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# **EMPOWERED TO SHARE**

**JOE ODEN**

# **Empowered to Witness**

**By**

**Joe Oden**

# INTRODUCTION

Various scholars reflect on why the book of Romans is listed first of the epistles. Paul wrote many of his letters elsewhere before he addressed the Christian community within the city of Rome. Some believe that Paul's letter to the Romans is his best work and therefore deserves its rightful place of honor.<sup>1</sup> Others comment that Rome's prominent status is what prompted the letter's placement.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the case may be, no one argues against the apostle's masterful use of words when speaking to the church in Rome—a church largely made up of Gentile influence.

In the book of Romans, not only do we see Paul address the conflict between Jewish and Gentile believers, but he clearly makes a case that the message of the gospel transcends the traditions of both groups. Where the Jews looked to the law for salvation, the Gentiles looked to understanding and education.

*“What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is*

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, “An Exposition, With Practical Observations, Of the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans,” Matthew Henry Commentary, Blue Letter Bible (2019), [blueletterbible.org, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Rom/Rom\\_000.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Rom/Rom_000.cfm) (accessed October 20, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Albert Barnes, “Introduction to Romans,” Albert Barnes Notes on the Whole Bible, StudyLight.org (2019), <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb/romans.html> (accessed October 20, 2019).

*written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God,’” (Romans 3:9–11 NIV).*

*Again, Paul writes, “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus,” (Romans 3:21–24 NIV).*

Certainly, Paul’s message was critical in laying foundational groundwork so that all might come to a saving knowledge of the truth and find a united corporate identity within the Church. But, it was equally important that the purity of the gospel was proclaimed and preserved in a city known for its grandeur and decadence. Why can we assume that Paul had this in mind? Because he addresses the moral and spiritual climate of Rome at the beginning of his letter.

### **The Condition of Rome Then**

Paul paints a rather bleak picture of the societal norms of his day. First, he addresses the fact that although God may be known to any who honestly seek him—people prefer to suppress the truth in order to live according to their own desires (Romans 1:20–22). Although they believed themselves to be a wise and civilized people, those that made up the Roman Empire were hardened to the things of God and worshipped worthless idols instead (Romans 1:22). Their desires ran rampant and they were given over to sins that degraded their bodies—specifically sexual sin. Not only was promiscuity an issue, but homosexuality became accepted and celebrated (Romans 1:24–26).

Paul concludes his assessment with this, *“Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them,”* (Romans 1:28-32 NIV).

### **The Condition of America Today**

If any nation ever needed a revival of the pure gospel message, it is the United States of America. When reading the first chapter of Romans we may identify the moral and spiritual climate of our nation line by line. Our public voices wield their influence like a sword that cuts away the knowledge of God from our nation’s foundations. Idolatry is rampant. From Hollywood and the music industry, to materialism and fame—the generations coming behind us are being sold a bill of goods that only leads to emptiness and disillusionment. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s has now given way to the celebration of homosexuality. It is considered brave to accept one’s same-sex attraction as their true identity, while it is deemed hate-speech to call it by its true name—sin. The killing of innocent children through abortion has become normative so that sin may increase without consequence. It would be understandable for those who desire to live righteously to simply throw in the towel and live quiet lives in the shelter of their own homes and churches. However, if we know Christ, we have been entrusted with the remedy and charged with the mandate needed to bring light back into our nation.

Before Paul addressed the spiritual decay of Rome in his letter, he penned some of the most encouraging words recorded in the entirety of the Scriptures, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’”* (Romans 1:16–17 NIV).

### **Is the Gospel Relevant in Our Day?**

If Paul knew that the answer to Rome’s moral decline was the power of the gospel, could we not as the born-again church of the living God believe the same? This poses some important questions to us: What is the gospel and how do we present it today. Is the message of the gospel still relevant? Who can share this message and in what form?

This book is written with those questions in mind. The foundational truths that makeup the content of what our apostolic Fathers preached will be spelled out in the following chapter. The importance of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit then and now will also be addressed. The need for the local church to evangelize their community will be put into context by looking at Paul’s letter to the Thessalonian church. And, finally, there is an entire section dedicated to helping you to reach the people around you for Christ—through prayer, loving acts of kindness, and then learning to share the gospel effectively and proficiently.

# **PART I**

# **Chapter 1**

## **What is the Gospel?**

In our church culture today, when asked to define the meaning of the word gospel, good news, or evangelism, we will hear many different answers. For us, as the Church of Jesus Christ, it is of the upmost importance that we understand what the gospel truly entails. It is the foundation on which everything else is built upon in the Kingdom. For our purposes, in order to clearly define the message of the gospel, we will look at two credible sources. The first is a statement created by well-known Christian leaders with worldwide ministries in our day. We will then look at what the apostles meant when they used the words gospel, good news, or evangelism. Through our study, it will be made clear that the gospel message contains specific content in which our apostolic Fathers clearly defined these terms so that it might endure throughout the ages.

### **The Lausanne Covenant**

A good source, and one of the best foundations I have ever read, comes from the Lausanne Conference held in 1974. Thousands of Christian leaders gathered together from around the globe. They assembled to discuss different topics. One being: What is evangelism? Billy Graham, who arguably was the most successful evangelist in our time, signed off on their conclusions. John Stott, noted theologian, was also a principal author of the document that disclosed their findings. That document is known today as the Lausanne Covenant. This meeting, with key-influential leaders, still carries strong weight among the body of Christ—in both

Pentecostal and Evangelical circles. I believe their statement on evangelism is a stalwart definition that will be approved throughout the days to come. Their conclusion is found in the statement below:

### The Nature of Evangelism

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that, as the reigning Lord, he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.<sup>3</sup>

### The Kerygmatic Gospel

Jude gave a clarion call to his readers to “*contend for the faith*” (Jude 1:3). To be clear, he was not referring to the ability to believe for the miraculous. He spoke regarding the message of the gospel. Putting this word into proper context, faith can be defined as “the persuasion of the will

<sup>3</sup> “Lausanne Covenant,” Lausanne Movement, (1974)  
<https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>, (Accessed September 26, 2019).

of God.”<sup>4</sup> Jude called attention to those who were opposing the faith. Therefore, it was necessary for Jude’s readers to contend for the true message of the apostolic gospel. That poses a question. What is the content of the true apostolic gospel that was in need of this defense?

### **Paul’s Apostolic Content**

When Paul preached to people who did not know Christ, his content consistently encompassed six key points. The word used in theological circles today for this content is *kerygma*. A true proclamation of the gospel to unbelievers, as laid out by the apostolic Fathers, is called the *kerygmatic gospel*.

*What is the content of the kerygmatic gospel?*

1. Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Paul, along with the other apostles, built their theology upon Jesus being the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic promises. This is the foundation on which the gospel was originally presented. They didn’t pull fabricated stories out of thin air, especially when preaching to the Jews. They reinterpreted the Old Testament through the lens of the cross and the resurrection. We see an example of this in Paul’s preaching when he said, “*After removing Saul, He raised up David as their king and testified about him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse a man after My own heart; he*

<sup>4</sup> Strong’s Greek: 4102. Πίστις (pistis).

*will carry out My will in its entirety. ' From the descendants of this man, God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as He promised'' (Acts 13:22–23 NIV).*

To put this in context, Paul was speaking to Jews who understood that the Messiah would come through the lineage of David. Paul meticulously made a case to show that the Old Testament promises were now being fulfilled. The word Messiah means king—specifically the King of Israel. When this terminology was used, they fully understood to whom the Apostle Paul was referring.

In our western mindset, we elect presidents. Technically, the president works for us. We live in a democratic republic. We have a vote. We vote for the candidate we believe has our best interest at heart. Our government is designed so that whoever is elected, works for the people. A Kingdom does not operate as such. You don't vote on a king. A king does not work for the people. The people are the subjects of the king and they are a part of the kingdom realm.

Sometimes, in our western mindset, we view salvation as an addition to our lives—like sugar in our tea, or dessert with our meal. Actually, when a person gets saved, they are subjecting themselves to a king. That king is Jesus and they now have become part of his eternal Kingdom. Their life is no longer their own. Their life is now under the lordship of Christ the King.

Paul spoke of coming under this rulership as part of the content of the kerygmatic gospel. He used Old Testament scriptures to give evidence that Jesus was the promised son of David—the Messiah to the Jews. To receive genuine salvation meant that one acknowledged the lordship of Jesus.

2. Jesus died upon a cross.

The cross was an absolute in Paul's gospel presentation. He states in Acts 13:28–29 (ESV),  
*“And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.”*

You might think as a believer, “Everyone knows that Jesus died on a cross. Why would you bring that up?” As having traveled throughout the west for decades, I have found that everyone does not understand the significance of the cross. We now live in a post-Christian era. Young people do not know the basic Bible stories that we learned in Sunday School. Ask a twelve-year-old, who doesn't go to church, to tell you the story of Jonah, or Moses, or Daniel in the lions' den. He doesn't know because he was not raised in church and missed out on foundational teachings we received as children.

We must continue to preach the cross. Paul never left the message of the cross out of his proclamation. It is of the utmost importance that people understand the truth found in 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV), *“For our sake he [Father God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* Upon the cross, Jesus, who was completely innocent, took the penalty of sin upon himself. This was done so that we who believe in him may be made righteous before a holy God. He was the sacrificial lamb without spot who died so that we might be reconciled to the Father.

The Bible says that, on the cross, Jesus was marred beyond recognition. Roman execution was a brutal way to die. Our Lord was first beaten so badly most would not live through the torture. Isaiah 53:5 (NIV) tells us, *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are*

*healed.*” Those stripes are the forty lashes that Jesus endured from the end of a Roman whip. His back was beaten so severely, that many theologians believe his bones were exposed. You could possibly see his organs. Blood would have gushed from him. His own mother could not recognize him.

Before they hung someone on a cross, Roman soldiers would beat them with a whip containing shrapnel objects attached to the end of each strand. These were extremely sharp objects. The Romans would use two or three of their strongest men. They would take turns using their full strength with each lash of the whip. Each soldier that hit Jesus would have a minute or two to regain their full strength. They struck Jesus with ultimate force forty times.

Most theologians also agree that Jesus was totally naked on the cross.<sup>5</sup> It was an act of sheer humiliation. A crown of thorns was pressed upon his head. They slapped him. They spit on him. They mocked him in utter disdain. He died the death of criminals, even though he was innocent. He never lied. He never used profanity. He never took the Lord’s name in vain. He never fornicated or had sex outside of marriage. He never broke the simplest command, yet he died a murderer’s death. This was the most humiliating death in which you could die by Roman hands. It is imperative that we never leave the cross out of our evangelistic efforts. The cross is paramount.

### 3. Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

<sup>5</sup> Earl L Henn, “The Cross: Christian Banner or Pagan Relic,” Forerunner Commentary (2019), Bibletools.org, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/187/Jesus-Christ-Crucifixion.htm> (accessed October 20, 2019)

Paul teaches in Acts 13:30–37 (NIV), *“But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are my son; today I have become your father.’ God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’ So, it is also stated elsewhere: ‘You will not let your holy one see decay.’ Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.”*

The truth that Christ was raised from the dead is mentioned four times in the verses above. Paul is adamant throughout his writings that we understand the reality that Jesus had indeed died, was buried, and was resurrected from the dead. Luke shouts at us this truth as he records the contents of the gospel for posterity to read.

In these same verses, it is explicitly made known that Jesus’s body did not see decay. Luke tells us of the contrasting message the Apostle Paul used to make his point: *“So, it is also stated elsewhere: ‘You will not let your holy one see decay.’ Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay”* (Acts 13:37 NIV). Although King David’s body saw decay, Jesus Christ’s body did not see decay.

Notice that Pilate and the Jews put Jesus on the cross. They handled his body. They knew the nails had penetrated his flesh. They secured him to the tree. They took Jesus off the cross and put him in a tomb. Then they didn’t touch him again. It was God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Those that crucified him didn't have the last word—God did. God explicitly raised Jesus Christ from the dead so that all the world might know that sin and death is truly conquered.

#### 4. Paul appealed for repentance.

A call for repentance was a staple in Paul's message. The Greek word for repent is *metanoia*.<sup>6</sup> It carries with it these ideas: believing the good news; turning away from sin; turning away from what brings offense; turning toward what is good; submitting to the lordship of Christ.

In context of the apostolic gospel, repentance can be summarized as turning away from sin and self-rule and submitting to Jesus and his Kingdom ways. Again, western ideals were formed during the enlightenment era. The foundations of the enlightenment era were built upon individual rights. Although, there is much good that has come from the understanding that each person has been given unalienable rights by God, it has also molded our ideas of salvation as something more personal than Kingdom. As we previously stated, the message of the apostolic gospel is that Jesus is King. We are saved from the world-system when we repent of our sin. We are then transferred into the Kingdom of light where God's authority is honored. As wonderful as it is to know that my sins have been forgiven, true repentance means that I come under the lordship of Christ in every area of my life. This means that I gain understanding in the fact my life is no longer my own.

#### 5. Paul preached for a response and not just to educate.

<sup>6</sup> Strong's Greek: 3341. μετάνοια (metanoia).

A true kerygmatic presentation calls for a response to the message. Paul states in Acts 13:38–39 (NIV), *Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.*

As forgiveness is sought, one will indeed repent because of the recognition of wrongs committed. There will be an earnestness to be reconciled to God and deemed righteous in his sight. We see clearly here that Paul is calling his audience to repent. This requires that something beyond a change of attitude or thought process must occur. Paul tells his disciples that it was not something that could be accomplished under the law. It is a change that comes from within, then radiates out through our thoughts, words, and deeds.

#### 6. Faith in Jesus includes ongoing repentance.

When Paul used the verb *believes*<sup>7</sup> in Acts 13:39, it meant ongoing faith. There is a continual renewal of our minds when it comes to submission to the lordship of Jesus. The word used for *believes* is the same word used for *faith*. However, in this particular passage it could be translated as “faithing.” It is not a one-time act of faith that Paul alludes to, but rather an ongoing trust that submits to the ways of the Kingdom on a daily basis.

Kevin DeYoung says it like this: “So we must never separate justification and sanctification. The former can’t help but produce the latter, and the latter must flow from the former. And yet we should not be afraid to talk about justification in a different way than we talk about sanctification. One calls us to rest; the other to fight. One *reckons* us righteous; the

<sup>7</sup> Strong’s Greek: 4100. Πιστεύω (pisteuo).

other *makes* us righteous. One allows for no increase or degrees; the other expects progress and growth. One is a declaration of God *about* us, the other a work of God *in* us.”<sup>8</sup>

These six components are what Paul used whenever the kerygmatic gospel was proclaimed:

1. Jesus is King—in the lineage of David.
2. He suffered: Paul preached the cross, the blood, and what Isaiah deemed as the suffering servant.
3. He rose from the dead: Paul consistently preached the resurrection of Jesus.
4. People must repent: Paul called people to repentance. He called people to get right with God. He called people to lay down their idols. He called people out of a life of sin and into a new covenant with Jesus Christ.
5. Paul preached for a response: Paul did not preach just to educate people and give them information concerning this process.
6. A believer’s holiness is critical: Paul made it unequivocally clear that to live the Christian life is to continually repent; continually go to God for forgiveness. This was not simply a one-time repentance because let’s face it—we are called to live holy, but sometimes believers blow it. Paul taught of the need to continually repent and move forward. He called his audience to live a life of continued repentance through sanctification.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin DeYoung, “Is Sanctification by Faith Alone?” The Gospel Coalition US Edition, (June 2011) <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/is-sanctification-by-faith-alone/> (accessed September 23, 2019).

