

THE GOSPEL:
FOR HERE OR TO GO?

BY KEITH GILES

**A [SUBVERSIVE UNDERGROUND]
PRODUCTION**

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

KEITH GILES AT ELYSIANSKY@HOTMAIL.COM

Cover design by Scott Laumann

DEDICATION

To Wendy Giles, my dearest friend and the love of my life. Because of your amazing heart for others I have learned what it means to love and to serve with joy.

SPECIAL THANKS

To Lito & Ruthie Bujanda-Moore, Jason & Heather Wright, Todd Hunter, Dallas Willard, Greg Russinger, David Ruis, Neil Cole, Scott & Alicia Laumann, John & Lisa Wahrmond, Keith Seckel, John O'Keefe, Spencer Burke, Paul Martin, Dr. Scott Bartchy, the faithful subscribers to [Subversive Underground], our Mission House Church Family, and of course my Mom and my Dad who always believed in me and my writing.

CONTENTS

FORWARD: Neil Cole	9
INTRODUCTION: Being Missional	15
ONE: Apology	19
TWO: Make Disciples	25
THREE: Believe, Belong, Become	31
FOUR: Social Leprosy	35
FIVE: Patterns of Evangelism	41
SIX: Religion of Compassion?	47
SEVEN: Not A Christian Anymore	55
EIGHT: The Problem	61
NINE: Discovery	65
TEN: Conversation, Community, Conversion	71

ELEVEN: The Mission	77
TWELVE: The Hard Question	85
THIRTEEN: Out of the Comfort Zone	91
FOURTEEN: Doubt	97
FIFTEEN: For Here?	103
SIXTEEN: Go!	107
About The Author	111

FORWARD

By Neil Cole

Fresh Bathwater and a Baby Too!

The words we share with loved ones at the end of our lives tend to be important. That's why some have said, "Last words are lasting words." These words tend to be the thing most remembered and leave a lasting impression on those left behind.

The last words that Jesus shared with His beloved disciples before He left this planet are very important. They are so important, in fact, that they are

repeated in all four gospels and the beginning of the book of Acts.

We refer to these words as the Great Commission. You get the sense that Jesus wants us to remember them and obey them, and you would be right. Simply summarized, we are to go into all nations and, in the power of the Spirit, preach the gospel and create obedient followers of Christ starting where we are at and extending to the ends of the earth.

There are many who are speaking and writing about what the gospel is in these transitional days. The conversation is helpful because, as is often the case, for far too long we have minimized God's multifaceted and deep truth to reflect our shallow knowledge and skimpy experience. Unfortunately, in all the writings, many have extracted what was there to replace it with what wasn't. The baby has been flushed down the drain with the cloudy bath water.

Keith Giles, in this book, contributes to the conversation. One of the most important things he adds is that he has put back into the gospel the redemptive atonement and compelling need to speak the truth to others, which has been sadly lacking in many other contributions.

The DNA of the body of Christ is both profound and simple at the same time. It is expressed as:

Divine Truth: God revealing Himself to us with both a human and divine connection but perfect in its

original communication. Love the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength.

Nurturing Relationships: a building of healthy and vibrant family based on a love relationship with our Father and His Son—Jesus Christ. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Apostolic Mission: Going into the world to bring the Good News of Christ’s kingdom to those who are lost and broken. Go into all the world and make disciples.

In essence, the great commandments and the great commission summarize the most important truth for the life, health, expansion and embodiment of the kingdom of God.

It is not recommended that we add to, take from, or compartmentalize any of the DNA. It must remain whole, unpolluted and powerful together, each part informing the rest.

Unfortunately, most churches in the West are strong with either the D or the N but frankly, they need a kick in the A (apostolic mission)!

Instead, many have changed the A in the DNA to reflect “attractional mission”. Rather than going into the darkness to bring the light to the lost many have merely expected the lost to come to us.

Our approach to mission has been so shallow as to become an attempt to bring the most people possible to our Sunday morning party. This “he who dies with

the most attendance wins” approach, a hold out to the church growth era, reflects a poor understanding of the gospel, the church and the Lord of the Harvest Himself. It fosters a competitive, consumeristic environment that is toxic.

Every day small family style churches die out as their people flock to the mega-warehouse brokers of spiritual goods and services. Because some of these churches boast large attendances we assume they are successful and parade them as the best thing happening today. In fact, very few are growing because of transformed lives, but rather, they grow at the expense of smaller churches that cannot compete with the programs offered at the “Walmart-esque” mega churches in town.

We can no longer afford to cheapen the Good News for which Jesus paid the ultimate price. Jesus didn’t die so that we can have a good service on Sunday mornings. His Gospel is much more than a reason to meet for an hour and a half once a week. His Gospel is not about me, it is about Jesus, and it is given to me to give to others. As Jesus said, “Freely you have received, freely give.”

In this book, Giles gives us a healthy and helpful kick in the Apostolic Mission of the church. For me, this is a very welcome kick that can potentially send us back into a dangerous and significant presence in this world.

It seems that most writing in today's emergent church scene avoid the sharing of the Gospel and focuses on being nice people who keep their mouths shut and do good things. Giles reminds us that the message itself is worth proclaiming on the rooftops, but not at the expense of being kind people. This book manages to replace the bathwater and keep the baby.

So many focus attention today on being “incarnational” but not vocal about Christ's presence. While the word “missional” is popular, it doesn't seem to include any sort of proclamation of the Good News itself—for fear that we become unpopular. Giles shows us that we can be incarnational and missional and still break the sound barrier and share the Good News without becoming belligerent and obnoxious about it.

In fact, we cannot be incarnational or missional without the gospel. Good News is to be told as well as demonstrated.

Keith is a masterful teacher who weaves divine truth with apostolic mission in a relational manner. In this book the DNA is whole, complete and informing. Simply for this reason alone, this book will bring health and wholeness to the body of Christ. He hits on the areas where we are most out of balance and does so in a compelling manner.

We can no longer expect the professionally led programs of the mega churches to do the work of preaching the gospel for the rest of us. We must all take up our cross and follow the King into the world

and proclaim His kingdom. This book can help each of us to see this call, this great commission, as a task worthy of our lives.

Using easily understood examples and insightful commentary, Giles brings out a multi-faceted understanding of the implications of the gospel in our context.

This book is challenging, compelling and a quick read. I recommend it to all who would wish to live a life of significance and break free from the status quo of an irrelevant and unengaged life.

-Neil Cole, Long Beach, CA, January 2008

Introduction

BEING MISSIONAL: A WAY OF LIFE

You are a missionary. If you have surrendered your life to Christ and if you are now actively following Jesus, you are a missionary.

This book is intended to help you to understand what it means to be a missionary and how to have an impact on the people around you for Christ.

This is not a book about how to change the world. It's about changing your world so that God, through you, might introduce Himself to a few of the people around you.

To think of yourself as a missionary is to realize that you have a mission. Every single day of your life, wherever you are, wherever you go, you are on a mission.

This book is intended to shed some much needed light on what it means to live this way without

being false. The important thing to remember is that you are not selling anything. The Gospel is not for sale. You are not a salesman. You don't need to memorize a pitch. You will not track your success on a chart. You will not have to pretend to be someone else.

The truth is that God has made you exactly who you are. You have talents and abilities that are uniquely your own. You have interests and hobbies. You have friends and co-workers. You have interaction with all kinds of people every single day.

Where do you work? Where do you live? That is your mission field. Who are your neighbors? Who are your co-workers? That is your mission field. What do you enjoy doing? Who has God made you to be? That is all you need to worry about.

Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, wherever you are going, that is exactly where your personal mission takes place.

As I've attempted to live out my own personal calling to be a missionary where I live, I am realizing that essentially I am simply called to relate to other human beings as a human being. I am called to love people, wherever I am and whoever is in my path. That is my mission.

Conversion is not in my job description. It's not in yours either. The main thing that Jesus commanded his followers to do was to love people, to serve people and to communicate the good news of the Kingdom of

God to anyone we meet along the way. Conversion is entirely God's job, not ours.

This means we are free to surrender ourselves to His perfect plan and focus on being the people of God every single day of our lives. This is far from easy, but God promises to help us along the way.

The most important thing to remember is that God loves people far more than you or I do. He will help us to love them as He does, if we will daily surrender ourselves to His perfect will.

All we have to do is to say "Yes" to God and begin to learn from Jesus what it means to love people as He does.

Are you ready to be a missionary? Too late, you already are. You're on the mission field now. You're sending messages every day. People are watching your life whether you realize it or not.

Now let's discover how to be the missionaries God intended us to be.

Chapter 1

Apology

There's a great scene at the end of the film, "*The Big Kahuna*" where Danny DeVito's character counsels a young co-worker about his heavy-handed mode of evangelism.

He says, "*It doesn't matter whether you're selling Jesus or Buddha or civil rights or 'How to Make Money in Real Estate with No Money Down.' That doesn't make you a human being; it makes you a marketing rep. If you want to talk to somebody honestly, as a human being, ask him about his kids. Find out what his dreams are - just to find out, for no other reason. Because as soon as you lay your hands on a conversation to steer it, it's not a conversation anymore; it's a pitch. And you're not a human being; you're a marketing rep.*"

That scene sums up, for me, how the world sees the insincerity of our attempts to sell our faith the way a door-to-door salesman sells magazine subscriptions.

As a young college student, I was very passionate about Christian Apologetics. I studied numerous books that taught me how to defend my Christian faith using science, history, archaeology, and logic. I got very good at constructing arguments designed to convince the skeptic and the unbeliever that Jesus really was the Son of God and that Christianity was the only way to believe.

