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MAKE THE NETWORK

A Group Discussion Series
Designed to Motivate
and Equip Professionals
to Influence Their Friends
and Co-Workers for Christ





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“There’s nothing in life that’s as exciting as befriending, loving, and leading wayward people toward faith in Christ. Nothing.”

— Bill Hybels,
senior pastor,
Willow Creek
Community Church

“I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.”

Philemon 1:6 (NIV)

INTRODUCTION

Some time ago I met a man named Tom, who works for a downtown bank, at an after work reception. When I told Tom that our organization helps professionals find balance, focus and direction in their lives through a personal relationship with God, he was interested. He told me, “I lost my job as president of another bank because of a drinking problem. Attending AA helped me to get sober. However, I still feel distant from God and need help connecting with Him.”

For the next year or so, we had lunch regularly and discussed what it means to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He began reading the Bible and once, even attended church with me. But he could never seem to make that commitment to become a Christian. Something was holding him back. Then at lunch one day, he told me that he had another addiction that had been enslaving him for many years, more serious than drinking. As we discussed the addiction, I showed him what the Bible had to say about it. We met a few weeks later to discuss it further. Then Tom told me that he didn’t want to meet with me again. “I have gone as far as I can with God,” he said. I was so discouraged. We had become friends. I had invested much time meeting with him and praying for him.

Several months went by. Then one day I ran into Tom. He was very positive about receiving the invitation to our upcoming breakfast event. He said he would be there. He even sent me a check ahead of time to cover the cost. I was very encouraged. Then to my dismay, Tom didn’t show up.

However, a week or so later, another organization was conducting a similar event with Norm Miller, president of Interstate Batteries, as the speaker. I called Tom and invited him to attend the luncheon with me. He accepted. At the luncheon, Norm Miller gave a powerful testimony as he described his own lifelong struggles with addictions and how he found freedom through Jesus Christ. Tom was touched by Norm’s talk and indicated that he had invited Jesus Christ into his life at the luncheon.

Walking back together, we talked about his response. Tom said, “I would like to be in a Bible study with some other men.” I was thrilled—amazed at what God was doing in Tom’s life and how He had used me to be a part of the process.

I’ll never forget those meetings and conversations with Tom. They were exciting, challenging, and yes, fun! I’ll always remember how God eventually answered my prayers to bring Tom to Himself.

The notebook in your hand is a discussion series designed to help you develop the thrilling lifestyle of befriending, loving and leading wayward men and women into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Too often we view sharing our faith as an obligation and duty rather than an exciting and joyful way of life.

Make the Net Work is designed to equip Christians with biblical principles and practical how-to’s for a fruitful lifestyle of communicating the beauty of a relationship with God with those around them. Our prayer is that as you understand, apply and use these principles and tools, you will experience joy in sharing your faith.

— PHIL KRATOVIL, *editor*

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SESSION ONE: Understanding the Mission 1.

“There is a legend which recounts the return of Jesus to glory after His time on earth. Even in heaven He bore the marks of His earthly pilgrimage with its cruel cross and shameful death. The angel Gabriel approached Him and said, “Master, you must have suffered terribly for men down there.”

“I did,” He said.

“And,” continued Gabriel, “do they know all about how you loved them and what you did for them?”

“Oh, no,” said Jesus, “not yet. Right now only a handful of people in Palestine know.”

Gabriel was perplexed. “Then what have you done,” he asked, “to let everyone know about your love for them?”

Jesus said, “I’ve asked Peter, James, John, and a few more friends to tell other people about Me...and My story will be spread to the farthest reaches of the globe. Ultimately, all of mankind will have heard about My life and what I have done.”

Gabriel frowned and looked rather skeptical. He knew well what poor stuff men were made of. “Yes,” he said, “but what if Peter and James and John grow weary? What if the people...way down in the twentieth century...just don’t tell others about you? Haven’t you made any other plans?”

And Jesus answered, “I haven’t made any other plans. I’m counting on them.”

The author continues, “Twenty centuries later...He still has no other plan. He’s counting on you and me. High on God’s “To Do” list is the evangelization of the world. His early disciples adopted His priorities and devoted themselves to reaching their world. Christ counted on them, and they delivered.”

Used by permission from *LifeStyle Evangelism* by Joe Aldrich, Multnomah Press

What are some barriers for you in carrying out the mission?

“With a world so ready, the Christian community cannot afford to sit back and hope that the relatively few full-time ministers of the Word accomplish the task alone. The fulfillment of Christ’s great command...is the shared responsibility of every individual who calls Christ Savior and Lord.”

— Billy Graham

“...the tragedy is that in failing to share one’s faith, a Christian misses out on one of the greatest blessings our Lord offers: the profound joy of helping a fellow human being find new, abundant life, as well as eternal life, in Jesus Christ.”

— Bill Bright

Read the story of Zaccheus in Luke 19:1-10 (NASB). Note Jesus’ final statement in verse 10:

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

What does it mean to be “lost” spiritually? Do you see your co-workers and friends this way? Why or why not?

Why do you think Jesus used the word “seek” here?

What would your life look like if it were to reflect Christ’s purpose and priorities of seeking and saving the lost?

“...they asked him, ‘Lord, are you going to free Israel from Rome now and restore us as an independent nation?’

‘The Father sets those dates,’ he replied, ‘and they are not for you to know. But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to testify about Me with great effect, to the people in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, about my death and resurrection.’

It was not long afterwards that He rose into the sky and disappeared into a cloud, leaving them staring after him.” — Acts 1:6-9

As Jesus ascended into heaven, with what were the disciples primarily concerned? What are some things that you are concerned with in your life?

What mission did Jesus want them to focus on and why? What mission do you think He wants you to participate in?

What does it mean to testify (be a witness)? What does it take to be a good witness? What role do we play?

Where does the power come from for you to testify (be a witness)? Why do we need power?

“And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’.”
— Matthew 4:19 (NASB)

What do you think it means to be “fishers of men”?

What are some implications of this metaphor?

What are some similarities between evangelism and fishing?

The first and last words of Jesus focused on evangelism. He effectively bookends His ministry with evangelism at the beginning (with His call to one of the twelve, Matthew) and at the end (with His instructions to His disciples as He ascends into heaven). This gave focus to the rest of His teachings and ministry.

REFLECT

How do you feel about Jesus’ mission and call for you?

What are your fears? What motivates you about His mission for you?

ASSIGNMENTS

- ▶ Memorize Matthew 4:19.
- ▶ Read the article on page 7, *How to Be Filled With the Spirit*.
- ▶ Read the following Scripture passage and answer the questions that follow.

“And on the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. And when it came about that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am just a man.’ And as he talked with him, he entered, and found many people assembled.” — Acts 10:24-27 (NASB)
- ▶ In anticipation of Peter’s arrival, Cornelius invited his relatives and close friends. Why do you think Cornelius invited these specific people?

- ▶ If a very special person was coming to your house, who would you invite and why?

“We are so utterly ordinary, so commonplace, while we profess to know a Power the twentieth century does not reckon with. But we are ‘harmless’ and therefore unharmed. We are spiritual pacifists, non-militants, conscientious objectors in this battle to the death with principalities and powers in high places....O, that God would make us dangerous!”

— *Jim Elliot, martyred missionary in Ecuador*

DEFINITION

Your **network** is a social system built around four elements of your life: biological, recreational, geographical, and vocational. The most effective means of influencing your network for Christ is through your natural sphere of relationships.

CRITERIA FOR YOUR NON-CHRISTIAN NETWORK:

- ✓ You know them on a first name basis.
- ✓ You have regular contact with them.
- ✓ They don't seem to have a personal relationship with God.
- ✓ You feel they are responsive to you or open to cultivating a relationship based on common ground.

Begin to identify people in your network who do not appear to enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Complete the following exercise by listing the individuals within your network. You do not have to list five people for each category, just list as many as you can. Remember the criteria for being part of your network.

VOCATIONAL/PROFESSIONAL	RECREATIONAL
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
BIOLOGICAL/FAMILY	GEOGRAPHICAL
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

Circle three names from the chart above that you would like to begin praying for on a regular basis.

Pray for their salvation every day this week.

HOW TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

by Bill Bright

The first streams of morning light filtered through the small windows of the upper room and slipped across Peter's bearded face. He opened his eyes and raised up on one elbow. Most of the others were awake, rolling up their pallets and beginning the morning meal preparations for yet another day. "How much longer, Lord?" he wondered. For many days they had waited together in this small room, over a hundred of them now, just waiting for the Holy Spirit to come as Jesus had promised...

And then he heard it. Like a strong windstorm in the distance at first, then the roaring sounds of violent, rushing winds right in the room. Louder and louder it sounded, and in their midst flaming tongues of fire resting on each one in the room, filling them with the Holy Spirit!

To say it changed their lives is an understatement! Suddenly these men and women of God were declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ with new confidence in a way that hearers understood, even to the point of preaching in languages they had never learned! They discovered an unquenchable power flowing from within them because they had been filled with the Source of Power Himself. And because of it, thousands followed them to a new and life-changing relationship with the risen Lord.

The book of Acts records for us the power of the Holy Spirit *at work in people's lives*. We read the stories and marvel at common people like you and me performing miracles and leading hundreds to Christ. Sadly we shake our heads, disappointed that we could not have lived then so we could have been a part of it all. We have all but conceded to the more "sophisticated" attitude that the Holy Spirit works among us only in subtle ways today. Peter and the others had to perform miracles to reach the lost with the gospel. Today many pass that idea off saying such "emotional displays" are no longer necessary.

But J. B. Phillips gives us insight on it when he writes in his introduction to *Letters to the Young Church*: "The great difference between present-day Christians and those of which we read in these letters [the New Testament epistles], is that to us it is primarily a performance; to them it was a real expe-

rience. We are apt to reduce the Christian religion to a code, or, at best, a rule of heart and life. To these men it is quite plainly the invasion of their lives by a new quality of life altogether. They do not hesitate to describe this as Christ living in them."

And if Christ still lives in His followers as He promised, should our lives be any less powerful than those of the disciples? For any Christian, life should be a great adventure. We have purpose, and we have the source of power needed to perform the tasks that fall to us. Jesus said, "He who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do" (John 14:12,13, NAS).

But we are not expected to do these wonderful things in our own power. It is Christ Himself living within us who gives us the power through the Holy Spirit to do great works. All our wisdom and eloquence, logic, personality and good looks can never persuade someone to follow Christ, but with Jesus' resurrection power, His heart, His mind, His love for the lost flowing from within us, who could resist?

If we cannot see evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we need to take inventory and ask whether we are living as fleshly (or carnal) Christians. If we are not, perhaps the reason for the absence of power is a lack of faith, or a lack of knowledge about who God and His Holy Spirit are.

Some years ago a West Texas rancher made a startling discovery. The story goes that for Homer Yates, the end of the road seemed to have come too soon. As he rested a dusty boot on the running board of his weathered pick-up truck, he looked across acres of ranch land dotted with clusters of cattle. This valley was *his* valley. He and his family had called this land home for many years.

This familiar scene had once brought peace to his heart. It had comforted him. But at this particular moment, it triggered tears. He loved this place. How could he leave it behind? How could he be expected to pack up his belongings and walk away from the ranch he had poured himself into for so many years? And yet what other choice was there now?

Things were all right until the depression hit. It

HOW TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

came in like a swarm of devouring locusts and stripped him bare financially. He even had to accept government subsidy to keep the beloved ranch running marginally. It had shamed him to ask for help – but there seemed to be no other way. And as carefully as he and his wife had parceled out their meager funds, they never had quite enough. They had gone without, had sacrificed everything possible, but ruin was their reward.

Now, in the distance he saw another truck coming down the gravel lane carrying a couple of men, strangers to him. They rumbled to a stop a few yards away, dust settling around them in swirls as they closed in on him.

“Are you Yates?” one of them asked. He nodded. “We’ve been looking for you,” he said, surprising Yates with a handshake. The tall one explained they were part of a geological crew sent by a major oil company, and they had reason to believe there might be oil on his land. Would he give them permission to drill a wildcat well on the other side of the ridge?

What could he lose? He signed the lease that afternoon. A little below eleven hundred feet they struck an oil reserve that was pumping 80,000 barrels a day before Yates knew what hit him. Several of the wells that followed yielded twice that amount. And Yates and his family owned it all!

Overnight, the humble rancher, scraping by on government relief, had become a multi-millionaire. He had lived in poverty on the very land that made him rich. The oil reserves had been there all along – all his since the day he signed the deed. But he *possessed* it only after he understood what riches were there, and that they were his for the taking.

How often we as Christians do the same thing, living like spiritual paupers, when in truth, we are *children of the King!* Jesus described the Christian life as an exciting, abundant adventure, and for centuries many believers around the world have found it to be true.

Another problem we have is that we fear God will somehow take advantage of us if we give ourselves

wholly to Him. We see in 1 John 4:18, “We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us, and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us” (TLB). We can trust God with our lives once we begin to accept His love.

Imagine with me for a moment that you are the parent of a small boy whom you love keenly. One warm summer day he stands at your knees and struggles to tell you something of great importance to him. “I love you,” he finally says, patting your hand, “and from now on I’m going to do everything you tell me to.” You get down on one knee beside him, take his little shoulders in your hands and begin to shake him violently. You can see his eyes fill with terror as you shout, “I’ve just been waiting for this! Now I’m going to make things *miserable* for you. No more fun, no more toys, only hateful, horrible chores for as long as you live!”

What a strange response from a loving parent. We would expect to see tenderness and compassion shown toward the child, not a tirade like this. And

yet, so often we fear the same kind of painful, punitive response from God if we should dare surrender ourselves to Him. A human parent would open their arms to their little one, welcoming him into an even deeper place of love. They would hope to merit such love from their child.

Why then do we expect anything less from God who loves us beyond human love? Is it that we do not understand His love for us? Matthew 7:11 describes God as a father demonstrative of his love for his children: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (NAS).

Like Jesus who wept over Jerusalem, God looks at us and says, “How often I would have gathered you into My arms, but you would not let Me.” If we are to be effective Christians we must begin – by

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HOW TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

faith – to trust the God of our salvation. From the time we accept His forgiveness to the time He walks with us through death, everything He gives us we receive by faith.

In Transferable Concept #2, we discussed the principle of “spiritual breathing,” defining “exhaling” as the confession of sin and the acknowledgement of His love and forgiveness in our lives. Now we come to “inhaling.”

Spiritual breathing would be as incomplete without the process of “inhaling” as would physical breathing. When obstructed breathing prevents oxygen from getting to the lungs, brain and vital organs, the human body dies. Proper spiritual breathing is of the same dramatic importance. To “inhale” spiritually is to draw deeply of the freshness of the Holy Spirit, appropriating by faith His fullness, giving Him free reign in our lives to control and empower us as He sees fit.

As we practice spiritual breathing, it becomes a natural habit. The constant, rhythmical “exhaling” (confession) and “inhaling” (appropriation of new power in our lives) creates a fresh, incomparable, daily approach to life.

But if we are to surrender our lives to Him, we must begin with an understanding of the nature and person of the Holy Spirit. You will notice I have not referred to Him as “it.” The Holy Spirit is as much a person as God Himself. He is not some ethereal influence, or fleecy white spiritual concept. He is God. He possesses all the attributes that are ascribed to God the Father. As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is co-equal with God the Father and God the Son. There is only one God, but He manifests Himself in three persons.

Defining the Trinity is a human impossibility. A seminary professor of mine used to say, “The person who denies the Trinity will lose his soul. The person who tries to understand the Trinity will lose his mind.” Finite man cannot fully comprehend the infinite God.

It was the Holy Spirit who inspired men to write

the Scriptures. As we read the Bible, He is the one who reveals its truth to us and helps us understand how to apply it to our lives. He makes our prayers heard by God, and it is He who reaps the harvest of our faithful witness. His sole purpose is to exalt and glorify Christ (John 16:1-15).

The evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is all around us. He has come to us, the Comforter that Jesus promised as He

prepared to leave this earth. “It is to your advantage that I go away,” Jesus said, “for if I do not go away, the Helper [Holy Spirit] shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you...But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth...and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you” (John 16:7,13,14, NAS). Through new birth the Holy Spirit enables us to know Christ, and to share the Good News with others.

In 1 John 1:7 we are told, “If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (NAS).

When we are filled with the Spirit, we are under His control; not as a robot, but as one led and empowered by the heart of God Himself. He walks this earth in our bodies, living His resurrection life in and through us.

Jesus said to the multitudes, “If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘*From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water*’” (John 7:37,38, NAS - italics ours). John adds, “But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive” (John 7:39, NAS). We can live the victorious, power-filled lives that Jesus offers if we open our hearts to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The choice is ours.

But a question arises: *How?* How do we receive the Spirit into our lives? What do we do, what do we say, so that He’ll take up residence within us? So that we’ll

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If we are to be
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effective Christians
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we must begin
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— by faith —
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to trust the God
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of our salvation.
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HOW TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

gain access to this marvelous power that is ours?

Suppose you have a bank account of several thousand dollars, and you need to cash a check. Would you walk into the bank, drop to your knees before a teller and begin begging and pleading for the money you need? You smile because you know the surprised teller would probably lean over the counter and remind you, “You don’t have to beg me. It’s already your money. Just write out what you want and I’ll cash your check.”

The Holy Spirit is ours the day we accept Christ’s forgiveness for sins. Like salvation, receiving the Holy Spirit is an act of faith. “For by grace you have been saved *through faith*” the Bible says, “and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9, NAS - italics ours). We need not beg or barter with God for His favor. Fasting, weeping, prostrating ourselves before Him will never cause Him to send His Spirit into our lives. We cannot *earn* God’s fullness. It is only ours through *faith*, and it has been ours since the moment we became Christians. Colossians 2:6 reminds us, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (NAS).

The Holy Spirit is ours. What we must learn to do now is *appropriate His power*. There are several factors that will help prepare our hearts as we seek to have lives filled with the Holy Spirit.

We must be hungry for the Spirit, and desire His indwelling. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6, NAS).

We must be willing to surrender our lives to Christ. In Romans 12:1,2 Paul writes, “I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living sacrifice, holy – the kind he can accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think. Then you will learn from your own experience how his ways will really satisfy you” (TLB).

Confess every sin. We need to let the Holy Spirit bring to mind everything that needs to be dealt with, then confess it all to God. We are promised in 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins to him, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. (And it is perfectly proper for God to do this for us because Christ died to wash away our sins)” (TLB).

With hearts opened and prepared for the filling of

the Spirit, we are instructed in Ephesians 5:18 to “not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but *be filled with the Spirit*” (NAS - italics ours). It is a command! Not to be filled, controlled and empowered is disobedience. Scripture also tells us that there is available to us a “confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14,15, NAS).

There is but one indwelling, one rebirth and one baptism of the Holy Spirit—all of which occur at the moment of salvation. There are many *fillings*, made clear in Ephesians 5:18. In the original text, the meaning is more explicit than most English translations. This command means to be constantly and continually filled, controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit *as a way of life!*

Technically, we do not even need to pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit as no Scripture tells us to do this. We are filled by faith. However, since the object of our faith is God and His Word, we can pray as an expression of our faith in God’s command and in His promise. We are not filled because we pray but because we trust in God who responds to our faith.

