

The title 'SENT SENT' is rendered in a large, dot-matrix font. Each letter is composed of a grid of small squares. The top row of letters uses a color gradient from light red to light green. The middle row of letters uses a gradient from light blue to light purple. The bottom row of letters uses a gradient from yellow to dark blue. The overall effect is a vibrant, multi-colored digital aesthetic.

SENT SENT

SEEKING THE ORPHANS OF GOD

DEAN EATON

Endorsements

One of the best ways to experience more life in our congregation is by participating in seeing not-yet-Christians become new disciples living in God. Dean Eaton is a faithful guide who gives us concrete ways to join God in helping to bring people into God's family in everyday kind of ways. This book reflects a missional theology that will help you cultivate an inclusive loving community that invites all to live into the divine dance of the Father, Son and Spirit.

J.R. Woodward, National director, V3 Church Planting Movement. Author, *Creating a Missional Culture*, Co-author, *The Church as Movement*.

Sent Seeking the Orphans of God and the accompanying *Love Life Community studies* are quite possibly the spark that could bring your church alive. They will build community and revitalise your life, faith, church and community. Dean Eaton is a pastor and evangelist who skilfully teaches and encourages the church to share the good news of Jesus Christ effectively and with meaning. **Dr Andrew Menzies**, Principal Stirling Theological College - University of Divinity.

Dean Eaton has planted churches in both rural and city locations in Australia and Japan. Dean has now distilled his lifetime's experience and study into one book. It brings both practical advice and the fruit of deep reflection. Importantly the process firmly embeds evangelism and church planting in the existing church, renewing long-established congregations and giving new initiatives the support and encouragement they need. There is practical advice on how to talk with secular post-Christian people, depending on where they are on the journey to faith. If you hear God calling you to bring Jesus to your friends, neighbours and workmates, then this is a must-read book for you. **Dr Steen Olsen**. *Director for Mission for the Lutheran Church in South Australia and the Northern Territory former Bishop of the Lutheran Church of New Zealand*.

The Western church desperately needs a fresh look at evangelism. The church is losing ground and many methods utilized in the past are no longer effective in our cultural context, it's like speaking Greek in Mexico. Apart from this, we are introducing people to a very transactional faith. Dean Eaton's book is refreshing on many levels. It takes the struggle and guilt out of evangelism. It is one of the most practical books on this topic that I have come across. This is not a book written for the experts, the extroverts or the great salesmen. As Eaton describes, it is more of a travel guide, teaching us to assist people on their spiritual journey. The book is set out with 'stepping stones' that present a very clear pathway to understand where those we come in contact with are along their own spiritual journey. The stepping stones then offer a way forward for those ready to take the next step on their spiritual pathway. I recommend this book for anyone that has an interest in the spiritual well-being of those around them. **Dr Michelle Sanders**, *Church Planter - Kaleidoscope Community (Melbourne, Australia). Founder/Director of Art & Soul*.



The voice of experience is a rare commodity to be highly prized. Buy this book and value it, because Dean Eaton, a pastor-evangelist with decades of experience, is a practitioner. He knows whereof he speaks. *Sent: Seeking the Orphans of God* is a theologically informed, pastorally aware volume from the heart of a man who has lived out what the title says. The church, in deep decline amid a culture of 'instant' everything, frequently succumbs to the temptation to grasp at anything to save itself, preferably by the quickest route possible. This book isn't interested in giving you hints and tips to save the church. It is interested in walking with God as he brings his lost children home. And that, in the end, is all the church is for. **Rev. Dr. Noel Due**, *Ministry and Mission Support Pastor, Lutheran Church of Australia, SA/NT District.*

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Religion, Mission, Evangelism

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*Dedicated to my life partner in the dance of the Spirit and
the mystery of love, Heather Joy Eaton.*

Forever in your love!



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Preface

God is constantly seeking people.

At the dawn of creation God looks for us in the garden. To walk with us, care for us, know us.

God is still seeking.

God is constantly saving people.

At the centre of human history is the death of the Son of Man on the Cross. In his death we are given eternal life. As a consequence every person is experiencing the relentless movement of God towards them to do them good.

God is still saving.

God is constantly sending people.

Just as the Father sent Jesus into the world, Jesus is now sending us, filled with the Holy Spirit. We are those who are sent, seeking the orphans of God—orphans, not because God has ever abandoned anyone, but rather because we abandon God.

God is still sending!

'...making his appeal through us...be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20b).

This book is for everyone concerned about how to participate with God in this seeking, saving and sending work: sowing the gospel and reaping God's harvest. It seeks to answer the question, how do you approach the task of reaping the harvest in a way that feels natural, and is both ethical and fruitful?

In summary, this resource explains in simple language how to approach the task of relational evangelism amongst your relatives and friends.

If you form a small group to read this book chapter by chapter together, do the small group Bible studies and activities found at the end of each chapter, which are introduced through online video interviews with experienced evangelists, you will grow in your ability to reap the harvest.

Believers feeling confused or apathetic about reaping the harvest will discover here a practical resource which is an encouragement to see, hear and become involved in what God is already up to in people's lives.

Theologians may feel slightly frustrated as this book doesn't attempt to explain all mysteries related to its subject. Rather it is a practitioner's humble attempt at a brief explanation of what it looks like to echo God's invitation to new life in Christ.

Sowing the gospel and reaping the harvest takes time and a willingness to journey with God in a community of co-learning. To support this there are bonus resources included in this publication: a course to help you form a community of missional practice (Love Life



Communities) and a resource to train church leaders who can support the work of such a community on mission with God (Missional Leadership).

Reaping with God

So how do we begin participating with God in reaping the harvest?

We commence in the same way we do worship. In the name, authority, power and grace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is because our whole lives are embedded (rooted) in the life of God, our loving Father, the crucified Son and the ever-present Spirit. Together we are called to echo God's call, inviting all people into eternal life.

This is an important place to begin because it anchors our conversation about evangelism in the biblical understanding of who God is and what he is doing. Building upon this foundation this book will focus on how, in practical terms, we are called to participate in reaping the harvest with this seeking, saving and sending God.

Jesus told us in Luke 10 that the harvest is great but the labourers are few.

The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit. These were his instructions to them: 'The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields. Now go...' (Luke 10:1–3, NLT).

The harvest in Luke 10 refers to the numerous people being welcomed into the Kingdom of God for the first time as well as to those who are returning after years of spiritual slumber.

You will notice that Jesus doesn't say, that the work of reaping the harvest is purely a work of God with no human involvement. The basis of our salvation is the finished work of Christ plus nothing. However, in Luke 10 Jesus says that the *invitation into God's salvation* is something his followers are called to echo. As a consequence of this activity God populates the New Creation; the new heaven and new earth. Today the reaping of the harvest is so great that after reading each sentence of this book, you can thank God that yet another person has been literally 'rescued from the power of darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of his beloved Son' (Colossians 1:13, NRSV).

We are sent not only to seek out but also to walk with the orphans of God, because even though a person may appear to have a so-called crisis conversion, it is always a journey over time requiring patience and grace on our part. This is important because, to use biblical language, *reaping the harvest* involves participating with God in *making disciples*, not just converts.

Disciples of Jesus Christ are formed in the divine/human community of Father, Son and Spirit, visibly seen by the world as the local church, a congregation of the Church Universal. Lesslie Newbigin describes this community of the church as a visible community that provides the interpretive key to God's wider purposes for humanity: the church embodies the future toward which God is drawing all humanity. Therefore the church is not a collection of



individuals 'who choose to associate in order to have their spiritual needs met', but rather 'a community of mutual participation in God's own life and the life of the world' (Gelder & Zscheile, 2011).¹ This community of participants' approach to mission starts with discovering what God is up to in their neighbourhoods and social networks and participating in that activity.²

Active presence

A core principle in this book is the idea of our need to be spiritually present with the people God has placed within the circumference of our lives, being drawn with them by the Spirit *on their way to Christ*. God is actively convicting us of sin and bringing true comfort to our consciences. Aligned to God's active presence, which is consistently convicting the world of sin, judgement and righteousness (John 16:8), our presence must be active in echoing this invitation to salvation. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Romans 10:13). The Apostle Paul continues on in this passage, however, by challenging missional passivity. 'But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? *And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?* And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?' (Romans 10:13–14). Therefore, being 'sent' is more than floating aimlessly. It is about being an active presence through active listening, active discerning and, based upon this, active Gospel sharing.

My old evangelism mentor once told me that if you take the opportunities God gives you to witness you will never have to create any. While this has certainly proven to be true over my lifetime, it was his follow-up remark that made the big difference. He said, 'Jesus spent most of his time with people who needed to know God, not those who already knew.'

The lesson is simple. Spend more social time with not-yet-believers doing things you already plan to do in your week: playing or watching the game, eating dinner, going to the beach, playing with your children at the local playground, walking the dog, cycling, shopping. The only thing that doesn't work here is sleeping. Like Jesus, enfold people into the normal activities of your life and journey with them. Then take the opportunities God provides to share your faith and you will never have to invent any.

But are people even remotely interested in talking about spiritual matters or religion anymore? Mark McCrindle is an Australian social researcher who asked Australians the question: 'Do you ever talk about spirituality or religion when you gather with friends?' The response? 7% said 'Often', 46% said 'Yes occasionally', and 47% said 'No, never'.¹³

This means that at least half of your friends will at least occasionally talk about spirituality or religion in social settings. Will you be there when they do?

Is your life's greatest purpose being there for people who need that conversation?

Does your church exist with this as its defining task? Are you available to invite people into the new life offered to them by Christ? Or has this purpose become secondary to other things?



Leslie was falling apart. She burst into tears when our class teacher left the room. It was our first week of school and all of us were feeling under pressure. In my house it was common for my father to gather us round the piano to sing gospel music to lift our spirits. I couldn't quite remember the words to any hymns that day but I did know *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, at that time a recent hit by the Beatles. So I stood on my desk, pulled out my air guitar, and started to sing at the top of my voice.

While it may have resulted in my first ever detention, it wasn't long before Leslie was smiling. Even at the tender age of five I knew that we all desire to be loved and to have someone hold our hand in the midst of our sense of abandonment. The simplicity of a Beatles love song may be considered bland in a literary sense, but Leslie certainly got the message—*somebody present cares*.

Here am I. Send me.

'Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me"' (Isaiah 6:8, NLT).

Availability is often the biggest struggle faced in the task of reaping the harvest. Jesus is saying in Luke 10 that he needs followers who are available to humbly walk the journey with spiritual pilgrims who are on their way to God. Too often however we don't quite get to the primary task of reaping the harvest and are happier to settle for just achieving the secondary outcomes of mission. I have in mind good things such as social justice, influencing the culture, meeting felt needs and appearing relevant, whatever that looks like this week. Lutheran pastor Dr David Daubert explains why these valid outcomes of our mission are not enough.

Mission starts with a gift. That gift is Jesus Christ. It is not forgiveness or reconciliation or any other fruit of Christ's work. It is Christ himself. As Christ is to us, so we become to the world. All that we are is now to be a gift to the world. All that we say and do is to show and declare the goodness of God in Christ. In fact, if mission does not result then faith is not fully there. This is not a legalistic understanding of Christianity. But it does take seriously the reality of a living Christ being a part of life for the believer. A key piece, missing for many Lutherans, is the final part of the process. We have often tried to lead good lives and tried to care for our neighbours. This has been the core of our witness (Daubert, 2002).⁴

But is it really true in the western world today that Christians care for their neighbours? The Australian National Church Life Survey informs us that 'Church attenders are active in the wider community. Far from being inward-looking and focused only on their own church group, church-going volunteers are part of society's powerful, invisible [welfare] safety net. Church attenders are more likely to be volunteers than the general community (57% vs 35%).'⁵

This is great news, however Daubert, speaking directly to his fellow Lutherans, goes on:

Oddly, a community formed on the priority of the Word over good deeds has relied on good deeds and neglected the Word. The final piece of discipleship is that as Christ serves as our guide in our journey, *so we are to be guides on behalf of Christ to others*. This means that with caring deeds that are our gift to the world *we must also bring a word that helps people see, not the deed, but the Christ who stands 'in, with, and under' the deed* [my emphasis], (Daubert, 2002).⁶

As someone who belongs to the same tribe as David Daubert, I have to admit to our need as Lutherans to hear this challenge, but I suspect it resonates with all followers of Jesus today.

After planting many churches in Australia and Japan, in small rural towns, suburban and urban settings, this book brings together my distilled wisdom from being a gospel sharer in the field along with extensive research on doing mission. May it encourage you to become guides on behalf of Christ to the orphans of God!

Enjoy the journey!

Dean Eaton

Endnotes

¹ Gelder, C.V., Zscheile, D.J. (2011). *The Missional Church in Perspective*. (p. 107). USA: Baker Academic.

² For more on this point see two books by Roxburgh, A. (2015). *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World and Structured for Mission*.

³ McCrindle.com.au (2016). *Spirituality and Christianity in Australia Today*. Retrieved 5th December 2016, from <http://mccrindle.com.au/the-mccrindle-blog/spirituality-and-christianity-in-australia-today> .

⁴ Lutheranmission.blogspot.com.au, (2016), Daubert, D. (2002). *Martin Luther and Mission Theology: A Glimpse Through the Lens of His Introduction to the Gospels*. Retrieved 4th December 2016, from http://lutheranmission.blogspot.com.au/2007_06_01_archive.html.

⁵ <http://www.ncls.org.au/>

⁶ Ibid. p.2.

Chapter 1

GOD: Saves

God the Father, Son and Spirit is drawing every human being into their eternal circle of love. This is because God loves all people and desires all to be saved (John 12:32; 1 Timothy 2:4; Psalm 67:1–2). In the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ the full expression of this love of God is seen as the Father judges our sin in the body of His Son. ‘Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring us safely home to God’ (1 Peter 3:18, NLT). Mission is therefore a saving movement from God to the world. To paraphrase Christopher Wright, the only concept of mission into which God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit fits is the one in which they are the beginning, the centre and the end.¹

Evangelism is then the proclamation of this invitation to life within the eternal love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are asked by Jesus to participate in giving this invitation.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you (Matt. 28:18–20, NRSV).

This makes evangelism a facet of the overall mission of God, which can be expounded as involving the following elements:

- Evangelism²
- Discipleship
- Planting and structuring new churches
- Social justice
- Healing of mind and body
- Giving and receiving the benefits of creation (Bingham, 1999)³

Mission is therefore everything the Church does in obedience to the gospel, including evangelism. ‘It is not the Church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the Church’ (Moltmann, 1997).⁴ Jesus used a wonderful image to describe what participating in this saving mission of God (*Missio Dei*)⁵ looks like in everyday life.

God in Christ
has called
us into
the family
business
the renewal
of all things



You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14–16, MSG)

God in Christ has called us into the family business—the renewal of all things; to 'keep open house', so that people may open up to God; to be 'generous with your life' so that people may discover 'this generous Father in heaven'. However, defining what evangelism is doesn't necessarily help us determine what successful mission looks like.

