eighteen) is currently 52, and this statistic increased from five years ago when the number was 47. This increase means the church is not growing younger and not keeping pace with the younger demographic. Church attendance reports suggest this trend has been a problem over the last five years. The data reveals the 25-30 year old age bracket is the fastest growing age demographic in Chester County, yet this age group remains the lowest percentage of people represented at Christ Community Church.

The people of Christ Community Church enjoy not only what happens on Sunday morning but also the many mid-week ministry options presented to the congregation and community. The men’s and women’s ministries adopted a Bible Study methodology for their ministry model. Available curriculum options are chosen based on biblical content, the spiritual needs which exist among the constituents, and the preference of the ministry director based on a comprehensive yearly outlook.

Since the inception of the weekly ministries, the goals of the men’s and women’s groups centered on spiritual growth and biblical knowledge. The student ministries have placed a greater emphasis over the last fifteen years on evangelism, engaging the culture, and easy access into growth type groups. The adult ministries, however, have not placed a great emphasis on evangelism over the last fifteen years. The fact that programs do not emphasize evangelism does not preclude the spreading the gospel through individual and one on one efforts. It simply is not a priority within the ministry programs and curriculum. The average church member, therefore,
has been taught (by the model itself) that evangelism and engagement in the culture is a lesser value. Spiritual growth remains the priority, and historically, church members have inadvertently neglected neighbors, friends, co-workers, and family who do not currently know Christ as Savior.

The current pastor began at Christ Community as the student pastor and held the position of student pastor for eighteen years. The building of meaningful relationships with many of the families at Christ Community fostered trust. Seven years ago, the current pastor was asked to move into a temporary position called the Pastoral Leadership Team where his primary responsibilities were teaching and worship. The model of church ministry changed to a Lead Pastor model in 2017. At that point, he assessed the gaps, asked questions, and listened. An awareness of deep-seated patterns within Christ Community Church emerged.

The aforementioned Bible study model is a strength of Christ Community Church. The weekly ministries which serve students, men, and women have also enjoyed a stable environment in which to do ministry. Accessible onramps into these smaller gatherings, however, continues to be a point of examination.

The worship service for the last thirty years experienced little to no change in style and format. Eight years ago the style and environment changed in keeping with current stylistic designs. One phase of improvement reached completion in 2014 (stage rebuild) and the other in 2017 (screen and aesthetic components). A continual need for upgrade in style requires assessment, research, analysis, and consensus. Christ Community Church enjoys a contemporary style of worship.

Given the cultural climate, patterns, and practices which have characterized Christ Community Church over the last twenty years, moving in a direction to establish a better balance
between evangelism and spiritual growth remains difficult. The majority of the congregation is unaware of the slight downward trends the church sees in visitors and overall attendance. The most recent summer series, which highlights a new five-year vision for the congregation, suggests giving the key volunteers in the church a new way to think about church and ministry. The Scriptures emphasize the rationale for church policy and procedure, and the series sought to emphasize the Great Commission in the life of the church.

The leadership of the church hired a consulting agency, *The Unstuck Church*, in order to gain objectivity while assessing Christ Community Church’s health and growth. In his book, *The Unstuck Church*, Tony Morgan created a chart which describes a church in ‘maintenance phase.’ A church in maintenance phase is characterized by complexity of schedule, a program-driven calendar, staff-driven rather than volunteer-driven programs, systems that begin to supersede vision, and priorities which focus on keeping current people happy rather attracting new people. When the assessments of *The Unstuck Church* were completed, Christ Community Church landed squarely in the maintenance phase. According to the statistics and emphasis on church health, the ‘maintenance phase’ is a declining phase which, if not corrected, will lead to phases of decline making it difficult for the church to survive. The desired phases of church life and health are: a) momentum growth, b) strategic growth, and c) sustainable health.

The people of Christ Community Church appreciate solid biblical teaching, genuine worship, and the opportunities to serve and give. The church continues to stand on the foundation of the inerrant and infallible Word of God. Teaching the truth of Scripture and suggesting relevant application are catalysts to deeper life change. However, many do not currently see themselves as catalysts for bringing life change in those around them.

---

Problem Presented

Prior to working with *The Unstuck Church*, the leadership at Christ Community Church over the past nine years uncovered a need for objective input and data and decided to contract with The Center Consulting Group.\(^6\) According to a survey produced by The Center Consulting Group and designed for Christ Community Church in the fall of 2017, the results showed a slow decline in several important areas. First, there was a 6% decline in the number of people from age 18-44 in the past five years. There was a 19% decrease in the number of people who have been attending two years or less since 2016. Ministry to young adults ranked third to last in the category of ministry effectiveness.

In a survey given to the staff and elders of Christ Community Church in 2018, only 52% of those surveyed said the church would remove whatever barriers necessary to reach people outside of the faith. Only 45% agreed that Christ Community Church is becoming known in this community. Only 26% agreed that the church is reproducing and multiplying at all levels and in all areas of ministry.\(^7\)

A ‘Spiritual Health Questionnaire’ created by the Lead Pastor was taken in the fall of 2018 by 387 out of 1000 regular attenders at Christ Community Church.\(^8\) Results showed that only 38% wholeheartedly yearn to share their faith while 13% have no desire to share their faith. The other 49% are uncertain. Similar results appeared when asked about the comfort level one has in sharing their faith. Twenty-two percent of the 387 who completed the survey are not

---

\(^6\) This survey and subsequent summary report was administered and prepared by The Center Consulting Group. The website is www.centerconsulting.org.

\(^7\) This survey and subsequent summary report was administered and prepared by Unstuck Church. The website is www.theunstuckgroup.com.

\(^8\) This survey was developed by William Burch for the EVCP 810 Spiritual Factors of Growing Churches as part of the DMIN completion coursework. The survey was administered through Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com).
developing an intentional relationship with others with the purpose of sharing their faith. When asked how often people invite others to church, 45% said they invite someone to church only once per year while 9% never do. The accumulation of the results uncovered a deficit.

The survey confirmed the suspicion that the numbers of weekly visitors have declined along with overall Sunday morning worship service attendance. This downward trend raises a concern. Without definitive purpose, sufficient knowledge, a reproducible model, and a rudimentary engagement program in ‘sentness,’ the church struggles to advance in the work for which it was established.

For the various reasons listed above, the leadership of Christ Community Church contracted ‘The Unstuck Church,’ a church consulting organization specializing in church growth in order to help address the prevailing issues and pave a road forward. Of the many finding examined in this process, three are pertinent as they uncovered and addressed the decline in church attendance. The Unstuck Group compared the findings to the national average of churches deemed ‘healthy.’ First, healthy churches experience a 5% yearly increase in attendance. Christ Community registers at -14%. Second, healthy churches have a 1:1 yearly guest to attendance ratio. Christ Community posts .11:1. Third, healthy churches have a baptism (or conversion) rate of 6% of the total population yearly. Christ Community Church experiences 1.7%. These findings correlate with the two other surveys mentioned above. Ultimately the data resulting from these three studies prompted this thesis project.

In order to be effective, a church must involve itself in the community, delve into the needs, and speak to the emptiness prevalent in the culture. The statistics raise questions. Does the community at large really know that Christ Community Church exists? If Christ Community

---

Church closed its doors, would it matter? Do the people of Christ Community Church see their part in kingdom work? Self-evaluation, honesty, and intentionality hold the keys which will unlock the potential for Christ Community Church to be a ‘sent community.’

A ‘sent community’ is one where the people who comprise that particular church move forward in kingdom work with kingdom purpose. ‘Sent’ people possess an understanding of that purpose which defines their mission and apply that mission on the mission field (sphere of influence). Understanding that church’s particular ‘field’ will help determine specific objectives and supply ample motivation. A successful method of advancement will provide tangible goals and tools with which the goal can be accomplished.

The church needs to see itself with a grander vision, one which challenges each individual to adhere to a cause beyond themselves. Vision and cause must supersede the discomfort associated with effort and sacrifice. “A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.”10 A ship was designed to be sent, not remain in the harbor. The problem is that Christ Community Church does not see itself as a ‘sent community’.11

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this project will be to establish Christ Community Church as a ‘sent community’ by offering a substantive engagement program which will: 1) describe the mission of Jesus; 2) assess the culture in which the church is situated; 3) answer six often asked theological questions; 4) emphasize the importance of faith, hope, and love; and 5) equip the

---

10 Fred R. Shapiro, “Section: John A. Shedd,” *The Yale Book of Quotations*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 705. The actual quote, while used by those of notoriety throughout this century, was finally traced back and attributed to John A. Shedd.

11 By saying ‘sent community’, what is meant is a local church who understands the mission of Jesus, implements the mission of Jesus, and does so together in the culture where the church was planted. It is participating in the work of a Triune God in the world.
people with a greater understanding of the Gospel. This twelve session engagement program will equip the congregation with the necessary tools with which they can move forward in this task of being ‘sent.’

A church who believes they are a ‘sent’ community will behave in a purposeful way and demonstrate a commitment to that purpose. In other words, this project will address the problem of ‘sentness,’ or lack thereof, in five main ways: 1) adopting the purpose for being sent; 2) understanding the destination to which Christ Community Church is sent; and 3) learning answers to common faith questions people are asking; 4) living the virtues of faith, hope, and love; and 5) training in sharing the Gospel. These comprise being part of a ‘sent community.’ Understanding the mission of Jesus and the believer’s participation in that mission is essential to this project.

The problem is that Christ Community Church is not living out its ‘sentness.’ When Christ Community Church is evaluated based on the five categories listed above, gaps are evident. Does the church adopt the purpose for which it is sent? Does the church desire to accomplish the mission of Jesus? Is the church aware that an epistemic gap exists? Does the church understand the current culture in which it is called to minister? Is the church willing to embrace the changes necessary to engage successfully? Are there ways in which the church can be developed to move forward? Can the church impact the community in tangible ways that demonstrate the presence of Jesus?

Engaging the culture with the gospel of Jesus requires a major, concerted, intentional, and sustainable effort. The prevailing attitude behind such a movement must be one of expectation (God doing big things), courage (appropriate risk-taking in ministry ventures), and mission (a purpose for every person in the church). It is a change in the current culture. A culture that
exhibits expectation, courage, and mission will be able to accomplish the purpose for which it exists. It can become a ‘sent community’ and overcome the stated problem.

The goal is to use the people inside the walls of Christ Community Church to saturate the community outside the walls of the church with the gospel of Jesus in word and deed. This will require an application of biblical principles which the believer learns as they grow in the knowledge of Christ. Application of those principles will counteract complacency, anxiety, and common emotions which accompany the challenge of active evangelistic engagement with the community. The desire is that other churches might likewise engage their communities thereby extending the reach of this project beyond Christ Community Church.

Michel J. Gorman in his book, *Becoming the Gospel*, describes the intentionality with which one needs to live a Christian life. Participation in this work is the idea behind ‘sentness’ as follows:

> It would be more precise, therefore, to say that what Paul wants in . . . all his churches is a ‘salvific intentionality’ that expresses the mind, or mindset, of Christ . . . This is to be the fundamental similarity between Paul and all those in Christ: a mindset that issues inevitably in loving, cruciform inward-focused (centripetal) and outward-focused (centrifugal) praxis. Both express the Missio Dei.\(^{12}\)

Having the mind of Christ means that our mindset is fashioned around the mission exemplified by Jesus and subsequently the apostle Paul. That is the idea behind ‘sentness.’

> ‘Sentness’ requires a purpose for being sent, a destination, and an adequate motivation to accomplish the sending task. It is understanding the mission of Jesus and the believer’s participation in that mission through the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit within each believer is paramount to the success of this operation because the He imparts to the believer force, motivation, and direction. Scripture, thus, points to the need for an enduring presence of

the Holy Spirit. In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul taught, “But I say, walk by the
Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16 NIV). Paul asks the reader to
consider the contrast between the two desires and live moment by moment under the desires of
the Holy Spirit. He furthers the severity of the situation with a warning expressed to the
extensive systematic theology urges that all “ministry be done in the Holy Spirit, that is, that we
consciously dwell in the Godlike atmosphere created by the Holy Spirit—the atmosphere of
power, love, joy, truth, holiness, righteousness, and peace.”

The most important aspect of Godlike atmosphere manifests itself through the presence of the third member of the Trinity.

Scripture points to the Thessalonian church as a model of a church which exemplifies
’sentness.’ The Thessalonian church is key because it exemplified ‘sentness’ as explained by
Paul in the first chapter of the two epistles to the church. Paul made clear that faith, hope, and
love are the predominant means by which a ‘sent’ community can fulfill its ‘sentness.’ A
comparison of Christ Community Church to the characteristics of the Thessalonian church will
indicate possible gaps and a means for closing those gaps. By research and analysis of the
Thessalonian church, a methodology involving faith, hope, and love will emerge by which Christ
Community Church might establish itself as a ‘sent’ community.

**Basic Assumptions**

This project seeks to modulate Christ Community Church’s culture from its current
inward focus to an outward focus. Though difficult, time consuming, and often slow, it is
possible to change a church culture which is what this project seeks to do. The success of this
entire project will depend on clarity, useful data, good theology, and an instrument for engaging

---

the culture. Success will hinge on the involvement of the people of Christ Community Church as they depend on the Holy Spirit for power and direction.

This project builds upon several God-given characteristics of people, fostering hope that spiritual maturity is possible. First, everyone is made in the image of God. This fact allows the believer to recognize the God-given potential in every human being. Second, everyone has a legitimate place in the world. God is sovereign and therefore determines how one might be part of His great narrative. Third, people are greatly impacted by relationships. Principles of faith are passed on to neighbors, family members, and the next generation through relationships. Fourth, everyone desires to contribute something meaningful, to make a difference, and will very likely stand ready when invited to do so.

These assumptions cause the believer to strive ahead while understanding that potentiality is from above and delivers the indispensable commodity of hope. For the above five postulates (adopting the purpose for being sent; understanding the destination to which Christ Community Church is sent; learning answers to common faith questions people are asking; living the virtues of faith, hope, and love; and training in sharing the Gospel) to be operationalized, every church member must be involved. “As long as a person is in your work community, is a legitimate part of that community, she’s indispensable to the group.” ¹⁴ Being the body of Christ and partakers in His work, all believers have a role, a place, and the privilege to carry on the work of the kingdom of God on earth.

Christ Community Church members and regular attenders desire to see people begin a new relationship with Christ, but many do not see themselves as shareholders in that work. An inward focus has over time created strong opinions about the worship service, ministry options,
and leadership protocols. Change, therefore, is necessary. Based on the four assumptions about humankind listed above (everyone is made in the image of God, everyone has a legitimate place in the world, people are greatly impacted by relationships, everyone desires to contribute something meaningful), the potential for meaningful work and ensuing change will tug on the hearts of the people resulting in a higher percentage of participation.

Principles derived from God’s Word present practical and relevant truth. The Word of God is the source for life and godliness. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul taught that Scripture is immensely useful as it pertains to life and godliness. An understanding of right and wrong, correction, and teaching are all vital to the believer as they become prepared and equipped to do every good work. The principles in Scripture are salient, durable, and will form the basis for the path forward.

Part of the problem on which this project focuses (lack of ‘sentness’) is not a problem germane to a church, rather to the church. Simply stated, churches generally do not gravitate toward great initiatives in evangelism. It will take effort, energy, vision, motivation, and courage to create an evangelistic initiative.

The participants in this thesis project will represent a cross-section of people who are active members and attenders of Christ Community Church. The information they reveal in the process will be generally accepted as normative across the church population.

This project aims to synthesize the active research portion of the project and the academic research into a usable format for both teaching and learning. Efforts will be made with the cross-

15 2 Peter 1:3 says, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (NLT).

16 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.”
section of people used in the active research process to encourage honesty, openness, and dialogue.

**Definitions**

**Absolutism**- the acceptance of or belief in absolute principles in political, philosophical, ethical, or theological matters.

**Apologetics**- reasoned argumentation to justify religious doctrine. This word is generally used in the context of Christianity and the defense of its core beliefs.

**B.L.E.S.S.**- a simple evangelistic acronym designed to foster confidence in having spiritual discussions with unbelievers. **Be** praying for that person. **Listen** to that person. **Experience** life with that person. **Serve** that person. **Share** testimony with that person.

**Climate**- the prevailing attitudes, standards, or values conditions of a group in a specified place. Used in this project, the sense is more immediate, concerning itself with the organizational, moral, philosophical, vocational and educational momentum now compared to two years ago.

**COVID-19 Protocols**- statewide social distancing and gathering rules due to the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. Governments around the world, including the United States, have prohibited gatherings of ten or more people and require social distancing which means six feet of distance between two people not living in the same household. This has challenged the church to creatively initiate other means of communication and gathering. The quarantine rules were in play through the duration of the implementation part of this project.

**Creed**- statements of doctrine and a subcategory of oral tradition which explain thoughts and beliefs of religions. Creeds were developed in a format easily handed down and quickly learned.
**Culture**- the values acted upon in a group or organization which, when observed, can be determined and defined. Culture can be positive or negative and are always the dominant driving force behind the characteristics and productivity of that organization.

**Demythologization**- a practice within liberal Christian theology whereby the miracles of the Bible are explained by naturalistic causes. Theologians who do not believe in the miraculous remove the supernatural events from Scripture through empirical explanation or by denial of the historicity of the miraculous events.

**Ecclesiology**- the study of church doctrine. This term includes a broader meaning whereby the practical outworking of doctrine is of equal concern.

**Engagement**- the act of involving oneself, whether individually or corporately, with the community around Christ Community Church either by serving, involvement in community activities, or by sharing one’s faith in any number of relational settings.

**Great Commandment**- the stated command of Jesus to love God above all other commands in Scripture and then to love one’s neighbor as self. The commandment was given within the context of a conversation with an inquisitive individual and is found in Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34, and Luke 10:25-27.

**Great Commission**- the mandate of Jesus as stated in Matthew 28:18-20 commanding all believers to go into the world to make new disciples. Spreading the Good News of Jesus, making followers of Jesus through discipleship, baptizing newfound followers, and teaching them to obey the commands of Jesus are all part of the Great Commission.

**Group Potential**- the hope for the sum of the individuals who comprise a group in accomplishing strategic objectives. While it takes individuality into consideration, the possibilities within the whole group remain the focal point.
**Individualism**- a philosophy or belief system predicated upon autonomy, determining to exalt human choice above all else. Tied closely to individualism is secularism, religious pluralism, and relativism.

**Manuscript Transmission**- the process by which ancient documents are translated over time and handed down generation after generation. Much study has been done in the transmission of both the Old Testament and the New Testament into many languages to bring historicity and veracity to the Holy Scriptures.

**Metanarrative**- the grand story overarching all of time and history. It is the overarching interpretation of events which provides a pattern for one’s beliefs and worldview. In postmodernism it is a narrative about historical meaning which offers legitimization of a master idea. For the believer, God’s creation, fall, redemption, and consummation and the involvement of all people in His plan constitutes the metanarrative.

**Mission**- a critical stage of the strategic planning process for political, religious, or commercial organizations which establishes the reason for its existence. A mission statement is generally a short but compound sentence stating the purpose or mission of an organization. Mission statements differ from vision statements in that the latter is a subset of the former.

**Participation**- the privilege of being used of God in His work in the world. As partners of the gospel and the status of the believer as heirs and ambassadors, Christians participate in God’s good works in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Podcast**- a digital audio file made available on the internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device. Typically, someone might subscribe to a certain podcast due to interest in the subject. While similar to radio talk shows, the platform broadcasts through the worldwide web.
**Postmodernism**- a time period in philosophy and formulation of one’s worldview begun in the late 1970’s and continues through today. Two prominent characteristics of postmodernism is the denial of absolute and objective truth and the acceptance of relativism when describing one’s philosophy of truth.

**Practical Theology**- a term used simply to describe doctrine in practice. The outworking of theology must result in applicability. Practical theology concerns itself with the development of strategies for personal growth, outreach, serving, using spiritual gifts, etc.

**Relativism**- a belief that what can be known about truth, especially in relation to moral issues, is dependent upon one’s own personal views or the collective beliefs in one’s culture. Truth, according to the relativist, is subject to the individual.

**Religious Pluralism**- the equalization in validity of all forms of religion, belief systems, and philosophies. A common phrase within religious pluralism is that there are many ways to God.

**Run**- the length of time needed from start to finish of the twelve session program within this project. The cyclical nature of certain ministry programs requires those programs to be offered at various times throughout a year. A run specifies those specific points in the yearly ministry calendar.

**Secularism**- the spirit or tendency in social and political philosophy that rejects all forms of religious faith. A denial of God leads to the belief that man is the arbiter of the world’s universal structures, morals, and social standards.

**Sent Community**- a church that understands its mission, continues on that mission, and accepts the missional tasks as responsibilities. A ‘sent community’ shares the love of Jesus both in word and deed.
Sentness- a term to describe what a church should primarily understand about itself in relation to its mission to the lost within that church’s vicinity and beyond. To be sent emulates why Jesus was sent.

Syncretism- the belief that all the religions of the world are essentially a spiritual quest to the same God based on similarities between the religions. Differences in religions, while interesting, hold little weight to syncretists.

Teacher Notes- a curriculum comprised of the twelve sessions presented in this project and specifically designed for a teacher. The intention is to have a reproducible tool for other churches and organizations to utilize the material here presented.

Teleological Argument- an argument for the existence of God which stands on a universal observation that the world has a purpose for its existence. This observation is based on the design of the universe in all its functions, thus pointing to a Designer.

Theodicy- the philosophical and theological argument that vindicates an all-wise, all-good, all-powerful God for the existence of evil.

Tools- the teaching notes, the podcast, and the workbook are subsumed under this heading.

Thessalonian Church- the first century church addressed by Paul in his first and second epistle to the people of that city. Paul praised them for their faith, hope and love and thereby used them as an adequate biblical model for being a ‘sent’ community.

Universalism- the idea that every human will be saved in a religious or spiritual sense. In other words, everyone goes to heaven regardless what they believe. Some universalists believe this to be the case because of the sufficiency of Jesus’ sacrifice while others attribute this to the character of God without reference to Christ.
**Unapologetic**- title of the podcast developed for this thesis project.

**Vision**- a critical stage in the strategic planning process for political, religious, or commercial organizations which establishes its short term, mid-range, and long-term direction. Generally, one can develop the vision of an organization by asking where it wants to be in a specified amount of time, usually in years. Vision statements differ from mission statements in that mission describes merely the purpose for the existence of that particular organization.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitations**

This project identifies five primary limitations. First, the sampling of church participants registered for this project by choice. Others, however, in the church should be involved but chose not to register. Many on the peripheries of church life and ministry also have something to contribute as to why they may or may not be unwilling to engage the culture with the Good News of Christ yet will often remain silent. The sampling, therefore, consists of church attendees who are involved in church life and desire to reach their friends and neighbors with the Good News. While encouraging to lead and teach many who are mature, opportunities to motivate, teach, and gain input from those who seem ambivalent to matters of faith remain scarce.

Second, the sampling of participants taking the survey will need to be completed through the actual training class thus making the sampling a convenient sample rather than a random sample. The survey, however, will remain anonymous. While the answers provided in the survey are truthful, they are merely opinions, perceptions, and experiences of those individuals. External factors (cultural upbringing, personality style, political bent, availability of resources, and family status) are some of the factors which bring subjectivity.
Third, this study incorporates academic study on the problem, purpose, and thesis. Although archaeology, anthropology, theology, and philosophy combine to give greater understanding of social settings and ensuing apologetic issues, ultimately the views are based on my interpretation of Scripture and other writers in history who delved into the same subject matter.

Fourth, the faith, hope, and love of which Paul writes are the three Christian virtues associated with the Thessalonians. Although there are other virtues pertaining to the Thessalonians which could prove helpful to this study, they will not be addressed. While extensive writing on these three virtues exists, some studies do not include the Thessalonian church, but rather a formulation of a word study on faith, hope, and love.

Fifth, the COVID-19 protocols and mandates have greatly changed the landscape in terms of gathering, teaching, and following through with this project. A system and platform for teaching ‘sentness’ must comply with the mandates of social distancing and reach people in their living rooms. The need to establish new venues of communication due to the COVID prohibitions introduces new challenges. Creativity, therefore, becomes imperative to initiate a program that engages and teaches during the quarantine. Traditional means of communication via lecture, seminar, Sunday school class or sermon series will be limited. Furthermore, interviews will not be conducted face to face. The possibility of reduced clarity and less data remains.

Delimitations

The selected topics germane to this study revolve around six elements which comprise the basis of the project. If a church is to be a ‘sent’ community, then it must understand itself to be so. ‘Sentness’ involves purpose akin to the mission of Jesus. There must also be an acute
understanding of the culture which the church must engage. Finally, a cognizance of the characteristics (faith, hope, love) which must shape the church in its sending must be evident. While many themes revolve around the incarnation of Jesus, this project will focus on His mission as it pertains to those who do not yet know Him. It is His ‘sentness,’ and therefore that of the church, which remains the focus.

The first element in this project will be a survey. The information in this survey will be collected by a random sample of people who regularly attend Christ Community Church. The sample will span all ages eighteen and older and remain impartial to vocation, politics, race, or gender. Questions will revolve around the knowledge and the willingness to accomplish the mission of Jesus. What do they consider the mission of Jesus? How have they been involved in the mission of Jesus? What reasons do they have to decline involvement in the mission of Jesus? Are there other concerns that prohibit a full measure of involvement? These are but a few questions that may apply. The statistics will be logged, charted, and used as the primary data for solving the problem of lack of ‘sentness’ at Christ Community Church.

The second element will consist of a local demographic study. The postmodern mindset will become a focus of the study as postmodernism has forged the worldview of the populace where the study is taking place. Sociological studies and other scholarly writing describing cognitive and faith processes will also aid in formulating a strategy for reaching this generation. The project will keep its focus on ‘belief systems’ and ‘philosophical foundations’ of those who live within the vicinity of Christ Community Church. This will form a basis of information through which the people of Christ Community Church can be equipped to serve.

The third element will be undertaken from scholarship and Scripture to clearly define the mission of Jesus. Work needs to be done to make a clear connection between the mission of
Jesus and the mission of the church. Participation in the work of God in the world, the Missio Dei, is at the core of the mission of the church. While there might be a host of other events, programs, and services offered by a church, engagement in the culture with the gospel of Jesus remains the focus.

The fourth element will include a study on the three virtues of faith, hope, and love, identified as the deeper needs of every human. When discussing the idea of ‘sentness’ as it relates to church, the Thessalonian church is a stellar example of what a ‘sent’ community looks like. Although other churches in Asia Minor and Europe which Paul and John mention have admirable attributes, the information presented in this study will center upon how faith, hope and love were demonstrated in the lives of the Thessalonians.

The fifth element explores six frequently asked theological questions unbelievers pose in the area of apologetics: 1) Can the Bible be trusted? 2) Does God exist? 3) Aren’t all religions basically the same? 4) Did the resurrection happen? 5) What about the afterlife? 6) Why does God allow evil? The information will not only give an answer for the hope which the believer possesses (1 Pet 3:15), but it will also bolster the confidence level of the believer who participates in this program.

The sixth element will be an engagement program which will be developed for the people of Christ Community Church so they can gain confidence as they engage in this cultural setting. Equipping people for the work of engaging the culture is the goal. Those who choose to participate will complete a survey before the program and will complete the same survey after the program. The feedback from this longitudinal survey will also offer the measurability necessary to ascertain whether this project was successful in accomplishing its objective. The program is specifically designed to help the average church member and regular attendee gain
confidence in sharing their faith in Christ with others. While other valuable service projects and programs which serve the community are venues for sharing the gospel, these will not be addressed.

**Thesis Statement**

The mission of Jesus must be central to the ministry life of the church and should be used to evaluate programs, teaching, evangelistic initiatives, ministry objectives, service projects, missions, and all other aspects of church life. The church is the extension of Jesus. While His incarnation demonstrated the reality of a particular kingdom purpose, his death, resurrection and ascension accomplished that purpose.

A distinct dynamic is evident in the thought processes, philosophy, theology, epistemology, politics, and social norms of the current post-modern culture. The gospel has the power to address a post-modern culture by injecting what is truly needed: faith, hope, and love. Saturating the current culture with the uniqueness of the gospel takes careful evaluation, proper criticism, and sensitivity. To achieve optimal effectiveness, a greater understanding of the transforming power of the gospel and an increased willingness to engage that culture with the gospel is necessary.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his epistle to the Thessalonian church, he did so with gratitude and acclaim. Paul explained they were living an inspirational life in Christ and called them imitators of the Lord, an example to believers in the entire region. He taught that the Lord’s message rang out in such a way that their faith became the talk of everyone (1 Thess 1:6-8). Looking deeper into the specifics of what characterized the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, “We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 1:3).
The grouping together of faith, hope, and love is not an anomaly. Paul links the three together throughout his epistles because these three virtues are what Jesus modeled in His life. Those virtues, therefore, stand as hallmarks of a Christian life. Paul wrote, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13). The defining characteristics of the Thessalonian communal life in Christ were faith, hope, and love. They clearly saw themselves as a ‘sent’ community.

Christ Community Church must adopt the mindset and lifestyle which the Thessalonian Christians displayed. As members of the church demonstrate and share their faith using the three virtues of faith, hope, and love, the people of Christ Community will see themselves as ‘sent.’ The epistles to the Thessalonian church and the historical context which characterizes the setting of the Thessalonian church is an adequate model for Christ Community Church in establishing itself as a ‘sent’ community.

A bright future exists for the impact Christ Community can have on the people who live in its vicinity if it will adapt the principles and mindset which Paul exhorts. The question is, why do many of the people and ministries of Christ Community Church recoil when leadership initiates an evangelistic emphasis? Why do fears and insecurities surface when encouraging engagement of the culture? Why does Christ Community not see itself as a ‘sent community’?

If the people of Christ Community Church through the venue of a twelve-session engagement program adopt the mission of Jesus, understand the culture, answer six commonly asked faith questions, exemplify the three virtues of faith, hope, and love, and better understand the gospel, Christ Community Church will establish itself as a ‘sent community.’ In other words, by engaging a post-modern culture with the heart of Jesus and by understanding the current culture while exercising faith, hope, and love, Christ Community Church will bear the fruit of the
‘sentness.’ Those who participate in the engagement program will leave with a greater confidence in their ability to initiate and sustain spiritual conversations.
Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

The church must see itself as a sent community. ‘Sentness’ requires a purpose for being sent, a destination, and an adequate motivation to accomplish the sending task. Understanding the mission of Jesus and the believer’s participation in that mission defines ‘sentness.’ The first part of this literature review focuses on the culture divided into three sections: cultural particulars (demographics, world view, and philosophical foundations), cultural engagement (seeking opportunities for church involvement within that particular culture), and cultural communication (epistemology, community, and apologetics being used to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in a post-modern culture).

The second part of the literature review centers upon church and unfolds into three sections: Jesus’ mission (why He was sent and how we are sent), Christian virtue (faith, hope, and love), as the approach of ‘sentness’ and the Thessalonian church (as the model of a ‘sent’ community). A church is to understand its purpose, participate in that purpose (‘sentness’), and thereby fulfill the Missio Dei. “The Missio Dei affirms the sending nature of the divine who is present in the world. To participate in this mission is to acknowledge God’s love and presence throughout creation and accept the invitation of the divine to be sent out to affirm and witness to the triune God.”