After several years of learning, and even teaching others, about the basics of Christianity and how to win those arguments of faith, I eventually came to a sobering realization. I realized that, in all my years of study, in all my numerous arguments about the validity of the Christian faith, I had never once argued anyone into trusting Jesus.

Along the way I did have some great theological and mentally stimulating discussions with people, but the fact was that my apologetics had not won a single person to Christ.

That's when I realized that the only apologetic that really matters is the apologetic of your life. No one can argue with your actual, personal experience. I realized that my life needed to reflect the transformational power of Jesus. If not, my logical arguments and brilliant proofs were useless. The real proof of what I was contending for was ultimately found in whether or not the Gospel had any real, transformational impact on my actual, every day life. Anything beyond that was just a mental exercise or an empty philosophical display.

I'm certainly much more secure in the grounding of my faith due to the hours spent studying apologetics. There's nothing wrong with knowing what you believe and why you believe it. But what is best for others, and especially for my own personal spiritual development, is for me to actually live out the Gospel in my daily life. The best apologetic possible is for me to share my personal struggles, failures, experiences and insights with others as I follow Jesus every single day.

This is what the Apostle Peter had in mind when he exhorted the early disciples of Jesus, in 1 Peter 3:15, to “*..always be ready to give an answer, a reason for the hope that lies within.*” This passage was written with the underlying assumption that the people he was writing to were living radically transformational lives within the culture they were part of. We know this is so because of what we see in both of Peter's epistles to the Church, and also in the book of Acts. We also know this by looking at the first three hundred years of Church History.

The early followers of Jesus were living lives that were extremely different from those of the pagan world around them. Because of this, Peter encourages them to be ready to explain why they cared for lepers, and fed pagan widows, and shared personal belongings with anyone in need.

These days I fear we in the Church have largely lost this sense of living a different sort of life from those around us. We are not often found acting out

such unbridled compassion to strangers, or caught in the act of serving others as Jesus commanded.

We have been given a high calling to carry the Gospel of the Kingdom to the ends of the Earth. At the very least we must begin by taking this same Gospel to the end of our street, or to the house next door.

We are the people God has chosen to carry the message of hope to a dying world. We are all called to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. We are expected to be salt and light wherever we are. How are we accomplishing this?

Early on in my Christian walk I heard the phrase, “The Gospel came to you on its way to someone else.” If so, the very next question is whether or not the Gospel has traveled onward to the next person in the chain. Have we passed the baton? Have we shared freely with others what was so freely given to us?

If not, why? What prevents us from sharing the Good News? I suspect it has something to do with the models we’ve been given. Most of us are not cut out to confront people with clever witnessing tracts at the shopping mall. We do not feel comfortable approaching total strangers to sell them something they probably don’t want in the first place. We are paralyzed by our fear.

Wouldn’t it be great if there were a more natural way to share our faith with others? Wouldn’t

you be relieved to discover that God's expectation of you was simply to be who He made you to be?

Over the years I've learned to jettison the sales pitch version of evangelism in favor of a more natural method. If we can become more effective carriers of the Gospel message, if we can begin to live our lives as God intended us to live, I believe we can have a greater impact on our world for Christ.

This book aims to clear up a lot of misconceptions we may have about evangelism. I believe Jesus really had something exceptional in mind when He taught His disciples to be salt and light to the world and commanded them to go and make disciples.

This is a journey I have only just begun, but I invite you to come along with me and discover what it really means to be a missionary in your neighborhood, at your work, and in your everyday life.

Chapter 2

Make Disciples

In the closing words of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus leaves us with what has become known as “The Great Commission.” In it, Jesus charges His disciples with a set of tasks until He returns.

Here’s what Jesus commands us to do:

- 1) Go out into the world and make disciples.
- 2) Baptize these disciples in the name of the Trinity.
- 3) Teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded us.

If we take a moment to evaluate how we, the Church, have done in accomplishing these tasks, I think we might see where we’ve missed the mark, and hopefully discover a few clues about how to get back on track.

GO OUT

First, we're called to go. It seems simple enough, but what frustrates me is how often I see us in the Church flipping things around the other way.

For the most part, the organized Church has built a model of evangelism and discipleship that says, "Come to us."

We build large buildings, we buy plasma television screens to announce our upcoming events, we host large-scale musicals and plays to dramatize the Gospel, and we instruct our members to invite their friends to Church so that the professional clergy can do the evangelizing.

I'm not trying to say that these methods are wrong or evil, but just that we've taken a very simple and clear command to go and made it into a call for the world to come to us- to our house, with our rules, on our terms. This just isn't what Jesus commanded us to do.

Jesus very easily could have commanded us to create appealing environments where the world felt welcome. He could have commanded us to make space for unbelievers to show up and meet us on our terms, but He didn't. What He commanded us to do was to go out and, in the course of our everyday, regular life, communicate and live out the message of the Gospel to those we encounter along the way.

MAKE DISCIPLES

Secondly, Jesus commands us to make disciples. A disciple is someone who is daily, intentionally following Jesus with their whole life.

A disciple is not a convert. If you take a look at how our local churches practice evangelism you'll probably see a lot of emphasis placed on winning people to Christ, getting them to come forward in the meeting to make a public profession of faith, and not as much emphasis on taking them from this first step into all the other steps that follow.

As one example, I recently came across a very helpful tool called "The Engel's Scale" which charts the slow progression by degrees of those who are far from God and how they slowly come to faith in Christ over time and with the assistance of loving friends and the Holy Spirit.

What I found troubling about the scale was that it stopped at conversion. As if, after the conversion experience, we no longer had any need to chart their ongoing development and discipleship to Jesus.

Again, the entire emphasis was on conversion, not on discipleship.

I understand that there are exceptions to this over-emphasis on conversion within the Body of Christ, and for that I am very grateful. I'm simply pointing out that, at least as far as I have seen, most modern American churches seem to focus entirely too much on conversion and not enough on discipleship,

which is expressly what Jesus commanded us to focus on.

Conversion is essential, for obvious reasons, but discipleship is central to our calling. We need to return to the basic instructions of Our Lord and begin to make disciples.

OBEY JESUS

Thirdly, Jesus commands us in the Great Commission to “teach them to obey everything I have commanded.” I find this part the most painful to explore. Simply put, I have never once encountered a church or a ministry where the main goal was to emphasize the commands of Jesus or to communicate a strong expectation of obedience for those who would call themselves disciples of Jesus.

If you want to know whether or not the Church has been obedient in the third section of The Great Commission, just ask yourself if you can name all of the commands of Jesus. If you don’t know what all of these commands are, you not only cannot teach others to obey them, you yourself cannot obey them.

Jesus had an expectation that those who would follow him would...well...*follow* him.

Obedience to Jesus is not an optional activity for disciples. Over and over again Jesus spoke about how those who love him would obey his commands.

His unwavering invitation was for disciples who would take his words seriously and put them into practice.

For the Gospel to become a living reality to those around us, it must become a living reality to those of us who have decided to make Jesus our Lord and Savior.

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus responded by saying, *“The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; and the second is like the first; you should love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matthew 22:37-39)

Without embracing the Great Commandment, we can never hope to accomplish the Great Commission. This is why Paul the Apostle tells us that, without love, all that we strive to do for the Kingdom is meaningless and empty. (see 1 Corinthians 13).

We have to love people because they are people that Jesus loves. We have to learn to love people unconditionally- to love others as He loved us.

Until we get really, really good at this, all our efforts to evangelize and to make disciples will appear hollow and empty.

Chapter 3

Believe, Belong, Become

Someone once told me that every single human being has a desire to believe something, to become something and to belong to something. As we enter into relationship with others we need to listen for the clues to where people are at in this process.

Ask people questions about what they believe, find out what they are searching to belong to, help them to come to grips with what they want to become.

In some cases, the answers to these questions will be very practical. Some people want to become a nurse, or a mechanic. Others may want to become significant or necessary. A few people we talk to will reveal that they want to belong to a family, or a discussion group. We may even find that some are already identified with people who share their viewpoint. Until we engage people in real, honest relationship we'll never discover the answers to these

questions, and we cannot help others find their own answers to these questions.

If nothing else, you can start your conversation by saying, “You know, I was reading the other day about how everyone wants to believe, belong to, and become something. What do you think about that?”

Let the Holy Spirit guide things from there and see where things go.

GARDNER VS WARRIOR

Another useful concept for me lately has been the understanding that there are two different styles of evangelism we can employ. As described in Spencer Burke’s book, *“Making Sense of Church,”* the two styles are “Warrior” and “Gardener”.

The “Warrior” model is the predominant method that I have been trained in over the course of my Christian life. This model uses ideas like closing the deal, winning the lost, and targeting sinners, as if they were deer on the other end of our hunting rifle.

Our mindset, in this model, is squarely centered on results, and often we expect the result to come sooner rather than later. If we take a shot and miss, we simply move on to the next target and take a shot at another one.

Granted, this sort of evangelism style has been largely successful in bringing hundreds of thousands of people into faith in Christ over the years. Perhaps, again, our focus has been so centered on conversion

that many have fallen through the cracks, but over the decades of the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies especially, this “Bag’em and Tag’em” mode of evangelism netted scores of new converts.

I think in today’s culture this warrior form of evangelism is a dead-end. If anything, it does more damage to the Gospel than good, in my opinion. The reason why is that, honestly, we’ve gotten so good at blasting out the message that “Jesus Loves You” and “Jesus Died For Your Sins” that the world is tired of hearing it. What they want now is to *see* it.

They want to see, with their eyes, if what we say is true, and they are looking at the lives of those who identify themselves as followers of Jesus to find the evidence.

The “Gardener” model of evangelism takes a much different approach. Like a farmer or a gardener who plants, waters and protects the growing things in their care, we need to recognize that making the plant produce fruit is not our job. Gardeners recognize that they are simply cooperating with the natural process of growth inherent in the creation.