Measuring success

How does God judge success in mission? How can we measure success in evangelism? Is it by the number of people who respond to the invitation of the gospel (converts) or something else? Bryan Stone in *Evangelism after Christendom*⁶ contends that in the New Testament we observe that it's about being a faithful gospel witness, which may not result in conversions but quite the opposite—rejection and possibly persecution. So whether we see God at work in miracles of healing and conversions or experience no results and even persecution as we engage in mission, a faithful gospel witness is careful not to glory in what we experience but in what Christ does. If we glory in what we do, we may start to slip into relying on our own plans, strength or ability. 'God reveals himself most clearly in the cross' of Jesus Christ and we therefore experience 'God's presence and work in our humanity and weakness' (Olsen, 1995).⁷

So then how do we measure being a faithful witness?

Stone argues that we cannot judge the faithfulness of our witness by measuring the extent to which it is accepted or rejected; we can, however, judge our faithfulness by measuring the *reach* rather than the *spread*. The reach is the universality of our invitation—that is, whether it is offered to all or only to some. If evangelism can be measured at all, perhaps it can best be measured by how well a community is socially inclusive and invitational to all people with the good news about Jesus (Stone, 2006).⁸



This inclusive and invitational community that we are called to become is seen in the nature of the relationship between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.⁸ In the 8th Century a follower of Jesus called John of Damascus described the inner life of God as a constant movement of relational love between the Father, Son and Spirit. Like his namesake John the Apostle, who opens his Gospel proclaiming that ‘...the Word (Christ) is God and eternally co-existed with God...’ (John 1:1), John of Damascus saw that Father, Son and Spirit are constantly and eternally honouring and giving gifts to one another.

One of the greatest theologians North America has ever produced is Jonathan Edwards. Paraphrasing the last paragraph of his unpublished essay on the Trinity, ‘...the purpose of all things is that the Father wanted to give to His Son a Bride (Edwards, 2015).¹⁰ This stunning summary of why we are here is immense in its implications for our faith. It tells us that our creation and redemption are the product of an eternal love relationship between the members of the Trinity.

The French Reformer John Calvin used a wedding metaphor to further expound how this relationship links to gospel proclamation. ‘Whenever we proclaim the gospel, it is as if Christ is once again saying his Wedding vows to His Bride’. This saving God is drawing, wooing all people home and the door of salvation is now set open (Rev. 3:8).

*The purpose
of all things
is that the
Father wanted
to give to His
Son a Bride*

Small Group Activity

Small Group Gatherings: Preparation & Format

PERSONAL PREPARATION (15 minutes): During the week prior to each small group gathering watch the next introduction video - www.lca.org.au/sent. The videos are on average 5 minutes. Reflect on the main ideas, biblical passages and concepts described.

Read the next chapter of the book, *Sent Seeking the Orphans of God*.

The small group should engage in weekly gatherings for at least 45 minutes (preferably 60 minutes). In theory, even busy Mothers looking after children could meet together at a Café or park with a playground as they dialogue together. However, ideally this gathering would happen in a home in order to make discussion, listening and prayer more fluent.

When you gather do the following:

LISTEN TOGETHER (15 minutes):

God's Word: With the group listen to God in his Word and to one another's reflections through the next suggested indwelling the Word session.

Video: Play the video again, especially if any group members have not yet seen it.

Book: Discuss the main ideas, biblical passages and concepts described in the chapter and summarised in the introduction video for this session.

SOW & REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the group doesn't need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

- Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?
- What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ.

Prayer

- Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.
- Thank God for the refreshing and continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Video: Watch this week's video. Accessed from www.lca.org.au/sent – Video 1 - God: Saves.

Book: Discuss the main ideas, other biblical passages and concepts described in the book and introduction video for this session.

SOW & REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the rest of the group doesn't need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?

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.....
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What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

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.....
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Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide, or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ?

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Prayer:

Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.

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Thank God for the continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

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Endnotes

¹ See Wright, Christopher J. H. (2006) *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. (P.56). Nottingham: IVP.

² See Luke 4:16–23; Mark 1:14–15; John 1:1–18. Evangelism comes from several related Greek words. *euangelion* means gospel and appears twelve times in the gospels, sixty times in Paul and twice in Acts. The primary meaning is good news. *euangelizein* appears twice in Revelation. *euaggeliloumai* means good messenger and appears fifty-two times in the New Testament e.g. Matt 11:5. *kerusso* means to preach and often had euangelion added to it. The message preached is the kerygma. Several other Greek words are connected like *didasko* (teaching—often in the case of Jesus), *martus* (witness) and *mathatas* (disciple).

³ Bingham, G. (1999). *Living Faith Studies Series 5 No. 50*, (p.1-2). *Evangelism*. S.A.: NCP.

⁴ Moltmann, J. (1977). *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. (p.64). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

⁵ '[*Missio Dei* is] God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate. Bosch, David J. (1991). *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (p.10). Maryknoll: Orbis.

⁶ Stone, B. P. (2006). *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Kindle Locations 3430-3670). Kindle Edition. MI: Brazos Press, Baker.

⁷ Olsen, S. (1995). *To Transform, Not Just to Inform*, (p.1). Australia: Lutheran Support Ministries, Lutheran Church of Australia. Olsen adds, 'Martin Luther distinguished between what he called a 'theology of the cross which is biblical and a 'theology of glory' which is not. God reveals himself most clearly on the cross not in irrefutable proofs of his presence and goodness. See 1 Cor. 1.22-25; 2 Cor. 1.9, 4.6, 10, 18; 12.7-10.'

⁸ Stone, B. P. (2006). *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Kindle Locations 3430-3670). Kindle Edition. MI: Brazos Press, Baker.

⁹ John of Damascus (c.675–c.750), though little known today, is probably the most famous theologian in the last 1500 years of the Eastern Church. The doctrine of the *perichoresis* (Greek) or *circumincession* (Latin), is the doctrine of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit within the Trinity. John was not the first to state this truth. For example, the fourth century Eastern fathers, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and Didymus the Blind, taught the *perichoresis*, and Reinhold Seeberg writes that Augustine (354–430) in the West wrote of the 'mutual interpenetration and inter-dwelling' of the three Persons in the Trinity. John, however, is clearer and fuller than all his predecessors.

¹⁰ www.ccel.org/ccel/ (2016). Jonathan Edwards, unpublished essay on the Trinity. Retrieved 22nd December 2015 from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/trinity/files/trinity.html>

Chapter 2

GOD: Seeks

Father, Son and Spirit are a community of love constantly seeking the orphans of God. God has never abandoned anyone, but many have abandoned and repressed their identity as God's children.

For thus says the Lord God, 'I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among the scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again' (Ezekiel 34:11, 12:16).

Jews such as Zacchaeus heard the call through Jesus to return, to come back into the Covenant,¹ 'For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost' (Luke 19:10). Non-Jews such as the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well also heard the call of 'the Father [who] seeks such as these to worship Him' (John 4:14, 23, NRSV).

In Acts the Apostles echo this call of Jesus. Peter preaching to Jews (Acts 2) *calls them back* into this covenantal relationship. Today this is equivalent to when we encounter someone who was baptised as a child and as a child of God needs to be re-converted (repent) or be re-awakened (revived) to who they are in Christ. In relation to the church we could refer to such people as *de-churched converts*.

On the other hand Paul preaching to Gentiles (Acts 17) *calls them into God's Kingdom*. This is the person who experiences the blessing of salvation in Christ for the first time; repenting, believing and being baptised. We may refer to these people as *un-churched converts*.

So in summary there are two kinds of people God is seeking.

People who are already in the family of God but who have forgotten who they are in Christ, and those who are in the process of being drawn into that eternal family for the first time. With everyone, everywhere and at all times, the limitless scope of God's Spirit to convict and draw all people is at work upon every human life. The Spirit does not act alone.

- **The Father draws.** In John 6:44 we see Jesus challenging Jews who are refusing to believe in him. 'For no-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them up.' This word 'draw' refers to God's pull or persuasive influence upon the heart and mind of the unregenerate.²

Father, Son
and Spirit are
a community
of love
constantly
seeking
the orphans
of God



- **Jesus Christ draws.** ‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die’ (John 12:32–33).
- **The Holy Spirit convicts.** ‘And He, when He comes, will convict the world about [the guilt of] sin [and the need for a Saviour], and about righteousness, and about judgment’ (John 16:8, AMP).

This seeking God is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. This is why Martin Luther’s definition of Gospel proclamation—‘what promotes Jesus’ (*Was Christum treibet*)—is a helpful summary. Evangelising is *Jesus coming to people!*

So God has spoken through the Son (Heb. 1:1–3) and as the ‘Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify’ (John 15:26) about Jesus, making the scope of dialogue between God and humanity limitless although the focus is particular. ‘We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God’ (Bosch 1996: p.489).³

This joint action of the Trinity in our salvation brings us to see something significant about the invitation of the Gospel. It is not an exhortation to invite God into our lives, but rather it is an invitation for us to enter God’s life. In *Simply Christian N.T.* Wright describes how the voice of Christ calls all of us into this life with God through four longings of humanity: the passion for justice, the quest for spirituality, the need for meaningful relationships, and the enjoyment of beauty. He defines these as ‘echoes of a voice’—not just any voice but the voice of God revealed in the voice of Christ who calls all of us to follow him and step into God’s new world. Wright then focuses on the biblical story of salvation and explains how the central aspects of that story meet these four deepest longings of humanity. In Wright’s own words,

God is the creator and lover of the world. Jesus spoke of God as ‘the Father who sent me’, indicating that, as he says elsewhere, ‘anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9). Look hard at Jesus, especially as he goes to his death, and you will discover more about God than you could ever have guessed from studying the infinite shining heavens or the moral law within your own conscience. God is the one who satisfies the passion for justice, the longing for spirituality, the hunger for relationships, the yearning for beauty (Wright, 2006).⁴

Father, Son and Spirit are a saving seeking community of love who beckon every person to come and receive the salvation that Christ alone has achieved in his finished work on the cross.

Salvation is not an exhortation to invite God into our lives, but rather it is an invitation for us to enter God’s life.



The next chapter will explore the fact that this saving, seeking God sends us to announce this good news.



Small Group Gathering #2

God: Seeks

Start with an opening prayer.

Listen Together

Indwelling the Word

Begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud in a good translation (e.g. NRSV) or if you prefer a paraphrase such as the Message. Read it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: Psalm 139.1-12

Write your thoughts & reflections here

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Conversations

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report what your partner said back to the whole group.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Video: Watch this week's video. Video 2 - GOD: Seeks. Accessed from www.lca.org.au/sent

Book: Discuss the main ideas, other biblical passages and concepts described in the book and introduction video for this session.

SOW AND REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the rest of the group doesn't need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?

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What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

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Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide, or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ?

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Prayer:

Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.

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Thank God for the continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

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Endnotes

¹ The idea of covenant in the Bible is a major theme but in summary we can say that God has made an everlasting covenant with his creation to bless it and through the blood of Jesus Christ all people are called into a covenant or relationship with God based upon God's grace. Thus we are called to live in the 'fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ' (Rom. 15.29 KJV).

² In the Greek when the word *elkō* is used figuratively, as it is in John 6:44, it refers to the pull on a person's inner life (BAGD, 251) and does not imply being 'dragged' as some Calvinists claim.

³ The exclusive claim of the Gospel is that Christ alone died for the sins of the world. The inclusive claim is that God has poured out his Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2.17-21) convicting the world of sin, judgement and righteousness (John 16.8) inviting all people everywhere to repent and be baptised.

⁴ Wright, Christopher J. H. (2006) *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. (p.17). Nottingham: IVP.

Chapter 3

GOD: Sends

The saving God who seeks after all people is also a sending God.

We are sent together, to lead people to Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The good news we speak is a message of peace with the God who ‘...was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation’ (2 Cor. 5:19, NLT).

It is a message for the healing of the whole of humanity and ultimately of the whole creation (Romans 8:19–23; Ephesians 1:5–10). Jesus said, ‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’ (John 20:21). This means that evangelism is a participation in the sending of Christ as we proclaim the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15) and baptise in the name of the triune God. Mission is not an option, but a divine sending.

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:35–38, NRSV)

Jesus invites his followers to pray and by implication become part of the answer to the prayer for workers who will reap the harvest. We are to be seekers after those who are lost, giving spiritual direction for the orphans of God. Evangelism training is therefore about learning the art of discipleship for the ‘lost’. Just as those who engage in pastoral care do the work of spiritual direction and care for those who are in Christ, evangelists do spiritual direction for people coming to Christ. Participating in such work requires the development of relational skills, Christ like attitudes and biblical/cultural knowledge rather than one singular ‘catch all’ technique. As Rick Richardson contends,

The paradigm that dominated much of the twentieth-century might be called ‘evangelism as closing the deal’ or a ‘sales call’. This paradigm put undue pressure on Christians making them feel inadequate to do evangelism as they were not extroverted, persuasive, and an expert in both knowing their product and presenting it. The new paradigm for this time is one of a travel guide or spiritual mentor helping others on their

Evangelism training is about learning the art of discipleship for the ‘lost’



journey. Such guides help people see the clues that God is at work in their experience. These guides also know that their own stories of failure, struggle, doubt, wrong turns, and missed opportunities are as important and compelling to listeners as their stories of success. Guides also show people that their individual stories are a part of a bigger and grander story that reveals purpose, meaning and direction. There are new ways to connect and communicate the good news.

- Collaboration versus activism: We collaborate with the Holy Spirit looking for clues about where God is already at work, expecting God to nudge us in His way, and being in an attitude of prayer when we are around unchurched people.
- Community versus individualism: God is far more committed to raising up witnessing communities than to raising up witnessing individuals.
- Friendship versus agenda: We learn the art of spiritual friendship and authentic conversation (Richardson, 2006).¹

Therefore evangelism is not dissimilar to good pastoral care ministry. It is people rather than program or technique centred. This is because good evangelism reflects the personable nature of Father, Son and Spirit. Some of Jesus' followers have responded positively to this call to be sent ones. "After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed *the Good News*. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us" (1 Corinthians 3:5, NLT).

Sent to do relational evangelism

Missional trainer Chris Walker suggests that relational evangelism includes sharing the verbal content of the gospel, but also includes an awareness about the *context and spiritual journey of the person with whom one is sharing*.

- Relational evangelism recognizes that a person's journey to faith comes in stages.
- Relational evangelism recognizes that a person needs time.
- Relational evangelism values the context of the conversation as well as the content of the gospel.
- Relational evangelism values the incarnational presence of the credible witness, as well as the unchanging revelation of the word of God. It is both expressing our faith (in our life) and explaining our faith (in the content) (Walker, 2016).²

Evangelism is similar to pastoral care in that it starts with relationships seeking to offer the skills of a spiritual director to pilgrims on a journey to God. Just as



in pastoral care people need to feel that you are inviting them into your life with God rather than your program, people who are coming to Christ need to feel the same way. This approach is in contrast to one that seeks to meet people's felt needs, treating them primarily as consumers.