In other words, the Missio Dei includes God’s story from beginning to end as it pertains to seeking and saving lost people through Jesus Christ.

The literature will form the basis for a twelve session course which will be offered as part of this project. The project aims to teach a more biblical way to think about church and its purposes. In doing so, the people of the church will gain confidence in their own ‘sentness.’

Culture

Cultural Particulars

The research on cultural particulars strives to isolate basic beliefs within the common belief systems in the current cultural setting. Charles Taylor’s writing masterfully portrays the roots of post-modern thought which is, by and large, the current belief system. He describes how the individualistic nature of the culture became a propellant for the entrenchment of secularism by saying, “I am free to do what I want without interference from other . . .”\(^\text{18}\) Self-determination requires freedom from external impositions and advocates a right to choose convictions without restraint. He furthers the argument by summarizing that the post-modern culture denounces all absolute values by adhering to no religious affiliation.

Although Keller meets Taylor on this point, Keller specifically leads the reader to scriptural application. Keller wrote \textit{Making Sense of God} in response to his prior book, \textit{The Reason for God}, because he felt that book did not address many of the background beliefs which culture presses upon the church. \textit{Making Sense of God} also brings together many of the cultural beliefs which confront the Christian thinker. Christianity, according to Keller, has moved to the margins. People “find creating [their] own purpose thrilling.”\(^\text{19}\)


John Stott also incorporates a distinctly biblical polemic of truth when describing the
culture. He defines the essence of post-modernism by stating that, although each person has a
different idea of truth, the post-modernist believes that no one person has the right to challenge
the veracity of that belief. “Truth is seen as personal rather than public, subjective rather than
objective.” Apologist Sean McDowell brings several of those concepts together by stating his
theology, epistemology, and church practice. A key argument he makes is that relativism and
individualism have overturned the influence of the church by “upending our theology,
philosophy, epistemology . . . and church practice.” In other words, people resist authority and
desire to develop their own decision-making pathways.

The effect of secularism disperses into the fabric of a person’s thinking. According to Art
Lindsley, a cumulative and negative consequence of secularism which eliminates God from any
moral and ethical space will “inevitably move humankind into a grim and meaningless
universe.” Lindsley carries this theme throughout his book by highlighting the absence of a
well-defined concept of love. The main purpose of this work is to provide a comprehensive view
of the concept of love and how a secular worldview, juxtaposed to a pluralistic worldview (New
Age philosophies), cannot truly love in the sense in which God intended. Charles Taylor agrees
with the notion of meaninglessness which he identifies as disenchantment. Taylor gives a far
better philosophical development of the inevitability of despair in a secular thought system. He
calls it a great loss of meaning when one shuts out “greater issues or concerns that transcend
self.”

23 Taylor, The Ethics of Authenticity, 14.
is even a point to life. Due to this nihilistic tendency in modern thought, modern selves are insecure because insecurity must be a logical conclusion of a godless philosophy. Moraru addressed the same theme highlighting the rise of a disenchanted culture.⁴ According to Mayes and Issler, the negative consequences of a godless society will continue to have widespread ramifications in everyday life.

When people pursue happiness, the persistent feeling of boredom and emptiness surfaces. The subsequent hunger for excitement and an insatiable appetite for busyness become coping mechanisms in a personal relief effort to hide the emptiness. A Christian mindset and a reliance on the Spirit’s filling is the only hope toward true wholeness.²⁵ The younger generations have an acute recognition of the void which secularity created. David Seel argues that the millennial generation, reacting against the secular void and a form of Christianity that ignores the questions they are asking, is approaching issues of ontology and teleology differently. The millennials have “adopted a corrective to three hundred years of distorted thinking.”²⁶ To address some of those questions, Samuel Chand challenges all leaders to begin a movement of better thinking about what God is up to in a godless society as a way to elevate hope.²⁷

The sense of pervasive hopelessness which has risen in the post-modern culture produces far less confidence in what secularity offers. Coupled with a sense that no epistemological foundation exists, this hopelessness created a darkness into which the light must

---


invade. The literature describes the darkness, exposes the fallacy, and goes to the heart of the matter. The authors established a greater understanding of the post-modern predicament. Few authors, however, offer a pragmatic solution to this predicament of hopelessness which secularity cannot answer.

**Cultural Engagement**

Into this predicament the church must throw itself. Keller, gives that challenge by concluding that all churches must love, understand, and identify with the local community and social setting “and yet at the same time be able and willing to critique it and challenge it.”28 As a textbook on church health, his writing not only encourages ministers to preach the Gospel, but to creatively do so into the culture in which we live. Only then will there be newfound ways to share the gospel. Samuel Escobar integrates the problem regarding secularism with the lack of impact the church is having on the current generation. He does so axiomatically by writing that “churches unable to understand the post-modern youth will be unable to keep the new generation in their fold.”29 This approach applies in the realm of apologetics.

Apologetics, according to McDowell, must present a culturally relevant argument for Christianity. In other words, he states that argumentation must be missional and that “churches must develop relational and community-oriented outreach.”30 A trust develops when the relational and communal aspects of apologetics emerge. In other words, discourse on thought and faith matters is not primarily informational, rather relational. David Skeel, a lawyer by trade, engages the secular culture with an argument from the complexities felt at the experiential level.

---


Skeel writes, “The complexities that will concern us most arise from the intangible aspects of our complexities that will concern us most arise from the intangible aspects of our experience.”  

These complexities, such as consciousness, beauty, and the experience of justice point to God as the most rational explanation. Is there not a polemic which can cut through the current thinking in such a way as to be relevant and loving? Oz Guinness concluded affirmatively in his recent work by advocating a return to the art of persuasion. According to Guinness, persuasion must be “cross-centered and cross-shaped.” In other words, the apologetic must be decisively Christian in nature.

Engaging the culture requires a readiness to answer the questions which the culture is asking. The task of apologetics seeks to engage the culture on a level which can ultimately and rationally answer those questions. Ravi Zacharias addresses the questions of faith on numerous levels in his books and utilizes fact and logic to assail mere opinion. “Opinions are preferences amid options. Convictions are woven into one’s conscience.” Josh McDowell has been on the forefront of apologetics for decades sounding the alarm that the next generation is adopting distorted beliefs about God, truth, and reality. The plethora of writing on apologetics has prompted compilations and surveys which address the major questions which skeptics are asking.

---


34 To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, J.P. Moreland, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004). These are a series of essays written by the top Christian apologists of this time period. The comprehensive volume of essays were written in honor of Norm Geisler, another Christian philosopher, apologist, theologian who has had a significant impact throughout the last forty years.

asking. Apologetics for Gary Habermas expresses the significance of the resurrection to the Christian faith by writing that “… it is central to Christian theology.”

The culture is inundated not only with secularism but with the philosophical groundwork of moral relativism and religious pluralism as well. The transcript of a Trinity Debate event featuring Harold Netland and Paul Knitter titled “Can a Christian be a pluralist?” shows the proliferation of pluralistic thinking and how easily it slips into the church.

John Stott’s commentary on Romans speaks to the missional, relational, and communal, as stated above, by entering into the argument on theological grounds. He argues that “God, who in Himself is invisible and unknowable has made Himself visible and knowable.” God’s transcendence and immanence at the same time beckon the believer to establish a cause beyond self. Escobar also approaches the challenge theologically by describing the hermeneutic of taking the text of the Bible and Christian theology and understanding its own cultural and historical context and then applying its meaning in different contexts. God’s knowability in Scripture demonstrates His desire to ultimately both serve and beckon. He challenges churches to be holistic in their approach by “using social activity as a bridge and partner of evangelism.”

James Bryant Smith also capitalizes on the concept of a well-rounded. He addresses the subject of cultural engagement by encouraging the church to develop a unique and necessary community which is characterized by an other-centeredness, following the Kingdom


narrative, and helping to shape and guide souls within the community.  

Nathan Wheeler also emphasizes the need for authentic community within the church to attract those who do not yet know Christ. The church gains trust by stating an inextricable relationship between participating in the work of Christ and participating in the community. By embodying the redemptive work of Jesus, the church bears witness to Jesus.  

Few writers offer practical biblical examples of cultural engagement. In one instance, however, F. F. Bruce in his commentary on the Book of Acts describes Paul’s journey as one where Paul engaged the culture by speaking the gospel directly to the philosophies he identified within that culture. The literature resources are replete with exhortation to participate in the work of God within a culture but seem rather sparse when providing guidance on the execution of such a task.

**Cultural Communication**

An understanding of the culture to which the church is called allows the church to address the needs of that culture dramatically increasing successful engagement. Having a grasp of the questions, for which the post-modern generation desperately seeks answers, will also lend itself to successful engagement of the culture. The church must seek both understand the culture and be willing to answer its questions. Michael Gorman begins the theological treatment of communicating the gospel to the specific culture by stating a need for those who participate to

---

40 James Bryant Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 72.


“not merely believe the gospel but become the gospel and in doing so to participate in the very mission of God.” The message, being Spirit-enabled and transformative, will be delivered by one who embodies it authentically. The authenticity will open doors for communication of the gospel. This is the heart by which Escobar postulates that missions exist because God is a missionary God who sends His people to be a blessing.

The practical application of such Christian living which brings the holistic blessing begins with prioritization. Lee Kricher insists that both personal growth and reaching out must be priorities for every Christian. A Christian must adopt a different mindset that in turn results in action. This new thought/action expression is the word ‘sent.’ A theological basis for this comes from D.A. Carson, who emphasizes that “the purpose of the sanctification of his followers is being sent, by Jesus Himself, into the world.” The ‘sentness’ about which Carson and Gorman write must become a priority for the believer. According to Smith, ‘sent’ Christians must pray, watch, reach out, listen, connect, share, and invite. The summons for the entire church to behave in that way and as a lively community is missing. To close that gap, Wilfred DeJesus offers a challenge to be the voice of God to families and communities.

The message, however, remains the same regardless of the cultural application. Stott, in his commentary on Romans, writes that the Christian duty is to bring people to accept their true

---


47 Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community*, 62.

diagnosis. Under that dark background, Christians must share the light of the gospel “to eradicate the antithesis between what people know and what they do.”\textsuperscript{49} In that way, the message to the culture can be a grander and more applicable message. The message must challenge the culture and, therefore, address the questions which the culture is asking. Guinness recognizes the need to challenge the culture and exhorts the reader to address questions on the levels of the human mind, heart, and emotions.\textsuperscript{50} Having given definition to what he stated, the key is to speak the truth into the culture as emphasized by Moraru. He suggests using every available means, even art.\textsuperscript{51} The idea of art has recently become a topic worth considering when confronting both secularism and creationism. Mayes and Issler give a model for doing so. They emphasize that the epistemological crisis of this age can only be solved through a Christian worldview. Based on knowledge and truth, the correct beliefs expressed will renovate and empower the soul. Renewed hearts will lead to a flourishing culture.\textsuperscript{52} Changed people changing communities, however, is stating the obvious. If a soul were renovated, and a worldview of truth adopted, the problem of changing communities is solved. The question remains as to what the best practice might be to initiate change. According to McDowell, being a catalyst to cultural transformation might mean “to ask troubling questions and thereby cultivate the garden of belief.”\textsuperscript{53} The knowledge of God allows the believer to better know themselves while at the same time addressing issues of unbelief for those who are inquiring.

\textsuperscript{49} Stott, Romans, 79.
\textsuperscript{50} Guinness, Fool’s Talk, 41.
\textsuperscript{51} Moraru, Christian Fundamentalism and Cultural Disenchantment, 424
\textsuperscript{52} Mayes and Issler, Kingdom Triangle, 393.
\textsuperscript{53} McDowell, Apologetics, 85.
The need to communicate about the culture remains. In a research-oriented format, Rick Richardson makes new discoveries about people’s attitudes and ideas regarding church. “This approach gets us a little closer to cracking the cultural code of persuasive conversation for the unchurched, and does so without giving up . . . conviction . . . and the power of the gospel.”54 The ability to communicate a new narrative to the culture in a way the culture will accept is an essential and much needed skill. Churches have struggled to find ways to connect the message to the culture. The data in Richardson’s book is valuable to the church leader willing to begin a new narrative with the community regarding the gospel.

On a philosophical level, the literature aptly described the culture in which the church presently finds itself. Practically, however, there remains a gap. Formulating a means to address the issue of ‘sentness’ that goes beyond mere intellectualism is difficult. Overarching principles, like rungs on a ladder, can assist us in having a mindset of ‘sentness.’ Bruce Riley and Heath Thomas affirm the need for this type of progression. They address the issue of being sent into the culture by injecting the idea of a King and a kingdom. That theme gives shape to the Bible, a proper worldview, and the mission of every Christian. The authors agree that Christian mission is comprised of “four aspects: theological, social, cultural, and global.”55 Addressing the hopelessness and emptiness of secularity and the deeper spaces which cannot be answered by pluralistic and relativistic philosophies raises questions. What can cut through the vaporous, blurred thinking that keeps people trapped in the immanent? Is it possible that within the deeper place of personhood, the three virtues of faith, and hope and love become the narrative behind ‘sentness’? What would happen if the believer demonstrated visible and audible Christlikeness?

54 Rick Richardson, You Found Me, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 78.

Would not the culture respond? ‘Sentness’ gives an adequate response to the above questions. The possibility of addressing an increasing number of unbelievers and skeptics is the aspiration of this project.

Church

Jesus’ Mission

When discussing the mission of the Lord Jesus, or why He came in the first place, it is clear that lost, hurting, and broken people are in the forefront of His mind (Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10; Matt 9:12-13; Luke 4:16-21). Jesus in meeting the chief needs of humanity, sets the captives free, mends broken hearts, serves the needy, and redeems the lost. David Wells opens the study with an utter emphasis on the incarnation of Christ and what the incarnation meant through history and the current ramifications for belief in the incarnation today. “It needs to be remembered, however, that whereas initially the thought of a fully human Christ was so problematic, in our time the difficulty is with a fully divine Christ.”  

The fact that Jesus was sent in the first place speaks volumes about His purpose.

The purpose in His coming was to seek all lost people and offer them salvation. Those people would find their rescue who were willing to admit their sinfulness, their need for Christ’s atoning sacrifice, and in repentance find their Savior. Linda Wright addresses salvation by calling people to an honest assessment of their true situation. “Because the fact is, everybody’s salvation is in jeopardy if forsaking of sin is a condition because we are all still sinners.” Jesus alone can take away sin through His sacrifice. When one makes a discovery of their true

---


situation, they are more ready to adapt the mission which Jesus set out to accomplish. Having grasped an appropriate and true assurance of this salvific relationship through faith, the believer begins to own their purpose of continuing the mission of Jesus through evangelistic efforts. They begin to own ‘sentness.’

The need to find Jesus is the starting point of living Jesus’ stated mission. The hindrance, however, is sin. Anthony Hoekema explains that being created in the image of God is a key to unlocking potential and purpose, however, the image has been corrupted by the fall. “The Bible, however, does not teach any such sharp antithesis between spirit (or mind) and body.” 58 Once a person understands that sin affects the whole person and redemption also affects the whole person, freedom can be found in the forgiveness which Jesus offers. Healing begins at the moment of trusting Christ. Only then can one life like Jesus according to His purposes. When the church believes spiritual healing to be true, the church must also beware of misrepresenting the pathway to healing. According to Stephen Arterburn, “There is evidence in Scripture that God sometimes offers a strange path toward healing that is easy to resist or reject outright.” 59 Authenticity, community, and good theology is the grounding for true healing and becomes tools for the mission of the believer as they follow the mission of Jesus. The starting point is belief and the motivation is love.

The mission of Jesus and subsequently the mission of the believer is based on love. God initiated love, and believers are to exemplify His love. John Townsend challenges the believer to be people of love based on the love demonstrated by Jesus. “Everybody needs to be sought after in love.” 60 The believer can be part of bringing healing to the broken. Understanding the deeper

58 Anthony Hoekema, Created in God’s Image, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman’s, 1986), 206.
59 Stephen Arterburn, Healing is a Choice (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), xxii.
needs of the soul and addressing those needs becomes an avenue for a community to begin healing and participate in the mission of Jesus. Human significance begins and continues in the love of God. Robert McGee differentiates the detrimental inner life of self-worth based on external and empirical factors (works) as opposed to a healthy self-worth based on the love and forgiveness of Jesus (grace). “The focus of the Christian life should be on Christ, not on self-imposed regulations.” 61 True community demonstrates authenticity by initiating conversations which expose deeper needs.

True community is essentially kingdom living. As previously mentioned in The Gospel of Our King, Ashford and Thomas adopt the idea of missional living through kingdom principles by establishing the reign and rule of Jesus as King. Scott McKnight in his thoughtful work proposes much of the same information but emphasizes that Jesus is currently on the throne and, therefore, has been “the Messiah/King.” 62 Bates brings the Kingdom argument to a different dimension by applying a lexical study on the word ‘faith.’ The proposition of his work centers upon ‘faith’ being more ‘allegiance’ to the rightful King Jesus. He further argues that contemporary Christian culture often comes prepackaged with functional ideas and operative definitions of belief, faith, works, salvation, heaven, and the gospel that truncate and distort the full message of the good news about Jesus. This needs to change. “Jesus anticipated that his death and resurrection were in the final analysis purposed toward his enthronement as the king of heaven and earth.” 63 According to Bates, the part of the gospel story often missing is the ascension. It cannot be overemphasized that Jesus is seated on the throne as the cosmic ruler right now.

62 Scott McKnight, The King Jesus Gospel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 96.
An incarnational community is aware of Jesus’ role as cosmic ruler. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay take principles of community from the ancient church and apply them to the church today. The focus is threefold as they talk through communion, community, and mission. These three form the practical “rhythms of community: sharing friends, food, and life.”\(^\text{64}\) Participating with God, others, and the Holy Spirit purposefully grounds the believer in the mission of Jesus. The three rhythms highlight the potential a church holds for healing. Building a true expression of the church, one based on the love and mission of Jesus, is the goal.

Demonstrating genuine community will result in bringing healing and hope to a lost and seeking world. When a community exemplifies authenticity, compassion, and a willingness to engage, the world will notice the difference. Authenticity and compassion fuel the light of Christ inside of the believer. The believer must be ready to tell their own story of Christ inside them. According to Rick Richardson, even the hard to reach millennial will notice a distinction which will in turn draw them toward the believing community. “The best way to begin in each of these steps is to first listen and affirm, and then engage through your authentic story of experiencing something similar.”\(^\text{65}\) Even the hardest of skeptics will be interested in the story regardless of how unbelievable it may seem.

**Christian Virtue as the Approach**

The three Christian virtues which the Apostle Paul reiterates throughout his epistles are faith, hope, and love. Most recognize these from Paul’s statement in his first letter to the Corinthians where he taught, “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the

---

\(^\text{64}\) Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community*, (San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 158.

\(^\text{65}\) Rick Richardson, *You Found Me*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 98.
greatest of these is love” (I Cor. 13:13 NIV). The epistle the Corinthians is not, however, the only place the Apostle combines these three virtues as will be seen in the next section. According to Paul, there is no better way to demonstrate the Christian life.

In examining the life and writings of the Apostle Paul, W.E. Chadwick sees faith, hope, and love as “a standard and a mirror which the believer must examine for themselves.”66 Paul epitomized these three giving the believer a framework with which they might determine and evaluate the quality of their actions. In a commentary on the first epistle to the Corinthians, F.W. Grosheide wrote while that is true, the three virtues are initiated and powered by God, and demonstrate the reality of a relationship with God.67

The three virtues of faith, hope, and love have consistently been a dominant theme in the circles of Christian writers. Josef Pieper wrote three volumes on the three virtues, which eventually were combined into one volume.68 He developed a practical theology on each in hopes that the works of the Catholic theologians of bygone days could shed light into the Christian life. More recently, Marva Dawn entered the argument giving a treatise on how the concept of hope can be a call to faithful living.69

The practicality of love as the dominant of the three virtues and as perhaps the deepest need of every human being (to love and be loved) is the subject matter of popular counselor and author John Townsend.70 The greatest of all commandments, as specified according to Jesus’


67 F.W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 312.


conversation with an expert in the law, is centered on the concept of love (Mat 22:37-39). The object of love for the believer is first God, who is to be loved with heart soul strength and mind, followed by a love for one another. With this in place, love for God is then followed by a love for one another. Only when one is well grounded and secure in being loved by God and responds by loving Him in return can one proceed in genuine and active love for fellow man. So, it must be remembered that the writings on the three Christian virtues will ultimately lead to the preeminence of love.

A surprising gap exists in the field of literature around these three virtues. Sources applicable to this project have mentioned faith, hope, and love as either an example, a reminder, a proof text, or a specific study on the major themes of Paul’s theology. Research is lacking on how faith, hope, and love become the foundation for a living faith and for engagement with the lost culture to accomplish the mission of Jesus. Mark Jones, however, in his recent work appropriately entitled *Faith, Hope, Love*, answers the question as to why this triad is mentioned so often in the New Testament. He argues that these three encompass the entire foundation for the Christian life.\(^7\)

This project relies heavily on the transformative nature of the three virtues of faith, hope, and love. Paul’s theology clearly identifies the necessity of these three virtues for meeting the spiritual needs of the culture. The message of Christ is a message of faith, hope, and love. Bringing this message to the masses requires the messengers to embody faith, hope, and love for that will become the primary way to gain a hearing. This project aims to provide clarity and direction through the foundational virtues of faith, hope, and love in order to accomplish the Mission of Jesus.

---

The Thessalonian Church

Of the churches in Asia Minor and Europe in which Paul was intimately involved, the Thessalonian church shined as a community demonstrating faith, hope, and love. According to Bruce, the Thessalonian church was the most likely to demonstrate Christ-like qualities even amidst the intense persecution. He goes on to affirm that “Thessalonica stood firm and actually began to propagate on their own initiative the message which they had believed.”72 These Christ-like qualities resonate with the church of today in many parts of the world where persecution is harsh and swift. Christlikeness also resonates with the church in America, not so much in radical persecution, but in the sense of counter-cultural values. Goodwin writes, “Faithfulness and charity characterized the Thessalonians.”73 These character qualities caught the attention of the communities surrounding the Thessalonian church and spread to other parts of Europe.

Michael Holmes draws a parallel between the Thessalonian culture and today’s culture with the understanding that Paul’s challenge to help believers learn, understand, and live by a different social and ethical code in the midst of skepticism and hostility proved challenging. The Thessalonians, however, realized that “... important as it is to promote or contend for biblical values in the so-called culture wars, it is even more important to live them.”74 Halter and Smay come back to the subject of the Kingdom and describe the Thessalonian church as one that needed to see faith lived out in order to understand better and steadfastly adhere to Paul’s teachings. Paul’s approach to the Thessalonians during his visit was one of gentleness,


selflessness, love and delight. Due to this posture, the church accepted Paul and his message and the church flourished. The fact that the Thessalonians imitated Paul allows the reader to assume they adopted the posture of faith, hope, and love. This posture of Christlikeness is necessary to engage and impact the culture with the Good News of Jesus.

According to G.K. Beale, the praise that Paul gives the Thessalonian church for its goodness on display was described by Paul to be a work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope. “People sometimes think of faith, love, and hope as mere traits of the so-called ‘spiritual’ Christian, but this foundational phrase describes how any Christian is able to weather the stormy trials of the end times.” This type of groundwork for Christian living will withstand the scrutiny, skepticism, persecution, and disorientation which the Thessalonian church and the church of today experiences.

The Thessalonian church, having heard the gospel, responded in a way that evidenced their transformation. Todd D. Still makes a strong case that it was the three Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love that comprised the evidence of the gospel in Thessalonica. The study corroborates the general idea of faith, hope, and love as the basis of the entire Christian life.

Despite this corroboration, a gap exists in the literature regarding the centrality of the three Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love within the Thessalonian community. Although the commentaries adequately describe the Thessalonian community to which Paul is writing, the description underemphasizes the virtues of faith, hope, and love as the groundwork for the

---

75 Halter and Smay, The Tangible Kingdom, 41.
believers of Thessalonica. In other words, the foundation of faith, hope, and love is the necessary foundation for an active faith that accomplishes the mission of Jesus both inside the walls of the church (meeting needs, growing in Christ, and community living) and outside the walls (engaging culture, meeting needs, and sharing hope). The Thessalonian believers displayed the characteristics of faith, hope, and love and many noticed.

Theological Foundations

The Mission of Jesus and the Church

The church is the extension of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus prayed in John 17:18, “Just as You sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world” (NLT). As the disciples experience sanctification (John 17:17), they become ready for sending into the world. Carson writes, “As Jesus was ‘sanctified’ and sent into the world (John 10:36), so the purpose of the ‘sanctification’ of his followers is that they are sent, by Jesus Himself, into the world.” Jesus sanctifies the believer, and that event presupposes mission. Mitchell agrees by concluding “we are also sanctified for a mission.” Many people around the world remain in need of missionary work and will require a certain method based on cultural nuances. However, the overriding principle of John 17:18 pertains to sanctification, or “a setting apart to special tasks,” as a prerequisite for mission.

The calling on a believer’s life is not merely a sense of mission, rather a bonifide

---

78 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages are in the New Living Translation (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1998).


81 Walter Elwell, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 969.
assignment given and modeled by Jesus Himself. Scripture declares why Jesus came. “The four canonical Gospels provide ample evidence that the primary focus of missio Christi was to provide salvation and the forgiveness of sins for lost humanity through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus.”

Through the teachings of the Bible the church can understand its purpose. The mission of the church, rooted in the mission of Jesus, needs always to remain between the boundaries of making disciples and reaching the community/world with the message of the gospel. The church must furthermore meet the needs of this broken world. Incorporating the elements of sharing the gospel and meeting needs in a compelling way is paramount to achieving the biblical mandates and goals associated with kingdom work. Mancini describes, “The mission mandate is like the heartbeat of an organization. It should touch members on an emotional level and act like a cohesive force and binding agent.”

Though his description can be applied to any organization, the church is the focus of his writing.

The theological foundation for this project falls under three categories and lay the groundwork for the advancement of the gospel. First, the Great Commission and the Great Commandment will be explored as the basis for Jesus’ mission and subsequently the mission of the church. Second, the stated purposes of Jesus delineated by Himself throughout the gospels clearly show why He came. Third, the method by which Jesus continued His vision through Peter, Paul, and the church will be reviewed. The three categories cast a theological footing for methodological clarity and ecclesiological practicality as believers collectively continue the work of Christ in the world.

---


83 Will Mancini, Church Unique, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 120.
The Great Commission and the Great Commandment

Great Commission

Jesus pronounced the Great Commission in the resurrection narrative at the end of Matthew’s gospel (also Mark 16:15). He outlined for His followers how the remainder of the civilized and uncivilized world would hear about and have a chance to respond to Jesus’ offer of salvation.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt 28:16-20).

The brevity of these verses gives emphasis by way of understatement. The entire Great Commission, simply stated and easily understood, became the basis for all church growth movements. The succinct nature of the command and the context in which it was set underscores its urgency. “The five short verses that comprise this Great Commission passage are among the most important to establish the ongoing agenda of the church throughout the ages.”\(^{84}\) The methodology intrinsic in this passage clearly gives the church the path forward.

In contemplating the Great Commission, Ed Stetzer writes, “Like a missionary, we are to contend for the faith, present Christ in a contextualized manner that can be received by the hearers, and operate in a countercultural community of faith. The end result of our very different mission is to persuade people of the greatness of Christ and His redemption.”\(^{85}\) The Great Commission, however, is not ultimately the footing on which to build the church. It is not the


most important commandment. The Great Commandment alone reserves that distinction.

Great Commandment

Jesus pronounced the Great Commandment when He responded to an expert in the Law of Moses. In the command, He gave His followers a plan to follow which would become the goal of a devoted Christ-follower.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt 22:34-40).

The Old Testament and New Testament by virtue of this verse emphasize the importance of a biblical concept of love based on the words and life of Jesus.

Jewish scholars of Jesus’ day decided which commandments were ‘light’ and which were ‘heavy.’ The reaction from the nearby scholars in this story is not surprising. A teacher of the law of God interrupts the silence by asking the supposed Great Teacher a question, or rather more of a cross examination. Jesus quickly shot back with two Old Testament passages. The first is from Deuteronomy 6:1-7 and posited a summarization of the law of Moses. The second Old Testament reference is an inferred general principle from Leviticus 19:18. Thus, to love God and to love others became the paramount imperative upon which all other commandments would find their base. Keener comments that “. . . amid the multiplicity of proposals concerning the greatest commandment in antiquity, only Jesus wielded the moral authority among his followers to focus their ethics so profoundly on a single theme.”86 The theme is love.

Love, stemming from a knowledge of Christ, must be central to all of theology. In his theological work, Grudem wrote “a life that is pleasing to God is one that has moral purity not only in its actions, but also in its desires of the heart. In fact, the greatest commandment of all requires that our heart be filled with an attitude of love for God.” That which comprises ministry of any sort must begin on the foundation of a love for God that incorporates the whole self.

Jesus’ Stated Purposes

A second way to determine a biblical foundation for a church mission statement is to look at Jesus’ earthly ministry. Once Jesus’ ministry is determined, the believer can adopt that mission, thereby comprehending the purpose He gave for His body (the church). If the church truly is the hands and feet of Jesus and expressly called His body, the church, then, must undertake the task of carefully listening to what Jesus taught about His purpose on earth. Seek and Save

First, Jesus stated one of the purposes for His coming in a dialogue with Zacchaeus the tax collector. At the end of the conversation, Jesus said, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Lost people were and are Jesus’ passion. He demonstrated His passion on an individual level during His interaction with Zacchaeus. In the ancient Middle East, sharing a meal with another showed the value placed on the relationship. The two individuals desiring to establish a continued friendship, ate a meal as a sign of ongoing commitment. This occasion, therefore, afforded Jesus an opportunity to restate His mission to Zacchaeus who was at that point one of the lost. Liefeld writes, “The verse itself expresses the heart of Jesus’

———

ministry as presented by Luke, both his work of salvation and his quest for the lost.”88 If Jesus was sent to the lost, the church must adopt the same posture.

The example of the story of Zacchaeus demonstrates Jesus’ concern for the individual. While Jesus is seen many times teaching the multitudes, His message always emphasizes a common theme: Jesus wants every individual to turn to Him. Stetzer states, “Yet, it is essential we remember that the most important step in helping anyone is introducing them to Jesus Christ.”89 The church, thus, must endeavor to reach the masses and the individual.

Serve

Second, Jesus used a teachable moment to address the twelve after James and John asked if they might sit at the right and left of His throne in heaven. The other disciples became indignant after hearing rumblings of their request. Maneuvering one’s way to high places, regardless of the motive, was commonplace in the political scene of the first century but a foreign concept in kingdom activity. Even though Jesus rebuked the disciples earlier for a spirit of ambition and jealousy (9:35), another rebuke was needed. It was that rebuke which afforded Jesus an opportunity to state another of His purposes. Jesus replied to the situation by saying, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

The upside-down nature of the kingdom escaped the understanding of the disciples, especially as it related to favoritism, greatness, and the path toward those objectives. Power and authority defined the culture under the machine of the Roman army. To conceive of another way


89 Stetzer, Compelled, 117.
to greatness was almost unthinkable. Wessel concludes, “In the kingdom of God, humble service is the rule, and even the Son of Man is not exempt from it. He is in fact par excellence the example of it, especially in his redemptive mission.” To serve is to look like Jesus.