This does not mean that the gardener does nothing, far from it. As anyone who has tended a garden knows, success depends on daily attention and care, but the bloom and the fruit will come in due time. These things cannot be forced or coerced. They must be allowed to occur in an organic and natural way.

To apply this to evangelism, it means trusting that God loves people more than we do. It means daily placing our attention on the lives and spiritual development of those whom we are in contact with.

Our goal is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He urges us to love people into the Kingdom of God. This means we'll be invested in their lives for the long haul. We're not to love them because we want to push them into our way of thinking. We are to love them simply because God loves them. We have to demonstrate to people that we are committed to love them in tangible ways so that when we say, "Jesus Loves You", they might have good reason to believe it might actually be true.

Chapter 4

Social Leprosy

In the book of John, Jesus prays for those who would follow His teachings after He ascended into heaven. What I find fascinating is that Jesus began by praying for what He didn't want to pray. Yeah, it sounds strange, doesn't it?

Why would anyone ever start praying by asking God for what they were *not* asking? Maybe the clue is in what it was that Jesus didn't pray. He says, "*I pray not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the Evil One.*" (John 17:15)

Why did Jesus pray this way? I think it's because He understood human nature and He knew that, soon after His ascension, we would want to remove ourselves from the world around us.

We're not comfortable hanging out with *those sinners*. More often than not, we treat the lost, those outside the Church, as if they had some sort of "Social

Leprosy”. We’re afraid we’ll catch what they’ve got, so we avoid contact with them. Instead, we create Christian versions of the world so that we never have to interact with these “Social Lepers”. We have our own Christian Radio Stations, Christian Yellow Pages, Christian Coffee Shops, Christian Book Stores, and all sorts of private avenues where our contact with non-Christians is mercifully minimized.

I’m convicted when I realize that Jesus didn’t even treat people who had *actual* leprosy this way, and yet I treat those who think differently than I do as if they had some infectious disease that I might catch if I’m exposed to them for any extended period of time.

Jesus expected that His disciples would be salt and light in the world, not hiding under a basket waiting for the second coming.

Paul the Apostle echoed the prayer of Jesus when he instructed the Christians in Corinth about their interactions with non-believers-

“I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people; not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.”

(1 Corinthians 5:9-10)

Have we removed ourselves from the world? If so, we've allowed the Enemy to pacify us into complacency. It's time to awaken from our slumber and burst out of our Christian bubble.

If we are to be the people of God, we must go to where the people are, not expect them to come to us on our terms.

SALVATION IS A PROCESS, NOT AN EVENT

One thing I find fascinating as I study the New Testament and the practice of the early church is that their concept of salvation was much different than mine. When I think of salvation, I usually think of that one day when, as a nine year old boy, I walked forward and prayed with my pastor to ask Jesus into my heart. However, Peter and Paul seemed to have a different view of salvation. In their minds, salvation was an ongoing experience, not a one-time deal.

"..And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

(Acts 2:42-47)

"For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

(1 Peter 1:9)

When we begin to think of Salvation as a process, and not an event, it changes the way we think of Evangelism.

The early church fathers also had a great saying that has come to inspire my own faith. The statement was “*Conversatio Morem!*” which can mean either “*Death To The Status Quo!*” or “*Constant Conversion!*” depending on the context.

This phrase was indicative of the mindset held by the early church fathers that salvation, or conversion, was something every disciple needed to experience constantly, not just a one-time event or a single point in time.

In my own spiritual life I know I need to daily acknowledge my need for Christ and for transformation.

THE FINISH LINE OR THE STARTING LINE?

In your own experience, what happens when someone you’ve been praying for and witnessing to finally accepts Christ as Lord and Savior? Don’t you cheer and weep and give high-fives to all your Christian friends? Sure you do. That’s an appropriate response. Even the Scriptures tell us that the angels in heaven celebrate when someone is saved. (Luke 15:7-10)

However, our response and attention usually diminishes soon after this event. I believe it’s because, for us, our work is done. Our friend has “made it”.

They are “in”. They’ve crossed the finish line and we can all move on with our lives now.

But, if Salvation is a process, and not an event or a point in time, then our work is *not* done. Our friend has not come to the end of the journey. Instead, our friend has only just begun.

In other words, Salvation is not the finish line, it is the starting line. If we begin to think of Salvation in this way, as an ongoing, daily commitment to following the marvelous person of Jesus, it will have a radical effect on our methods of evangelism and the way we treat those we hope to lead into this way of life.

Chapter 5

Patterns of Evangelism

One thing that's also helpful to me is to realize that, contrary to popular opinion, there is not a formula to evangelism found in the New Testament. Several times in the Gospels we see various people who come to Jesus and ask point blank, "What must I do to be saved?" One of the most shocking things is that Jesus never gives the answer that all of us have been trained to give. Not once. Jesus never says, "Confess your sins, believe in me and repeat this prayer after me."

What we see is that Jesus gave a different answer to this question every single time. He never gave the same answer twice. It's as if Jesus goes out of His way to demonstrate to us that evangelism needs to be done in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, being sensitive to the specific heart of the one person we are speaking to, and not applying the cookie cutter approach to preaching the Gospel.

Let's look briefly at the various answers Jesus gives to those who approached Him asking about what must be done to inherit eternal life and see what we can learn from Him.

To Zaccheus Jesus simply acknowledges him in the crowd, invites himself to dinner and when Zaccheus repents of skimming from the taxes he's collected, Jesus proclaims that salvation has come to his household.

In the case of the Rich Young Ruler, Jesus commands him to sell everything he has, give it to the poor and become a disciple under Jesus. The man refuses and is allowed to walk away, seemingly unconverted.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, is told he must be born a second time. This confuses him and Jesus does little to explain what He means, leaving the teacher of the Law to work it out on his own time.

The Woman at the Well is boldly confronted with the promiscuous lifestyle she's been living and yet never feels offended or condemned by Jesus throughout the conversation.

Finally, the thief on the cross is converted and welcomed into Paradise simply for realizing that Jesus was the promised Messiah. His only part in the process seems to be the amazing good fortune of being crucified for his crimes on the same day as the Son of God.

Many other examples of salvation in the New Testament reflect this same lack of pattern and tailor-made response to the Gospel message.

How does your personal conversion experience compare to these found in the New Testament? Do you see a common pattern in your own story?

When I look at this amazing variety of conversion experiences in Scripture it really puzzles me as to why we've made evangelism so predictable and uninteresting.

What's more, our focus on evangelism seems to be in asking whether or not someone knows if they would go to heaven if they were to die tonight? If anything, it seems the basic questions being asked by Jesus and His disciples dealt with what one would do if they knew for a fact that they'd be alive tomorrow. The real question seems to be, "If you were alive tomorrow, who would you follow and how would you live your life?"

Are we asking the wrong questions?

HAVE YOU EVER FALLEN IN LOVE?

If you've ever fallen in love you know that it's a scary, delicate and uncertain process. Sometimes we get it right, sometimes we get in the way of the natural progression of things. Other times we fall in love and we can't even fully explain how and when it really happened. All we know is that one day we woke up and realized that we could not live without this other

person in our lives. There is no science to the process of falling in love.

What I think we fail to realize is that, conversion to Christ is really a process of falling in love with Jesus over a period of time. When we attempt to make conversion to Christ a process that involves a series of pre-determined steps and a progression of words, or a specific prayer, we have seriously interfered with the process. Falling in love is something that is far outside our ability to grasp and it's impossible for us to coordinate this from the outside.

I can remember when I fell in love with my wife, Wendy, back in college. I can remember that first time I ever saw her. I was sitting on a bus that was headed for a leadership conference across the State. Several of us were attending this event with an on-campus student ministry. That's when Wendy walked into my life. She boarded the bus with her blue-jean backpack slung over her shoulder. Her beautiful blonde hair was pulled back into a ponytail, exposing her gorgeous blue eyes and her wide, wonderful smile.

As she walked towards my seat and eventually sat in front of me I remember thinking, "Wow. Who is she? I've not seen her around campus before."

Before the bus left the parking lot she and I were engaged in small talk. By the time the bus got in motion, however, we had both settled back into our seats. We barely interacted for the rest of the trip.

A few weeks later I joined the drama group she was leading, just to be near her. Over the next few months I got to know her better. Our first few dates were awkward and we very nearly abandoned our relationship because of the difficulties we were having with communication and trust. But one night we spent a few hours on the phone talking things out and ended up praying together that God would either bless our relationship, if it was “meant to be”, or let it die since it wasn’t going so great anyway. After that night our relationship improved dramatically.

After formally dating for a few months I asked her to marry me and a year later we were married.

Now, what if I took my own personal experience of falling in love and created a formula by which all others who wanted to fall in love must follow? Would that make any sense? Would that be wise? Would it work?

Hopefully we can plainly see that to expect everyone to fall in love the way that we fell in love is ridiculous. Yet, in the Church we have formulated a process for falling in love with Jesus based entirely on tradition, and if people miss a few steps along the way we are quick to point out that they have failed to fall in love with Him in the acceptable way.

Doesn’t this seem foolish? My prayer is that we will begin to see evangelism, and conversion, and discipleship to Jesus as an organic, creative, and

miraculous process, as mysterious and marvelous as falling in love.

Chapter 6

Religion of Compassion?

One of the most disheartening things, when you listen to non-believers talk about why they are not followers of Jesus, is to hear things like, “My boss is a Christian and he’s the meanest person I know,” or “Our neighbors are Christians but they are just as screwed up as we are, why would I want to join them?”

One thing that’s clear when we look at the early church is the fact that they were living radically different lives from the Jews and pagans around them. It was the curiosity such living provoked that drew the majority of early converts towards the “Jesus way of life”.