Is this the desire of your heart? If you would like, pray this prayer: “*Dear Father, I acknowledge that I have been the one in control of my life and as a result, I have disobeyed your command to be controlled with the Spirit. Thank you for forgiving me. Now, Father, I invite Christ to take His rightful place on the throne of my life. In faith I ask You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit as You promised in Your Word. Thank You for keeping Your promises and for filling me with the Holy Spirit right now.*”

If you prayed this prayer or expressed your heart similarly to God in your own words, you are now filled with the Holy Spirit. You do not have to “feel” like it; simply believe it as a *fact-in faith*. You can begin this very moment to draw upon the vast, inexhaustible resources of the Holy Spirit. He will enable you to live a holy life and to share the claims of Christ with seeking hearts in a new way.

Thank God for the fullness of His Spirit as you begin each day, and continue to invite Him to control your life, moment by moment. The Spirit-filled life is a life of supernatural power, of abiding in Christ and of bearing spiritual fruit. It is trusting God, not self, to live the Christian life. ●



SESSION TWO: The Master Principles

2.

“Later on as Jesus left the town He saw a tax collector—with the usual reputation for cheating—sitting at a tax collection booth. The man’s name was Levi. Jesus said to him, ‘Come and be one of My disciples!’ So Levi left everything, sprang up and went with Him.

Soon Levi held a reception in his home with Jesus as the guest of honor. Many of Levi’s fellow tax collectors and other guests were there.

But the Pharisees and teachers of the Law complained bitterly to Jesus’ disciples about His eating with such notorious sinners.

Jesus answered them, ‘It is the sick who need a doctor, not those in good health. My purpose is to invite sinners to turn from their sins, not to spend My time with those who think themselves already good enough.’” — Luke 5:27-32

Imagine you were attending the party at Levi’s house. What do you think the atmosphere would have been like?

- The party would have been loud and wild with plenty of eating and drinking.
- Jesus was in complete control, and everything was quiet and orderly.
- The party broke up early, and everyone was home by 10 p.m.
- Jesus was laughing and talking right along with the tax collectors and sinners.
- Jesus was enjoying himself, exchanging business cards and making new friends, but there was no moral compromise.

What do you think are some things Jesus did to make the tax collectors and sinners feel comfortable in His presence? How can you (without compromising your moral convictions) make your non-Christian friends more comfortable around you?

Would you accept an invitation by a close friend to attend this type of gathering? Why or why not? What might the “religious” people of our day think or say about your doing this?

In this session we will discuss your current opportunities for sharing your faith and some principles for effectively communicating your faith as a lifestyle.

1

Master Principle One

Many individuals around us are spiritually open and receptive.

“Do you think the work of harvesting will not begin until the summer ends four months from now? Look around you! Vast fields of human souls are ripening all around us, and are ready now for reaping.” — John 4:35

What were the primary concerns of Jesus’ disciples? How do you think they viewed the people around them? (See John 4:7-9,27-31)

Think back to the party at Levi’s house. Though the tax collectors and sinners may not have appeared spiritually open at first glance, what do you think would be their attitude by the end of the evening?

Many times we are like the early disciples, concerned primarily about our day-to-day affairs. We often assume that those around us don’t care about spiritual issues, instead of making the effort to discover their deepest needs and concerns.

Check This Out

During the year 1997, Marshall Williams, a rehabilitation counselor in Washington, D.C., saw 82 men personally receive Christ with him as he shared the gospel with them on a one-to-one basis. One man, George, received Christ with Marshall on August 11. A few weeks later, one of George’s relatives sought out Marshall. He told him that George had just died of a sudden heart attack. Marshall rejoiced that he had taken the opportunity to share the gospel with George.

What evidence do you see for spiritual openness and receptivity among the people in your network of relationships? In your city?

DEFINITION

A **seeker** is someone who does not possess a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They are seeking truth in the sense that they have a world view and are consciously or unconsciously striving to live it out consistently.

2

Master Principle Two

Bringing someone to Christ is both an event and a process.

“The reapers will be paid good wages and will be gathering eternal souls into the granaries of heaven! What joys await the sower and the reaper, both together! For it is true that one sows and someone else reaps.” — John 4:36,37

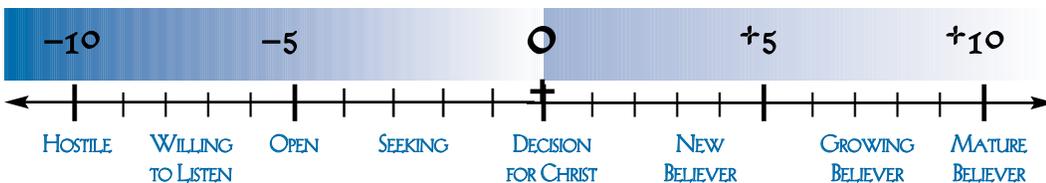
“My work was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollos’ work was to water it, but it was God, not we, who made the garden grow in your hearts.”
 — 1 Corinthians 3:6

What are some conclusions you can draw from the agricultural metaphor?

Evangelism, like farming, includes cultivation, sowing and reaping. What qualities might we need in our lives to be successful in each of these areas?

Most major decisions in life are a result of numerous mini-decisions. One clear example of this is marriage. The final decision to marry a person is typically preceded by numerous mini-decisions involving dating, courtship, engagement, and finally marriage. The same is often true of one’s spiritual journey. When a person makes the final decision to trust Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior, this has usually been preceded by multiple encounters with Christians and events that involved numerous mini-decisions throughout their lives. One way to look at evangelism is that it is the process of doing anything with seekers that causes them to move closer to the decision to place their faith in Christ.

The following graphic illustrates the principle that evangelism is a process.



Myles Martel in his excellent book, *The Persuasive Edge*, puts it this way: “Simply categorizing your audience on a pro/con basis is too superficial and provides you with little direction in refining your persuasive strategy. I would recommend that you quantify your audience’s predisposition toward your message by using a scale...”

Think back to the three people you circled in your network. Where are each of them on this graph?

NAME	POINT ON THE JOURNEY
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____

“Whether evangelism is a ‘sowing’ process or a reaping event is not so much to be determined by the intention of the evangelist, but by the response of the listeners. For some in Thessalonica... they believed the first time they heard the gospel. For others it was the first step in a process that took weeks or even months and years.”

— Mark McCloskey, *Tell It Often, Tell It Well*

Master Principle Three

God is responsible for the results.

3

“...but it was God, not we, who made the garden grow in your hearts. The person who does the planting or watering isn’t very important, but God is important because He is the one who makes things grow.” — 1 Corinthians 3:6,7

“For no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him to Me...” — John 6:44

For what part of the process is God responsible? How does that make you feel?

DEFINITION

Successful witnessing is simply taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God.

4

Master Principle Four

God wants you and me to be involved in the process.

“Apollos and I are working as a team, with the same aim, though each of us will be rewarded for his own hard work. We are...God’s co-workers...”
— 1 Corinthians 3:8,9

“...And God has given us the privilege of urging everyone to come into His favor and be reconciled to Him....We are Christ’s ambassadors. God is using us to speak to you: we beg you, as though Christ Himself were here pleading with you, receive the love He offers you—be reconciled to God.”
— 2 Corinthians 5:18,20

What are some titles God gives us?

In the Scripture above, Paul calls himself an ambassador. What are some responsibilities of an ambassador?

What are some ways you can be an ambassador for Christ in your workplace?

Understanding these master principles of evangelism will help you develop the proper mindset for effectively communicating your faith. It will also help you overcome fears of rejection and failure. The fear of rejection is overcome by realizing that evangelism is a process. Your role is to simply be available and faithful in that process, realizing that rejection of the truth is ultimately rejection of Christ, not of you. Our fear of failure is overcome by leaving the results to God, and allowing Him to move people into a readiness to receive Christ, rather than coercing or manipulating them into making a decision.

-
- ASSIGNMENTS**
- ▶ Memorize Acts 1:8 and the definition of successful witnessing.
 - ▶ Take the Reach 3 Challenge with the three people you identified in Session One.

The REACH 3 Challenge

- Take the three men or women from your network that you identified in Session One, or three different ones if you desire.
- Pray for the salvation of these three men or women every day.
- Invite each man or woman to a one-to-one (or with spouses), “non-agenda” meal, just to get to know them.
- As appropriate, consider asking each man or woman for prayer requests (check back later, to see how it’s going).
- Later, consider inviting your three people to an outreach event, Bible study, or church.
- Continue praying for them and seeking to expose them to evangelistic opportunities.
- Once a man or woman makes a commitment to Christ, help him or her become involved in church and other discipleship opportunities.

Will you take the Reach 3 Challenge?

In the spaces below, record the names of three people with whom you want to take the Reach 3 Challenge. Remember to pray for them every day and begin planning your one-to-one get-together.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The Great Divide

For a variety of reasons, the unchurched often develop emotional, intellectual or volitional barriers against Christianity in general or against Christians in particular. For our evangelistic efforts to be most effective, we need to understand these barriers and what causes them. We need to know how we can overcome these barriers to build trust and create an open atmosphere in which we can communicate the gospel.

The Emotional Barrier

The emotional barrier is the product of a bad experience with Christianity, Christians or religion in general. Perhaps the individual grew up in a religious home, but found it hypocritical and irrelevant. Or in a moment of need, he or she was rejected or abused by a Christian. The negative experience could even be something they saw or heard in the media. These are the barriers of negative feelings or emotions.

There are three master principles to keep in mind as you seek to break through the Emotional Barrier.

5

Master Principle Five

Seek to live a dynamic and consistent Christian life.

“The best argument for Christianity is Christians: their joy, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians—when they are somber and joyless, when they are self-righteous and smug in complacent consecration, when they are narrow and repressive, then Christianity dies a thousand deaths.”

— Sheldon Vanauken

“In everything you do, stay away from complaining and arguing, so that no one can speak a word of blame against you. You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of people who are crooked and stubborn. Shine out among them like beacon lights, holding out to them the Word of Life...” — Philippians 2:14-16

What are some ways Christians disqualify themselves in the marketplace?

What area of your public life would you like to trust God to strengthen?

Master Principle Six

6

Seek to develop or deepen a relationship with that person.

Think back to the story from the last session about the party at Levi's house. What do you think were some of the feelings and emotions of the tax collectors and sinners toward the religious community?

How do you think Jesus overcame these barriers?

What are some activities you could plan with your unbelieving acquaintances to develop or deepen your relationships with them?

“If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his true friend. Therein is a drop of honey which will catch his heart—which, say what you will, is the greater high road to his reason. When you have once gained his heart, you have little trouble convincing his judgment of the justices of your cause, if indeed that cause is really just.”

—Abraham Lincoln

Master Principle Seven

7

Expose non-Christians to other dynamic, respected Christians.

Seeing, hearing from and talking with Christians they respect can help evaporate this obstacle. This could involve taking them to a Priority Associates (or other similar) event. It could also involve giving your friend a tape or article about a respected person who is a Christian. It could mean helping your friend meet and interact with other dynamic Christians on a social or personal level.

In the spaces below, write the names of three people from your network. Then list an activity you want to do with each person to deepen the friendship or expose them to other Christians along with a deadline for when you want to do it by.

NAME	ACTIVITY	TO DO BY
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____

- ASSIGNMENTS**
- ▶ Memorize Philippians 2:14-16.
 - ▶ Continue praying for your Reach 3 people.
 - ▶ Do one of the activities that you listed above.



SESSION FOUR: Overcoming the Barriers—II. 4.

Phil was waiting to check in for an airplane flight when he struck up a conversation with a Jewish engineer named Steve in line behind him. Phil transitioned to spiritual things and began sharing the gospel with him. Steve broke in and said, “I really don’t believe in such a thing as sin.” Phil asked, “Well, is there anything that’s wrong?” Steve replied, “Of course there is, but that’s determined by a person’s culture.” Phil answered, “So then, what the Nazis did in Germany was fine since their culture said it was ‘right?’” Steve couldn’t think of anything to say, so Phil went on to explain that there has to be a standard of right and wrong established by God that transcends culture. Phil gave Steve some literature to read and left the encounter feeling like he had planted a seed and had moved Steve closer to belief in God.

“Your neighbors will have a hard time thinking you want them in heaven if you don’t want them in your living room.”

—Anonymous

The Intellectual Barrier

The intellectual barrier is a predisposition to disregard or reject Christianity based upon bad information, misconceptions or caricatures. An example is the student whose college professor presented belief in Christianity as intellectual suicide. It could be an individual who assumes that because he never heard an answer to one of his questions, then there isn’t one. This barrier also comes as the product of a culture that elevates tolerance, relativism and political correctness. By giving good answers to good questions and by challenging faulty belief systems, we can provide a reasonable foundation upon which the gospel can be considered.

There are four master principles to keep in mind as you seek to break through the Intellectual Barrier.

Master Principle Eight

Be filled with love.

8

“Let love be your greatest aim...” — 1 Corinthians 14:1

How would you describe your attitude toward those who are hostile or ambivalent toward your beliefs?

“It must never be forgotten that the enterprise required of us in evangelism is the enterprise of love: an enterprise that springs from a genuine interest in those whom we seek to win, and a genuine care for their well-being, and expresses itself in a genuine respect for them and a genuine friendliness toward them.”

—J.I. Packer

9

Master Principle Nine

Listen and ask lots of questions before telling.

“He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.”
— Proverbs 18:13 (NASB)

“A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind.” — Proverbs 18:2 (NASB)

How do you think listening and asking questions might help you be effective in sharing your faith?

10

Master Principle Ten

Be poised to raise issues and challenge people’s thinking.

“Make the most of your chances to tell others the Good News. Be wise in all your contacts with them. Let your conversation be gracious as well as sensible, for then you will have the right answer for everyone.” — Colossians 4:5,6

Suppose you are talking with someone about investing in IRAs and they make the comment, “I’m not sure I’ll even be alive five years from now!” What would you say as a follow-up to that?”

Here are a few examples of questions to ask in raising the issue and challenging someone’s thinking at the same time:

- “What is it you really want out of life? What’s going to make you happy and fulfilled?”
- “What would be your basis for deciding what’s right and wrong?”
- “Where do right and wrong come from?”
- “Where do you think most people get their ideas about God today?”
- “Do you think God is relevant in making decisions about your business? Your family?”

(Read Matthew 21:23-27 for a good example of how Jesus used questions to challenge some people’s thinking on the issue of authority.)

Master Principle Eleven

11

Be familiar with the apologetic issues of our culture and be able to give people resources (books, tapes, articles) that will speak to those issues from a biblical perspective.

“So Paul...addressed them...‘Men of Athens...as I was out walking I saw your many altars, and one of them had this inscription on it—‘To the Unknown God.’ You have been worshiping him without knowing who he is, and now I wish to tell you about him.” — Acts 17:22,23

What cultural issue or value did Paul identify in Greece?

Discuss with your group what the three hottest issues are in the marketplace today and list a resource you could give someone to address each issue.

ISSUE	RESOURCE (BOOK, TAPE, VIDEO, ETC.)
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____

As professionals with demanding jobs, it is difficult to be experts on every issue. But we can know what the hot issues are and be able to point people in the right direction and get the proper resources into their hands.

The Volitional Barrier

This is the product of man’s will demonstrated through the sin nature. It is the clenched fist of pride raised in the face of God. This is seen in people who, after being loved, having their questions answered and hearing the gospel, still refuse to respond to Christ. We can’t change a person’s nature, but we can pray that God’s Spirit will convict of sin, righteousness and judgment.

Read the following Scriptures and list some things to pray for your non-Christian friends. (John 16:8-10; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Romans 10:9,17)

For our evangelistic efforts to be most effective, we need to discover which barriers are standing between our friends and Jesus Christ. Having identified them, we need to continue to develop the relationship, provide answers to their honest questions, and pray for them specifically.

“From my personal experience and study of God’s Word, I can assure you that the key starting point in bringing a loved one to Christ is prayer.”

— **Bill Bright**

PLANT SEEDS, NOT BURNING BUSHES

by Mark Littleton

I sat down in my co-worker's office, wondering exactly how I should bring up a problem in my department. "What should I do in a situation where someone in my department is doing something wrong?" I asked. "I know about it, but I'm not sure how to deal with it."

Betty G., a lapsed Catholic, pursed her lips a moment, then said, "*Ethically, what I'd do is go talk to the person in private and see what they say. There may be more to it than meets the eye. If that doesn't work, sit down with the worker and your supervisor together and try to work it out.*"

I nodded, and a sudden idea bounded into my mind. Betty and I had talked about religion on occasion before. I tended to think that anything good I could say to her about Jesus or the Bible might edge her in the direction of faith. So I said, "*You know, it's funny, but Jesus said the same thing.*"

She gazed at me, raised her eyebrows and said, "*That's interesting.*"

I pulled out my little pocket Bible. "*In Matthew 18,*" I said, "*Jesus tells his disciples that if a person sins in some way, you should go and talk to them in private. If that doesn't resolve the problem, get one or two others to come along as witnesses, and talk to them again. It's the process of church discipline.*"

Betty shrugged. "*Sounds like good business advice to me.*"

I laughed. "*Lots of good business advice in this book.*"

She grinned. "*Trying to convert me again, huh?*"

"*Always,*" I said, rising and leaving her office. "*Always working on it.*"

Over the years, Betty and I have talked about many of Christianity's truths and principles. Though she's never made a commitment, I've always felt dropping a 'seed' here and there is helpful. Maybe one day it'll all add up to her happy entrance into the kingdom.

Another example is my brother. I pretty much blew him away as a young zealot whipping hellfire and brimstone out at the dinner table. It produced a real barrier in our relationship.

Years later, I realized it was a mistake to lambaste him with the gospel like some spiritual cudgel. I began seeking less volatile avenues of planting tiny seeds in his head. One occurred some time ago when he recommended John Irving to me as an exceptional writer. I read one of Irving's books, *The*

World According to Garp, specifically to find something common to discuss with him. Some years later, Irving came out with an amazingly religious tome, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. Again, I read it and found in it some points worth discussing. My brother and I talked about it, I was able to offer some thoughts about Irving's treatment of Christianity, and we ended up having quite a discussion. He was even surprised that I would enjoy Irving's portrayal.

I often find it frustrating to get into religious discussions with unbelievers and end up not presenting the gospel. Sometimes time constraints don't allow a presentation. Occasionally, it doesn't seem appropriate. And now and then my attempt is rebuffed.

As a result, I've gradually arrived at a principle that encourages me in the great work of sharing the gospel: learn to plant seeds anywhere and everywhere you can.

What is a 'seed'?

It's a bite size chunk of truth that points to the Bible, God or the gospel. It's a means to get the unbeliever thinking. By planting an idea, a question, an application of the Word, we give the Holy Spirit something to work with, grist for the mill. Many times it's just sharing something off the cuff. Letting a friend know that the Bible has something to say about their need or problem. Showing a relative where it says such and such about a point you've brought up. Telling someone at work about an insight the pastor offered last Sunday, or even a year ago, that pertains to a situation you're discussing.