## Chapter 2

### The Empowerment of the Holy Spirit

Now that we have laid the foundation of what the true kerygmatic gospel contains, let's answer the question of how this eternal Kingdom manifests upon the earth. The pivotal moment when heaven and earth intersected was at the birth of Jesus. Throughout his ministry, Jesus revealed the heart of the Father and the ways of the Kingdom. It was now time to equip his disciples to become the apostolic Fathers that would lay the foundations of the Church. This formation would not happen through human effort, but rather through the ministry of the promised Paraclete, or Helper.

The last words Jesus spoke to his disciples before his ascension are some of the most important words he used. They framed a crucial lesson for his disciples, and us for that matter. He said in Acts 1:8 (NIV), *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

By saying these words, Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit would empower the disciples' proclamation for the mission he had given them as stated in the Gospel of Matthew (28:16–20). We know this as the Great Commission. The role of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, our proclamation as we share the gospel, is just as vital today.

To understand the book of Acts, most theologians teach us to view Acts as a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Today, scholars often categorize Luke's two-volumes as Luke-Acts.<sup>9</sup> If we view Luke's writing in this way, we see that he blazes a trail through the recorded events that highlight a rather specific message.

### **The Activity of the Holy Spirit**

In the first chapter of Luke, we see the writer begin to lay the foundation for his lesson—the Holy Spirit has come upon the scene. To set this event in context, we must know that God had been silent for 400 years. From the time the book of Malachi ends to the events recorded in the Gospels, there had been no prophetic unction or revelation. God had been silent. But then, we get a *suddenly*.

All of a sudden, in Luke 1:14–15, the Holy Spirit showed up as Zechariah was in the temple. He was attending to his priestly duties. An angel visited him and said (paraphrased), “You will have a son who will be a forerunner to the Messiah. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.” This promised son, John, would be born to Zechariah and Elizabeth who were unable to conceive. They did not have any children. When the angel of the Lord said these words to Zechariah, understandably he had great trouble receiving this miraculous message. In a real sense, he didn't receive it. Instead, he responded, “How can this be?” (Luke 1:18).

The word of God tells us that the angel of the Lord closed John's mouth so that he could not speak. We see later in the biblical account that not only is Zechariah mute, he was unable to hear as well. Proverbs 18:21 (ESV) tells us, “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue.*” It is

<sup>9</sup> Walter A. Elwell, *Luke Acts, Theology of*, Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, (Baker Book House Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 1996).

possible God brought this condition upon Zechariah because he did not want any negative connotation spoken about the imminent birth of the prophet we know as John the Baptist.

Coinciding with the miraculous pregnancy of John and Elizabeth, the angel of the Lord visited Mary and told her (paraphrased), “You are going to have a son, his name will be Emmanuel—Jesus—the Savior of the World” (Luke 1:26–56). Mary is chosen to give birth to Jesus Christ. It is important to note that the young girl’s response is quite different than that of the priest Zechariah. Mary received the word, and she was filled with great joy as a result.

Riding on a colt, Mary traveled to visit her cousin Elizabeth. We see a wise principle in this visit. When God reveals or speaks a promise to you, be careful with whom you share the revelation. Mary found someone who would come into agreement with what God had spoken to her. She had a true friend in Elizabeth.

As Mary entered the property, and Elizabeth greeted her cousin, a truly remarkable occurrence took place. *“When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit”* (Luke 1:41 NIV).

Luke tells us that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, as was the infant in her womb. Something magnificent happened as Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit. She began to speak in a manner in which she had never spoken. She was inspired the likes of which she had never experienced. She knew without even seeing Mary, without any frame of reference, that Mary was also pregnant and that this visit was significant. She exclaimed, *“But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”* (Luke 1:43 NIV). Luke’s lesson is starting to unfold. When the Holy Spirit comes, there is an empowerment and wisdom behind our speech that is unlike what we have previously known. We certainly see that in Elizabeth’s greeting.

The activity of the Holy Spirit is highlighted again as Luke's narrative continues. This time, Zechariah was filled with the Spirit. He had just been asked, "What shall we name your son?" Those inquiring about the child's name made signs for the priest to read. This is why we know that he was both deaf and mute at the same time. As Zechariah wrote John's name on a tablet, Luke tells us that his tongue was loosed. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and he began to prophesy concerning his son, "*...And you my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sin*" (Luke 1:76–78 NIV). He foretells of the prophetic call upon John's life. But notice, it wasn't until he was filled with the Holy Spirit that Zechariah had this prophetic empowerment to proclaim in this manner—one he had not known before. Zechariah was a priest. He taught and upheld the traditions of the Torah. But he had never received a prophetic unction in this way.

Luke continues his lesson on the activity and the pattern of the Holy Spirit in the second chapter. Here we meet Simeon, whom the Bible describes as a righteous and just man. In Luke 2:26 (NIV), we learn, "*It had been revealed to him [Simeon] by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.*" We also read that Simeon was "*moved by the Spirit*" to go to the temple just as Mary and Joseph arrived with the infant Jesus. Once again, in the presence of Jesus, the Holy Spirit fell upon Simeon and he uttered, "*Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace*" (Luke 2:29 NIV). Simeon supernaturally understood that he was in the presence of Jesus. Joseph didn't tell him. Mary didn't tell him. But when the Holy Spirit came upon him, he was inspired like never before. He carried a proclamation within himself like never before. He prophesied, "This is the Lamb of God that is in my presence." By doing so, he dedicated the baby Jesus in the temple that day.

Now, we fast-forward to the third chapter of Luke. Who is on the scene? John the Baptist. What did he do? He preached a powerful message of repentance. He fulfilled the prophecy that was spoken concerning him by the angel of the Lord that visited Zechariah. He fulfilled the prophecy that Zechariah himself gave concerning the ministry of his son.

Why did the multitudes come to hear John preach? They were not drawn to him simply because he communicated a fresh word. It wasn't John's ability at oration or communication, neither was it his vocabulary that people came to hear. It was the fact that this true prophet was empowered by the Holy Spirit. Do you see the motif that Luke builds? He clearly and meticulously paints a picture for us, that shouts this truth: when the Holy Spirit comes, there is an empowerment to witness about Jesus that you did not have before, know before, or walk in before.

Continuing the story, Jesus arrived on the scene where John was baptizing. John looked up and made this statement, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29 NIV). As you know, John baptized Jesus, and as this occurred, a supernatural manifestation of God's favor was revealed. The Word of God clearly articulates that heaven opened up, a dove descended upon Jesus in bodily form, and a voice from heaven declared, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well please*" (Luke 3:22 ESV). This was the moment where Jesus Christ himself was baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is crucial in Luke's account of Jesus's ministry. In Luke 4:1, we learn that Jesus is about to be led into the desert where he will face the Devil's temptations. But Luke is adamant that we know that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 4:14 tells us that when Jesus came out of the wilderness, having overcome the temptation of the enemy, he then walked in the power of the Spirit. He was not only filled with the Spirit, he walked in the power of the Spirit.

I thank God that I am filled with the Spirit and that other Christians recognize the empowerment of the Spirit upon my life. But I believe it is the will of God that even the atheists feel the empowerment of the Spirit upon our lives; that Buddhists and Muslims, and people addicted to drugs and alcohol, feel the power of the Holy Spirit upon our lives. Lord, I thank you that you fill us, but it's time for the world to experience the power that is upon our lives through the empowerment of the Spirit.

### **Salvation — The Year of the Lord's Favor**

Luke continues his lesson as Jesus is now in the synagogue. Jesus had not yet preached one message. He had not crafted one sermon. Why? Because it is imperative that we understand what theologians call the Lukan Pneumatological Pattern.<sup>10</sup> The simple definition of that term is that the Holy Spirit must empower a person before there can be a proclamation. And Jesus Himself followed this pattern.

What was the subject of Jesus's first sermon? What would his first articulation be? It was nothing other than the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. He stood up and said in Luke 4:18–19, *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

He articulated that the Spirit of God was upon him and that it signified the “Year of the Lord's Favor.” Jesus was clear as to why the Holy Spirit had come upon him. The foundation of Luke's theology rested on this particular point. Jesus said explicitly because it was to empower his proclamation of the gospel.

<sup>10</sup> Robert P Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke Acts* (New York: T&T International. 2004).

Jesus spoke of people who were captives. He spoke of people who were blind and oppressed. These were the people to whom his message would be delivered. Why was it imperative that Jesus's message be empowered by the Holy Spirit? Because, both then and now, it takes the Spirit of God to liberate those held in captivity by the enemy.

Upon hearing these words, the predominately Jewish audience would be reminded of another man who was empowered by the Holy Spirit and brought liberty for those held captive. The Great Deliverer Moses had a supernatural encounter with God as well. Many theologians would say that the Spirit of God came upon Moses during this encounter at the burning bush. What did God instruct him to do? After the Spirit fell on him, he said, *“And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt”* (Exodus 3:9–10 ESV).

Who were the people of God under Egyptian bondage? They were captives. They were slaves. They were told when to go to bed, when to arise, what to do, what to eat, and how long they needed to work. They did not get a day off. They experienced the definition of what it meant to be held in captivity. The Israelites were at the mercy of merciless Egypt.

But thanks be to God that Moses showed up, empowered by the Spirit, and proclaimed to Pharaoh to let the captives go. Ten miracles took place. Miracles follow a Spirit-empowered proclamation. Finally, after much contention, Pharaoh relented and opened the gates. This man Moses, a husband and a father, who was not armed with an army, weapons, or chariots, had the one thing that was needed to free Israel from captivity—the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

I believe Israel's deliverance happened in this manner because God wanted his people to know that salvation is a supernatural act from start to finish. Israel did not have the power to

liberate themselves. It took a miracle from God. This liberating event was an Old Testament shadow of New Testament salvation. Today, it takes a supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit to bring about salvation.

This generation of Israelites walked out of Egypt, for the first time in their lives, totally free. They came to the banks of the Red Sea. They looked behind them, and to their dismay the enemy had shown back up. There was no way to escape the approaching Egyptian army. Did they get their hopes up in exiting Egypt simply to die outside its walls? No! God would show himself strong yet again. There was no Plan B. There was no other path of escape. It was God, and God alone, that provided the way of salvation. He opened up the Red Sea and they walked through it unharmed. The Israelites faced certain destruction unless God showed up to save them—and he saved them indeed. As they came to the other side, they looked behind them and saw the vast enemy army floating dead in the Red Sea. God clearly showed them that salvation—from A to Z—was His doing.

The Israelites could not save themselves. It was a supernatural occurrence. It is the same today. When someone is lost, bound by drugs, or trapped in immorality—they have the same need as the ancient Israelites. Maybe someone has been brought up in Islam or Buddhism. Or, maybe they proclaim to be an atheist. They still have the same need. It does not matter which stronghold holds them captive. In order to find true freedom, they must experience the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Some in the audience that now listened to Jesus's proclamation, understood the magnitude of his words. They remembered ancient Israel and Egypt. They knew the historical event to be God's salvation. They recognized that Jesus's proclamation carried the same

supernatural dimension designed to set them free; to liberate souls, for recovery of sight for the blind, to heal the infirm, and to bring relief to the oppressed.

Luke is masterful at building his case. The proclamation of the gospel requires a supernatural demonstration that cannot take place in any other form or fashion. It's as if God used Luke to thread a needle, and he's now weaving a tapestry that tells the story of what it means to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### **Pentecost — The Infilling of the Holy Spirit**

After following this thread, we can now apply Acts 1:8 in a broader perspective. Jesus, after he was raised from the dead, instructed his disciples “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you to be a witness.” Where the empowerment of the Holy Spirit was somewhat ambiguous in the book of Luke, it has now become absolutely explicit from the very words of Jesus. He clearly instructed them to wait in the upper room until they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Obediently, they waited for ten days. And, in the second chapter of Acts, we read that the fulfillment of the promise came. The Bible says there was a wind—the sound of a rushing mighty wind that filled the place in which they were. A flame of fire descended upon every head, and they began to speak in other tongues.

The disciples had never spoken like that in their existence. Not only was their speech empowered, but they felt compelled to move out in faith. They didn't simply stay in their prayer room and say, “Thank you God for filling us.” What happened? They took their experience out into the street. The Bible tells us that many different nationalities were gathered in Jerusalem on that day. They each heard the wonders of God in their own language. They literally heard the proclamation of the Gospel in their own native tongue.

No doubt, there were those who criticized the spectacle they witnessed. Not everyone accepted the event as a heavenly appointment. The Bible tells us some of the comments being made were, “What’s taking place? What’s going on? It’s only 9 o’clock in the morning. Are these men drunk?”

However, we may assume that not everyone thought the disciples, and the other one-hundred and eight in the upper room, had been drinking all night. There were those who discerned that something was upon them that was not of their own disposition. Something unusual was influencing these men. Maybe they could not find the right words in their vocabulary to describe what they witnessed. Instead, they used the only language they knew. Surely, some were looking for a genuine explanation when they exclaimed, “These men are drunk.”

Today, if an individual gets pulled over by a police officer for drinking and driving, the officer may say, “You’ve been driving under the influence.” The signs posted outside of drinking establishments say something like, “Food and Spirits,” or “Wine and Spirits.” What those men and women were saying that day in Jerusalem was, “Something is on those men who have been with Jesus. They are under the influence of something else and they are no longer in control. What is it?”

Peter, in a clear and concise manner, stands up and says this, *“Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...’”* (Acts 2:14–17 ESV).

Peter clearly articulated and demonstrated Luke's message. He gave them a theological foundation to the questions they asked. He told them explicitly that when the Spirit comes, prophetic unction follows. In Israel's history, those deemed as prophets had been the only ones who prophesied. Peter established groundbreaking theology. To all those who would listen, in essence, he said, "We have entered into a new dispensation of time where not only Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, Ezekiel, and all the prophets of old will prophesy, but every individual that is filled with the Spirit will be empowered to prophesy as well.

To bring the point home, Peter repeats himself, "*...your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy*" (Acts 2:17–18 ESV).

Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, Peter proclaimed the good news of the gospel to this particular crowd. Three thousand people were born-again. As he preached, people who were bound by sin—alcoholism, immorality, and all manner of addictions—were set free under the Spirit empowered proclamation of the gospel.

Following Peter's story, we see the same thing happen again in the next chapter. Peter and John are on their way to prayer. A man, lame since birth, is healed in a supernatural way. What did Peter do? He proclaimed the gospel. He publicly testified of Jesus; of his divine nature, and of his death, burial, and resurrection. This time, two thousand people were born again. Peter gave a supernatural proclamation through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and multitudes were saved.