Early Christians did not pass out printed tracts about salvation, they did not market their religion, and everyone knew that to join them meant becoming an outcast within the culture, possibly even arrested and put to death because of aligning oneself with Christ.

Yet the early church grew by leaps and bounds. Hundreds of thousands of people gave up their lives to follow this Jesus, in spite of the lack of evangelistic crusades and the threat of persecution. Why is that?

Many scholars are convinced that the lifestyle of those first and second century disciples was, in itself, the main reason. Some even suggest that their lives of service to the poor and their inclusive nature was as important as the miracles performed in their midst by the Apostles, perhaps even more important.

Historian Henry Chadwick, for example, attributes the practical application of Christian charity as the “most potent single cause of Christian success in the ancient world” and German theologian George Krestschmar has said that it was not so much the miraculous signs and wonders that followed the early church but the unbelievable conduct of the Christians that had such an impact on the world of its day. He calls this, “the propaganda of the deed” where the generosity of the early church spoke louder than the word of doctrine or the healing of the infirmed.

It was the overwhelmingly generous lifestyle of those early believers that transformed the world and overcame the threat of horrific persecution. Their lives demonstrated that Christ was more than powerful enough to change their hearts and the evidence of this power was their ongoing care for others.

The sad truth is that, in our day, especially here in America, the line separating the pagan and the self-proclaimed Christian is difficult to see.

You don't have to read too many Barna or Gallup polls to see that attending church services and proclaiming oneself to be "Born Again" doesn't automatically make any noticeable difference in the sort of life you may live on a daily basis. Many experts on Church Growth and Evangelism see a direct correlation between the lower ethical standards of those who claim to be Christian and the kind of evangelism we've been practicing for the last century.

"They've simply believed the story we told them," says Todd Hunter, President of ALPHA Ministries USA. "We've made the story of the Gospel reductive in the absurd," he says. "It's like that old bumper sticker that says, 'Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven'. Is that all we are? Just Forgiven? What about living a life of radical transformation where we are learning to live our lives like Jesus?"

Granted, the sound-byte culture we live in has encouraged the Church to present a watered-down version of the Gospel to the world around us. Most have heard our story over and over again and have decided that it doesn't work.

The real question is what sort of Christianity are we calling people to? Are we really calling people to surrender their lives to Christ? Do we even really know what we mean when we say this?

Sadly, most of us do not think of conversion as a surrendered life to Jesus as our Lord and our Savior. Most of us think of salvation as the answer to the question, “If you died tonight do you know you’d be in heaven tomorrow?” and perhaps the better question we should ask is, “If you knew you’d be alive tomorrow (and most of us will be), then whom would you follow and how would you live your life?”

Christianity is a way of life. Jesus calls us to die to ourselves in order to walk in this path.

Maybe we’re asking the wrong questions? If so, we’re offering the wrong answers too. This would explain why the majority of people, both inside and outside the Church, misunderstand what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Nothing illustrates this better than a comment made by the son of former President Ronald Reagan after the death of his famous father.

In a New York Times exclusive interview, Ronald Reagan Jr. was asked about his outspokenly Christian father and his own opinion of Christianity in general. Here’s what he said:

Q: Now that the country is awash in Reagan nostalgia, some observers are predicting that you will enter politics. Would you like to be president of the United States?

RRJ: I would be unelectable. I'm an atheist. As we all know, that is something people won't accept.

Q: Do you ever go to church?

RRJ: No. I visit my wife's sangha.

Q: So you sometimes practice Buddhism?

RRJ: I don't claim anything. But my sympathies would be in that direction. I admire the fact that the central core of Buddhist teaching involves mindfulness and loving kindness and compassion. ... One thing that Buddhism teaches you is that every moment is an opportunity to change.

The sad truth is that, in the private life of his Christian father, Ron Jr. saw nothing about Christianity that felt real to him, or relevant. Furthermore, he didn't think of Christianity as a religion that promoted compassion or loving kindness.

While we might blame the first part on Ron Junior's parents, we have to take the blame for the second part ourselves.

It would have been virtually impossible for an unbeliever living in those first three hundred years of

Church History to ever reject Christianity on the grounds that it lacked compassionate people or failed to teach loving kindness.

In fact, we have testimony from many of the most hostile pagans who lived during the first three hundred years of Christianity who were put to shame because of the overwhelming generosity of the Church. Julian, the Apostate wrote of this frustrating situation when he said, *“the godless Galileans feed not only their poor, but ours also.”*

Christian philosopher Aristides (125 AD) wrote about the radical charity of the early Church also, recording the fact that, *“...if there is among them a man that is poor and needy and they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast for three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.”*

Radical compassion indeed. Where have we gone wrong? Perhaps we’ve forgotten that our first and greatest command was to love?

GHANDI ON CHRIST

One quote which has always haunted me comes from a great man of peace named Mohatmas Gandhi who said this about Jesus Christ; *“(He was) a man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.”*

As encouraging as those words may be however, Gandhi had little good to say about those who call themselves the followers of Jesus. *“I like*

your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ. If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today.”

Have we missed our opportunity to change a nation for Christ because of our inability to live out the Gospel on a daily basis? Can we afford to miss another opportunity like this?

THE WAY BACK

Mike Pilavachi, the founder of Soul Survivor Ministries, uses a great illustration of our modern evangelistic efforts when he describes the Church as a great castle that, out of guilt, lowers the drawbridge annually to embark on an evangelistic crusade.

Traveling in large groups, (for safety), we pass out tracts, launch “Bible Bombs” at people, play Christian music or perform pre-recorded puppet shows for those poor, lost people.

Somehow, by sheer luck, we manage to convince one or two of them to pray a prayer and join us inside the castle where we raise the drawbridge and begin to teach them our quirky “Christianese” so that, a year later when we launch out again, they can’t talk to non-Christians either.

It may be funny, in some ways, but it’s the sad truth. We have to change the way we think of non-Christians and we have to start changing our approach now.

First, I believe we need to lose the “drawbridge” mentality. The Church in current times desperately needs to stop treating non-believers as if they have social leprosy. We need to lower our defenses and learn to express the love of Jesus in practical ways to those in need.

Secondly, we need to expand our concept of evangelism to include an intentional discipleship to this person known as Jesus. As long as discipleship is optional, all our efforts at evangelism will lack the necessary proof that the kind of life Jesus offers is worth a dime.

Finally, we have to take the calling to love others personally. It’s not “The Church” that needs to have a reformation of the heart, it’s you and I- because you and I *are* the Church. We are the Body of Christ.

If we want to change the way “The Church” behaves, we can only effect change in our own hearts and minds.

Chapter 7

Not a Christian Anymore

"I don't call myself a Christian anymore," John said. The passengers in the car with him all turned their heads and blinked. "What do you mean," the driver asked, "You mean you're not a Christian?"

John turned to the driver and shook his head. "No, I mean if a Christian is someone that claims they are following Christ, but is ok with living a worldly lifestyle, or is someone who has no concern for the needy and the poor, then that's not a person I want to be associated with. When people hear the word 'Christian', what they think of is the televangelist conning old women out of their social security money, or some guy in a three-piece suit telling people that God wants to make them rich. That's not what a Christian is to me," he said.

John had spent the weekend with these three other gentlemen on a fishing trip to the mountains.

None of them were very close friends, but they shared a common love of fishing, and a faith in Christ. At least that's what they had all assumed at the beginning of their trip.

"You can't do that," the driver said. John looked over at the man. "Do what?"

"You can't just decide to stop calling yourself a Christian because you don't want to be associated with a certain group of people," the driver said.

John smiled and said, "Why not? I mean, on the other hand I don't think any of us measure up to what a real, Biblical Christian looks like. When I read the book of Acts and I see their radical compassion for the poor and their willingness to sell property and possessions to share with anyone in need, I'm blown away because I'm not even close to having that kind of faith in God," he said. "What right do I have, do any of us have, to compare ourselves to people like that who had faith to give up everything to follow Jesus?"

As the discussion raged on, one of the four men sat quietly in the back seat and stared out the window. He was not much of a talker by nature, as the rest of them had already discovered early on in their weekend together. After the storm of dialog had quieted down he cleared his throat and said, "I'm like you, John. I call myself a Christian too, but I'm not a loving person. I don't love my wife the way I should," he said.

The other men in the car looked at one another, and then looked away in the silence of the car. John

felt his eyes filling with tears for this man in the backseat. He knew that it was a very brave thing to admit, especially to a car full of acquaintances, but because of John's willingness to confess his weakness, this gentleman had found the courage to admit his own tendency to fall short of the Glory of God.

As John relayed this story to me, I was touched and challenged by what had transpired in that car. First, I was very proud of my friend for having the courage to say those sorts of things and provoke that sort of conversation. We could all use a bit more raw honesty in our lives, and this is the sort of thing I believe James had in mind when he said, "*Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.*" (James 5:16)

Secondly, I was inspired by the wisdom of John's statement concerning our identity as followers of Jesus. I whole-heartedly agree with him on both counts. The idea of someone equating what I believe and practice in my faith with what transpires on 99% of Christian Television makes me sick to my stomach. The last thing I'd want is for someone to hear that I'm a Christian and assume that I'm in favor of what these self-proclaimed spokespeople for Jesus spew out over the airwaves daily. At the same time, when the Bible describes the character of those earliest Christians, I am humbled by their radical compassion and somewhat ashamed to compare my life to theirs.

What if we all stopped identifying ourselves as Christians? What would we say the next time a co-

worker asks us about our faith? How would we describe what we believe to a stranger at a party or that person next to us on the airplane?

Here's what I think I'll say from now on; "I have been fascinated lately with the person of Jesus. So, I've been reading books about his teachings, especially the Gospels, and doing my best to follow his wisdom in every area of my life."