It's what that seed does that's important. It gets lodged in the unbeliever's brain. It grows. It sends down roots. It leads to other questions, other ideas. Maybe it will even open up the way to a complete sharing of the gospel and a conversion.

Such seeds can also be the specific act of praying for someone in a time of need. When my next door neighbor was dying of cancer, I visited her several times and on one occasion I gave her one of my books on the subject of suffering. Before we left, I asked if she'd like me to pray for her. She said yes, and I offered a brief but heartfelt prayer about her health and future. When I concluded, she said to me, "*No one has ever prayed for me like that before.*"

She died some time later, but her son told me several times his Mom always remembered my prayer. I wondered how often in my life I have missed oppor-

tunities to plant a seed through prayer offered over someone who was sick, or in need, or just worried.

Some would say this is a form of manipulation. I'm advocating using prayer or a quote from the pastor or a word from the Bible to 'manipulate' people into thinking about God, Jesus and salvation. Actually, though, it's not manipulation if what you're doing is the natural overflow of your own walk and life with God. What is more natural for a Christian than to share his thoughts and experiences about the Bible with others, even if they're not Christians?

Furthermore, manipulation usually involves trying to get someone to do something against their will – like the sales person who batters you into submission or the telemarketer who simply won't hang up and keeps throwing up sentences to wear you out. Yes, those are forms of manipulation. But if your purpose is to sincerely and honestly try to interest a person in the greatest news in history, and you're willing to 'back off' when they've heard enough, then isn't that a logical and natural part of real evangelism?

It's the seed-planting outlook that rids us of our nearly pathological guilt about evangelism. Most Christians know they should share the gospel with friends, relatives and neighbors. But they don't know how, or, in some cases, they've tried and gotten burned. Planting seeds is natural, easy, and free of guilt. You can do it almost anywhere and anytime. For those Christians especially who reject some of the 'buttonholing' tactics of past gospelizers, learning to plant seeds as a part of daily living is a realistic solution to the pressures of time we all face.

Anyone who reads the Bible regularly knows that Jesus, Paul and the disciples were masters at planting seeds. Sometimes those seeds, like Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well (John 4) or Philip's word to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), can lead to an unbeliever's conversion. In each case, a little hint was given, an honest query was made. Jesus asked the woman at the well if she might get him a drink of water. Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch if he understood what he was reading.

How then can you begin planting such seeds? Here are several ideas.

1. Learn to ask spiritual questions during lulls in a conversation. One question I sometimes use is, "Have you ever thought much about God and faith?" If the person isn't interested in talking about it, fine. But for me it has often opened up many conversations that might otherwise not move beyond the weather.

2. Make your faith obvious to others by your lifestyle. When Paul and Silas sat chained to a wall in the Philippian prison, they sang songs long into the night. They were simply living out their faith, but their worshipful songs resulted in interest that led to the jailer's conversion. The early Christians used the sign of the fish as a symbol of their faith. Letting others know you're a Christian can sometimes move them to ask you about it. I've also found that they begin to expect you to speak up when opportunities arise, if you've established a pattern of sharing.

3. Truth-dropping. Every time you see Peter in a crowd in the Book of Acts, he has to stand up and give the divine line on the situation. I find in my workplace that many subjects – politics, abortion, the church, the pope, marriage, adultery and others – came up at the strangest times. I often have opportunity to share my own convictions from a biblical standpoint, just like Peter said, "Always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." (1 Peter 3:15).

There are numerous other ways to plant seeds, too:

Ask for something – Jesus did this with the woman at the well.

Help solve a problem with a word about God – Paul offered his help on the storm-tossed ship headed to Rome (Acts 27).

Explain your reasons for unusual behavior – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego reflect this in their refusal to worship Nebuchadnezzar's idol.

Share a word of testimony, how you came to faith – the Apostle Paul did this many times.

Learning to plant seeds not only opens up numerous opportunities to share your faith, but it's also fun. What greater joy can there be than advancing God's kingdom?

There are endless variations on this theme. The important thing is to plant seeds through our words, deeds and character. As we work to live out the truths of our faith, God will bring opportunities to us and cause growth, just like Paul said to the Corinthians, "I planted; Apollos watered; but God was causing the growth." (1 Cor. 3:6). ●

Mark Littleton is a contributor to numerous national magazines, author of 56 books and the pastor of Westbridge Church in Des Moines, Iowa.

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- ASSIGNMENTS**
- ▶ Continue memorizing Philippians 2:14-16.
 - ▶ Continue praying for your Reach 3 people.
 - ▶ Schedule your one-to-one meal with another of your Reach 3 people.
 - ▶ If you currently don't have one of the resources you listed on the previous page, obtain it. Think about your Reach 3 people or others in your network. Is there a barrier they need to overcome? How can you best help them hurdle it?



Why do you think so many people read *People* magazine?

The Power of a Story

There are many reasons why the story of your life and your spiritual journey are so powerful when seeking to share the gospel with someone. First, most of us have had many interesting experiences throughout the course of our lives. When we relate these experiences in a well thought-out way, they can be very compelling to those with whom we are speaking.

Second, when you describe how God has changed your life, people can't argue with you. A skeptic may deny your doctrine, but he can't deny the fact that your life has changed and you are a different person. In your story, you can often say things that would be offensive if stated propositionally. When truth is stated through your personal experience, it is much more palatable.

Finally, your story helps you establish common ground with those to whom you are speaking. It enables them to relate to you, your experiences and the solutions you have found in Jesus Christ. And more often than not, your story will pique your listeners' interest, and they will allow you to give a broader and fuller account of the message of Christ.

“Go Ahead, Tell Us Your Story!”

There will be many occasions in the coming years where you will have the opportunity to tell your story and describe your spiritual journey. In fact, you may have the opportunity to share the gospel on a personal level through your story with 50, 100, 200 or even 500 people throughout your Christian life. And if you have the privilege to tell your story in group settings, that number could run well into the thousands! With that in mind, doesn't it make sense to spend some time preparing to tell your story?

During the life of the apostle Paul, we find just such an occasion in the year 70 A.D. Paul has become somewhat of a celebrity and has gained an audience before King Agrippa, ruler of Israel, and a number of his political advisers in the provincial capital of Caesarea. After some initial conversation, the king sets the stage by saying to Paul, “*Go ahead, tell us your story!*” Paul does not fail to take advantage of the situation. Let's read Acts 26:4-23 and eavesdrop on a master storyteller.

After reading Paul's story, list several points that he makes for each period of his life.

LIFE BEFORE CHRIST
(verses 4-11)

HOW RECEIVED CHRIST
(verses 12-18)

LIFE AFTER CHRIST
(verses 19-25)

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

How would you describe a unifying theme of his story?

What concluding question did he ask (verse 27)?

Now begin to think about your life and your story. Follow Paul's pattern of three main sections to your story, a unifying theme and a concluding question. Try to imagine yourself sharing your story with a friend over lunch or with someone you're sitting next to on an airplane.

First read through the Tips before beginning. Then start writing your story using the questions listed. Be sure to keep the Tips in mind as you write.

Tips for Writing Your Story

- Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and guidance as you write.
- Do not begin by describing your experience (or lack of it) with church.
- Do not start on a spiritual note. Your audience needs to get warmed up first.
- Do not use Christian terminology such as "saved," "converted," "born again," etc.
- Try not to use glittering generalities like "wonderful," "glorious," etc.
- Include as many relevant, thought-provoking facts and experiences as possible.
- Write in such a way that unbelievers can connect with you and your experiences.
- Don't give the impression that your life now has no problems.

Begin With an Interesting or Intriguing Sentence or Story

What Your Life Was Like Before Christ

- What things were important to you (values)?

- What did your life revolve around most?

- What did you get your security/happiness from (career, relationships, achievements)?

- How did these things ultimately let you down?

- Describe one or two experiences or stories from your life that demonstrate the above things (“I remember one time when I...”).

How You Received Christ

- When was the first time you were exposed to dynamic Christianity? What were your reactions, your initial defenses and fears?

- When did you first begin to feel positive? When did you entertain the idea of becoming a Christian? Why? What was motivating you? Answer the question, “Why should I?”

- Describe your struggles in making the decision. What were you afraid of giving up?

- Explain why you did it anyway.

- If you became a Christian at a young age, when did your faith become a day-to-day relationship? What elements of your faith have taken on deeper significance?

“Compelling communication is a prerequisite for capturing your workplace for Christ. Our communication must be clear. It must be delivered in a style that reflects its Creator, and it must be relevant. If we invest the energy to accomplish this very difficult task of communicating, the consequences will be eternal.”

—William Nix,
*Transforming Your
Workplace
for Christ*

After You Received Christ

- What changes in your life did you begin to see? Talk about character issues and attitude and behavioral changes versus do’s and don’ts (e.g. “I started going to church.”). Describe how you saw Christ begin to change some of those things that you talked about in your “Before” section. (“I began to notice how I wasn’t that concerned about my next promotion.”)
- What other benefits have you observed in your life?
- How has Christ changed your marriage and family life? Your work relationships? What changes have you seen in your approach to your work, money, reputation, the opposite sex, etc.?

CONCLUSION

Think of a thought-provoking question to ask your friend at the end so that it encourages him or her to respond to what they’ve heard (e.g. “*Have you ever considered what will happen to you when you die?*”).

Other Things to Keep in Mind

Write a specific outline and then write out your story word for word. (Most accomplished speakers and lecturers do this as standard practice.)

Practice on friends and family members, get feedback and make changes. You will share your story most of the time with friends or co-workers in an informal setting, so keep your story to about 5-10 minutes, as we rarely talk much longer than that at one time in the course of a conversation.

APPLICATION

Take the next few minutes and in the spaces above, begin writing your story.

ASSIGNMENTS

- ▶ Write out your story fully this week, including a specific outline and word-for-word rough draft. Be prepared to share your story with your group members at next week’s meeting.
- ▶ Continue praying for your Reach 3 people.
- ▶ Schedule another one-to-one meeting with your Reach 3 people.

THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF William C. Hill

The early years of my life were characterized by trying to achieve the American dream, making money, buying a home and finding a beautiful wife. And so June 13, 1963 was a day that most people hope for, dream of and even pray for.

I was marrying my childhood sweetheart who came from a wealthy family, and we would be soon moving into a house that her parents would give us. At that time I loved my wife and her parents more than anything in the world. Although my government salary was low, I really didn't have to worry about money because my in-laws gave us anything we wanted.

I enjoyed this arrangement at first, but after awhile I began to feel crowded and somewhat insecure. I knew that I could not give my wife all the things that her parents could give her and continued to give her. This went on for about 4 years until my father-in-law was sent to prison. I was asked to take over the illegal business and I saw this as my chance to assert myself and prove that I was needed and worth something. So I quit my good government job and went to work as the boss of a very large gambling operation.

I felt great about my new status as a man and husband as the business continued to flourish. My lifestyle began to get extravagant. We bought a sports car, a Cadillac, hired a housekeeper and used two of our bedrooms just to store our wardrobe. We went on trips, stayed in the best hotels and ate at the finest restaurants. I suddenly had a lot of friends. In spite of all this outward success, I felt empty, and my marriage relationship began to deteriorate as I was more concerned with material gains and maintaining my image.

About this time my father-in-law was released from prison, and I again began to feel smothered by my wife's family. This added an additional strain to my marriage. Then a child was born to us who had Down's Syndrome. This was devastating to my wife and me as we were unable to cope with this situation.

At this point my wife asked for a divorce, my friends left me and I was bitter toward God for the condition of my daughter. My life seemed to be caving in around me. I began to drink heavily and was very depressed. I even contemplated suicide.

At this point I desperately began to look for answers to my problems. I wondered if God could somehow help me, so I started going to church.

By this time I had left the gambling operation and taken a position with the D.C. Department of Corrections. One day I received a telephone call from a man by the name of Jack in reference to an old friend of mine who was at that time incarcerated at the D.C. jail.

I went to visit my friend in jail, and he shared with me how he had just become a Christian and how Jesus Christ was changing his life. After my friend's release from jail, both he and Jack came to see me in my office. While they were there they shared a booklet with me which explained how a person could have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

I realized that this was the answer to my problems. So right there in my office I prayed a simple prayer and invited Christ to come into my life. The prayer went like this: "Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person you want me to be."

I immediately felt like a tremendous load had been lifted from my shoulders. I experienced a peace like I had never felt before. In the coming months I began to feel at ease and secure with myself. My bitterness about my daughter left me, and I felt a new love toward her and saw her as a special gift from God. The Lord also began to give me a new perspective toward financial and material things. I no longer received my fulfillment and happiness from those things but rather through my relationship with Jesus Christ. I am able to be happy no matter how much financial security I have. Today the Lord has blessed me with a lovely wife and family. With Christ at the center of our marriage, my wife and I are able to love and accept one another for who we are. I don't have to prove anything to my wife. When problems arise we are able to communicate about the problems and to be one-minded as we seek to solve them. My life has not been perfect, but through God I have experienced a life of peace, significance and fulfillment. ●



“...I believe and therefore I speak.” — 2 Corinthians 4:13

*“Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men...”
— 2 Corinthians 5:11 (NASB)*

*“God is using us to speak to you: we beg you...be reconciled to God.”
— 2 Corinthians 5:20*

Chris normally ate his lunch at his desk at work, but today he decided to grab a sandwich at a nearby deli. He saw a co-worker, Joe, eating alone and asked if he could join him. During the meal, Joe mentioned a TV program he had seen the night before about tension in the Middle East.

Later in the afternoon, Chris reflected on his conversation with Joe. He wondered if he could have used that conversation with Joe to have introduced the topic of spiritual matters.

How might Chris have steered the conversation toward spiritual things?

If you are available to meet new people, spend time with them and show personal interest in them, you will discover many opportunities to talk about spiritual matters. However, most of us tend to rush from place to place and from one activity to another and, like the disciples in John, chapter four, rarely think about the people around us.

Master Principle Twelve

Pray each day for opportunities and then take the initiative to be friendly and talk to people.

12

“Jesus was tired from the long walk in the hot sun and sat wearily beside the well. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus asked her for a drink....The woman was surprised that a Jew would ask a ‘despised Samaritan’ for anything—usually they wouldn’t even speak to them!—and she remarked about this to Jesus.” — John 4:6,7,9

Considering the culture of the day, what did Jesus do that was unusual?

How did he open the conversation? Why?

Conversation Starters

- Ask an open-ended question: “*What do you think of...?*”
- Make a comment: “*I really like that tie!*”
- Respond to a comment: “*Why do I always choose the slow line?*” How might you respond to this comment in order to keep the conversation going?

What are some good starters you could use to bridge to the gospel in the following situations?

Riding the subway...

Traveling with a co-worker...

Discussing a TV show...

13

Master Principle Thirteen

Try to steer the conversation toward the spiritual.

“All of us at the Coca-Cola family wake up each morning knowing that every single one of the world’s 5.6 billion people will get thirsty that day — and that we are the ones with the best opportunity to refresh them.”

**— Robert Goizueta,
former Coca-Cola
CEO**

“He replied, ‘If you only knew what a wonderful gift God has for you, and who I am, you would ask me for some living water!’ — John 4:10

How did Jesus steer the conversation toward spiritual matters?

What spiritual parallels can you draw from this quote by Robert Goizueta?

Master Principle Fourteen

14

Relate the spiritual dimension of life to an interest or felt need in the person's life.

How could you steer the conversation if someone made the following comments? First, think of a question to ask. Second, think of a comment to make.

INTEREST OR FELT NEED OF SEEKER

"I'm not a very religious person."

TRANSITION TO SPIRITUAL THINGS

Question:

Comment:

"Life is so crazy—I wonder sometimes what the point is."

Question:

Comment:

"I'm thinking about changing jobs. I've been feeling very unfulfilled lately."

Question:

Comment:

*"I've had a hard time recently in my relationship with _____"
(my spouse, a co-worker, etc.)*

Question:

Comment:

15

Master Principle Fifteen

Ask a question to introduce the topic of spiritual things.

“Do you ever think about spiritual things?”

(e.g., God, the meaning of life or life after death)

“In your opinion, what makes a person a success?”

“If you could change one thing about our world, what would it be?”

“What questions trouble you most about life?”

“How do you determine your values and what are they based on?”

“Are there any areas of your life with which you struggle in determining right from wrong?”

“If your child asked you the following questions, how would you respond?”

— *“What makes something right or wrong?”*

— *“Why do people die and what happens to them when they die?”*

“Why do you think people believe or don’t believe in God?”

“How would someone decide whether or not God exists?”

What are some additional questions you have used or can think of using to turn the conversation toward the spiritual?

16

Master Principle Sixteen

Use tapes, books, articles and videos to introduce spiritual things.

Here’s an example of what you could say:

“Let me give you this Success Factors cassette tape about Doris McMillon. She talks about her career in the media as well as about her spiritual life and how that’s made a difference in her professional and personal life. I think you’ll enjoy it.”

The next time you see that person, ask some follow-up questions to see what they thought of the resource you gave them. For example:

“What did you think of that tape?”

“What was the most meaningful aspect of what she shared?”

“What did you think of the spiritual part — where she describes the idea of a personal relationship with God? Did that make sense to you?”

“Would you like to learn more about experiencing a personal relationship with God?”

In your group, discuss what tapes, books, articles, etc. might be meaningful and relevant to give to a co-worker or friend. List some of them in the space below.

“Even if I were utterly selfish and had no care for anything but my own happiness, I would choose if I might, under God, to be a soul-winner, for never did I know perfect, overflowing, unutterable happiness of the purest and most ennobling order till I first heard of one who had sought and found the Saviour through my means. No young mother ever so rejoiced over her first-born child; no warrior was so exultant over a hard-won victory.”

— Charles H. Spurgeon

CONCLUSION

As we take the initiative to be friendly, talk to people and guide the conversation toward spiritual matters, God will give us many opportunities to discuss a relationship with God, share our own story and use us to bring people to Himself.

ASSIGNMENTS

- ▶ Steer the conversation toward spiritual matters with someone at least once this week.
- ▶ Continue praying for your Reach 3 people.
- ▶ Schedule your one-to-one meal this week with the last person on your Reach 3 list.

YOUR VOCATIONAL NETWORK — Cultivating Relationships at Work

Begin by looking at your job as one of the greatest opportunities in which to build relationships. Think about how you can begin applying these suggestions.

1. Help make your company and its people successful. Co-workers are interested in how you handle problems. Help others to become successful.
2. Make sure that anything labeled Christian with which you are involved is as sharp or sharper than anything sponsored by your company.
3. Pray for yourself and ask God to give you a love for people around you.
4. Pray for your co-workers by name.
5. Get involved in their personal lives. Invite them out for lunch, dinner, coffee, sporting events, plays, etc. Do things together.
6. Invite an individual or couple for dinner to provide a chance to relate personally.
7. Remember events in the lives of your business associates: birthdays, weddings, sickness, accidents, births. Send cards, make telephone calls, drop by.
8. Join a local service club.
9. Become active in your business athletic team(s): softball, bowling, basketball.
10. Participate with associates in athletic activities such as racquetball, tennis, golf.
11. Don't embarrass nonbelievers by your witness. Be sensitive, look for a relaxed setting where you are alone. People rarely share their feelings in a crowd.
12. Reflect a positive outlook in every aspect of your work.
13. Don't pressure anyone. Talk only to people who seem to be interested.
14. Don't try to make an impact for Christ alone! Seek out Christian co-workers and work together on a plan to reach fellow employees.
15. Get training. We may be offending people. Zeal without knowledge builds barriers rather than bridges.
16. Plan your strategy. It's good to be flexible, but planning helps you keep your goal.
17. Plan a night each month to devote to entertaining co-workers and friends.