Jesus served, and will continue to serve even unto death, a point made clear in the upper room as He washed His disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17). The serving to which Jesus challenged His disciples was not to be a singular instance, but a lifetime of activity to the last breath. Garland agrees by writing, “All followers must share his self-giving love and service and His fate of suffering before they can share his glory.” If the believer is to accomplish the mission of Jesus, then serving is a mandate motivated by an overflow of gratitude to God.

Obey

Third, Jesus provided yet another statement that clearly demonstrated His purpose on earth. Jesus escaped to a solitary place, and the crowds looked intently for Him. After all, He just fed five thousand people. A desire to see more of Him and perhaps benefit once again from His miracles, they eventually found Him. A gathered crowd became an opportunity for Jesus to teach a matter of utmost importance saying, “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me” (John 6:38). The disciples, only a few verses prior, asked Jesus what work they needed to accomplish. Jesus responded with only one item: to believe in the one He [God] has sent (John 6:29). Belief results in a change of allegiance and course of action throughout one’s life. Jesus’ obedience to the Father takes center stage. Morris concludes, “In this whole work of salvation Jesus is in the most perfect harmony with the Father. He came

---


down from heaven specifically to do the will of the Father.”92 The church must never lose sight of the imperative to obey.

Jesus’ whole life as the Son of God was an act of spiritual worship. It is the same for every believer. Those who follow Christ are to offer their bodies as a spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1-2). The entirety of their lives ought to reflect a desire to glorify, worship, and honor the God who bought them at a price and adopted them as sons and daughters.

Obedience is integral and inseparable to the concept of worship. Millard Erickson in his theological work spells that out by writing, “Jesus had a profound sense that the Father had sent Him, and that He had to do the Father’s work. . . The apostle John expressly relates the sending by the Father to the Son’s redemptive and atoning work.”93 As the Holy Trinity works to accomplish the divine purpose for mankind, a call to obedience is at the heart of it. Jesus obeyed and Christians must also obey as part of their spiritual discipline. Jesus’ obedience was demonstrated by Jesus as He prayed, worshipped, served, taught, endured suffering, loved, and sacrificed Himself.

**Jesus’ Personal Vision**

Jesus’ destination included suffering and death. That much was clear to Him. It would be through the cross that Jesus would accomplish His great work. What drove Jesus to continue His journey knowing what would meet Him at the end of it? His love for all people. The work of Jesus and His impact on people must become the focal point of a cross-centered kingdom vision. Several places in Scripture provide a glimpse of Jesus’ vision for His life and ministry.

---


Jerusalem set before Him

Luke tells of a defining moment in the ministry of Jesus when He moved toward the great work to be accomplished. Luke wrote, “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). He literally set His face toward Jerusalem and began the trek. Liefeld writes, “The approaching goal is not only the death and resurrection but especially the ascension of Christ . . .”94 All three Christological events were clearly in mind as Jesus stood and looked toward Jerusalem.

Just two weeks prior, Jesus predicted His death and clearly outlined for the disciples the sequence of His glorification. Eight days after Jesus predicted His death, Moses and Elijah met Jesus in what is known as the transfiguration. The purpose of this supernatural visit was to encourage Jesus. “They spoke about His departure, which He was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). Directly after the encounter, Jesus set His sights on Jerusalem, the place of His impending death. These two instances within this very short period of time revealed to the disciples the path their Master must take.

Jesus demonstrated that He a personal vision. He headed toward death on a cross for a much bigger purpose than anyone at that time realized. He would accomplish the salvation offered to all mankind, the forgiveness of sins, and entrance into His family. He set His sights and saw in His mind’s eye what lay before Him. Warfield comments, “In any event, we must bear in mind that our Lord did not come into the world to be broken by the power of sin and death, but to break it.”95 He was undaunted.

---


Joy Set before Him

Paul reiterates what Luke spoke of when he described Jesus’ resolution to accomplish His vision. He writes, “. . . For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). How could anyone see joy in such an assignment? What, for Jesus, was the silver lining? Enduring the pain and humiliation of the cross and disregarding the shame involved in that kind of execution, He accomplished the work, finishing what He always saw Himself finishing. For what did He hang on the cross? The answer is for the joy set before Him.

The joy of His ascension and reunion in heaven was no doubt on His mind. Forefront in His heart, however, were the people of the world He loved. David Filson highlights this point by writing, “But, what could have been joyful in view of the humiliating horrors of the looming cross? If only the page you are reading could turn into a mirror and your reflection appear, you would see the joy set before Him.”96 The joy of seeing people come to faith in Him motivated Him to persevere.

God created people to have a relationship with Jesus. Jesus, having been sent for the very purpose of offering that relationship, continued in His joyful work. Warfield writes, “From His exalted position in heaven at God’s right hand, Jesus enables us to persist, to endure, and to be faithful to God and his Word.”97 Surely Jesus’ joy found completion from that standpoint. But the passage clearly states that the people whom His Father created remained on the forefront of His mind. Once again, love for His people created the storehouse of joy even in the face of the cross.

---


Jesus’ Continued Vision

Through Peter

Jesus entered Caesarea Philippi and asked His disciples a question that has resided in the mind of pastors and lay persons ever since, challenging those inside and outside the faith. “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matt 16:13; also Mark 8:27). The answer came back with various names of prophets. Jesus then asked the disciples who they personally thought Jesus was. Peter, who was prone to rush into things, answered first and answered correctly. “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:16 NLT). It was then that Jesus set forth a vision for Simon that would have implications for the remainder of his life. He would no longer cast nets only for fish, but for men. Jesus replied, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt 16:18).

Projecting a hopeful future through mission and vision is a powerful form of encouragement. Vision and encouraging words communicate a belief in the gifts and abilities of the one to whom the vision is spoken and highlights their great potential. Encouragement is extremely important coming from significant others. “The position we hold in people’s lives determines the weight of our words and thus our potential to shape their future.”98 The significance of the relationship is especially true of Jesus to Peter. Jesus gave to Peter not only a new name but the reason for his name (rock). The significance of this event multiplies when one realizes that Jesus, the Son of God, spoke Peter’s destiny.

Peter would be the person chosen to be the foundation of the church. Thus, when Peter wrote his epistles, the church and its functioning became a focal point. Christ served as the star

---

subject of the epistles to the churches. Lykin, Wilhoit, and Longman wrote, “Peter wrote of the
church as being built on the firm granite foundation of Isaiah 28:16, built with living stones into
a spiritual temple, for Christ himself is the living stone par excellence. . .”99 The church, the
living Body of Christ, is the way Jesus chose to continue His work on earth. The church began
with a man named Peter whom God chose for this purpose.

Through Paul

Jesus chose an unlikely candidate to take the message of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. He
chose Saul (later to become Paul), a strong willed and zealous Pharisee. Paul, who only shortly
before became a Christ follower, visited Jerusalem soon after his conversion and met a hostile
crowd. After a great uproar and threats from the crowd, people feared for Paul’s life. Those
friendly to Paul hid him in the barracks of the guards for a few nights. On the second night, Jesus
the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem,
so you must testify about me in Rome”” (Acts 23:11). Fernando describes Paul’s journey.

At times of special need, God appears to his servants in some supernatural way and gives
them a glimpse of himself that encourages them to persevere in the task they have been
given. . . The comfort Paul received was in the form of an affirmation of the sovereignty
of God. This time of uncertainty eventually resulted in Paul’s fulfilling one of his greatest
ambitions: to preach the gospel in Rome.100

Paul set his mind on Rome after receiving a vision from an angel. The angel forecasted for Paul
where he would continue his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 23:11). This must have been at the
same time both startling and intriguing.

99 Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, ed., Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (Downers

All roads truly did lead to Rome. Thus, the prospect of people from all nations hearing about the Good News of God’s Son dominated the vision. In this way, Paul could continue the work which Jesus already began. The vision of going to Rome now dominated Paul’s mind. According to Jesus, the message would have the greatest potential of spreading going through Rome. Crowds traveled to and from the capital city with frequency for two reasons: the pax Romana and the road systems created by this powerful empire. Boice explains,

Rome had brought peace to the world (the pax Romana) and had linked the world by a magnificent system of roads, some of which still exist in parts of Italy, France, and Switzerland, Britain and elsewhere. On these roads (and at sea), under the general protection of the Roman legions, the apostle Paul and his companions brought the good news of the gospel to Asia Minor, Greece and even to Rome.\(^{101}\)

God prepared the first century geography and the history in anticipation of the incarnation of His Son at precisely the right time (Gal 4:4).

The prospect of reaching the world with the Good News brought with it a strategy. Giving Paul a command regarding his next steps was part of that strategy. God’s sovereignty guaranteed the safe voyage to Rome by having Paul arrested, a plan conducive for sharing the theological truth of His realized Kingdom. Paul, now having seen his destination and purpose, traveled under arrest to the capital of the civilized world and testified about Jesus to whomever God might choose.

Through the church

The apostle Paul wrote a passage of Scripture under the power of the Holy Spirit that could arguably be considered the high mark of church function. In it, Paul sets out a vision for the church. He sees and sets forth in writing what he hopes will become reality for the Ephesian

---

church and the surrounding fledgling churches dotted along the Eastern Mediterranean rim and beyond.

So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, . . . From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Eph 4:11-13, 16).

God designed the body to work and fit together to accomplish the good things He planned for us long ago (Eph 2:10).

That particular passage is laden with vision for the body of Christ today. It is a vision of the body built up in unity and fullness in Christ. The result is growth, love, and service.

Campbell in his commentary on Ephesians wrote, “This passage gives us a ringside view into how the Body of Christ is to mutually function.” 102 He goes on to describe the goal of the passage by stating how those who are teachers must initiate and continue the work of building believers toward perfection so they might minister effectively. “The end result includes edification of the body of Christ.” 103 Edification, in turn, results in productive ministry.

A key word in the passage above is the word ‘love’. Love is the hallmark of a follower of Christ. The foundation and growth of effective ministry must all be done in a context of love. Campbell writes, “Through this process, growth and enlargement takes place among the members. All this is unto the end of the body building itself up in the sphere of love.” 104 This is the vision which Paul gave to the church and that vision applies today which, if followed,

---


103 Ibid., 159.

104 Campbell, Ephesians, 166.
will build a powerful, effective, and joyful church.

The body of Christ has as its primary function to move the Kingdom of God forward into the world. A body built upon the foundation of Christ and growing toward its intended God-given design has great power and potential to accomplish Kingdom tasks. The proclamation of the gospel and serving those in need are part of the responsibility of the body. Jerry Ireland writes, “While the concept of the Kingdom of God proves central for understanding that both evangelism and social concern are vital to a biblical faith, it is the doctrine of revelation and the necessary and unique correlation between this doctrine and the verbal proclamation of the Gospel that gives evangelism priority.”

Faith, Hope and Love

Introduction

The three Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love are central to this project in that they will become the groundwork for embodying the mission of Jesus and engaging the culture. Every believer must have the mind of Christ and by implication live the way Jesus lived. If faith, hope, and love remain in the forefront of the mind and heart of a Christ follower, those virtues will likely play out in speech and action. In that way the believer will model the life of Jesus.

Modeling the life of Jesus is the ultimate goal of spiritual formation. The more believers are formed into the image of Christ, the more impact they will have in relationships, attitudes, and endeavors. Hillman, in writing about a Christian’s calling and spiritual formation concluded, “Our primary calling is to a loving and dynamic relationship with God.” He goes on to describe how the functional aspect of a calling demonstrates the relationship with God daily. Peter wrote, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps” (1 Pet 2:21). In other words, living out the life of Jesus is

---


the greatest calling for the believer.

The Holy Spirit motivates, directs, and empowers this way of living. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote, “I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit” (Eph 3:16). Modeling Jesus is an understanding of how the Holy Spirit’s power works inside of each believer. Paul wrote, “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7). This power can be realized by serving within the walls of the church and outside the walls of church. By seeing a need and meeting it, believers begin to show the fruits of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit catalyzes faith, hope, and love and appropriates these virtues into our lives.

**Connecting Jesus and Faith, Hope, Love**

**Faith**

Faith is a multifaceted word. A cursory look at its synonyms helps to recognize how diverse an application one word can have. Belief, conviction, dependence, expectation, hope, aspiration, religion, dogma, opinion, loyalty, compliance, steadiness, can fall within the realm of possible definitions depending on context. One example of a faith passage is Romans 3:22, “We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are” (Rom 3:22). The meaning of faith synchronizes with the concept of belief.

Hermeneutical decisions, however, need to be made to accurately convey the original intent of the biblical writer. In certain passages, faith can also represent allegiance. In his book *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, Bates takes the concept of faith (*pistis* in the Greek text) and...
applies a lexicographical study to that word. Bates approaches faith with a very practical outworking of what actual faith is and does. He starts out with a provocative thought by writing, “. . . our contemporary Christian culture often comes prepackaged with functional ideas and operative definitions of belief, faith, works, salvation, heaven, and the gospel that in various ways truncate and distort the full message of the good news about Jesus the Messiah that is proclaimed in the Bible.” According to Bates, the current fixed definition of the word faith is, at times, flawed. He suggests that more lexical care must be taken to ensure the scholar correctly reflect the original intent of the author. Bates concludes, “With regard to eternal salvation, rather than speaking of belief, trust, or faith in Jesus, we should speak instead of fidelity to Jesus as cosmic Lord or allegiance to Jesus the King.” Looking at faith from a purely ‘belief’ perspective might allow faith to become little more than sin management by cutting short the imperative and motivation to live like Jesus. Using the word allegiance brings the kingly motif as motivation. Jesus is the King whom the believer serves in utter devotion. As a definition for faith, the concept of allegiance often aligns more with the original intent and historical context with which the word is associated.

Hope

Hope may be the deepest need in humanity. This is partly due to the inherent future aspect of the word. Insecurities rise with uncertainties regarding the future. Hope speaks directly to those insecurities. It matters greatly, however, where one places their hope. The Scriptures urge people to place hope in the living God. He is the gracious, merciful, and unchanging One


109 Ibid., 5.
One in whom any person can place their hope confidently.

The Psalms are replete with the notion of hope directed toward God. David simply states, “We put our hope in the Lord. He is our help and our shield” (Ps 33:20). The statement is exclusionary for God alone is the foundation. Wilson writes, “Deliverance belongs to YHWH (3:8), and salvation comes to those who ‘wait hopefully’ for YHWH rather than those who trust in any form of human power.”110 God is the only true foundation for hope and the only One who can deliver true hope.

Sharing the hope of Jesus exemplifies one of the great purposes for those in the Christian faith. God plans evangelistic efforts by placing Christians in certain locations at specific times in history. Peter exhorts, “But in your heart revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. . .” (1 Pet 3:15).

Giving an answer fulfills, in part, the Great Commission. People share hope by initiating conversation in various ways. Either by inviting others to church, presenting the life changing gospel in a one on one situation, or using a venue of serving to build bridges, the doors to share the hope of Jesus swing open.

Love

Embracing the love of Jesus encompasses two things. First, it involves receiving Jesus as Lord. Paul wrote, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him” (Col 2:6). Second, it involves embodying the love of God. John agrees and wrote, “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them” (1 John 4:16). A love for God can be developed in any number of spiritual

---

formation practices. Communities which practice worship, prayer, service and fellowship live a life under the power of God’s love and embody the love He demonstrated through Jesus.

When John wrote his first epistle, he made sure that love presided over all speech and action. Love also became a determining factor over the claim to be a believer. If love was absent in a person’s life, the question remained as to whether they actually possessed the love of God, i.e. could claim to be a believer. John continued, “Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8 NLT). John also makes a point to give the reader a picture of love. John concludes, “We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So, we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16). Bringing those concepts together, John described the role in the life of a believer when indwelt by the Holy Spirit. “No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us” (1 John 4:12). Love must be visible and active in the life of a believer. Thompson concludes, “So strong is John’s confidence that the Christian community will fulfill this command that he writes that mutual Christian love manifests the presence and action of the invisible God.”

Reproducing Faith, Hope, Love in Others

Jesus created a master plan of handing faith in Him to the next generation. As a matter of fact, this master plan included a strategy to commission all future generations. Jesus revealed that plan in the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew, known as the Great Commission. The adjective (great) is entirely appropriate in that the greatest assignment was given by the Great I Am.

---

Disciples must reproduce themselves and make new disciples according to the Great Commission.

Mature Christians must constantly look toward new or malnourished believers to encourage them and build their faith. Furthermore, the mature believer should look for, initiate, and pray for those opportunities to persuade people into the faith. Passing along the Christian faith in the way of apprenticeship defines the primary method of discipleship. Paul tells young Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim. 2:2). Disciple making transpires in various ways. Mentoring programs, lay counseling, leading a small group, or apprenticing a young believer during service projects or evangelistic initiatives are just a few ways to make disciples of Jesus. Love, however, remains the prerequisite for making disciples.

Faith, hope and love in Paul’s writings

Paul very clearly describes the preeminence of the three virtues of faith, hope, and love by writing, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13 NIV). To anyone who chooses to read through the gospels, it is clear that Jesus exemplified these virtues. Paul uses predominant characteristics of Jesus as the basis for these three virtues. The believer is, then, to do the same. Campbell comments, “This triad is basic and foundational for all believers.” Faith, hope, and love became the standout character qualities of the believer.

The triad of faith, hope, and love can be found in other places in Paul’s epistles. In Paul’s letter to the Colossians, he wrote, “… because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of

---

the love you have for all the saints, the faith and love spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel . . .” (Col 1:4-5 NIV). Spirituality is rooted in faith, hope, and love. A similar statement is found in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, though he brings the focus toward the believer’s active role in expressing love. Paul exhorts, “But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. . . The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal 5:5-6 NIV). The interaction between faith and hope in the life of the believer is the expression of love.

One of the most encouraging chapters in the New Testament when encountering trials and difficulties comes from Paul’s letter to the Romans in which the triad of faith, hope, and love is again found. It is here that the theology surrounding those three virtues becomes extremely practical for everyday trials.

Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace[a] with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory. We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love (Rom 5:1-5).

Faith gives access to God, which in turn activates the ability to rejoice in hope, all because God pours out His love.

The Thessalonian church

Thessalonica was an invaluable location for the spread of the gospel. Paul founded a flourishing church during his three week stay. His time there ended because a mob attacked the house where Paul stayed with the intention to harm Paul and forced him to flee. In that short time, the Holy Spirit moved swiftly among the people to accept the message of Christ. Due to
their acceptance of the gospel message, the transformation which took place in their lives, and
their perseverance through severe persecution, people took notice. Paul remarked, “The Lord’s
message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become
known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it . . .” (1 Thess 1:8 NIV).

The key passage which highlights the three virtues of faith, hope, and love is 1
Thessalonians 1:3: “We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced
by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus
Christ.” Paul praised the Thessalonian church for their faith and behavior in the midst of
persecution and poverty. One of the significant reasons for Paul’s accolades is found in Paul’s
second letter to the Thessalonians:

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is
growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.
Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the
persecutions and trials you are enduring (2 Thess 1:3-4 NIV).

A descriptive consistency is quickly noticed within the two letters which speaks of the enduring
and active faith of the Thessalonian believers. Trials proved difficult throughout the year A.D. 51
when these two letters were written. Faith, hope, and love, however, won the day.

When one hears of the triangular descriptors of faith, hope, and love, the mind
immediately turns to 1 Corinthians 13:13: “These things will last forever—faith, hope and
love—and the greatest of these is love.” The reader of Scripture recognizes the significance of
the relationship between the three virtues. Gorman furthers that significance, however, by
bringing a refreshing look at those three words by pointing back to 1 Thessalonians 1:3: “As we
pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the
enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Using this passage as a basis,
Gorman explains that embodying faith, hope, and love is what it means to be holy yet in the
world.

Rather, it is a kind of participation in God that means participation in the world in a radically new and different way. Thus, faith, hope, and love have to do with the distinctive form of Christian participation in the world: they are not merely centripetal activities but centrifugal ones. In other words, they have to do with witness, with mission. It is appropriate therefore to refer to them as the missional marks or the missional virtues.\(^{113}\)

Faith, hope, and love are character qualities which constantly grow inside of the believer as they commune with Jesus. Gorman attributes the success a believer has in participating in the work of God to those three virtues. They are also virtues to be demonstrated to others. The Holy Spirit cultivates both.

What does it mean to exhibit faith, hope, and love to the world? The three are meant to demonstrate the heart behind the *missio Dei*. Thus, His love was offered to a lost world. Gorman writes, “It seems that Thessalonian believers bore public witness to their faith, love, and hope—by what they did and did not do . . . even as their words of witness and invitation were rebuffed . . .”\(^{114}\) The Thessalonian church enthusiastically lived out the three virtues bearing witness to those who watched this fledgling community embrace Jesus and each other.

The Thessalonian church stands as a model for all churches and most specifically Christ Community Church. The faith, hope, and love which the Thessalonian church demonstrated must become the principal example of the mindset and lifestyle which Christ followers must imitate. By replicating the Thessalonians in their work produced by faith, their labor prompted by love, and their endurance inspired by hope, the modern church will emerge as a change agent in a culture in desperate need of faith, hope, and love.


\(^{114}\) Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 73.
The Post-Modern Mind

Cultural engagement stands as one of the forefront goals of this project. The culture, therefore, requires analysis and scrutiny in order to adequately apply the gospel into that context. Contextual thinking will carry great weight in developing a strategy and polemic to answer the questions which the post-modern generation asks. Apologetics, then, becomes a necessary part of that strategy.

Understanding the post-modern mind can be somewhat of a trick. Graves writes, “Postmodern thinkers reject absolute truth and prefer relativism, so difficulties arise in defining the movement with precision.” This being the case, one must tread carefully among the modern philosophies and authors who promote an individualism which attempts to dismantle traditional beliefs and epistemology. Establishing a stronghold of relativism by necessity requires the obliteration of objectivism. Deconstruction of the metanarrative, therefore, remains on the post-modern agenda. Relativism is an incessant key component of post-modern thought. Graves continues his assessment of post-modern thought.

Proponents of postmodernism attempt to replace established interpretations of knowledge with cultural relativism by ignoring foundational truth and reclassifying traditional belief systems as oppressive. Postmodern thinkers generally resist precise definitions, but a common tendency includes the rejection of absolute truth with an emphasis on personal opinions and beliefs relative to each individual. A negative consequence of individualistic thinking is the plummet into moral relativism. Having no foundation for objective truth, opinion and preference rise to usurp truth.

The philosophies of relativism and individualism establish self as the arbiter of truth. Truth, being determined only by the individual, has no solid foundation on which to rest. Post-

---


116 Graves, “Postmodern Challenges,” 49.
modernism resists truth altogether in concept. When truth is denied, values lose meaning. When speaking of today’s educated mind, the main feature noted in their “outlook on life was their acceptance of rather facile relativism. Everybody has his or her own values, and about these it is impossible to argue.”\textsuperscript{117} In other words, when every person claims truth, the argument can quickly turn into a stalemate.

The chief outcome of this line of thinking is a more entrenched insistence on the non-existence or absence of God. Atheism and agnosticism reach far into the fabric of the culture, even to the theological underpinnings of church doctrine. The danger lies in the supreme foolishness of dismissing the Creator God. King David wrote, “Fools say to themselves, ‘There is no God’” (Ps 53:1). God has made Himself plain through the heavens (Ps 19:1-4) and through all of creation (Rom 1:20). There will be condemnation for unbelief (2 Thess 2:10-12). There was a time when people assumed the existence of God. John Seel concludes, “For Christian and non-Christian alike, the lordship of Christ was assumed within the medieval world. Everyone assumed they were living within a larger spiritual reality under a religious canopy, in which they merely served different functions . . .”\textsuperscript{118} God was real and to challenge this would have been absurd. As the writer to the Hebrews wrote, Paul made clear a pathway for belief. “Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him” (Heb 11:6). Faith and belief were the instruments for the knowledge of God.

This changed in the period of the 18th century known as the Enlightenment which brought forth the modern age. Reason and verifiable sensory and scientific data became judge and jury over the existence of the supernatural. Although people felt they could still determine


truth during the Enlightenment, truth was decided upon through empirical evidence. In the new secular age, or what is called post-modernism, the difference is that truth itself is denied. Neither science nor philosophy can determine absolute truth as it is said not to exist. Truth must conform to the taste, knowledge, opinion, and experience of the individual thereby nullifying a universal truth. Nothing is Truth, or everything is Truth. In any case, what would the difference be? The critical matter at hand remains a denial of the existence of God, or at least One who determines truth and is involved in the lives of people. Paul warned the Colossians against this hollow philosophy. Paul exhorted, “Don’t let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ” (Col 2:8). Stemming from evil spiritual influences, human thinking falls into deep deception. For those who consider themselves secular, faith in a supernatural being becomes meaningless and useless. A denial of the existence of God causes many other issues by implication for which the new atheist and philosopher have no answer. Keller gives an example.

If there is not God, then there is no way to say any one action is ‘moral’ and another ‘immoral’ but only ‘I like this.’ If that is the case, who gets the right to put their subjective, arbitrary moral feelings into law? You may say ‘the majority has the right to make the law,’ but do you mean that then the majority has the right to vote to exterminate the minority? If you say ‘no, that is wrong,’ then you are back to square one. If

Those who hold to a relativistic worldview have a flimsy foundation that quickly succumbs to proper logic.

There is more. A secular way of thinking not only confuses issues such as morality, but it also denies the involvement and help of a God who desires to be involved in the lives of His

---

created beings. This can be true whether a person thinks of themselves as secular or not. Keller goes on to write, “Even if you are not a secular person, the secular age can ‘thin out’ (secularize) faith until it is seen as simply one more choice in life along with job, recreation, hobbies, [and] politics rather than as the comprehensive framework that determines all life choices.” The writer of Hebrews chastises the readers for just such futility. Paul challenged his readers. “You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God’s Word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food” (Heb 5:12). The warning is clear. Secular thinking can influence the theological footings of the church.

In the middle of this quagmire of thought hope exists. Based on the consequences of the compounded disillusionment brought forth by secularity and its progeny, the emptiness cannot be ignored. Smith agrees by writing, “Even what Taylor calls the ‘immanent frame’ is haunted.” In other words, unexplainable events, emotions, and expressions strike at the core of unbelief and leave a residue of doubt in the secular mind. Secularism has left an undeniable emptiness. Keller writes, “There are two good answers to the question of why religion continues to persist and grow. One explanation is that many people find secular reason to have ‘things missing’ from it that are necessary to live life well. Another explanation is that great numbers of people intuitively sense a transcendent realm beyond this natural world.” There is hope.

Once embraced, a transcendent hope satisfies the longing for which people are created. Paul wrote, “And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves


122 Keller, Making Sense of God, 11.
us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love” (Rom 5:5). Not only does the believer receive a promise of certain hope, the source of hope is also promised. The Holy Spirit fills the believer and as a result, hope rises as the believer begins to understand the depth of God’s love.

The gospel provides the answer in full to the deeper questions raised by the new thinkers. Into this culture of western post-modernism believers are sent. Sensible answers that transcend the material and immanent frame in which the secularist lives causes a ‘haunting’ in their unbelief. When confronted with persuasive ideas of God, the unbelieving mind can only respond in two ways if they are to persist in their unbelief: dilemma (where the skeptic must confront the inconsistencies inherent in their beliefs) or diversion (where the skeptic must take measured steps to avoid the confrontation). Oz Guinness explains.

The dilemma pole expresses the logic of the fact that the more consistent people are to their own view of reality, the less close they are to God’s reality and the more likely they are to feel their dilemma. The diversion pole expresses the fact that the less consistent people are to their own view of reality, the closer they are to God’s reality, so the more they must find a diversion.123

In other words, the way God designed the human being, makes it impossible to deny altogether a sense of the supernatural.

The simple message of the gospel transcends time and culture. Paul defined the gospel to the Corinthians when he said, “I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said” (1 Cor 15:3-4). It is this simple, miraculous, magnificent story which demonstrates God’s love, grace, and power. The Good News offers everyone an opportunity to embrace the One who offers hope, who answers

the haunting sense that something other-worldly exists, who through His word illuminates a unique path, and who through the forgiveness of sins renews the soul.

**Theoretical Foundations**

The mission of Jesus as defined above has three major components: seeking and saving the lost, serving the needs of a broken world, and obeying the Father. Jesus demonstrated the purpose for His incarnation in these three areas. These three are among the ways Jesus impacted this world. Now He asks believers, who comprise the church, to continue His mission on earth. Jesus prays for believers to be a ‘sent’ people (John 17:18). Having ‘sentness’ as a purpose for existence, the church must act upon that ‘sentness’ and accept the call to continue the mission of Jesus. What Jesus began, the church continues. Participating in the work of God and being a godly influence must characterize a believer’s life.

Participating with God and being a witness to Christ can be daunting. Fear and insecurity surface for various internal and external reasons. Questions posed by non-believers can take those of the faith by surprise. Social justice issues predominate the landscape and create touchy situations into which the believer speaks. Skepticism about religion and belief in God rise with no restraint. The believer, however, in the middle of this must find a way to give a response to the hope they possess (1 Pet 3:15). Churches scramble to find effective means to accomplish Jesus’ work in a world not exactly open to it.

“I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message.” (John 17:14-20).
Jesus never intended to take the church out of the brokenness which characterizes this world but to address the needs and answer the questions the world raises, thereby shining a light into the darkness.

Far Reaching Evangelistic Efforts

The church historically and collectively put forth a great deal of effort into ‘evangelistic crusades.’ Traveling preachers common in the 18th and 19th centuries rode horseback into towns for the purpose of soul winning. Itinerant preaching continues even today. While tent revival meetings and sporadic crusades continue to meet around the United States, these gatherings do not have the impact they once did. Other countries, however, have enjoyed recent success. Luis Palao crusades spread globally and impacted many who attended. In 2007, Palao was estimated to have shared the message of Jesus Christ with 25 million people in 70 nations.124 Billy Graham crusades in both the U.S. and abroad were attended and had a historic impact, as he held four hundred crusades in one hundred eighty-five countries. Drawing thousands into stadiums, these crusades had a major impact on Christendom. In total, an estimate of 80,000,000 heard the gospel under these crusades while 3,000,000 professed faith in Christ through the crusades.125 Churches used the crusades as a major thrust in their evangelistic efforts. The process was simple: invite a friend to the crusade, and for follow up, invite them to the church where that believer attends.

Another common evangelistic strategy includes ‘blanket’ evangelism. The goal is to canvas a geographical area with the gospel in any way possible. Not frequently used in

124 “World renowned evangelist, Luis Palau, is keynote speaker at Hillsboro’s Prayer Breakfast,” Hillsboro Argus, October 5, 2007. This was an article in a local newspaper from Hillsboro, Oregon.

contemporary churches, the goal was gospel saturation in that designated area. Usually a day was selected, and a mass of people converged on certain parts of a city or town. Gospel tracts, pamphlets, or cards were generally distributed among anyone they encounter. These blanket programs often coincided with door to door efforts in hopes of gaining a hearing of the salvation which Jesus offers. This tactic falls into a category some have deemed ‘confrontational’ evangelism. Some have deemed this method of evangelism ‘confrontational’ rather than ‘relational.’ Relational and confrontational evangelism strategies, however, must not be seen in opposition to one another but as complementary. A quick reading in the book of Acts shows that both are necessary.