At this point, Peter and John are arrested. Acts 4:8 (ESV) sets the scene for Peter's defense as he addresses those who have imprisoned him: "*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders...'*" The Bible is clear. Filled with the Holy Spirit,

Peter begins to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to his accusers. At the end of the fourth chapter of Acts, Peter and John are released from prison, and as usual, began to pray: “*And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus*” (Luke 4:29–30 ESV). Luke tells us at that moment, they were freshly filled with the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 5, we see a continuation of the Lukan Pneumatological Pattern. Peter once again preached through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. People were healed. Thousands more were added to the Kingdom of God.

It is here (Acts 6) that we come to a turning point: Luke begins to highlight a Greek influenced Jewish believer named Stephen. This is significant in the fact that although Stephen was of Jewish ancestry, his cultural practices were Gentile in nature. We see from this point on, a push toward the gospel being moved out of Jerusalem and into the Gentile world. But although a shift in focus took place, the means in which the proclamation went forth remained the same. What was Stephen known for? —Powerful speech, and signs and wonders. Luke makes sure we know that Stephen was filled with the Spirit.

As the thread continues to weave its pattern, in Acts 8 we encounter Philip the Evangelist. Samaria received Christ as he boldly proclaimed the gospel, and everyone is healed. Again, Luke stresses the fact that through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, an unprecedented anointing comes that brings about signs, wonders, and miracles.

Finally, we are introduced to the man showcased throughout the rest of Luke’s narrative—the Apostle Paul. On the road to Damascus, Paul had an encounter with Jesus Christ. He was blinded. This brilliant man had to be led away and cared for by others. This once zealous

teacher of the Torah had now come to understand the truth of the divine nature of Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit, a word of knowledge was given to Ananias with instructions to pray for Paul and where to find him. *“Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit’*” (Acts 9:17 NIV).

Paul was indeed filled with the Holy Spirit and as a result, what happened? He immediately began to boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Empowerment for Today**

I want to submit to you that the Devil has deceived many believers, time and time again, when it comes to this simple truth. Some have bought into the lie that an unusual encounter, or an 80 day fast, or hours of Bible study and prayer each day is what God requires of us in order to be used in a special way.

But know this! If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you have everything you need to share the gospel effectively. The same Spirit that filled the Apostle Paul, that filled Peter, that filled Jesus and John the Baptist is on the inside of you right now. You are not filled with the Spirit just to enjoy your church service or live a depressed free life. The Spirit of God has empowered you to proclaim the gospel to people who are lost and bound in spiritual captivity. You have been empowered to witness to Muslims, Buddhist, atheists, drug addicts, and to anyone who does not know Christ.

Your effectiveness is not built upon your persuasive abilities. You may share the gospel with a soft approach or in a robust manner. You may share the gospel sweetly, or you may share it with a strong voice. The method in which you choose to articulate the message is not what

makes it effectual. The power is in the anointing of the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Please be encouraged that before you witness, just as the disciples modeled, lift your hands and ask God to empower you and to fill you afresh with the Holy Spirit. If you've never been empowered by the Holy Spirit, lift your hands and ask God to fill you even now. It will give you the confidence and the foresight to know that as you step out and share the gospel with someone, that it's not about your abilities. It's about the Holy Spirit who resides within you. As you do that, you will see the captive set free. You will see people bound or oppressed by the Devil loosed in Jesus Name. You will see the sick healed.

I want to encourage you to take hold of this truth, whether or not you feel it or sense it. Take the truth of God's word and pray to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. As you step out to share the gospel, you will see the kingdom come in power in Jesus Name!

## **Chapter 3**

### **Thessalonica—Supreme Model of an Evangelistic Church**

Much of the New Testament was written to local churches founded by the apostles. Every one of these congregations were formed by an apostle serving as an evangelist. Evangelism was paramount then and is still paramount today.

The Thessalonian Church is a pristine example of powerful evangelism accomplished through the local church. The foundation of the New Testament church was, and will forever be, the message of the gospel. We now proclaim that the risen Jesus is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah who has come to reveal the truth of his eternal reign. However, this Savior is not for the Jews only, but the good news of the gospel is that Jesus has paved the way for the whole world to be reconciled to God. As we layout the biblical context in which the Thessalonian church was birthed, we will see that it was indeed this kerygmatic gospel that shaped them into becoming such a model.

#### **The City of Thessalonica**

During Roman rule, Thessalonica was considered an important port city. With its location directly on a gulf in the Aegean Sea, and its close proximity to the Roman Road, Thessalonica rose as a dynamic metropolis in the Greco-Roman world.

Although our images of the Greco-Romans typically have to do with philosophy, military might, and perverse immorality—the culture in itself was highly religious. Both the Greeks and

the Romans were polytheistic, meaning they worshipped the idea of many gods. The presumed deities were created in an attempt to explain weather phenomenon or to cultivate prosperity and fertility. Ancient Romans personified their experiences by attributing them to individual gods whose emotional turmoil could bring about calamity if not appeased. This idea was crucial in establishing a religious culture where everyone would need to adhere to societal expectations so as not to bring upon the community the backlash of a temperamental deity.

There were a few exceptions to polytheistic worship in the ancient world. The most notable of course would be the monotheistic Jews who only worshipped YHWH. The Scripture says that as was his custom, when Paul entered Thessalonica, he preached three days at the synagogue. Scholars argue the reason that Paul went to the synagogue to preach was twofold.<sup>11</sup> He believed that the message was first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. The synagogue would be the perfect arena since it was the Jewish practice to allow teachers to disciple the people. It was also full of Gentiles who were seeking the truth about the God of Jews. Many historians believe that Paul saw this as an opportunity to reach converts from both mindsets.

In the early days of Rome, the Jews received favor from the Caesars. But as time went on, the Jewish community was often met with suspicion and distrust. They were viewed as outsiders with strange customs. Keeping the peace in Rome was of the highest priority. Disturbances of any kind were often crushed under the boot of the Roman guard. Although the Jews desired autonomy, they had made an uneasy agreement with Roman rule.

When the Apostle Paul showed up in Thessalonica, this is the scene in which he entered. There weren't any Christians. The Gospel had not yet been presented. Thessalonica was in the grips of a Roman-Greco worldview—full of idols where they believed Caesar was god.

<sup>11</sup> Albert Barnes, *Albert Barnes Notes on the Whole Bible: Book Overview on 1 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 1996).

Immorality was rampant. And basically, Christianity was illegal. Remember, in ancient Rome, they slaughtered Christians by the thousands. There was also a representation of Jewish life that attempted to remain separated and off the radar of the Roman soldiers.

Now imagine with me the scene. The Apostle Paul shows up with a message that busts through the mask of false peace. That's my kind of guy. I don't know about you, but I think that is bold and bodacious. He literally put his blood on the line. What was his message? — the kerygmatic gospel.

Paul does find success in converting new believers to Christ and a church is formed in Thessalonica. We learn much about what was expected of a New Testament church from the way Paul commends his new disciples. During his continuing journeys, Paul wrote to the new Thessalonian church opening his letter with these words, *“To the church of the Lord Jesus Christ...”* (1 Thessalonians 1:1 NIV).

The specific word used here for church in the Greek is *ecclesia*.<sup>12</sup> In the Greco-Roman world, when they heard the word *ecclesia*, a local church body was not what came to mind. The word was understood as a body of men gathered together to talk about the politics of the day. The Apostle Paul takes a commonly used word in the culture and drives home the fact that Jesus has changed everything. What Paul is saying by using the term *ecclesia* is, “I’m establishing a new government. I’m establishing a new formation.”

That in itself would be very irritating to Rome. He was speaking treasonous talk. Treason was punishable by death. Right out of the gate, to his newly formed church, Paul contrasts the message of the true Kingdom with the Greco-Roman culture which dominated the day. And that's not all. When he says “Lord,” the word used in the Greek for Lord is *Kyrios*. The only

<sup>12</sup> Strong's Greek: 1577 ἐκκλησία (ekklesia).

person that word was attached to in that day was Caesar. They called Caesar *Kyrios*<sup>13</sup> because, in its purest form, it meant supreme master.

Paul opened his entire discourse with the Thessalonian church by saying there is a new *Kyrios*. He wasn't necessarily trying to bring about a provocation, but rather he wanted his new converts to see the contrast. What was implicit to him, however, was rather explicit to his audience. He was saying there is another Lord and his name is Jesus Christ—not Caesar.

### **Not in Word Only**

It was this message that was preached for three days at the synagogue during Paul's first visit to Thessalonica. Obviously, there were those, both Jew and Greek, who believed, because a church was birthed. But for the most part, in that context, the crowd was infuriated. They were appalled. They were angry. Paul's life was in danger.

The disbelieving Jews stirred up contention while blaming Paul for the unrest. An angry mob barreled their way to Jason's house where Paul had been staying. Their hopes were to have Paul arrested. They wanted Paul charged with rioting which at best would have banished him from Thessalonica. But instead, they had to settle for harassing Jason who had housed the noted rebel. What was Paul's offense? Again, it was preaching the kerygmatic gospel.

Returning to the letter written to the Thessalonian church, Paul says, "*this is how we know that your election is sure*" (1 Thessalonians 1:4 NIV). Many theologians will agree that Paul is not talking about predestination. He is saying this is the evidence that when we came to you the first time on that journey, you indeed received salvation. What was Paul's litmus test?

<sup>13</sup> Strong's Greek: 2962 κύριος (kurios)

He states it in the next verse, “*Because our Gospel came to you not in word only, but in power*” (1 Thessalonians 1:5 NIV).

Paul is a master communicator. He uses cultural relevance to paint the picture that the true gospel comes with the empowerment to live righteously. When he writes “our gospel” he is contrasting the message of a specific group of people who were well known in Thessalonica—the Sophists.

Greco-Roman culture was at a crossroads of sorts. The traditions of the Greco-Roman society were being challenged through a variety of philosophical thought. The Sophist gave vent to the idea that each man was an individual and could pave his own way. This was in direct conflict with the traditional belief that a civilized nation required men to do what was best for the state. The Sophists traveled through Thessalonica preaching out of the love of money. They preached for fame. They preached for the aggrandizement of man. They preached for their own status. What Paul stressed in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 was that “our gospel” is not like their gospel. It is not man-made philosophy. “Our gospel” carries with it an empowerment from the Holy Spirit—it is not merely formed from human words.

Paul doesn’t downplay the fact that the words he speaks are truth. On the contrary, he states that the words are proven because of the power behind them. It wasn’t just a communicated sermon. It wasn’t just an oration with an expansive vocabulary. No doubt, the Sophists were excellent communicators. But unlike the Sophists, Paul’s message didn’t come by itself. It came in power. The Greek word used for power in this verse is *dunamis*.<sup>14</sup> To the Greeks it meant God’s inherent ability to perform signs and wonders. For believing Jews, it

<sup>14</sup> Strong’s Greek: 1411 δύναμις (dunamis).

related back to how Egypt was overcome by the signs and wonders of the Spirit of God as proclaimed through Moses.

What Paul was saying was that the new converts didn't receive salvation through simply hearing a communicative word or believing a specific theology. But rather, the message they believed came in supernatural power. Imagine, just for a moment, Paul's first journey into Thessalonica. Do not think that Paul's message was preached in a vacuum. The synagogue was an active arena. Native Romans, maybe even a Roman soldier or politician, would have been exposed to Paul's message of this established Messianic Kingdom. There had to be some who thought to kill him on the spot. A message like that would infuriate the Romans. Maybe a guard began to garner his sword as he hears these words from Paul's mouth, "My message doesn't come in word only—it comes in power."

And yet, maybe, at that precise moment, someone known to the locals to be blind, stood and shouted, "I can see!" The Spirit of God began to break out through the proclamation of the Apostle Paul and heaven's activity began to manifest. Deaf people began to hear. Lame people began to walk. Why? Because the word was never meant to just simply be communicated as a transfer of information. The message of the Kingdom is always to be accompanied by signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Paul began to proclaim, a tangible presence of the Holy Spirit surely fell upon the hearers. The power of the Holy Spirit fell upon the Romans. He fell upon the Jews. He fell upon the Greeks. They might not have given their lives to Christ, but they knew without a shadow of a doubt that the Holy Spirit was upon them. Something of another nature had now invaded the premises. There was no denying the fact.

It is this recollection that prompts the Apostle Paul to state in his letter, “it also came in deep conviction.” Paul commends the newly formed church. He reiterates to them that this is how they received salvation. Transformation took place because they received the word with power.

Listen to what he says in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 (NIV): “*You became imitators of us and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Paul was saying, not only did you experience God, and submit your life to Christ, but you also became imitators of me and of Jesus Christ. That is saying a lot my friend! The Apostle Paul literally laid his life down for the gospel and Jesus Christ. He is not using hyperbole. These people literally began to imitate him.

What did the Thessalonians imitate? For what was both Jesus and Paul known? The scriptures are clear. The primary activity for which these men were known was preaching the kerygmatic gospel—the proclamation of the Kingdom of God that was only obtained through faith in Jesus. That faith included the reality of the events at the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, and repentance.

When he said, you have begun to imitate me, he was saying to the Thessalonian church that he could see the fruit of true salvation because they began to evangelize their community. Paul had continued his travels, but the Thessalonian believers were evangelizing their city. They were witnessing in the street. They were laying hands on the sick. They were casting out devils. They were doing what the Apostle Paul did in both word and power. They began to imitate Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember, Thessalonica was not a safe place for this imitation to occur. Everywhere Paul preached, he found himself in and out of prison. Jesus had been nailed to a cross and murdered. The church was preaching about a man whom Rome had executed. This was not a

popular message culturally, in any way, shape, form, or fashion. The belief of the day was that the cross was reserved for the most deplorable of society. Nice Roman people would not even mention the word cross because of its imagery. It was meant for the worst of the worst—the murderers of society. That is how Jesus had died and, who they now preached as the risen Messiah and Supreme Lord.

This evangelism method would not fly in today's think tank mentality. But God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. It was in the weakness of things that God showed himself strong. They preached what Rome would consider weakness, but God considered strength. They preached the message of Jesus Christ. This is true evangelism.

### **The Thessalonian Example**

In 1 Thessalonians 1:7 (ESV), we see Paul himself call the Thessalonian church an example to other believers, *“So that you became examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.”* That word example could also mean model. The connotation behind the word example or model means to mark with a dye<sup>15</sup>; to strike a blow upon metal. Paul is masterful in his use of imagery. The new converts in Thessalonica became such an example to the believers in that region that they were literally imprinting their understanding of how to witness onto the hearts of other believers. There was a literal imprinting of the gospel message like dye on a garment. That's how Paul described these young Christians. They preached the gospel with such empowerment that it literally left an intangible mark on both the souls of lost humanity and new disciples of Jesus.

This was a church on fire. This was a church being effective in their witness. This was a prototype of the New Testament church. Paul used the Thessalonians as an example of how he

<sup>15</sup> Strong's Greek: 5179 τύπος (tupos).

expected his churches to operate. They were to be evangelistic centers that were fueled by the same power in which they came to Christ. We see the same idea in Paul's communication with the Corinthian church. *"And so, it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power"* (1 Corinthians 2:1–5 NIV).

These young believers in Thessalonica were moving and operating in the same manner. There was a demonstration of God's power behind their words. As they proclaimed liberty to the captive, healing took place. As they proclaimed the risen Messiah, they imprinted the gospel of Jesus Christ on the very souls of their listeners.