Adapted from *The Secular Bridge*, by Glenn Pate. Used by permission of Search Ministries.



SESSION SEVEN: Master the Message

7.

One of your co-workers has just been taken to the hospital with a terminal illness. As you travel to the hospital to visit your friend, you begin to think about what you will say to him or her—a person who has never mentioned anything about believing in Christ.

List the key points about the gospel that you want to tell your dying friend.

“Now let me remind you, brothers, of what the Gospel really is, for it has not changed....I passed on to you right from the first what had been told to me, that Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures said He would, and that He was buried, and that three days afterwards He arose from the grave just as the prophets foretold.” — 1 Corinthians 15:1,3,4

Compare your notes from above with the rest of the group and then discuss together what essential points are needed in explaining the gospel to another person. List those points below.

Read Matthew 10:5-18. What type of instructions did Jesus give His disciples as He sent them out to share their faith? Why?

Turn to *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment* in the Appendix section and read through it together as a group.

How does what you wrote above compare with the four principles in *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment*? Are the four principles adequate? Why or why not?

What are some benefits of using a tool like *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment* when sharing the gospel with another person?

Benefits of Using A Guide to Your Most Important Investment

There are many benefits to using *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment* to share the gospel with someone. Here are a few of them.

- It enables you to be prepared and confident.
- It begins with a positive note.
- It contains everything needed to explain the gospel and provides an opportunity for the person to respond to Christ.
- You can read all the way through it with someone in a short period of time.
- It enables you to interact with the person you are sharing with.
- It provides a transferable method—you can teach someone how to use it in a short period of time.
- It contains lots of follow-up information so that you can help someone start growing spiritually right away.
- It is inexpensive and thus can be easily given away.

Which of the above benefits do you think would be most helpful to you in sharing the gospel?

Using A Guide to Your Most Important Investment

1. Using one booklet if possible, hold it so that the person can follow along with you, and read it through word-for-word with the person you are talking with. If you are in a restaurant or similar setting, you may want to use two booklets. Personalize the presentation by using the person's name and by demonstrating a sincere interest in the individual.
2. Ask all of the questions that are asked in the booklet—none of them are rhetorical. Let the person give a response to each and every question.
3. Explain carefully the circle diagrams, making sure they understand the difference between the two types of people. Be sure to interact over the two questions after the circles; they are the most important ones, and they lead into the prayer on the next page.
4. If the person is ready to receive Christ, ask him or her to pray it along with you, out loud if possible, or silently if that is more comfortable or appropriate.
5. Time permitting, read completely through the follow-up information at the end of the booklet. If the person is not ready to receive Christ, encourage him or her to keep the booklet and read it again at a later date.
6. Enjoy yourself!

Role Play Exercise

Find a partner in your group and practice presenting *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment*. (One play the role of the Christian, and the other play the role of the seeker.)

After a few minutes, change roles. Then take some time to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your gospel presentation with each other.

Using the Questions in the Booklet

Find your partner again and practice using the following questions. As before, change roles after a few minutes.

■ 1. Which circle best represents your life?

INDIVIDUAL'S ANSWER

"The one on the left."

"I'm not sure."

"The one on the right."

YOUR RESPONSE

Ask the next question. ("Which circle would you like to have represent your life?")

Ask the next question.

Seek to continue reading the booklet. Say, "Allow me to finish the booklet so you'll be able to share this with someone else."
After the prayer ask, *"Have you ever received Christ in the way this prayer expresses?"*

■ 2. Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

INDIVIDUAL'S ANSWER

"The one on the right, of course!"

"I'm not sure."

"I'd like to stay like the one on the left."

YOUR RESPONSE

Continue reading the booklet. You can say, *"Let me show you how you can receive Christ."*

Continue reading the booklet. You can say, *"Allow me to finish reading so you can hear some of the exciting things that happen when you receive Christ."*

Try to finish as much of the booklet as possible. Say, *"Allow me to finish reading so that you'll completely understand what's involved in receiving Christ."*

■ 3. Does this prayer express the desire of your heart?

INDIVIDUAL'S ANSWER

"Yes"

"No"

YOUR RESPONSE

Encourage the individual to pray the prayer, repeating after you phrase by phrase, or silently if he or she prefers.

a. Share your own spiritual journey.

b. Ask several probing questions, like, *"If you were to die today, do you know for certain where you would spend eternity?"*
"If you died today and you stood before God and He asked you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' what would you say?"

c. Say, *"Let me show you a few of the wonderful things that happen when you receive Christ."* Then turn to the *Now That You Have Received Christ* section and explain those things to the person.

ASSIGNMENTS

- ▶ Read *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment* aloud on your own to become more familiar with its content. Memorize the four principle statements and their Scripture reference locations.
- ▶ Share *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment* with a non-Christian this week. Try to share with one of your Reach 3 people.

A GUIDE TO YOUR MOST IMPORTANT INVESTMENT

YOU INVEST IN YOURSELF DAILY—EDUCATION, RELATIONSHIPS, CAREER. BUT HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED THE VALUE OF INVESTING IN THE SPIRITUAL ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE? THE FOLLOWING FOUR PRINCIPLES WILL HELP YOU SUCCEED SPIRITUALLY THROUGH A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

> *From the beginning, relationships have been woven into the tapestry of our lives. We were designed to experience love, intimacy with God and each other.*

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” “When I look at the night sky and see the work of Your fingers—the moon and the stars You have set in place—what are mortals that You should think of us, mere humans that You should care for us?” (Selections from Genesis 1:1; Psalm 8:3,4 (NLT).)

Principle One

God loves you and created you to know Him and experience His love.

> GOD OFFERS LOVE

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

> GOD OFFERS LIFE

[Jesus speaking] “I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness” (John 10:10, TEV).

> What prevents us from knowing God personally?

Principle Two

All people are sinful and separated from God. Therefore, none can know Him personally or experience His love.

> PEOPLE ARE SINFUL

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

We were all created to experience an intimate relationship with God; but, because of our own stubborn self-will, we chose to go our own independent way, and the relationship with God was broken. This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is an evidence of what the Bible calls sin.

> PEOPLE ARE SEPARATED FROM GOD

“For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

God is holy (entirely free of moral evil and absolutely perfect in motive and behavior) and people are sinful (not living up to God’s perfect standard). Thus, a great gap separates the two. The arrows in the diagram on the left illustrate that people are continually trying to reach God and establish a personal relationship with Him through philosophy and religion or by depending on their own efforts, such as leading a “good, moral life,” but they inevitably fail.

> The third principle explains the only way to bridge this gap ...

Principle Three

Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for our sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience His love.

> HE DIED IN OUR PLACE

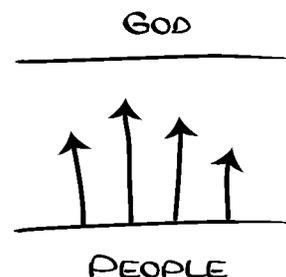
“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

> HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD

“... Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, He was seen by more than five hundred of His followers at one time ...” (1 Corinthians 15:3-6 NLT).

> HE IS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me’” (John 14:6).



This diagram illustrates that God has bridged the gap that separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place to pay the penalty for our sins.

A GUIDE TO YOUR MOST IMPORTANT INVESTMENT

> IT IS NOT ENOUGH JUST TO KNOW THESE THREE PRINCIPLES ...

Principle Four

We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Then we can know God personally and experience His love.

> WE MUST RECEIVE CHRIST

“But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12 NLT).

> WE RECEIVE CHRIST THROUGH FAITH

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9).

> WHEN WE RECEIVE CHRIST, WE EXPERIENCE A SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

(Read John 3:1–8)

> WE RECEIVE CHRIST BY PERSONAL INVITATION

“Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear Me calling and open the door, I will come in” (Revelation 3:20 NLT).

Receiving Christ involves turning to Him from self (repentance), trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive our sins and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of our will.

These two circles represent two kinds of lives.

> A Life Without Jesus Christ

Self is on the throne.
Christ (+) is outside the life.

• Areas of life directed by self, resulting in frustration and imbalance.



> A Life Entrusted to Christ

Christ is in the life and on the throne.
Self is yielding to Christ (+).

• Areas of life directed by Christ, enabling you to begin to experience balance, peace and fulfillment.



> Which circle best represents your life?

> Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

The following explains how you can receive Christ

> YOU CAN RECEIVE CHRIST RIGHT NOW BY FAITH THROUGH PRAYER (PRAYER MEANS TALKING WITH GOD.)

God knows your heart and is not as concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

*“Dear Jesus, I want to know You personally.
Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins.
Please forgive all my sins and give me eternal life.
I open the door of my life and receive You as my
Savior and Lord. Take control of the throne of
my life. Make me the kind of person
You want me to be.”*

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, pray this prayer right now, and Christ will come into your life as He promised. Through His power you will begin to experience the lasting peace, balance and fulfillment that only He can provide.

How to Know That Christ Is In Your Life

> DID YOU RECEIVE CHRIST INTO YOUR LIFE?

According to His promise in Revelation 3:20, where is Christ right now in relationship to you? Christ said that He would come into your life and be your Savior and friend so you can know Him personally. Would He mislead you? On what authority do you know that God has answered your prayer? (The trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word.)

> THE BIBLE PROMISES ETERNAL LIFE TO ALL WHO RECEIVE CHRIST

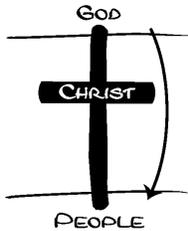
“And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:11-13).

Thank God often that Christ is in your life and that He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5). You can know on the basis of His promise that Christ lives in you and that you have eternal life from the very moment you invited Him in. He will not deceive you.

A GUIDE TO YOUR MOST IMPORTANT INVESTMENT

> AN IMPORTANT REMINDER ... FEELINGS CAN BE UNRELIABLE

You might have expectations about how you should feel after placing your trust in Christ. While feelings are important, they are unreliable indicators of your sincerity or the trustworthiness of God's promise. Our feelings change easily, but God's Word and His character remain constant.



This diagram illustrates the relationship between fact (God and His Word), faith (trust in God and His Word), and feelings (the result of our faith and obedience). When filled with gasoline, the car will run with or without the trailer; however, it would be useless to attempt to pull the car by the trailer. In the same way, we

should not depend on feelings or emotions to live the Christian life, but place our faith in God and His Word.

Now That You Have Entered Into a Personal Relationship With Christ

The moment you entered into a personal relationship with Christ by faith, as an act of the will, many things happened including the following:

- > Christ came into your life (Revelation 3:20; Colossians 1:27).
- > Your sins were forgiven (Colossians 1:14).
- > You became a child of God (John 1:12,13).
- > You received eternal life (John 5:24).
- > You began the great adventure for which God created you (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Can you think of anything more wonderful that could happen to you than entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Would you like to thank God in prayer right now for what He has done for you? By thanking God, you demonstrate your faith.

Investing in Your Relationship With God

Every relationship requires an investment of time and effort to make it grow. Investing in the following will ensure your spiritual growth.

G . R . O . W . T . H .

- > **Go** to God in prayer daily (John 15:7).
- > **Read** God's Word daily (Acts 17:11); begin with the Gospel of John.
- > **Obey** God moment by moment (John 14:21).
- > **Witness** for Christ by your life and words (Matthew 4:19; John 15:8).
- > **Trust** God for every detail of your life (1 Peter 5:7).
- > **Holy Spirit**—Allow Him to control and empower your daily life and witness (Galatians 5:16,17; Acts 1:8).

> REMEMBER

Your walk with Christ depends on what you allow Him to do in and through you, empowered by the Holy Spirit, not what you do for Him through self-effort.

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APPENDICES

CLOSING THE PRESENTATION

What Would You Have Said?

Janie had been talking with her co-worker Kay for many months about spiritual matters. Then one day they went to lunch and during that time Janie read through the *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment* brochure with Kay. At the end, Kay made a sincere decision to receive Jesus Christ as her Savior, and Janie was thrilled.

They continued reading in the brochure, and Janie asked Kay the question, “Did you receive Christ into your life?” Janie replied by saying, “I hope so!”

Janie asked the next question found in the booklet, “According to His promise in Revelation 3:20, where is Christ right now in relation to you?” Kay responded with, “God is everywhere.”

Janie was now faced with the challenge of helping Kay have confidence that Jesus Christ was in her heart and that she now possessed eternal life.

After a Person Has Received Christ

After your friend has prayed to invite Jesus Christ into his or her heart, congratulate him or her and express how glad you are for him or her. Continue reading in the brochure and ask the same question that Janie did, “Did you receive Christ into your life?” If a person is unsure (e.g. Kay’s response, “I hope so!”) or hesitant, there are some questions you can ask to help the person gain confidence in his or her relationship with God. (N.B. We must be careful not to imply that a person has Christ in his or her life based on praying a prayer. We are not saved by prayer, but through trusting in Christ’s payment for our sins on the cross.)

Helping a Person Who Is Unsure

■ Read again Revelation 3:20. Ask the following questions based on this verse.

“What does the door represent?”
(Answer: the door to our hearts and lives.)

“What is your responsibility?”
(Answer: to open the door.)

“What is Christ’s responsibility?”
(Answer: to come in.)

“Did you sincerely open the door of your life to Christ?” (Wait for his or her answer.)

“If you did, then where is Christ right now in relation to you?” (Answer: in my life.)

■ Read 1 John 5:11-13. Ask the following questions based on these verses.

“What has God given you?”
(Answer: eternal life.)

“Where is this life found?”
(Answer: in His Son, Jesus Christ.)

“If you have the Son, what else do you have?”
(Answer: eternal life.)

“Do you have the Son?”
(Wait for his or her answer.)

“If so, then what else do you have?”
(Answer: eternal life.)

“When did this life begin for you?”
(Answer: at the moment of trusting Christ as Savior.)

“When does this life end?”
(Answer: never; it’s eternal.)

■ Read together the paragraph in the brochure which says, “Thank God often that Christ is in your life and that He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5). You can know on the basis of His promise that Christ lives in you and that you have eternal life from the very moment you invite Him in. He will not deceive you.” Now find and read together Hebrews 13:5 from your Bible or New Testament (note: this verse is referenced in the brochure, but not written out). Now ask the following questions.

“What has God promised you?”
(Answer: to never leave or forsake you.)

“Then how many times do you need to receive Christ into your life?” (Answer: only once.)

Other Things to Emphasize

■ Read through the section entitled, “Do Not Depend On Feelings.” Make sure your friend understands this concept.

■ Read through the section entitled, “Now That You Have Received Christ.” Stop after the fifth point and ask the question, “Which of these exciting truths seems most significant to you right now?” (Pause to let him or her answer.)

■ Now read the following section which contains two questions: “Can you think of anything more wonderful that could happen to you than receiving Christ? Would you like to thank God in prayer right now for what He has done for you? By thanking God you demonstrate your faith.” Encourage your friend to pray a “thank you”

prayer, either out loud or silently. Say something like, “I’ll pray a short prayer first and then you can say a prayer too. Would that be all right?”

■ Finish reading through the brochure if time permits. Emphasize any points under the Growth section that seem important to you.

■ Ask your friend to meet with you again to begin the growth process. If a Foundations or similar group is available, then invite your friend to participate.

■ Close in prayer if appropriate.

HOW TO PERSONALLY INVITE A NON-CHRISTIAN FRIEND TO AN OUTREACH EVENT

Q. “Who should I invite to the upcoming evangelistic breakfast?”

A. A non-Christian or unchurched friend or colleague.

Q. What if they’re not interested?

A. You won’t know until you ask! Don’t prejudge their response!! Also, if your words and attitude convey, “I care about you and want to share something that’s meaningful to me and I think you’d enjoy, too,” then they’ll appreciate your thinking of them.

Remember, the purpose of inviting them is so that they will be exposed to the message and love of Christ from a person of influence and accomplishment in a non-threatening, comfortable environment.

Q. So when should I invite my guest?

A. The sooner the better, to give them time to make necessary arrangements. Once you receive the printed invitations, go ahead and ask.

Q. What should I say?

A. Here are some ideas of what not to say and then what to say.

What Not to Say

Try to avoid religious or unfamiliar terminology:

“Hi, Joe. How’s it going? By the way, I’ve been meaning to tell you about this great ‘prayer breakfast’ that meets over at the Club. This month’s speaker is a ‘very religious’ businessman here in Dallas. He’ll be sharing his ‘personal testimony.’ How about joining me on the 23rd?”

What to Say

Instead, be clear yet sensitive to his/her interests, needs, desires and comfort level:

“Hi, Carol. How was your weekend? Sounds busy! The next couple of weeks will be pretty hectic, too.”

“You know, Carol, there’s a very special breakfast coming up on Thursday, the 23rd that I want to tell you about, and I hope you can even join me. Here’s an invi-

tation that gives you all the information. I’ve gone to events like this before and the speakers have been interesting — everything from sports figures to politicians to accomplished business and professional people.”

“I think it’ll be fascinating to hear about this man’s experiences and feelings. The speakers usually talk a little about the spiritual side of their lives as well, which has always given me something new to think about.”

“Carol, I’d like you to come as my guest. I know the meeting’s early in the morning, but it’s been worth getting up for, and there’ll be plenty of coffee and good food. Would you like to join me?”

Phone Conversation for Getting Other Christians Involved in an Outreach Event

“Hello, _____.
This is _____,
calling about the Norm Miller breakfast on April 23. Do you have a minute to chat?”

“Are you familiar with the details of the breakfast? Have you received a copy (s) of the invitation?” (If no, explain the details.)

“I really hope you’re planning to attend because this is going to be a very exciting event. As you know, the purpose of the breakfast is to expose non-Christian men and women to the reality of a personal relationship with God as Norm Miller shares his spiritual journey. It’s a great opportunity to bring a few of your unchurched co-workers, friends or family members. Will you be able to attend and bring a few people?”

“That’s great! Would you be interested in being a table host and trying to fill a table with your friends and colleagues?”

“Let me suggest that you make a list of the people you’d like to invite. Keep in mind that about one in three or four that you invite will be able to attend.”

“Either give your friend an invitation in person or send them one in the mail with a personal note enclosed right

away. Do you have enough invitations? How can I get you some more very quickly?”

“Then be sure to follow-up in a few days to see if they’ll be able to come. Let me also send or fax you a document that explains how to personally invite someone to an

event like this. You’ll find this very helpful when you talk to your friends in person or make your follow-up phone call.”