An increased emphasis on personal evangelism training occurred over the last few decades. The basic instrument used in most of these campaigns are some version of the ‘four spiritual laws.’ Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, predicated this form of evangelism on simplicity and friendship. While the Four Spiritual Laws can appear in various forms, the basics tenets are as follows:

1) God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life. 2) Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God’s love and plan for your life. 3) Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for man’s sin. Through Him you can know and experience God’s love and plan for your life. 4) You must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then you can know and experience God’s love and plan for your life. 126

Immediately following the laws is an invitation to receive Christ by faith and a basic model to begin walking with Christ.

The simplicity is apparent and memorization potential optimal. One can see how this tool builds confidence in sharing faith. The four spiritual laws, however, were written by Bill Bright

---

in 1952, some twenty plus years prior to the post-modern era. While this method of explaining the gospel remains helpful, it may be answering questions which people in the post-modern era are not asking. There is a need for a method of evangelism that speaks to modern day skeptics by addressing the gaps caused by secularism, religious pluralism, and moral relativism. Only by addressing the issues in this post-modern culture will those laws will gain meaning for the hearer.

The book and video series by Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church, *Just Walk Across the Room*, is a helpful resource which gives simple steps to pointing people toward faith. The premise of this system is based on Spirit-led promptings to begin spiritual conversation. One must merely take the initiative. Developing friendships, discovering stories, discerning next steps, telling your story, and sharing the gospel story are all part of this achievable and sustainable plan of evangelism. This method is not only simple but very motivating. It addresses the fear which surfaces when people think about sharing their faith. Due to the ease of learning, the video series has many benefits for personal and small group study. Predicated upon relationship building, it offers a very natural way of initiating spiritual conversation. *Just Walk Across the Room*, however, lacks the information needed when confronting many of the questions being asked today.

**Churched Evangelistic Programs**

Churches have often incorporated programs into their yearly calendar which have as their purpose to bring a non-believer. These events include car shows, concerts, Christmas events, BBQ’s, picnics, street fairs, and guest speakers teaching on relevant needs. The decisions surrounding choice of programs are based on the culture in which the church finds itself and the

---

stated goals of that particular church. While these have a place in church life, the constant expectation that people will be drawn onto church property is unrealistic. The opposite is most often the case. An effort must be made to go outside the walls of the church.

Churches across the country, therefore, have opted to use serving as a way of sharing the Good News of Jesus. Servant evangelism has become a classification of sharing the gospel through serving in the last half century. The idea of servant evangelism has also developed into a plethora of programs in many churches. Whether through the venue of a serving ‘day’ or ‘season,’ churches have created their own programs or adopted mission agencies and other non-profits (faith based or not) in the community with whom they partner in serving efforts. The purpose of servant evangelism revolves around imitating Jesus and sharing His love. Richard Bargas emphasizes the importance of servant-evangelism by writing,

Who are the modern-day rejects, lepers and unclean people in our society? The gospel is for them! Who are the outcasts, dregs, and cast-away people? Christ will save them! The problem is sometimes us. We don’t want the problems that come with problem people. . . But that is not how Christ would be. Our Savior loved the unloved and unlovable. He was the friend of sinners and drunkards. His people should be known by this too. We do not wish to leave people in their sin, but Christ will transform them through the gospel, which we preach.128

Through serving, people hope to build relationships as a conduit to share their faith. Serving also prompts curiosity as to why the participants serve with nothing expected in return.

Target Sundays are also incorporated into the yearly strategy of evangelism in many churches. Many churches establish a target Sunday within each teaching series. When a church determines the relevant subject matter for the Sunday morning series, they often choose a Sunday to incorporate special elements useful to clearly share the gospel story. People are encouraged to bring family, friends, neighbors, workmates, and others within their sphere of

influence on that particular Sunday. Again, this strategy has its place and can be very effective. It was never meant, however, to take the place of mobilizing the people of the church beyond the walls of the church.

Faith, Hope and Love in Evangelism

Any good news is healing to the soul. According to a study by J.P. Harrell in 2000, “when participants watched concentrations of positive news and media, they had decreased levels of stress and anxiety.” Hearing positive news can lower stress, increase happiness, and generally cause positivity. “A cheerful look brings joy to the heart; good news makes for good health” (Prov 15:30). What if this ‘good news’ offered more than just information? What if it offered love, security, and strength for this journey of life? What if that same ‘good news’ would ensure them eternal happiness? The point is, ‘good news’ matters beyond the immediate sense of happiness upon its hearing if it is truly based on something substantial. Highlighting and broadcasting the Good News (Gospel) goes far beyond a sense of temporary happiness. It sparks supernatural joy. The believer participates in that process by sharing this Good News.

Paul emphasized the need for and the result of sharing the gospel. “And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago” (Eph 1:13). Christians today have the opportunity to see that come to fruition. This ‘Good News’ of Jesus meets the three deepest needs for the human being: faith, hope, and love. The world desperately seeks those three virtues. Furthermore, when a person intently examines the truth of Jesus, that person finds the three virtues of faith, hope, and love perfectly exemplified. Jesus

---

embodies faith, hope, and love. The result is people turning toward Him to fill their deepest needs.

The tactic this project will employ targets the three Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love. Faith, hope, and love are not merely character qualities; they are the foundation on which the believer bases daily activities. Leading with those qualities, the culture into which that particular church is called will take notice. “In the labors of Jesus among those estranged from God, in his preached word and in his association with them, the Lord God Himself is seeking and finding and rejoicing. The saving sovereignty of God is at work where men least expected it.”

Furthermore, faith, hope, and love are also the topic headings which can be used to share the Good News of Jesus with the post-modern culture. When believers demonstrate faith, hope, and love in speech and life, their commitment to the ideals of Jesus cannot be disputed.

**Faith**

Human beings are designed for faith. There exists a void within everyone that can only be filled through faith. Faith must have as its foundation genuine and confirmed substance. Only faith in the true and living God, through Christ, will suffice to fill the void. Faith, however, must be defined in such a way that anyone who teaches or hears of the concept gains a fuller understanding of its relevance and adaptability. Bates states that “. . . our contemporary Christian culture often comes prepackaged with functional ideas and operative definitions of belief, faith, works, salvation, heaven, and the gospel that in various ways truncate and distort the full message of the good news about Jesus the Messiah that is proclaimed in the Bible.”

---


words, one must ponder phrases which define faith with more scrutiny or lapse into misrepresented and errant meanings.

Faith is generally used synonymously with belief. In that way faith appeals to everyone due to the transcendent and forward reaching nature of the word. Other possibilities, however, exist when translating faith (pistis). Using the word allegiance instead of the word belief for faith in many cases aligns more with the original intent and historical context with which the word is associated. While faith can imply ‘belief’ in certain contexts, it is allegiance that appeals to causality for the post-modern. “And so the faithful (believing) are also faithful (obedient). Fidelity, constancy, firmness, confidence, reliance, trust [and] belief are all indivisibly wrapped up in the idea of believing.”132 Faith, therefore, incorporates belief and allegiance.

Hope

Hope is defined as a desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment.133 Hope and love are two of the deepest needs in the human soul. They are distinct in and of themselves but travel as pairs. Because love, in desire and deed, wants the best for the other, it will inevitably result in hope. Hope can be examined in four categories: 1) having purpose (teleology); 2) persevering through difficulty; 3) why secular thought offers very little hope; and 4) the guarantee of hope. The fourth category includes the gospel story. The central focus lies in the hope that Jesus offers every human being both for this life and the life to come.

Hope stems from a correct understanding of God. Theology teaches that God is unchanging (Jas 1:17), faithful (Deut 7:9), wise (1 Cor 1:25), good (1 Chr 16:24), and strong (Prov 18:10). The character of God, therefore, becomes the foundation of hope. Although the


faith of the believer can be a difficult road, the trials are faced “in the power of Him who has promised to be with us to the end and who has said that we will never perish.” The believer stands strong in the worst of circumstances because of who God is. Hope never objectively diminishes but falls out of purview when God is no longer sought.

**Love**

Love is the basis for sharing the story of Jesus. The intent of this approach centers on the broader concept of ‘story’. Anthropology and theology combine to bring a well-rounded biblical definition of love. Love can be examined in three categories: 1) love as a basis for life; 2) the impossibility of true love within secular thought; and 3) love as demonstrated by Jesus. Love is an active word. The believer encounters great difficulty when persuading people toward Jesus if they merely talk about love without demonstrating love. Demonstrating love, however, will create the potential to attract the post-modern individual toward the pursuit of a better definition and true example of love. Love is the single greatest instrument of gospel sharing in a world unfamiliar with a biblical understanding or worldview.

Jesus’ love, though on one hand unfathomable (Eph 3:18), is on the other hand comprehensible due to His demonstration of love toward the unlovable and His work on the cross. The effect of Jesus’ demonstration of love on the cross is inescapable. “What it does is to show us the greatness of the love of God and move us to love in return. It moves us to love God, and because we love God to love our fellows.” Jesus proved to be the greatest example of love the world has ever known by perfectly displaying Himself on the cross. “It is a work that God

---


accomplishes because He loves us. The love of God is the great fact that undergirds the whole New Testament.” Love, as exemplified by Jesus, is first and foremost the command believers must follow.

**Tying Faith, Hope, and Love Together**

Faith, hope, and love must be envisioned as missional, or they will be lost in a sea of other descriptors which characterize Christianity but lack the motivational content which shapes the Christian life. The three virtues are missional because they are practices “. . . meant to embody the gospel and thus to proclaim it. That is, faith, hope, and love are ‘evangelistic’ (witness to the gospel) by their very nature. . .” What common void do unbelieving people experience? This world seeks belief in something of substance beyond themselves, something in the future that will at any moment overtake the despair which is so prevalent, and a love that will not quit. The believer in Christ has that to offer.

The instrument developed, distributed and taught will use faith, hope, and love as the basis for engagement. Thinking through personal evangelism with faith, hope, and love in mind will offer the evangelist a framework to use as a reference point at any time in the conversation. The virtues of faith, hope, and love will also act as the tool to share the gospel of Jesus in a way that will answer today’s questions, interject one’s story, and bring the truth of God to bear on that conversation. In the same way which the “four spiritual laws” have been memorized, distributed, and taught, the three virtues will have that same practical applicability. Booklets, handouts, and training classes can be developed to assist the equipping of believers to this purpose.


137 Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 89.
Follow-up Discipleship Material

The question must be raised in both church and parachurch circles regarding the responsibility of follow-up once someone trusts in Christ. There is great joy in heaven when a person comes to faith in Christ (Luke 15:7). That joy will also fill the newly converted Christian. But the life in Christ was never meant to stop there. The believer will never embrace the life God has for them if they do not grow in their faith. Nor will they achieve the grand purposes God established for them without understanding the Great Commission. If the hope embedded throughout this entire project centers around people making a life-altering decision to embrace faith in Jesus, then there must be a circle of discipleship with follow-up material. Follow up can take the form of curriculum-based study, one on one apprenticeship, or both. Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU) created one of the most prolific and useful tools designed for the purpose of follow up and discipleship. Although it has undergone several revisions over the years to adapt to its cultural environment, the basic discourse and instruction remains the same.

The material from CRU, complete with leader’s guide, draws the reader into five basic categories: 1) Your New Life in Christ; 2) Your New Life in God's Love; 3) Your New Life in the Spirit; 4) Growing in Your New Life; 5) Your New Life in Relationships. Evangelism programs initiated by churches and parachurch ministries alike must have a system ready for the new convert to grow and ultimately continue the circle of discipleship. CRU developed an alternate version comprised of only four parts with the headings: *confidence, acceptance, empowerment*, and *development*. The four-part version is the one currently in use at Christ Community Church for new conversion follow-up.


Engaging the Post-Modern Mind

Understanding the post-modern mind is pertinent to the theoretical foundation of this project. Few widespread church-based programs currently exist which address postmodern thought. Other than a sermon series on secularity or an occasional mention of how to answer difficult questions, many churches fall short of specifically addressing how the Western mind thinks. There is a lack of helpful courses on apologetics designed to answer longstanding difficult questions being asked today.

Engaging a culture necessitates understanding. A distinct advantage exists when the believer grasps the questions being asked. In his first epistle, Peter wrote, “. . . And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it” (1 Peter 3:15). Several major programs aimed in the direction of apologetics and cultural engagement can be found. One such organization is RZIM (Ravi Zacharias International Ministries). Under that umbrella, the Zacharias Institute, located in Alpharetta, GA, hosts lectures and conferences geared toward giving an answer for the hope of every believer. Comprehensive training programs on apologetics are available as well. These seminars are geared toward answering some of life’s hardest questions from a Christian perspective

Another training program, which is geared toward those 16-21, is called Worldview Academy. Worldview Academy seeks to understand the world and the way it thinks and propose a Christian worldview when addressing current issues and belief systems. It offers the students, who must make a two to three week commitment to this in-house program, a

---

140 RZIM Global Headquarters and Zacharias Institute, 3755 Mansell Road Alpharetta, GA 30022. RZIM.org.

141 Worldview Academy, 9535 Forest Ln. Suite 220, Dallas, TX 75243. WORLDVIEW.org.
comprehensive look at apologetics, worldviews, post-modern thinking, and establishing a correct way of thinking based on the principles of Scripture. Other smaller seminars and conferences can be easily found online. Many of these are offered on a smaller scale in which people might increase their learning.

There are a number of books, articles, and blogs describing the post-modern’s attitude toward the church. There seems to exist a gap, however, in programs which help those in the church answer questions and present the gospel to the post-modern culture.

Renewed Approach

The church must approach culture differently if it is to effectively engage the minds of a post-modern culture. Engaging the culture through individual conversations is at the heart of this project. The believer must begin to increasingly see this period in history an opportunity. Collin Hansen writes, “Evangelical faith ought to be well-equipped to thrive even in such a situation. It’s not altogether different from the multicultural Mediterranean world of the New Testament, where Roman jurisprudence, Greek philosophy, and various Jewish schools of thought vied for influence.”142 Given the similarity between the New Testament culture and the current secular culture, Christians ought to be encouraged that the principles in Scripture are adequate for the task of evangelism and apologetics.

The church must practice, evaluate, and progress considering this project’s effectiveness. If evangelism does not emerge as a key value for church life, that church will eventually close its doors. Carl Henry wrote, “A church without evangelism invites extinction.”143 Evangelism is

often not a key priority for churches and need to heed that warning. Consequences are much more than a building going up for sale.

Conversation points, therefore, need serious thought and attention. Themes emerge from this culture which raise certain questions unlike those of previous generations. Evangelism has as its goal the hearing of the Good News of Jesus. Individual conversations are an integral part of God’s plan of gospel saturation.

Several ways the church historically approached the culture were evangelistic campaigns, crusades, and tracts. Many such tracts used in these campaigns incorporate the ‘Four Spiritual Laws.’ While the Four Spiritual Laws contain critical truths of the Good News and have helped many millions understand, and even accept the Gospel message, there is need for a change. The ‘Four Spiritual Laws’ were written in 1952. Much has changed since then. These were also written at a time when evangelistic crusades (e.g. Billy Graham), and campus ministries (e.g. Campus Crusade, InterVarsity, Navigators) flourished. More importantly, they were written at a time when church and Christianity were still very much a part of culture. There was not such a drastic separation in the minds of people between church, morals, beliefs, and life as there is today.

The four laws basically talk someone through the fact that God has a plan for everyone’s life, that sin separates us from God, that the remedy is Jesus Christ, and that acceptance of Jesus is through faith. At one time these were not so foreign a concept. Today, in this post-modern culture, the Four Spiritual Laws are often brushed off by non-believers when used as the primary method of sharing the Gospel. This is partly true due to the rise of secularism, religious pluralism and moral relativism. Questions move to the forefront. Whose law? Is the law verifiable? Why sin? Is not that considered judging? Are there not many paths to God? Met with that type
of thinking, conversations tend to halt.

Furthermore, the Four Spiritual Laws are answering questions that people are not necessarily asking. This would not have been true 65 years ago. The issues currently in vogue center around feelings, tolerance, justice, hopelessness, and self-gratification. Secularism cannot arrive at the depth with which those issues deserve. What remains is emptiness.

The believers, according to 1 Peter 3:15, must address the emptiness left by post-modern philosophies. There is a way. The concepts of faith, hope, and love speak directly into that void. This project uses faith, hope and love as key elements in gospel sharing. At some point in conversation, however, the gift of the gospel in its most simple form as presented by the Four Spiritual Laws will need to be communicated, but the wrapping must appeal to the needs and minds of those living in the twenty-first century.

Apologetics also becomes highlighted in this mode of gospel sharing. Addressing issues related to the Christian faith, answering questions which people ask, and showing grace in the moment all speak to the hearts and minds of the post-modern generation. Apologetics, however, does not have the power to transform. The goal of apologetics is to share information and raise questions which will remain on their minds. Greg Koukl writes, “I want to put a stone in his shoe. All I want to do is give him something worth thinking about. I want him to hobble away on a nugget of truth he can’t simply ignore because it continues to poke at him.”  

144 God will use that stone as a catalyst.

Starting with the posture of faith, hope, and love is imperative in this process. The apologetic aspect of the training will center on three dominant philosophies of the day (secularism, religious pluralism, and moral relativism) and will also answer six often-asked

---

questions about the Christian faith. These will be taught in an easy to understand format and will serve as a rudimentary discussion rather than a comprehensive discourse. Again, the goal is to equip the believer with confidence and clarity when engaging in spiritual conversations.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Intervention Design

Introduction

The intervention plan for the problem (Christ Community Church does not see itself as a ‘sent’ community) will utilize a training program to accomplish five goals. The people of Christ Community Church will have the opportunity to: 1) adopt the purpose for being sent; 2) understand their community; 3) answer six common theological questions; 4) embrace the importance of faith, hope, and love; and 5) grasp a greater understanding of the Gospel.

The program will include a longitudinal survey, teaching material, workbook, and a digital platform to disseminate the information. The format is a twelve-session podcast engagement program which will empower the participants with the conviction and confidence to engage in spiritual discussions with those who are far from Christ.

A group of at least 100 people from Christ Community Church will be asked to participate. The program will officially commence in February and close in May of 2020.

Choosing Subject Matter

To address the issue of conviction, a portion of the teaching aims at identifying the mission and vision of Jesus, which is the first step for the church to discover its own mission and vision. Understanding the beliefs, needs, and values of the immediate culture equips believers with more confidence. Additionally, training in apologetics will allow the believer to have an answer for crucial questions asked by unbelievers. Finally, a proper and comprehensive
understanding of the gospel builds a framework for sharing one’s faith.

**Choosing the Right Venue**

In a fast-paced, transient, educated, middle-class culture, the obstacles of time and schedule are formidable. Families of Christ Community Church have increasingly less margin for church activities. The curricular and extra-curricular calendar keeps most parents occupied each night of the week.

More pertinent, the COVID-19 protocols and mandates have greatly changed the landscape in terms of gathering and teaching since Christ Community Church must comply with the mandates of social distancing. The coronavirus pandemic presented many challenges for the church at large. Christ Community Church is one of many churches pivoting to creatively meet people relationally, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. This program, therefore, is relevant to the current crisis, easily accessible, and engaging. Since gathering is out of the question, an online or digital communication format is necessary.

**Developing a Survey**

A longitudinal survey was administered before and after the twelve sessions. The survey must legitimize or refute assumptions as to why Christ Community Church lacks conviction and confidence to engage in spiritual conversations. The goal of the survey is to ascertain whether the twelve sessions prove helpful in elevating the level of conviction and confidence for those attempting to share their faith.

**Developing the Curriculum**

A well-rehearsed and researched biblical approach superintended all twelve weeks. Based on the program values (relevant, accessible, engaging) and the added difficulty of the COVID-19
protocols, the subject matter speaks to deeper needs, answers questions people are asking, exhibits cultural relevance, and clearly explains the gospel. Teaching notes serve as a study tool for the presenter, and a simple workbook was developed so the participants can retain the information.

**Program Needs**

Having met with key leaders in the church, a determination was made as to the teaching format. Included in the meeting were people of various ages and genders who are well connected to the church and aware of the cultural climate of this area. A brainstorming session followed by a proposal with rationale facilitated final decisions before the implementation of the program.

Once the implementation phase began, so did plans for the operational aspect of the program. Necessary equipment, space, and personnel integrated into the plan which included teachers, facilitators, audio/visual apparatus, and advertisements.

**Potential and Possibilities**

This intervention, if successful, will make a notable change in the problem—Christ Community Church is lacking conviction and confidence to engage the people of our culture with the Good News. There are several reasons for this lack: 1) Some people do not have a well-rounded understanding of the culture in which they live. 2) Some are afraid of questions which may arise when engaging the culture. 3) Some do not know how to clearly explain the gospel. 4) Some do not know why it is necessary to engage the culture. 5) Some do not have a framework for carrying the gospel into the culture.

If the people of Christ Community Church participate in the program and apply themselves to the teaching, a new excitement for reaching the lost will develop. As well, a higher
percentage of people will engage the culture resulting in steady church growth, an increase in spiritual conversations and more people receiving Christ. Furthermore, an increasing number of people at Christ Community Church will be ready to launch into making disciples. Christ Community Church would then visibly and tangibly be viewed as a ‘sent community.’

This twelve-session program of engagement will also be helpful to other ministries which have a goal to reach their respective community with the gospel of Jesus. Engaging in spiritual conversations will contribute toward accomplishing their goals. Clarity and simplicity, two overarching values of this project, become important methodological values when transferring a program to other organizations.

**Intervention Plan**

**Subject Matter**

The subject matter chosen was based on the gaps previously discussed: a lack of conviction and a lack of confidence to initiate and continue spiritual conversations. Research on four significant areas of study are pertinent to this project: a) apologetics pertaining to the more oft-asked questions which fall within the larger categories of secularism, religious pluralism, moral relativism, and current social concerns; b) the mission and vision of Jesus which the church must continue; c) faith, hope, love as the three Christian virtues which will serve as the basis for missional conversation, posture, and action; d) a comprehensive view of the Gospel story in order to expand the theology of being ‘sent.’

Six apologetic questions which non-believers frequently ask were chosen: 1) Can the Bible be trusted? 2) Does God exist? 3) Aren’t all religions basically the same? 4) Did the resurrection happen? 5) What about the afterlife? 6) Why does God allow evil? Because the goal
of this particular project is to have conversations which focus on the basic tenets of Christianity, questions specifically geared toward moral, cultural, and political issues (i.e. gender identity, abortion, gay marriage) were not addressed. There is admittedly a need for such a program.

The topics decided upon are: a) mission and vision, b) continuing the work of Jesus, c) understanding the culture, d) the three deepest needs, e) a comprehensive view of the gospel, f) having spiritual conversations. The mission and vision of Jesus comes first as it sets the foundation for the remainder of the twelve sessions. Next, it was determined that understanding the post-modern culture would be helpful for those who initiate spiritual conversations so they can understand the worldview of the listener. Touching on the deeper needs of the soul raises awareness of a void within. Answering theological questions which non-believers ask makes the dialogue relevant. The last section equips believers with a clear explanation of the gospel.

Title

The title chosen for this twelve-session podcast is: [UN]apologetic: Explaining the Reason for Our Hope. The leaders of the college ministry at Christ Community Church and I collaborated on this decision since a large part of the church's vision is to equip more young adults. Also, they have a pulse on contemporary subject matter and popular media venues.

Format

Creativity quickly rose as a pertinent value for this project. The format of a podcast was chosen over other teaching methods. There were three primary reasons for this choosing a podcast interview for this project. First, A motivating interview is often very engaging and can be limited to whatever length of time is deemed reasonable. The flexibility of this format lends to the goal of having as many people as possible at Christ Community Church participate.
Second, the COVID-19 restrictions make a live gathering impossible. A format was needed which could capture a crowd of people without meeting physically. The information required a teaching format that could also disseminate the information necessary to accomplish the goals of this project.

Third, the current culture has little margin for ‘extra’ church activity. For families with children, extra-curricular weeknight and weekend activities take precedence over most other activities. It is not that all people lack interest in growing and learning, rather life situations have pushed out involvement in ‘extras’ where church life is concerned. Given these two reasons, twelve podcasts, 15-20 minutes in length, are the appropriate venue for this program. The chosen platform for this podcast is Buzzsprout (https://buzzsprout.com).

**Research**

**Traditional Research Aspect**

For the podcasts to engage the mind of the listener, the content must be meaningful, thorough, and relevant. Twelve essays were written, each 12-13 pages, and each essay became a session in the podcast series. These essays proved helpful as they developed into teaching notes. The final “Unapologetic” document spanned 162 pages of writing with 235 references. While the study was helpful to accumulate the necessary information, it became unwieldy as teaching notes. At the beginning of February, under the direction of Dr. Graves, I spent a considerable number of hours editing the document down to a reasonable number of pages.

**Active Research Aspect**

A twenty-question survey was developed and administered to the participants which focused on the participants’ knowledge, desire, comfort level, and ability to have spiritual
conversations with unbelievers. The data gathered from the survey provided necessary
information as to the readiness of the people of Christ Community Church to share the Gospel.
Note that this is a longitudinal survey. The goal of the follow-up survey is to ascertain whether
the podcasts moved the participants toward greater confidence and a stronger conviction to
engage in spiritual conversations. (The survey can be found in Appendix A.) A random sampling
of people from Christ Community Church, with an emphasis on those in the 18-25 year-old
demographic, listened to the podcasts and participated in the surveys. The process began in
March.

**Approvals**

The approval of the Christ Community Church elder board was needed to implement the
study. This approval can be found in Appendix F. The approval of my mentor Dr. Graves at the
Liberty University School of Divinity was also necessary to begin this project.

**Personnel and Equipment**

To create the type of podcast deemed most effective, using an interviewer as opposed to a
monologue seemed most appropriate. A staff member from the college ministry at Christ
Community Church was chosen to create dialogue and make the program more relational. I was
the guest on the podcast who fielded the questions she asked. After reviewing the teaching notes,
we developed simple questions for the interview. The teaching notes proved not only helpful for
the interviewee, but also for the interviewer to develop the flow of the interview.

Podcasts require recording equipment, microphones, a computer, a recording engineer,
audio editing, and a location conducive for conducting an interview. A podcast producer
volunteered his time producing and uploading the [UN]apologetic podcast.
Introduction

The purpose of these twelve sessions is to establish Christ Community Church as a ‘sent community’ by offering a podcast which will: 1) describe the mission of Jesus; 2) assess the culture in which the church is situated; 3) answer six theological questions; 4) emphasize the importance of faith, hope, and love; and 5) equip listeners with a greater understanding of the gospel. This program will equip the congregation with the necessary tools to move forward in the task of being ‘sent.’ The result will be a formidable group of people who have the confidence and conviction to initiate and sustain spiritual discussions. (See Appendix B for the companion workbook and Appendix C for the table of contents for the twelve episodes.)

Episode #1: Mission and Vision

Hope is the Goal

Since ultimate hope is impossible apart from a relationship with God, the banner for this course is hope. These podcasts seek to provide the believer with confidence to share that hope. Since hope must be based on something solid (Matt 7:24-27), the hope Jesus offers speaks to deeper needs and will gain a hearing.

Pertinent Observations

Over the last ten years of my twenty-five plus years in ministry, I have noticed an increase on two fronts. First, Christians are often unwilling to engage in spiritual conversation. Fear blocks an open pathway for what could be a life-changing conversation. Second, non-Christians are experiencing an unprecedented frequency of anxiety, depression, and suicide

98
indicating that hope is at an all-time low. Secularity offers few substantive answers to the soul’s deeper needs resulting in a dilemma. Those who have the answer are often unwilling to share their hope. Those who need the answer are unwilling to acknowledge Jesus as the viable solution to fill their deeper needs. Many, however, are desperate to hear something of substance. What would happen if according to a divine confluence, the one holding the message of hope offered it to the one needing the message of hope? The result would be transformative.

The Mission of Christ Community Church: “Gather, Engage, Serve”

The mission of the church must always live between the boundaries of growing in faith and reaching the needs of a broken world with the Gospel. Mancini writes, “The mission mandate is like the heartbeat of an organization. It should touch members on an emotional level and act like a cohesive force and binding agent.”145 The church’s mission is paramount to achieving the biblical mandates and goals of Kingdom work.

The words gather, engage, and serve, meet the criteria in Scripture and form the basis for the mission statement of Christ Community Church. Gathering includes worship, fellowship, teaching and prayer. Engaging involves reaching those who are close to us but far from Christ. Serving entails meeting the needs of a broken world. Gathering to worship God and encourage one another’s faith, engaging a culture far from Christ, and serving the needs of a broken world, Christ Community Church continues the mission of Jesus.


While mission is about purpose and answers the question of why an organization exists, vision explains where the organization is headed. Vision answers the question, “What do you

145 Will Mancini, Church Unique (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 120.
want to look like in 5 or 10 years?” Vision sets the direction for that time and location in history. Mission says, “There is something I must do.” Vision says, “There is somewhere I need to go.” A church must know its purpose and what it hopes to accomplish in the future.

Vision plans the route for the journey because it defines the destination. Malphurs and Penfold challenge pastors to create vision for their church by stating, “Vision is a clear, exciting picture of God’s future for your ministry as you believe it can and must be.”146 Vision statements vary from church to church because time and place affect each ministry differentiating it from others. The vision of Christ Community Church is as follows.

We desire to transform the people of Chester County by developing a movement of disciples making new disciples. We will accomplish that by encouraging everyone onto our discipleship path which involves four things: attendance on Sunday mornings, commitment to serve, involvement in a group, owning our intentional evangelism strategy (B.L.E.S.S.). Through those, we will accomplish the following: meet three critical needs in the community, develop 200 young adult leaders, implement 300 healthy community groups, see 1000 kids and students weekly, see 1000 visitors per year, see 500 conversions.147

The tag line of the vision statement is Lead. Grow. Transform Chesco148 and gives Christ Community Church a singular focus. ‘Lead’ stands for the process which will create a movement of disciples making new disciples. ‘Grow’ indicates that each individual commits to a lifestyle of personal discipleship. Lives ‘transformed’ by the Holy Spirit is the goal. “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever


147 See Appendix E for official vision chart.

148 Chesco is a colloquialism and is short for Chester County. Chester County is a Philadelphia suburb located in Southeastern Pennsylvania.
increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18 NIV).

**Church-wide Evangelism Initiative: B.L.E.S.S.**

The B.L.E.S.S. paradigm provides a tool for relationship building and evangelism. This paradigm decreases the stigma associated with evangelism because approaching friends no longer seems daunting. The B.L.E.S.S. paradigm urges intentionality in relationships.

1) **B:** Be in prayer for a person specifically that they will come to Christ.
2) **L:** Listen to that person to detect space for spiritual conversations.
3) **E:** Experience life with that person by sitting and talking over a meal.
4) **S:** Serve that person as soon as an opportunity arises.
5) **S:** Share the story of how you entered into a relationship with Jesus.

Episode #2: Continuing the Work of Jesus

**Jesus’ Stated Purpose and Mission**

The church must heed what Jesus says about His purpose on earth. First, Jesus stated one of His purposes in a dialogue with Zacchaeus, the tax collector, when He said, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 18:10). Lost people were and are Jesus’ passion.

Second, Jesus addressed the twelve after their confusion regarding what ‘greatness’ means. He said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Humble servanthood is the Kingdom way.