It seriously excites me now to think about my next encounter of this sort. Imagine the honest conversation you can have with someone by simply identifying yourself as someone who is fascinated with Jesus.

Personally, I can't wait to introduce myself as someone who is curious about the teachings of Jesus and who is learning how to put his words into practice. I think this is a far more compelling response to someone who inquires about our faith. Much more so than simply saying, "I am a Christian" which instantly polarizes everyone, shuts down any hope of conversation and creates an "Us vs Them" environment.

From this day forward, if anyone asks me about my faith, I want it to be known that I am not a Christian, at least not in the sense that it has come to be understood. Today, I am a follower of Jesus. I am someone who is fascinated with the person and teaching of Jesus and I am doing my best to put His words into practice.

I am not a Christian. I am a follower of Jesus.
The saddest truth is that those two things aren't
necessarily the same.

Chapter 8

The Problem

In many ways, the Church in America has created its own problem. We have retreated into the safety and comfort of our own little sub-culture. We've re-made the world in our image and have been content to exist within this artificial reality while we pray for our Savior to come back soon, judge this sinful world, and lead us into everlasting joy.

The problem with the Christian Subculture is that it isolates us from the world we're supposed to have a positive influence on.

One by-product of the Christian Subculture is the sense of antagonism it creates. The "Us vs Them" mentality begins to dominate our thoughts from behind our wall of safety and comfort.

Keep in mind that most of this "comfort" and "safety" is made up of materialistic goods and services, as if our descent into Christian Consumerism would

ever hope to change us, or the World around us in any way.

We've probably all had the opportunity to hear this mentality verbalized as something like, *"If only those sinners would get saved, the world would be a much better place."*

You can substitute the word "sinner" for anything such as "Homosexual", "Liberal", "Atheist", "Agnostic", "Criminal", etc. It really doesn't matter what word you place in that sentence. The heart of the matter is still the same. We, who call ourselves followers of Jesus, tend to point the finger and shake our heads and blame the moral decay of our nation on *"Those People"* who are not like us.

The idea being that, if there were more people in the world just like us, then everything would be perfect...because of course, we are so much better than all of *"Those People"* who are not good like we are.

In 2 Chronicles, chapter 7, verse 14, we read a most interesting idea set forth by God Himself. This passage is not uncommon among those who call themselves followers of Jesus. We quote it now and again, but I suspect we miss the real point that is being made more often than not.

God says, *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

Did you see it? God speaks to those who are "*called by (His) name*" and says that the healing of their land, their Nation, is held back because of their own lack of humility, their own lack of prayer, and their own unwillingness to seek His face.

It's amazing to me that God holds *His own people* accountable for the healing of their land. What He says needs to happen first is that we humble ourselves. That means we don't use statements like "*If only those people would be more like us, everything would be wonderful.*" Humble people don't talk like that, or think that way either.

I hate to break it to you, but God will not hold the Homosexual Agenda accountable for the Spiritual health and direction of this nation. He will hold you and I responsible.

Next, he calls us to pray, and I would suggest that in this context what we need to pray for is our own hearts to be changed and softened and melted. We need to humble ourselves first, and then second we need to pray for forgiveness and repent of our pride.

Remember, "*God opposes the proud, but gives Grace to the humble.*" (*Proverbs 3:34*) I don't know about you, but I'd rather that God give me Grace than that He oppose me.

After we pray, God asks us to seek His face. This means that we remain humble, we stay on our knees, and we submit ourselves to Him and His perfect will for our lives.

Finally, God asks that those who are called by His name "*turn from their wicked ways*".

This is sobering stuff. At face value it would appear that it is *our sin* that is holding back the healing of our nation, not the sin of "*those people*". If this is true, then we will have more to answer for than we have expected when this life is over and our lives are laid open before God at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Has our sin, our pride, our lack of humility or submission to God prevented our nation from being blessed and healed and restored? Simply put, this verse suggests that we are the problem, not "*those people*".

Repentance is not an option, then. It is a necessity. Not just for our own salvation and spiritual health, but for the health of this nation.

Our insistence upon huddling together against the big bad world has disqualified us from our calling to be salt and light in the culture around us.

We have allowed our craving for safety and comfort to lure us away from our calling as followers of Christ. We've isolated ourselves from the world we were supposed to change.

Let the humility, the prayer, the repentance, and the submission, begin. Time is short.

Chapter 9

Discovery

My friend Paul was sharing with me a story about a recent trip to the mountains where he had an odd spiritual experience. It all started while walking with some of his friends along mountain trails on their way to an overnight camp out. As he was crossing over a stream along the way he randomly picked up a rock to take along with him, something he did quite often on treks such as this one.

It wasn't a particularly interesting or colorful rock. He really had no specific motive for picking it up initially other than that it was black and it felt good in his hands. Almost reflexively he pulled the rock from the cold water, dried it on his shirt, and placed it in his pants pocket as they continued up out of the stream and up along a newfound trail.

As the group of friends made their way up the mountain they happened to pass an older gentleman

coming down the same trail. After a brief bit of friendly chit-chat one of Paul's friends asked the older man if he had any words of wisdom for their group.

"You mean, like a mantra or something?" the old man asked. "Yeah, something like that," Paul's friend said. The older gentleman took a short moment to reflect and then he said, "I've got just two words for you," he said. "The first is 'Immanuel', and the second one is 'Maranatha'." The group nodded their heads and smiled, and after a bit more chit-chat the two groups parted.

As they continued walking, the conversation in Paul's group shifted to discuss the meaning of the words the older gentleman had shared with them. No one was certain what they meant, but Paul made a point to remember them so he could look them up when he got back home.

Eventually the group arrived at the cabin where they had planned to spend the evening. One of the women in the group asked Paul if he had ever prayed before. He said that he sometimes meditated in the mornings, but had really never prayed before. Something about the interaction with the old man made him feel like he should start to pray, or at least to try, the next time he was enjoying his morning meditation.

That very next morning, Paul woke up and went about his usual routine of meditation. He began to think about what had happened the previous day,

and did his best to pray about those words and what meaning, if any, they might have for him. He was also holding on to the rock he had found in the stream the day before. The rock that he had selected at random and placed almost absently into his pocket was nestled into the palm of his right hand as he sat, eyes closed, on the floor.

Suddenly Paul felt the urge to open his hand to look closer at the rock. As he opened his hand and looked at it closer he almost did a double-take. There, clearly and naturally formed across one side of the stone was the unmistakable form of a cross.

Paul sat silently and looked at the rock. He wondered now even more about the meaning of the events of the previous day.

Sitting in my living room, telling me this story, Paul pulled out the rock and handed it to me. I was amazed at his story, and even more amazed to actually hold this rock in my hands.

The shape of the cross was unmistakable, but clearly not man-made at all. The shape had been formed along the surface eons ago when the rock was first formed, and etched by the constant erosion of the stream it had been pulled from only weeks earlier. Now it was in my hand and I could easily imagine what Paul must have felt when he first opened his hand and realized the significance of the stone and the image that marked it.

I was reminded of the Proverb that says, *"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, and the glory of Kings to search it out."* (Proverbs 25:2)

Paul and I discussed the method that Jesus used to teach people about the Kingdom of God during his ministry on Earth, how He told stories that made people wonder and how He never seemed to answer a question unless it was with a question of his own.

Paul had been given a riddle of sorts and now had the privilege to work out what it all meant. Paul shared with me that, so far, all he knew for certain was that he was supposed to tell his story to people, and not just anyone, but people who would be likely to appreciate it. I felt honored to hold this stone in my hand and to have heard Paul's amazing story. It was with some reluctance that I handed the stone back to him.

In his search for the meaning of this experience, Paul had printed out the Wikipedia definitions of the words "Immanuel" and "Maranatha" and he unfolded the papers and passed them to me. He and I talked about these words and I expressed to him my sincere curiosity regarding his journey to discover the meaning of this rock that had found him in the stream.

In many ways I envied my friend Paul for his opportunity to learn the meaning of this mysterious rock and the two corresponding words left to him by a stranger on the side of a mountain.

As far as I could see, Paul had been given the words, "Immanuel" (which means 'God with us') and "Maranatha" (which means 'He has come'). He had been given a rock with a very obvious cross on it to accentuate those two words. A rock which he would not have picked up had they crossed the stream a few feet to the right or to the left, and which he admits he might not have picked up at all considering the randomness of his choice of stones there in the stream. He was also encouraged by his friend to pray and that next morning all of these various elements converged together to spark his imagination and his journey of discovery regarding the meaning of the message.

This is why Jesus loved to use parables to teach his disciples, so that when the meaning was finally discovered, the person would own the truth and treasure the revelation. When someone gives you the answer you don't value the information as much. When you're handed the keys you lose the thrill of the chase and the joy of discovery.

I pray that even more people will discover a stone in the stream or cross paths with wise old men bearing clues to the journey of life. We all need more questions to work out with fear and trembling. We all need to seek the Truth.

Maybe the clues are already all around us?
Maybe we're just not paying enough attention?

All creation cries out and pours forth speech,
day and night. Sometimes even the rocks cry out.

Chapter 10

Conversation, Community, Conversion

While it's already been established that Jesus had no real formula when it came to evangelism, it does seem that there are several guiding principles that can help us in our pursuit of a more missional way of life.

The first thing we see is the absence of an “any size fits all” approach to sharing the Gospel message. Instead, Jesus employed a tailor-made, “this is just for you” style of evangelism. He took the time to get to know people. He listened to them speak first. He spent hours in prayer with the Father, and when it came time to answer the question, “What must I do to be saved?” He communicated the necessary information in a way that the person asking could understand and receive the truth.