Their message was spread throughout the metropolis of Thessalonica. The word of the Lord now saturated an entire region because a church in the midst of persecution, birthed within an anti-god society, in essence said, "We are not going to bow to the culture. We are going to evangelize our community." Many theologians believe that not only was this powerful witness going forth in their city, but they had already taken missionary journeys themselves. It is even possible that the zealous Thessalonian church beat Paul to Macedonia as they preached the gospel, cast out demons, and moved in signs and wonders.

Not only does Paul commend them for sharing the message, but for their example of truly living the message as well. *"For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God"* (1Thesalonians 1:9 NIV). A radical change had taken place that was evidenced by their refusal

to worship the idols of the day. They not only preached a message of repentance; they also modeled the message. They lived a lifestyle in contrast to their culture. The Greco-Roman culture that was so filled with idols, immorality, and the aggrandizement of Caesar was confronted with the truth that Jesus was truly Lord.

Their allegiance to Jesus was costly. The Roman world literally bowed to Caesar and the Caesars of old, as gods to be worshipped. There lived now a group of believers who publicly proclaimed through their words and actions, “We are not going to bow to Caesar anymore. We are not going to bow to the idols.”

The repercussions that came with this allegiance was intense. The Romans looked at Christians as atheists. It was believed in their polytheistic mindset that Christians, who would not acknowledge the Roman gods, could bring calamity onto the city by not serving those gods. They believed that an earthquake, a flood, a fire, or famine could come because of these Christians who would not bow down to the gods of Rome. Christians were thought to be atheistic because they only served one God, and that God couldn’t be seen or touched. Persecution broke out against the Thessalonian church in an attempt to silence their message. They lost their jobs. They were socially ostracized. Violent acts were perpetrated against them. All of hell was against them. Yet, full of the Holy Spirit and the word of the Lord, and armed with the gospel of Jesus Christ, they evangelized their community and made a great impact for the kingdom of God.

### **Our Model for Today**

This is the model given to us of a New Testament church. Not only did they have a specific message; not only did they demonstrate that message in power; they all worked together to see it come to fruition. It wasn’t just a few people doing evangelism. It wasn’t just a select few who

were on fire. It wasn't only the youth group. It wasn't those who had been saved a long time. It was everyone—the teenagers, the men, the women, the children, and the grandparents. The whole church understood their role in reaching the whole community.

### **This Is for Our Culture Today**

The Thessalonians are a model for today's church to follow. Your church can move in the same power as the Thessalonian church. This means the whole church, reaching the whole community, with the whole gospel—as the exorcism of demons and signs and wonders follow.

If there was ever a day whereas believers, as preachers, as people who witness about Jesus need the convicting power of God Almighty upon our message, it is this day. We live in a dispensation of time where anything goes. Just like the ancient Greco-Roman world, immorality rules the day. Explicit drug use is prevalent. A hatred toward God is voiced at an alarming rate.

I want to encourage you today that if this early church could shake their city where it was illegal to preach the gospel—you can win your community for Christ. Where they faced persecution, physical violence, and martyrdom, we have the freedom to proclaim the message of the Kingdom and show forth a demonstration of its the power. May it be said of today's New Testament Church that we did not bow down to the culture of our day. May we not back off from demonstrating the power of the gospel, but rather preach the gospel in its fullness. Let us make known a glorious Jesus that lived perfect and was crucified; one who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. May we preach the repentance of our sins and a turning to God. By doing so, we will watch the miracles flow. May we be a church in our day that is characterized like the Thessalonians—that we imitated Paul, but not only that, we were imitators of Jesus Christ.

## Chapter 4

### Spirit-led Evangelism for Today

It is easy to believe that the Holy Spirit moved through the apostles in astounding ways as the church was being established in the times of the Roman Empire. We picture men, larger than life, who were completely sold out to Jesus in order that Christianity might flourish. But the Bible teaches, as well as did the apostles, that all believers throughout the generations would be empowered by the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. This is so the proclamation of the Kingdom and the fulfillment of God's purposes might be brought about through the establishment of the Church. *"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way"* (Ephesians 1:18-23 NIV).

#### Our Need of the Holy Spirit

How many of you like old cars? I know I do. Specifically, 1967, 1968, and 1969 Ford Mustangs. Say today, you are on the way home. You stop at a gas station. You pull up to see a fine 1969

pearl blue Mustang. As you walk over, you notice a for-sale sign in the window. The owner pops his head out and asks if you want to get in the front seat. You eagerly get in the car and sit down.

Now, this car is the real deal. You immediately hear the 8-track cassette player with Elvis's Christmas hits coming out of the dash. A disco ball is hanging from the rear-view mirror. You can't help but think, "Wow! I'd like to take this for a test drive." You talk to the owner and he gives you a price. You are blown away by the low number. This baby has 21,304 original miles and you say, "I'd like to have the keys. I want to take this beauty for a spin." But then the owner says, "There's just one problem. She doesn't have a motor." How many know that's a big problem?

### **The Gifts of the Spirit**

The gifts of the Spirit are like the motor in that car. We see the gifts of the Spirit continually operating in the life of Jesus. We also see a manifestation of the gifts in the Apostle Paul and in the life of Peter. It was a crucial aspect of the kerygmatic gospel. The gospel wasn't preached in word only, but it came with a manifestation of power. Just as we see a demonstration of the gifts through the early church Fathers, the gifts of the Spirit should accompany our witness today.

The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 14:1 (NIV), "*Follow the way of love and eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.*" The teachings of Paul instruct us that as believers, we should ask God, on a consistent basis, for the gifts of the Spirit to operate through our lives—especially the gift of prophecy. What does that mean? It means that every day we need to ask God, "Lord today, as I go out into the community, would you empower me in a fresh way? God, let me move in the gifts of the Spirit. Empower me to move in healing. Empower me to move in

the prophetic gifts. Empower me to move in the discerning of spirits.” And then we should believe that God is going to do just that in our lives.

### **Jesus Demonstrated the Gifts of the Spirit**

In order to see the gifts in operation in the life of Jesus, let’s look at a specific one-on-one encounter he had while evangelizing. We see different Kingdom principles expressed throughout the Bible in the life of Jesus, but we don’t find many where he did one-on-one evangelism. However, that is not the case in the fourth chapter of John. Here, we see Jesus orchestrate a one-on-one evangelistic encounter and provide us an example of how he moved in the gifts of the Spirit at the same time.

John 4:5–9 (NIV) reads, *“So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’ (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)”*

In this instance, we see Jesus evangelize on purpose. It is not a nonchalant conversation. Jesus intentionally engaged the Samaritan woman. He also exemplified a biblical principle, *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble”* (James 4:6 ESV). Jesus Christ found a way to humble himself to this dear woman. “Ma’am, I’m extremely thirsty. I’ve walked a long way and it’s hot. Could you provide me some water? I don’t have anything in which to draw

water from the well.” She responded, “Yes, but you are a Jew and I am a Samaritan. How can you ask me for a drink?” (John 4:7–9).

We need to be careful that we do not come across as prideful in our use of God’s word. Maybe, we recognize that we are a bit arrogant in our approach at times. It’s not the desire of our heart to be proud, but it is good to be reminded that if God senses pride in our lives, he will actually resist us. I don’t know about you, but I want the grace of God on my interactions with people. From the moment of contact with the Samaritan woman, Jesus modeled the spiritual principle that humility releases God’s grace upon a conversation.

This woman began her questions toward Jesus with a statement about their racial tensions—the cultural division between the Jews and the Samaritans. “*You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?*” (John 4:9 NIV). We also learn, from the context of the scriptures, that she was living in immorality. She was not in right standing with God. Here, Jesus seemed to have no regard for the strong cultural and societal barriers of his day. She was probably in shock that a Jew was talking to her—not to mention, a Jewish man.

It is conceivable that this woman felt awkward as she continued her conversation with Jesus. Have you ever thought to yourself, “I don’t know if I should start a conversation with this person because I don’t want them to feel awkward. I don’t know if I should talk to them about Jesus. I don’t want them to feel uncomfortable.” I have good news for you. If Jesus Christ, the Master Evangelist, could not get around someone feeling awkward, neither can we. We need to trust that God will move us past the initial awkwardness and into a productive conversation.

We see that the woman asked Jesus a direct question. What was the manner in which Jesus responded? He turned the tables: “*Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you*

*living water*’” (John 4:10 NIV). In essence, Jesus said, “I’ve got water that you need.” Do you see the scenario? She might have thought to herself, “Wow! You’ve just asked me for water. Now you say you have water for me.” If it hadn’t been offered before, that water was definitely offered to Jesus now. She must have thought, “Who is this guy?” Then she asked him another question, “Are you greater than Jacob?” (John 4:12).

### **Keeping the Conversation on Course**

A key component in evangelism is recognizing that spiritual warfare takes place over an individual as they contemplate eternal life. Jesus has a plan for our evangelistic conversations, but so does the Devil. Oftentimes, questions will be asked that have nothing to do with God’s plan for that conversation. These questions are designed to get us off track. We act with wisdom in our evangelistic efforts when we remember Jesus’s approach. He only said what he heard the Father say, and he only did what he saw the Father do (John 12:49, John 5:19).

The divisiveness between the Jews and the Samaritans was not the issue Father God wanted to address. This woman’s eternal soul was at stake. Therefore, Jesus didn’t answer her original question. The Spirit of God was drawing her, and although she was oddly ignored, she asked another question, “Are you greater than Jacob?” (John 4:12).

When sharing the gospel with someone, have you ever been asked a question that was almost impossible to answer? Maybe something like this, “If there is a God, and he loves everyone, why are people in Mozambique dying of contaminated water?” It would be great if you could answer, “That’s a great question. As it happens, I just graduated from Texas Tech with a master’s degree in ecology and biology. My class went to Mozambique in order to study the water systems. Do you know what we found? It was discovered that the surrounding nations

poured nuclear waste into the river system. The people were dying for reasons that have nothing to do with the nature of the organic water, and everything to do with man's pollution of the rivers. It had nothing to do with God, and everything to do with man." If that scenario were true, you could have been as articulate as possible and answered with the upmost credibility only to be asked another question. "Well, if God is real, why do people die of aids?" When these kinds of questions are asked, usually they are not looking for an answer. They are looking for an argument.

We all know that Jesus fully comprehended that he was greater than Jacob. But not wanting to be combative, Jesus guided the conversation back to the main point. By not answering her questions, he steered the conversation away from going down a path he had no intention of going. She finally says to him, "Jesus, I tell you what. I would like to have some of that water. I don't want to keep coming here and drawing from this well. Would you please give me some of this living water?" (John 4:15). Interestingly enough, when he gets her talking about water, Jesus changed the subject again.

Their dialogue continues, "*He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.' 'I have no husband,' she replied. Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true'*" (John 4:16–18 NIV). This woman's response was a smoke screen. She implied that she was either a virgin or a widow. She wasn't transparent with Jesus. It was at that moment where Jesus dealt with her heart through a word of knowledge. "You're right ma'am. You don't have a husband. You've had five husbands. And the one that you slept with last night, neither is he your husband."

That was a pivotal moment where everything changed. The words Jesus spoke became saturated with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit began to operate through Jesus. From that point on, this woman understood that she wasn't talking to a strange Jewish man. She answered with, “*‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘I can see that you are a prophet’*” (John 4:19 NIV).

When you begin to operate in the gifts of the Spirit in evangelism—everything changes. The person changes. The atmosphere changes. Your ability to speak in a bolder context of what the word of God says even about issues of immorality begins to increase. The proclamation of the gospel and the gifts of the Spirit go hand in hand. This is not only true in large crusades, or in a Sunday morning church service, but in our day to day witness. We can operate in the gifts of the Spirit in Walmart, at the gas station, on an airplane, or anywhere we might find ourselves.

### **The Gifts in Operation Today**

Several years ago, I was in a hotel room in Pueblo, Colorado. I was there to preach at a church that had organized a large outreach. I prayed for a couple of hours that morning in my room before the pastor picked me up for breakfast. I asked the Lord for a word of knowledge specifically for my waitress. I began to practice 1 Corinthians 14:1 (NIV), “*Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.*” I earnestly prayed, “Lord give me a prophetic word. Give me a word of knowledge, or a word of wisdom, so my waitress knows that Joe Oden is not doing the talking, but that you are speaking to her.”

After about fifteen minutes into my prayer time for my waitress, I had a simple vision of her. It wasn't a hologram where I saw her walking about in my room. In my mind's eye, I saw the color of her hair. I saw her face. And I got this simple word, “Joe, I've given her a real

gracious heart, a congenial heart. She easily makes friends. However, there is a male figure, a father figure in her life, that has hurt her tremendously. Her warm heart has become hardened and she can no longer receive love. She is afraid to love. She is walking in a façade. Joe, I want you to tell her it's time to receive my love. The condition of her heart breaks mine."

We get to the restaurant, and there she is. I know it's her. It was the same woman I had seen in the vision. At the end of the meal, I left a tip that was over 50% of the bill. I wanted to be generous with her. (Let me interject a quick lesson. Whenever we are sharing the gospel, no matter what, we should be good tippers.) My waitress came back to my table and I said, "Ma'am may I have a minute of your time?" She said, "You have one minute." I responded, "Ma'am, I gave you a great tip, may I have at least two?" She laughed and said of course.

I recounted to her my story, "I am an evangelist. I'm here in town doing ministry. I prayed for you this morning before I came into this restaurant. I asked God to give me a specific word for you." She wasn't spooked. She didn't step back and say that's weird. When you tell someone that you have been praying for them, ninety-nine percent of the time, they receive it with open arms. She began to engage in conversation with me. I reiterated to her what I heard the Father say, "God said he gave you a real congenial spirit. There is a genuine spirit of grace on you. You make friends easily, but you've been hurt by a male father figure and your heart has become hardened because of the pain, the hurt, and the rejection that you felt. You can't receive love or give it like you could before. The Lord said he wants to love you and he wants to soften your hurting heart so you can feel his presence and his love."

She looked at me with wide eyes. She said, "How did you know that?" The anointing of the Holy Spirit fell right there at our table. I began to dialogue with her, and I asked, "Have you received Christ before?" She had not. In that very moment, I shared the gospel with her. It was

the first time she had ever prayed to receive Jesus. We were not in the Bible Belt. We were in Colorado — the state known for the legalization of marijuana, and where new age philosophy is at an all-time high. This lady, in a public place, under the unction of the Spirit, gave her life to Christ. I watched as she began to tell others.

The next day, I entered the baseball field where the outreach was held. The church had set up cotton candy machines, inflatables, and I believe, even offered pony rides. Everything imaginable was set up for a successful block party outreach. I remember that I enjoyed watching it all unfold as I arrived. A gentleman walked up to me and introduced his stepdaughter. Guess where she worked? The Ruby Tuesday where I ate breakfast the day before. This young lady worked there too. I had spent my entire prayer time the day before asking that the gifts of the Spirit would be in operation at this restaurant and God honored my prayer.

This doesn't happen every day, every week, or even every month. But I immediately had a word of knowledge for this young lady as well. She was so touched by the power of God that she didn't want anybody else around. She began to weep profusely. I gently prayed for her and the power of God touched her. She began to shake. We immediately ministered deliverance to her as it was an apparent demonic manifestation.