Third, Jesus taught, “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me” (John 6:38). Millard Erickson in his theological work highlights Christ’s obedience by writing, “Jesus had a profound sense that the Father had sent Him, and that
He had to do the Father’s work... The apostle John relates the sending by the Father to the Son's redemptive and atoning work.”¹⁴⁹

**Jesus’ Personal Vision**

Jesus saw what was before Him. In his theological work, Erickson writes, “In any event, we must bear in mind that our Lord did not come into the world to be broken by the power of sin and death, but to break it.”¹⁵⁰ Two passages define the direction Jesus headed to fulfill His vision.

First, Jerusalem was set before Him. Luke tells us that a moment transpired in the ministry of Jesus when He moved toward the great work which needed to be accomplished. “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Jerusalem represented death, and Jesus set His sights precisely there.

Second, joy was set before Him. The writer of Hebrews furthers what Luke spoke of “… for the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). He endured the pain and humiliation of the cross and disregarded the shame of execution for the joy set before Him: the redemption of mankind.

**Jesus’ Continued Vision**

The encouraging effect of vision-casting is multiplied when it comes from significant others. “The position we hold in people’s lives determines the weight of our words and thus our potential to shape their future.”¹⁵¹ Jesus projected a great future to Peter, Paul, and the church.

---


Through Peter

After Simon Peter confessed his belief in Jesus as Messiah (Matthew 16:16), Jesus cast a greater vision for Peter. “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt 16:18). Peter’s epistles gave focus to the church and its functioning, and through Peter the church would find its beginnings. “Peter wrote of the church as being built on a firm granite foundation of Isaiah 28:16, built with living stones into a spiritual temple, for Christ himself is the living stone par excellence . . .” Jesus continued His work on earth through the living church, but it began with Jesus’ vision-casting upon Peter.

Through Paul

Jesus visited Paul in a dream to convey a vision. “The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify about me in Rome”” (Acts 23:11). Ajith Fernando in his commentary writes:

At times of special need, God appears to his servants in some supernatural way and gives them a glimpse of himself that encourages them to persevere in the task they have been given. . . The comfort Paul received was in the form of an affirmation of the sovereignty of God. This time of uncertainty eventually resulted in Paul’s fulfilling one of his greatest ambitions: to preach the gospel in Rome. Paul traveled under arrest to the capital of the civilized world and testified about Jesus. By God’s divine design, Rome provided the greatest potential of spreading the gospel. The prospect of preaching the gospel to those in the central city of the civilized world must have been at the same time startling and intriguing. To that end, Paul set his sights.


Through the church

Jesus accomplished His vision. Jesus continued His vision through His disciple Peter and subsequently through another unlikely candidate in Paul. Peter and Paul then set forth a vision for those who would follow Peter and Paul on this quest to reach the world with the gospel. The church, being a loosely banded organization, needed a framework for accomplishing the task which Jesus originally established. Paul sets out a vision for the church when he writes,

So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. . . From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Eph 4:11-13, 16).

The passage portrays a vision of unity, growth, love, evangelism and fellowship. Campbell, in his commentary on Ephesians says, “This passage gives us a ringside view into how the Body is to mutually function.” That is how the church continues the work of Jesus.

Through us

To reach the world with the Gospel message, Jesus equipped every believer. “But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NLT). The power of the Holy Spirit is crucial. Boice writes, “. . . He empowers the church to do Christ’s bidding and to be effective in doing it. That is the thrust of Christ’s command . . . But they would not be able to do that [witness] until the Holy Spirit came upon them to fill their words with power.” The Holy Spirit does the sending and the transforming.

---


The Great Commission and the Great Commandment

Great Commission

With the Great Commission, Jesus gave His followers a plan on how the remainder of the world would hear about and have a chance to respond to Jesus’ offer of salvation.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt 28:18-20).

Ed Stetzer writes, “Like a missionary, we are to contend for the faith, present Christ in a contextualized manner that can be received by the hearers and operate in a countercultural community of faith. The result of our very different mission is to persuade people of the greatness of Christ and His redemption.”156 The spread of the gospel will come from believers who live out Jesus’ mandate and introduce Christ through word and deed.

Great Commandment

Jesus frequently taught His disciples to love one another. Loving one another consisted of service and sacrifice just as Jesus demonstrated. Jesus confirms the primacy of love by establishing the Great Commandment.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt 22:34-40).

The commandment to love stems from God’s love. It can be argued that the primary

156 Stetzer and Nation, Compelled, 91.
characteristic of God Himself is love.

In his theological work, Grudem writes “a life that is pleasing to God is one that has moral purity not only in its actions, but also in its desires of the heart. In fact, the greatest commandment of all requires that our heart be filled with an attitude of love for God.” The Great Commission depends upon the Great Commandment. Paul makes this point clear by teaching that if a believer does not have love, they gain nothing (1 Cor 13:1-3).

Episode #3: Understanding Our Culture

An Overview of Post-modernism

There was a time in history when people assumed the existence of God. John Seel writes, “For Christian and non-Christian alike, the lordship of Christ was assumed within the medieval world. Everyone assumed they were living within a larger spiritual reality under a religious canopy, in which they merely served different functions . . .” To challenge the reality of God would have been absurd. As the writer to the Hebrews wrote, “Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him” (Heb 11:6). Faith and belief were instruments for the knowledge of God. The fact of God was not disputed. Tim Keller writes, “Ancient people did not assume that the human mind had enough wisdom to sit in judgment on how an infinite God was disposing of things. It is only in modern times that we . . . carry out a trial of God.” This period of time when people assumed the existence of God is classified as the pre-modern era.


159 Keller, Making Sense of God, 37.
The Enlightenment, stemming from elite thinkers of the 18th century, birthed the modern age and introduced doubt in the existence of God. Reason and verifiable sensory and scientific data led influential thinkers to deny the existence of the supernatural. The philosophers of the modern age debated about how one came to know truth.

In the 1970’s, the post-modern age burst upon the scene. In this new secular age, dubbed post-modern, the concept of truth came into question. To the post-modern thinker, neither science nor philosophy can determine absolute truth because objective truth does not exist. The post-modern individual establishes self as the arbiter of truth. Because truth must conform to the taste, knowledge, opinion, and experience of the individual, truth has no stable foundation.

Understanding the post-modern mind can be somewhat tricky. Gary Graves writes, “Postmodern thinkers reject absolute truth and prefer relativism, so difficulties arise in defining the movement with precision.” Denying objective truth creates logical consequences in other areas of thinking and life, such as the denial of biblical truth. Without God, a sense of emptiness pervades the post-modern age which secularism is unable to address.

**Cultural Expressions of Post-modernism**

Secularism

Secularism develops within the confines of a godless intellectual frame. Non-belief in God, or anything transcendent, becomes the go-to belief. “In earlier modern times, religion was still seen as a good thing—or at least a benign one…Religion is now almost the ultimate enemy. That is why for many today religious faith seems so unimaginable as to be crazy.”

---


in its denial of the supernatural, denies the God of hope. Hope is an elemental need in every human being and every human being is on a quest for hope.

No human being, however, can escape a sense of the other-worldly no matter how entrenched in formal secularity one might be. James Smith, explaining the thoughts of Charles Taylor writes, “And he thinks that, in some fleeting moments of aesthetic enchantment or mundane haunting, even the secularist is pressed by a sense of something more—some ‘fullness’ that wells up within...”162 One cannot ignore the emptiness. The question is not whether we will worship, rather who or what we worship.163 Tanya Luhrmann, an anthropologist who studies people’s interactions with God writes, “Belief is natural. It comes partly from the way our minds are hardwired...”164 In that God draws all people, there is hope for the secularist to find God.

The fact that God draws people, confronts them with the reality of the supernatural, haunts them with an undeniable ‘presence’ at critical junctures in their lives, causes the astute and intrinsically honest skeptic to search for that which will fill that void. While church may not be the first place a skeptic seeks that which escapes them, it is inevitably a stop along the way. Hansen writes, “The world has indeed moved away from the church, but it hasn’t yet discovered any better alternatives or lasting answers.”165 The journey to Jesus may well come through the venue of church (as a local expression of believers in a specific place and time), but will

162 Smith, How (Not) to Be Secular, 12.

163 True worship, as described by Millard Erickson, is “recognizing and declaring his greatness. It is appropriate that the church, which belongs to God, praise and glorify him. In this aspect of its activity, the church centers its attention upon who and what God is, not upon itself.” Without a locus of worship, the void created searches monstrously for a replacement, which could turn up anywhere or be anything. Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 1058.


certainly involve its members (church as the worldwide expression of believers from all times and places) as they present the gospel accordingly.

Relativism

One term which describes the post-modern view of morality, epistemology, and theology, is relativism. Relativism is clearly the front-running philosophy of the day. Tolerance has trumped truth and holds highest rank in categories of decision-making, relationships, and morality. Relativism is “a belief that what can be known, especially in relation to moral issues, is dependent upon one’s own personal views or the collective beliefs in one’s culture.”

Relativism claims that determining truth is based on the feelings, suppositions and claims of the subjective individual, resulting in no universal standard for evaluating truth claims. Luboff in her dissertation writes, “For the relativist, between two different ways of life, there can be no impartial or highest arbiter of what is right, what is true, what is good, what is real, and so on.”

Relativism asserts that the determination of right and wrong is subject to personal opinion.

Serious issues arise for those who hold the relativist position. The position by nature defeats itself. To establish that no absolutes exist requires an absolute to exist: the absolute that there are no absolutes. The logical contradiction inherent in this position dooms it from the start.

A second issue is that the current culture holds tolerance as its highest virtue. If, however, all positions are deemed equally valid, how will society progress? History has proven that only with a standard and adherence to that standard can a society progress.

Furthermore, the post-modern culture aims to make social norms as non-confrontational

---


as possible. In doing so, it also perpetuates man’s proclivity to avoid the emotions associated with guilt and confrontation. Guilt and confrontation, however, are an indispensable part of a person’s moral development. Without a standard, civility ultimately becomes impossible.

**Individualism**

Individualism is predicated upon autonomy and exalting human choice above all else. The basis of the individualistic belief system combines the strongest tenets of secularism and relativism. Self-fulfillment becomes the deciding factor for values. Psychologist Gary Collins highlights a North American trend writing, “a psychology which has emphasized self-fulfillment, and an economy which has made such fulfillment possible . . . has real emotional implications. . . The frustration of this viewpoint can be overwhelming.”¹⁶⁸ Individualism breeds self-absorption.

Another cultural danger rises under the philosophy of individualism called fragmentation. Fragmentation happens when people are increasingly less capable of forming and carrying out a common purpose. “Fragmentation arises when people come to see themselves more and more atomistically, otherwise put, as less and less bound to their fellow citizens in common projects and allegiances.”¹⁶⁹ In other words, a weakening of sympathy and a self-referential ethic leads to fragmented societies where they will find it harder and harder to relate and truly love.

**Episode #4: Our Three Deepest Needs**

**A Key Passage: 1 Peter 3:15**

One of the key passages in Scripture to equip believers for the work of being ‘sent’ comes from Peter. “But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an


answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. . .” (1 Pet 3:15 NIV). It is in this spirit that believers must approach unbelievers. It requires of the believer an understanding of hope and a desire to help others understand it as well.

Hope within the early church community was not merely an individualistic reality but something experienced among the entire body of believers. Michaels in his commentary emphasizes this point. “Hope is what distinguishes Christian from non-Christian Gentiles . . . Through Christ’s resurrection they are reborn to a living hope (1:3) . . . this hope separates . . . and invites . . .”170 Hope among believers was a key attraction to those who joined the early church through faith in Christ. In the same way, hope has great appeal to this post-modern generation.

**Persuasion**

The mandate of the Great Commission and the art of persuasion work together. Much communication of the gospel fails to lure the post-modern because the presentation is irrelevant. While the message is not irrelevant and never will be, the method for sharing the gospel can be.

Almost all our witnessing and Christian communication assumes that people are open to what we have to say, or at least are interested, if not in need of what we are saying. Yet most people quite simply are not open, not interested and not needy, and in much of the advanced modern world fewer people are open today than even a generation ago. Indeed, many are more hostile, and their hostility is greater than the Western church has faced for centuries.171

Christians must endeavor to seek effective ways to communicate the life-changing truth of Jesus and do so with the characteristics of Christ, that of faith, hope, and love. It is then that the world will sit up and take notice.

---


Practical Principles of Engagement in Spiritual Conversation

About spiritual conversation Gregory Koukl writes, “You have only about ten seconds before the door closes.” To maintain a posture conducive for sharing one’s belief in Christ, several principles will aid in the art of persuasion to keep the door open longer.

a) Love people well. Belief systems can be sensitive subjects. Love speaks loudest. If emotions in either the presenter or the hearer flare up, the argument is lost.

b) Raise questions. Two questions are the most helpful in generating spiritual conversations: 1) What do you mean by that? 2) How did you come to that conclusion?

c) Look for signals of the supernatural. Discovering what people identify as moments of supernatural experience invites dialogue about the supernatural realm.

d) Listen for something missing. Until people come to know and love God, and are known and loved by Him, the soul will exist with an anxious craving for Him.

e) Bring in the person of Jesus. The post-modern generation is much more apt to listen to a story of a person, invoking wonder and curiosity, rather than a principle or law.

f) Focus on the deeper needs. The opportunity to generate spiritual conversation starts with understanding what is deeply important to that person.

Spiritual conversation is diplomacy, not war. Guinness reminds us that “the work of apologetics is only finished when the door to the gospel has been opened and the good news of the gospel can be proclaimed.” Apologetics must never be divorced from sharing the gospel.

The Three Deepest Needs: Faith, Hope, and Love

The three Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love are the groundwork for engaging the culture. “These things will last forever—faith, hope and love—and the greatest of these is love (I Cor. 13:13, NIV).” These are the deepest of human needs. A quotation often attributed to 18th

---

172 Gregory Koukl, Tactics, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 43.

173 Guinness, Fool’s Talk, 111.
century author Alexander Chalmers reads, “The three grand essentials of happiness are: something to do, someone to love, and something to hope for.”

The search for meaning and happiness hits upon the soul’s deepest needs. The Thessalonian church was praised for their practical application of these virtues (1 Thess 1:3) and news of them spread widely.

Faith

Faith is defined in two ways: belief and allegiance. MacArthur writes, “… the faithful (believing) are also faithful (obedient). Fidelity, constancy, firmness, confidence, reliance, trust [and] belief are all indivisibly wrapped up in the idea of believing.”

Humans are hardwired to believe in something beyond self and adopt a grand purpose to carry through life. Faith defines being and attributes purpose.

Hope

People were created with a need for hope, for something bigger than the temporal experiences of life. Czech leader Vaclav Havel said, “Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”

Christianity has an answer for the questions raised in this broken world.

Hope also speaks directly to uncertainty. The Scriptures urge people to place hope in a gracious, unchanging God. David simply states, “We put our hope in the Lord. He is our help and our shield” (Ps 33:20). The statement is exclusionary. Wilson writes, “Deliverance belongs

---


to YHWH (3:8), and salvation comes to those who ‘wait hopefully’ for YHWH rather than those who trust in any form of human power.”\textsuperscript{177} God is the only true foundation for hope.

Love

Any ministry done in the name of Jesus must stem from a genuine love for God and neighbor. When John wrote his first epistle, he emphasized that love must preside over all speech and action saying, “Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8 NLT). Love validates one’s Christian faith.

John gives the reader a picture of love. “We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So, we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16). Leon Morris writes that Jesus’ death, “. . . is a work that God accomplishes because He loves us. The love of God is the great fact that undergirds the whole New Testament.”\textsuperscript{178} Love must be active in the life of a believer. Thompson concludes, “So strong is John’s confidence that the Christian community will fulfill this command that he writes that mutual Christian love manifests the presence and action of the invisible God.”\textsuperscript{179} The believer resembles Jesus by loving others.

Summary

Any evangelistic effort must touch on the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Ravi Zacharias

\textsuperscript{177} Gerald H. Wilson, \textit{Psalms} Vol. 1 of \textit{The NIV Application Commentary}, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 561.

\textsuperscript{178} Leon Morris, \textit{The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1983), 149.

asks a question which those interested in reaching the post-modern must ask: “How do you reach a generation that listens with its eyes and thinks with its feelings?”\textsuperscript{180} The answer is with faith, hope, and love. While the post-modern world denies absolute truth, they cannot deny what they feel. The believer has faith, hope, and love to offer to the post-modern world.

Episode #5: Can We Trust the Bible?

Introduction

Christian doctrine is founded on the 66 books of the Bible. The historicity of the Bible has fallen into question over the last century and a half. Textual criticism and liberal viewpoints on theology contribute to the suspicion. The legitimization of all world religions and a relativistic post-modern society also seek to dismantle the Bible’s authority. Even Christians are left to wonder which parts of the Bible are authoritative today. This book, which claims to be the very words of God and which declares its own ability to transform lives, shows its trustworthiness.

Bible Claims Itself to Be the Word of God

Moses clearly states the written law to be the Word of God. In the Pentateuch alone, “. . . it is stated no fewer than 420 times that the express words of God are being recounted.”\textsuperscript{181} God commanded Moses to write His words. “Then the \textsc{Lord} said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel” (Exodus 34:27 NIV). The prophets of the Old Testament also claim to speak God’s word. The phrase “Thus says the Lord . . .” appears over 80 times in the book of Isaiah alone.

\textsuperscript{180} Ravi Zaccharias, “Think Again- The Gentle Goldsmith,” Just Think-RZIM (https://www.rzim.org/read/just-think-magazine/think-again-the-gentle-goldsmith/)

\textsuperscript{181} Rubel Shelley, Prepare to Answer: a Defense of the Christian Faith, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 94.
Jesus claimed the Bible to be God’s word. Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt 5:17-18 NIV).

Peter described the process God used writing, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20-21 NIV). The prophets spoke God's very words.

**Manuscript Evidence**

The Sopherim (300 B.C.–A.D. 500), a group of scholars responsible for the accurate transmission of the Scriptures, approached their task seriously and developed a system to eliminate errors. Shelley writes, “They counted to the middle word and middle letter of each book, calculated how many times a letter was used in each book, and compiled other statistics that reduced the possibility of copying errors creeping into their scrolls.”182 By 500 A.D. the Masoretes took over the job and developed vowels to ensure accurate word meanings. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, proved the accuracy of their scribal work. A copy of the entire book of Isaiah from about 100-150 B.C. was discovered as nearly identical to today’s copies.

The transmission of the New Testament also shows Divine intervention. When an Apostle wrote a letter to a city, that letter would be copied and delivered to another city. Those copies were written on a crude paper called papyrus. Due to its scarcity, the copies were often written on damaged papyri. Somehow, despite this crude method of transmission, there are still

---

182 Shelley, *Prepare to Answer*, 133.
over 5,300 copies of the New Testament, including fragments. For example, one from John dates as early as A.D. 130, which is only 50 years from the original writing.

Two other pieces of manuscript evidence are worth mentioning. First, 8,000 Latin versions and 9,300 other versions of the entire Bible in differing languages dating back to the fourth century have been discovered. Second, the citations of Scripture in the writings of the early church fathers can reconstruct a nearly complete New Testament. The New Testament stands alone compared to other historical writings in the sheer amount of ancient manuscript evidence.

**Evidence from Archeology**

Skeptics erroneously cite a lack of archeological evidence to disprove the validity of Scripture. Three recent noteworthy archeological finds which support the historicity of the Bible are the Tel Dan Stele (discovered in 1993 supporting the historicity of David’s throne in Jerusalem), the Ossuary of Caiaphas (found in 1990 proving the authenticity of the High Priest Caiaphas), and the Pilate Stone (discovered in 1961 where Pilate’s name and title were inscribed). These facts were once denied by scholars, but archeology proved them accurate.

**Evidence from Prophecy**

Over three hundred prophecies of the coming Messiah were recorded in the Old Testament. (See Appendix G for a short list.) Fulfilled prophecies, predicted in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament, bring validity to the message of the prophets.

**Evidence from Unity**

One of the most striking characteristics of the Bible is its unity, maintaining a common theme throughout. The individual books were written by various authors including kings (David, Solomon), fishermen (Peter, John, Mark), a priest (Samuel), prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah,
etc.), a tax collector (Matthew), a physician (Luke), a Pharisee (Paul), and others. There were over 1,800 years between when the first and last books were written. The books were written in different genres (poetry, history, parables, stories, and letters). These books were written on three different continents (Asia, Africa, Europe), and in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek). Yet, each book delivers a message about the Messiah Jesus Christ, salvation, holy living, and the deeper questions of life and death. The Bible is the eternally durable Word and establishes Jesus as the central theme.

Episode #6: Does God Exist?

Introduction

It would be arrogant of anyone to say with certainty that God does not exist. One would have to know everything about the physical universe and grasp all things which are transcendent and spiritual to claim the non-existence of God. One would, in other words, have to be God to deny His existence.

Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument states that if there is matter, then there must be a cause for that matter. Thomas Aquinas was the first to argue for God’s existence through motion saying, “…whatever is moved must be moved by another.”¹²³ Motion is an effect which had a cause.

A first cause is needed to explain the origin of matter. The Bible begins saying, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1 NIV). Aalders writes in his Genesis commentary, “…the words ‘in the beginning’ must be taken in their absolute sense… [the]

alternative interpretation…does not reflect Hebrew usage.”

Everything owes its existence to God.

**Design Argument**

Often called the teleological argument, the premise stands on a universal observation that the world has a purpose for its existence. The sequencing and functional complexity in the world are undeniable. Intelligent design is a universal characteristic of the world.

If it were possible to discover a place on earth untouched by human civilization, and if in that place an explorer found a pocket watch, questions would arise: Who made this? Why was it made? The watch exhibits design, so there must be a designer. Paul used this argument saying, “Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy (Acts 14:17 NIV).” God created and sustains the universe.

Scientist Allan Sandage wrote, “The world is too complicated in all its parts and interconnections to be due to chance alone. I am convinced that the existence of life with all its order in each of its organisms is simply too well put together.”

**The Moral Argument**

Norms and codes of conduct are similar across diverse cultures. Most cultures, for instance, will punish such acts as murder and theft, and many disapprove of adultery and physical abuse. Throughout history people of all cultures have felt an innate sense of fairness. If

---


one admits a standard of right and wrong exists for all cultures throughout history (moral law), then it would be difficult to deny the existence of a Moral Law Giver.

Morals correspond to and originate from the character of God. In his book on apologetics, Powell writes, “His preferences are extensions of His character, not an arbitrary decision on His part. Because His character does not change, morality is grounded in the very character of God.” Simply put, if moral laws exist, a Moral Law Giver exists as well.

**Ideas and Art as an Argument**

Those who deny God’s existence must agree to a form of Darwinist evolutionary theory. Darwinism has no adequate response for the origin of ideas and art. On one hand it can be argued that ideas are born of necessity. Darwinism would concur. If, for instance, the perpetuation of life were dependent upon finding a more efficient hunting method, reason would find it. But what of higher math? Where did those ideas originate from? Is higher math necessary for the survival of a society? Thomas Nagel said, “Something has happened that has gotten our minds into immediate contact with the rational order of the world.” It is God.

And what of art? How does art serve to perpetuate a species? Darwinist reasoning cannot explain the origin of beauty and art as they are not necessary to survival. In the Christian worldview, art reflects the beauty of God’s creation recognized by people created in God’s image.

God reveals to man an understanding of how creation works and a glimpse of His amazing and complex abilities. Skeel writes, “These beliefs imply that the universe is rational

---

186 Powell, *Christian Apologetics*, 90.

and intelligible, since it reflects the glory of a personal, intelligent creator; and that our idea-making capacity will help us to better function in the universe, since we are made in the image of its Creator.”188 Ideas and art are not arbitrary but instead reflections of God’s image stamped upon man.

Episode #7: Aren’t All Religions Basically the Same?

Introduction

Religious pluralism, the most common theological belief system of today, stems from the current relativistic culture. This system equalizes the validity of all belief systems. A frequent phrase within pluralism is that there are many ways to God. Religion is viewed as a matter of choice and is often influenced by birthplace, nationality, culture and family. John Stott writes that religious pluralism, “. . . is due to the decline of the institutional church, the rise of religious alternatives, and the fragmentation of the nature of belief.”189 Increased information on world religions and worldviews contributes to this. Netland adds, “And with an increased awareness of religious pluralism [there] has come a greater emphasis on questions dealing with the relation between various religious traditions.”190

Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism appeals to people because: 1) it validates the inescapable sense of transcendence, and 2) it maintains choice as the ultimate ethic. If exercising belief in a god will satisfy at least some of the emptiness while upholding unlimited individual freedom, then many

---


will subscribe. This philosophy demands absolutely nothing of its advocates, which is a large reason why people easily fall into this mindset.

But truths cannot be equally valid and diametrically opposed. Different religions and philosophies, brought to their lowest common denominator, are not the ‘same paths to God.’ When Jesus said, “Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32 NIV), He clarified one truth by using the definite article, “the.”

Comparison of Major Religions

The fascinating study of world religions brings the observant student to both the similarities and differences of each religion. Most classes celebrate the similarities among the world religions in an attempt to homogenize them into one omni-religion. Religious pluralism, however, leads to an impasse: major world religions are all mutually exclusive. The differences are insurmountable. Since the pluralist almost always focuses on the salvation question, comparison below demonstrates that major world religions are not compatible on this issue of salvation, afterlife, and the path to heaven.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World Religion:</th>
<th>Destiny:</th>
<th>How to get there:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>Believers will spend eternity in heaven and have a personal experience with God forever</td>
<td>Acceptance of Christ’s payment on the cross for one’s sin. Faith in Jesus Christ, not man’s good works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>Some say: nothing exists after life is over Some say: afterlife is where they enjoy the company of the Messiah (who is not Jesus)</td>
<td>Turn back to God and live a moral life (through effort)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Join “Allah” in heaven where they enjoy sensual pleasure and gratification</td>
<td>Salvation is by believing in the five doctrines of Islam and performing the duties of the five pillars of faith (through effort)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>Become one with the impersonal supreme being “Brahman” and arrive in a state of nirvana</td>
<td>Accomplish through a series of reincarnations in which one reaps in the next life the rewards/punishments of this life (through effort)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>Aspire to Nirvana as a state of total nothingness, a final annihilation of individual consciousness</td>
<td>Find release from the endless chain of reincarnations by following the four noble truths and the eightfold path (through effort)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Synchronizing the religions into one is logically impossible. David Clark writes, “It’s unreasonable to say that all the religions are true paths to the spiritual quest, meaning that every
religion is a true path to whatever that religion defines as the spiritual quest. There’s just too much variation on the truth question I submit that people who claim every religion is true paint themselves into a corner.”

Some feel the similarities across religions make syncretism valid, but the opposite is actually true. Two pills . . . might have the same shape, same color and both be stamped with the letter ‘a,’ but one pill might be aspirin and the other arsenic. Differences matter.

Salvation in Jesus

What about those sincere people who believe in other religions? Sincerity is not the determining factor of truth. Many people who make honest mistakes are sincere in their endeavors. Jesus made a clear statement saying, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 NIV). Based on that, “. . . all of life is spiritual, and Jesus demands that it all be surrendered to him.”

The most important question in reaction to pluralism is “whether what it affirms about the nature of reality is in fact true.”

Truth and error also exist in the realm of religious choice. Truth is not relative. Even the staunch individualist must admit to universal standards in areas such as mathematics, medicine, and quality control. If there are standards in other fields of study, why not in theology?

Some say Christianity is very narrow and that it is insensitive to claim only one way to God. Yet truth by its very definition is narrow. Insensitivity would be demonstrated by believing

---


193 Harlod Netland, “Religious Pluralism and Truth,” Trinity Journal, 6 (1985): 87. Netland is an advocate of the exclusivist view, himself being a Christian, stating that it is the only plausible view logically. The incompatibility of truth claims is self-evident. The only way to hold to an inclusivist viewpoint (pluralism) is to make a logical jump in regard to truth claims. Therefore, the truth claims or religions which are not compatible with Scripture must be rejected.
one’s faith to be true and not proclaiming it. If a movie theatre were on fire and the people inside unaware, the most insensitive thing to do would be to not tell them.

Episode #8: Did the Resurrection of Jesus Really Happen?

The Centrality of the Resurrection

The resurrection proved Jesus’ ultimate authority over sin and death. Jesus’ resurrection ensures the believer’s resurrection on the Last Day. The entire Christian faith hinges on the doctrine of the resurrection. Paul explains the necessity of the resurrection saying, “And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God . . . then your faith is useless, and you are still guilty of your sins… [and] all who have died believing in Christ are lost!” (I Cor. 15:14-15a, 17b-18). Jesus’ resurrection is essential to Christian faith and doctrine, without which the foundation of the Christian faith falls apart.

Naturalistic Explanations

Naturalistic explanations for the resurrection of Jesus stem from liberal theology’s attempts to demythologize the Bible. Striving to explain the resurrection through naturalistic means has fallen out of favor with most scholars, but four arguments are worth mentioning.

Stolen body theory

The stolen body theory is the oldest theory to disprove the resurrection and is recorded in Matthew 28:11-15. According to this passage, tomb guards were urged to spread the rumor that the disciples stole the body of Jesus while the guards slept. The religious leaders would then convince the authorities either by rhetoric or bribery to exonerate the guards. Several problems
exist with this theory. Soldiers who fell asleep on watch could likely receive the death penalty, with or without the backing of religious leaders. Additionally, how would the guards know the disciples stole the body if they were sleeping? And if the disciples did steal the body, the whole conspiracy had a high probability of crumbling because producing the body would instantly dispel the myth.

Wrong tomb theory

The second argument, the wrong tomb theory, is no longer in favor among scholars. The argument states that because of the psychological stress or an error in judgment due to the agonizing nature of the event, the disciples arrived at the wrong tomb. The tomb, however, belonged to a man named Joseph of Arimethea. They would merely need to ask Joseph the whereabouts of his tomb. Also, would Mary, Peter, and John all make that same mistake simultaneously? The idea is highly unlikely.

Swoon theory

The third argument, the swoon theory, has completely fallen out of favor with most reputable scholars but is mentioned for historical knowledge and reference. The swoon theory states that Jesus did not actually die. But the events of Jesus’ last day disprove this, as recorded in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Jesus of Nazareth underwent Jewish and Roman trials, was flogged, and was sentenced to death by crucifixion. The scourging produced deep striplike lacerations and appreciable blood loss, and it probably set the stage for hypovolemic shock, as evidenced by the fact that Jesus was too weakened to carry the crossbar (patibulum) to Golgotha. At the site of crucifixion, his wrists were nailed to the patibulum and, after the patibulum was lifted onto the upright post (stipes), his feet were nailed to the stipes. The major pathophysiologic effect of crucifixion was an interference with normal respirations. Accordingly, death resulted primarily from hypovolemic shock and exhaustion asphyxia. Jesus' death was ensured by the thrust of a soldier's spear into his side. Modern medical
interpretation of the historical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead when taken down from the cross.\(^{194}\)

It is generally not disputed that Jesus died based on these series of events. Romans were experts in capital punishment.