“Do you have any other questions I can answer for you?”

HOW TO PHONE SOMEONE AFTER AN OUTREACH EVENT

After an outreach event it is a great time to follow up on the interest that the event creates in those whom you have invited. The goal of your contact is to build on and bridge from that interest to an opportunity for further discussion. The following phone dialogue illustrates a conversational flow that can lead to further interaction. The basic dialogue could be used in person as well on the phone.

Inviter: Hi Jim, how’s it going?

Invited: Great. What’s new with you?

Inviter: Not much. Hey, thanks again for joining me at that breakfast. I hope you had a good time.

Invited: I really did—I appreciate your inviting me to come.

[If they had a box checked on their card, go to A. If no boxes checked, but had a positive comment, go to B. If no comment, go to C.]

A. If the Person Checked a Box

Inviter: You’re sure welcome. By the way, the Priority staff asked me to follow up with you concerning your response from the card you filled out. You indicated on your card _____. I would love to get with you in the next few days and share with you some great material that has really helped a lot of people cultivate their relationship with God. I’d also love to explain to you some of the opportunities for spiritual growth that are available and see if any would be of interest to you.

Invited: Great. I’d like that.

Inviter: If you don’t mind, I’ll also check with one of the Priority staff and see if he/she could join us. I think you’d enjoy meeting him/her. When would you be free in the next few days?

Invited: How about Wednesday for lunch?

Inviter: That sounds great! I’ll see you then.

B. If the Person Did Not Check a Box, But Gave a Positive Comment

Inviter: You’re sure welcome. By the way, the Priority staff asked me to follow up with you concerning your response from the card you filled out. I really appreciate the comment you made on your card, Jim. It’s really helpful to get that kind of feedback. I would love to get with you in the next few days and share with you some of the opportunities for spiritual growth that are available from Priority Associates and see if any would be of interest to you. Maybe I could get one of the Priority staff to join us. I think you’d enjoy meeting him.

Invited: Great. I’d like that.

Inviter: When would you be free in the next few days?

Invited: How about Wednesday for lunch?

Inviter: That sounds great! I’ll see you then.

C. If a Person Did Not Check a Box, and Did Not Write a Comment

Inviter: What did you think of Matt’s presentation?

Invited: I really enjoyed it.

Inviter: From what you heard that morning, where would you say you are on your spiritual journey?

Invited: Oh, somewhere on the path I guess, not really making a lot of progress.

Inviter: I’ve been learning some interesting things through the activities sponsored by Priority Associates that have been encouraging in my own spiritual growth. I’d love to share them with you sometime if you’re interested.

[If no or negative response, then let it go. If neutral or positive, suggest lunch as above. If you get the appointment, great. If they seem to put it off, drop it and invite them to the next event. Wait on God’s timing!]

How to Contact Invitees Who Didn't Come!!

Yes! You can follow up with individuals that you invited but who didn't come. Of course there isn't as much of an open door, but just the fact that you invited them to a "spiritual event" leaves a door open for further conversation.

With this contact though, you are simply going to put out a feeler to see if in God's timing they are really open to further discussion. All you can do is take the initiative—it is really up to God to create any response ... but HE CAN!

Inviter: Hi Jim, how's it going?

Invited: Great. What's new with you?

Inviter: Not much. Hey, I'm sorry you were unable to join me at that breakfast last Tuesday. It was really a good event.

Invited: Well, I am sorry I couldn't make it—but I do appreciate your inviting me. I really wanted to come, but something came up.

Inviter: Well, don't worry about it. There will be other opportunities if you're interested. I know that this fall in October, Priority Associates is hosting a nationally recognized speaker, John Trent, at the Hyatt. If you like, I'll let you know when that takes place.

Invited: Sure, keep me informed about that.

Inviter: Can I ask you a related question?

Invited: Sure.

Inviter: Where would you say you are on your spiritual journey anyway?

Invited: I'm somewhat interested but not really pursuing it that much right now.

Inviter: Would you be interested in exploring in a non-religious, business-like fashion how faith can make a positive difference in your personal and professional life?

[If he responds negatively, go to A, if positively, to B.]

A. I understand. But if your interest grows at any point, I'd love to talk with you.

B. Great. Why don't we have lunch sometime and I can show you some materials that really have helped me in my spiritual journey. [set a time] I may have another friend join us who has an interest in this area. [leaves the door open to bring a friend]

What to Do on the Appointment

Start with casual conversation. Then turn the conversation to the event.

[Even if they indicated on their card an interest in a discussion group, growing in their faith, etc., assume that they may not know Christ. Your primary goal is to discover where they stand in that regard. The first priority is to make sure they understand the gospel.]

Use the questions from Master Principle Sixteen:

"What did you think of the _____ (event, literature, etc.)?"

"What was the most meaningful aspect of what he shared?"

"The speaker talked about a personal relationship with Christ—has anyone ever shared with you how you can know Christ personally?"

When they say, "No" or "What do you mean?" answer with, "Could I explain to you what I have found?" Proceed only if they say okay.

Note: Before taking out A Guide to Your Most Important Investment brochure say, "I have a brief presentation of the New Testament message that explains how a person can know Christ personally. May I show it to you?" Then if they say yes, begin sharing the booklet.

After explaining the gospel, tell them about other options available for further discussion and study with a group or one-to-one in the areas of investigating Christianity or growing in their faith.

TWELVE REASONS PEOPLE HESITATE TO FOLLOW CHRIST AND WHAT TO SAY by Paul Barger

Many people have an emptiness or hunger that they sense is related to a void in the spiritual part of their lives. They are inclined to investigate matters of faith but are held back because of bad experiences, people who poorly represent Christ or fears about what is really involved.

Jerry and Greg were friends who came to a luncheon where they heard a prominent business man share his story of how following Christ had changed his life. Both were skeptics but were at a point in their lives where they wanted to know more so they joined a discussion group to investigate the claims of Christ.

Each week before the meeting they would talk on the phone to see if the other was going to go. They were intrigued by the discussions, but kept waiting for the “other shoe to drop.” They just “knew” it was all a show and eventually they were going to get asked for money.

The “ask” never came and after a few weeks Greg became a follower of Jesus Christ. His life changed dramatically and he found the peace and meaning that had eluded him for forty-some years. Many of the hesitations below were felt by Greg as he considered the claims of Christ. Perhaps hearing the answers that Greg and others have found will help you as you speak to people like him.

Keep in mind that there is often a grain of truth in some of these concerns. But usually the grain of truth is overshadowed by a flood of misconceptions or wrong perceptions that make these hesitations groundless in light of the reality of life with Christ.

1. “I don’t want to give up all the fun in my life.”

This was a feeling a man named Jim had. He was afraid that if he became serious about Christianity then he would have to give up doing all the things he considered fun.

This is primarily a misconception about what it means to walk with Christ. Before a person comes to Christ he thinks there are certain things he must “give up” in order to become a Christian. But in fact, the Bible speaks about the inadequacy of human abstinence in dealing with spiritual matters anyway or changing our character and desires to what God wants.

However, Jesus Christ changes a person from within. Jim found that he did not have to “give up things.”

Rather, Christ changed his attitudes and interests so that he found himself with a whole new category of values, desires and definition of fun. Sometimes slowly, sometimes dramatically, Christ changes a person’s desires in life so he or she finds a new and deeper joy in things that are really important and significant in life.

Does this mean a Christian never has “fun”? Not at all. Scripture is full of examples of joy, enjoyment, celebration and laughter. Certainly, Jesus creating wine from water at a wedding exemplifies the idea that God’s creation is to be enjoyed. Scripture addresses the dangers of excess in many areas, of course, and gives clear guidelines for living that reflect God’s best for us.

Jim found that being a Christian doesn’t mean you don’t have fun, it means you find greater joy in legitimate ways and also in new and deeper ways than ever before. Jesus said, “*I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.*”

2. “I’m afraid I will lose control of my life.”

Many fear that following Christ will make them “robots for Jesus.” They are worried that God will start making all the decisions in their lives. A large part of this concern is based on an inadequate understanding of God’s character of love, kindness and desire for man to exercise free will (see also question 8).

Another part of this concern is that we feel we know what is best for us and are fearful of letting anyone else control that. It is important to realize that the God of the Bible is someone who knows everything about your life and has your very best in mind. In addition, being in control of your life is largely a myth anyway. Could you control when or where you were born? Or how you look? Or what family or culture you come from? Think of all the things about your life that you really can’t control!

God will never force you to submit to His plan for you. He has given us free will. We can run our lives on our own or trust Him to bless and enrich our lives beyond our imagination. To surrender control to Him is to acknowledge the reality that He alone is really in control of the events of our lives. To willingly trust Him with the direction of our lives results in the very best for us.

3. “I don’t want to give up my career and pursuit of success.”

This is, of course, related to the above concerns. If I get serious about Christ will He change the direction of my life? Is pursuing success “unchristian?”

Actually, the Bible talks a lot about success. It does however, couch the concept in terms of one’s relationship with Christ and not how much money one makes. It is interesting that Christ spoke of money far more than “salvation.” The Bible also speaks about the Lord prospering the work of those who trust Him, but there are no blanket promises of riches. God gives wealth and position to some but instructs that these gifts are to be used for blessing others. In the long run they are very undependable and simply cannot be relied upon for either happiness or security.

As far as changing your career, the Bible encourages each new believer to “remain where you are called.” It means that God most likely wants your “light to shine” in whatever field you find yourself in. There is a great need for people to be Christian examples in every walk of life. As Christ changes a person’s life, others around him or her will notice and want to know how they can have that too. Of course, God may have a plan for your life that includes a career change. But if so, it will be something that you will find a growing desire for and in it will experience God’s very best.

4. “I’m afraid that I will become a ‘weird’ person.”

Greg, mentioned in the opening remarks above, finally came to grips with the claims of Christ one evening while standing in his kitchen. As he thought about opening his life to Christ, he had a strange fear that when he invited Christ into his life he would fall on the floor, foam at the mouth or have some strange, dramatic experience like people he had seen while watching certain “televangelist” TV shows.

As he thought about it, he decided that the risk was outweighed by the potential payoff if all this was really true and life-changing. He prayed a simple prayer inviting Christ to come into his life. And then he waited...but nothing happened. At least nothing dramatic or strange. But over the next several weeks he began to see his life change in ways that were exciting and very satisfying.

Rather than becoming “weird” Greg found new reason and strength for living. The most significant example was when he got fired a few weeks later. He had e-mailed his boss about taking on work outside the company and the boss said, “Go ahead, full-time!” Greg found to his amazement that Christ gave him a peace about it all and even helped him deal with the feelings of anger and hurt with those involved in the firing.

So what does happen to us when we receive Christ? Do we have a personality change? Actually, no. What happens is that Christ changes us from the inside out, but in ways that liberate who we really are. He enables us to become what He designed us to be, not something weird, but a person who reflects the beauty and ingenuity of the Creator.

5. “My friends will ostracize/reject me.”

There is certainly a grain of truth in this. As a new Christian’s values change, sometimes his friends don’t know what to think. Over time they may sense he doesn’t seem to want to do all the same things they used to do together. Depending on how the new Christian expresses his feelings about this he can either send the wrong message to his friends or draw out their interest in what they see happening in his life.

For Christians who maintain an attitude of acceptance and love toward their friends, there will be many doors opened to share what is happening in their lives and help others find new life in Christ as well. However, sometimes well-meaning Christians will unknowingly communicate a sense of superiority or condemnation. This is clearly wrong and does not reflect how Christ feels about their friends!

Some new Christians coming out of destructive lifestyles may need to limit their time spent with old buddies simply to minimize the influence of the old lifestyle they wish to escape. This can lead to feelings of rejection on both sides but as the believer stands firm and relies on Christ, his old friends will see someone with new strength and realize that they too, can be free of some of the destructive things that drag them down.

6. “I’m turned off by all the hypocrites in the church.”

Unfortunately, there are a lot of hypocrites in the church! But there are hypocrites in all walks of life. It is interesting to note that Jesus reserved His harshest criticism for religious leaders who were hypocritical. You may know people at work who proudly tell you they are leaders in their church, but you know they conduct business in ways that are illegal or lack integrity. People will participate in church for varied reasons, often social or cultural in nature. It is important to realize that we cannot evaluate the claims of Christ based on the lives of those claiming to follow Him. The Bible uses strong language about this and says that those who claim to belong to Christ but do not follow His teachings are liars!

The honest seeker and skeptic needs to look at the life of Christ and see if He lived consistently with His claims. If He is the way, truth and life, then we must grapple with Him and not be led astray from the truth by the incon-

sistencies of those claiming to be His followers.

7. “Christianity is just a psychological crutch for weak people.”

Far from being a crutch, Christianity in truth is more like an iron lung. We are designed to live in a vital relationship with the living God. To try to fill one’s life with anything less than that is an exercise in futility. Jesus does not want to be your crutch, He wants to be your life!

To be sure, people sometimes turn to Christ in their hour of difficulty. But that does not affect the question of the truthfulness of the claims of Christ. People will often grasp at anything to relieve pain. Drugs, travel, sexual activity, etc. can all be used to medicate the soul. But only one thing can really fill the “God-shaped vacuum,” and that is Christ.

Some people come to Christ in difficulty because that is the only thing that breaks through their shell of pride and self-dependence. Others come to Christ because they are looking for truth and are struck by the life and words of Jesus. Regardless of the motive, if Christ is indeed the Savior, and if He accepts all who come to trust Him as such, then whether we come to Him through difficulty, intellectual search or just seeing some friend’s changed life, we can be assured of His acceptance and be confident that our decision is right.

8. “I’m not sure that I can trust God with my life.”

This concern can stem from a limited or distorted view of God. Sometimes people grow up only hearing preachers scream about an angry, vengeful God. Their view of God is of someone to be feared, not trusted. They feel that if they really give their life to Christ He may send them to Africa as missionaries or make them marry an ugly spouse.

For others, their view of God is shaped by the closest authority figures in their lives, their parents. If a parent was harsh, withdrawn, absent or if they were physically and emotionally abusive, the child grows up learning not to trust God and projects on God those qualities of the parent. It is very hard to trust God if you believe Him to be distant, mean, vindictive or otherwise untrustworthy.

Some people tend to see difficult circumstances in life as a sign that God is angry with them, punishing them or unloving. When people pray for God’s intervention and still experience the death of a family member, reversal of fortune or other great disappointment, it is taken as rejection by God. Often the person disappointed will decide that either God hates them or He doesn’t exist. It is incredibly difficult for us to understand how evil can exist if there is a God who is both good and all-powerful.

While Scripture does not fully explain this paradox, it is clear that regardless of circumstances, God is compassionate, forgiving, and accepting. To be sure, God judges sin but the whole point of the gospel is that Jesus Christ bore the judgment for sin at the cross. His sacrifice provides forgiveness for all those who willingly come to Him and accept Him as Savior.

Christ’s death on the cross is the ultimate display of the love and grace of God. All other circumstances must be evaluated in light of the cross. If God loved us enough to send His Son to die for us, and if, as the Bible assures us, He really wants the very best for us, then we can trust Him with every area of our life. The measure of His trustworthiness was demonstrated at the cross.

9. “I’m too unworthy to be accepted by God and other Christians.”

People who have made a lot of mistakes in their lives feel completely unworthy of God’s love. They feel they are too bad, that they have sinned too much and are unredeemable from God’s point of view. They compare themselves to others and feel like God loves the “square guy” but they are worthless, not special. They may look good outwardly but they know what is inside them and feel beyond help.

This attitude, of course, is based on the idea that somehow we can merit God’s love and forgiveness, if only we can “clean up our act.” The Bible makes it clear, however, that “there is no one good, not even one.” Even the “nicest” person has a sinful heart. God doesn’t merely look at our outward acts, He judges the heart. Not a single person can come to God and expect anything but judgment. Ask anyone if they would be comfortable playing a video tape of their thoughts for the world to see and they will quickly decline. Jesus gave a long and unflattering list of evils that stem from the heart of all men.

We are ALL unworthy. As a matter of fact, Paul wrote that as a persecutor of the church he was “chief among sinners.” And yet Christ forgave him and made him a prime example of the grace of God. Have you murdered any Christians? Then you are not any worse than the apostle Paul. God can graciously forgive you and just as certainly transform you into a man or woman who is a marvelous example to others of His unlimited grace and power to change lives.

Some people also use this as an excuse to reject Christ, saying they are too sinful, when in reality they don’t want to take responsibility for their past actions, nor are they willing to grapple with the attitude and behavioral changes they will need to make in partnership with God.

10. “I can’t live up to the commitment required.”

This is related to the previous concern. Many look at their lives and feel that they could never live up to the high standards of the Christian life. As a matter of integrity they don’t want to accept Christ and then not follow through on the commitment.

The Bible clearly tells us that just as there is nothing we can do to merit God’s acceptance of us, neither can we live up to God’s standards in our own human strength. That is the good news of Christ. Not only does He take away our sin and judgment through His death on the cross, but also He Himself comes to live within us to produce His very life in ours.

Jesus doesn’t ask us to struggle in our own strength to live the Christian life, but to trust in Him to produce His life in us. It is a growing part of the personal relationship that begins when we accept Christ as our Savior.

Again, this may just be a ploy on the part of the non-Christian which he uses as a rationalization to excuse himself from coming to Christ (“The standard is just too high, so why try?”).

11. “I feel uncomfortable in the church; I don’t fit in.”

Churches come in all kinds of different styles. Some are very traditional, some very contemporary. Unfortunately, some have the attitude that if you don’t dress, talk and pray like them, then you are an outsider. This is not how Christ would have it, but reflects the fallibility of people at times, even those who call themselves Christians. Don’t judge Christ by everyone who bears His name.

The seeker and new Christian often feel they aren’t as good as those in the church. They feel like they have a lot of rough edges, they don’t know the lingo, can’t pray, can’t find verses in the Bible. To them it’s like being in a whole different culture.

However, there are churches where seekers and skeptics are welcomed. These groups tend to have services that are user-friendly with music and language that relate to the person on the street.

Each person needs to find the kind of church where they feel accepted and comfortable with the style of worship and teaching, which at the same time puts a high value on studying the Bible and following Christ.

One exciting thing for our friend, Greg, took place on a trip to visit relatives shortly after his decision to receive Christ. His wife’s brother was part of a church that met in their home. For years Greg had refused to ever go when in town because he was so turned off to religion. But now he told his wife he wanted to go, which thrilled her. The service was simple, with singing and people sharing things that God had taught them that week. Greg was amazed at how God actually spoke to him through the examples people gave of their growth. He was even more amazed when he found himself sharing with the group something God had been teaching him—and people told him, a new Christian, how much that encouraged them!

You will find that, as people grow in their relationship with Christ, they will understand how to relate better with other believers in Christ and find great encouragement from that.

12. “I think you should just do what feels good.”

It is one of the great curses of the late 20th century that people have decided to measure what’s true on the basis of how they feel. Dr. Laura Schlessinger makes the telling point that we need to operate not on the basis of what feels good, but what is right.