The Evangelism and Charity Mash-up

A 'mash-up' is slang for something created by combining elements from two or more sources. For example a musical track comprising the vocals of one recording placed over the instrumental backing of another. When this is done well it can create some interesting results. Many of the outreach programs run by churches today aspire to be a mashup of meeting felt needs and gospel sharing. The logic is that if we show people we care first then perhaps they will be more open to our message about Jesus. It was in part a reaction to evangelism as cold calling salesmanship involving knocking on the doors of strangers or harassing shoppers in Malls with Gospel presentations in various forms. Historically this has been a source of confusion in the Church for a long time.³ However, this book proposes a third way called relational evangelism; genuine caring human relationships rather than merely transactions of either information or goods and services. God sends us to approach people as people not consumers. This aligns with Missiologist David Hesselgrave who asserts,

Paul considered the preaching of the gospel and the establishment of churches as his primary task. The biblical record leaves no room for thinking that either Paul or the members of his team were basically engaged in raising living standards, ameliorating social conditions, imparting secular knowledge, or dispensing aid from previously established churches. There can be no doubt that allegiance to Christ on the part of converts in the churches entailed these effects as by-products of faith even to the sending of needed aid back to the Jerusalem church (a kind of reverse flow). That the missionaries were concerned about social relationships, and about minds and bodies as well as souls, is patently true. But Paul's primary mission was established when the gospel was preached, people were converted, and churches were established (Hesselgrave, 2000).⁴

Keeping the dispensing of charity separate from direct gospel sharing is in my experience a much better way to operate than doing a mash-up of the two. Then both those giving and those receiving are clear about what is occurring. It is an action of unconditional love, with no other secret agendas from the giver. No power differentials are in the relationship.

Avoiding the mash-up keeps evangelism tethered to relationships that commence on the basis of mutual common ground rather than some kind

of transaction; either dispensing goods and services or merely sharing information about God.

What does this differentiation between charity and gospel sharing look like in practice?

In our family we regularly engage in the social justice, social welfare space. We sponsor children in need of food, shelter and education. We have raised funds for organisations working to rescue child prostitutes throughout Asia. We have hosted groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. We have set up food banks. We have walked with neighbourhoods in other lands such as Cambodia cleaning up rubbish in order to assist them in environment care as well as providing them with medical supplies. In the midst of such situations we are not ashamed of the Gospel, but we are under no illusion that such encounters amount to being friends with the recipients of such assistance. We do it because Jesus said that when we feed the hungry and shelter the homeless we are living out the righteousness he has given to us as a gift; faith without works is dead (Matthew 25.31-46; James 2.14-25).

On the other hand when Jesus sent out the seventy-two to share the word they were to go empty handed with nothing to offer but this message of reconciliation (Luke 10). In fact he said they had to be open to receiving hospitality from strangers rather than offering it.

In practice, when doing relational evangelism, we are getting to know someone as a friend who is not-yet-Christian and our primary concern is their long term spiritual welfare; their eternal destiny. Yes we laugh, eat and play with our friends. We look after each other's children, gardens or pets when needed, because that's what friends do for each other. Ultimately, our greatest role, however, is to be spiritual journeymen with them, leading them to, not away from Christ; there is no neutral state. If along the way someone needs material assistance beyond the scope of our own family resources we refer them or go with them to charities and service organisations. However, we recognise that by the sovereign hand of God we are in a relationship for eternal never just temporal reasons.

A good comparison could be made with the events recorded in John 11 when Jesus' friend Lazarus died. Jesus performed a miracle, a resuscitation, but it was not a resurrection. Lazarus came back to life, later he once again died.

We should genuinely assist people whenever we can with their temporary needs. However, Jesus went to the Cross to die for his friend Lazarus, because he knew that although he had assisted him with a temporary resuscitation of his material and emotional life, his eternal spiritual existence was the primary reason he had come into Lazarus' life.

Evangelists
offer the
skills of
a spiritual
director to
pilgrims
on a
journey
to God.



So it's not a choice between doing charity or evangelism, it is rather doing each in an ethically appropriate manner. This is why, in my opinion, it is more transparent to separate charity from direct evangelism.

Sent together

God doesn't send individuals into the world to reap the harvest but communities on mission.

In the Brazilian method of learning an orchestral instrument you start from your first lesson playing with a small orchestra rather than on your own with a teacher. This communal approach to learning resonates with how we best develop in learning participation in God's mission.

In my youth I was blessed to have an older couple in our church who hosted a youth Bible study in their home. Each week they lead the study in such a way that God's Word was the clearest voice in the room but genuine dialogue by all was encouraged. It wasn't a 'pooling of ignorance' as sometimes is the case with inductive Bible study groups. The couple leading this group were well enough trained by our pastor to bring gentle correction to our discussion when it didn't align with Jesus and the Apostles' doctrine. However, they were also never too quick to do that, allowing us to truly 'do theology' together so that we would learn not only that we should eat fish but how to catch them for ourselves. This is the environment from which I gained confidence not only in the gospel, but also in my ability to share it. In a safe supportive space I was allowed to verbalise my faith and share testimony of how God was at work in my life. Consequently this made it feel more natural for me to share my faith in a less secure space like the school yard or my footy club. In this setting I was also taught that Jesus often responded to people's questions with a question in order to create a dialogue rather than an adversarial debate. I was taught to see myself as being on a journey with fellow believers entering the mystery and wonder of God, and that this same posture of being a fellow journeyman was the way a good evangelist walks with not-yet-believers on their way to Christ.

I also observed these Bible study leaders showing grace and patience to my friends who were either investigating the faith or were brand new believers in Christ. This home Bible study was a socially inclusive, high trust low control open dialogue. Such small group Bible study discussions are the breeding ground for developing evangelistic confidence.

Building Confidence

To summarise this chapter so far we have said that we are 'sent' but remain a part of a local congregation to do relational evangelism in a community on mission, approaching people as spiritual pilgrims not consumers.

For a local ministry of relational evangelism to gain momentum it is important to address the issues of how to continuously sustain motivation, confidence and the desire to discover the orphans of God. In my experience sustainability occurs when the following weekly rhythm and activities are adopted by a missional community.

- **Worship:** Through regular worship we are *motivated* by God as Christ gives Himself to us in Word and Sacrament, therefore we regularly worship at our local church.
- **Fellowship:** As we confess and articulate the faith 'once and for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3) with fellow believers, we *grow in confidence* in sharing the gospel in a safe space, giving us confidence to share it in often unsafe spaces in the world.
- **Discover:** We are sent by God to *discover* the lost people currently being drawn by the Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can work faith in a non-believer but we also know that the Holy Spirit uses Christians like us in the process. There are many dimensions to this process but a large part of it is regularly encouraging one another in the work of discovering, sowing and reaping the harvest. In practice this involves the following tasks:
 - **Include:** We are sent to include the orphans of God in our lives.
 - **Listen:** We are sent to listen to the narrative of their lives.
 - **Discern:** We are sent to understand where they are up to on their journey towards God.
 - **Provide:** We are sent to provide the next stepping stone that will move them forward in their understanding and experience of God's invitation to them in Christ.
 - **Invite:** We are to invite them into a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ by sharing the gospel in a way that they can understand.
 - **Grow:** We are sent to teach, train and care for new believers in Christ. This is what some prefer to call discipleship.

These dimensions will be explored further throughout this book. So, building confidence comes with doing these activities regularly in a community of practice (mission community). The implications of doing such ministry (relational evangelism) requires that you let go of spending your time, energy

Learning to listen and learning together is the posture of disciples who makes disciples.



and resources on doing events called ‘outreach programs’ that seek to deliver the mash up of both meeting felt needs and communicating the Gospel. It may be tempting to keep all of your congregation’s ‘outreach programs’ going as well as trying to develop a team that does relational evangelism, but one may only diminish the other.

Gospel sharers need an energy margin to live, walk and talk with the orphans of God. If you have them busy running events they won’t have the energy margin for relationships that reap the harvest. This is important because the saving God who calls us to participate in seeking the lost, desires to guide, empower and teach us how to be effective in discovering the orphans of God, walking with them, and navigating them towards the saviour. This is why Martin Luther contends, ‘The gospel is not in truth that which is written in books and set down in letters, but rather a spoken message and living word, and a voice which sounds out into the world and is publicly proclaimed, that it may be heard everywhere.’⁵

‘The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.’

(John 1:14, MSG).



Small Group Gathering #3

God: Sends

Start with an opening prayer.

Listen Together

Indwelling the Word

Begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud in a good translation (e.g. NRSV) or if you prefer a paraphrase such as the Message. Read it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: Isaiah 55

Write your thoughts & reflections here

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Conversations

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report what your partner said back to the whole group.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Video: Watch this week's video. Video 3 - GOD: Sends. Accessed from www.lca.org.au/sent

Book: Discuss the main ideas, other biblical passages and concepts described in the book and introduction video for this session.

SOW AND REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the rest of the group doesn't need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?

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What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

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Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide, or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ?

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Prayer:

Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.

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Thank God for the continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

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Endnotes

¹ Richardson, R. (2006). *Reimagining Evangelism*. (p.13). USA: IVP.

² www.evangelismcoach.org. Relational Evangelism. Walker. C. (p.1). Retrieved 13th December 2016 from <http://www.evangelismcoach.org/2013/what-is-relational-evangelism/>

³ The 19th Century Danish Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard argued that the church in the Middle Ages made good works *the only thing* and as a correction Martin Luther and the sixteenth century Protestant Reformers argued that Christ is *the only thing*. You could say that Protestant Christians in particular have been confused about this ever since, despite the fact that the Augsburg Confession makes it clear that good work's should and must be done. See Bliese. R.H. & Gelder C.V. Ed. (2005). *The Evangelising Church. A Lutheran Contribution*. (p.20-21). Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

⁴ Hesselgrave D.J. (2000) *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*. (p.24). MI: Baker, Grand Rapids.

⁵ Luther, M. *Weimarer Ausgabe* XII. (p. 259).

Chapter 4

SENT: Discover the Orphans of God

Everyone is on a journey to God.

Everyone is being drawn to God by God.

Everyone has a relationship with God — *either one of rebellion or repentance!*

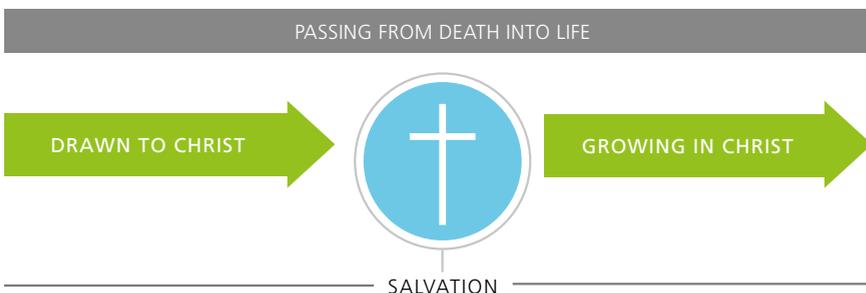
Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life' (John 5:24, NLT). This indicates that a process of passing from death into life is occurring in every human life. Some people, however, rebel and 'suppress the truth' (Romans 1:18). They are living under judgement. As Jesus said, 'There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son' (John 3:18).

People you already know are in the process of repentance i.e. of turning around. By the discreet and often mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, these not-yet-Christian people are conscious that they are being drawn, with a sense that the tide of God's love is rising all around them.

And the Mississippi's mighty
But it starts in Minnesota
At a place that you could walk across with five steps down
And I guess that's how you started
Like a pinprick to my heart
But at this point you rush right through me
And I start to drown¹

The following diagram portrays every person is being drawn to Christ.

Diagram 1: **Pathway to Christ**



People
experience
coming
to Christ
as a
journey
or quest
over time



Conversion is a process

Recently Apologist Dr Matthew James Gray researched adult converts from Billy Graham crusades. He investigated the journey which adult converts experienced in coming to Christ. He discovered that in all cases these 'crisis conversions' were in reality a process, a journey involving an awareness of being drawn by God over a long period. A feature of each conversion was that there were always significant people involved, spiritual helpers who prayed for, dialogued with, and eventually invited them to the crusade. This highlights the role of relational evangelism in the process of conversions, even those seemingly resulting from an attractational program like a mass Gospel crusade.

The process involves God and us

And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18–19)

The finished work of Christ on the cross as the only basis of our reconciliation with God is the foundation of the gospel, 'And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ,' and, the text continues, '*God has given us this task of reconciling people to him*' (2 Cor. 5:18).

It is possible that God may choose to involve you in leading just about anyone to Christ. My observation however, is that you are most likely to lead someone to Christ who is like you in many ways. Someone of the same sex, age group, language, culture, social context and with whom you have an affinity (e.g. a common hobby), is the person you are most likely to lead to Christ. The exception to this tends to be your nuclear family members. Often it takes someone outside of the family to become a spiritual influence upon your own family members, complimenting your witness to family members.

It is possible that over your lifetime you may be used by God to lead many people to Christ. However, in my experience there is usually only one person at a time in your life that you are directly leading to Christ. If you have the capacity for more then so be it. In the Gospels we don't observe Jesus becoming everyone's new best friend in order to witness to them. Neither did he always walk with them all the way to their point of salvation. But he did walk for three years with the twelve, and noticeably more closely with three of the twelve. Jesus could name his disciples, the precious people he was leading to God. Can you name one?

Every person's journey is unique

British social critic Os Guinness says that, while there is only one way to God, there are many ways to Jesus.² This is because every life is unique; everyone's journey to Christ is different. Even though the basis of our need of redemption and God's solution is the same, our journey to salvation is unique. Therefore we must appreciate that every person we engage with in relational evangelism will have similarities but will also be unique in their journey to Christ. This will require from us therefore a tailored rather than one size fits all approach to evangelising.

A person's journey to Christ does not start at the front door of the Church or any of its programs. It begins when a person is physically born and goes on eternally. Along their pathway toward God every person is granted the opportunity to receive the saving grace of God in Christ.

Not I, nor anyone else can travel that road for you.

You must travel it by yourself.

It is not far. It is within reach.

Perhaps you have been on it since you were born, and did not know.

Perhaps it is everywhere – on water and land.

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*³

People's journeys to faith are all different and personal, as Gordon Fee points out.

Christian conversion has both an objective and a subjective dimension to it. On the one hand, Christ's death and resurrection have secured eternal salvation for those who believe...But...the beginning point of conversion also involves a clearly subjective, personally experienced dimension that results in some radical changes in the believer; and the Spirit is the absolutely indispensable element for this dimension (Fee, 1996).⁴

Conversion takes time

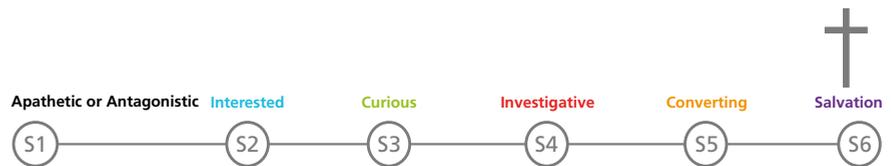
People experience coming to Christ as a journey or quest over time. Out of a broad based survey of people 69% described their coming to faith as gradual, with the average being four years (Green, 2005). Writing about contemporary spirituality, the philosopher and intellectual historian Charles Taylor notes that when spirituality is pursued intentionally today, it takes the form of the quest over time.