**A Strong Case for the Resurrection**

Gary Habermas developed the Minimal Facts Argument to establish the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection. He says, “. . . with the exception of the empty tomb, which is still accepted by a majority of scholars, it is virtually unanimously thought that these are historical facts as the list is evaluated.”\(^{195}\) Even the skeptical scholars agree to these facts. “These six historical facts are capable of dismissing each of the naturalistic hypotheses, as well as furnishing the most convincing evidence for Jesus’ resurrection appearances.”\(^{196}\) Habermas’ Minimal Facts are:

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.
2. The disciples experienced what they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.
3. The disciples were thoroughly transformed, even being willing to die for this belief.
4. The apostolic proclamation of the resurrection took place very early, when the church was in its infancy.
5. James, the brother of Jesus and a former skeptic, became a Christian due to experiencing the appearance of the risen Jesus.
6. Saul (Paul), the church persecutor, became a Christian due to experiencing the appearance of the risen Jesus.\(^{197}\)

---


\(^{195}\) Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, 10.

\(^{196}\) Ibid., 29.

\(^{197}\) Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, 27.
There is proof for the resurrection from the early historical sources which corroborate with Paul’s testimony. “Critical scholars like to emphasize what we cannot know about the New Testament narratives. But it is illuminating to concentrate on what can be positively concluded from these sources.”\(^{198}\) The argument in favor of the resurrection is undeniable.

**Living in the Power of the Resurrection**

Paul emphasizes the power of the resurrection in his epistle to the Ephesians writing, “I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe Him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms” (Eph 1:19-20 NLT). MacArthur in his commentary reminds us that, “The surpassing greatness of God’s power is given to every believer. . . When we are saved we receive all of God’s grace and all of His power, and that assures us of the realization of our eternal hope.”\(^{199}\) Paul exhorts believers to grasp this assurance.

1 Corinthians 15 explains that if there was no resurrection, then the whole of Christian faith and teaching would be false (1 Cor 15:14). Further, there would be no forgiveness of sins; believers will have died in vain (1 Cor 15:17-18); and Christians would be absent of hope and therefore pitied (1 Cor 15:19). Because of the resurrection, we have a firm foundation for our faith (1 Cor 15:21-23) and obtain forgiveness, hope, and victory over the grave (1 Cor 15:54-57). The resurrection motivates the believer in daily life (1 Cor 15:58).

Habermas writes, “In 1 Corinthians 15 alone, Paul makes it clear that Jesus’ death and

\(^{198}\) Ibid., 275.

resurrection provide the grounding for Christian hope and action, as well as the basis for some Christian doctrines. "\textsuperscript{200} The believer can live the Christian life because of the resurrection power of Jesus.

Episode #9: What About the Afterlife?

\section*{Eternity}

One noteworthy and agreed-upon doctrine of the Christian faith is the existence of heaven. The inevitability of death draws the attention of everyone. Believers, non-believers, and those from differing theological perspectives admit to a heaven. David says, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps 90:12 NIV). Gaebelein in his commentary emphasizes the fleeting nature of life. "Life is short, life is uncertain, and we need to remember how fleeting all is\ldots\textsuperscript{201} The denial of afterlife perpetuates a meaningless existence.

The concept of eternity goes beyond a knowledge of the reality of death. "\ldots He has planted eternity in the human heart\ldots" (Eccl. 3:11). First, having eternity in one’s heart is a homing device pointing to something which is not presently experienced. Second, this longing brings people to the inevitability of mortality. Third, God is using the concept of eternity to draw people to Himself.

\section*{Heaven}

Heaven is described as the dwelling place of God. Several times in Scripture God is said to reside in heaven. "May you hear the humble and earnest requests from me and your people

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{200} Habermas, \textit{The Risen Jesus and Future Hope}, x.
\textsuperscript{201} Arno C. Gaebelein, \textit{The Book of Psalms}, (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1939), 345.
\end{flushright}
Israel when we pray toward this place. Yes, hear us from heaven where you live, and when you 
hear, forgive” (2 Chr 6:21). Jesus describes heaven as His dwelling place saying, “For I have 
come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will” (John 6:38).
Heaven is described as the destination of all believers. Jesus spoke of heaven to one of the 
thieves hanging next to Him on the cross. “And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be 
with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Revelation gives us a glimpse of Heaven by describing its physical attributes. A river and 
the layout of the city and its building materials are described. Also, there are several immaterial 
descriptions of heaven. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death 
or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever” (Rev 21:14). Heaven is the joyous 
destiny promised to believers in Jesus.

The words with which Jesus encouraged the believing thief who hung on the neighboring 
cross extends to all believers. Assurance of the reward of heaven should greatly encourage the 
believer. Those who believe in a works-based salvation do not enjoy the assurance of eternity 
spent with God and will often reel with an uncertainty that causes debilitating fear when faced 
with the prospect of death. Mueller writes, “Work-righteousness always produces doubt and 
uncertainty, while personal trust in the vicarious atonement of Christ and His objective 
justification always effects a most joyous assurance of salvation in the believer’s heart.”202 The 
major doctrinal of assurance of salvation must not be ignored, nor should the effect of true joy at 
the prospect of heaven.

The path

Jesus made it clear one can only get to heaven through Himself, saying, “. . . I am the

---

way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 NIV). This stands in opposition to universalism, the belief that all people, regardless of their faith system, will attain eternal life in heaven. In truth, no one is excluded from the offer of heaven. But each individual must choose to receive or reject that offer.

The question of infants

What about infants? What happens to infants when they die, not having the capacity to fully understand salvation, know Jesus, or comprehend faith? (Some place the severely disabled in this category as well.) The reply of David whose infant son died provides insight into that question. “David replied, “I fasted and wept while the child was alive, for I said, ‘Perhaps the LORD will be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But why should I fast when he is dead? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him one day, but he cannot return to me” (2 Sam 12:22-23). David explains that his son cannot come back to life, but he himself will go to where his son is (heaven) upon his own death.

The question of those who have not heard

Another commonly asked question is, “What about all the people who have never heard of Jesus?” First, the Bible clearly states that all people are without excuse. “For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So, they have no excuse for not knowing God” (Rom 1:20). People have been given evidence enough to pursue God and each must respond personally to that evidence.

Second, God made a promise. “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened” (Mat 7:7-8). Anyone anywhere can keep seeking and asking. God promises that
He will answer and they will find Him. Anyone anywhere can seek and ask. “If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me” (Jer 29:13). How? God can send a messenger, a printed message, a divine appointment or even a dream. “For example, many Muslims around the world today who seem unreachable with the gospel are having dreams and visions of Jesus, and great numbers of them are coming to faith in Christ.” As part of God’s faithfulness and covenant love, He gets His message across to those willing to hear.

Hell

The mention of hell stirs several things in the minds of people. First, historic images of people burning for eternity dominate minds. Some think this image of fire stands in complete juxtaposition to the God of love and grace spoken of in Scripture. Second, it is difficult to grasp the reality of such a place. Third, anger surfaces in people as they are offended by the reality of hell. How dare someone be as judgmental as to suggest that some people go to hell! In a culture of moral relativism and religious pluralism, hell has little chance of finding favor in the circles of truth. The big question is, “Why hell?”

Jesus’ teaching

Jesus taught that hell is a literal place which warranted warning. Mittleberg writes, “When you read his consistent and repeated warnings about the sobering realities of heaven and hell, it becomes clear that he believed in them sincerely and expects us to do the same.” Jesus’ teaching rules out the possibility of annihilationism (the belief that the soul ceases to exist upon death). The doctrine of hell can be a driving motivator for evangelism efforts.

---

203 Mark Mittelberg, The Questions Christians Hope No One will Ask, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2010), 273.
204 Mittleberg, The Questions Christians Hope No One will Ask, 265.
The justice of God

Justice is forged in the holiness of God. It is from God’s character that justice must gain its true meaning. With that established, a discourse around the subject of hell may ensue. “As the Scriptures say, ‘No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one . . . For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard’” (Rom 3:10-12, 23). If justice has a cousin it is fairness, but it seems unfair that Jesus took the penalty for all of our sins. If justice were the only filter, all people deserve hell. It is only in God’s love and grace that the offer of heaven through Christ has been made available. David wrote, “He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve” (Psalm 103:10). Humankind deserves hell, but are the benefactors of God’s grace made clear by offering His Son that people might choose Him and thereby choose life.

The question still remains, “How can you believe in a good God that sends people to hell? The short answer is: we don’t.”205 That is the appropriate answer, yet deserves more explanation. Mittelberg asks another question. “So then, why does anybody end up in hell? This is hard to hear, but it is because people actually choose to go there.”206 Every person is an object of God’s undeserved grace, but also a product of their own choices. Since God’s offer is good and universal in its invitation, the onus is on the individual to accept or reject that invitation to salvation. The entire offer is predicated upon the grace shown in Jesus. “But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners” (Rom 5:8). That is a more than fair offer.

---

205 Ibid., 268.

206 Mittelberg, The Questions Christians Hope No One will Ask, 269.
Defining the Problem of Evil

Theodicy is the theological term that describes the problem of evil. The classical argument is: if God is all-good, He must not be all-powerful (and vice-versa) since there is evil in the world. He cannot, according to that argument, be both all-good and all-powerful and allow evil in the world. Theodicy is “the answer to the question of why God permits evil.” Theodicy vindicates an all-wise, all-good, all-powerful God for the presence of evil. This problem is often cited as the chief reason why many people have not embraced Christianity. A proper theodicy, however, can also become a very strong argument for the existence of God.

Original Sin

One doctrine which bolsters theodicy is that of original sin. Original sin explains that all people are born into a sinful state. Sin originated in Adam and carries its devastating results through progeny. “When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned” (Rom 5:12). Original sin causes rebelliousness, propensity toward selfishness, and a desire to be free from God’s authority over humanity. Original sin is why this world remains a broken place. Emotional pain, such as depression, grief, and despair are plentiful. Natural disasters, war, murder, and abuse proliferate. The fall of man in the Garden of Eden is the cause of pain. This was not God’s original design.

Living with the Tension of Evil

First, when discussing evil in terms of crime, hatred, abuse, theft, and other detrimental acts which humans impose on others, the concept of sin is involved. God created each person to
have an amount of free will that allows them to choose. Since the world is one where humans make choices every day, many of those choices will be evil. Evil choices will be hurtful, even tragic as the consequences unfold.

Second, there is a sense in which pain is a necessary part of living. Some accuse God because He did not make a world free from pain. But pain can be a gift, signaling that something is too hot, sharp, or poisonous. Pain can alert of an ailment in the body which needs attention. “Pain is generally an instrumental good in our experience. A theist could even insist that it is part of the wise design of our human bodies by an infinitely good God.” Furthermore, pain has a strengthening component to it. “Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing” (Jas 1:2-4). Growth can result from pain.

Third, when speaking of the difficult issues of natural disasters, tragedies, and disease, several thoughts need to be considered. There is brokenness in this world because when sin entered the world all of creation was affected. Living in a world where choice abounds means living in a world where moral and material mistakes are made in every aspect of life. A doomed airplane, for example, might have been the result of an overlooked mechanical malfunction.

Fourth, the fact is, no one will ever know exactly why different events occur. When one thing is deemed as good, and another as evil, how does one know if that good thing is representative of all possible good? Martin comments, “A representative sampling of goods is one where every possible good has an equal chance or probability of getting into the set of goods we know of.” However, only an omniscient being can discern that. So, when one thing looks

---

208 Shelley, *Prepare to Answer*, 85.
bad, in light of all other options, it might be good. Time, hindsight, and wisdom enable man to
glimpse what God sees. People do not have access to the full picture.

In the final analysis, there are the secret things of God. Deuteronomy says, “The LORD
our God has secrets known to no one” (Deut. 29:29). In this realm of the unknown, God desires
for man to trust Him. He draws people to Himself and pain and suffering are a powerful way to
accomplish the greater good of knowing God. “God is not through: he will continue to work on
us, like a persistent sculptor working the metal with hard blows and constant lighter corrections,
to help us become worthy of happiness if we receive Him and submit to His plan. On most
occasions, it seems, we do not know why our good God allows certain evils. But we know
Someone who knows these things…” 210 Through the suffering, God is near and He knows best.

**The Problem of Evil as an Evidence for God**

Instead of a hindrance to belief in God, the problem of evil can be evidence for the
existence of God. First, the atheist or secularist who uses the problem of evil as their basis for
denying God cannot also claim man has evolved through the mechanism of natural selection—a
process of death, suffering, and violence. If the stronger species is to continue propagation, the
strong will abuse or annihilate the weak. If suffering is a natural part of their system, on what
basis do they claim a good God cannot exist in an evil world?

Second, any person who asks why so much suffering, evil, and pain exist in the world,
has also backed themselves into a corner. One who denies the existence of God because of the
presence of evil is claiming an understanding of evil with no objective standard. If something is
universally considered unfair, an authoritative moral principle is guiding that sense of fairness. If

one claims the natural world is unjust and filled with evil, they are assuming a supernatural or overarching standard by which to make that judgment. Where there is a supernatural moral law, there is a supernatural moral Lawgiver.

Episode #11: Is God Good?

Defining ‘Gospel’

The gospel gives “shape to everything the church does, the element which lies at the heart of all its functions. . .”211 The word ‘Gospel’ most accurately means Good News.212 In the LXX (translated from Hebrew word bsr) and the New Testament, the word translated gospel is “euangelion,”213 from which we get the word evangelism. The gospel, then, is essentially a news report telling man something has occurred which demands a response. Redemption began in eternity past, in the confines of the Trinitarian relationship where a plan was made by God to rescue His people. God provided a way, and that has been the message from the very start. This Good News message is entrenched in the Old Testament scriptures.

Old Testament Creeds as Promises of Good News

The Good News was transmitted in ancient history through oral tradition, specifically in creeds. Creeds explained what people believed in a format easily handed down, learned, and memorized. According to Mark Boda, narrative creeds, character creeds, and relationship creeds

---

211 Erickson, Systematic Theology, 1059.

212 Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary. (Philippines: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1979), 492. Gospel, from OE godspel; good + spell. I.e. ‘a good word.’ Word here is used as an entire message, not merely a literal one word.

are statements of belief which weave together the Old Testament. Boda defines theology as “a deep and disciplined reflection of God.” Creeds, then, form a basis for that reflection.

The narrative creeds tell the stories of God’s action in history. One talks of the Israelites being slaves in Egypt and their eventual liberation. “The fullest form of the narrative creed thus binds together the historical experience of the present, understood as a community looking in faith for restoration, with the historical experiences of the past.” Theology is thus expressed as a redemptive story. The believer is in a redemptive story that points to God’s immense grace.

The character creeds describe the nature of God. “In this creedal tradition in ancient Israel, theology is expressed as God’s redemptive character. . .” The descriptors can be participles (forgiving), nouns (goodness), or adjectives (compassionate). An example of this type of creed described God as “…abounding in steadfast love” (Ps 103:8 ESV).

The relational creeds also describe God, but with reference to His people. These creeds show God in an active relationship with His people. One such creed says, “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people” (Lev 26:12 NIV). God’s involvement in the specific events of His people is the chief concern with relational creeds.

Even today the narrative, character and relational creedal rhythms serve as tools to engage the non-believer by giving a framework for conversation points. First, by understanding the narrative creed, “we place ourselves in our present into the redemptive story . . . and we have the opportunity to embed others within this story.” Stories can be a compelling way to share

---

215 Ibid., 23.
216 Ibid., 29.
217 Ibid., 128.
the Good News. The character creeds are a reminder to reflect on God’s goodness and mercy and also His discipline throughout Scripture. Character creeds prompt watching for God’s activity in everyday life. Third, the relational creeds signify that relationships are critical to our Christian life. The Bible emphasizes covenant and community. There is also a focus on the relationship between the believer and the Creator. “Front and center in the relational creed is the opportunity for a relationship with God.” It is truly good news that God desires a relationship with the people He created.

**Old Testament Covenants as Promises of Good News**

The three covenants of the Old Testament create for us the anticipatory backdrop which leads to the hope of a Savior. These are the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the New covenant—each bearing an integral part of the Good News.

In the Abrahamic Covenant, the LORD promised to Abraham that all people would be blessed through him, and that God’s people would be numerous. “Perhaps the greatest of God’s promises to Abraham was this: through Abraham, God’s blessing would penetrate throughout the world...In that unfolding story is our story—our need for promise and hope of restoration.” The Good News can be traced back to this promise of God’s blessing in Genesis 15.

In the Davidic Covenant, God granted the request of the Israelites by giving them a king but then God extended the promise. “Out of His promise came the hope of a Messiah, a king would bring peace and establish righteousness . . .” That King would be the promise from the line of King David (see 2 Sam 7:11b-16). This Messiah would be the eternal King.

---


220 Ibid., 10.
The New Covenant is comprised of two key theological elements. The prophet Jeremiah establishes the basis for the New Covenant. In speaking of the New Covenant, Bock reminds the reader, “First, there would be forgiveness of sin; second, God’s law would be written on the heart.” Furthermore, within the confines of the New Covenant, Ezekiel sheds a prophetic light on a new work of God upon the people. God promises to put a new Spirit into the faithful (see Jer 31:33-34, Ezek 36:25-27).

**Jesus is the Fulfillment of the Good News**

The gospel, while unmistakably noticeable in the New Testament, is clearly evident in the pages of the Old Testament. Scott McKnight writes that Old Testament scriptures “tell us the Story of Israel coming to completion in the Story of Jesus.” Paul emphasized the importance of Old Testament promises when he wrote, “I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said” (1 Cor 15:3-4 NIV). The gospel defined here mentions the death, burial, and resurrection, and connects it to the Old Testament story of Israel needing a Savior. Paul also wrote to Timothy, “Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach” (2 Tim. 2:8). Paul here states key gospel elements of the resurrection and a larger gospel story continued from the Old Testament kingly line. The gospel in the New Testament can never be separated from the origins of the gospel story in the Old Testament.

---


222 Scott McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 96.

223 See I Cor. 15:1-6 where Paul uses the words, “according to the Scriptures.”
Episode #12: Having Spiritual Conversations

**Introduction**

As a reminder, these twelve sessions have one goal: to develop a conviction and confidence for initiating spiritual conversations. This confidence will assist the believer in their calling as someone who is ‘sent’ to their spheres of influence to make new disciples. Spiritual conversations will lead to sharing the Good News of Jesus and offering the hearer an opportunity to respond.

**B.L.E.S.S.**

As mentioned previously, the following is a simple evangelism strategy adopted by Christ Community Church and supplemented by these twelve episodes. This method employs intentionality and relational principles based on love. Love is its primary distinctive.

1) **B**: Be in prayer for that person, praying intentionally that they will come to Christ. The prayer is for open doors of communication and receptive hearts.

2) **L**: Listen to that person. Listening well is a tool to deepen that relationship. Using the skill of listening also creates space to interject spiritual conversation.

3) **E**: Experience life with that person. The letter E can also stand for Eat. Friendships grow when someone takes the initiative to just sit and talk over a meal.

4) **S**: Serve that person. While listening and experiencing life together, the believer will inevitably stumble upon opportunities to serve that person.

5) **S**: Share your story with that person. The goal is to eventually share one’s spiritual journey, explaining how they entered into a relationship with Jesus.

**Thoughts on Sharing the Gospel**

There are several points to consider when sharing the gospel in this post-modern culture. First, this culture is resistant to ‘spiritual laws’ and ‘axioms.’ The Four Spiritual Laws, written in
1952, have been immensely helpful over the last seventy years. While these principles remain an integral part of sharing the gospel, the ‘spiritual law’ approach may not get the hearing it once did.

Second, no one can deny what they feel. A relativistic culture bases their definition of truth upon feelings. If the approach used in sharing the Good News relates to the deeper feelings within a person, that person will listen. The deeper needs of the human soul are faith, hope, and love. Utilizing faith, hope, and love to share the gospel will be very persuasive.

Third, everyone loves a good story. Bestselling books throughout history have been stories because the reader identifies with the characters, entering into the story themselves through imagination. Using the metanarrative of the Bible to describe how the unbelieving person fits into God’s story can be an exciting prospect.

Fourth, fear is often a barrier to advancing the conversation to the point of decision when sharing the gospel. Ed Stetzer writes, “Yet, it is essential we remember that the most important step in helping anyone is introducing them to Jesus Christ.” Sharing the basics of the gospel is not complete without asking someone if they are ready to make a commitment to Jesus Christ.

Two Themes for Sharing the Gospel

Two persuasive ways of sharing the Good News to a post-modern culture are the use of a) overarching story, and b) deeper needs. If the information shared with a non-believer falls into one of those two categories, it has a greater chance of being heard. Arts (story) were created by God to touch people in deeper emotional places. Emotions were created by God to get a person’s attention that He might draw them to Himself.

First, story is a powerful tool to initiate spiritual conversation. The story of creation, fall,
redemption is the grand metanarrative of history, the great story of the Bible. When people develop an awareness that they are part of God’s story, the chance for spiritual conversation rises even if only due to curiosity. People want to hear about why they are here.

Second, discussing deeper needs is also a powerful tool when initiating conversation. Leading a discussion which highlights deeper needs of the soul generates interest. Because everyone needs something to believe in, something to live for, and something which sustains hope, the three needs of faith, hope, and love are universal. When someone says God offers to fill those undeniable voids, people are apt to listen.

**Bringing People to a Point of Decision**

People often need to be challenged to think through their beliefs. When a believer is engaging in spiritual conversations the Holy Spirit gives discernment. “For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what needs to be said” (Luke 12:12). Following is a list of gateway questions which serve as conversation points to foster faith in Jesus.

When initiating spiritual conversation using the ‘story’ tactic, try asking, “Do you know God has you here for a reason? Would you like to be part of God’s story?” When using the ‘deeper needs’ tactic, try asking, “Do you need something to believe in, something to hope for, and someone to love you? Would you like to invite God into those places?” “Do you need a brand-new start? Do you need a new heart? Do you need renewed power for the next step in your life?” To move people to commitment, try asking, “Did you know you can entrust your life to God right now? Will you let God take care of your deeper needs? What is holding you back? Can we talk about it?”

If the believer has progressed to the point of asking for a commitment, then clearly the work of the Spirit has been involved. The believer would do well to continue praying with all
diligence for the hearer to place their trust in Jesus, both during and after the conversation.

**Two Vital Gospel Passages**

Two relevant and understandable biblical passages clarify the main points of this project and speak to both the ‘deeper needs’ and ‘metanarrative’:

1) “*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom 6:23). This passage uses the easily understandable metaphor of wages and gifts. The Bible story shows rebellious people earning their way to death through their sin. However, God offers the gift of eternal life. A gift is neither earned nor deserved but given freely. A gift indicates that one person thought of another even in their absence. Such is the Good News. God's love is such that He values the individual and sacrificed Himself to meet their deepest need, which is a relationship with their Creator and Savior.

2) “*This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun*” (2 Cor 5:17)! The offer of new life is the crux of the Good News. For those using the metanarrative to tell the story of the Gospel, God's redemption literally bought back the old life and replaced it with a new life. That story is offered to all people. New life comes through faith, gives hope, and is generated by the immense love of God. The offer of new life, new soul, and new destiny will gain a hearing with this generation which hungers for a substantive hope.

**God's Strategic Post**

Every believer is placed strategically by God to share Jesus with others. Time and locale originate from the providential hand of God. Grasping that fact becomes a powerful motivator in the advancement of the gospel because the believer sees themself as a useful tool chosen for
those specific people in that specified place who need to, or maybe even desire to, hear the Good News of Jesus. It is when the believer steps up to the task of being ‘sent’ with conviction and confidence that the gospel will advance. May a flame be started by all who listen to these twelve "[UN]apologetic" sessions. “Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it” (1 Pet 3:15 NLT).
Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

This project incorporates academic and active research to create a program which has the aim of establishing Christ Community Church as a ‘sent community.’ The people of Christ Community Church must see themselves as a ‘sent community,’ a community where reaching those who are far from Christ is woven into the fabric of church life. A church who believes they are a ‘sent’ community will behave in purposeful ways and demonstrate a commitment to engage the lost with the message of the gospel. In other words, this project addresses the problem of ‘sentness’, or lack thereof, in five primary ways: 1) adopting the purpose for being sent; 2) understanding the destination to which the church is sent; 3) learning answers to common faith questions; 4) living the virtues of faith, hope, and love; and 5) having a broader concept of the gospel. A ‘sent community’ is characterized by these five marks.

The people of Christ Community Church, through the venue of this twelve session podcast, gained an understanding of how to: a) adopt the mission of Jesus, b) understand the culture, c) exemplify the three virtues of faith, hope, and love, d) answer six commonly asked faith questions, and e) know how the gospel stretches throughout scripture. By engaging a post-modern culture with the heart of Jesus, embracing the current culture utilizing faith, hope, and love, and discerning how the gospel commonly applies to everyone, Christ Community Church will bear the fruit of ‘sentness.’ The goal of this project requires the development and implementation of a twelve-session program aimed at the believer to increase conviction and confidence while engaging in spiritual conversations. Those who participated in this engagement program gained a greater confidence in their ability to have spiritual conversations.
Compilation and Implementation

Teaching Notes

Importance of the Teaching Notes

The teaching notes are the engine of this project. Like an engine, the application can vary. The teaching notes demonstrate versatility because the teacher can utilize the content (and companion workbook) in multiple ways: a sermon series, Sunday school curriculum, lectures, podcasts, etc. Without the teaching notes, one cannot execute and reproduce the twelve sessions in other contexts because the information needed to achieve the specific objectives of this project are contained within its pages. While a variety of formats can be used to teach the information using the teaching notes, the podcast format was chosen for this project partly due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Conviction and Confidence

Many people at Christ Community Church experience difficulty initiating spiritual conversations. The opening survey confirmed that presupposition. The major reasons for this are twofold: lack of conviction and/or lack of confidence. It was concluded, however, that lack of confidence as the dominant issue. While lack of confidence is more prevalent than lack of conviction, both must be addressed.

Addressing both lack of conviction and lack of confidence required an outline which incorporated both issues. Attention was given to the flow of the outline in order to design a program which would pique the interest of the participants and speak directly to their reticence regarding evangelism. What resulted was a program, complete with teaching notes, that tackled both conviction and confidence issues surrounding evangelism.
Compiling the Teaching Notes

Accumulating and formulating the information for the teaching notes was a four-step process. 1) Decide upon subject matter. 2) Form the outline. 3) Write the twelve essays. 4) Edit the twelve essays. The subject matter needed to match the goals for the project in a way that would engage the hearer. The outline provided a clear pathway for the information. The essays which comprise the content of the teaching notes followed that outline.

The addition of teaching notes proved immensely helpful for the podcast format. The interviewer as well as the interviewee (teacher) had a resource in hand to generate questions and to review in the days prior to the recording and particularly in the hour leading up to the recording. The teaching notes thus became a valuable resource to improve the quality of the interview in both structure and information.

Content of the Twelve Sessions

Each of the twelve essays culminated in an average of thirteen pages per essay, bringing the teaching notes to 167 pages. To provide a more concise, readable, and useful set of teaching notes, the essays were reduced to an average of five pages per session, totaling 59 pages. Further editing revised it to a more acceptable 44 pages.

Session one centers on the mission and vision of Christ Community Church and how this project fits into that strategic plan. A reminder of what Christ Community Church sets out to accomplish in the next five years lays a foundation for why time and effort was focused on this project. A section on a personal evangelism strategy is also included in this session.

Session two dives into the mission and vision of Jesus. Passages which declare Jesus' purpose on earth are meant to develop knowledge and conviction as Jesus teaches the church to continue His work. He came to seek and save the lost, serve, and accomplish the will of the
Father. This session also describes how Jesus' mission and vision was transferred to Peter, Paul, and ultimately the church. The session ends on the primacy of the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Session three begins to elucidate the culture which Christ Community serves. Post-modernism is defined, and practical contexts are given describing where this philosophy is most prevalent. Secularism and relativism are two of the dominant themes addressed within this post-modern characterization. Inconsistencies and dangers of relativism are reviewed. The threat of fragmentation within society due to an individualistic mindset completes this session.

Session four begins with 1 Peter 3:15 which exhorts the believer to be ready to give an answer for their hope. Practical principles demonstrating proven ways to initiate spiritual conversations are offered with the goal of promoting confidence. Session four highlights the three deepest needs of the human soul: faith, hope, and love.

Session five begins by answering the first of six frequently asked questions, the question of whether the Bible can be trusted. This subject was listed first because everything which follows is based on Scripture. Evidence from archaeology, prophecy, unity, and manuscript transmission is included in this session on the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Session six argues for the existence of God. Traditional argumentation, including the cosmological, moral, and design arguments, establish a case for a Creator. A more recent argument gaining in popularity is the argument from ideas and art (beauty). The latter argument was included for its appeal to post-modernists.

Session seven contrasts several world religions with Christianity. Religious pluralism, the most commonly held belief system of today, is defined and refuted throughout this session. Comparing the major world religions shows the untenability of religious pluralism and
syncretism. The session ends with a case for the truth and exclusivity of true faith in Jesus Christ.

Session eight follows where session seven ends. If the claim of Jesus is true, then the resurrection must be true and logically defensible. The centrality of the resurrection and proofs of the resurrection highlight this session. A refutation of arguments against the resurrection commonly held throughout history are included in this session.

Session nine’s theme is the afterlife. The concept of salvation and its attainment is explained. Heaven is then described as a real place and a preferred destination over hell. Most of the questions revolve around hell, so Jesus’ teachings about hell are brought to the forefront. A logical consideration of hell as it fits into the grace of God is offered here.

Session ten, the last of the apologetic questions, confronts the problem of evil. The classic theodicy vindicates an all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good God for the presence of evil. Logical and practical theological reasons for the problem of evil are observed. As a turnabout toward the end of the session, the problem of evil is used as an argument for rather than against the existence of God.

Session eleven moves the reader toward a comprehensive understanding of the gospel. Starting with the creeds and covenants of the Old Testament, the session centers on the person of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises delineated in the Old Testament. The grand metanarrative of God is then defined as the story of the gospel and how each person fits into that story. A greater understanding of the gospel allows for greater confidence in initiating spiritual conversations.

Session twelve has three purposes: a) to recap the personal evangelism strategy utilized at Christ Community Church, b) to convey two effective themes which can be used when sharing the Good News of Jesus, and c) to instruct on how to bring someone to the point of decision.
Captivating an Audience

Basics of Engagement

The twelve sessions seek to generate a conviction among believers driving them toward cultural engagement by demonstrating the importance of adopting the mission of Jesus as their life mission. There is also a great need for those who are believers to understand and address the 'lostness' of their culture. Incorporated into the twelve sessions are principles of engagement and persuasion which are used to move a non-believer toward faith in Christ. The project also answers questions commonly asked of Christians regarding Christianity, offering the believer a stronger assurance and confidence with which they might progress forward with certainty in the task of evangelism. With those categories of strategic teaching, the twelve sessions generated and increased degree of confidence in the believer which was previously lacking.

In order to captivate this post-modern generation, the believer must begin to address the emptiness deep inside the human soul which secularity has no power to fill. If the believer understands what motivates people at the deepest level and at the same time this believer exemplifies character qualities which will foster dialogue with the unbeliever, the chance of engaging in spiritual conversation greatly increases. Faith, hope, and love are the deepest needs which are woven into the human soul and Jesus offers all three. Therefore, faith, hope, and love are also the character qualities with which the believer must approach the non-believer. By demonstrating faith, hope, and love, the believer influences non-believers at a ‘felt’ level. Understanding this, conviction is sure to blossom as believers will have more compassion for non-believers and their lost condition. Confidence is bolstered because a mode of conduct (exemplifying the three virtues) aimed at a specific objective (initiate spiritual conversation) has arisen.
Social Distancing Regulations

Due to the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent quarantine, it was necessary to alter the baseline of values to comply with COVID-19 protocols. Accessibility and engagement became two necessary features which rose in importance. Motivating people to use this window of opportunity to engage in spiritual conversations means creating a strategic curriculum to challenge the believer for such work. Gathering for sermons, lectures, class or other common teaching venues were not options since Pennsylvania, where Christ Community Church is located, was one of the first states to implement strict lockdown protocols due to a high COVID-19 caseload.