You my say, "Wow! That's odd. That's unusual." But truthfully, that's what Jesus did. He went from town to town doing good and casting out devils. As a matter of fact, that's what Paul did. That's what Peter did. It should be normative that Christians move in this kind of demonstration of power. This should not be an uncommon occurrence.

This young lady was gloriously touched and came to church the next night. She brought a friend, but they didn't sit together. That particular night, I had a word of knowledge for the friend too. Guess where she worked? Yes, Ruby Tuesday. Three young ladies, in three consecutive

nights, received a powerful word of knowledge that led to three salvations. After a time of prayer like what it says in 1 Corinthians 14:1, God moved in a powerful way and three people came into the Kingdom of God. If God can use me to do that, he can use you in the same way.

Another story about the gifts of the Spirit in operation happened when I was in Kansas. I am again in a restaurant with a pastor eating a meal. I began to silently pray for my waitress as she went back and forth. I prayed God give me a word of knowledge for this lady. I received a very simple message. Father said, “Joe, tell her that I see her. I know her circumstances. Tell her my arm is not too short to save. Tell her that everything is going to be alright, and not to be afraid. I’m going to come into her situation.” I shared that with my waitress and could tell it impacted her. She left the table. She then left the main floor and went into the kitchen.

I knew God was doing something, but I didn’t know what. The pastor and I proceeded to the cash register where the manager stood. He asked, “How do you know her?” We informed him that we didn’t know her. The manager began to weep and said, “The lady you spoke with—her daughter has just been diagnosed with kidney failure and is going to die if she doesn’t receive a miracle.” The word of knowledge that had been given assured her that God knew of her circumstances. God wanted her to know that his hand is not too short. We told her God was going to come through and not to be afraid. It brought life to her.

I walked to the back of the restaurant where this woman was weeping under the power of God. It encouraged her beyond comprehension. I lead her to Jesus Christ right on the spot. And what’s more, her daughter called me the next day and said, “I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that everything is going to be okay.” God used me, through the gifts of the Spirit, to encourage a fearful woman, to release healing in a dear lady, and to bring the Kingdom of God upon the earth as it is in heaven.

I have one more story to share with you. I prayed for another waitress while eating breakfast. The Lord gave me a simple word. He said, “Joe, she has a two-year-old son. She can’t afford to get him any presents for Christmas.” He said, “Add an additional \$50.00 to the tip. Let her know that the particular gift she wants to get her son is on Jesus. Tell her I care about everything in her life.” When I did that, the power of God came upon that woman. She bent over and she began to weep under the power of his presence. You might ask, “What happened next, Joe? Did you lead her to Christ?” Truth is, I didn’t. There is an important biblical principle that is always at work: Some plant. Others sow. But God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). In this particular instance, I felt as though God said, “It’s not harvest time for this lady. You have sown a seed and you have watered. I’m going to bring the increase in due time.”

### **The Fruit of Operating in the Gifts of the Spirit**

The encounter the Samaritan woman had with Jesus ended dramatically. She moved from thinking Jesus was a strange Jewish man, to the thought that he might be a prophet, to the truth that he was the long-awaited Messiah. She fully gave her life to Jesus Christ. She returned to her community where she was known as a harlot. She had experienced five divorces and was currently living with another man. She now began to proclaim the good news of salvation. She had one encounter with Jesus Christ, who manifested the gifts of the Spirit. This woman was completely transformed. The book of John records her as the first evangelist to proclaim the gospel.

Please know that the gifts of the Spirit are for today. The gifts of the Spirit will move through you. These gifts are given to impact people’s lives and to bring them into a saving knowledge of Christ. The Apostle Paul reminds us of our need to earnestly pray for spiritual

gifts—especially the gift of prophecy. Pray that God uses you in miracles. Pray that God uses you in the discernment of spirits. Then trust as you are in Walmart, in a local restaurant, at the zoo with your children, at a baseball game, on an airplane, or wherever you find yourself, that the leading of the Spirit and the anointing of God will begin to flow. As you earnestly seek the gifts of the Spirit, you will be emboldened to share the gospel, the gifts will be in operation, and you will see people saved.

## **PART II**

### **Prayer/Care/Share**

The Mission America Coalition was the first to coin the phrase Prayer/Care/Share when it comes to evangelism. This has become an effective model for evangelistic ministries and individuals alike. The following chapters are taken from various sermons Joe preached that are designed to equip us in the Prayer/Care/Share strategy when evangelizing. Our goal is that by the time you finish this section, you will understand that you have all that is needed to effectively evangelize those in your sphere of influence.

# Chapter 5

## The Power of Prayer

Throughout the Bible, Jesus gave different examples of how we ought to pray. These principles should be applied as we pray for healing, deliverance, provision, and the plethora of needs we have in which God desires to meet. For our purposes, in this study, we will look at those principles in regard to praying for the lost.

1 John 5:14–15 (NIV) tells us, *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”* In James 1:6 (ESV) we read, *“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.”*

One thing that I want to stress upfront is whenever we pray for an individual that doesn’t know Christ, God unequivocally hears our prayer. First, you may be confident in knowing that if you are praying for someone that is lost, God hears you. Secondly, be assured it’s God’s will to save that individual.

The question arises in how we fill the space in between praying and receiving God’s answer to our prayers. Most of us in the body of Christ are familiar with the parable of the persistent widow. Jesus answered this question as he addressed his disciples through this parable. He taught them that they should always pray and not lose heart. *“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: ‘In a certain town*

*there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' For some time, he refused. But finally, he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!' And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says'” (Luke 18:1–6 NIV).*

This key point is stressed in many different Bible translations: The English Standard Version says, “...*they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*” The Contemporary English Version says, “...*keep on praying and never give up.*” The NET Bible uses the words “...*never lose heart.*” And, the King James Version states “...*and not to faint.*” We may define the word *always* as Jesus saying to pray without ceasing. We are to continually pray—not to stop in prayer. Our praying is to endure in an ongoing way. When he says to never lose heart, he is saying do not quit! Don't stop! Keep on praying!

At the very front of this parable, Jesus threw ambiguity out the window. Often, when Jesus taught through parables, the disciples would come together and ask, “What is Jesus trying to teach us?” The Bible says, “*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings*” (Proverbs 25:2 NIV). In this parable however, Jesus understood the importance of the disciple's full comprehension of what he was saying.

Right out of the gate, Jesus says, I'm going to teach you a parable about how you should pray and never give up. As he sets up the story, he depicts two characters. The first is a judge. When God gave the administration to Jehoshaphat to appoint judges, one of the qualifications to serve in such a manner was that the judge should always fear God. Because it is said twice in this short parable, we have the understanding that this particular judge was totally antithetical to

God's expectations of this office. He didn't fear God. The Bible also says of him that he had no respect for humanity. This judge was a total narcissist. He did not care about people, nor did he fear God. This widowed woman truly had an obstacle in front of her. A huge barrier stood in her way. What she needed to happen was basically unachievable. She had zero chance of winning her case.

This was a true David and Goliath scenario. This judge represented the highest of society. He represented the powerful nobility of his day. He was also a male facing a female. In that society, this was an unparalleled gap. Jesus paints a clear picture of the gravity of her situation.

Then Jesus begins to talk about the widow. A widow is someone whose husband has passed away. She didn't have a male figure in her life that would officiate legal matters for her. That was important in the culture in which she lived. Today, women may represent themselves in society. A woman representing herself in a court of law in this cultural context however, had a great disadvantage. We might ask if she had extended family. Where were her sons? Where were her parents, or her brother? The Bible does not say. Apparently, her husband didn't leave her in good standing. She didn't have the finances to hire a lawyer, or to pay a bribe to the judge. She was in a vicarious situation having to stand up for herself.

Have you ever felt utterly alone? Have you ever felt like no one was standing with you? That's how Jesus portrayed this widow. I would like to submit to you that the Jewish synagogue in her area was not fulfilling its role in her life. They were to care for widows. It would have been easy for this woman to become offended with the priest. She could have become offended with the entire synagogue. She might have become angry with her family or offended with the judge. Maybe she fought within herself at being offended with God. Mark 11 teaches us that holding onto offense in your heart will cause your prayer not to be heard: *"Therefore, I tell you,*

*whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins”* (Mark 11:24–25 NIV). No one would blame this widow for being offended. However, it seems as though she must have worked through a great deal of forgiveness because there is no sign of offense.

We recognize this fact because she didn’t play the victim card. Sometimes when a person feels as though the whole world is against them, they come across as a victim. This widow did not do that in any way, shape, or form. She didn’t view herself as a victimized widow. The posture of her heart was unusual for widows depicted in the Bible. In Luke 7:11–16, the Bible tells the story of a widow who was meek and mild—low tempered. In the book of Ruth, we read of one of the most famous widows in the Bible. Ruth was humble before Boaz. She would bow when speaking to him. She called him lord. It was her submission that is highlighted as noble and won her Boaz’s heart.

Yet, the widow in our story had a very different disposition. Why was she so bold? Why was she so confident? Why was she so brash with this judge? Please hear this and understand this one fact: Jesus was making a statement about the power of petitionary prayer. Believers serve a God who hears their prayers—not only hears, but answers! There is something to be said when an individual understands their place before God. There is power in persistent petition. We find it all throughout the Bible.

### **The Power of Petitionary Prayer**

The Patriarch Jacob could write theological commentary on the power of petitionary prayer.

Jacob was left alone with the angel of the Lord. He made up his mind that he was not going to let

go of his wrestling partner until he received his blessing from the Lord. The Bible communicates that the angel smote him on the hip and Jacob walked from then on with a limp. He was disabled, but he knew that he was not going to let go until he received his breakthrough.

In 1 Samuel we see another example of persistent prayer. Elkanah's wife, Hannah, was barren. The Bible tells us that she prayed so intensely at the temple that the priest thought she was drunk. She did not quit praying to God and asking him for divine deliverance. Because she did not give in, she received her miracle. Not only that, she gave birth a prophet.

Our widow, in Luke 18, exemplified patterns that people of faith prayed all throughout the word of God. She didn't get offended. She didn't play the victim card. And she did not quit. This widow was so persistent, she probably knew the coffee shop this judge frequented. Imagine the scene: The judge is sitting at the counter and in walks our widow. She takes up the seat beside him and begins to plead her case, crying out for justice. She knows his favorite steakhouse and frequents the place in hopes of getting a chance to remind him of his duty toward her. Maybe she knew which day he went to the market and she made sure that he saw her face and heard her voice— "Give me justice against my adversaries!"

Her pursuit was relentless. She continued to petition him until finally he could take no more. I can hear him say something like this, "I don't fear God. And I certainly don't care about man. But this woman will not stop! There is something on the inside of her that is not going to be deterred. She is driving me crazy!" In some versions of the Bible, the judge described the widow's persistence in boxing terminology. The judge is quoted as saying, "*...so that she will not beat me down*" (Luke 18:5 ESV). This has the connotation of meaning, "*...so that she doesn't give me a black eye.*" She was so determined and so steadfast that this judge described

her as a boxer in a match. Because of her fighting spirit, he finally granted her justice. This was not due to the goodness of his heart, but rather the persistence of the widow.

Jesus taught his disciples the value of petitionary prayer through the example of this judge. Although this judge was wicked, in the end, he gave the widow justice. Jesus then contrasted the wicked heart of the judge to the compassionate heart of the Father, *“And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?”* (Luke 18:7 NIV).

When we go before God, over individuals that are lost, we must know that he hears our prayers. Not only does he hear us, but the Bible is crystal clear that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). It is God’s will that all would be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). He wants our prayers before him to be of a petitionary manner—a continual crying out. Maybe your brother is lost. Maybe it’s an uncle, a neighbor, or a co-worker named Steve. By applying the principles of this parable, you can be certain that the Lord wants you to come before him like this widow—beseeching him, “God save Steve!” If you pray for Steve for a week and he doesn’t get saved, pray for him a month. If he is not saved after a month, pray for him a year. If he is not saved after a year, pray for him two years. Do not give up! Jesus taught his disciples to pray in such a manner in which they never gave up.

### **My Mother’s Prayers**

I haven’t always been saved. Actually, I was a drug addict and a drug dealer—addicted to everything the world had to offer. I was in and out of jail more times than I want to admit. I can’t remember the number of rehabilitation centers in which I was admitted, both in house and outpatient. Many, many times, I went through drug treatment and counseling. All of those things

had virtually no effect on me. But I had a mother, who in the midst of my years of addiction, prayed for me every day. I had a father who prayed for me. The more they prayed, the more addicted I became. The more they sought God, the more it seemed as though their prayers had no effect. But they continued to pray. They continued to seek God.

In Pensacola, Florida, there was a church that had an unusual object on their front table—an empty fish aquarium. One day, my parents attended that church. They took a picture of me and put it in that aquarium. The aquarium was used as a place to drop prayer requests so that others could pray. Now, not only were my parents praying, but the church staff was praying. What's more, this particular church would stop during their service and pray for the lost people whose names were placed in the aquarium. The congregants would hold the names up in their hands—calling that name out before God. Although it seemed as though I was a hopeless cause, and my actions were a complete contrast to salvation, because my mother, and others, were persistent in their prayers—I got saved! I was radically delivered from drugs and alcohol. God called me to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ because my mother exemplified the role of the widow who kept praying and did not give up.

### **Removing Obstacles Through Prayer**

I was what the Bible called an obstacle. Not me personally, but my addictions. One must understand that there are many obstacles that keep people from coming to Christ: atheism, false religions, disillusionment pertaining to God, etc. We will look at these more below. However, Jesus taught his disciples how to remove obstacles through prayer in the book of Mark: “*‘Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered. ‘Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will*

*happen, it will be done for them. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (11:22–24 NIV).*

Sometimes we read those words, in the midst of a crisis, and think our faith is not strong enough to pray effectively. We hear verses that say, *“if you have no doubt in your heart,”* or, *“if you have faith in God,”* and we take that to mean that our heart has to be 100% faith filled before we utter a prayer. Or, we think that since I have not received the answer to my prayer, there must be some doubt in my heart. Listen, it’s not so much about our position of perfection in prayer. What Jesus taught is that we must have faith in God. God is the object of our faith. We take the pressure off our human understanding and we place it on God!

It could be said like this, “Have faith that God is good. Have faith that God is a healer. Have faith that God is a savior. Have faith that when you pray, God is going to bring about deliverance. Have faith that when you need a breakthrough, and you bring that petition to God, that he hears you. Put your faith in him. Pray according to his will knowing that he hears you.” That is the crux of what Jesus is saying. Put your faith in the goodness of God. When praying for your lost loved ones, pray knowing that God wants to save the lost. He wants to bring deliverance into their lives. It’s not as much about the perfection of your heart, but rather the position of your faith in God and His love for the lost.

You may be saying to yourself, “I have been praying for Jack for three years. His drinking only increases. When I go before the Lord, I just see his alcoholism.” Take your mind off the immovable obstacle that you see and put your faith in God. God is good and he is all-powerful. He is able to completely deliver those who are addicted. Take the pressure off of yourself and know that God is bigger than any obstacle you face.

I want to submit this to you. Jesus didn't take his disciples to the Mount of Olives and say, "Peter, let's have you go first. Speak to the mountain and throw it into the Sea of Galilee. If you are not able to do it, then we will let Matthew try." The mountain was an allegory. Jesus was using hyperbole. The mountain was a representation of an object that is unmovable. It would be impossible for me to go to a mountain and move it. But with God, all things are possible.