The only formula I can see, at a very basic level, begins with conversation. We have to learn to communicate well with others. The first and greatest secret of good conversation is simply utilizing your listening skills. People want to share what's in their heart with someone who genuinely cares to know. We have to develop a heart for others and that begins with knowing them in an intimate way.

We can't learn to really know someone or begin to love them until we've listened to them.

I've always loved the phrase, *"Listening to someone is so much like loving them that most people can't tell the difference."* It's true.

We can fulfill the command of Jesus to love others simply by closing our mouths and laying aside our prepared speeches and evangelistic jargon in order to listen to the people around us with sincere compassion.

So, we begin with conversation, which at some point leads to community. By this I mean that, as we listen to others we begin to develop a sense of commonality. We identify the areas where we have things in common and as we build on these we soon discover a bond which goes beyond casual acquaintance and moves into friendship.

Through this ongoing relationship we eventually earn the right to be heard by them. Because we've spent so much time listening to what is in their heart, we develop credibility with them. Our opinion,

suddenly and miraculously, actually matters to our new friend.

Because of this new, genuine relationship, the Gospel message finds the fertile soil necessary for conversion to take root and germinate.

Our role in this process then is simply obedience to God and the practice of unconditional love towards everyone God leads into our path.

So, the pattern, if we must have one, would look like this:

- 1) Conversation
- 2) Community
- 3) Conversion.

Unfortunately, the pattern I believe the traditional Church has long practiced and adopted has been to first try to convert people so that we can have a conversation with them, and then, perhaps, we might have community with them. At least I know that, over the course of my own Christian experience this has been the pattern I've found myself falling into with those who were outside of my faith.

Somehow we've turned things completely around. We've asked those outside of Christ to come to us on our terms, on our day, and conform to our subculture so that we might engage them in dialog and conversation.

Once they convert we are happy to invite them into our community and befriend them. But this is not

the way we should relate to people. This is not the way that Jesus taught us to love others or to communicate the message of the Gospel.

If we can learn to engage people in conversation first, and I mean real, honest conversation, we have a hope to build a common ground for establishing a relationship based on love.

To be honest, I am the worst at this. I think I'm the least competent conversationalist I've ever met. If someone doesn't immediately share my interests, it's difficult for me to continue in conversation. But, I know down inside that there's something wrong with this.

I should be able to relate to someone simply because they are human and I am human. We are, at the core, all the same on the inside. We hunger, we thirst, we laugh, cry, we dream, we imagine, we breathe. Why can't I relate to someone at the level of being a simple human being?

THE MINISTRY OF LISTENING

Maybe I cannot engage people who are unlike me in a meaningful conversation because I am too interested in talking and not interested in listening?

Maybe I need to pray that God would help me to develop a ministry of listening? There is a world full of people who are desperate for someone to listen to them. Our senior centers and nursing homes are full of people with amazing stories to tell, if only someone would take the time to listen to them.

People everywhere are starving for someone who will take a genuine interest in who they are, or what they believe, or who they hope to become.

Will we take the time to listen to people? Are we willing to surrender our time for an hour or two with someone with a story to tell?

I once had a friend tell me that she had trained herself to look at people in the eye whenever she talked to them, long enough to remember the color of their eyes. It helped her to make a human connection with another person, and to see them as more than who they appeared to be on the surface.

Once in a while I will try to look at a crowd of people and try to imagine what they looked like as children. It's a fascinating experiment really. It reduces everyone into the same virtual elementary school class. You can see that, deep down, we're all still the same on the inside as we were when we were in grade school. We're uncertain, we're lonely, we're trying to fit in and be popular and make friends.

I've wondered if maybe being missional is really only the process of learning how to be a human who can relate to other humans.

Sometimes I think I've forgotten how to really just relate to people as human beings, without first determining if they think like I do, or if they believe what I believe.

For a Christian, this means un-learning how to interact with people as either "non-Christians" or

“Christians”. It means loving each person for who they are. It means learning how to see people as God sees them.

Chapter 11

The Mission

Recently, my wife and I felt a calling from God to leave the local church we had helped to plant. The dream God had given us was to start a new sort of a church, one where everyone took following Jesus seriously, where the practice of compassion to others was expressed in the giving of 100% of the offering to the poor and the needy.

Our conviction was that everyone who called themselves a follower of Jesus was, by default, a missionary to their culture. Because we wanted to be reminded of this, we called our new church, “The Mission”.

Our challenge has been to inspire this sort of activity within our own weekly house church gathering. While we’ve called ourselves, “The Mission,” not everyone has come to the place where

they have their calling figured out completely. This is where discipleship comes in.

Our goal is to lovingly assist everyone in our house church to discover their gifts, their talents, and their mission field.

Part of what inspired us to start a house church was the idea that we, as followers of Jesus, should imagine the Church less in terms of where we meet, or the building we gather in, and more in terms of who we are and what we do.

Our goal is to learn what it means to “be the church” and not to just “attend a church”. Our assumption is that “being the church” is what Jesus had in mind for us in the first place.

Jesus did not suffer and die to commission a Body of Believers whose only goal and aim was to meet once or twice a week and have a little meeting. He intended that we would be His full-time ambassadors to the world, living His teachings with our entire life, every single day.

The Christian life isn’t lived on Sunday morning or Wednesday night. That might be when we meet and sing songs together, but that’s not where the Christian life is actually realized.

Fellowship is great. Corporate worship is great. Sermons are great. But when we live for God, I believe we engage in the best form of worship possible. (See Romans 12).

KID'S CLUB

For over a decade my wife and I have lead Children's Ministry in the local church, and many of those children we taught came to faith in Christ as a result.

We are thrilled for that experience and we applaud all of those who serve in this way. However, we recently began to feel a tugging in our hearts for those children who played with our sons every weekend in our neighborhood and yet did not know Christ. So, in response we decided to host a Sunday School program in our living room on Sunday mornings for all those children who weren't going to church anywhere else.

Our first step was to start a Sunday Morning "Kids Club" in our new neighborhood as part of our family calling to be missionaries to our neighbors and share Christ with our friends.

Four elementary-aged children came and joined our two sons to spend five weeks studying the life of Jesus. We sang songs, played games, and had fun together learning more about how Jesus loves us and can change our lives.

Next our plan was to get to know the parents of these children by hosting a series of monthly Barbecue's in the front yard and inviting the families to come and join us. Our first such event was a community breakfast on our driveway. We passed out flyers to every family in our cul-de-sac and provided

pancakes, eggs, bacon and juice for everyone who showed up. It was a rousing success. Everyone who came thanked us over and over again for doing this. Neighbors who had never met shared smiles and exchanged handshakes on our front lawn. Before the breakfast was over people were asking us when we could get together to do this again.

Eventually we plan to invite each family over for dinner and, one by one, to get to know them and to practice the art of conversation with them.

One day, we plan to invite them to join us all on Sunday Morning for our regular House Church gatherings.

This is the way my wife and I have felt called to express our calling as missionaries in our neighborhood. Your talents are probably different than ours. Your area of ministry is probably a little different too. But your calling to “Go” is exactly the same.

OUT OF THE BOX

For years I lived my life in a box. I did my Christian stuff on Sunday’s and my work stuff on the weekdays, and my family and friend’s stuff on Saturday’s.

I had totally compartmentalized my life. I had convinced myself that this was the only way to live, but eventually I began to realize that this was not the way that God intended for me to live my life. Mainly because it meant that my “Christian stuff” really never spilled over into my work life, or my recreational life.

My life as a follower of Jesus was safely isolated from the rest of my life, where I actually lived, and over time I realized that what God wanted for me to break out of that box. I had to leave my compartmentalized life behind.

The first thing I realized was that, when I lived that way, it was *me* who was in the box, not God. God was never inside a box, but I had tried to keep Him there. My life was constricted, and made small, because of my desire to keep things separated. God wanted me to live my life outside of the boundaries I had created.

I can still remember the first time I heard God speak to me about the idea of living my life wide open. I realized that all of Creation is His and that my whole life is meant to be lived with Him in relationship.

I had to admit that the world I was born into, the world I lived in and worked in and played in, was the *only real world*. There was no other world but this one, in spite of the illusion that there was some sanitized, non-secular version of the world alongside of this one.

My calling was to operate in the real world, the actual world, and to forsake the world of illusion where we can buy our Christian milk from a sanctified cow. I stopped asking people if they were freshening their breath with “secular” mints or the new, holy “Testamints” that I’d bought at the local Christian bookstore.

I finally started to wake up to the fact that mints were mints and labels were irrelevant.

“All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given unto me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Surely I am with you always, even unto the very end of the age.” – Jesus (Matthew 28:18)

It’s in the going that we experience life with Christ. It’s not so much in the sitting or the attending that we encounter Jesus, or become empowered by the Holy Spirit. We have to be in motion, we have to “go”, in order to be the Church that God has called us to be.

As I’ve looked through the Scriptures I don’t often notice that the power of God falls on people when they’re in the meeting. Instead, it is when the disciples are in the marketplace, or walking along the way, that the Spirit of God falls on His people in power.

When God pours out His Spirit on us, it’s for a purpose. It’s not for our personal enjoyment. God fills us up in order to send us out. The gifts we’re given are for others, and they’re meant to be spent on others and given away for the benefit of others.

I believe this is why sometimes when a church has grown old, or when Christians have grown tired, we see less and less of God’s power flowing through the people. It’s because we’ve started to build

reservoirs to hold the blessings, rather than to trust God to give us more if we continually give His gifts away to others.

The reason God doesn't give us more is often because we've started to hoard what He gave us to share with others. Much like manna, which would rot if the Israelites took more than they needed for a single day, the gifts of God are for sharing, not for storing up.