People prefer to be on a journey than to reach a destination. Destination speaks of closure, whereas a journey keeps options open. Possibilities must not be shut down by presuming a person's starting point or ruling

something out of court. Individuals must travel their own paths and respect the paths of others. In seeking support, people would rather have resources than ready-made answers. In this climate, while some people will come to a point of conversion and many will follow the process of a structured course, an individual's pathway to faith is of special importance. There is a greater emphasis on the personal nature of the pathway an individual is on. It is important to remember that these are not alternatives – someone's pathway may involve a process of study at some stage, and during that process the person may come to a point of commitment. Rather, the emphasis has changed (Taylor, 2007).⁶

In the parlance of California surf culture, the term 'switchfoot' is used when a surfer changes feet on the board to change direction. In biblical theology we call this repentance; to turn from sin to God, to develop a new perspective on ourselves, God and the creation. The next diagram outlines the observable turning or progress points that a person will experience on their journey to Christ and the stages they pass through.

Diagram 2: **Stages on the Journey to God**



Apathetic or Antagonistic:

- **Apathetic:** It is not uncommon to meet people with an attitude of being indifferent or apathetic about the existence or relevance of God. Is the person's apathy or indifference masking antagonism, ignorance, or an emotional wound caused by bad experience's associated with the Church or God?
- **Antagonistic:** An antagonistic person will often present themselves as an atheist or agnostic who believes that faith in any God and religion is bad for humanity.



Interested: An interested person may also place themselves into the atheist or agnostic category but will at least concede that some Christians are helpful people and that maybe having faith in God is not all bad.

Curious: A curious person is starting to ask questions about spirituality, God, the Bible, Church, but not necessarily yet willing to contribute much effort to their spiritual life by attending courses or meetings.

Investigative: Beyond curiosity is the investigation stage when the person is willing to invest time and energy into the process of finding out more than casual information about the Gospel. This is when it is appropriate to offer them some solid instruction in the Gospel in a way that deals with their personal questions and issues, rather than a one-size fits all presentation like an Alpha or New Life course. An open bible and open dialogue around coffee one on one may be the best approach initially. Courses done one on one or in small groups can happen in time, but usually not at this initial stage.

Converting: This is the person who is starting to declare faith in Christ or could also seem to have a reversal into anger as the Holy Spirit turns up the heat on their lives convicting them of their sin and idols. Some people in this period begin to count the cost of following Christ and decide to turn away from God. Much patience and prayer is required by the Gospel sharer during this phase of the journey.

Salvation: Some people wake up one day and confess that they realise they now have faith in Christ and share this with you. Other people have a more pronounced turning point moment which may appear to be a 'crisis conversion' to people who have not been relationally involved with the process.

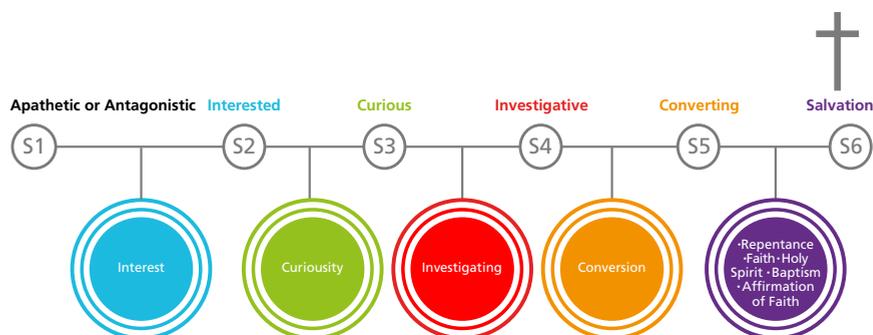
These stages and our possible responses to them will be further explained in the next chapter.

The Holy Spirit engages us and guides us in the process of not only discovering the orphans of God but also leading us to discern where the person is on their journey to God. Being aware of the different progress points on the pathway that a person has reached will help us to point them to the most appropriate next stepping stone for them. This will also be further explored in the next chapter.⁷

This journey is never linear either. You may find that one day someone appears to have made progress, only to regress when something happens in their lives. The faithful witness of Christ is required by God to walk patiently with people, often over many years, before they come to Christ.

What do we say and/or do to move someone forward in their journey to God; to work with the Holy Spirit as He leads a person to the Father through Jesus Christ? This question will now be addressed by introducing the idea of providing stepping stones.

Diagram 3: **Stepping Stones to God**

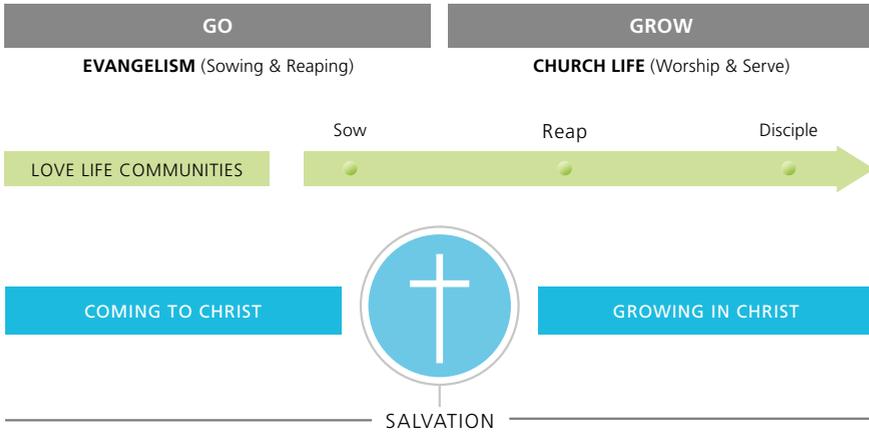


Stepping stones (coloured dots) result from discerning what the Holy Spirit is doing in a person's life and what it is that we should do to help and not hinder their progress towards Christ. The role of the missional community is to discern together the next appropriate stepping stones to offer a person in order to enable them to progress towards Christ. The appropriate stepping stone could be providing resources, acts of kindness, listening and dialogue, direct testimony or whatever you discern is required in each case. In the next chapter I will describe in more forensic detail the experience of both the orphan of God and the evangelist as this journey unfolds, including examples of stepping stones which are appropriate on each stage of a person's journey. For now I wish to simply introduce the concept of our need to discern, track and participate in a person's journey to Christ.

How we discern what the Holy Spirit is doing is best done in teams, communities on mission with God, called in this book Love Life Communities.

The role of the missional community is to discern together the next appropriate stepping stones to offer a person

Diagram 4: **The role of the Love Life Communities**



The saving God, who calls us to participate in seeking and discovering the lost, desires to guide us to be effective in the work of walking with the orphans of God as they progress on their journey to Christ. Therefore the next chapter will explore the part our walking with the orphans of God plays in successfully reaping the harvest. See *page 125 on how to develop a Love Life Community*.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Video: Watch this week's video. Video 4 - SENT: Discover the orphans of God. Accessed from www.lca.org.au/sentnt

Book: Discuss the main ideas, other biblical passages and concepts described in the book and introduction video for this session.

SOW AND REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the rest of the group doesn't need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?

.....
.....
.....

What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

.....
.....
.....

Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide, or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ?

.....
.....
.....

Prayer:

Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.

.....
.....
.....

Thank God for the continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

.....
.....
.....



Endnotes

- ¹ Lyricsfreak.com. SALIERS, EMILY ANN. Ghost © EMI Music Publishing, BMG RIGHTS MANAGEMENT US, LLC. Retrieved 13th December 2016 from http://www.lyricsfreak.com/i/indigo+girls/ghost_20067260.html.
- ² Heard by the author in a public lecture in 2012.
- ³ Whitman, W. Retrieved 5th December 2016 from <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/28117-leaves-of-grass>.
- ⁴ Fee, G. (1996) *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*. (p.38). Minneapolis: Baker Academic.
- ⁵ Green, M. (2005). *Sharing Your Faith with Friends and Family*. (p.10). Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- ⁶ Taylor, C. (2007). *A Secular Age*. (p. 507-508). Cambridge, MA: Bleknep Press.
- ⁷ These 'progress points' are adapted from Moynagh, M. (2012). *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice*. (Kindle Locations 8998-9014).

Chapter 5

SENT: Walk with the Orphans of God

You never know till you try to reach them how accessible people are but you must approach each person by the right door. Henry Ward Beecher

Some of the people we meet are very responsive to the Gospel and ready for conversion. Many others seem to be so far from God we feel little hope of their eventual turning to Him.

Wherever people are on their journey to God, we are sent to walk alongside them in order to discern where they are on that journey, to share the Gospel with them and to work with the Holy Spirit as he leads them to Christ.

This chapter will explore this journey to Christ that people are on and how we play our part in assisting them to know God. We will firstly learn why Jesus sent his disciples to discover a 'person of peace' before exploring how to walk with people at different stages of conversion.

Jesus' mission strategy

In the Gospels we see how Jesus walked and talked with people encouraging them to enter the Kingdom of God. In Luke 10 he now sends his disciples out to reap the harvest of people being drawn to God. 'The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit' (Luke 10:1 NLT).

Christ is the great evangelist reaping the harvest. We have the privilege of echoing His invitation in all the towns and places he plans to visit (Luke 10:1 NLT).¹

Jesus did not advertise for people interested in going on mission. He didn't seek to gather a large group of many thousands of workers to commence his campaign. For some reason he only sent out the 72 (or 70, depending on the translation). Was there any significance in the number of disciples he sent out? It could be a reference to the list of Gentile nations found in Genesis 10, which lists exactly that many, inferring this was a commission to go to every nation. According to Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18-20, this all-inclusive commission remains in place today. The implication is that no-one anywhere is to be excluded from the invitation to live at peace with God through Christ.



In Luke 10:4 the disciples are told by Jesus to take nothing with them and be willing to receive hospitality rather than provide it. Why? Such an approach required them to remain socially open, adaptable, humble, vulnerable, and reliant upon the people they met. This points to an inter-dependent relationship rather than a Colonialist mission.

Then in Luke 10:5 Jesus introduces his way of entering any and all relationships in which we are called to share the Good News. He tells them, ‘Whenever you enter someone’s home, first say, “May God’s peace be on this house.” If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you.’ (Luke 10:5, 6). This was not an unusual way of speaking in Jesus’ time and culture. It reminds us of the blessing David told the ten young men to give to Nabal. ‘...thus you shall say, “Have a long life, peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have”’ (1 Samuel 25:6 NASV). This also reminds us of the passage in Luke’s Gospel where the angels announce to the shepherds the message of global peace through the birth of Christ.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased” (Luke 2:8-14 NLT).²

Echoing the angels the announcement of peace in Luke 10 is a public blessing, an invitation to pursue a course of life within the blessing of God. We see this theme of blessing throughout the Old and New Testaments. For example, God’s promise to Abraham that ‘all peoples on earth shall be blessed’ (Gen.12:3) is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:8-14). He has borne the consequences of the curse for believers (Gal. 3:13) and blessed them with the forgiveness of sins (Rom. 4:6-9; Psalm 32:1-2). Believers are ‘blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ’ (Eph.:1.3) and now inherit the blessings promised through the patriarchs (Hebrews 6:12; 6:15; 12:17; 1 Peter 3:9).³

In many traditional churches today ‘passing on the peace’ is incorporated into the worship. This is when participants turn to one another and say the words, ‘the peace of the Lord be with you’, to which one responds, ‘And also

*Christ is
the great
evangelist
reaping the
harvest*

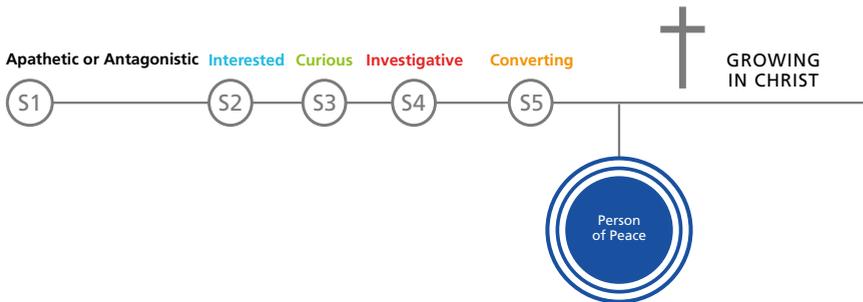
with you'. Linked to Jesus instructions in Matthew 5:23-24 for reconciliation amongst those who are in the covenant, in Luke 10 I think Jesus is telling his followers to now share that same proclamation of peace with all people.

It should not be so hard to offer this peace of the Lord to our not yet Christian friends given that we practice such blessing with one another when we worship. This is not to suggest that we walk up to people in the street or even good friends and simply say, 'May God's peace be on this house'. In our culture the idea of the blessing of God requires explanation. It is not just a piece of information to communicate but also an experience to be embodied by those who already know the blessing of salvation in Christ. How to communicate this to people will be explored in the next chapter.

Who is a person of peace?

The person of peace referred to by Jesus in Luke 10 is someone that welcomes the blessing of God and those who bring it, and is converted quickly.

Diagram 5. **Stages of the journey – a person of peace**



When you encounter such a person today they will be someone who surprises you with their readiness to believe in Jesus Christ. Your job is to stay with them to teach them 'the whole counsel or plan or will of God (Acts 20:27; Romans 12:1-3).

I have encountered persons of peace when I have moved into new communities in Australia and Japan to evangelise and plant churches. In one astonishing case, I witnessed a person of peace turn to the Lord within 48 hours of our arrival. Within six weeks some forty-two of his social network became followers of Christ. We never did get an opportunity to enact our predetermined rather elaborate strategic mission plan to 'win that city for Christ'. Apparently God had a different strategy – a person of peace.



Luke 10 indicates that you don't really go looking for a person of peace but rather in the midst of your Gospel sharing they will come to you from time to time. You will only really know in hindsight that they are a person of peace. They are fruit for which you have not laboured. Rodney Calfee writes,

So we are not sent out to find the person of peace. We are sent to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom. God then uses our proclamation to reveal the persons of peace whom He has prepared beforehand. Our natural process of evangelization is to sow first and reap the returns afterward. However, the idea of the person of peace is that God has sovereignly gone before the ones He has sent and prepared the heart already. The seed of the gospel has already been sown (John 4: 38). The sent one goes into the harvest not to sow, but to reap the person of peace (McCrary, 2013).⁴

But what is the relevance to us today? We live in quite a different world from that of Jesus' time. Therefore, is a 'person of peace' important to the local mission strategy of a church today?

Why is a 'person of peace' important to local mission strategy?

The disciples are never told by Jesus to do a needs analysis of a community, attempt to meet those needs and then witness, which is so often the approach adopted by churches doing local mission today. Not that there is anything wrong with meeting practical needs when encountered, but it's not the main task before us.

Neither did the first disciples set up formal public worship hoping that people, attracted by the event, would come to hear their message.⁵ In fact, to our ears Jesus' instructions to his disciples about how to commence evangelising a community seem frustratingly vague and perhaps even mystical.