### **Your Lost Loved Ones Are Not Too Far Gone**

You may be praying for someone that seems like an immovable mountain. They seem too far gone. They are too addicted. They hate the mention of God and say they are an atheist. They are entrenched in Islam, or Buddhism. They are agnostic. They've been hurt in church and they've sworn off ever giving their life to Christ again. Whatever the case may be, they seem to be immovable. Their salvation seems to be impossible. That is the point of Jesus's lesson in Mark. He emphasizes to his disciples, "You are going to come across seemingly impossible situations, but if you pray with your faith pointed toward Father's goodness and deliverance, then you can say to the mountain 'be thou removed,' and it will be removed."

Renew your faith in God and speak over your brother's drug addiction. Speak over your neighbor's atheism. Take your eyes off of their rejection of the truth and turn your eyes to the God who sets people free. Pray in that manner and God will move that mountain! God will bring salvation. It might not be on your timetable. It might not be when or how you want it to happen, but trust that the goodness of God is chasing after your loved one. If you have not been praying in this manner, do not let condemnation creep in, but rather begin to pray today. Take the key from Jesus, begin to pray and do not give up.

## **Determining Your “My Five”**

One of the tools we are using in the Go2020 evangelism initiative is called “My Five.” It is a simple tool to help you pray daily. Write down the names of five people that you know are lost. You may have the “My Five” bookmark that was created for this purpose. Pause for a moment and think of five people you know that, if Jesus were to come back today, wouldn’t spend eternity with him. Not everyone that is lost is addicted to illegal substances. Maybe they are great citizens, exemplary people, but they simply don’t know Jesus. Every day, in your devotion time, pray for those individuals by name. Just like the church in Florida, hold those names up before the Lord. Say their name out loud, “God save Isabelle, God save Mike, God save Steve.” Take your five names and ask your pastoral staff to begin to pray with you. Ask your pastor to put these names on his desk and partner with you in prayer. Maybe you have a designated prayer team at your church that will pray for your lost loved ones. Get people praying and agreeing with you for those individuals.

## **Effective Evangelism Starts with Prayer**

Recently, a major university conducted a study that looked at the growth of a particular denomination. The findings were that six percent of the churches in this denomination were growing through evangelistic conversion. Many churches grew through other means—transfer growth, or biological growth. But six percent were growing through evangelistic conversion—people outside of the church who received Christ. Of those six percent, there were three things that those churches had in common. First was this: the lay people prayed for the lost by name. Every day and in every devotion, they prayed for people who were lost. Second, the pastoral staff agreed with them. They prayed, by name, in agreement that those individuals would get

saved. Third, on Sunday morning, they would stop the service and the entire congregation would pray. Individuals would call out the people's names that needed salvation. They corporately prayed for the lost. This was the key factor of the six percent of churches that were growing.

It's not rocket science. You don't need a PhD. You don't have to be a Bible school graduate to implement this method. Pick out five people—your “My Five”—and pray for them every day. Have your church pray for them. And if your pastor will, have the congregation pray corporately for everyone's “My Five.” If you do that, you will see the results of petitionary prayer like the widow used against the unjust judge. She came with a petition in which she would not let go. She would not be denied. That judge was her Mark 11 mountain that would not move. But because she had faith in God, she knew that God heard her prayer and would answer. Get your five names down, begin to pray, and believe God that he will do what Jesus was sent to do—to seek and to save that which is lost. God is about to save your family and friends. Get ready! Pray the prayer of faith. Seek the Lord, and you will see salvation come in Jesus name!

## **Chapter 6**

### **Care—Compassionate Evangelism Methods**

When you think of evangelism, what comes to mind? Do you think of a confrontational outreach where the street preacher stands on the corner and proclaims the gospel? Let me put your mind to ease—not everyone is called to evangelism in that manner. Much of the time, because of our ideas of what it means to evangelize, we are intimidated at the thought. The idea of walking up to someone, opening up the word of God, and confronting them with their sin is not the approach in which most are comfortable.

#### **Friendship Evangelism**

Friendship evangelism is much more palatable to most Christians. It may be defined as a process of investing in an individual and caring for them over time. This evangelism strategy identifies people who are already in your life such as a neighbor, a co-worker, your mechanic, or the barista at your favorite coffee shop. Then, over the course of time, you care for that individual in personal ways. Your genuine concern and care will pave the way for you to be able to share with them the good news of the gospel when the time is right. This is a much more natural approach to evangelism in which everyone can engage.

Maybe, some of your “My Five” are people you want to reach out to in friendship evangelism. You could put your coffee barista on your “My Five” list, then go beyond prayer and take a genuine interest in her life. Take the pressure off yourself. When you start a

conversation with someone on your prayer list, be released from the fear of needing to say everything just right. The individual most likely will not give their life to Christ during the initial conversation. God is the one who saves. We are simply the conduits. We are His voice and hands on earth. Right now, take all of the pressure off and think, “All I need to do is start a conversation. God will do the rest. My responsibility is simply to engage.”

I love the principle the Apostle Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 3:6 (ESV) in regard to the maturing of the Corinthian church, *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”* We use it today in a more general context by saying, “Some plant, others water, but God gives the increase.” This principle may be applied to any area of ministry within the body of Christ—but especially to evangelism.

You may be in the seed planting stage by demonstrating a measure of joy to one in need of hope. Again, you don’t have to take an individual all the way to a conversation about salvation during your first encounter. As I have traveled throughout the United States, I have found that not many get saved the first time they hear the gospel. The statistics say that number is less than five percent. It takes a plethora of touches before an individual actually gives their life to Christ. Take the pressure off, and just know that you are a part of the process. You may be in the planting stage. You may be in the watering stage. It may be sometime in the future before the harvest comes.

In summary, when we talk about engagement with those in your sphere of influence—friends, neighbors, the barista at the local coffee shop—one’s concern should be just to connect. To connect with someone takes intentionality. The message of the gospel never has to come up as you initially engage and connect. You’re building a rapport with that individual. Maybe you talk about their favorite sports team. If you are engaging your waitress, make sure you leave a

good tip and smile—don't be rude. Maybe you could compliment someone on their watch. Find an inroad to build relationship. The goal is to genuinely connect. This will eventually lead to an opportunity for you to pray for this person down the road.

### **Building the Friendship**

Now, you are ready to take the next step. When seeking to build a relationship with those already in your circle of influence, it is good to ask personal questions that show a genuine interest. In this process, a good question to ask is, "When is your birthday?" Ask them about their child's birthday? Or, maybe talk to them about an anniversary. Just imagine, if you know your coffee barista's birthday and you bring her a gift card to Outback Steakhouse, you will build an endearment in her toward you. Taking a genuine interest in that person builds the foundation needed when it comes time to share the gospel.

I have a tendency, during a conversation, to think about what I want to say next. My listening begins to diminish. My articulation begins to elevate. People pick up on that. Whenever you are engaged, focus on listening and not responding. Listening is one of the most powerful tools we have in our arsenal.

After you have had your initial conversation, think of ways you can show acts of kindness to that person. This is true friendship evangelism. Maybe your neighbor is having a birthday party for their child. You know that child likes action figures, or coloring books, or My Little Pony. A simple thoughtful gift goes a long way in establishing friendship and trust.

I remember my neighbor doing just this when I was five years old. I still remember the house we lived in thirty-five years ago. I remember the foyer. I can see myself opening the door. I was in kindergarten, but I was home that day with chicken pox. Our next-door neighbors were

named Roger and Mary. Mary found out that I was sick and home from school. She brought me several coloring books and some crayons. I still remember that to this day. She truly endeared herself to me through her kindness. She didn't show up later to share the gospel with me, but it was a special moment that created an endearment.

People remember when you go above and beyond to show kindness to them. Maybe, you notice that a tree limb has fallen in your neighbor's yard. You could help them clean that up with no strings attached. Maybe you notice their garbage cans are out by the road. Taking them back to their place would be a kind act toward your busy neighbor. Maybe their dog got out of the back yard. Helping them search communicates that you care about what is important to them. Whatever the case may be, you want to intentionally look for ways to let them know that you genuinely care.

### **Conversational Evangelism**

Doing random acts of kindness that lead to conversational evangelism is a bit different than friendship evangelism. This takes place when you know that you will have one encounter with a person and that it is unlikely you will see them again—such as during an outreach. Even in this situation, acts of kindness are still a great entry point into starting a conversation. Here are some things you can do that are random acts of kindness that cause people to take notice:

- ◆ Open a door for someone.
- ◆ Go to a laundry mat and buy a roll of quarters. Approach people in the laundry mat and say, “I want to show God’s love to you today in a practical way. May I pay for your next

load of laundry?” When you do that for someone, it usually creates an openness. Ask, “How can I pray for you?” When I do this, I sometimes leave it at prayer. Sometimes I pray and share my testimony. Still other times, I pray, share my testimony, and then share the gospel. What is important is knowing where we are in the process. The Holy Spirit will lead us into what is needed in the moment.

- ◆ There is a church in Michigan that recently went above and beyond in my book. They gave their local gas station \$10,000. They asked that the money be used to buy the first \$10 of gas for each customer until the money ran out. Let me just say that is great seed planted into the community.
- ◆ Giving out bottles of water in front of a business or on a corner is another random act of kindness. By doing so, it opens the door for you to pray, for you to share, and for you to potentially share the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Hold a cookout in front of a business and handout hamburgers.
- ◆ When I was on staff at Christ the King Church outside of Atlanta, one of the things we implemented was what we called our “Be Blessed Card.” On the front of the card it was a simple saying, “Be blessed.” On the back of the card it said, “Someone from Christ the King church wanted to bless you today.” We printed the address, the phone number, and the service times of the church on the card as well. I would often use that at Starbucks. I would say, “Hey, see the individual behind us? Can you hand them this ‘Be Blessed

Card' and I will pay for their order." Or in a restaurant, I would say, "See that man with the beard having dinner with his wife and kids? Would you bring me their bill? And instead of their bill, would you give them this card?" That's a fun way to sow a seed of God's love in an individual's heart.

Door to door evangelism can be very intimidating. Starting the conversation with a random act of kindness makes the process of going from house to house much easier. In this day and age, everybody should have a smoke detector. You could take a nine-volt battery and give it as a gift. In case of an emergency, an extra nine-volt battery is a good thing to have. You could say, "We want you to have this to be prepared in an emergency. If you ever have an emergency in your house, or family, please know that our church is here for you." It opens the door to share and to build a connection or relationship.

A hygiene kit, with a snickers bar and a bottle of water, is another kind act to provide. People end up in the emergency room unexpectedly. If someone has had a heart attack or they've broken a leg, fainted, hit their head or had a stroke, the family has had to rush to the emergency room. This may be a 24-hour ordeal. By bringing a hygiene kit with a toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, and other items like this, along with a snicker's bar and a bottle of water, genuine concern is shown that is memorable. You might communicate, "Hey, we are from Christ the King Church. We want you to know that God loves you." Jesus cared for people's needs. When we do that, we look like God.

You could also hold up a sign on a corner as a point of prayer. "Do you need prayer today?" That is a random act of kindness. When people are going through difficult life issues,

you would be surprised at how many will pull over and ask for prayer. Maybe they don't have a Christian in their life. The Holy Spirit will often prompt them to pull over and ask for prayer.

### **SALT—Start, Ask, Listen, Tell Your Story**

An evangelist friend of mine, Rice Brooks uses this acronym: SALT. This is a great way to help you remember the steps of engagement when you are witnessing. Beginning with the S, it stands for: *Start* a conversation. If you feel led to engage an individual you do not know, look for a conversational item. Maybe they have a particular sports team on their hat. You could say, “So, you’re a Cowboys fan?” or “Do you like the Houston Rockets? I tell you what, that playoff game last year where Harden was fouled and it was never called, cost them game six.” By doing so, you have found an entry point. Maybe it’s a mutual respect for someone’s vintage car. Or maybe it’s something on their shirt. Say you find yourself in Nashville, Tennessee, and someone has on a Jackson Hole, Wyoming, T-shirt with a moose on the front. This allows you to ask a question, “Hey, have you been to Jackson Hole? I love that place. We took a vacation there.” There is no pressure. You are simply having an enjoyable conversation and waiting to see if God will open the door. It may be that they are in a hurry and are unable to dialogue. You do not have to force the conversation. You looked for an opportunity, but it just wasn’t available.

However, usually when you approach someone in that manner, you find they are open. Now that you have identified an entry point, you may continue with casual conversation. “Tell me, what was the favorite part of your vacation in Jackson Hole?” Or, “Have you ever had a chance to go to a Houston Rocket’s game? How did you like that?” A good tip to remember is to avoid asking questions that can end in “yes” or “no.” You want to ask open-ended questions that draw out the individual. That is what the A stands for in our acronym: *Ask* open-ended questions.

Then we come to the L: *Listen*. It is important to be a good listener. I had a friend tell me recently, “You know Joe, whenever you talk to me on the phone, you are usually pulling through Arby’s or Starbucks. I often hear you say, “Hold on a minute.” Then you proceed to say, “I want a triple latte with an extra shot.” He was letting me know that I do not always give attention to our conversation as I should.

We live in a fast-paced society. We seem to always be on the run. This can dictate our conversations with people. We may appear distracted while looking at our watch thinking about our next appointment. Or our eye contact may be all over the place because we are thinking of everything on our to do list.

To truly be listening, our body language should say that we are engaged in the conversation. If I’m sharing what is on my heart over lunch with a pastor or with a good friend, and I notice them looking at their watch, I get a signal that says they are not really engaged. We want to be purposeful on how we engage with people. Make it a rule of thumb to be completely focused on whomever you are prayerfully sharing and caring. Don’t look at your phone if it rings. That lets a person know they are important, and you are listening to them. When people feel a genuine sincerity in your interest of them, a beautiful thing begins to happen. A genuine connection takes place and an openness occurs.

Proverbs 18:2 (ESV) says, “*A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.*” James 1:19 (NIV) says, “*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.*” These two verses are foundational in friendship evangelism. Especially with a neighbor or a co-worker. You are just getting to know them, and you don’t want the relationship to get off on the wrong foot. You are building a friendship in an intentional way.

T then stands for: *Tell your story*. Through building an intentional relationship, the easiest way to share Jesus with someone is to tell your story. If they need healing, share a time that you received a healing touch from Jesus. If they are in need of a financial miracle, has there been a time in your life where finances were supplied supernaturally? At this point, telling your story of what Jesus has done for you should fit naturally into the conversation.

Through all of these examples, we've spelled out ways to do two different methods of evangelism—friendship and conversational as well as given you an acronym to help remember the process. However, a key element was missing—sharing the gospel. There will come a point in either process where you will need to share Jesus. It is important that you allow someone to see Christ in you—to see your good life and your kindness and love. However, know this, friendship evangelism doesn't take place if all you do is build a friendship.

## Chapter 7

### Share—Defining Evangelism

This section of sharing our faith is not designed to discourage you in any way. It is important that we take a look at our evangelism efforts and share the gospel with wisdom and understanding. Proverbs 11:30 (NIV) tells us, “...*he who wins souls is wise.*” There is a wisdom gained when we share with people the good news of the gospel. But there is also a wisdom needed in sharing our faith. Fortunately for us, the Bible tells us, “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him*” (James 1:5 ESV).