Feelings are not reliable. They can change. People have felt good about “bad” systems as well as “good” ones. Nazism, communism, and the cult of Jim Jones all began with good feelings. These examples show that the notion that truth is relative to the cultural setting or situation is inaccurate. Adultery, for example, is never right no matter what the cultural values are. According to the Bible, there are absolute standards given by God.

The country-western song says, “It can’t be wrong when it feels so right!” God has given us clear guidelines for living that are for our very best and reflect a morality that is right and true. Giving in to the emotions of the moment because they “feel right” only leads to destruction and misery in relationships and every other area of life.

As you share your faith with your family, friends and colleagues, you will find that many of them have these objections and concerns. These answers should help you as you lovingly help them wrestle with the reality of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. ●

Paul Barger is the director of Priority Associates in Austin, Texas.

It was one of those clear, bitterly cold days that occasionally blows through Washington, D.C., and I was nervously driving across Memorial Bridge on my way to church. Nervously, because this was the first time I had brought anyone to my new church since becoming a believer eight months earlier. I had been raised in the Christian Science faith, and my friend was confused as to why I would leave a progressive, intellectually-oriented religion for one that seemed so... “traditional.” At that moment I was telling her about the church structure, and she asked if there were any women on the Board of Elders at my church.

“No,” I said, staring straight ahead to avoid eye contact.

A stunned silence followed. “You go to a church where the elders are all MEN?” And then she laughed, not unkindly, but incredulously.

That laugh captured better than any words the dilemma I had wrestled with — or more accurately, had avoided — since my life-transforming encounter with God the previous summer. Giving my life to Christ and joining a new church had created a sort of internal culture shock. The familiar territory of being a “liberated woman” had been rearranged by one overwhelming fact: I had been born again.

I had been raised by parents who encouraged me to follow my dreams, and gave me the tools to do it. I had attended a liberal arts college and had received a masters degree from Yale Law School. I had enjoyed a wonderful career at *The Christian Science Monitor*, as a Washington reporter and later a foreign correspondent. By the age of 32, I had covered everything from politics and law in Washington, to the rebel wars in Burma and the collapse of the East bloc. In short, I had discovered that there are no limits to a determined woman.

Then I came into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in June 1995. And suddenly, my ambitions and my desires changed dramatically: They had lurched from a focus on myself, my career, my success, to Jesus Christ and His message. My hunger to know more about Christ led me to a place I had never dreamed of in my worst liberal nightmare — to a church with conservative values and a traditional view of women. So you see, my friend’s laugh was not so far off the mark; I had often laughed that way, softly and incredulously, to myself.

I believe there are thousands of women who would jump at having a profound relationship with God, but feel they have nowhere to go. Often the theologically lib-

eral churches, which give great responsibility to women in the church, seem to lack an emphasis on the personal relationship with Christ that is the heart and soul of faith. But often churches which put Jesus Christ at the center, seem to cut women out of leadership. During the week, she’s a lawyer or congresswoman or engineer. But on the weekend sometimes the only opportunities for service are teaching Sunday school to third graders. That’s a wonderful investment for those who have that gift and desire, but for me was not how I wanted to be available to serve Christ.

This state of affairs raises a question that I believe will affect the future of the Church, and just as important, the future of 51 percent of America. The cold, hard question is: What can the Christian movement offer an intelligent, progressive woman? The answer to that is wrapped up in another question: How can the Body of Christ begin to tap into all that feminine talent?

Burying Your Talents?

Why should a woman subscribe to traditional Christian beliefs and become a vital part of mainstream, biblical Christianity? Very simply: a vibrant relationship with the living God.

I’ve wanted to work at National Public Radio since my first days as a journalist. And so three years ago, when I was offered a job there, let me tell you what I didn’t “think” about. I didn’t think about who would be sitting in the cubicle next to me, or whether I’d like the person who would be editing my stories. Sure, it would be great if my personality meshed with everyone else’s in the newsroom; but ultimately, that was a side issue. The real issue was that I believed in NPR, I loved the quality of its broadcast, and I wanted to be part of its mission.

The same is true in following Christ. You may not totally relate to the person next to you in the pew; he or she may not agree with your politics at all. But you have to ask yourself, what is at the center of this church or Christian organization? What is its mission? If it is filled with people whose lives have been transformed by Christ, if its core values are to help you become closer to and more intimate with God, then that church or group will fill your spiritual needs. The other things — the politics or education or wealth of the parishioners or even the pastor — these are incidental. My advice to women is to avoid focusing on those things; instead, focus on living a life that is supernatural in nature, suffused with God, and try to find a fellowship or small group with that very mission.

The Dreaded “S” Word

Secular society has a strong misperception that Christians and Christianity are behind the times when it comes to the role of women. I have happily discovered otherwise. In my church, the leadership has welcomed my ideas with open arms. I’ve been able to help start a radio ministry for the pastor; they’ve supported me in starting a brand new ministry — a lecture series called CrossTalk. This church wants to use everyone’s experience and talents and ideas to the fullest, regardless of whether the person has 2 “X” chromosomes or one. So I don’t agree with the premise that Christianity by “definition” puts women in a second class status.

However, with most Christians believing that the Bible is the Word of God, we bump right up against Paul... and specifically, his teachings on women. What do you do with those?

Ephesians 5:21-33 contains a very irritating word to women, the dreaded “S” word: Submission. It’s this notion that wives should “submit” to their husbands.

Unfortunately, what’s often overlooked is that Paul begins with an overarching principle, in verse 21: “Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ.” It’s not one-sided submission; it applies to men and women alike. Paul is speaking of the privilege of modeling after Jesus Christ — of putting the other person first, of washing his feet just as He washed the feet of His disciples, of availing ourselves of the principle that the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Submission, in God’s mind, is not a negative value, but the highest value. Otherwise, why would Jesus perform the ultimate act of submission, and, with the words, “Not My will but Thine, be done,” set His face for the Cross.

Mutual submission may seem palatable, but then the next few verses in Ephesians are fingernails on a chalkboard to many modern women, because they specifically speak about wives submitting to husbands. What is lost to us in the twilight of the 20th century is the “revolutionary” nature of these verses.

The passage begins by instructing husbands to love their wives “as Christ loved the church.” This means that they are to love with Christ’s love, putting their wives’ interests above their own and helping them reach their full potential in their gifts, talents and abilities. This is the foundation and environment that a husband is to lay in the marriage relationship. This, in essence, is the husband’s submission to the wife.

In Paul’s time, women were considered property, and while women could not divorce husbands except in the most extreme circumstances, men could divorce their

wives for almost any cause, including finding a younger, prettier sort. This state of affairs condemned women to a life of uncertainty and possibly impoverishment if they so much as irritated their husbands.

Enter the Christian view of marriage: It is, said Paul, the most precious relationship in life, one that reflects Christ’s relationship with His church. Divorce was discouraged in Christian marriages except in extreme cases — why? — because women had inherent value as the daughters of God. In this way, Paul elevated the role of women, providing them with unprecedented rights. This was unheard of in both the secular and religious society of Paul’s day. And it should be noted that Paul spent many more verses talking about the husband’s sacrificial love for his wife — that is, how he can serve her — than about the wife’s submission. Viewed in historical context, the Christian church is the first century equivalent of healthy radical feminism.

There are other teachings that might rub the wrong way, and these concern the role of women in the church. Among the most restrictive occurs in 1 Tim. 2:11-12. “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.”

For this public radio reporter, with an audience of 10 million people, that is pretty hard to swallow. But then I looked more closely at the historical context. Namely, women in Ephesus had a poor track record of being easily misled by theologically false teachers. Paul wasn’t saying that women could never have teaching or leadership roles. After all, there were many women in the early Christian church who were in leadership: Priscilla, Phoebe, Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa (in Romans), Euodia and Syntyche, mentioned in Philippians. Paul was saying to the Ephesian woman, before you do anything, get your theology right.

And in fact, verse 11 shows once again the revolutionary nature of Paul’s words: “A woman should learn...” Jewish women couldn’t read the Torah, they couldn’t study the Scriptures. With that one phrase, Paul is swinging open the door for Christian women to dig into the Word of God, and ultimately to have a relationship with Him on the same footing that men have. No wonder Paul was vilified in the Jewish religious community!

The secular view of submission is indeed dreaded if its perception of the role of women in the church is one of weakness and passivity. The Scriptures are telling women we matter and as women we should give those ideas a close, historical reading before instinctively rejecting an environment that could help us nurture a vibrant relationship with God.

Three Women of Influence

HOW FAR HAVE WOMEN COME IN 2,000 YEARS? LESS THAN 100 YEARS AGO A WOMAN'S RIGHTS WERE NOT MUCH BETTER THAN A SLAVE'S. SHE HAD NO LEGAL RIGHT TO THE WAGES OF HER LABOR, NO RIGHT TO THE CUSTODY OF HER CHILDREN, NO LEGAL PRESENCE SAVE THE PERSON OF HER HUSBAND, COULD NOT OWN PROPERTY IN HER OWN NAME, COULD NOT CONTRACT LEGALLY IN HER OWN NAME, MANY DOORS TO EDUCATION WERE CLOSED TO WOMEN, SHE COULD NOT TRAVEL IF HER HUSBAND OR FATHER OBJECTED. THREE WOMEN, COMPELLED BY THEIR DEEP CHRISTIAN CONVICTION, WENT AGAINST THE RIGID STRICTURES OF BOTH SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES TO EFFECT RADICAL, POSITIVE CHANGE FOR WOMEN.

CATHERINE BOOTH (1829-1890), co-founder with her husband of The Salvation Army, objected to William Booth's view that women were the weaker sex. But her sermons were so impressive that he gave her a leading role in revival services to the poor and outcast. This was 1860 England, not 1960 America! It was believed that a woman's place was in the home and "any respectable woman who raised her voice in public risked grave censure." Catherine was instrumental in improving the working conditions for women in sweat shops, particularly those producing matches. Sixteen-hour work days exposed to toxic yellow phosphorus brought on a horrible death from "Phossy Jaw" (necrosis of the bone) for many poor women. Though she died before she saw the fruits of her persistent labor, her husband founded The Salvation Army's own match factory using harmless red phosphorus, in working conditions far improved, with double the pay of other factories. Journalists saw the difference between the sweat factories and the "model" factory and as a result of bad publicity, companies stopped using the destructive yellow phosphorus.

SOJOURNER TRUTH (Isabella Baumfree) (1795-1883), was a slave born in New York. Her mother had taught her that God lived in the sky and watched over all. If she was ever in trouble or needed help, she only needed to call on God. She experienced many trials in her life including having her children taken from her, being spit on, stoned, beaten, and having her life threatened. She became a powerful anti-slavery speaker after gaining her freedom in 1827. Sojourner dedicated her life to reform. She fought for equal rights as well as women's rights. In addition to this, she helped freed slaves find better homes after the Civil War. She

encouraged the government to make land available to black Southerners. She felt that God had told her to take a new name and preach the truth. On June 1, 1843, she left New York with a new name, Sojourner Truth. Almost six feet tall, her presence at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851 helped dispel arguments against women's rights with her speech, "Ain't I a Woman?" Along with having a large impact on women's rights, she became one of the most famous abolitionists, singing gospel songs and reciting speeches in churches and auditoriums to primarily white, middle class audiences.

FRANCES WILLARD (1839-1898), the second and most influential president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), pressed for the advocacy of women's rights and suffrage. She was independent-minded, a college graduate, and pursued a career in education as a school teacher and eventually as president of Evanston College for Ladies.

Under Frances Willard's leadership, the WCTU expanded its social and political causes and activities in an attempt to "do everything" and addressed issues of prostitution, prison and labor reform, age of consent, tobacco and drug addiction, a cottage home for unwed mothers, day nurseries and eight-hour work days. Members of the WCTU were devoutly Christian, starting and ending meetings with prayers, and basing their anti-alcohol sentiment on the Bible and the sanctity of preserving home life. Abstinence was championed on moral grounds. Membership swelled to over one million in past years with the WCTU being a major driving force in securing the right to vote for American women.

This is a challenge for women to think independently of modern culture; I believe it leads to an even greater challenge to the Church: Namely, how do we as Christians think outside of current religious paradigms?

Breaking the Mold

The challenge, I believe, was laid down by none other than Jesus Christ.

Just as Christianity was revolutionary for women in the first century, so should the church be today. In Jesus' day, a woman was of such low status that a righteous Jew did not acknowledge women on the street, not even his wife. In fact, there was a group of especially pious Pharisees who closed their eyes lest they even see a woman on the street; not surprisingly, this act of piety sent them stumbling into any object in their way, which gained them the name, "bruised and bleeding Pharisees."

Into this culture stepped Jesus Christ, who surrounded Himself with women. The Gospels are brimming with women. Martha and Mary were among His closest friends. Rather than shunning women, He blessed them for their repentance (the woman who washed his feet with oil). He forgave them their sins (the women caught in adultery); He healed them without regard to gender (the woman with the issue of blood, or Jairus's daughter). He used them as an example of true sacrifice (the woman who gave a mite to the synagogue). In other

words, Jesus turned the social order on its head.

This out-of-the-box thinking continued in the early church. Jewish men had a prayer in which they thanked God that "Thou hast not made me a Gentile, a slave or a woman." Paul specifically reverses this prayer, when he says "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). In other words, Christianity erased the social hierarchy.

That's the challenge for the church today. It needs to ask itself, what role would Jesus Christ assign to women if He were here in the flesh today? Jesus broke the mold, He up-ended the established order — how can we do that today? This is a significant time in history and the role of women is vital to the growth of the Church. The Church, not secular organizations, should be setting the pace for women in leadership. I suspect Jesus would not want His followers to bury these talents, but rather to multiply them. ●

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Begin by drawing a large circle to represent the entire scope of knowledge. Then ask your friend to symbolize his knowledge in comparison to all knowledge. Even the most arrogant person would be compelled to draw a tiny circle.

We all use only a small percentage of our total capacity, but even if we could draw on 100 percent, our knowledge would be paltry when compared to all that could be known. Therefore, it is completely unreasonable to say, “I know that God does not exist.” A person would have to know everything before that statement could be confirmed.

Certain missionaries have had difficulty describing ice to natives in equatorial regions. The more they talked about cubes of water or water that became so solid that people could easily walk on it, the harder the natives laughed. Ice was outside their sphere of knowledge, but this did not jeopardize its existence. Similarly, a person may deny the existence of God, but he must be omniscient to logically do so. Ironically, one would have to be God to be sure that God does not exist.

It is sometimes good to help a person think his way through the implications of a universe with no God. The human heart cries out for meaning, value, and purpose, but these are precisely the things that are denied in an atheistic cosmos. The universe is expanding, and left to itself, the galaxies will grow farther apart and the stars will eventually burn out. All will be cold, dark, and lifeless. On the scale of cosmic time, the human race (let alone the life of a man) flashes into existence for the briefest moment before passing into oblivion. From an ultimate standpoint, all that we do is meaningless—no one will be left to remember us in the endless cosmic night.

Also, without God we have no basis for morality, meaning that values such as right and wrong and good and bad are totally relative and have no absolute mooring. If man is the product of an accidental combination of molecules in an ultimately impersonal universe, human values such as honesty, brotherhood, love, and equality have no more cosmic significance than treachery, selfishness, hatred, and prejudice.

Man is also stripped of purpose in a godless reality. An impersonal universe is bereft of purpose and plan; in the final analysis it moves only toward decay, disorder, and death. It is Macbeth’s “tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” In such a pointless existence, human aspirations are mocked by silence.

Not many people have come to grips with these logical implications of atheism, and no one can live consistently with them. All of us act as though human existence has meaning, as though moral values are real, and as though human life has purpose and dignity. But all these things presuppose an infinite-personal Creator, so if God is dead, man is also as good as dead.

Can We Prove that God Exists?

We must first overcome some misconceptions about the meaning of proof. What kind of proof is necessary and how much? Some people wrongly demand scientific proof for the reality of God, as though He could somehow be found at the end of a repeatable and controlled experiment. Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin illustrated this mentality when he returned from orbiting the earth and said, “I didn’t see any God out there.” This is somewhat like scraping the paint off a portrait to find the artist inside. The painting points to the artist just as the cosmos points to the Creator, but we must remember that the Creator is distinct from His creation.

The scientific method of controlled and repeatable experimentation is useful for achieving a great deal of knowledge: smoking increases the probability of lung cancer, a molecule of water consists of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom, the earth orbits the sun, etc. But there are other kinds of knowledge (historical knowledge, philosophical knowledge, moral knowledge, personal knowledge, religious knowledge) and these lie outside the scope of scientific inquiry.

Verdicts in courts of law are based on legal historical proof, not scientific proof. In civil cases the verdict is reached on the basis of a preponderance of the credible evidence. In criminal cases the jury must be convinced of guilt “beyond a reasonable doubt” before reaching the verdict of guilty. The phrase is not “beyond the shadow of a doubt” because 100 percent proof is rarely attainable. If complete proof were required before making legal verdicts or personal decisions, practically nothing would be accomplished. There is a danger of demanding so much evidence that people become immune to the evidence that is already before them. God’s existence cannot be demonstrated to another person with the kind of certainty that forces him to believe. The evidence may be powerful, but one must choose to respond. This is where faith comes in, not against the evidence but as a response to it. Belief in God is not a leap into the dark, but a step into the light.

A decision must be based on sufficient evidence, not exhaustive evidence. But what constitutes sufficient evidence for the existence of God? Because God is not perceived by our five senses, we must rely upon the indirect evidence of cause and effect. We depend on this kind of reasoning every day, and this is the kind of reasoning that will point us in the direction of God as well. A sufficient cause must exist to account for the effects of the the natural universe, order and design within the universe, personal beings and the phenomenon of morality.

If we examined a radio, we would find that its component parts are all designed to work together to accomplish a specific function. The more we understand the principles of electronics and how components such as transistors, capacitors, resistors, and transformers work in accordance with those principles, the more we can appreciate the purposeful intelligence and creative design required to make a radio. Yet a radio is only child's play when compared to the enormous complexity and subtlety of a living cell. Biologists are only beginning to realize how profound living systems really are, and yet many people still cling tightly to the theory that, given enough time, this design can be produced by chance.

Those who place their faith in atheistic evolution must maintain the philosophically absurd position that chaos produced order, matter produced life, chance produced intelligence, and accidents produced purpose. It is nonsense to say that an effect can be greater than its cause. This is why these people spell nature with a capital N and slip intelligent purpose (teleology) through the back door under the guise of "natural selection." In this way, the evolutionary process itself becomes a substitute god in a universe that would otherwise be utterly impersonal.

The argument from morality holds that man's moral consciousness requires a personal God to have any ultimate meaning. Moral experience is a universal human phenomenon. There are variations, but in all ages and countries, qualities like honesty, wisdom, courage, and fairness are regarded as virtues. Even if a person claims that moral notions are the subjective products of cultural conditioning, he betrays himself every time he criticizes or praises. If a skeptic says, "How could you be so

selfish?" he is really appealing to an objective moral standard: consideration for the needs of others. Otherwise, his criticism has no weight. For moral experience to be valid (and all of us live as though it is), it must be based on more than individual or group preferences. Groups and societies can pursue paths as evil as those followed by any individual. The only absolute foundation for morality is the changeless character of the personal Creator of the universe. Righteousness, love, justice, and mercy find their true basis in the personality of God. These qualities have no ultimate significance if the universe is the product of impersonal causes.