They were told to go into the community listening and looking to see what God was up to before they had arrived, to discover the people God had already been drawing to Himself, to whom they were to announce God's peace. In turn, such persons of peace would be catalytic in inviting their local family and friends into God's Kingdom. The women at the well in John 4.28-30, 39 is an example of this happening. Effectively Jesus is saying that the best people to reach the locals are the locals.⁶

This pattern of reaping the harvest continued beyond the 72 disciples mentioned in Luke and is observable throughout the book of Acts as the normal 'mission strategy'. For example,

The person of peace is someone who receives the gospel invitation and is converted quickly.



The conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10), the conversion of Lydia and her household (16: 14), and the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household (16: 30– 33) are all wonderful examples of this idea. These people had their hearts opened by the Lord. God had done the work. The apostles only had to enter the field and reap. The sowing was already done. Once the person of peace emerged, her *oikos* —or “household,” including extended family, friends, and others in the house—was always converted as well, and became an entry point to the rest of the community (e.g. Peter remained with Cornelius working from his home for some days; Lydia opened her home to Paul and Timothy from which they worked in Philippi and through which the Philippian jailer was converted) (McCrary, 2013).⁷

Over four decades of leading people to Christ and observing the Body of Christ in the fields of harvest, I have rarely heard of anyone paying much attention to Luke 10 as instruction for developing their local mission.⁸ This has started to change but mostly I hear about outreach programs, usually centred on delivering welfare services or attractional worship. I rarely hear about a people-centred relational evangelism approach, which trusts the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to reap the person of peace, who in turn reaps the local harvest.

Where do we meet people to witness?

Based upon Luke 10 some literalists may commence planning for a systematic door knocking type of mission. If so, please press the pause button on any activist and reflect upon today’s context. Rather than randomly walking up to people’s front doors and cold calling with the Gospel, as is the habit of some pseudo-Christian groups such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, I suggest you find your ‘third places’.

If your first place is home, and your second is work or school, then your third place will be local environments for social engagement such as cafes, clubs, and parks. To reach adults, finding common ground is important for creating an emotional bond that leads to meaningful conversations. The ‘common ground’ may be a physical common space like a playground or, café, or a common interest such as sport, dog walking, or music. We can observe Jesus talking to people in third places as he engaged with them in various social settings and events, like the woman at the well (John 4), a wedding (John 2), a dinner party in a home (Matt. 9:10), and a spontaneous lunch invitation in a home (Luke 11:37).

After third places homes are the next best place for witnessing. Dinner parties work well as a home-based social engagement. Watching a broadcast

of a sporting game with friends in your living room is something you will probably already do at home anyway, so why not do it with someone who is not yet a Christian? As seen in the examples given above in Luke 10 and Acts, even better than your home is the home of a new convert. This is because their friends will feel more comfortable encountering you in a home in which they are already familiar.

Both second (work or school) and third places provide opportunities for children and youth to develop relationships through a blend of talk and play. Youth develop affinity and trust through this mix of play and talk, unlike adults who tend to emphasise talking.

Gradual conversion

Not everyone Jesus and the disciples witnessed to was quickly converted.

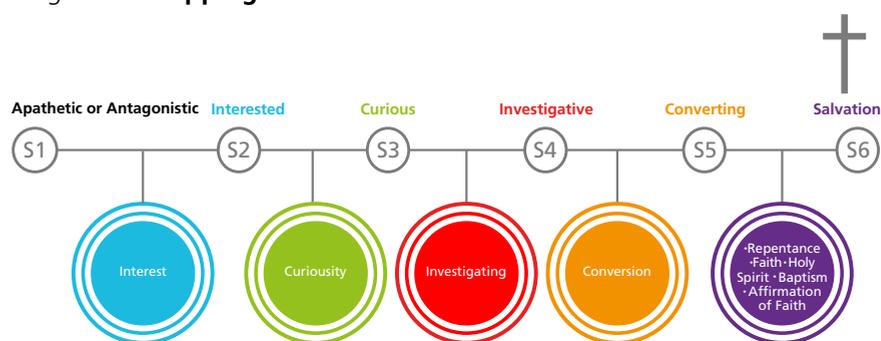
Commonly even a person of peace discovers that after an initial reaping of new converts amongst immediate friends and family they find themselves then walking a longer road with people who are slow, reluctant and even antagonistic towards God.

As previously stated, ‘...adult converts report an awareness of the process of conversion as taking on average four years’ (Green, 2005).⁹ So how do we journey with family and friends who are less responsive than a person of peace?

We do this by providing the right kind of stepping stones, rather than stumbling blocks.

Diagram 6. **Stepping stones to God**

See what
God was
up to before
you arrived
and discover
the people
God is
already
drawing
to Himself



In chapter four the stages of the journey were defined and the concept of stepping stones introduced. An appropriate stepping stone will help and not hinder a person's progress towards Christ. It could be providing resources, acts of kindness, listening and dialogue, direct testimony or whatever you discern is required in each case. But a key question is, how do you determine what is an appropriate stepping stone?

How you discern an appropriate stepping stone?

It starts by viewing the person you are reaching with the Gospel as a spiritual pilgrim. This requires intentionally entering into a process of discernment by seeking to understand their spiritual profile which involves the two elements - their particular cultural identity and their spiritual progress. The following diagram summarises these points.

Diagram 7. **Spiritual profile discovery**



When we make the effort to understand a person's cultural identity and cross reference this with their spiritual progress, we discover their personal spiritual profile. You probably know moderately well about sixty people including relatives, work or school associates, and people you encounter in 'third spaces'. Walking with an orphan of God is an assignment from the Holy Spirit that will probably only involve one or two people at a time.

This process is important because we are not wanting to offer a one size fits all approach to personal spiritual development. Just as a good clothing tailor will measure a person rather than merely make an educated guess at their physical profile, likewise a good evangelist will use tools to discover a person's spiritual profile through understanding their cultural identity and spiritual progress.

You are not called to this ministry alone. In a missional community you work together in the discernment process, and are jointly called to discover those in whom God's Spirit is already at work.

Understand a person's cultural identity and spiritual progress, then you will discover their spiritual profile.

Diagram 8. **Discernment of stepping stones**



A missional community discerns together appropriate stepping stones using the following activities.

Profile: Share about the spiritual profile of the person[s] based upon their cultural identity and spiritual progress. I will define cultural identity later in this chapter.

It is important to maintain confidentiality for the person you are reaching. There will be some personal things which cannot be shared with the missional community.

Prayer: The missional community prays daily for each of the people whose profile has been shared with the group.

Dialogue: The missional community listens together to God's Word, one another and the wisdom of the Body of Christ in order to discern appropriate next stepping stones for the orphan of God being considered.

As you pray and ponder God's Spirit will often provide a 'word of wisdom' (1 Cor. 12:8) that will surface quite naturally in the conversation and direct you to which particular resource or opportunity will be appropriate for the people you are leading to Christ.

If you have been diligent in seeking understanding of the person you are leading to Christ through discovering their cultural identity and spiritual progress then you can trust that the Spirit knows you and them well enough to get through to you what God is up to, guiding your thoughts regarding what the person you are praying for and seeking to assist needs next.

Discernment: The aim is to discern appropriate stepping stones for each person.

A side benefit to members of the missional community is that this exercise creates the opportunity to feel the support of the group as each member gets to debrief about experiences and conversations with the people they are reaching. This provides ongoing inspiration and motivation to keep walking faithfully with people on their journey. The missional community becomes a place of accountability so that we don't get distracted from the task of walking faithfully with spiritual pilgrims.

*Provide the
right kind of
stepping stones,
rather than
stumbling
blocks*

Tools to discover spiritual profile

The two main tools to discover a person's cultural identity and spiritual progress are asking good questions and gathering information about their cultural story.

Tool #1: Asking good questions

Asking good questions and listening well is a key to discovering a person's cultural identity and spiritual progress. To walk through life with someone means that we are getting to know them as a person. Every person is unique and as we listen to their story gaining understanding about them as we go, we ask good questions. Good questions enable the person being asked to be listened to, which has therapeutic value in and of itself. Good questions enable the listener to gain greater understanding and deeper appreciation of the person.

There are two sets of questions - framing questions and personal questions.

Framing questions: These are questions that help the Gospel sharer know what knowledge and understanding he is seeking. For example:

- What culture was the person raised in and how has it shaped their spiritual identity?
- What was God up to in this person's life before I got here?
- What is their current understanding of who God is?
- How do they feel about God?
- Are they aware of God's presence in their life?
- Do they ever pray? Why? What about?
- What idols have they put in God's place? (e.g. self, money)
- Do they have any religious upbringing?
- Are they already baptised?

(These questions are in no particular order of priority).

Personal questions: These are questions which run parallel to the questions above and enable the Gospel sharer to understand the person's spiritual journey and cultural identity. For example:

- What culture were you raised in and how do you think that has shaped who you are now?
- What do you think God is up to in your life?
- What is your understanding about who God is?
- How do you feel about God?
- Are you ever aware of God's presence in your life?

Good questions enable greater understanding and deeper appreciation of people.

- 
- Do you ever pray? Why? What about?
 - What is most important to you in life?
 - Did you have any religious upbringing?
 - Are you already baptised?

These are examples of the type of questions a Gospel sharer could ask casually over time of a friend coming to Christ. They will enable you to understand where a person is on their journey to Christ as well as their cultural identity.

What is cultural identity?

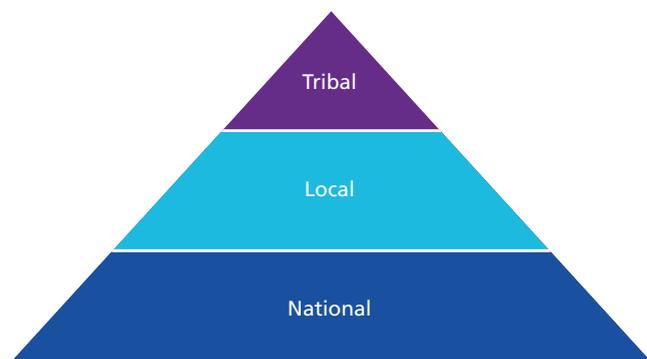
Tool #2: Cultural identity

As social creatures, humans identify with and shape their lives around common stories. These common stories are the most powerful influences on the lives of an individual, and so we must engage with these stories and explain how the Gospel is an alternative vision for life which addresses the deepest desires and aspirations people have. In our particular cultural context we must seek to identify and understand the symbols, myths and rituals that shape people.

In *The Suburban Captivity of the Church: Contextualising the Gospel for Post-Christian Australia*, Australian church planter and academic Dr Tim Foster has written an excellent book describing, in part, how the social context of the people we are encountering influences how we share the Gospel with them. I suggest you read the entire book, however, to summarise Foster's main points.

- Each person is shaped by a number of cultural narratives (stories)¹⁰ Symbols, myths and rituals are woven together to tell a cultural narrative. Taken together they shape identity, provide meaning and direct behaviour.
- There are levels to the narrative (Foster, 2014).¹¹

Diagram 9. **Social context pyramid**



National: This is the story of the country in which we live which stems from our shared history, language and political order, forming a national ethos.

Local: Our local context is shaped to some extent by socioeconomic factors, demography and geography.

Tribal: This is responsible for forming the cultures of groups like bikers, surfers, and particular youth subcultures like “emos”. It does not displace the subcultural local narrative, but sits on top of it.

All of these narratives operate simultaneously, with the higher-level narratives exercising the strongest influence. When these narratives are in conflict, the values dictated by the higher-level narrative will exercise the most influence (Foster, 2014).¹²

Adapting some of Tim Foster’s profiles, now let’s go local and meet some new friends.¹³

Meet Kate

I am Kate, I’m a heritage architect. I live with my partner Chris in an inner-city suburb, a 15-minute bike ride from work. We love living here. We love the people, the pubs, the vibe of the place. Last weekend we built a chicken shed in our back yard. I want to leave the world a better place than I found it. I worry about the environment, about the plight of indigenous Australians and our treatment of refugees. I wish we were a more tolerant country. We recently returned from four weeks in Cuba, and later in the year we are hiking in Nepal.

Meet Bruce

I'm Bruce, I'm a builder. I live with my partner Linda, and our daughter Zoe, on a new housing development in the outer suburbs. It's a great house with its own theatre, gym and pool room. Linda works three days a week as a hairdresser and is pregnant with our second. We want to get married when Zoe is old enough to be a flower girl. I like to keep fit and still play footy. We have a holiday in Bali planned for next May.

Meet Graham

I am Graham from an expensive suburban area, a partner in one of the Big Four accounting firms. Last year I billed a total of \$ 2.2 million for my company and I'm set for senior partner at my next review. My wife and I have been married 10 years and we have two girls, Ellie (4), and Sarah (6). I'm glad that we set ourselves up before having kids. We are settled in a safe area with people like us – not that we see them much – and the girls go to a good private school, so I think we have given them the best. We are looking forward to a family holiday to Northern Italy, Switzerland and Austria in June.

Meet Suzie

I am Suzie. I live on a housing estate in the outer suburbs. I am 22 and married to Terry. We have three kids, Mercedes (5), Taylah (4) and Seth (6 months). Life's a struggle, but my mum is a great help. She's 40 and lives on her own down the road in another Commission house. Mercedes goes to school, but the teacher doesn't understand that she is very active and can't be expected to sit still all day. Terry is out of work, but one day we'll win the lottery and everything will come good! When we can get away we drive down the coast where we like to camp and Terry can fish (Foster, 2014).'

Foster contends,

Each of these people not only lives in different areas, but they have a distinctive identity and set of values and aspirations. But where do these differences come from? Why does each of these people have the identity, the values and the aspirations that they do? Typically we think it is because of the education they had or the opportunities they were given. Perhaps Kate went to a private school and has wealthy parents while Suzie grew up in Struggle Street? To some extent that is true, but it is only a part of the picture. Each of these people has their particular identity, values and aspirations because of the different narratives that inform and shape their lives. Every person on this planet has his or her life shaped by a story. You have your life shaped by a story, a narrative that tells you who you



are, what is important and what you should become. Your narrative gives order and meaning to your life, shaping your knowledge and experience... Kate, Graham, Bruce and Suzie belong to different socioeconomic groups, live in different locations and have distinctive demographic profiles. But the values do not come from their socioeconomic status. Rather, their values are the product of a shared story, a common narrative with those from a similar socioeconomic background who also live in reasonable proximity to one another. Often it is our failure to recognise the subtle but significant differences in the values of these subcultures that makes us ineffective in reaching them (Foster, 2014).¹⁴

From Foster's helpful description we can summarise that over time our values and attitudes all emerge as we embrace a story that was communicated through the myths, symbols and rituals of our tribal, local and national stories. 'It could be the story we have grown up with, or a story we have absorbed and embraced because it addressed the doubts we held about the narrative of our own upbringing, or it gave us an identity that was clear and attractive' (Foster, 2014).¹⁵

How do you discern an appropriate stepping stone which a person needs to move forward to Christ?

Discernment starts by making the effort to understand a person's cultural identity and cross reference this with their spiritual progress to discover their personal spiritual profile.

Once you and your mission community (Love Life Community) are tracking a person's spiritual profile, you can prayerfully seek to discover the next stepping stones to provide for them at each stage of their journey to Christ.

Examples of stepping stones and exploring why they are appropriate at each stage of a person's journey will be explored in the next chapter.