#### Pre-evangelism vs Evangelism

As I travel throughout the world, equipping the church for evangelism, I frequently ask this question, “What is the gospel?” I have asked parishioners, staff pastors, and senior pastors. Undoubtedly, hands go up around the room with responses. Some of those responses are as follows:

- ◆ *The gospel is “Praying for my co-worker.” Or, “I was in my cubicle and somebody next to me was sick. I prayed for them and it was a great gospel presentation.”*

Certainly, we all need to be engaged in praying for those around us. And, I might add, not every time you interact with someone must you go over the entire content of the gospel. But please know, when you pray with someone you are not sharing the gospel. It's an act of kindness. It is something Jesus would do. It is something that I would recommend, but we cannot qualify praying for someone as doing evangelism or sharing the gospel. As we will see, the early church and the apostolic Fathers, who wrote the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would not qualify praying for someone as sharing the gospel. *ONCE AGAIN, I WANT TO CLARIFY, OUR NEED FOR PRE-EVANGELISM.* There are times when people will try to do evangelism before someone is ready to receive. I want to encourage everyone to continue to pray for people because it bears fruit. Just be sure, not to confuse praying with someone as being the same as articulating the gospel.

- ◆ *"I invited someone to church. I was at the ballfield, watching my son play soccer and I invited the father of one of his teammates to church."*

As good as that is—and I encourage you to invite people to church—it's not evangelism. Please continue to invite people to church on a weekly basis. But know, that it is just that—inviting someone to church. It's not sharing the gospel.

It could certainly be called pre-evangelism. If when, those you invite to church come, and the pastor depicts the contents of the gospel, then evangelism will have taken place. In your pre-evangelism, you brought them to a place where evangelism happened. But again, just giving someone an invitation to church is not sharing the gospel.

◆ *“I lived a godly life in front of them.”*

We have learned that mindset from a quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “In all your actions, preach the gospel. If necessary, use words.” I have no problem with the first part of that statement. I believe that our actions give our presentation validity. But modeling a godly life before someone is not always going to equate to them the truth of the gospel message. The reason why we live a godly life shouldn’t be left up to interpretation. It needs to be communicated through words. Jesus was the example of this. There was no one perfect, except Jesus. He used words everywhere he went. He never lusted. He never lied. He never cheated. He never murdered or stole, yet he used words on a continual basis. It’s not enough to simply live the life, we have to communicate the truth of the gospel through our words.

◆ *“I ministered prophetically to someone.”*

I love when the gifts of the Spirit are in operation in my life and I am able to prophesy to someone in a very normative lifestyle evangelism way. Let me share a recent testimony. I was in an ice cream shop not that long ago. A friend of mine turned to the people behind us and said, “I feel the Lord has just spoken to me that you’ve lost a family member. Someone very close to you in your life just recently.” The married couple looked at one another in a bewildered way. And my friend continued, “It’s not only a loss. It’s your father.” The bewilderment then turned into amazement. Then my friend said, “And Mike,” (God gave him the guy’s name!) “you are grieved because a family member has run off with the inheritance. I want you to know that God sees your situation, and everything is going to be okay.” First, Mike was completely blown

away. Secondly, that was one of the most specific prophetic words that I have ever heard in my life. It was a gift of the Spirit manifested. But then my friend just walked off. The evangelist in me came out and I began to talk to them about their salvation. I began to share the gospel. Being as they were already believers, it was a great encouragement to them. But as powerful as that prophetic word was—as anointed as it was—it wasn’t sharing the gospel. It was the gifts of the Spirit in operation.

♦ *“I prayed for someone and they got healed.”*

I can’t tell you how many people that I have talked to over the years say this to me. I thank God that people are going out and praying for the sick. I celebrate it. I say, “Thank you God!” But even then, when someone lays hands on the sick and they get healed, that’s not doing evangelism unless you verbally shared the content of the gospel.

My wife, Trisha has a powerful story of healing evangelism that is a part of the prayer/care/share process. Trisha prayed for one of our neighbors, who we will call Monica, consistently for a long period of time. Monica developed an auto-immune disease. One of the ways it manifested in her body was through crippling arthritis. Her Muslim fiancé was taking care of her because her mobility was affected greatly. She had tremendous trouble doing simple things around the house. He was having to wait upon her.

When Trisha found out about it, she laid hands on her and God healed her. Monica was shocked. She didn’t have a frame of reference for what had taken place. On top of that, she was a nurse practitioner. In all of her study in the medical field, she had no answer for why she was suddenly healed. In the natural, you don’t instantly recover from this kind of disease.

Her Muslim fiancé witnessed her healing. He was perplexed as well. So, they asked us out to dinner. Through this process, of prayer and care, he asked me directly what I believed about Jesus and what I preached. At that point, I shared my full testimony and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He did not get saved. However, Monica is very close to the Kingdom of God.

We are still praying and caring for them, while we ask God for open doors to continue to share. This was the prayer/care/share model at its best. This would also fit the My Five process. I would love to write that they both gave their life to Christ, however, people have a will. I want to encourage you that even when you fulfill the process and someone doesn't receive Christ—continue in prayer, continue to care, and continue to share as God opens the door.

When you know the Spirit is leading, be sure to share the gospel. I love what evangelist Reinhard Bonnke says, “The supernatural is not an accessory. It's like a dinner bell to the gospel message.” Whenever you do pray for the sick, or move in the gifts of the Spirit, be sure to share the gospel at that moment.

◆ *“I've led someone in the sinner's prayer.”*

It's good that we lead people in what is commonly known as the Sinner's Prayer, but for true salvation to occur, people have to understand in whom they are placing their faith.

I was with a gentleman several years ago. He unpacked a sermon for me. He wanted me to pay close attention to the content. He said, “The cross is never mentioned. The resurrection of the dead is never mentioned. The innocent life of Christ is never mentioned. This preacher is speaking to people who are culturally churchied. And he is speaking to their life of sin and calling them to repentance. That's good, but Buddha could have done that.” When he stated those words,

I had an “aha moment.” Just calling people to repentance is not enough. In that, we rightfully teach them they must turn from something, but where do they go from there? People must understand to whom they are turning.

It is the contents of the true apostolic gospel that answers that question. It’s not my opinion. It’s not my definition. It’s what the early apostles laid out for us in which God knew would be a road map for us today in the time we live.

◆ *“Well, I shared my testimony with someone.”*

Praise God for sharing your testimony of how you were delivered or saved. However, unless you add some of the core principles of the gospel, your listener won’t know where to turn. I preach all over America and I share my testimony. Revelation 12:11 (NKJV) states, *“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony...”* Sharing our testimony is a key component in opening someone up to the goodness of God. But again, this is pre-evangelism. Specific content must be added in order to qualify sharing our testimony as evangelism.

Let me be clear, I encourage all the activities we have mentioned as pre-evangelism. Oftentimes, these things are a part of the process. It is sowing seed. Paul wrote to his disciples, *“I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow....”* (1 Corinthians 3:6–7 NIV).

Even with me, Joe the Evangelist, there are times when I discern that I simply need to share my testimony, or pray for someone, without giving them the full content of the gospel. Well-known Evangelist Tom Elie says, “It takes the average person seven times of hearing the

gospel before they will respond. You don't know where you are in the process." Sometimes we try to harvest someone—take them all the way to making a decision for Christ—when they might not be ready. As I have traveled, I find that I agree with Tom. In my estimation, one out of one-hundred people will actually receive salvation the first time they hear the gospel. It takes seven, ten, maybe fifteen times of hearing the gospel message before they are ready to make that decision. That tells me there is a process.

### **Intentionally Sharing the Gospel**

However, this process does have a desired end goal in mind. To truly be defined as evangelism, the share has to follow your care. The best entry point to sharing the gospel is your testimony. If you are saved, you have a testimony. Don't let the Devil lie to you and say that your story is of no value. If you know Jesus, your story is one of genuine transformation.

You may say, "You know Joe, it's not my personality to share my story." Let me encourage you. This is the time to step out of your comfort zone. You have engaged with and built a relationship with the person. You have built a rapport. Now, in an easy, natural manner, it is time to share the most important aspect of your life with your new friend. Don't worry about the nature of your personality. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:24 (NIV), "*...put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*"

### **The Nature of Christ**

There are times that I do not treat my wife with the utmost respect. I sometimes get out of the bed on the proverbial wrong side. In those moments, I make a conscious decision to take off my attitude of not being kind and put on the nature of Christ. The very nature of Christ compels

people to come unto him for salvation. We have his nature living inside us through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. “...*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27 NIV). I don’t want to share the gospel through the personality of Joe Oden. I want to display the personality of Jesus Christ.

### **Sharing Your Personal Testimony**

A key place to start when sharing your testimony is the condition of your heart before Christ. What spiritual, moral, emotional, or physical condition did you find yourself in before you gave your life to Jesus. For me: I was a drug addict. I was a drug dealer. I was immoral. I was a thief. When I share my testimony with people, I clearly paint the picture that before I met God, I was not a top of the line citizen. I was a menace to society. I then go into detail concerning my life before I met Christ.

Talk about key events that led to your salvation. Maybe a family member passed away that caused you to evaluate your situation. Or, maybe someone was sick with a life-threatening illness. Were you in a car accident where your life flashed before your eyes? Maybe the EMT at the scene told you, “I’ve never seen someone survive such a wreck. Or the police officer said, “You are lucky to be alive. This is a miracle.” Maybe you went through a devastating divorce or a broken relationship. Were you about to lose your home or your job? Did you have a child facing difficult situations, such as addiction, that caused you to evaluate yourself? Did these circumstances point you to the path where you received Christ? If so, it is a key point in your testimony of how you came to Christ.

For me, I experienced an over-dose of LSD. I had an encounter with God that led up to a two- or three-year process before actually receiving Christ. However, that drug overdose was an

arrow that pointed me toward Jesus. I began to pray, “God get me into church.” God heard my prayer and sent a judge into my life that court ordered me, by the law, to go to church. It was at that church that a team from the Brownsville Revival came and I got radically saved. Those were key points that led to my salvation.

As I stated earlier, most individuals are not saved the first time they hear about Jesus. There are usually ten to fifteen key touch points that people experience. Think about yours and insert them in your story. After you share your story of conversion, you might want to stop there for the time being. Especially in friendship evangelism, you know you will see that individual again. Be led by the Holy Spirit. Let me reiterate, the highest method of evangelism is this: Jesus only said what he heard the Father say; and he only did what he saw the Father do. (John 12:49; John 5:19). There are times when God will say, “Okay, you shared your testimony. Hit the pause button.”

I experienced this recently on a plane. A young lady sat next to me and I began to dialogue with her. I showed her a picture of the remodel that my wife and I are doing on our house. I asked her what she thought about our choices as a point of engagement. As we continued to talk, I asked her what she did for a living. She then asked me the same question which led the conversation into talking about her spiritual background. I shared my testimony with her and then I asked her this question, “Do you have a story like that?”

You could see the wheels turn in her mind. You could tell she thought, “No, I don’t have a story like that.” It had nothing to do with the dramatic aspect of my testimony. She was pondering if she had ever asked Jesus to transform her life. Had there been a moment when Jesus stepped in and changed her through a personal encounter. She didn’t have one.

She said she attended a particular church. I followed up with, “Have you ever heard the pastor teach and preach about John chapter 3? About being born-again? About being regenerate? Or, have you ever heard a sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV), “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*”? She said, “Wow!” I could see with my eyes the Spirit of the Living God working upon her. She even put her hand on her heart, and she said, “Wow! This really hits me!”

At that point I felt God say, “Joe, Stop! Don’t go any further.” She needed to process our conversation and meditate upon it. Sometimes, with good intentions, we lead people to pray a prayer before they are ready. By doing so, we take people across a false finish line when they are not ready to repent of their sins. I left it there with no pressure about having to perform or lead her to Christ. The Holy Spirit led me to understand that she wasn’t ready. We had another forty-five minutes on the plane. I read my book, and she watched a movie. But before we got off the plane, I said, “Louise, do you mind if I pray for you?” She was wide open. She responded, “Absolutely!” I gently laid my hand on her shoulder and prayed. You could sense the presence of God touch her.

### **Being Open to the Spirit’s Lead**

Recently, as I sat on another plane, I noticed a presidential candidate running on the Democratic platform, walk down the aisle. It was Pete Buttigieg. I didn’t have an hour and a half or even forty-five minutes to share like I did with Louise. As a point of entry, I walked back to him and said, “Pete, I watched the debate last night. I’m a believer. I know you wouldn’t be running for President if you didn’t have a burden for our nation and care about people. That’s very evident. If there was ever anyone who needs a touch of God, it’s someone running for President of the

United States. Do you mind if I pray for you?” He said, “Absolutely!” I laid my hands on him and said, “Lord, I thank you for this individual. I thank you for his heart to serve. I thank you for his heart for our nation. God if there is anyone on this planet that needs a visitation from Jesus, it’s this man. Jesus would you visit Pete? Would you bless him? Would you make yourself known to him and be real to him? In Jesus name, amen.”

I took out my personal tract and I handed it to him. That’s all the interaction that time allowed. There was no pressure. I prayed. I was kind. I was loving. I was compassionate and he sensed it. All of those aspects are part of the pre-evangelism process. I sowed seed, but I knew not to go any further.

But remember, we truly have not done evangelism unless we share the gospel. Now that you have shown that you care and you have shared your testimony, look for a green light to share the gospel—to make Jesus known. It would be of great benefit to you to memorize the points of the kerygma. Meditate upon them and let them sink into your understanding. It will make it easier to share the gospel with people when the time comes. Remember, we are not calling people into a relationship alone, but we are calling people into a kingdom in order to serve a King.

### **Honing Our Gospel Presentation**

It is certainly not our job to clean people up before they come to Christ. But in our gospel presentation, we must be clear that Jesus requires us to repent of our sins. *“From that time, Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17 ESV).* We must present the truth of what repentance looks like and not hide that fact. Romans 5 is a great chapter to study when honing your gospel presentation. It is important to understand and

communicate the fact that we are all born under the curse. Romans 5:12 (ESV) states, *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”*

This is what is known as Adamic humanity. In order to step into the Kingdom of God, we must receive Christ as our Savior. From what do we need saved? —the effects of sin that we inherited as Adamic humanity. God is holy. He cannot look upon sin, meaning that what is sinful cannot come into his presence. We are all born into sin. Not one of us escapes.

*“...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us,”* (Romans 5:8 ESV). We have no ability to save ourselves. Self-help books, spiritual enlightenment retreats, or new age meditation cannot bring the peace with God that we need. Peace with God is only found through the person of Jesus Christ. *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God”* (Romans 5:1–2 ESV).

It is by faith that we are saved. Our faith must be placed in Jesus as our King. Faith demonstrates trust that he accomplished everything needed for us to have access to the Father through his death on the cross, his burial, and his resurrection from the dead. *“And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe”* (Romans 3:22 Berean Study Bible). When we are saved, we are made righteous in the sight of God. This allows us full access into the Kingdom and the presence of the Father. This is indeed good news!