The Podcast Platform

After meeting with chosen staff and elders at the church, the option of a podcast series seemed most advantageous. Podcasting accomplished both the goals of accessibility and engagement. One could join the podcast anywhere with a smartphone, or simply download it on their computer. Not only is a podcast a highly accessible venue for teaching, it also allows for participant flexibility because the listener can choose the optimal time and place to proceed with the teaching. Thus, accessibility was achieved through this approach.

The interview format achieved the goal of engagement due to its inherent interactive nature. The interviewer and the interviewee met to discuss each of the twelve topics both several days prior and an hour before recording. It was necessary for the interviewer to be naturally conversational and also understand the role and purpose of the podcast format. The teacher needed to teach but also be engagingly conversational. The interviewer received positive feedback for her role in the podcast by achieving the goal of an engaging program. The podcast was titled: [UN]apologetic: Explaining the Reason for Our Hope.
The decision to keep the podcasts within a 15-20 minute time range stemmed from the newly formed values of accessibility and engagement. Fifteen to twenty minutes was chosen because an average commute to work, eating breakfast or lunch alone, and completing a household chore will most likely span 15-20 minutes. With the use of headphones, multitasking becomes possible. The goal, again, is to eventually have everyone in the church participate in becoming a ‘sent’ community by listening to the podcasts.

**First Survey Results**

**Basic Data**

The first survey established a base line of both knowledge of the gospel and desire to make the gospel known. Those two categories, knowledge and desire, feed into the groundwork for this entire project. Knowledge and desire are cousins to conviction and confidence, both of which might be lacking in the people of Christ Community Church regarding the subject of evangelism. Of the twenty questions in the survey, eight of them are most pertinent and will be evaluated and merged into relevant data and graphs. Given that the survey will follow the format of a longitudinal survey, a first survey was taken before participating in the twelve-session podcast and a second survey identical to the first was given following the completion of the twelve-session program. A comparison was drawn and the data provided information about the effectiveness of the program. A full list of the survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

The age of those who anonymously completed the survey tended toward a slightly older demographic with 62.4% being 40 and over, while 37.6% were 39 and younger. This number fits well with the general age demographic of Christ Community Church. While the church must endeavor to grow younger to reach the next generation, one must include all generations when
equipping them for the work of evangelism.

Of the 110 people who completed the survey, 86.2% fully know what Jesus did for them. Furthermore, 87.2% fully understand or mostly understand why they need Jesus. There was a decline, however, in the percentage of those who have full confidence in their ability to share the gospel story of Jesus when given the opportunity. Only 52.3% expressed confidence in their ability to evangelize. The same question asked in a different way revealed almost identical results. If given the opportunity to explain their faith, only 50.5% agreed they would know what to say.

A comparison of these two facts verifies the assumption that either conviction or confidence is a problem. There are reasons for this. The fact that knowledge and understanding ranked so high among those who participated in the survey reveals that a foundation of Christian knowledge exists for the most part. One might then assume an ability exists to confidently and adequately share the gospel story of Jesus and other tenets of their Christian faith when given the opportunity. What is revealed, however, is knowledge of Christian doctrine is only one of several qualities needed for the work of evangelism. The percentages decrease by over a third when that information needs to translate from knowledge to conversation.

Specific Data

More specific to the goals of developing conviction and confidence in spiritual conversation, the following charts present a clear picture of the problem being addressed. The following questions and data related to those questions point directly to the thesis statement which states that if the people of Christ Community Church, through the venue of a twelve-session engagement program, adopt the mission of Jesus, understand the culture, answer six commonly asked faith questions, exemplify faith, hope, and love, and firmly comprehend the
gospel, the church will establish itself as a ‘sent community.’ In other words, by engaging a post-modern culture with the heart of Jesus and developing an understanding of the current culture while utilizing faith, hope, and love, Christ Community Church will bear the fruit of ‘sentness.’ Those who participate in the engagement program will leave with a greater confidence in their ability to have spiritual conversations. A ‘sent community’ is predicated upon believers having the conviction and confidence to engage in spiritual conversations.

Conviction

First, according to the survey, 81% agree to knowing people in their lives who have a spiritual need. Another 18% somewhat agree, as shown by the chart below. If there exists a foundational knowledge of the gospel (as shown above), and an acknowledgement of people whom they know who have a spiritual need (as shown below), then spiritual conversations ought to spring forth often. Those spiritual conversations, however, do not. Regrettably, many believers think the work of sharing the Christian faith among those locally and abroad belongs primarily to professionals in the church. In truth, every Christian must endeavor to participate in the work of evangelism.

1.2 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I know of people in my life who have a spiritual need.”
Second, when those who participated in the survey were asked pointedly whether they yearn to share their faith, only 53% agreed. Another 40% somewhat agreed. Over 7% of those taking the survey declared little interest in sharing their faith, as shown by the chart below.

1.3 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I yearn to share my faith.”

This is disconcerting. The fact that believers of Christ Community Church know others who have spiritual need, yet only a little over half of the people really yearn to share their faith speaks to either a conviction or a confidence issue, or both.

Third, arguably the easiest way to help someone enter the realm of spirituality is to invite them to church. Yet few of those who completed the survey invite others to church. In reality, most Sundays incorporate an invitation to begin a relationship with Jesus. Therefore, this question was included under a ‘conviction’ problem. Only 18% said they invite people to church often, while 4% state that they have never invited anyone. The majority of those polled invite someone to church only once per year. While this is a start, it is discouraging to realize that this easy approach to evangelism is being utilized infrequently. One can identify in the last two questions the possibility of a conviction issue. The answer to this question confirms the assumption. The chart below demonstrates the above concerns as it relates to evangelism strategies tied to an invitation to church.
1.4 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I have invited someone to church on a Sunday morning.”

The next question asked whether those taking the survey are currently developing an intentional relationship with someone with the goal of bringing them to Christ. The knowledge which a believer has regarding spiritual matters and a lack of mission to share Christ with others seems to point to a conviction issue. Only 36% fully agreed they are developing an intentional relationship. Another 36% somewhat agreed. The other almost 28% had little interest. Intentionality reveals desire, and the desire is low. A belief that apart from Christ a relationship with God is impossible is the first and most important motivation to participate in the Great Commission.

1.5 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I am currently developing an intentional relationship with someone with whom I hope to share Christ.”
If the people of Christ Community Church do not see themselves as purposefully sent to do the work of sharing the Gospel, a lack of conviction is at least part of the problem. This project addressed that issue by discussing the mission of Jesus and the church, teaching about hell, and speaking of the need for people to engage in spiritual discussion.

Confidence

While conviction plays a large part in motivating the believer to share their faith, so does confidence. It is one thing to be firmly convicted about the need to engage non-believers in spiritual discussion, and quite another to act upon it. The confidence level of those who need to share their faith greatly influences whether they will do so, as people will naturally shy away from something at which they feel incompetent.

The results from the ‘Basic Data’ section show that, for the most part, knowledge of what Jesus did for the believer is present. Many also recognize that those with whom they relate have spiritual needs. The charts above revealed that many participants do not intentionally establish an strategic relationship with those who are far from Christ. This might have more to do with a lack of conviction regarding evangelism. There is another aspect, however, which confronts every believer when engaging in spiritual conversation. That aspect is confidence. If someone lacks confidence, the aversion to sharing the gospel might be mistaken for a lack of conviction. The following charts speak to the lack of confidence many Christians have when engaging in spiritual conversations.

The results below clearly demonstrate a lack of confidence when initiating spiritual conversations with those who are considered non-believers. The church has done an insufficient job in bolstering the confidence of its members when they struggle in this area, avoiding evangelism due to the discomfort they feel.
1.6 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “I comfortably talk about my faith.”

The majority of people (59%) who completed the survey stated they only somewhat agree upon a comfort level when talking about their faith. Only 34% fully agreed that they are comfortable talking about their faith. The next two graphs show an even greater lack of confidence.

1.7 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “How confident do you feel in your ability to initiate spiritual conversation with someone?”

Only 12% felt they are fully equipped and confident in their ability to initiate spiritual conversations, while 32% felt they have the confidence to initiate spiritual conversations only at certain times. This corroborates the data given previously which states that, though nearly 90%
of the believers who participated in this survey are confident in their knowledge of Jesus and the gospel, only a little over 50% have a level of confidence when that knowledge needs to be converted into actual conversation. These results verify the assumption that a lack of confidence exists. The same people claim to have the knowledge of the gospel but lack the confidence to move forward in sharing that gospel.

The following chart also confirms the confidence issue. Nearly half of those polled lean toward disagreeing with the notion that bringing up spiritual conversation comes easily.

![Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “Bringing up issues of faith with a non-believer comes easily for me.”](image)

1.8 Graph Showing Result of Survey Question: “Bringing up issues of faith with a non-believer comes easily for me.”

There is good news in this graph, however. More than half say that bringing up spiritual issues with a non-believer comes easily. This was somewhat of a surprise. At least for those 110 who completed the survey, there is more to work with than originally anticipated.

When asked, however, the number of times in the lifetime of that believer they have invited someone into a relationship with Jesus, only a quarter of those who participated in the survey have invited someone into a relationship with Jesus more than five times. Just over half of believers surveyed have only done so five or fewer times. A quarter of those who were surveyed have never invited someone into a relationship with Jesus.
The above graph is troubling and demonstrates a huge gap in the church. If knowledge brings confidence, and confidence moves one to action, then the twelve-session program must teach something of substance with the idea of increasing one’s confidence level. Thus, having chosen appropriate material and a plan for the clear dissemination of that material must be demonstrated throughout the podcast series. If one can simply act upon the conviction of engaging the non-believers with the gospel, and then move consistently through life with the confidence to do so, the percentages in the charts above would radically alter. It must be remembered that, ultimately, the goal for this project is to get people a little further down the road toward sharing the gospel and inviting someone into a relationship with Jesus.

Second Survey Results

Pertinent Survey Questions

The results of the second survey were, for the most part, promising. A question lingered which the second survey would be able to answer. Did the podcast format give enough information to accomplish the objectives of increased conviction and confidence within the believer to motivate them toward action by engaging with those who are far from Christ with the
intention to share Christ? In other words, was the information adequate to equip the believer with a level of ‘sentness’ not previously felt?

As stated previously, the COVID-19 quarantine laws took effect at the very beginning of the implementation phase of this project. The stated goals of accessibility and engagement were paramount in the planning and production of this podcast. The first survey was taken two weeks prior to the coronavirus pandemic hitting the United States. Therefore, no questions were on the survey regarding the two values of engagement and accessibility. The survey was developed in the fall semester of 2019. The format originally chosen (evening lecture and group discussion) changed quickly to a podcast format specifically to offer easy access and an engaging venue since meeting in person was prohibited.

The midstream change to the podcast format, however, accomplished the goals of accessibility and engagement. Random participants spoke of how easy the twelve sessions were to follow and how interesting they were, partly due to the interview format. Accessibility and engagement were also enhanced with the length of each podcast being 20 minutes or less. But was that enough time to bring the necessary change? Did the material have the ability to spark an interest in ‘sentness’? Having accomplished the goals of accessibility and engagement, the transition into the usable format of the podcast gained its first win. But was it enough?

Analysis of Data

Several of the questions and associated graphs which spoke directly to the issue of conviction and confidence imparted insight. Since this was a unilateral survey, the questions asked in the first survey were identical to the questions asked in the second survey. The twelve-session podcast stood between them. Unilateral surveys ask a question: Did the program yield different results, either positive or negative, or did the results remain the same? The effectiveness
of the project based on its intention is readily demonstrated through the survey results. More questions, however, would have been raised if the results diverged in an undesirable direction. The data results shown side by side reveal the effectiveness.

The four questions which comprise the comparative charts are: a) How confident do you feel in your ability to initiate spiritual conversation with someone? b) Bringing up issues of faith with a non-believer comes easily for me. c) I comfortably talk about my faith. d) I yearn to share my faith. Of the twenty questions, the four listed above remain the most pertinent to this project and will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the twelve-session program. Upon administration and evaluation of the second survey, the data revealed positive results.