God wants us to trust that if we give away the blessings, He will supply us with more. In order to demonstrate that we trust Him, we must let go of our gifts, our talent, our time, and even our money, and share freely with those who are in need. God will make sure we have enough when we need it.

Our job, as ambassadors of Christ, is to develop a discipline of letting go and giving away the blessings God gives to us so that we can be continually refreshed and blessed with the ongoing ministry of Jesus.

Whether or not you decide to start a house church is beside the point. The issue of who we are as Christians is still just as important, if not more important, than what we say we believe in our heads.

Our message, the Gospel, is only relevant if our lives demonstrate its power. Following Christ, from the very beginning, was a practice. It was intended as a way of life, not simply a set of beliefs.

The truth is that we must begin to live out the power of the Gospel in our everyday lives, no matter what. We must begin today.

Chapter 12

The Hard Question

In thinking about what it means to be a missionary to my community and culture, I've had to ask myself, "Do I have any meaningful relationships with non-Christians?"

Honestly, the answer is that I don't know too many people who are not Christians. This means that I need more practice at being missional.

Jesus was a man of scandalous inclusion. He regularly spent his time with known drunkards, and prostitutes, and people commonly referred to as "sinners". He hung out with people you and I would never dream of hanging out with, and not as an outreach, but simply because he loved them and wanted to have a relationship with them.

"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate

with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."- Jesus (Matthew 9: 10-13)

God's heart is for those who are the least and the lost. If we're honest, we'd be scandalized to find out our pastor was spending time partying with the prostitutes, drunkards and 'sinners' in our community. Yet this is where Jesus was most often to be found, at the home of someone the righteous would never be caught dead with.

In my own heart, I want the scales to fall off so I can really love people the way Jesus did. I want to love them for who they are, not judge them because of what they've done. This means risking my own reputation in favor of caring for the unlovely.

My own scandalous inclusion could result in my being radically excluded from many "righteous" gatherings. Am I really ready to make that choice? Can I learn to love that way?

THE DISCOMFORT ZONE

I am fascinated with the person of Jesus. He is more incredible, more unsettling, more confounding than my Sunday School teachers lead me to believe.

His words have a bite that most sermons play down, and his commands are more than enough to make anyone squirm in their chair.

There seems to be a huge gap between the life that Jesus led and the life that I live each day.

“Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” (1 John 2:6)

That’s an astounding and unsettling statement. In my Bible I’ve penned the word, “Yowza!” next to this verse. You might want to do the same.

I’m finding more and more that my comfort zone isn’t pleasing to God. I realize that Jesus didn’t have a comfort zone and that means that neither should I.

Many times I’ve excused myself from helping people in need because I rationalize that they will only use the money for drugs or alcohol, and so I’ve justified not helping them at all. I’ve even assured myself that this is really what God would want me to do because I’m actually being a “good steward” of my money by withholding such assistance.

The funny thing is that Jesus didn’t seem to act this way. In fact, using this logic, Jesus was a really bad steward of his resources because he healed eyes from blindness knowing that those people would surely use their eyes to lust or to covet. He healed withered hands knowing that they would probably use those hands to steal or to do violence to others. He healed

lepers who would most likely re-enter society and commit crimes.

Obviously, Jesus wasn't as much concerned with "being a good steward" as he was with showing compassion on those in need and advancing the Kingdom of God.

Of course, we should be wise in the ways we help people in need. If someone says they're in need of food, we can offer to stand in line with them at a nearby fast-food chain and buy them whatever they want to eat. We can engage them in conversation. Ask them their name. Listen to them as they speak. Offer to pray for them as they sit down to eat their food. This is much better than simply throwing money at someone who says they are hungry, and certainly more Christ-like than justifying our lack of assistance as "good stewardship."

I've come to believe that the Holy Spirit is all about making us uncomfortable when it comes to the poor, the lost, and the broken around us. I believe we need to embrace our discomfort zone because that's where Jesus is usually operating in compassion and power.

Mother Teresa once said, "If sometimes our poor people have had to die of starvation, it is not that God didn't care for them, but because you and I didn't give, were not an instrument of love in the hands of God, to give them that bread, to give them that clothing; because we did not recognize him, when once

more Christ came in distressing disguise, in the hungry man, in the lonely man, in the homeless child, and seeking for shelter.”

Do I have the right to my own comfort zone? Not if I'm trying to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, I don't. As long as I'm operating within my comfort zone I will continue to be totally ineffective for God.

Jesus was not safe. His version of the Kingdom of God was not safe. Why, then, is my version of Christian life so often about safety and comfort?

Faith seems to only be necessary for a dangerous life. If my journey with Jesus is all about my safety and my comfort or security, I'm probably not really walking where Jesus is walking.

Living out my calling to be missional, then, is something that involves risk. It involves stepping into my own discomfort zone. It requires real faith. It is not for the faint of heart.

Chapter 13

Out of the Comfort Zone

When I really get down to analyzing my own personal comfort zone I have to admit that it's the part of me that I have not yet surrendered to Jesus. It's the small, precious part of my life that I just want to hang onto and keep for myself.

My comfort zone is the last bit of ground where I keep my own dreams, my own personal territory where I hoard the things that I am afraid to give up to God.

The one thing in the world that Jesus wants most from me is exactly that part of me that is still unsurrendered. He wants the part of us that we don't want to let go of. More than anything else, He wants that last piece of our heart that we're afraid to give to Him.

Maybe you know what I'm talking about. Maybe you have that one small part of your life that

you're still afraid to give to Jesus, because if you do you're not really sure what He will do with it. Maybe God will screw up your life if you surrender that last bit to Him? Will He ruin your plans? Will He jack up your dreams? Are you sure you can really, *really* trust God with this one, precious thing?

Our comfort zone is that last part of us that we've yet to lay on the altar to Him. Maybe we've given him 99% of our selves, but it's that last 1% that we've held back, whatever it may be, that Jesus wants most of all. It's what He suffered for. It's what He died for. It's all of you.

I think really our ability to trust God is a huge issue in our day and age. We have difficulty trusting God because so many of us have been abused by people in authority over us. We've been exploited, even by the people in the Church who should have loved us and empowered us.

Somehow we've got to reach a place in our walk with Jesus that we trust Him with everything.

Do we love God more than we love our comfort zone? We cannot remain in an attitude of fear. We cannot be afraid that we're going to lose what we've been given in Christ. We cannot build containers to hold onto the blessings of God. We are called to give it away. We're called to give away the blessings. We're called to give away the Kingdom. We're called to give even our very lives away to others so that they might see the love of God and turn to Him.

God can be trusted. He's demonstrated this upon the cross. He humbled Himself and became a servant to us all. He submitted Himself to us. He bowed down and became a servant to us. He emptied Himself of His power and position. He willingly surrendered to our brutality and He endured the shame that was intended for us.

His cross demonstrated that even though He has all power and all authority at His command, He will not use it to exploit us or to harm us.

If we can look upon the face of Jesus, beaten and humiliated in our place on the cross of shame, and still doubt His love for us, or doubt that He wants what is best for our lives, then we have no hope of every fully trusting and loving anyone in our lives.

“Freely you have been given, freely receive” – Jesus (Matthew 10:8)

“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” – Jesus (Matthew 10:39)

Don't let that one simple thing you're holding on to keep you from fully receiving the great riches that God has in store for your life. Let go of it. Surrender it to Jesus today. Receive the treasure He has buried for you along the way.

“The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy he went and sold all he had and bought that field.” – Jesus (Matthew 13:44)

The truth is that God *does* ask you to give up something when you come to Him. It’s called “Everything”. That’s all He wants from you. Just everything.

The Good News is that what you give up will never compare to the boundless riches of His Kingdom.

When the Rich Young Ruler went away from Jesus because he was unable to sell all that he had to give it to the poor, Jesus turns to His disciples and encourages them by saying *“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26)*.

What is the thing that Jesus says is impossible for man? It’s giving up our material possessions in exchange for the Kingdom of God.

What is it that He says is possible with God? It’s the ability to let go of our worldly wealth and possessions in order to gain the incomparable treasures of The Kingdom.

The response of the disciples to these words from Jesus is also worth noting. Peter asks Jesus what

will become of them since they have left everything to follow him (in Matthew 19:27).

It was true. Each of the disciples had walked away from their day job to dedicate themselves to Jesus as apprentices.

Peter and his brother, on the day of the largest catch of fish in their careers as fishermen, left the fish dieing on the beach to follow Him.

Matthew, the tax collector, stood up and left the money on the table in the middle of the day to follow Jesus.

Each of the disciples, in his own way, turned away from his life and gave it up to discover a new way of life.

In response to Peter's question Jesus makes an astounding promise that I'm certain almost no one really believes. He said, "*I tell you the truth...no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age...and in the age to come, eternal life.*" (Mark 10:29)

Here Jesus assures those who give up worldly possessions and even family relationships, will receive back one hundred times as much. Not just in Eternity, after death, but here and now, in this life on Earth.

Jesus promises more than a one-for-one repayment for what is given up for the sake of

following Him. He promises more than a ten percent return on your investment. He promises more than you can imagine; One hundred times as much, in this life and in the life to come.

Do we believe Jesus? Do we have the faith to trust Him in this promise? Can we really let go of our dreams, our hopes, our plans, our security, our comfort, our money in exchange for an abiding and enduring trust that He is faithful and true to His word?

Like Paul the Apostle, I have yet to attain this. (If you'll indulge me a moment I will borrow from him to express my own struggle within my comfort zone). I endure hardship, sometimes in faith, sometimes with great complaint. I know the good I ought to do and sometimes I fail to do it. I am the chief of sinners. I can be the most evil and petty person you'd ever imagine one moment, and full of compassion and faith the next. I have not arrived at perfection in Christ just yet, far, far from it, but this one thing I do with all that is within me, I press on towards the mark of the high calling of Christ Jesus. I urge you to do the same.