Wherever people are on their journey to God, we are sent to walk alongside them in order to discern where they are on that journey, to share the Gospel with them and to work with the Holy Spirit as he leads them to Christ. This is attentive love that seeks another person's highest good. This is why the next chapter will explore more deeply the idea of stepping stones for the various stages of the journey to Christ.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Video: Watch this week's video. Video 5 - Sent to walk with the orphans of God. Accessed from www.lca.org.au/sent

Book: Discuss the main ideas, other biblical passages and concepts described in the book and introduction video for this session.

SOW AND REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the rest of the group doesn't need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?

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What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

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Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide, or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ?

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Prayer:

Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.

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Thank God for the continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

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Endnotes

¹ The imagery of agriculture applied to conversion is common in the Gospels and other early sources (Lk 8:10-15; John 4:31-38; Rom. 11:16-24; 1 Cor. 3:6-7; 1QS 8:5-6; Odes of Solomon 38:17-21)

² See also Luke 19.9; Matthew 10.12-13; Acts 10.36; 2 Cor. 5.18-20; Ephesians 2.17.

³ Biblestudytools.com Retrieved 5th December 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/blessing/>.

⁴ McCrary, L. Crider, C., Stephens, W. Calfee, R. (2013). *Tradecraft: For the Church on Mission*. (p.111-113). Skyforest, U.S.: Urban Loft Publishers.

⁵ In the Early Church the Worship of God is something believers did together regularly, but never as an attractional outreach event.

⁶ For more on Luke 10 see McCrary, L. Crider, C., Stephens, W. Calfee, R. (2013). *Tradecraft: For the Church on Mission*. (p.103). Skyforest, U.S.: Urban Loft Publishers.

⁷ *Ibid.* (p.111).

⁸ The few exceptions are Vincent J. Donovan's *Christianity Rediscovered* and Roland Allen's *Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, more recently Rick Richardson and other writers have explored and applied these themes. For example church planters like Rodney Calfee and even Systematic Theologians like Patrick Keifert of Church Innovations at www.churchinnovations.org.

⁹ Green. M. (2005). *Sharing Your Faith with Friends and Family*. (p.10). Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

¹⁰ Exploring these myths, symbols and rituals is important because in traditional Protestant theology "points of contact" (John Calvin, Karl Rahner), or what Alistair McGrath prefers to call "starting points" or "felt needs" can motivate people to seek answers which helps to create openings for Gospel dialogue and apologetics (McGrath, 1992:36; Calvin, 1559, 1.v 5, 11). The concept of "God-given starting points within the very nature of the created order" (McGrath, 1992, 18) is extended by the paradigm of what Don Richardson has called "redemptive analogy", however, this paradigm relates to a wider variety of avenues through which people may enter the conversion process. Redemptive analogy finds symbols and ideas within the culture, such as mythology, as a starting point for Gospel dialogue. Of course, the idea was not really new. Jesus used the technique all the time in his story-telling: "The kingdom of God is like ..."

¹¹ Foster. T. (2014). *The Suburban Captivity of the Church: Contextualising the Gospel for Post-Christian Australia* (Kindle Locations 575-581). Brookvale: Acorn Press Ltd.

¹² *Ibid.*, (2014), (Kindle Loc. 583-584). See also Gerald A. Arbuckle. *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians: A Postmodern Critique*, 2010. See also Lecrea on *How Do We Build a Culture of Creativity*. Retrieved 2nd October 2016 from <http://qideas.org/videos/why-culture-matters/>

¹³ The following section is adapted from Tim Foster. (2014). *The Suburban Captivity of the Church: Contextualising the Gospel for Post-Christian Australia*. (Kindle Loc. 483-484). Brookvale: Acorn Press Ltd.

¹⁴ Foster. T. (2014). *The Suburban Captivity of the Church: Contextualising the Gospel for Post-Christian Australia*. (Kindle Loc. 507-510). Brookvale: Acorn Press Ltd.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* (Kindle Loc. 543).

Chapter 6

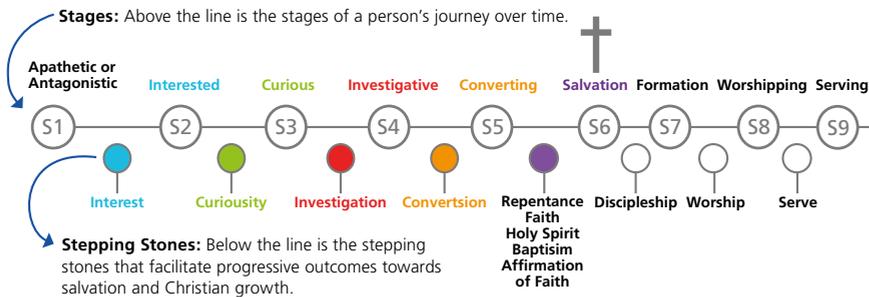
SENT: Live with the Orphans of God

Jigsaw puzzles are fun. Can you remember the first one you ever did?

I think I was four when I did my first jigsaw puzzle. It was a giant elephant and included about a dozen pieces. More recently I watched a friend spend a whole morning on a rather more complex puzzle with 500 pieces, only to discover that in the end there were several key pieces missing.

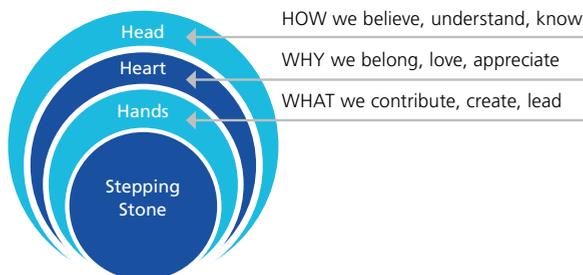
People and their relationships, especially with God, are complex. Understanding a person's spiritual profile by using a combination of their spiritual journey and cultural identity is helpful, but it is not like doing a simple children's puzzle with just a few pieces. The experience of getting to know someone is much more like that of doing a time consuming larger puzzle. As you look at the emerging picture of a person, it will help you to understand what stepping stones you need to provide for them. That's why this chapter will explore more deeply the idea of stepping stones for the various stages of the journey to Christ.

Diagram 10. **Forensic view of a person's stages on the journey**



Stepping stones involve your head, heart and hands.

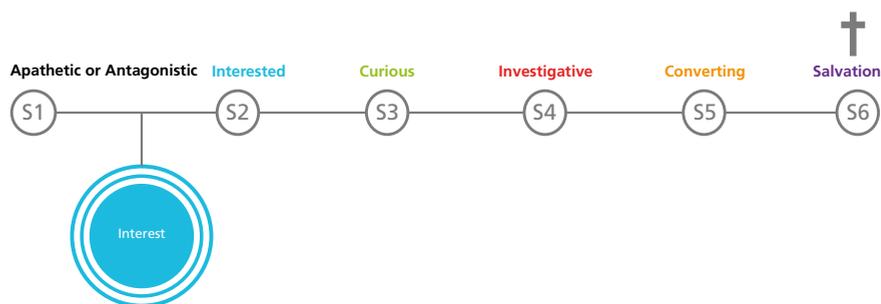
Diagram 11. **Head, Heart and Hands**



To illustrate each stepping stone visually I'm using a multi-layered circle (= stone) to describe how the outer layers, HOW (head) and WHY (heart), embrace and support WHAT (hands) we do to create the stepping stone.

Stage 1 of the journey

Diagram 12. **Stage 1 - Apathetic or Antagonism**



Stage 1 Apathetic or Antagonistic (A or A). This person is apathetic or even antagonistic about Christianity and on the extreme left of the line of progress. They are a self-declared atheist or agnostic and may believe that any religion or the idea of God is bad for society.

First stepping stone: Interest. Here are some ideas for stepping stones which may ignite interest, moving the person from apathy or antagonism to being interested.

Head: *Listen.* Get to know a person by casually asking them appropriate questions about their interests, life journey, opinions, as outlined earlier in the last chapter. Take it slow, listen well.

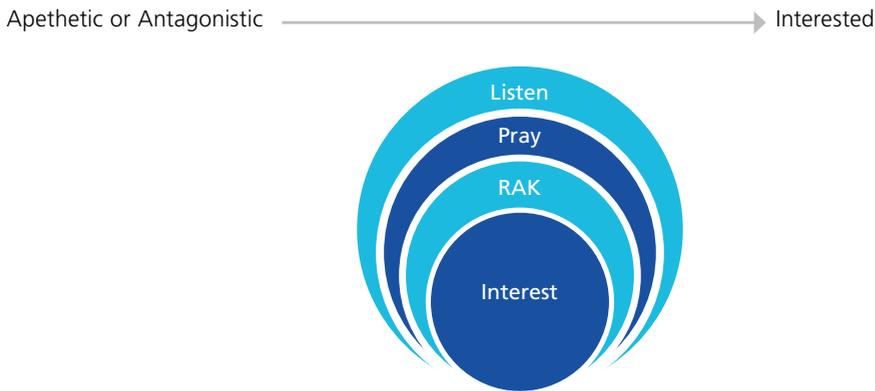
Heart: *Pray.* There is a spiritual battle occurring and satanic forces will seek to distract and discourage the person away from Christ. Consistent prayer for them is vital for every step of their journey. We are called to participate in Jesus prayer life before our Heavenly Father, as in John 17: 20-21 Jesus prays, 'I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me (NLT)'.

Hands: *RAK* – Random Acts of Kindness are offers of practical assistance e.g. helping to move house, child-minding, providing a meal when they are ill. If the need is beyond your own resources then use the many options to be found within your church or local charity networks.

Find common interests and seek ways to spend time together which feel natural

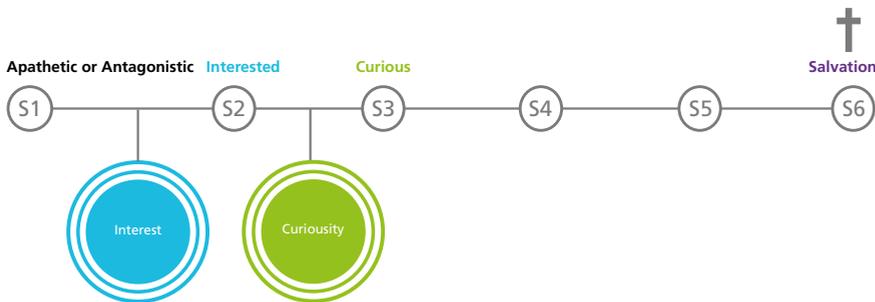
Find common interests and seek ways to spend time together which feel natural. For example, you may find you both like watching or playing a sport, or have the same hobby. Find your common ground whether it be music, art, sport, pain, relationships, national or local causes. Bring people into your normal routines such as going shopping together, doing Saturday brunch at the local market, attending playgroup with your children, or having study sessions or, LAN parties.

Diagram 13. **Stepping Stone: Interest**



Stage 2 of the journey

Diagram 14. **Stage 2 - Interested**



Stage 2 - Interested. This person is interested. They are a self-declared atheist or agnostic but they have a growing interest in spiritual matters even if it's only on the human level.

Next Stepping Stone: Curiosity. God is moving them from being interested to curious. Carrying into this stage the good habits of continuing to listen well, prayer and doing random acts of kindness you now need to add a stepping stone that may create curiosity. Here are some ideas.



Head: *ROG.* Share rumours of glory (ROG) to nurture curiosity. These are small stories and testimonies of God’s activity in people’s lives; your own as well as people your friend may admire or have an affinity with due to common ground. For example you may have stories about a sporting personality, an artist, a scientist, or a writer. Include stories about Jesus in this category when appropriate. If your friend shares some common interests with you, there is a high chance that you can discover things to inspire their interest by reviewing the things that make you more interested in God and the true purpose of life, e.g. an inspiring video, song, story, poem, picture, or cause. Utilise YouTube, podcast, films, articles or books. If you don’t have similar primary interests then find a Christian who does and ask them for advice.

Heart: *Testimony.* If you haven’t already, mention in passing that you go to church regularly or perhaps use the expression ‘I’m a practising Christian’ to describe yourself. Do this in a low key manner but be transparent about your faith. ‘Undercover Christians’ end up looking suspicious if their faith only comes out much later in the relationship. When the opportunity arises share how your faith affects decisions you make about such issues as handling depression, giving to charity, environmental concerns, managing money, raising children, social justice issues, or being hospitable to a stranger, etc.

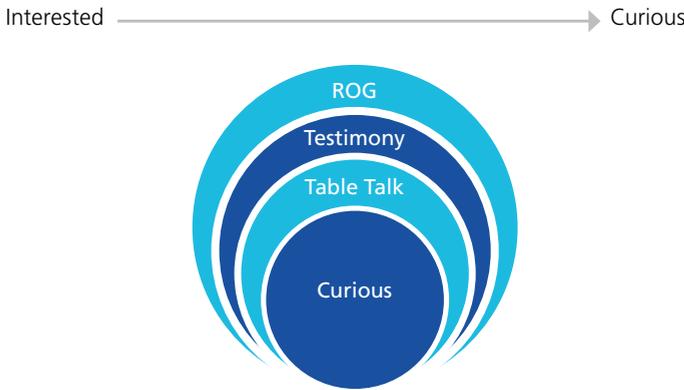
Hands: *Table Talk.* Go out for brunch, a picnic in the park or host a dinner party of no more than six to eight people and listen for the Holy Spirit’s cues in the conversations. Rarely will you have to bring up God as a topic. An Australian survey asked the question: ‘Do you ever talk about spirituality or religion when you gather with friends?’

7% said often,
46% said yes, occasionally, and,
47% said, no never.’ (McCrinkle, 2016).²

Remember your aim is to nurture spiritual conversations rather than provoke them at this stage. If you take the opportunities God gives to share your faith you will never have to create them. Be sensitive and attentive to what God is up to in social settings.

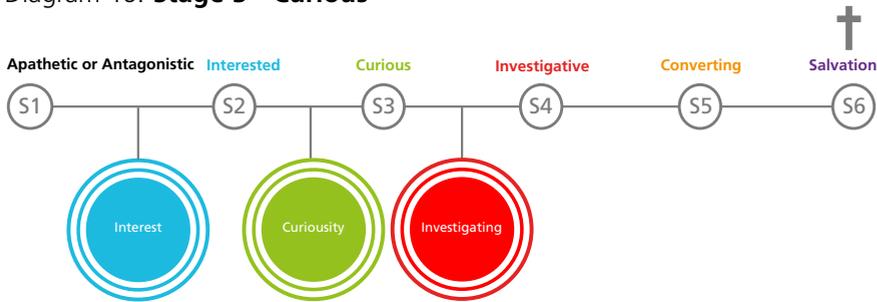
The Gospel
is not
a truth
among
other truths.
Rather,
it sets
a question-
mark against
all truths.
Karl Barth

Diagram 15. **Stepping Stone: Curiosity**



Stage 3 of the journey

Diagram 16. **Stage 3 - Curious**



Stage 3 - Curious. The curious person may be a self-declared atheist or agnostic but they now have a genuine curiosity about who God is and what impact he may have on their lives.

Next Stepping Stone: Investigation. God is moving them from being curious to investigative. Consider these ideas for stepping stones that will provide opportunities for investigation.