Once you have gone through your gospel presentation, you simply ask, “Do you want to submit your life to Jesus Christ and ask him to forgive you of your sins—repent and turn to God?” If so, lead them in a simple prayer. It doesn’t have to be long, just sincere.

## **The Romans Road**

A powerful tool to have in our belts is the Romans Road. Maybe you are familiar with what is commonly called the Romans Road, but you think it to be an antiquated way of sharing the gospel. Let me tell you, I've been to Rome. There are roads in Rome that were built before the time of Christ and they are still in use today. Just because it is an old method, does not mean that it is not effective.

The Romans Road is a guide through the scriptures that aids us in sharing our need of Jesus, the answer to our sin problem, and the blessings of salvation in Christ. These are the scriptures that make up its content:

Romans 3:23 (NIV), *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

Romans 6:23 (NIV), *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Romans 5:8 (NIV), *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Romans 10:13 (NIV), *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

Romans 10:9–10 (NIV), *“If you declare with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be*

*saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”*

These are foundational scriptures that will help you when you begin to share your faith. Inevitably you will hear people say, “Well, no one is perfect.” And because you know these verses, you can say, “You are right! There is no one who is perfect. That is why we all need a savior.” Or, “I’m not that bad of a guy. I never killed anyone. I’ve never hurt anybody.” The severity of our sin is not the barometer we need to use when dealing with salvation. God says, “*All have sinned...*” If you have committed one sin, you need the blood of Jesus to cleanse you of that sin.

The greatest act of kindness that has ever been portrayed to humanity is God stepping out of heaven, putting on the flesh of humanity, and becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross (Romans 5:8). That was beyond kind. There is not a word in the English language that fully describes this monumental act of love. He died for us. What measure of love and kindness did it take for God to do this for humanity?

When sharing the gospel with people, it is not wrong to talk about the consequence of not following Christ. I’ve heard it said before, “That’s a fear tactic.” Whenever I quote Romans 6:23, my intention is not to frighten. But at the same time, ponder this for a moment, the road we were on before we received Christ led to eternal destruction. That is a frightening thought. The revelation of the path I was on was part of the reason I gave my life to Christ. I did not want to spend eternity in eternal destruction. I wanted to go to heaven.

If someone is not going to heaven, the reality is that the road they travel leads to a frightening end. The Bible does tell us clearly that God will judge every human being that has ever lived. If we stand before a holy God and we have not been bought by the blood of the Lamb—redeemed and repentant of our sins—that is a terrifying spot for an individual to find themselves. It is a loving act to communicate that truth. We don't need to put our spin on it. We simply should let the word of God work and speak for itself.

The good news is found in Romans 10:13 (NIV): *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* We must communicate that an individual must believe in their heart the death, burial, resurrection, repentant message of the gospel and confess with their mouth that Jesus is indeed Lord!

### **Our Posture in Sharing the Gospel**

Let me give you a few tips for sharing the gospel with others.

1. Whenever we share the Romans Road and we mention the severity of God, we must always do so in compassion and love.

We must never forget where we were when we first came to Christ. We should never take the posture of “You need to listen to me because I’ve got it and you need it.” That is the wrong approach and the wrong heart attitude. John 3:17 (ESV) states, *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

Jesus’s modus operandi had nothing to do with condemnation and everything to do with salvation. That is the heart of Jesus and that should be our stance. If it weren’t for the grace of

God, God only knows where any of us would be today. For me, if it weren't for the grace of God, I would be six feet under, in a prison cell, or strung out under a bridge somewhere.

## 2. Never argue with anyone.

If someone brings up a controversial question like “What about people who live in a foreign nation and have never heard the name Jesus? How could a loving God send them to hell?” That line of thinking has more to do with spiritual warfare and distraction than truth seeking.

Remember, the Devil has a plan for that conversation and God has a plan for that conversation.

You are there as an ambassador of Christ.

As I stated earlier, this is the greatest form of evangelism: Jesus only said what he heard the Father say, and he only did what he saw the Father do (John 12:49; John 5:19). Stay engaged with what God is doing and don't get distracted with peripheral questions that lead nowhere.

## 3. Ask God for Wisdom.

Remember, Proverbs 11:30 (NKJV), “*And he who wins souls is wise.*” It doesn't say, “He that tells people about Jesus is wise.” It says, “*...he who wins souls.*” The Bible also tells us in James 1:5 (ESV), “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*” In your prayer time, I want to encourage you to not only pray for your “My Five” individuals, but begin to ask God this, “How do you want me to engage people? How do you want me to talk about you?”

You will not see me bake a pie in order to show the love of God. I'm not a baker. That's not my style. I promise, people don't want me to bring them a pie. But you may be the best baker around. It may be your way of engaging your neighbors.

My preference is conversational evangelism in any atmosphere—not confrontational, but conversational. Maybe you are more prone to power evangelism. You know that when you lay your hands on people and pray for healing, God truly heals. This is your entry point in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

I have been on staff before as the evangelism director. We would take a worship team and go to bar districts where drug activity and alcohol was rampant. Pimps and prostitutes could be seen hanging out on the street corners. We would just begin to worship Jesus. That is called presence evangelism. It is a form of power evangelism. We would lay hands on people and they would have dramatic encounters with God. This is what God had asked us to do in that season of our ministry.

Pastor Tommy Barnett is one of the greatest evangelistic pastors of our day. His church holds a yearly evangelism school that teaches their “adopt a block” method. I know of pastors who have gone to his school to learn this method. They have returned to implement this plan into their community but found it didn't work. That is because it was God's strategy for a specific people in a specific area. Instead of trying to copy what another ministry has done, we need to do what James taught us. Ask for wisdom on who to reach, how to reach, and what methods are needed. I believe God has a specific plan for every ministry to reach their community.

In closing, let's look at the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15). This son had a father who loved him. But because of his rebellious heart, he asked for his inheritance so that he might live a life of his choosing. After considerable wild and promiscuous living, he had blown his finances.

So much so that he begged for the food that was given to pigs. He had taken the inheritance from his father and wasted it. Being a Jew, he was taught that pigs were unclean animals and yet, he was begging for the very thing the loathsome animal ate. The Bible tells us that “*he came to himself*” (Luke 15:17 ESV). He made up his mind to go home even if that meant he would be considered a servant. The beautiful thing about this story is that his Father didn’t make it hard for him to come home. He opened his arms. He received him graciously.

Let me leave you with this: No matter your preferred evangelism method, don’t make it hard for people to come home.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Creating Your Personal Tract**

I have handed out tracts for years. There are many great tracts readily available, but I have found that the personal touch of writing and distributing your own tract is a better strategy. When handing out generic tracts, maybe one out of five or two out of five actually take the tracts. Sometimes as much as fifty percent refuse them. Since writing my own tract, I can count on my hands the number of times I have been rejected. I have handed out thousands and thousands of my personal tract over the years.

Why write your own personal tract? For me, I feel more comfortable handing my own personal story to someone. It's my story. It's organic and natural. Also, people are more likely to read your own personal story. It's more of a natural way of witnessing. When I hand my tract to someone, I say, "Hey, this is my story. Check it out." People like to read redemptive stories of people overcoming what has held them back in life. It offers hope.

Maybe you think you don't have a story. You weren't a drug addict. You weren't involved in a life of crime or deceit. Listen, if you are saved, you have a story. I have found that those who do not think they have a story, actually have some of the most powerful stories I have ever heard. I have discovered truly amazing stories as I have sat and helped people write out their experiences.

I was speaking at a church not too long ago. A gentleman raised his hand and said, "Joe, I wasn't an addict that needed to be set free. I don't really have a story." I asked him to share a

little about himself. I asked if he had experienced a moment when he thought he might lose his life. He said, “Oh yeah, I’ve had many of those.” I said, “You don’t think you have a story? You thought you were going to lose your life? Where did that take place?” His response, “In Afghanistan on numerous occasions. One time a roadside bomb went off and I should have died. Other people around me experienced catastrophic injuries.” If my memory serves me right, he began to talk about how many fellow soldiers died in that event. But he knew that it was a miracle from God that he was still alive. He ended up saying, “You know, Joe, I do have a story! And I can write it around the miracle that happened that day—how God spared me.”

Maybe you were in a car accident. Maybe you have had a breach of relationship and God brought restoration. Maybe your story speaks to specific gender or age bracket. I know an individual who wrote her tract specifically for girls between the ages of fourteen and twenty-two. It doesn’t have to fit any kind of particular mold. It’s your tract. It’s your story. You get to share your story however you see fit.

### **The Opening Line of Your Story**

A well-written opening line is crucial in hooking the reader’s interest. Mine reads, “Blue lights flashed through the cab of my pickup truck as I fled the police at ninety miles an hour down a dead-end street.” Can I just say, that was a bad night for me. I went to jail. From this starting place, I go back and tell the back-story. “During my teenage years I just wanted to fit in and be accepted by others.” I talk about how I started doing drugs at a very young age. But I use the hook of the flash of the police lights to catch my reader’s interest so that they read my whole story.

Here are some hooks that you can think about as you put your story together. You need something that garners attention:

- ◆ In 1969, as Neil Armstrong was stepping on the moon, I was in Viet Nam stepping on a landmine. That is a strong opening statement!
- ◆ As evening fell on April 12, 1994, I never would have guessed that before the night was over, I would be charged with the murder of Joe Smith.
- ◆ The police said my car rolled five times on I-65. I regretted not wearing a seatbelt as I found myself being hurled from the convertible.
- ◆ As I sat in the doctor's office, I was told that I had stage four cancer and six weeks to live.
- ◆ I received a call at mid-night informing me that my son had been in a severe, life-threatening car accident.

### **Sharing the Rest of Your Story**

After the hook, you want to write the body—the place you share your actual story. It's important to stay focused on a single narrative. You don't want to try to tell three or four stories at once. You want to lead up to the specific salvation/deliverance experience that God wants you to highlight. Maybe it's your personal salvation, or maybe a miraculous healing.

You don't want to preach. This is not a sermon outline. Nor do you want to fill your story with scriptures. A few scripture references at the end is more effectual. When you start writing, don't worry about grammar, spelling, or the way you pronounce things. Just begin to write. Get it out on paper. You can clean it up once you have put your thoughts together.

Your track doesn't have to be long. Six hundred to eight hundred words is plenty. Mine is short and condensed. It is not a chapter of a book or a novel. It's a single story. Don't try to write too much. Your initial draft may be two thousand words, but through looking at it, praying over it, asking the Holy Spirit the points he wants you to illuminate, and having others read it, you can condense the content down to what has the most impact.

### **Writing the Conclusion**

After you get through the body of the story, you want to write a conclusion. You've cast the hook, now you want to set the hook. This is where you talk about what God did for you in your particular situation. For me, I was converted after a long life of drug addiction and alcoholism. I was court ordered by the law to go to church. A team from the Brownsville Revival showed up at the church I was attending. They preached the gospel. I was powerfully saved. I was touched by the power of God. I was transformed. And then I began to immediately share the gospel. All of that information is in the conclusion of my story.

### **Your Gospel Presentation**

Not only do you want to share how you were converted, but you want to share a concise, and precise, articulation of the gospel. Romans 1:16 (NIV) says, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.*” A testimony is a powerful tool in leading a person to accept the gospel, but we cannot assume that everyone we give our tract to understands the gospel.

*These are five key points the Apostle Paul used in his gospel presentations.*

1. Jesus was innocent yet condemned.
2. He died on the cross.
3. He ascended to heaven.
4. He is coming back to judge the quick and the dead.
5. People must repent.

This message can be added in a simple line or two. Remember, people must understand that when they repent—turn from their sin—they need to turn to Jesus. They must also understand the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. You don’t want to share your story and not give ample opportunity for an individual to get saved.

*You want to ask yourself different questions as you are writing your story as well:*

1. How old were you when you got saved?
2. Where were you?

3. How were you led to Christ?
4. What is the purpose for the tract?
5. How do you want it used?
6. What difference has Christ made in your life?
7. Have miracles occurred in your life since being saved?
8. Are there any particular Bible verses you want to use in the tract? Etc.

Brainstorming will help you boil down the key points that you want to include in your tract (and help you discard irrelevant points).

### **The Finished Product**

It is best if you invest in your tract and have it professionally finished. Don't think of it as extra cost; think of it as an investment. I had ten thousand of mine made. There needs to be some kind of contact information on the back. You may not want to give people your personal information, but I do. I give my cell number and my email address. I would discourage the ladies from giving your personal information. You may want to put your church website and phone number. That way, it is both a tract that shares the gospel and an invitation or a pathway for someone to visit your church. That's a win/win. Your story is being presented and an invitation to church is being given.

### **Testimony of Using My Tract**

I give my personal tract away all the time. One day, I was headed to preach, and my time was limited. I stopped to get gas and was standing behind a man at the counter who was obviously

drunk. He began to flirt with the young lady behind the counter. I remember thinking, “Man, I wish I had my tract with me.” In the parking lot, he rolled his window down and started yelling at me, “Yeah, I’m a lady’s man.” I knew it was my opportunity.

I grabbed my tract out of my car as he was about to pull out onto the highway. I ran toward him. He rolled down his window revealing the open containers of alcohol in his car. My tract is titled “From Dope to Hope.” He looked at it and this drunk man suddenly became sober faced. He looked me straight in the eyes and said, “I’m on the way to go kill myself. I’m going to take one hundred Tylenol and die.”

I called the pastor where I was about to preach and told him that God had set up a divine appointment. I needed to intervene in this man’s life. I followed the man to his house. After talking to me, he followed me to the church. As soon as he walked in the front door, he went to the altar, knelt down, and gave his life to Christ. All this happened through the simplicity of me handing him my tract. God used it immediately. It was instant harvest.

### **You Never Know Who Your Story Might Impact**

I’ve given my tract to all kinds of celebrities—one being William Shatner. You may think there is no way that he would take my tract from me—but he did! I’ve given my tract to major league sports players like Herschel Walker (running back for the Dallas Cowboys), Dwight Howard (a candidate to be a future hall of famer with the NBA), and Michael Finley (NBA world champion of the San Antonio Spurs). I’ve given my tract to country music stars like Big and Rich while sitting on a plane. I’ve given it to band members of rock and roll groups like the Daughtry Band. You may say, “No, Joe! They didn’t take your tract.” But yes, they did! —every single one of them! I’ve never given my tract to somebody who was famous who didn’t take it.

I want to encourage you to write your own personal tract. God will use it! Once you create it, it's a tool that you can use for life. You don't always have thirty minutes to talk to someone, but you can hand someone your tract every day.

I close with a list of Bible verses that you might consider using to effectively share the gospel. As a Christian, you are fully equipped through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to be effective in your witness. You are ready!

### **Helpful Bible Verses to Know by Heart**

- ◆ **John 3:16–17**, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”*
  
- ◆ **2 Peter 3:9**, *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*
  
- ◆ **1 Timothy 2:2-4**, *“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

- ◆ **Romans 5:8**, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*
  
- ◆ **1 John 4:9–10**, *“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*
  
- ◆ **1 Corinthians 15:3–4**, *“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”*
  
- ◆ **Ephesians 2:8–10**, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*
  
- ◆ **Mark 1:14–15**, *“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”*