Putting all these arguments together, we are left with an eternal, personal, and ethical God as the only sufficient cause of the universe, order and design within the universe, and the personality of man. We saw earlier that no one can live consistently with a philosophy that rules out meaning, value, and purpose in life. We long for these things because we were made to find them all in the infinite-personal God who makes them real. We are not merely biological entities; we are spiritual creatures, made in the image of God and designed to receive and display His life.

Again, these arguments do not provide the kind of absolute proof that will overwhelm a person who chooses to reject God. But they can help a non-militant agnostic recognize the reasonableness of faith in God. They can also make him aware of the danger of straddling the fence between rejecting and accepting God.

Suppose a doctor told you that you were afflicted with a disease that would take your life if left untreated. You have a 50-50 chance if he operates. Shaken up, you seek two other opinions, and they both concur. Now the choice is up to you, but you can only defer your decision for so long. You would no doubt choose the operation, because a possible solution is better than no solution at all. Non-decision agnosticism is even more foolish than an indefinite postponement of the operation, because the chances are greater and the stakes are higher. If God exists, agnosticism is eternally unwise. The agnostic gains nothing and loses everything. ●

*Larry Moody is the president of Search Ministries.
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Traditionally we recognize two types of evil. The first is moral evil, caused by man through his rebellion against God and/or by his cruelty to others. The innocent suffer many times because of man's hatred (e.g., war), because of his overindulgence (e.g., the drunk driver who kills an innocent family) and because of his greed (e.g., many starving to death while others hoard surpluses).

The second is natural evil, a result of the natural phenomena inflicted on the innocent. Examples include hurricanes, plagues, earthquakes, and other diseases and disasters. How do we account for the presence of both classes of evil, and is there an answer for the plight it presents? The problem of evil is the old chestnut with which all philosophies and religions must wrestle. How to reconcile the concept of evil and God has baffled man for centuries.

The atheist solves the problem by eliminating God. Evil and suffering are taken as givens, but the existence of God is not. Such prominent thinkers as David Hume, H. G. Wells, and Bertrand Russell have concluded, on the basis of their observations of suffering and evil that the God of the Bible does not exist. Because of the prevalence of evil in the world, they formulated this classical proposition: (1) If God is all-good, He will destroy evil. (2) If God is all-powerful, He can destroy evil. (3) But evil is not destroyed. (4) Therefore, there is no all-good, all-powerful God.

The false assumption made in this classical proposition is that evil would have to have been destroyed by now if God were capable or wanted to. On the contrary, if there is an all-good, all-powerful God, then the proposition could be stated another way: (1) If God is all-good, He will destroy evil. (2) If God is all-powerful, He can destroy evil. (3) Evil is not yet destroyed. (4) Therefore evil will be destroyed one day. See Revelation 20:10-15; 21:4; 22:3-8 for a description of how God plans to do just that.

God created the universe without evil and suffering. He also created man perfect, with the ability to freely love or reject the God who created him (Gen. 1). Scripture says throughout that God desires to have loving fellowship with man. But the ability to reject as well as accept is essential to any relationship. God did not force His love on man but gave him the privilege of a choice. The magnitude of any choice is determined by the size of the consequences. Choosing between Coke and Pepsi is not a major choice in life, but choosing between apples and arsenic is. The consequences of accepting or rejecting God make this the choice of supreme importance. God told man that if he chose to embrace Him, their fellowship and blessings could continue. To spurn God and His commandments,

however, would bring separation from Him (spiritual death) and physical death as well (Gen. 2). Genesis 3 tells us that man chose to go his own way rather than follow God's. Man thus suffered the consequences of spiritual and physical death. It was at this point that evil and suffering entered the world.

So we see that God did not create nor is He responsible for evil and sin. God's plan had the potential for evil when He gave man freedom of choice, but the actual origin of evil came as a result of man who directed his will away from God and toward his own selfish desires. Evil, remember, is not a thing but a corruption of a good thing already created by God. God told man what to do, but man corrupted himself by choosing to disobey God. God's way is the perfect way and anything less than complete obedience to His instructions will bring problems into the process. God is not to blame for man's disobedience; man is the moral agent who is responsible.

Suppose, for example, a man purchases a \$500,000 computer for his company. The manufacturer installs the computer and provides ample instructions as well as an operations manual. As soon as the computer personnel leave, the new owner throws away the operations manual. He begins to randomly press buttons until the machine malfunctions and shuts down. The potential for misuse of the equipment was always there, but the manufacturer had given specific instructions on how to use it properly and had warned of the consequences of misuse. Whose fault is it that the machine broke down? God's creation had the potential for evil, but God did not promote it in any way. It only came about when man chose to ignore God's instructions and warning. Because of the Fall, mankind became imperfect. This state of imperfection yielded temporal and eternal consequences.

The temporal consequences encompass both moral and natural evil. Moral evil is caused by man's inhumanity to man. Man in his fallen nature often seeks to promote himself at the expense of others. The suffering of innocent people is part of the insidiousness of evil. If only the wicked suffered, we would call that justice, but because there are innocent victims, there is a problem of injustice.

It is easy to associate moral evil with the fall of man, but how do we associate natural evil to the Fall? This occurs when the innocent are afflicted by natural phenomena such as typhoons and tornadoes. The Bible tells us that man's fall included not only a curse on him but also a curse on the creation around him (see Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 8:18-23; Rev. 22:3). We live today in a disease-death environment. God did not originally design this environment; it has changed as a result of man's sin.

This is an abnormal state which God will rectify when sin is removed (see Rev. 21:3-4; 22:3). Eden saw no natural disasters or death until after the sin of man, and there will be no natural disasters or death in the new heavens and earth when God puts an end to evil. Thus, human choice caused evil to enter our world and wrought temporal and eternal consequences upon mankind and his environment.

We have established the cause of evil to be the disobedient choice of man. But there is still an unattended problem. Even if God didn't cause evil, why hasn't He stopped it? Most people want God to wipe out all evil that affects them, but they want to set the conditions for God's eradication process. They would like to see God eliminate the cruel world leaders, murderers, and thieves along with the natural disasters and diseases that afflict the world. But God is not interested in a partial containment of evil. He promised that He will someday permanently put an end to evil. To do this, He must not only move against actual evil but also potential evil.

Let's imagine that God stopped all evil at 12 o'clock. How many people would be left at 12:01? God showed us with Noah and the flood that if He removes actual evil and leaves potential evil behind, actual evil eventually returns. Even though God hasn't done it yet, we have God's promise that He will put an end to evil and suffering in the future (2 Peter 3:7-12; Rev.19:1-2, 11-21; 20:7-15; 21:4-8).

It can be helpful to consider what God would have to do in our present environment to eliminate the painful consequences of human choices. Every time an act of violence is attempted, God would have to make the weapons harmless. Bullets would turn to mush, clubs and knives would become soft, and so forth. If someone driving on a mountain road loses control on a turn, God would have to intervene, perhaps by lifting the car in a gust of wind and gently putting it back on the road. In effect, our lives would have to be cushioned by hundreds of daily miracles to protect us from the consequences of our actions.

The Bible tells us that the world today is in an abnormal state. God did not begin creation with evil and suffering, and He will one day eliminate evil and suffering from His creation. God will return it to its normal state. So the question should not be, "Will God stop evil?" but, "When will He stop evil?"

Peter gives us a glimpse of why God is so patient. The early church suffered many persecutions and the Christians clung to the promise of Christ's return. They knew that suffering and pain would then end. Knowing this, they questioned Peter as to why it was taking Christ so long to come. Peter answered, "The Lord is not slow

about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). By delaying His return, Christ is extending the opportunity for people to turn to Him and thus escape eternal punishment. When Christ comes, there will be no more chances, for time will have run out. If a person has not accepted God's substitute before then, it will be too late. It is imperative that we view temporal suffering in light of God's perspective. Believers are not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. They are in the land of the dying going to the land of the living. One reason why God delays the return of Christ and allows temporal suffering to continue is to allow more people to hear about and accept Christ, and thereby escape eternal suffering. God could send Christ today and stop temporal suffering, but when He does, all opportunity to know Christ as Saviour goes with it. Pose this question to a friend who is concerned with why God allows suffering to continue: "If God had sent Christ and eliminated all suffering the day before you had a chance to understand and accept Christ as Savior, where would you be now?" God delays putting an end to evil in order to allow us more opportunities to share the gospel of Christ with others.

The following story illustrates how man refuses to see God's solution to evil. A minister and a barber who boasted of being an atheist walked one day through a disreputable part of the city. As they looked around, the barber said, "This is why I can't believe in a God of love. If He is as kind as they say, why does He permit all this poverty, disease, and squalor? How can He allow all this drug-dealing and vandalism?" The minister said nothing until they came across an unkempt and filthy man with hair down his back and a half-inch of stubble on his face. Then he said to the atheist, "You can't be a very good barber or you wouldn't let people like this live around here without a haircut and a shave." Indignantly, the barber answered, "Why blame me for that man's condition? I can't help it if he's like that. He's never given me a chance! If he would only come to my shop, I could fix him up and make him look like a gentleman!" With a penetrating look, the minister said, "Then don't blame God for allowing these people to continue in their evil ways. He constantly invites them to come to Him and be changed. The reason they are slaves to sin and evil habits is because they refuse to accept the One who died to save and deliver them."

God is greater than evil, and He will indeed put an end to evil and suffering. Christ defeated evil through His work on the cross (1 Cor.15:54-57) and will finalize that defeat by confining evil in hell forever. ●

*Larry Moody is the president of Search Ministries.
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There is a common notion running around today that doubts whether anyone can claim to know the truth about God (or Ultimate Reality). Os Guinness writes: “Yet in an era that prizes tolerance, affirms diversity, and bends over backwards not to appear judgmental, serious claims to truth sound much like an obscenity—often prompting embarrassed looks, rising blood pressures, and even open hostility. Clearly a claim to truth marks one off as culturally gauche, politically most incorrect, or on the side of the fanatics and bomb throwers.”

It was Winston Churchill who remarked, “Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened.”

Here are the main objections to the idea of absolute truth.

1. We cannot know anything for certain about matters regarding God (or “Ultimate Reality”).

If someone says that the only thing we can know with certainty about religious things is that we cannot know anything certain about religious things, is this not an absolute and certain statement about religious things? To say that relative statements “are the most we can humanly manage”... is this not also an absolute statement? To make such a large claim about the limits of knowledge first requires transcendent (absolute) knowledge. In order to say that we cannot know anything for certain about matters regarding God requires certain and absolute knowledge about God. This statement doesn’t work.

But there is another way that people deny the accessibility of absolute truth.

2. “We do not know what Ultimate Reality or God looks like.”

How can anyone know that they cannot know? If someone is saying that we cannot be certain, we empathize with their recognition of our finitude. But radical skepticism and a healthy finitude are two different things. Radical skepticism rules out knowing anything—except radical skepticism. But that is an absolute kind of skepticism that says there are no absolutes!

A healthy finitude, instead, says that we do not know everything, and ought to be careful in our truth claims. A healthy humility does not rule out knowing anything, however. There is a difference between not knowing completely and not knowing at all. It is a faulty dilemma to say that if you do not know something in its entirety, you do not know it at all. For example, just because you cannot know God in His entirety (which we would agree

with), it does not necessarily follow that you cannot know Him accurately. Here’s another example. A man may not know his friend, Bill, completely. But he can say some truthful things about Bill. His friend exists. Bill is a male...and a father. He’s a husband. You may not know him perfectly...but you do know him accurately. We can know what God looks like...it is not impossible.

3. “It is not possible to make authoritative statements about God.”

To say that truth statements are not possible is begging the question. The statement (“truth is not absolute”) is itself an absolute truth statement! To make this claim, you have to make an exception for your own truth claim. To say that it is not possible to make authoritative statements about God is indeed making an authoritative statement about God!

Many other philosophical movements have had to face the absurdities of excluding themselves from their own world view. Brian McLaren has noted, “Freudianism says that all beliefs and behaviors flow out of certain psychosexual complexes...all beliefs except, of course, Freudianism, and all behaviors except, of course, the behavior of expounding Freudianism. Evolutionism says that all characteristics, including the development of thinking brains, are selected naturally to favor survival...not necessarily the apprehension of truth; this belief suggests that the very organ which conceives of evolution is oriented to produce useful theories, but not necessarily true ones. And radical postmodernism (rejection of absolute truth claims regarding God) rejects the universal truthfulness of every other belief while assuming its own position as the only universally true one.” It is possible to make authoritative statements about God.

4. “It is arrogant to claim to know the truth about God. It’s all just speculation.”

There is much to be said about the idea of humility. We agree that Christians have had too much hubris and arrogance. We need to own up to that. But this turns the idea of humility on its head. It seems that real humility would say, “I don’t know—I’m willing to investigate the evidence...or what you’re saying...and listen to others scrutinize what I’m saying. I’ll be fair—and play by fair rules.” Does it not seem that humility would say, “I’m not sure”—rather than “It can’t be!”

This is why it is not simply a matter of mere speculation (in searching for truth about God). Real humility would say that—instead of speculating—why not do some investigating? It would seem that we do that in all

of life. When we are uncertain as to which item is the better buy, we do a little homework. It is not arrogant to claim to know the truth about God.

5. “It is circular reasoning. You claim that truth is absolute...then use your statement to prove its truthfulness. That’s circular reasoning.”

The two tests for truth regarding any statement have always been the fact that your claim is both affirmable by its very statement and not falsifiable by the fact that you cannot negate it without contradicting your statement. Here are two examples: First, what about the statement, “I exist.” The very fact that you can state it affirms that you exist. That’s the first truth-test. Second, try saying, “I do not exist.” It is not falsifiable. You cannot say this without contradicting your own words. Therefore, to say truth is absolute is not circular reasoning. It’s a self-evident conclusion!

6. “Truth is simply a perception. All of us are bound by our cultural limitations, and we are socially constructed beings. Absolute truth lies outside of our senses.”

Many people will tell you that all truth is really true from a certain way of seeing things. The old story of six blind men and the elephant is often used to illustrate and support this position. One blind man, feeling only the trunk, thought that it was a snake. Another discovered only ears and concluded that it was a fan. The one who came across the body said it was a wall and, after finding a leg, another said it was a tree. Finally, the last blind man felt a pointed tusk and informed them that it was a spear. To some, this proves that what you think is

true is only a matter of your perspective of things. They claim it proves that all statements regarding God are just a matter of one’s own perspective.

It should be pointed out, though, that all of the blind men were wrong. None of their conclusions were true, so this illustration says nothing about truth. There really was an objective truth that all of them failed to discover. Also, the statement, “All truth statements regarding God are simply a matter of your perspective”, is either an absolute statement or simply a matter of your perspective. If it is absolute, then not all truths are a matter of perspective. If it is a matter of opinion (perspective), then there is no reason to think that it is absolutely true—it is only one perspective. It doesn’t succeed either way.

In order to make the claim that ‘all truth lies outside of our senses’ means that the speaker has been able to step outside of his or her senses to discover this statement to be absolutely true. But if this is so, then absolute truth is indeed within our reach. Truth is more than our perceptions. Truth—by its very nature must exist and be absolute. I’m glad that the airline pilot believes in absolute truth when he’s landing the aircraft that I ride in. I’m happy that auto makers believe that four cylinders absolutely means four. It is comforting to know that human beings also have the capacity to know something about Ultimate Reality—God. ●

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IS EVERYTHING RELATIVE? by Mike Metzger

Many years ago, the Enlightenment philosopher G.E. Lessing wrote this story:

A father has a magic ring that he must bequeath to one of three sons. He loves them all, and desires to hurt none. He has two other rings made (not magic). An argument arises between the brothers. They go to Nathan the Wise (representing the wisdom of the age). He offers this: Let each brother think his own ring is the magic one. But—in the meantime—show forth gentleness and heartfelt tolerance.

This was Lessing’s way of holding up tolerance as the chief virtue in an open society. In theory, he holds to the idea that there is absolute truth (there is a magic ring). But no one can know—no one can prove who’s ring is the true one. Therefore, tolerance is best.

Carl Poppler made the same argument in his influential book *The Open Society*. Poppler held that any ideologue who believes that he has the Truth is always (potentially) a tyrant. For it’s a short step (in his mind) from the confidence that “I’m sure that this is the Truth”...to the tyranny of “Therefore, you must obey me, because I know what is good for you.” From this thesis, Poppler’s tenet was: A democracy can only be sustained if there is an attitude of permanent uncertainty on all issues of ideology and virtue. He notes that this is the genius of the physical sciences: they dismiss historian’s schemes that are all-inclusive in describing “why things are as they are.” Real science contents itself with modest, tentative, falsifiable hypotheses. True scientists are engineers—not ideologues. An open society must be one that rejects absolute truth claims...and the *a priori* assumptions that go with them. An open society is a sci-

entific society that treats human experience as an ongoing experiment in social engineering for which we have no blueprint. He, too, advocates tolerance as the supreme virtue.

This applies to the study of God and religion. Why can't we all be right? Why don't all roads lead to heaven and God? Isn't it intolerant to say someone is wrong?

To respond to these formidable challenges, it is important to distinguish between an unhealthy intolerance...and a healthy one. There are times when intolerance is the better virtue.

An unhealthy intolerance is things like...hate speech, being mean-spirited, name calling, racism, or sexism. These are things we should never tolerate.

But a healthy intolerance is things like...loving the telling of truth, wanting the best for others, demanding that what we say corresponds to who we are and what we do. In other words, demanding truth in advertising (as an example) is a healthy intolerance. Or simply not tolerating anything as being right.

Consider this real-life example: On an overseas trip, you witness an African tribe performing the female circumcision ritual. The teenage girl is screaming in pain as men carve up her body performing a clitorrectomy. Will you complain to the tour guide that this is barbaric? If tolerance is the maxim in life, the guide could then point out that you are expressing Eurocentric values and are being intolerant of their culture.

Can you see how upholding tolerance as the highest value simply doesn't work? It crashes on the rocks of reality. Tolerance gets bogged down. How is that? Perhaps it's best illustrated in "The Relativistic Bog."

Picture four people representing the entire world, with a horizontal line representing The Plane (extent) of Human Opinion (knowledge). All that we know sits on this line, and everyone lives on this plane. (In other words, the world is a closed system.)

Now, write in over the four people these words:

"Buddhist," "Atheist," "Muslim," and "Christian." These four people represent the differing religious views in our world today. There are four conclusions you can draw from this picture.

1. On the plane of human opinion, one can't say to the other, "You're wrong."
2. But they can't all be right.
3. They may all be wrong.
4. But only one can be right.

This is where radical relativism bogs down. If everyone cannot be right...and this idea of God really matters...how do you discover who is right (if anyone is)? Being tolerant is not the highest value, especially if this concerns such weighty matters as truth, God, and eternity.

Years ago, E. F. Hutton had a series of commercials showing their agents brainstorming on business problems. The solution was found when they thought outside the mental boxes and asked, "What if...???"