Head: Hope & Love. Invite them to meet with you for coffee and a short bible based dialogue on the themes of hope and love. Gently provoke the conversation by sending them a bible verse such as Jeremiah 29.11.

‘For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.’ (NRSV)

Alternatively, send them a quote from a Christian writer such as C.S.Lewis.

Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot



be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise.

At present we are on the outside... the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the pleasures we see. But all the pages of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get 'in'... We will put on glory... that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch.

We do not want to merely 'see' beauty—though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it (2016).¹³

Don't be afraid to open your Bible and read from it to them. Let the conversation naturally develop but keep an open Bible. Some suggested starting verses:

Hope: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Jeremiah 29:11; 1 Peter 1:3; Romans 15:13; Hebrews 11:1.

Love: Zephaniah 3:17; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8.

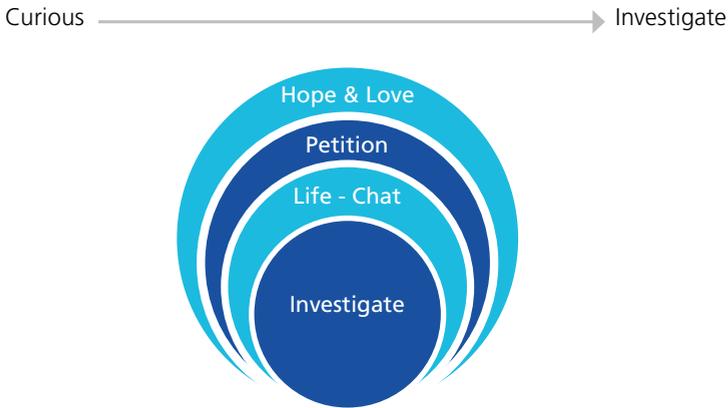
Heart: *Petition.* Offer to pray for them, particularly if they are going through pain such as the loss of a loved one, sickness, job loss, or anxiety. Encourage them that they are important to you and to God.

Hands: *Life-chat.* Invite them to a Sunday lunch with your Love Life Community. Keep it low key and social. Expose your friend to an informal interest based event which features some Gospel input, hosted by either your Love Life Community, your local congregation, or another local church in your area. This may be a one-off work, skills or hobby-related event or workshop. Look for something like a Men's Shed (<http://mensshed.org/>), a church based women's craft morning, cooking, parenting, budgeting, a children's playgroup such as Mainly Music (<https://www.mainlymusic.org/>), a work-life balance or business ethics and spirituality in the workplace seminar. The idea is to provide useful information or assistance as well as introducing life application principles based upon the wisdom of Jesus.

One creative example is a young mother who, as a Christian physiotherapist, invited new mothers to learn how to massage their newborn babies. On display was a 'prayer for your baby' as an option. During the session she was able to share the story about Jesus beckoning the children to come to Him - a story of invitation and inclusion. Remember your aim is to tempt them with inspiring opportunities that will further nurture your one-on-one spiritual conversations. It's not about getting them to church yet. Mike

Moynagh shares numerous examples of such stepping stones in his excellent book *Church for Every Context*, chapter 11:- 'How Do Contextual Churches Emerge?'

Diagram 17. **Stepping Stone: Investigation**



Stage 4 of the journey

Diagram 18. **Stage 4 – Investigative**



Stage 4 - Investigative. This person may be a self-declared atheist, agnostic or spiritual seeker. They have moved beyond curiosity and are willing to invest time and energy into investigating who God is and how he will impact their life journey.

Next Stepping Stone: Conversion. God is moving them from being investigative into conversion. Here are some ideas for stepping stones that will provide opportunities for conversion:

Head: *Gospel*. This aspect of the conversion stepping stone can take many forms but it involves teaching the Gospel.

- 
- Introverts may appreciate online spaces for Gospel learning and interaction first.
 - Others may accept an invitation to watch a Jesus film or to do a course like Alpha, NEW Life, or similar.

Your aim is to offer clear options relevant to their literacy level. Don't assume they are able to read. Even if they are well educated don't assume they are comfortable looking up Bible verses and reading them out loud in a small group setting.

What is your part? Invitation is the key word to remember here. Reaping the harvest, seeing people become believers in Christ, is about inviting people to turn to God. The invitation is not to invite Jesus into our hearts, but to accept God's open invitation to enter the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You can only enter in because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He paid the price once and for all and now we are forgiven, washed white as snow of all of our sins.

The Gospel is an invitation to move from grasping after life, living from within their own resources, to receiving all of life as a gift from God.

...And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:5-7 (NRSV)

Martin Luther explains why it is important to humble ourselves before God.

God has surely promised His grace to the humbled: that is, to those who mourn over and despair of themselves. But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled till he realizes that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsels, efforts, will and works, and depends absolutely on the will, counsel, pleasure and work of Another -- God alone. As long as a man is persuaded that he can make even the smallest contribution to his salvation, he remains self-confident and does not utterly despair of himself, and so is not humbled before God. Such a man plans out for himself - or at least hopes and longs for - a position, an occasion, a work, which shall bring him final salvation, but which will not. Conversely, the man who is out of doubt that his destiny depends entirely on the will of God, despairs entirely of himself, chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work in him; and such a man is very near to grace for his salvation (Luther, 1957).⁴

You are inviting them to hear God's YES to them in Christ found in God's word. 2 Corinthians 1:20 (NLT) says, 'For all of God's promises have been

fulfilled in Christ with a resounding 'Yes!' And through Christ, our 'Amen' (which means 'Yes') ascends to God for his glory,' and in (Romans 10:13-17) we are assured, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' People need to hear this Word of God in many ways and at many different times.

Heart: *Presence.* Provide opportunities for them to experience God's presence. It's time to move beyond *offering to pray for them, to, praying with them* about their needs.

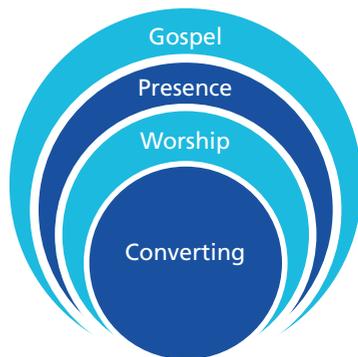
Hands: *Worship.* Offer to take them to worship if they are open to attending e.g. a Sunday church special event (like the Baptism of your child, or Christmas or Easter). If the person is hesitant provide a shorter home-based missional worship event which comprises of music, Scripture, testimony, open dialogue and prayer in 20 minutes followed by a cuppa. If you belong to a Love Life Community (missional community or similar) this would be the ideal setting.

Mike Moynagh advises,

At this juncture you can act in a nurturing way by understanding that some people need a clear invitation and others need to be allowed to inch their way across the line almost imperceptibly. In our low commitment culture the step from seeking to joining may be too big. If you are unsure then the golden rule is, *ask the person.* Ask them if it would help them to pray with you now to turn to Jesus asking them to repent of their sin, confessing Jesus as Lord; as their life leader and only Saviour (Moynagh, 2014).⁵

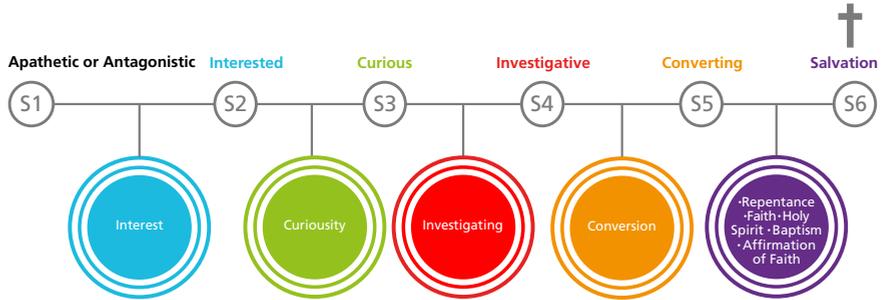
Diagram 19. **Stepping Stone: Conversion**

Investigate → Converting



Stage 5 of the journey

Diagram 20. **Stage 5 - Converting**

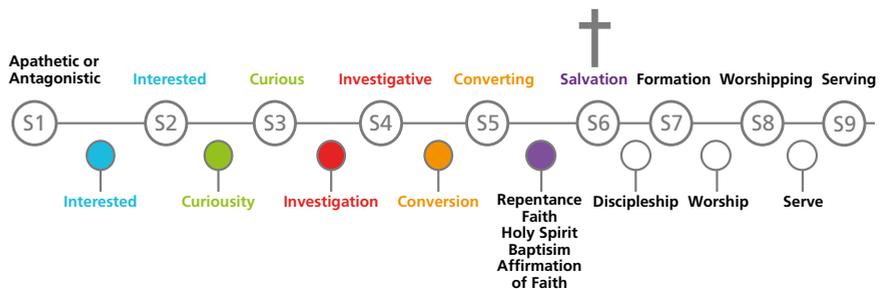


Stage 5 - Converting. God is moving them from converting into experiencing salvation through an invitation to salvation in Christ involving their whole being (head, heart and hands). It involves repentance, faith, the gift of the Holy Spirit and Baptism into Christ.

‘This grace of God is a very great, strong, mighty and active thing. It does not lie asleep in the soul. Grace hears, leads, drives, draws, changes, works all in people, and let’s itself be distinctly felt and experienced. It is hidden, but its works are evident.’ Anonymous

Stage 6 of the journey and beyond

Diagram 21. **Stage 6 and beyond**



Formation, Worship, Service: God is moving them from salvation to being a growing disciple whose life is centred upon the worship of God and service. This will be explored in chapter nine, as we explore being sent to grow with the orphans of God.

The conversion process is not linear

People will make progress and then at times seem to regress. One day they may seem curious, but then they'll back off for a long period. Journeys to faith can be prolonged, especially among the growing number of people with little or no Christian background. Church planting teams and missional communities tend to overestimate what they can achieve in their first twelve months of local mission and underestimate what they can achieve in three years. You will need patience as you wait for someone to come to faith.

A person may skip a stage in their journey. For example they may go from apathy into the investigative stage due to suffering. A woman I know was told she had six months to live and was converted within a few weeks of getting this bad news. This is not always how a person who has been apathetic or antagonistic reacts on receiving such news. Some harden their hearts in anger at God. Of course they don't believe he is there, but because he is, their fear of judgement is heightened as a loving gracious God draws them to himself. There are ultimately only two responses to God's presence in our lives, worship or rebellion.

Don't short circuit the process

Sometimes in our haste to 'get converts' we fall into the classic trap of trying to create a one-size-fits-all approach to hearing God's invitation to salvation in Christ. For example, we can tend to short circuit the process of conversion by inviting an apathetic, antagonistic or only interested person to church or to a short course which explores the Christian faith. This is not usually appropriate because they are not yet curious enough or committed to investigating the Christian faith. This is an attempt to pick the fruit too early. Such invitations may simply annoy the person rather than advance them on their journey and are in the high risk category because they may cause the person to reject any further contact with you.

Curious people have moved beyond just being interested but are not yet at the investigative stage. They may be willing to ask questions but don't overestimate this as investigation. Keep your responses brief and low-key and look for visual cues to see how far you should go in that conversation. Better to leave them wanting more than saying too much.

When a person has moved beyond the curious into the investigative stage, they are willing to put in some personal effort and would probably respond if you invited them to have a one-on-one chat about God or to read an appropriate book (if they read books).



After the investigative is the conversion stage. If you haven't already attended one, inviting them to something like an Alpha or New Life course is an excellent idea. On the other hand some people won't want to meet with a small group, so then you might suggest a Bible study resource (e.g. New Life) which can still work one-on-one that you can do with them.

Don't miss the moment

Romans 10:8-10 says,

'The message is very close at hand;
it is on your lips and in your heart.'

And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. (NRSV)

Dr. Steen Olsen once said to me, 'It may be helpful to listen for statements of faith, or even to ask the 'faith' questions if the time is right. Even when faith is confessed, to clarify that and then with the person thank God in prayer for that gift of faith.'⁷

As the person is moving towards conversion and they have come to understand God's free grace in Christ, invite them to repent, believe, be baptised and receive the promised Holy Spirit. Praying with them is good but preparing them for Baptism is the next step. In many contexts this will involve introducing them to the congregation's pastor. This is important so that the foundation of their relationship with God is firmly rooted in what God has done for them in Christ as seen in Baptism, rather than their 'decision' or 'commitment' to God.

Remember, for many people it is a slow journey to Christ. Linger between the various stages is normal. Most of the people you encounter will not be a person of peace on the brink of conversion. Some people who have been brought into your life you may never see become a follower of Jesus. Being a faithful witness requires that you stay in this ministry of leading people to Christ long term.

The saving God who calls us to participate in seeking, discovering and walking alongside the orphans of God as they progress on their journey to Christ also calls us to share the Gospel invitation with them. Therefore the next chapter will explore our role in the Gospel communication process.

*Invite people
to repent,
believe, be
baptised
and receive
the promised
Holy Spirit.*



Small Group Gathering #6

SENT: To live with the Orphans of God

Start with an opening prayer.

Listen Together

Indwelling the Word

Begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud in a good translation (e.g. NRSV) or if you prefer a paraphrase such as the Message. Read it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: John 17

Write your thoughts & reflections here

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Conversations

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report what your partner said back to the whole group.



Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Video: Watch this week's video. Video 6 - Sent to live with the orphans of God. Accessed from www.lca.org.au/sent

Book: Discuss the main ideas, other biblical passages and concepts described in the book and introduction video for this session.

SOW AND REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the rest of the group doesn't need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?

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What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

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Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide, or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ?

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Prayer:

Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.

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Thank God for the continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

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Endnotes

¹ Theopedia.com, Barth. K. (1919). The Epistle to the Romans. Retrieved 12th November 2016 from <http://www.theopedia.com/theology-of-karl-barth>.

² Markmccrindle.com. Mark McCrindle Research. Retrieved 5th December 2016 from <http://markmccrindle.com/>.

³ [www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com](http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/bible-verses-about-hope-20-uplifting-scripture-quotes/). Retrieved 11th December 2016 from <http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/bible-verses-about-hope-20-uplifting-scripture-quotes/>.

⁴ Luther. M. (1957). *The Bondage of the Will: A New Translation of De Servo Arbitrio (1525) Martin Luther's Reply to Erasmus of Rotterdam*. Translated by J. I. Packer and O.R. Johnston. Fleming Revell Co. p.100

⁵ Moynagh M. (2014). *Church for Every Context: An introduction to theology and practice*. (p.143). Norwich UK: Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd., Kindle Edition.

⁶ See also Don Everts and Dough Shaupp, *Pathways to Jesus: Crossing the Thresholds of Faith*. (2009). US: IVP.

⁷ Dr Steen Olsen, shared with the author in private correspondence (2016).

Chapter 7

SENT: Communicate with the Orphans of God

The saving God who calls us to participate in seeking, discovering and walking alongside the orphans of God as they progress on their journey to Christ, also calls us to share the Gospel invitation with them. This chapter will explore our role in the communication process, before exploring what to say in chapter 8.

What is our role in the communication process?