**Survey #1**

```

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fully equipped</th>
<th>Growing in confidence</th>
<th>Somewhat regularly</th>
<th>Only at certain times</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey #1</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey #2</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

2.0 **Graph Showing Comparative Results of Survey Question:** “How confident do you feel in your ability to initiate spiritual conversation with someone?”
Since having confidence in spiritual conversations is a primary goal of this project, two noteworthy pieces of data surfaced from these two graphs. First, those who feel they are fully equipped for the task of initiating spiritual conversations rose by 16%. The quantity of those who during the first survey said they were growing in their confidence increased dramatically after they listened to the podcast. The second survey revealed a 27% increase in those who are growing in their faith. If the two categories are combined, the percentage rose from 35% to 78% for those who are either fully confident or are growing in confidence when initiating spiritual conversation.

Notice also the decrease in those who only at certain times feel confident enough to have spiritual conversations. The change went from 32% who seldom felt confident in having spiritual conversations down to 11%. This suggests more people are ready to have spiritual conversations with non-believers after listening to the twelve sessions than before listening to the twelve sessions.

The data reveals one additional point. The percentage of people who either are fully equipped, growing in confidence, or somewhat regularly feel confident increased by 25%. This is significant because it reveals the very real possibility of more total people initiating faith conversations. The objective of the Great Commission (to make new disciples of all the world) will only be accomplished when more and more believers commit to being an active part in its success.

Since confidence and conviction are related, a rising confidence level creates more pathways for bringing up issues of faith. What more cohesively connects confidence and ease of conversation is knowledge. If the twelve sessions gave adequate and easily assimilated information, and at the same time increased the confidence level of the believer in having those
conversations, then it will certainly be easier for believers to follow through with spiritual conversations. The next graph supports that assumption.

2.1 Graph Showing Comparative Results of Survey Question: “Bringing up issues of faith with a non-believer comes easily for me.”

The percentage of people who in the first survey disagreed that bringing up issues of faith with non-believers was easy was 22%. In other words, those 22% felt strongly that having conversations with those far from Christ happen only with great difficulty. That number decreased to 11% in the second survey. Understanding more about the culture and having a handle on the frequently asked questions allowed 11% of the participants to move from complete disagreement to something more moderate. One other noteworthy statistic is on the polar-opposite side of the graph. Those who agreed that speaking with a non-believer comes easily
went from only 13% to 22% after listening to the podcasts. That 9% increase represents people who needed the confidence provided by these podcasts.

The believers who participated in this program increased in their confidence level to have spiritual conversations and can see the task of evangelism as easier than they once determined. That produces a greater comfort level for having spiritual conversations as shown in the charts below.

Survey #1

Survey #2

2.2 Graph Showing Comparative Results of Survey Question: “I comfortably talk about my faith.”

Two statistics in the above graphs are worth noting. First, those who agree with the statement that they comfortably talk about their faith rose from 34% to 50%. That is a 15%
increase overall in people who now comfortably talk about their faith. Second, the percentage of those who completely or somewhat disagreed that sharing their faith was comfortable vanished after participants listened to the podcasts. That piece of data also demonstrates an increased confidence level.

For some of the participants, this twelve session podcast was their first experience with an apologetic teaching program. Even for those who have been Christians for most of their lives, the lack of information needed to answer the questions brought before them resulted in diminished confidence to follow through with the task of evangelism. These believers were aware of the need for evangelism but had not been sufficiently prepared for the task. The twelve [UN]apologetic sessions gave a cohesive and logical explanation of why Christians firmly stake their lives on the beliefs of the Christian faith, as well as training to overcome the common roadblocks encountered when sharing the faith.

If the above comparisons demonstrated an increase in confidence when opportunities for conversations with non-believers arose, the charts below answer the question of personal conviction to do so. Conviction is the catalyst for change. If believers do not feel convicted to share the Good News of Jesus, confidence is a moot point.

A critical objective of this project was to provide information which will expand the listener’s theological knowledge base, providing groundwork for a rudimentary Christian apologetic. This information will not only become a file folder of ways to answer commonly asked questions, it will also have the added benefit of awakening an awareness that every believer can be used of God to share a lasting hope to a predominantly hopeless world. Everyone wants to make a difference. The statement, therefore, in this survey question highlights the desire or lack thereof to share one’s faith. Of the many questions on the survey, to have this question
answered favorably might be the tell tale of the composite success of this thesis project. A brief
glimpse of the charts below shows that the overall leaning is favorable.

Survey #1

Survey #2

2.3 Graph Showing Comparative Results of Survey Question: “I yearn to share my faith.”

Yearning to take action is driven by conviction. When the yearning is attached to faith
and belief, people are convicted to initiate spiritual conversations. In the first survey, 53% of the
people agreed that they desire to share their faith. After having listened to the podcasts, 78% of
the people agreed that they yearn to share their faith. Those who at one point disagreed or
somewhat disagreed that they yearn to share their faith moved into the categories of either
somewhat agree or fully agree that they yearn to share their faith. Not only have many of the
participants grown in confidence, but they have also grown in their conviction to participate
in the Great Commission providing the necessary volitional impetus to carry out the enormous task of reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus.

Conviction is the bigger win. Once someone believes deeply that they must share the Good News, they will find ways to make that happen. The B.L.E.S.S.\textsuperscript{225} paradigm for personal evangelism is a great place to start. Participants who use the B.L.E.S.S. personal evangelism strategy will continue to grow in their confidence due to its simplicity. Conviction and confidence are two integrated steps toward individuals initiating spiritual conversation with those who are far from Christ. When a church full of individuals begins to ‘bless’ those around them, they display the characteristics of being a ‘sent community.’

\textsuperscript{225} See “Definitions” on page 23. Or for a more complete description of this personal evangelism strategy see page 101.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Importance of Evangelistic Initiatives

No great initiatives in evangelism ever happen naturally. The reason is simple: evangelism is hard work. The Great Commission can only be fulfilled if the local church challenges and equips the congregation to participate. This project addressed two issues which truncate evangelistic efforts, which are conviction and confidence. Without a conviction from the Holy Spirit to share the Good News with the lost, no initiative would exist. Without a certain level of confidence, evangelistic efforts will falter due to fear. If either of those describe a believer’s attitude toward evangelism, they will most likely incur either a sense of guilt for ‘not being very good at it,’ or a sense of exoneration from those duties because ‘that is the job of the pastor.’ Both stem from either a lack of confidence or a lack of conviction.

The mindset some believers have about evangelism is skewed. Evangelism is viewed more as a chore than a privilege. Mark Cahill in his book on evangelism writes that the believer must “… change your mindset from one in which you have ‘got’ to share your faith, to realizing that you ‘GET’ to share your faith with all the lost people you can find until you get to Heaven.”226 The believers’ attitude toward evangelism is a matter of perspective and experience.

Let no one forget, however, the difficulty in evangelistic initiatives is accentuated upon realizing its spiritual nature and the forces at work against such activity. Paul says, “For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule the world, and against

---

226 Mark Cahill, One Thing You Can’t Do In Heaven, (Rockwell, TX: Biblical Discipleship Publishers, 2010), 26.
wicked spirits in the heavenly realm” (Eph 6:12 NLT). Spiritual warfare is real, subtle, and powerful and can discourage evangelistic efforts among believers in various ways. For that reason, the believer must put on the full armor of God, not the least of which are the shoes of the gospel (v. 15).

The sheer difficulty of evangelism can be greatly reduced as the believer grows in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet 3:18), gains an awareness of how to relate to unbelievers (Col 4:5-6), answers the questions of hope (1 Pet 3:15), and grasps a greater understanding of the gospel itself (2 Tim. 2:8). This project attempted to address these issues by way of a twelve-session podcast.

Project Relevance

Great initiatives in evangelism must continue. Hopelessness permeates the culture and fewer people are finding church a place of hope. According to a survey by the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism, 67% of the unchurched population surveyed expressed they are unlikely to return to church sometime in the future.227 The relevance of church and its message are less and less capturing the unchurched. Nor is it capturing the younger generations, as similar data demonstrates. The Good News must be made relevant to all subsequent generations or the proliferation of the gospel will diminish, making it exponentially difficult to reach the masses with the true gospel of Jesus. History has already shown this to be true in Europe and in many parts of the United States.

In the book Crucial Conversations, the authors state, “At the heart of almost all chronic problems in our organizations, our teams, and our relationships lie crucial conversations—ones

227 Richardson, You Found Me, 69.
that we’re either not holding or not holding well.” The decline in church attendance, conversions, and personal evangelistic efforts are partly due to the avoidance of having conversations about Jesus, perhaps the most crucial of all conversations. This project aimed at equipping the believer with confidence and conviction for the work of evangelism, thereby allowing them to move forward in accomplishing the Great Commission. It is then that the church will accomplish its mission as a ‘sent community.’

To maintain relevance throughout the twelve sessions, several questions were constantly revisited. What is the culture like? What questions are they asking? What is so good about the Good News? What is my role in sharing this Good News with the people of this culture? How might the Good News be shared in accessible and engaging ways? The answers to these questions formed the basis for the twelve sessions.

The bottom line is that people today need Jesus and it is the job of every believer to involve themselves in the work of sharing Jesus. The time is ripe for people to search for something more especially amidst the fall-out of a global pandemic. The great void left by secularism has been, and always will be, powerless to fill that void. Only Jesus can fill that space. The church must see the opportunity and push forward on the task of being a ‘sent’ community. Looking for ways to encourage success in the task of evangelism, Rick Richardson in his book on evangelistic efforts writes,

The three key foundations for recovering missional imagination are:
1. becoming reenchanted by the power and beauty of the mission of Jesus;
2. recovering the reality of the receptivity of the unchurched people in our culture and the ripeness of the harvest;
3. and recapturing a vision for the church and its potential for being brighter light and stronger salt in our world.

---

229 Richardson, You Found Me, 21-22.
To that end churches need to explore new ways of strategically initiating the work of evangelism. Again, no great evangelistic initiative and effort starts on its own. Evangelism is a challenge which continually needs to be addressed. The [UN]apologetic podcast is an introductory step in that direction. Each church must ask themselves questions which will formulate a strategic plan and answer them based on their location in space, time, and history. Only then will the church be relevant.

**Results from Thesis Project**

The purpose of this study was to establish Christ Community Church as a ‘sent community.’ The people of Christ Community Church, via this twelve session podcast gained an understanding of how to: a) adopt the mission of Jesus, b) understand the culture, c) exemplify faith, hope, and love, d) answer six commonly asked faith questions, and e) know how the gospel in woven throughout scripture. In other words, engaging a post-modern culture with the heart of Jesus, embracing the current culture, utilizing faith, hope, and love, and discerning how the gospel applies directly to anyone, Christ Community Church will bear the fruit of ‘sentness.’ Those who participated in the twelve-session engagement program gained a greater confidence in their ability to have spiritual conversations.

**Content**

The results of the longitudinal survey demonstrated relative success in accomplishing the goals of this project. The four questions highlighted in the second survey addressed the issues of confidence, ability, ease and desire in bringing up faith discussions. If combined into one theme, the entire survey describes whether the participants increased or decreased in their willingness to initiate spiritual conversations. The aggregate increase is 23%. The results revealed those who
listened to the podcasts demonstrated growth in confidence and conviction and, therefore, are more willing to initiate spiritual conversations.

An increased knowledge of doctrinal matters pertaining to Christianity has the added benefit of increasing the faith of the believer. Many Christians who have been trained in apologetics and evangelism not only share their faith more frequently but also show a greater confidence in the principles upon which they have staked their lives. The overall effect, which these twelve sessions have demonstrated, is an increased confidence level in their faith and an increased desire to share their faith.

Format

The use of the podcast format achieved the goals of making the twelve-session program accessible, engaging, and relevant. For one reason, podcasts resemble talk radio shows, which have been extremely popular over the last fifty years. Podcasts are basically on-demand radio shows which can be enjoyed while driving, exercising, and various other activities throughout the day. The flexibility of such a platform allowed people to listen by smartphone, computer, or other portable electronic devices making it very easy to participate. Time and place were no longer obstacles. The flexibility and accessibility was critical due to COVID-19 protocols which disallowed gatherings, thereby prohibiting a more traditional format for these twelve sessions.

Related Resources and Study

Many noteworthy organizations have addressed the need to continue major efforts in evangelism. Denominational efforts, parachurch ministries, independent ministries, and influential churches have all experienced success in programs which highlight the importance of training in evangelism. Four will be mentioned here as they are most similar to the current
project but also arrive at the next level of exploration and training for the work of accomplishing the Great Commission. These four resources would be excellent next steps for churches or individuals to pursue after completing the [UN]apologetic podcast sessions.

Barna

First, the Barna Group has been the frontrunner in the accumulation and dissemination of data relevant to evangelism, or the lack thereof, in the church. While the Barna Group does not produce extensive evangelism training programs, they do an invaluable service to those producing evangelistic programs. Their research centers on current religious and cultural trends, two themes necessary in the development of any evangelistic program. Having conducted over one million interviews over thirty years, Barna continues to be a rich resource of information when developing quality programs.

One resource to note is their most recent church kit titled *Reviving Evangelism*. In a joint project with Alpha USA, the study compares the faith-sharing experiences and expectations of Christians and non-Christians. This includes data on how Americans express spiritual openness and hunger which is valuable information in any evangelism training. *Reviving Evangelism* also includes information on how people, both believers and non-believers, engage in spiritual conversations. In essence, this tool is an assessment of Christian evangelism in America today and shares what is and is not effective so the church might carry on the legacy of sharing the gospel.

Relevance requires investigation. Hard questions must be asked and answered. This current project began with the premise that asking and answering these difficult questions with solid information and life-altering truth will result in relevance. When relevance becomes a characteristic of the conversation between the one sharing the Good News and the one listening,
the words become threaded into the mind and heart. Relevance also lends itself to the effort of increasing the confidence level of the believer in sharing their faith with others. The Good News has answers for today’s issues, and Barna continues to share relevant data.

**Dare 2 Share**

Second, over the last twenty years, Dare 2 Share (D2S) has been a force in mobilizing teenagers to share their faith in Christ peer to peer. Greg Stier, and the ministry of D2S, have impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of teens across the country motivating and equipping them to relationally reach out to those who do not know Jesus. Greg has himself spoken to over 1,000,000 teens during retreats and conferences about reaching the lost. D2S is the leader in equipping the next generation to reach their generation for Christ.

Dare 2 Share equips churches as well for the work of local evangelism. Stier’s book, *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry*, challenges all youth pastors to make evangelism a part of their youth ministry culture. Sharing one’s faith, according to the ‘gospelize’ paradigm, will not only bring more young people to faith in Christ but become the dominant catalyst to spiritual growth. The *Dare 2 Share Field Guide* is an equipping tool that gives the young believer fingertip information such as comparative charts on various beliefs, conversation starters, and a discussion guide.

Stier’s insistence on reaching the next generation for Christ stands as a hallmark of his ministry. Handing faith to the next generation must be front and center in any church’s mission and vision. The format chosen for this [UN]apologetic project kept that age demographic in mind. First, the podcast format is a popular platform among young people for gathering information and thinking through ideas. Second, the podcast interviewer is in her late twenties, and relates exceptionally well to that age demographic. The simple approach which D2S
employs is one that, if emulated, will go a long way in reaching the next generation and begin a chain reaction through the process of discipleship to continue the difficult work of reaching the younger people.

Stand to Reason

Third, apologetics must be a part of any evangelistic initiative to reach this post-modern world. The reason for that is simple: skepticism raises questions. The believer is told in 1 Peter 3:15 to be ready to answer the question as to why the believer has hope. Greg Koukl founded a ministry called Stand to Reason (STR) with the goal of training Christians to defend their faith and values in a gracious yet incisive way. STR holds accurate knowledge, skillful method, and attractive character in balance to speak rationally to any skeptic, whether stranger or friend. Greg teaches that the ideals of Christianity can compete amongst other worldviews.

One of Koukl’s most popular books, Tactics in Defending the Faith, equips the believer with the tools to answer some of the more difficult questions of faith and philosophy. Not only does he provide an accurate and biblical response, he also provides a method for answering potentially volatile questions. He turned this book into a comprehensive video course complete with workbook, discussion material, and role-play scenarios. The values of STR translate to this project. The [UN]apologetic podcast highlights leading with love, giving a framework for conversations, and teaching relevant material by answering pertinent questions.

Just Walk Across the Room

Fourth, an older yet very effective program for church evangelism is called Just Walk Across the Room. Bill Hybels, who founded Willow Creek Community Church, has promoted relational evangelism as the primary tool for bringing people to Jesus. The evangelism strategy
of Willow Creek Community Church uses a seeker service as part of the overall method of bringing people to hear the Gospel. Hybels, however, always insisted on individuals taking the command of the Great Commission to heart by reaching those in their sphere of relational influence.

The popularity of this resource resides in its simplicity. Using the building blocks of relationships, Hybels adds the element of intentionality. Using easy-to-understand illustrations, constant invitations, emerging opportunities, and the leading of the Holy Spirit, the work of evangelism becomes much less daunting as one progresses through this book. The material is available not only in book form, but in a four-week Bible study format which can be easily adapted by a small group in their yearly plan.

The B.L.E.S.S. paradigm for relational evangelism uses many of the same principles. When believers discover a viable expression of evangelism which is merely relationship building with the added element of intentionality, possibilities rise for gospel engagement. With simple relational methods, the stigma associated with evangelism begins to fade.

Synthesis

The four programs for evangelism incorporate similar values as those in this twelve session podcast. Barna’s Reviving Evangelism divulges solid information about culture and Christianity, giving the facilitator or teacher tools and motivation to advance the gospel. Stier’s Dare 2 Share Field Guide provides information at a glance for doing the work of evangelism. Koukl’s Tactics in Defending the Faith supplies the participant with logical responses but also a loving method with which to hold significant conversations. Hybel’s Just Walk Across the Room makes evangelism seem doable in everyday life. Those resources represent the values of this project and are suggested as follow up material for those who want to dive deeper and more
comprehensively into the areas of apologetics and evangelism. They provide excellent follow-up material for those who have completed the twelve [UN]apologetic sessions.

**Reproducibility**

Three major elements comprise this thesis project which make it easily reproducible for other churches, para-church ministries, and other outreach-based organizations. Those three are the teaching notes (which form the basis of information and structure for facilitator and teacher), the companion workbook (which offers an opportunity for note-taking and increased capacity for learning), and the podcast itself (which can be used as an example to follow or as a presentation piece).

**Teaching Notes**

The teaching notes serve as an instrument from which the presenter can learn new principles, glean biblical references, and establish the proper venue to communicate the information. The information is gathered into twelve sections of three to four pages for each session. The twelve part division was most conducive for keeping each podcast episode under 20 minutes. While the current podcast series is separated into twelve sessions, the program could easily be combined into six lectures if used for a Sunday School class, preaching series, evening lectures and so forth. The information was arranged in an order which seemed most appropriate and advantageous for both teacher and learner as each session builds upon the previous one. The entire program begins with the first two sessions centering on the mission and vision of the church, which is based on the mission and vision of Jesus. Having the foundation for this project the mission and vision of Jesus allows this to be used as a six or twelve-week sermon series. An extremely important aspect of healthy church life is the use of a smaller group format for the
purpose of bible study, fellowship, and mutual encouragement. Using the teaching notes and workbook, these podcasts can also become a twelve-week small group Bible study. In the final analysis, the teaching notes give the facilitator, pastor, or teacher flexibility.

**Companion Workbook**

The companion workbook allows for coherent note-taking and is best used for lectures or small group Bible studies. The workbook follows the teaching notes. A workbook is also beneficial to the teacher as it will ensure that all the information is taught. Utilizing fill-in-the-blanks, space blocks for note-taking, and lists of biblical references create avenues for concise note-taking. Due to the logical order of the material, the workbook can also be used as a review resource for the learner.

Incorporating a workbook also heightens the seriousness of the study regardless of the venue. When a workbook accompanies the teaching, the self-expectation of the participant rises. The participant expects they will write, engage their minds, and follow the teaching outline. A workbook can increase the quality of both a lecture or small group Bible study as the teacher or facilitator will be less likely to omit material.

**Podcast**

The podcast can be used as a reproducible resource in several different ways. First, it can be used to demonstrate how a podcast might flow if the presenter decides to produce his or her own similar podcast. The cultural setting of another church or ministry might make it necessary for the teacher to create a unique program and, therefore, find an interviewer who meets the educational and relational criteria for such a role. Voicing is important. Merely listening to this podcast will demonstrate the individual voice or character. But secondly, the podcast can also be
used as a presentation piece for the lecture, discussion group, bible study, or youth group meeting. As a digital presentation to bolster the lecture, merely listening to the content as is and holding a question and answer session with the facilitator after each session could be an interesting learning event. That method might be helpful when, during the planning stages, the leader senses a need for a change of pace within the lecture. A pastor or leader might also need a break in their own teaching schedule and use each session in place of the teaching. If chosen, the presentation option can be used with or without the workbook. In either case, a question and answer session would be highly advised.

**Implementation Gleanings**

The implementation of the [UN]apologetic podcast was somewhat of a challenge for several reasons. First, producing the material spun a little out of control. After developing the outline, I spent considerable time creating the teaching material. I decided to create the teaching notes in an essay format, broken down into twelve separate sections. Each of the twelve sections became a twelve-page essay. The compilation of the essays totaled over 160 pages of teaching notes. While it was helpful to gather all the information, three edits were necessary to condense the teaching notes into a more concise, useful, and easily understood product. The sheer number of pages also exceeded the limit for this thesis paper. More work should have been done on the front end of this research to create an outline to drive the quantity of the content. I focused only on the quality and gave little heed to how long the teaching notes were actually becoming. In the end, though, the work proved helpful in the development of a usable and flexible set of teaching notes.

Second, the original teaching format of the material had to be abandoned due to COVID-19 restrictions. That being the case, several options were possible. The decision to move to a
podcast format was one developed from a think tank of people in touch with technology, the younger generation, and a new set of values I established amidst the quarantine. The material needed to be accessible, engaging, and relevant. I prioritized the assembling of a podcast production team. I chose a personable interviewer to engage the audience during the podcast and an expert production engineer to ensure quality control. Those two ‘staffing’ elements were critical to the success of a well-produced and engaging teaching tool.

Third, finding people to participate in this project was difficult due to the global pandemic. The congregation was understandably occupied by various mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs which surfaced very quickly. I found it relatively difficult to recruit people toward this project in the midst of their uncertainty with health, job, and school related concerns. Because of that, multiple reminders were necessary to prompt participants to complete the second survey.

Once people agreed, however, the feedback of the twelve-session podcast was overwhelmingly positive. People did not anticipate it being a professional production. The positive feedback pointed to another challenge. More work could have been done on the front end of recruiting to better promote the podcast. Going forward, as I desire to see more people from Christ Community Church listen to it, sound bites and samples might be helpful to use in our social media platforms as trailers and participation incentives.

Further Questions and Research

Upon reflecting on this project, several questions surfaced regarding implementation and long-term effectiveness. In other words, did the methodology serve to accomplish the goals of the project or does unfinished business remain? While there was relative success in achieving the goals, the task of being a ‘sent community’ is far from complete.
Gain and Loss

The first question centers on the mode of communication during quarantine. What was lost and gained with the decision to move the project to an entirely electronic platform? The loss was clearly face-to-face interaction. People were created with a need for fellowship, dialogue, and relationship. In the absence of that, several important dynamics remained absent. For instance, if the quarantine were lifted and people could gather for an evening seminar, the fifteen minutes before and after would have been spaces where relationships were built, information exchanged, and unexpected conversations enriched one another. These discussions can forge bonds which strengthen the desire to accomplish a common goal. This face-to-face connection is lost over any electronic application where either screen to screen meetings take place, or as in the case of [UN]apologetic, listening individually occurs. Side stories and synergy hold more motivational power than people realize.

The loss of ability to hold a real time question and answer session throughout the presentation also diminishes the learning experience. The symbiotic nature of impromptu questions would have helped the entire class learn from different perspectives. Questions often generate more questions. Without such interaction, less critical thinking is required of the learners. Disseminating the information through podcasts also eliminates the possibility of breaking into smaller discussion groups.

There are, however, a few advantages associated with the podcast venue. First, due to the widespread use of smartphones, this format is easily accessible. Most people are accustomed to ‘on demand’ entertainment and information gathering. Several clicks into the process and someone can listen to potentially lifechanging information.

Second, the podcast format is flexible enough for anyone’s schedule, including those who
have little margin for extras in their already overloaded calendar. Podcasts can be a productive part of those who choose to multi-task. The drive from work or a planned lunch break become timespans into which the podcast might fit. The participant can choose the optimal time to focus on the teaching.

One question worth asking is how a podcast platform can take advantage of technology to incorporate two-way communication. Typically, one will listen to the podcast episode and possibly take notes. Beyond that, there is little opportunity for dialogue. Is there a way to push comments and encourage questions on a regular basis after having listened to an episode? For instance, when people comment on Facebook regarding a post they just watched or read, they feel more connected and more invested. Could the series have incorporated that element into the [UN]apologetic podcast?

True Effectiveness

There is a bigger question, however. While the podcast was effective in developing the confidence level of the believer to engage in spiritual conversations with unbelievers, will it translate into action? In other words, will the participants begin to initiate faith conversation immediately? Real measurement in terms of effectiveness can only be determined over a valid length of time. Are more spiritual conversations happening over the next year? Along with that, was there an increase in the number of conversions to Christ? What can be done to ensure the information transfers from cerebral to actual?

Several ideas might help increase the rate of application of the content within the twelve sessions to everyday evangelism. 1) A planned quarterly gathering could be used as a refresher, a story telling time, and inherent accountability. 2) Assignments given during the last session could function as the material for discussion. 3) A prayer and accountability chain could easily
be established during the first session, with the hope that fervent prayer would continue through the duration of the twelve sessions.

**Where to Go from Here**

Finally, what information might a follow-up podcast teach? The twelve-session podcast for this project centered on the mission of Jesus, the mission of the church, an understanding of the culture, six commonly asked questions about Christianity, a teaching on the gospel, and a challenge to do the work of a ‘sent’ community. Are there more questions being asked by the culture for which Christians need to be equipped? The current project focused on issues of Christianity and the gospel. Yet more issues remain.

Many questions are constantly asked by skeptics regarding the moral and political issues of the day. The issues of race, gender identity, gay marriage, abortion, welfare, socialism, and the role of government top the list. These issues constantly circulate in newsfeed streams, multimedia news coverage, and printed news venues creating more questions for Christians and skeptics alike. Since the goal is to engage the culture with relevance, then answering questions which the current culture is asking must be part of the objective. That being the case, discussing those issues in a subsequent podcast would be a reasonable next step.

Furthermore, intellectual argumentation against Christianity and its beliefs can often be a smokescreen which hides what lies deep in the emotions of the skeptic. A person, for instance, may have developed a contempt for Christianity due to an abusive family member who also happened to be a consistent church-goer. Another may have seen first-hand (as opposed to assumed) greed and power struggles within the church which look very different from the lifestyle Jesus purported. These instances and hundreds more have to potential to cause indelible scars which bring pain to the surface upon the mention of religious places, phrases, or the like.
The emotional argumentation, too difficult to verbalize, is then replaced by equally difficult intellectual arguments. Would it be possible to develop a half-dozen or so of the most common contentions against the Christian faith that first stem from emotional trauma? At least one has the possibility of addressing broader issues such as hypocrisy, disobedience, false witness and greed which first seem to attack the emotions, before moving on to the intellect.

And last, since western individualism has created a dogged self-sufficiency within those who adhere to its values, the need for Christianity or any form of religious ‘crutch’ seems unthinkable. To go a step further, the God-given sense in every person which haunts them into the fact that there is a god is also the same sense which the skeptic pushes away from. If there is admittedly a god, then said god would have authority in that person’s life. Individualism naturally pushes away intrinsic religious authority. Are there five or six primary tenets of the Christian faith or the character of God against which a skeptic most often pushes?

The common strand which runs through all the above ideas remains the willingness to answer the questions people are asking. Sometimes people find it difficult to verbalize their skepticism and are greatly interested when someone else asks and answers the question which pinpoints (or comes very near to) the actual questions causing their emotional and intellectual struggle. An honest willingness to engage in real dialogue over these seeming insurmountable issues bridges a gap leading to faith. Initiating spiritual conversations with confidence, relevance, and conviction requires the proclamation of truth and a lifestyle of faith, hope, and love. There lies the best chance for reaching the world with the great message of the love of Jesus.
Bibliography

Books


**Commentaries**


Dissertations


Journal Articles


Magazine Articles


Reference Works


**Systematic Theologies**


**Web Addresses**


APPENDIX A

Survey for Christ Community Church Members and Attenders:
Formulating the Basis for Analyzing the Lack of Conviction and/or Confidence
in Initiating Spiritual Conversations

SURVEY: (5-10 minutes)

Age:
- 18-21
- 22-30
- 31-40
- 40 and over

Gender:
- male
- female

I know what Jesus did for me.
- not at all
- somewhat
- mostly
- fully

I understand why I need Jesus.
- not at all
- somewhat
- mostly
- fully

I have an understanding of how God demonstrated grace toward me through Jesus.
- not at all
- somewhat
- mostly
- fully

I would be able to share the gospel if given the opportunity.
- not at all
- somewhat
- mostly
- fully

I know what my testimony (the story of my spiritual journey) is and how to verbalize it.
- not at all
- somewhat
I yearn to share my faith.
- disagree
- somewhat disagree
- somewhat agree
- agree

I comfortably talk about my faith.
- disagree
- somewhat disagree
- somewhat agree
- agree

I have invited someone to church or to a ministry in the church.
- never
- about once a year
- a few times a year
- often

I am currently developing an intentional relationship with someone whom I hope to share Christ.
- disagree
- somewhat disagree
- somewhat agree
- agree

If given the opportunity to explain my faith, I would know what to say.
- disagree
- somewhat disagree
- somewhat agree
- agree

How confident do you feel in your ability to share the gospel?
- not at all
- only at certain times
- somewhat regularly
- growing in confidence
- fully equipped

I have shared the entire gospel with someone.
- never
- five or less times
- five or more times

I know where to go in the Bible to come up with basic verses about the gospel.
I know how to express the gospel truths in simple language.
   o disagree
   o somewhat disagree
   o somewhat agree
   o agree

I know of people in my life who have a spiritual need.
   o disagree
   o somewhat disagree
   o somewhat agree
   o agree

Where do you feel you are in your knowledge of the Good News of Jesus?
   o I do not have any idea how to share the gospel.
   o I know how to share the basic truths of the gospel, but I am stumped by any questions that go beyond the basics.
   o I feel confident that I can share the gospel and handle other biblical questions.

I know how Christianity compares/contrasts with the other main world religions/belief systems.
   o disagree
   o somewhat disagree
   o somewhat agree
   o agree

I have invited someone into a relationship with Jesus.
   o yes
   o no

Bringing up issues of faith with a non-believer comes easily for me.
   o disagree
   o somewhat disagree
   o somewhat agree
   o agree
APPENDIX B

[UN]apologetic Teaching Notes Companion Workbook: an Optional Resource Designed to Equip Believers to Increase their Conviction and Confidence Levels When Initiating Spiritual Conversations

Session 1
Mission and Vision

Hope is the Goal
• Before we understand “apologetics” we must understand why we need it:
  a) This world lacks _________.
  b) We can bring _________ if the hope has substance.

Pertinent Observations

The Mission of Christ Community Church
• MISSION = What is our ____________?
• MISSION of Christ Community Church: _________ / _________ / _________

The Vision of Christ Community Church
• VISION = Where are we ________________?
• VISION of Christ Community Church:
  - , ,
    - a movement of __________ who make ______ ______________
    - committed to discipleship ______________

• VISION Goals = Where do we want to be in five years?
  a) ______________________________
  b) ______________________________
  c) ______________________________
  d) ______________________________
  e) ______________________________
  f) ______________________________
Church-wide Evangelism Strategy (B.L.E.S.S.)

- B: _______________________________
- L: _______________________________
- E: _______________________________
- S: _______________________________
- S: _______________________________
Session 2
Continuing the Work of Jesus

Jesus' Stated Mission  "I have come...
• _______________________ (Luke 18:10)
• _______________________ (Mark10:45)
• _______________________ (John 6:38)

Jesus’ Personal Vision
• Luke 9:51 – _______________________ 
• Hebrew 12:2 – _______________________

Jesus' Continued Vision: 
• Through Peter: _______________________
• Through Paul: _______________________
• Through the Church: _______________________
  a) _______________________
  b) _______________________
  c) _______________________
  d) _______________________
• Through us: 
  God has a __________ _________ for me than ___ ________.

  If I am an __________ of Christ, I am now doing the ______ of ________.
  When trying to determine vision (where God wants me) ask:
    a) What is the _________________?
    b) What is the _______________?
    c) Why must ________________ be done?
    d) Why _____________?

The Great Commission
• Matthew 28:18-20
• The Great Commission tells us to: 
  a) ______
  b) _______________________
  c) _______________________
  d) _______________________

The Great Commandment
• ____________ is the most important thing - Matthew 22:37-39

200
• To love the way Jesus tells us to, we must:
  a) __________________________________________________________
  b) __________________________________________________________
• If you do not have love, you have ____________, gain ____________, and offer ____________. (1 Cor 13:1-3)
Session 3
Understanding Our Culture

Post-modernism
We are in a “Post-Modern Culture.” What does that mean?

• Pre-modern

• Modern

• Post-modern

• Problems with Post-modernism

Cultural Expressions of Post-modernism

• _______________ = godless intellectual frame.

• _______________ = morals are opinions.

• _______________ = “I’m the most important.”

(Leads to fragmentation, which is
__________________________ and causes ______________ and
________________________)
Passages which Speak to Post-modernism

- Proverbs 16:25
- 1 Peter 1:25
- Matthew 5:18
Session 4
Our Three Deepest Needs

A Key Passage – ________________
- It is about __________!  
- Our generation has been ______________ and have been _____ ________.

Persuasion
- People confidently assume things and they are confidently misinformed.  
- Our job is not to fight, our job is to put a ______ in their ________.
- ______________ = It is not a ______, it’s more like ________________.

“How can we speak for our Lord in a manner that does justice to the wonder of who God is, to the profundity of the good news he has entrusted to us, to the wily stubbornness of the human heart and mind, as well as to the wide-ranging challenges of today’s world and the mind-boggling prospects of tomorrow’s? In short, how can we as followers of Jesus be as truly ______ as we desire to be? Nothing less than that is the goal of our exploration.”- Guinness

“How do we reach a generation that listens with its ______, and thinks with its __________?” - Ravi Zacharias

WHAT WE CAN DO:
Practical Principles of Engagement
- Always _________ people well.
- Raise __________.
  “________________________?”
  “________________________?”
- Look for _________ of supernatural.
- Look for something __________.
- Bring in the person of __________.
- Tap into the __________ needs.
  (1 Cor 13:13)

The Three Deepest Needs: Faith, Hope, Love
- What We Need
  a) We all need something to do, someone to love, and something to hope for.
  b) Use the example of _________________________________

- Faith

- Hope
• Love

Remember This
• God _________ _____ with FAITH, HOPE and LOVE →
• I use FAITH, HOPE and LOVE as a __________.
Session 5
Can the Bible be trusted?

Introduction
- Influences on our culture’s thinking:
  - ________________________________________________
  - ________________________________________________
  - ________________________________________________

Proofs of the Bible’s Validity
1. The Bible claims itself to be God’s word.
   OT about OT:
   
   NT about OT:
   
   NT about NT:

2. The Bible was conveyed to us in remarkable ways.
   Old Testament:
   
   New Testament:
   
3. Proofs from Archaeology
   - No archeological discovery has ever _____________ the Bible.
   - Examples:
     a. ________________________________________________
     b. ________________________________________________
4. Prophecies fulfilled from the OT in the NT
   • Messiah would be:
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
   • These prophecies were written ______ years before they were fulfilled in Jesus.

5. Unity of the Bible
   • _____ OT Books + _____ NT Books
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________
     - __________________________________________________________________________

   • Yet… ___________________________________________________________: JESUS!
Session 6
Does God exist?

Introduction

• We would have to _____ ________________ in the universe to say that there is no God.
• ________________, then, is the key.

Four Arguments for the Existence of God

1. ARGUMENT FROM __________ (“_____________________ __________________”)
   • Argument: “If there is matter, there must have been a __________ for that matter.”
   • __________ doesn’t exist out of ________________.

2. ARGUMENT FROM __________
   • Argument: “The sequencing and ______________ ____________ in the world points
     to a Designer.”
     a. Example: Rock vs. Pocket Watch
     b. Example: Human body – complexity even merely to play the piano.
     c. Example: Geology – axial tilt, distance from sun, gravity

   • Acts 14:17; 17:27

3. MORAL ARGUMENT
   • Argument: “If there is a moral ______, there must be a Moral ________________.”
   • All cultures have a shared ____________ on civil ___________
     - Such as ____________, ________________, ________________
     - Issue of ________________
• Laws and social norms point to an ___________ ___________ ___________ of law (natural law).

4. ARGUMENT FROM ART AND IDEAS
• Argument: “Ideas and art come from being _______ ___ ______ __________ and Him allowing us to ____________ how this world works and the _________ that lies therein.”
• Where do ___________ come from?
• Darwinism's silence:

• Where does ___________ come from?
• One of the greatest distinguishing factors between man and animals is the production of art. What ___________ would it make for us to create beauty, to make art, if all we are here for is to survive and reproduce?
  a. Example: a spider web's purpose and beauty
  b. Ecclesiastes 3:11
  c. “Christians believe the sensations we associate with beauty reflect the deepest reality of our ____________: that we are finite but made in the image of a transcendent God and that we _________ for Him.” – Skeel
Session 7
Aren’t all basically the same?

Introduction
• “Different paths to God” – ________________________________
• “Syncretism” – ________________________________

Pluralism
• “____________ ____________” = equalization of the validity of all religions/beliefs.
• Why has this happened?

Comparison of Major Religions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World Religion:</th>
<th>Destiny:</th>
<th>How to get there:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHRISTIANITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUDAISM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISLAM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HINDU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUDDHISM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We need to look at the ____________________.

- Christianity

- Two pills on a table, both white with the letter “A” on them

- Continually challenge skeptics to ask themselves:
  - What do you believe?
  - Why do you believe it?

**Salvation in Jesus**
- John 14:6 – “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” = Exclusivity of the ______ of salvation, not of the ______ of salvation.

- People ask, “What about all those sincere people around the world who believe their religion?”

- People say, “That’s insensitive.”

- People say, “That’s narrow-minded of you.”
Session 8
The Resurrection is Our Hinge Point

The Centrality of the Resurrection
• The resurrection has serious implications for our Christian faith.

• If you take away the resurrection, the ___________ we have placed our lives upon falls apart. (1 Cor 15:12-19)
  - …the whole of Christian faith and teaching would be ___________
  - …there would be no ___________
  - …believers would have died in ___________
  - …Christians would be without ___________

Errant Naturalistic Explanations of the Resurrection
1. **Stolen Body Theory**: “The soldiers stole the body.” (Matthew 28:12-15)

   But…
   a. ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   b. ______________________________________________________________
   c. ______________________________________________________________
   d. ______________________________________________________________

2. **Wrong Tomb Theory**: “The disciples ran to the wrong tomb.”

   But…
   a. ______________________________________________________________
   b. ______________________________________________________________
   c. ______________________________________________________________
   d. ______________________________________________________________

3. **Swoon Theory**: “Jesus did not actually die. He just passed out.”

   But…
   a. ______________________________________________________________
A Strong Case for the Physical Resurrection of Jesus

- Gary Habermas' Six “Minimal Facts” about Jesus' Resurrection
- Scholars do not ______________ the following:
  1. _______________________________________________________
  2. _______________________________________________________
  3. _______________________________________________________
  4. _______________________________________________________
  5. _______________________________________________________
  6. _______________________________________________________

Living in the Power of the Resurrection

- Ephesians 1:19-20

- 1 Corinthians 15:58
Session 9
What about the afterlife?

Eternity
- Psalm 90:12
- 1 Peter 1:24-25
- Ecclesiastes 7:2

➔ Gain a heart of wisdom by pondering _______________.
   - Curiosity in man to wonder about eternity = a ______________.
   - Deny eternity → _________________/_______________ for life here.

Heaven
- Where God Lives
- Final Destination of Believers
- Description
- Jesus and Heaven
- The Path

Hard Questions:
Q: “What about a baby who can’t make this choice? What if this child dies?”
A:
Q: “What about areas in the world which are unreached? Who have not heard about Jesus?"
A:

Q: Aren't all people going to heaven?
A:

Hell
- The __________ of God, the reason for hell, is wrapped up in His __________.
- What is “__________”? Romans 3:23 – “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”
- What is not _______? __________ being _________ for ______ ________.
- Justice __________________ punishment for wrong-doing.
- “A man can’t be taken to hell or sent to hell. You can only go there on your own steam.”
  – C. S. Lewis

Q: How can I believe in a good God who sends people to hell?
A:
Session 10
Why does God allow evil?

Defining the Problem of Evil
- “_____________” - the answer as to why God permits evil; the philosophical and theological argument that vindicates an all-wise, all-good, all-powerful God for the existence of evil.

- How can God and evil both exist? If God is all-________, he must not be all-________ since there is still evil in the world. If God is all-____________, he must not be all-_______ since there is still evil in the world.

Living With the Tension of Evil
We have to clarify assumptions.

1. People assume there is no __________ __________ for evil than God
   - Our own __________ __________
   - ______________ __________
   - ______________ __________
   - ______________ __________
   - ______________ __________

2. Suffering and pain are not __________ __________.

3. There is a __________ __________ to suffering and pain

4. There is pain and suffering due to _____________ we ____________.

5. We do not get access to the _____ ____________. We can only see in ____________.
The presence of pain and suffering can be a good argument for belief in God.

Remember the compassion of God in the presence of pain and suffering.
- Revelation 21:5
- Hebrews 4:14-16
Session 11
Is God good?

Defining 'Gospel'
- “Good Spell” - ________________________________
- “Evangelism” - ________________________________
- Romans 1:2-3 - ________________________________

OT Creeds as Promises of Good News
- “Creed” – a statement of beliefs easily _______ _____ and ____________ as a basis for ____________, ____________, and ultimately ________________.
- OT creeds are interrelated and _____________ how _________ God is.

1. ________________ Creed – tells of God’s actions in ______ _________, a story explaining what God has done. These help us ____________ on what is seen today in light of what God has done in the past, and we can develop our _______ and ________
   for tomorrow.
   *Deuteronomy 6:21-23*

2. ________________ Creed – expresses God’s _________ and _____________ character.
   *Exodus 34:6-7*

3. ________________ Creeds – proclaims that there is a real God in a real relationship with real people.
   *Leviticus 26:12*

**HOPE IS FOUND IN WHAT GOD _______ = I have HOPE because of what God does.**

**HOPE IS FOUND IN ______ HE _____ = I have FAITH in who God is.**
HOPE IS FOUND IN HOW HE ____________ TO ______ = I see the LOVE of God in His relationship with me.

OT Covenants as Promises of Good News
1. Abrahamic Covenant
   *Genesis 15:1-6*

2. Davidic
   *2 Samuel 7:11b-16*

3. New Covenant
   *Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27*

Jesus is the Fulfillment of the Good News
- 1 Corinthians 15:3

- 2 Timothy 2:8
Session 12
Having Spiritual Conversations

Never forget our goal! The goal is to initiate ___________ ________________ which will lead to sharing the _______ _________ about Jesus and giving the person the _____________ to _____________.

Review of “B.L.E.S.S.” Strategy = relationship building
   B: __________ - ______________________________________
   L: __________ - ______________________________________
   E: __________ - ______________________________________
   S: __________ - ______________________________________
   S: __________ - ______________________________________

Thoughts on Sharing the Gospel
   • STORIES

   • DEEPER NEEDS

Possible Questions to Invite Someone to Receive Jesus
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________


Two Helpful Verses when Sharing the Gospel:
Romans 6:23 – “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

How might this passage have meaning for those in this generation?

2 Corinthians 5:17 – “What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore. For the old life is gone, a new life has begun.

How might this passage have meaning for those in this generation?

Reminder:
1 Peter 3:15 – “Instead you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.”

You are placed ________________________ by God to share Jesus with people!
APPENDIX C

Twelve Session [UN]apologetic Podcast Link

1. Episode #1 – Mission and Vision
2. Episode #2 – Continuing the Work of Jesus
3. Episode #3 – Understanding Our Culture
4. Episode #4 – Our Three Deepest Needs
5. Episode #5 – Can we trust the Bible?
6. Episode #6 – Does God exist?
7. Episode #7 – Aren’t all religions basically the same?
8. Episode #8 – The resurrection is our hinge point.
9. Episode #9 – What about the afterlife?
10. Episode #10 – Why does God allow evil?
11. Episode #11 – Is God Good?
12. Episode #12 – Having Spiritual Conversations

unapologetic.visitccc.com
APPENDIX D

Vision Statement and Five Year Measurables of Christ Community Church

At Christ Community Church, a ‘disciple’ is defined as a follower of Christ on our Discipleship Path:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Serve</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>B.L.E.S.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gathering together for worship, teaching, fellowship and prayer.</td>
<td>Following Christ's example by serving together.</td>
<td>Doing life together and growing spiritually in community.</td>
<td>Loving those around us by sharing the hope we have in Christ.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through this, we are asking God to help us accomplish the following by 2025:

- Meet 3 critical needs of our community.
- Develop 300 healthy groups.
- Equip 200 young adult leaders.
- See 1,000 kids & students attend weekly.
- Welcome 1,000 guests annually.
- Celebrate 500 conversions.

#blesschesco
You are invited to be in a research study on how the church might more effectively engage the community. The purpose of this research is to have practical insight into how Christ Community Church might better meet the deeper needs in our community through the avenues of faith, hope, and love. The goal is to establish Christ Community Church as a ‘sent community’ by offering a comprehensive engagement program which will: 1) describe the mission of Jesus; 2) assess the culture in which the church is situated; 3) discover a biblical model of such a church; and 4) equip the people with the necessary tools with which they can move forward in this task. This is an invitation for you to participate in the study.

You were selected as a possible participant because you attend Christ Community Church and are interested in learning about and challenging yourself in this area of study. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

William Burch, a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to answer the question of why the church and Christianity in general is often seen as irrelevant to everyday life for individuals, families and the community. It is also to gain information about the deeper questions of life in order to understand better how they intertwine with three of humans deepest needs: that of faith, hope, and love. At the end of the six week course, the participant will have gained valuable information and an elevated confidence in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who do not know Him.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, there will be a choice of one or more of the following levels of involvement. Please do the following things:

a. Complete a survey. It should take approximately ten minutes to complete.
b. Complete a questionnaire. It should take approximately ten minutes to complete.
c. Participate in a group interview. It should take approximately an hour and a half to complete. The group interview will be part of session one.
d. Participate in a course comprised of six sessions in February-April 2020 which will inform of results and accomplish the four goals listed in the first paragraph and will include the survey, questionnaire, and group interview in session one of six.

If you choose to participate in the group interview, the intent of the interview is to allow dialogue to continue around the questions which you will have answered in the survey and questionnaire. The discussion will pertain to the subject matter of those questions and will not include surprise questions or questions that lead in a different direction than the intent of this project.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from participating in this study are:

a. addressing the needs of the community and how the Christ Community Church might be a catalyst for individual and community health
b. grasping a better understanding of what and how Christ Community Church is specifically attempting to address the spiritual issues of the community
c. generally benefiting your entire community through your feedback
d. learning group interview techniques and establishing open lines of communication
e. entering into the possibility of further involvement in the church or community for the purpose of bringing the Good News of Jesus to those who need it
f. opportunity to grasp a basic understanding of Christianity as it pertains to cultural engagement
g. gaining confidence in living out the mandate to be light
h. learning many biblical principles through a six session course that can be easily applied
i. gaining a greater understanding of how the culture thinks about spiritual issues

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. The collected data may be used in future research studies or with other researchers. Data will be removed which could identify you, if applicable, before that data is shared. Please note the following: 1) Participants will be assigned a pseudonym when discussing the data with others or in any setting where the data is being taught. 2) Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. 3) Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. 4) I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University and/or Christ Community Church. If you decide to participate, you are not obligated to answer any question. You may withdraw from this study at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: Please review the options below and select the appropriate option based on your study design.

Option 1: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation prior to submitting your study materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Option 2: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from group interview data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in the study. Group interview data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the interview will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is William Burch. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 610-431-0300 or email him at bburch@visitccc.com. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty chair, Dr. Adam McClendon, at pamcclendon2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

______________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant Date

______________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator Date
APPENDIX F

Prophecies of Jesus Found in the Old Testament

Of the hundreds of prophecies surrounding the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, these few will serve as examples.

- The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2). The written account of fulfillment is found in Luke 2:15.
- The Messiah would be preceded by a messenger (Mal 3:1). The written account of fulfillment is found in Mark 1:1-11.
- The Messiah would come to Jerusalem riding on a colt (Zech 9:9). The written account of fulfillment is found in Matthew 21:1-11.
- The Messiah would be betrayed for thirty silver pieces (Zech 11:2). The written account of fulfillment is found in Matthew 26:15.
- The Messiah’s betrayer would try to return the thirty pieces of silver, then be refused, then throw them on the floor of the temple (Zech 11:13). The written account of fulfillment is found in Matthew 27:3-5.
- The Messiah’s garments would be divided among the soldiers (Ps 22:18). The written account of fulfillment is found in John 19:23-24.
- The Messiah would be despised (Isa 53:3). The written account of fulfillment is found in John 19:1-16.
- The Messiah would not speak in His own defense (Isa 53:7). The written account of fulfillment is found in Mark 14:55-15:15.
- The Messiah’s hands and feet would be pierced (Ps 22:16). The written account of fulfillment is found in John 19:18.
Dear William L. Burch, II,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent forms are also attached. These forms should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent documents should be made available without alteration.

Per your request, your approved supporting documents are also attached to this email.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971