What if God did actually exist, and had entered the system revealing truth about himself? Would that change the picture? Wouldn't it mean that whoever discovered what God had revealed...they would be the ones to have apprehended truth?

This would not be arrogant. It would be a humble and gratifying experience. If a theater was on fire, and you were fortunate enough to have discovered the last exit door left untouched by the flames, what would you do? Would you be viewed as intolerant if you yelled and literally demanded that people follow you to life? No.

This is the essential claim that Christianity makes. God has revealed himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and many have been fortunate enough to stumble upon this truth. It's not an arrogant or intolerant claim. It is the exuberant joy of having found life. ●

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CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

It has been called “The Greatest Book Ever Written.” Kings and rulers have sought to destroy it with intense fervor. Men, women and children have been put to death for affirming its teachings. Scholars have devoted their lives to proving or disproving its contents. It claims to be the Word of God and the source of absolute truth. If this book has made such astonishing claims about itself, one must ask, “Is it reliable? Where did it come from? Did the events described in the Bible really take place? Can I trust that it is God’s Word?”

In order to answer these questions, the Bible needs to be examined in terms of its uniqueness, preparation, and confirmation through history, archeology and prophecy. These avenues of exploration will demonstrate the reliability of the Bible and why it has earned the respect and allegiance of millions throughout history.

I. UNIQUENESS OF THE BIBLE

The study of the reliability of the Bible begins with its uniqueness. Webster defines “unique” as “different from all others; having no like or equal.” The Bible is different from all other human writings in its continuity, circulation and survival.

A. Its Continuity

The first area of uniqueness of the Bible is its continuity. It is an amazingly unified document, despite factors which would lead to great disharmony in ordinary writings. Josh McDowell, noted author and lecturer on the historical evidences of the Christian faith, outlines some of these factors. He explains that the Bible was:

1. Written over a 1,600-year span.
2. Written by more than 40 writers from every walk of life – from king to peasant; philosopher to fisherman.
3. Written in different places – from the wilderness, to a comfortable room, to a dungeon.
4. Written at different times – from war to peace.
5. Written during authors’ different moods – from the height of joy to the depths of despair.
6. Written on three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe.
7. Written in three languages – Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.
8. Written concerning hundreds of controversial issues. ¹

Although the Bible contains this much diversity, its authors speak with harmony and focus on one theme: “God’s redemption of man.” ² F.F. Bruce, Professor of Biblical Criticism at the University of Manchester, summarizes the Bible’s continuity:

The writings themselves belong to a great variety of literary types. They include history, law, religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries.... For all that, the Bible is not simply an anthology; there is a unity which binds the whole together. An anthology is compiled by an anthologist, but no anthologist compiled the Bible. ³

B. Its Circulation

The second area of uniqueness for the Bible is its circulation. It has been read by more people and published in more languages than any other work. ⁴ At the end of 1993, United Bible Societies reported that 2,062 languages had access to at least one book of the Bible. The Cambridge History of the Bible reports, “No other book has known anything approaching this constant circulation.” ⁵ Although the widespread circulation of the Bible does not prove it is the Word of God, it does substantiate further the uniqueness of the Bible.

C. Its Survival

The survival of the Bible is the third way it is unique from all other books. Composed before the invention of the printing press, it was written on perishable material such as papyrus and parchment. For hundreds of years, it was copied and recopied by hand. Yet, this did not diminish its soundness. It has more manuscript evidence than any other piece of classical literature. John Warwick Montgomery, former Chairman of Church History at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, makes this statement:

To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament. ⁶

The accuracy of the Old Testament manuscripts is the result of the Jewish system of preservation. Bernard Ramm explains this system:

Jews preserved it as no other manuscript has ever been preserved. With their massora [methods of counting] they kept tabs on every letter, syllable,

*word and paragraph. They had special classes of men within their culture whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with practically perfect fidelity. ... Whoever counted the letters and syllables and words of Plato or Aristotle? Cicero or Seneca?*⁷

Not only has the Bible weathered the elements, but it also has withstood constant scrutiny and persecution. John W. Lea, author of *The Greatest Book in the World*, cited H.L. Hastings' explanation:

*Infidels for eighteen hundred years have been refuting and overthrowing this book, and yet it stands today as solid as a rock. Its circulation increases, and it is more loved and cherished and read today than ever before. ... So the hammers of the infidels have been pecking away at this book for ages, but the hammers are worn out, and the anvil still endures. If the book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. Emperors and popes, kings and priests, princes and rulers have all tried their hand at it; they die, and the book still lives.*⁸

II. TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE

Not only does the uniqueness of the Bible support its reliability, but the methods of translation of this book also support its dependability. As previously outlined, the Bible was written over centuries by a variety of people. The original writings were composed in Hebrew (most of the Old Testament), Aramaic (parts of Ezra, Daniel and Jeremiah), and Greek (the whole New Testament).⁹

These writings have since been translated into most of the world's known languages. This causes some to question the accuracy of the Bible. They ask, "If the Bible has been translated so many times, version upon version, how can one possibly trust its reliability?" The answer to this question is found in the translation process. While the Bible has been translated into numerous languages, these translations are only one, or at most two, steps removed from the original text.

The Bible was translated into other languages soon after it was written. The Old Testament was translated into Greek during the third century B.C. From 383-400 A.D., Jerome, the secretary to the bishop of Rome, translated the Bible into Latin.¹⁰ In 1382, John Wycliffe translated the Bible from Latin into English so that the people could study the Bible in their own tongue. The Renaissance brought a renewed interest in the classics and the desire to study them in their original languages.¹¹ William Tyndale, who studied Hebrew and Greek, translated the Bible into English directly from ancient

Greek texts.¹² Other English translations followed in quick order, but probably the greatest of all English translations was commissioned by King James of England in 1604 and was first published in 1611.¹⁵

Each of these works was taken carefully from the oldest writings of the Old and New Testament. Since the study of Greek and Hebrew was revived in the fifteenth century, scholars have been able to work directly from ancient manuscripts. Therefore, the belief is unfounded that today's Bible is based on a series of previous translations. We can be confident that the Bible translations we have today are accurate and based directly on ancient manuscripts.

A further question arises, "Why are there so many current translations and why do they seem to vary at times?" Wycliffe produced his work because of his desire to present a translation in the common tongue. Current translations are made with a similar motivation—to produce a fresh version in the language of today. A careful comparison of a translation from 1960 with a more current translation would show subtle differences in word choice. Comparing both to the much older King James Version would show even greater differences.

Today's translations also will vary somewhat based on whether the translators made a "word for word" translation or one based on a "thought for thought" concept. The meaning remains the same, but word choices will vary.

III. CONFIRMATION OF THE BIBLE THROUGH HISTORY

A. Bibliographical Test

The third means for verifying the reliability of the Bible is its confirmation by historical test. Josh McDowell argues that the Bible should be subjected to the same tests as any other historical document to determine its reliability. These tests are the bibliographical test, the internal evidence test and the external evidence test.

1. New Testament bibliographical test. McDowell describes the bibliographical test as "...an examination of the textual transmission by which documents reach us."¹⁴ This is accomplished by examining the number of manuscripts and the time interval between the original and the existing copy. The manuscript evidence of the New Testament is astounding. Today there are over 5,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in Greek and at least 15,000 more in other languages. No other ancient writing has *anywhere near* this abundance of existing manuscript evidence. Additionally, the interval of time between the composition of the New Testament books and the date of the earliest existing manuscripts is the shortest of any work of antiquity. Sir Frederic G. Kenyon,

who was the Director of the British Museum, summarizes the manuscript evidence as follows:

*The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant [existing] evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.*¹⁵

2. Old Testament bibliographical test. This test for the Old Testament is more complicated. Given the age difference between the New and Old Testaments, the number of surviving manuscripts for the Old Testament is much smaller.

Despite the small number of manuscripts (as compared to the New Testament), the accuracy of the Old Testament documents has been verified through the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. The Scrolls consist of approximately 40,000 inscribed fragments. Over 500 books have been reconstructed from these pieces. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide confirming evidence that Old Testament manuscripts date before the time of Christ.

Gleason Archer, Chairman of Old Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, reports that the Isaiah copies “... proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.”¹⁶ Dr. Henry Morris, President of the Institute for Creation Research, concludes, “There is thus no reasonable doubt that our present Old Testament ... is practically identical with the text in use several centuries before Christ, practically extending back to the time when the last books of the Old Testament were originally written.”¹⁷

B. Internal Evidence Test

The second test for the historical accuracy of the Bible is the internal evidence test. This test determines whether the written record is credible by analyzing the ability of the writer or the witness to tell the truth. The New Testament relies upon men who were eyewitnesses of the actual events and teachings of Jesus, or men who related eyewitness accounts of these details. Throughout the New Testament, the writers refer to what they had seen and heard. Many of their contemporaries also had witnessed Jesus’ life. If they reported the facts incorrectly, these people would have challenged their writings. F.F. Bruce explains, “The disciples could not afford to

risk inaccuracies (not to speak of willful manipulation of the facts), which would at once be exposed by those who would be only too glad to do so.”¹⁸

An additional indication of the sincerity of the New Testament writers is their willingness to record incidents that portray themselves in a negative light, such as their flight after Jesus’ arrest, their competition for a high place in the Kingdom of God, and Peter’s denial of Christ.¹⁹ Given these facts, we can trust the New Testament writers’ portrayal of Christ.

C. External Evidence Test

The external evidence test is the final one that historians use to verify the reliability of a document. This test seeks other historical material to substantiate the information contained in the document under review. One example of such confirmation is the testimony of a friend of the Apostle John (who wrote five books in the New Testament). Irenaeus, who was the Bishop of Lyons in A.D. 180, was a disciple of John and wrote the following:

*Matthew published his gospel among the Hebrews ... in their own tongue, when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church there. After their departure, ... Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter’s preaching. Luke, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the gospel preached by his teacher. Then John ... himself produced his gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia.*²⁰

Along with the testimony of contemporaries, archeology also provides powerful external evidence for the reliability of the Bible. (This confirmation will be discussed at length in the following section.) Archeologist Joseph Free reports, “Archeology has confirmed countless passages which have been rejected by critics as unhistorical or contradictory to known facts.”²¹ Finally, the weight of historical evidence clearly upholds the reliability of the Bible as Dr. Clark Pinnock states:

*There exists no document from the ancient world witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies and offering so superb an array of historical data on which an intelligent decision may be made. An honest [person] cannot dismiss a source of this kind. Skepticism regarding the historical credentials of Christianity is based upon an irrational (i.e., antisupernatural) bias.*²²

IV. THE WITNESS OF ARCHEOLOGY TO THE BIBLE

Archeology provides the fourth avenue of exploration of the reliability of the Bible. Archeology not only verifies certain biblical references, but it also pro-

vides a background for the message of the Bible.

A. The Old Testament Record

William F. Albright, one of the world's greatest Near East archeologists, states, "There can be no doubt that archeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition."²³

With more than 25,000 sites already discovered that show connections to the Old Testament period, the amount of archeological support is *overwhelming*. To demonstrate how archeology has confirmed the Bible, the controversy surrounding Abraham can be cited. Critics of the nineteenth century felt that Abraham could not have existed as he is described in the Bible. For example, they felt he would be unable to read and would lack knowledge of law and history.

Sir Leonard Woolley's excavations at Ur of the Chaldees show that it was a highly developed city. They

discovered clay tablets that served as books and receipts for business transactions. Therefore, "it became clear that Abraham was a product of a highly developed culture. ..." ²⁴ Sir Frederic Kenyon concurs:

It is therefore legitimate to say that, in respect of that part of the Old Testament against which the disintegrating criticism of the last half of the nineteenth century was chiefly directed, the evidence of archeology has been to re-establish its authority. ... ²⁵

Another example of the contribution of archeology is the discovery of the Ebla tablets in 1974. For years, the Genesis 14 account of the victory of Abraham over Chedorlaomer and the Mesopotamian kings has been held to be fictitious and the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar as mere legend. ²⁶ However, the Ebla tablets refer to all five of these cities and in one document even lists them in the same sequence as Genesis 14. ²⁷

Lastly, in August 1993, it was reported that an Israeli

PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
#1 Born of a Virgin "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." — <i>Isaiah 7:14</i>	"... she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. ... And Joseph ... kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus." — <i>Matthew 1:18,24,25</i>
#2 Born at Bethlehem "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." — <i>Micah 5:2</i>	"... Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea ..." — <i>Matthew 2:1</i>
#3 Hands and Feet Pierced "... they pierced my hands and my feet." — <i>Psalms 22:16</i>	"And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him ..." — <i>Luke 23:33</i>
#4 Garments Parted and Lots Cast "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." — <i>Psalms 22:18</i>	"The soldiers therefore, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. They said ... 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be ...'" — <i>John 19:23,24</i>
#5 Bones Not Broken "He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken." — <i>Psalms 34:20</i>	"But coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs." — <i>John 19:33</i> [Historical Note: The executioners normally broke criminals' legs to hasten their death.]

archeologist had discovered the first known reference outside the Bible to King David. The inscriptions were found on a broken monument in northern Israel. Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, said, "The stele [monument] brings to life the biblical text in a very dramatic way. It also gives us more confidence in the historical reality of the biblical text."²⁸

B. The New Testament Record

The New Testament has also been substantiated by the archeologist's spade. The book of Acts most readily lends itself to archeological investigation because it contains so many references to customs, places and events of that time. Therefore, Luke, the author of Acts, has been subjected to intense scrutiny. For example, in his gospel, it was believed that Luke was wrong about the events surrounding Jesus' birth. Critics maintained that there was no census at that time; people did not have to return to their ancestral home; and Quirinius was not governor of Syria.²⁹

Archeological discoveries have upheld Luke's account on all three fronts. First, the evidence shows that the Romans held a census every 14 years and that the practice was initiated under Augustus. Second, an inscription in Antioch names Quirinius as governor of Syria in 7 B.C. and 6 A.D. Finally, a papyrus found in Egypt reads this way:

*Because of the approaching census it is necessary that all those residents for any cause away from their homes should at once prepare to return to their governments in order that they may complete the family registration of the enrollment. ...*³⁰

Sir William Ramsay, who has completed the most extensive study, thus far, of the data recorded in Acts, concedes, "Luke is a historian of the first rank....In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."³¹

Other references in the New Testament to certain cities and regions, customs and political situations have also been confirmed through archeology. In fact, Morris says, "...no statement in the New Testament has to this date been refuted by an unquestioned find of science or history. This in itself is a unique testimony to the amazing accuracy and authenticity of the New Testament records."³²

V. CONFIRMATION OF THE BIBLE THROUGH PROPHECY

The final area of confirmation of the reliability of the Bible is prophecy. The inclusion of many specific prophecies sets the Bible apart from all other works. The fulfillment of these prophecies points to the reliability of

the other information presented in the Old and New Testaments. The number of prophecies is astounding. Therefore, the following analysis is limited to a few messianic prophecies and prophecies related to a specific city. The fulfillment of these prophecies will amply demonstrate the reliability of the Word of God.

A. Prophecies Concerning the Messiah

The Old Testament contains over 300 prophecies of the coming Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus. For purposes of this discussion, a few of these prophecies have been selected. Their fulfillment is explained in the New Testament excerpts that are included.

It should be remembered that the prophecies were written by a variety of men over several centuries. At least 400 years passed between the last of these prophecies and the appearance of Jesus.³³

Given the fulfillment in Jesus' life of these and many other prophecies, it becomes evident that God directed what has been written by the prophets. Josh McDowell makes this conclusion:

*Certainly God was writing an address in history that only the Messiah could fulfill. Approximately forty major claims to be the Jewish Messiah have been made by men. Only one—Jesus Christ—appealed to fulfilled prophecy to substantiate His claims, and only His credentials back up those claims.*³⁴

B. Prophecies Concerning the City of Tyre

In addition to the messianic prophecies, the Bible also contains many prophecies regarding the fate of certain cities and nations. As an example of the astounding accuracy of these biblical prophecies, the following is an analysis of the predictions related to the city of Tyre. This city of ancient Phoenicia is now in southern Lebanon. It was once an enemy of Israel.

In Ezekiel 26, written between 592 and 570 B.C., the Lord declares His anger towards Tyre for her extreme arrogance. He predicts her invasion by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and her ultimate destruction. Verses 7, 8 and 14 declare her fate:

For thus says the Lord God, 'Behold I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon...and he will make siege walls against you...'

'And I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I, the Lord, have spoken,' declares the Lord God.

The fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy is explained by the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. It states, "After a 13-year

siege (585-573 B.C.) by Nebuchadnezzar II, Tyre made terms and acknowledged Babylonian suzerainty [sovereignty].” It goes on to say:

*In his war on the Persians, Alexander III...marched southward toward Egypt, calling upon the Phoenician cities to open their gates...The citizens of Tyre refused to do so, and Alexander laid siege to the city. Possessing no fleet, he demolished old Tyre, on the mainland...*³⁵

Philip Myers, a secular historian, summarizes the fate of Tyre:

*Alexander the Great...reduced [Tyre] to ruins. She recovered in a measure from this blow, but never regained the place she had previously held in the world. The larger part of the site of the once great city is now bare as the top of a rock—a place where the fishermen that still frequent the spot spread their nets to dry.*³⁶

The record of history regarding Tyre makes it obvious that each prophetic detail recorded in Ezekiel was fulfilled just as the Bible predicted.

CONCLUSION

The Bible’s uniqueness, its preparation, and the testimony of history, archeology and prophecy, all work together to confirm beyond reasonable doubt that it is totally reliable. Sir Frederic G. Kenyon makes this conclusion:

*“...it is reassuring at the end to find that the general result of all these discoveries and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scripture, and our conviction that we have in our hands, in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God”*³⁷ ●

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29. Wilson, p.109.
30. Ibid.
31. Morris, p.26.
32. Ibid., pp.26-27.
33. Wilson, pp.210-211.
34. Ibid., p.211.
35. Ibid., p.61.
36. Ibid.
37. Morris, p.23.

Scripture quotations are from the NASB.

For Further Study

- *Becoming a Contagious Christian* by Bill Hybels
- *Hope Has Its Reasons* by Rebecca Manley Pippert
- *Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World* by Rebecca Manley Pippert
- *Witnessing Without Fear* by Bill Bright
- *Gentle Persuasion* by Joe Aldrich
- *Transforming Your Workplace for Christ* by William Nix
- *Answers to Tough Questions* by Josh McDowell
- *He Walked Among Us* by Josh McDowell
- *More Than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell
- *Reasons to Believe* by R.C. Sproul
- *Can Man Live Without God?* by Ravi Zacharias
- *Christianity: The Faith That Makes Sense* by Dennis McCallum
- *Making Choices* by Peter Kreeft
- *The Death of Truth* by Dennis McCallum, ed.
- *Letters From a Skeptic* by Dr. Gregory Boyd
- *Know Why You Believe* by Paul Little
- *The Signature of God* by Grant R. Jeffery
- *True for You, But Not for Me* by Paul Copan

Notes