I know that, here in my comfort zone, I am in denial of the power of Christ in me. I know that, outside of my comfort zone, I have discovered the power of Christ at work in my glorious weakness.

I want to encourage you to embrace your discomfort zone. Jesus is waiting for you there.

He can be trusted and He is faithful beyond your wildest imagination.

Chapter 14

Doubt

Jesus is our blue-print for life in the Kingdom of God. It's a life that starts here and now, and continues each and every day that we live and breathe on this planet. It involves living today as if God were on the throne of this Earth ruling it as King, right now. We don't have to wait until that day comes, we are invited to live under His rule and reign today.

Jesus said we cannot enter the Kingdom and follow Him unless we daily die to ourselves and obey His teaching. This is the Gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus came and died to preach and communicate. There is no other Gospel in the Scripture. The Gospel of Jesus is the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Grace is an integral part of the process for those who hope to follow Jesus. Without Grace we could not hope to daily surrender our lives and fully submit to God's will in favor of our own desire. Grace does not

cancel out our daily need to surrender to Jesus as our Lord.

The phrase “Jesus is Lord” is powerless unless we actually live it out in our lives every day. Without the daily act of surrender, it's simply a pointless bumper sticker slogan.

Simply put, the Gospel of the Kingdom has been drowned out by the more popular televangelical version of the Gospel that says, “Repeat this prayer after me and you can go to heaven when you die.”

A by-product of this kind of teaching has been the cheapening of the decision to follow Jesus with your whole life. Instead the calling to follow Jesus is treated so lightly that I've seen Christians urge total strangers they've only just met seconds earlier to pray and ask Jesus into their heart so they can go to heaven when they die. It's almost as if they believe that this magic prayer will take anyone to heaven if they say it twice and click their heels together.

Instead, I would urge us who follow Jesus to allow people around us to get to know Jesus first, and maybe then they can make an informed decision about whether or not to surrender their life to follow after Him.

There's a great story about the great evangelist Charles Finney who would regularly tell his converts that they were not truly converted to Christ. Imagine that. A famous evangelist urging his newly converted to doubt their faith in Christ.

The story goes that he would cast doubt upon their faith in Christ and send them away saying, “I don’t think you really are a follower of Jesus yet.” After a few weeks the person would invariably return after a season of introspection and declare that they were now a true follower of Jesus. Finney would then find a reason to doubt them once more and send them on their way again. Eventually the person would return, declaring with fire in their eyes that they “knew” they were a follower of Jesus. When Finney could no longer dissuade them he would let them go with a nod, “You might actually be a follower of Jesus after all.”

If anything, Finney employed doubt to test the faith of those who claimed too eagerly to be genuine disciples of Christ. Whether or not you agree with Finney’s tactics, please don’t treat the decision to follow Jesus too lightly. These days we are far too eager to ask a total stranger to pray on the spot to receive Jesus, before they’ve even really understood who He is or what such a decision might mean to their life.

I believe the decision to follow Jesus is more like a commitment to enter into a life-long marriage and less like the decision to rent a movie. We would never counsel someone to go into a marriage quickly, and yet we are sometimes over-eager when it comes to pushing people to enter into an eternal relationship with Jesus.

I would suggest we let people have a chance to get to know Jesus before we push them into praying to receive forgiveness and follow Him. They need to know who He is first.

Can you imagine a total stranger coming up to you on the street and leading the conversation in such a way that you felt compelled to marry his daughter as fast as possible? Who is this guy? What is his daughter like? Why is he so eager to get her married off? All of these questions would be flashing into your brain as this stranger tried to convince you that all you had to do was to repeat the vows after him and everything would work itself out later.

If you were wise you would flee from that person as fast as possible. Yet, this is almost exactly the sort of witnessing and evangelism that many Christians practice, or at least visualize, when it comes to reaching others for Christ.

Jesus does not force Himself upon us. Do not force Jesus onto those who do not know Him yet or who are not ready to make this life-changing, eternal decision.

Better yet, try living a life that bears witness to the compassion and humility of Jesus each and every day. Maybe then people will actually ask us why we live this way and what it was that transformed us into such patient, compassionate, loving people. Then we can make sure we are prepared to give to every man an answer, a reason for the hope that lies within.

Let's live a life that provokes the question
rather than throwing around the answers to questions
that no one is really asking.

Chapter 15

For Here?

In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus declares that we, His followers, are the salt of the Earth and the light of the world.

I believe this means God simply wants us to be who we are, and what we are, no more and no less.

Jesus makes the point that salt is for being salty and if it doesn't do that it is worthless. He explains how light is meant to be seen in the darkness and if you light the candle and then hide it, what good is it?

This illustrates the futility of attempting to be something other than what we are.

Sometimes we think that to be a good witness for Jesus we have to be the most holy and perfect person in the room. We have to smile as much as possible. We have to wear a mask of holiness and be careful not to let anyone see weakness or doubt or failure in our lives.

I can remember once when my Dad came home from work and told me that, after months of trying to be a witness in his workplace he had discovered something unexpected. When he was doing his best to appear "Godly" in front of his co-workers, they kept him at arms length and avoided him.

That day he had been in a conversation with a co-worker who was not a Believer and he had accidentally cursed out loud in his frustration.

His co-worker sat back and stared at my father in shock and disbelief. Then my Dad hung his head and apologized for his coarse language, admitting that he struggled sometimes in this area.

His friend leaned forward and began to ask him about his faith. He wanted to know where my Dad attended church. Over the next few weeks this man would come around and ask my Dad questions about the Bible.

What had happened? My father had simply let his mask fall to the ground. He had confessed to his friend that he was a sinner and that he needed the Gospel himself.

Jesus called us salt and light. It only takes a small flicker of light to push back an ocean of darkness. It only takes a few grains of salt to season a steak. Too much light only blinds those who are searching. Too much salt ruins the most succulent of meals.

I found myself wondering how great it would be if Christians around the nation would begin to take down their masks and just be who they are in front of their co-workers and neighbors. Instead of pointing our fingers and saying, “You sinner! You need to repent and receive the Gospel!” maybe we should be saying, “I am the wretched sinner who needs the Gospel. Here are the ways I would be hopeless without Jesus.” Maybe then people could see our small, flickering light? Maybe then they might taste the small grains of salt upon their tongues?

When we present the Gospel as something “those sinners” need, we deny that we are also sinners and that we also need the same Gospel. People can see that we are still struggling with sin, and yet they don’t hear us confessing that we need the power of Christ to overcome this daily testing of our faith.

Instead, let us confess our own need for Jesus. Let us demonstrate that we are hopeless without Him so that others who are hopeless can identify with our weakness and recognize their own need for Him.

Chapter 16

Go!

Evangelism, like following Jesus, is all about going to where the broken and the lost and the forgotten are and loving them as Christ loved us. It's not, I am convinced, about finding new ways to get them to come to us on our terms and to learn to believe the way we believe.

Jesus commanded us to "Go" and the command is still valid today. If we have any hope of accomplishing this command, it will only be as we go out in the power of the Holy Spirit and as we cooperate with Him in the process.

Evangelism is also more than simply telling people something they don't know yet. It's not about information. Without the evidence of a life that is being transformed by the power of this message, the message itself is useless and without evidence.

Evangelism is something we must be willing to live out, to demonstrate daily to others around us without relying on words alone. We can only accomplish this in the power of the Holy Spirit. We have to intend to live a life that bears witness to the transformational power of Christ. It will mean a full surrender. It will require great faith. It will not be easy. It will not be quickly accomplished. There is no formula. It is not for the faint of heart. Nevertheless, if you call yourself a follower of Christ, then you have already entered into an agreement to follow Him with your whole life. You've already taken on the job of ambassador. Your life is already being directed into the path of surrender and daily dependence upon Him.

I encourage you to engage others in conversation. Tell your story, and listen to their story. Share your experiences with God in natural ways, not rehearsed speeches, but with a genuine voice of concern and compassion. Love others the way Jesus loved you. Invest in people. Trust that God loves them far more than you ever will, but ask God to teach you to love them more anyway.

As I've studied this subject, and as I've tried to learn what it means to fulfill my calling to be a missionary into the culture, I've discovered a very important truth; God never calls us to convert people. He never calls us to win arguments with non-believers. What He does call us to do, even commands us to do, is to love people. We are to be so good at loving others that it becomes our main source of identification.

If someone were to wonder if you were a Christian, they should be able to ask your neighbors, your enemies, even the poor in your community and receive the correct answer.

More than information, people need love. More than religion, people need hope. More than doctrine, people need compassion.

We are commanded to love others, and the Great Commission can only be fulfilled if we first understand this and step out as disciples of Jesus who embodied Love in all that He did.

This book poses a question about The Gospel that I hope we can now understand more clearly. The Gospel is for here, for us right now, and it is most certainly to go with us as we live our lives in the place God has planted us.

So, I encourage you to be filled with the Love of God by the power of the Holy Spirit so that you can be Ambassador's of Jesus in a world desperate for hope, and compassion, and real, self-giving love.

And, by all means, whatever you do; Go!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Keith Giles has been a published freelance writer since 1989, which is also about as long as he has been a licensed and ordained minister of the Gospel and the husband of Wendy Giles.

He is a frequent contributor to several online webzines dedicated to spiritual formation, social justice, the Kingdom of God, and house church, such as TheOoze.com, SeedStories.com and Ginkworld.net.

He also publishes a free, weekly e-newsletter called [Subversive Underground] which has been running non-stop since December of 2005.

Keith and his wife co-pastor a house church called “The Mission” in Orange, California along with their two boys, Dylan and David.

Find out more about Keith Giles at his website, www.KeithGiles.com