As the Holy Spirit whispers the good news of God's unconditional redeeming love into every human soul, what is our role in the communication process?

In Williamstown in South Australia there is a water reservoir retaining wall which curves around for one hundred forty-four metres (470 feet). It is popular with tourists on their way to the famous Barossa Valley wine district. Words whispered at one end of the wall can be heard clearly over 144 metres away. When it was completed in 1902 the engineers had no idea about the hidden properties of the engineering marvel they had created. In fact '...the dam's whispering abilities were actually discovered by accident. According to locals, the story goes that during construction, a group of workers who were complaining about their boss were over-heard on the other side of the dam. The Whispering Wall was thus revealed! Unfortunately, this wasn't a cool enough discovery to save the workers' jobs (Sumitra, 2016).'¹

I first experienced the Whispering Wall when I was five and I remember begging my Father to whisper something to me when I got to the other side. The words I heard were miraculous. Miraculous because I could not figure out how it worked. I was so far away from my Father and yet it sounded like he was right next to me. Miraculous too because it's the first time I can remember my Dad telling me he loved me. In reply I whispered back – 'I love you too Daddy.'

Now every time I see a reservoir I am reminded of my Father's whisper, – 'I love you son.'

The Whispering Wall and its dynamics are a wonderful metaphor for discussing our position in the Gospel sharing communication process. Using a metaphor to describe our place in the often mysterious work of God in the process of revealing himself and producing faith in us has vast limitations. However, it will serve our purpose if we don't expect too much from a

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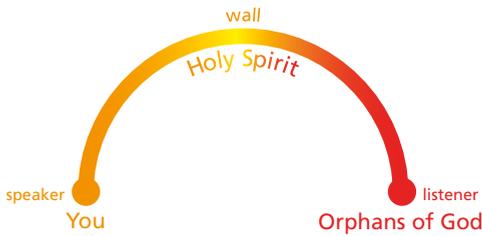
metaphor and stick to seeking to understand our role in the process rather than all mysteries associated with it.

The Whispering Wall

What is your position in the process of communicating the Gospel to people?

For example, are you the whisperer or the speaker of the message along the wall as in example one?

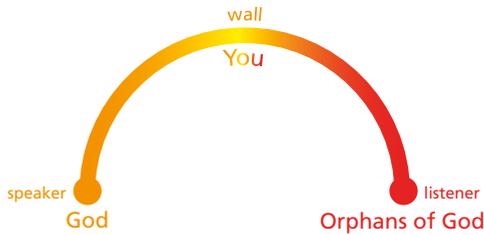
Example One: Speaker



Or,

Do you think God (Father, Son and Spirit) is the speaker and you are the wall; the conduit through which people hear the message?

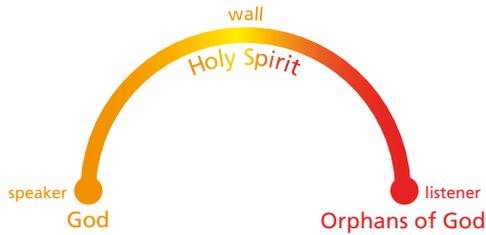
Example Two: The Wall



Or,

Are you the passive observer waiting for God to do it all?

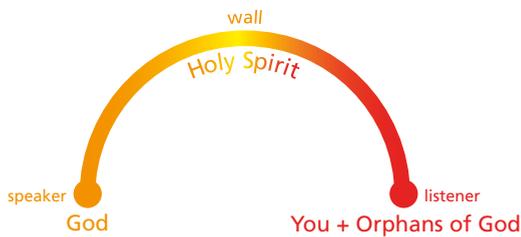
Example Three: Passive Observer



Or,

Are you the co-listener with the orphans of God?

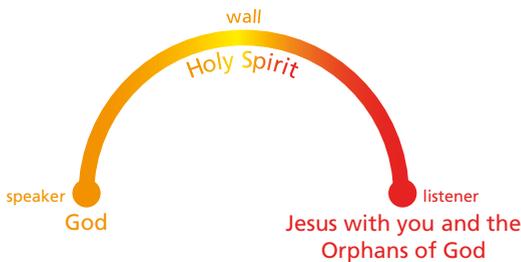
Example Four: Co-listener



Or,

Are you a co-listener with the orphans of God pointing to the Living Word Jesus?

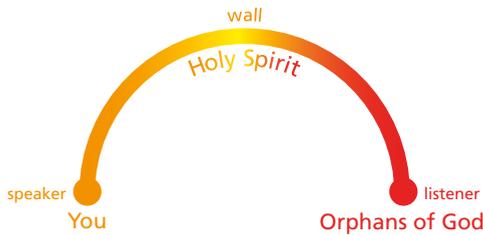
Example Five: Guide



My question is, where do you see yourself positioned?

Let's take each of these examples and analyse their implications in practical terms.²

Example One: Speaker



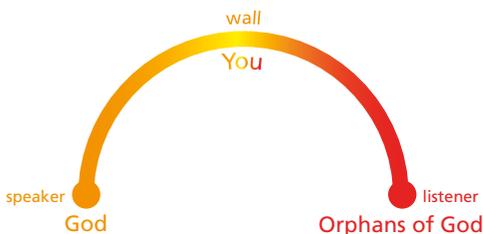
In this example, you have received God's Word and believe it and you are the person speaking the message, the genesis of the communication process. You believe that the Holy Spirit mystically covers deficiencies in the communication process.

God (Father, Son and Spirit) has given the Church the message to pass on and the hope is that as we do so the Holy Spirit, who is like the wall, will take our words and somehow cover the distance, the gulf of good communication between us and the listener. It is hoped that any deficiencies in either our precision in telling the truth, our ability to articulate it or our lack of capacity to contextualise the message, are somehow accounted for by a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit.

There is a degree of truth in this idea in that whatever witness of Christ we give to others the Holy Spirit is opportunistic in using it, no matter how weak it may look to us upon later reflection. However, it is a dangerous idea because it reduces the work of the Holy Spirit to a kind of filter/cleaner and our human role as being in God's place as instigator of the message. It sets you up as prime mover in the missional endeavour.

We are called to echo God's Word not to be the primary speaker!

Example Two: Wall



Here God is the speaker of the message and your role is to work hard at spanning the gulf between people and the message by becoming an expert in communicating the Gospel. The better you are at harnessing your

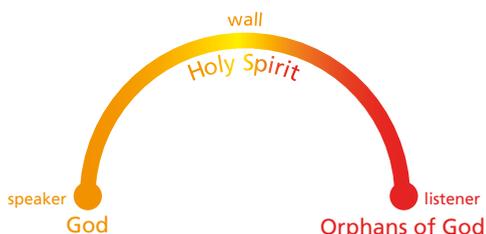
knowledge of the Bible, apologetics, theology, communications, rhetoric, philosophy, contextualisation and apologetics, the better the communication of the Gospel. It sets you up as the expert communicator in the process.

This approach appeals to people who emphasise rational arguments that support faith in God and is often perpetuated by Christians living in privileged economic circumstances where higher education is available. This approach has its limitations even for the greatest Christian minds because its limitations are set by our intellectual capacity. Plus if we are honest, God often seems mysterious, complex and even distant to us. Admitting this fact as a Christian is the first step to becoming an effective witness of the Gospel. Like my childhood memory of my Fathers words of love at the Whispering Wall, when you know that God loves you the facts about how it all works is stimulating but not a source of anxiety.

We shall see later (example four) that academic learning is not unhelpful to Christians for enhancing effectiveness, but it is dangerous if we assume the posture of being the wall as it places us in a role which belongs to the Holy Spirit alone. It is a tremendous burden to be in this position as the ultimate interpretive authority; the 'last word on the matter' rather than humble co-learner as it often breeds an adversarial style of witnessing.

We are called to be a co-learner not expert communicator.

Example Three: Passive Observer



In this scenario you are a passive observer. Why?

You may have heard the saying mistakenly attributed to Francis of Assisi, 'share the Gospel at all times, if necessary use words.' I once heard Ed Stetzer remark upon this by saying, 'this is a lot like saying, feed the hungry at all times and if necessary use food'.

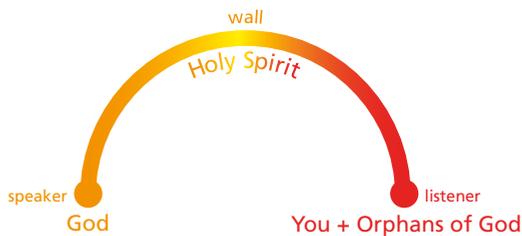
It may be due to a fear of rejection, feelings of intimidation from personal doubts about your faith, or perhaps because of past failed attempts at sharing the Gospel. A recent poll found that 8 to 10% of Christians regularly share Christ with others. When asked "Why don't Christians share Christ?" several responses were given.

- 33.5% are afraid of being rejected or, embarrassed
- 21.7% are afraid of not having answers
- 19.2% rarely think about the need
- 17.3% don't know what to say.
- 8.3% haven't found a way to share that fits a personal style. In other words it's not comfortable or natural.³

You may even justify this posture of silence and passivity appealing to God's Sovereignty. However, it is unbiblical in that Jesus and the Apostles explained that although God is the instigator of the message we are called to be active witnesses testifying to the truth of the Gospel, as 'God is making his appeal through us' (2 Cor. 5.20).

We are called to be an active witness not a passive observer.

Example Four: Co-Listener



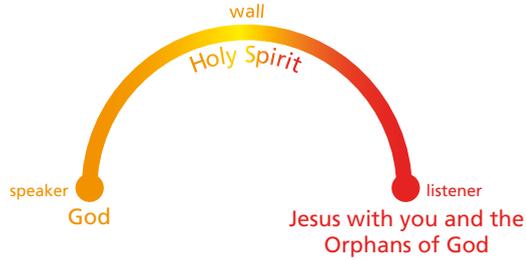
In this scenario God (Father, Son and Spirit) is the instigator and speaker of the Word. The Holy Spirit is not reduced to being our filter, but is rather the active voice of God to the conscience of all people; 'convicting the world of sin, judgement and righteousness (John 16.8)'.

You are positioned along with all of humanity as a co-listener with the orphans of God because the Holy Spirit is convicting us all of sin, judgement and righteousness. This role in the communication process places you into a level playing field situation in relationships with people of faith and people without it. Such a posture works against spiritual pride.

We are called to be a co-listener not the only listener.

Such an approach to witnessing is a vast improvement on previous examples except for one thing. Where is Jesus? In this model he is an historical person bound in black leather red lettered Bibles. You have his words, although their historical validity is sometimes debated. You have his finished work on the cross, but that is in the past. In this scenario you are left with the orphans of God to listen and determine what God is saying; to seek understanding and be motivated to obey. Thus the need for our final proposition about our role in the Gospel communication process.

Example Five: Guide



In the final scenario God is the speaker of the word.

The Holy Spirit is the wall or active ever-present voice of God to the conscience of all people.

Jesus is that word incarnated with us, the perfect listener to the Father. He is the perfect embodiment of the message of God's grace (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Jesus Christ is the perfect interpreter of what God is saying, perfectly displaying how a human being lives in obedience to God's word, and, empowered by the Holy Spirit, puts into action that word (John 5:19, 12:9).

We are not the best examples of listeners to God's word, Jesus is. We point people to his life, death and resurrection as the perfect example of a human being living in relationship with God.

We are not like an expert 'sage on the stage' but Jesus is. We are called to be guides on the side, fellow listeners, directing people to Jesus.

We are not the primary strategist in the missional endeavour, Jesus is.

We are called to be guides not God.

What then, in summary, is our role in communicating the Gospel?

We are called to be the,

- **Echo not primary speaker. We are called to echo God's Word not to be the primary speaker!** We are not the genesis of the message or prime mover in the communication process. God the Father, Son and Spirit speak, we echo their Word.
- **Co-Learner not expert communicator. We are called to be a co-learner not expert communicator.** Our knowledge and communication skills will never be adequate to span the gulf between people and the message by becoming the expert 'sage on the stage'. Only the Holy Spirit can ultimately bridge the gap in the communication process.

*Witnessing
as learning
is joining the
conversation
God is already
having with
someone.*

- **Active witness not passive observer. We are called to be an active witness not a passive observer.** We actively echo the message to the world as ‘...God is making his appeal through us...’ (2 Cor. 5:20)
- **Co-listener not only listener. We are called to be a co-listener not the only listener.** We are positioned along with all of humanity as a co-listener with the orphans of God.
- **Guide not God.** *We are called to be guides not God.* We are positioned as guides on the side, fellow listeners, directing people to Jesus

In summary, our role in the Gospel sharing communication process is to live within the promises of God in Christ pointing people to him and encouraging others to do the same. Witnessing then becomes a mutually transformative co-learning event. Witnessing as learning is not just about sharing information but being willing to join in on the conversation that God is already having with someone. This will be explored further in the next chapter.

The dance of the Spirit

In the example of the Whispering Wall the Holy Spirit is not reduced to being our communication filter but rather the direct active voice of God to the conscience⁴ of all people; ‘convicting the world of sin, judgement and righteousness (John 16:8)’. This is why Jesus told his followers not to go into the world inviting people into God’s Kingdom until they had been filled with the Holy Spirit.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8 NLT).

This sending of the Spirit is a response to the question, ‘What has God done about people who don’t or won’t believe?’ In the past God sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins and rise again. But what is God doing about it today in my neighbourhood, to communicate this truth? In other words, how does God address people who do not believe?

Romans 1 is a good place in Scripture to start our response to this question before we expound further upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the communication process.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to people because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things that he has made. So people are without excuse.



For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God (Romans 1:18-20 NLT).

Commenting on Romans 1 John Calvin says,

There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. That there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow (Calvin, 1960).⁵

This is similar to Martin Luther’s commentary on the book of Jonah. Luther takes the reactions of the pagan mariners on the boat as an occasion to describe in detail the natural knowledge of God that all people possess. He says that natural knowledge is a real knowledge of the Godhead, but it suffers from critical defects that prevent its being a means of salvation.

Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. Here you find St. Paul’s statement in Rom.1:19 concerning the universal knowledge of God among all unbelievers, that is, that the whole world talks about the Godhead and natural reason is aware that this Godhead is something superior to all other things. . . Although they do not have true faith in God, they at least hold that God is a being able to help on the sea and in every need. Such a light and such perception is innate in the hearts of all men, and this light cannot be subdued or extinguished. There are, to be sure, some people, for instance the Epicureans, Pliny and the like, who deny this with their lips. But they do it by force and want to quench this light in their hearts. They are like people who purposely stop their ears or pinch their eyes shut to close out sound and light. However, they do not succeed in this; their conscience tells them otherwise. For Paul is not lying when he asserts that they know something about God ‘because God has shown it to them.’ (Rom. 1:19)...So there is a vast difference between knowing that there is a God and knowing who or what God is. Nature knows the former — it is inscribed in everybody’s heart; the latter is taught only by the Holy Spirit (Luther, 1896).⁶

Martin Luther is saying that to know who or what God is, this is *taught only by the Holy Spirit*.

The exclusive claim of the Gospel is that Christ alone died for our sins and that salvation is available through him alone. The inclusive claim of the Gospel is that the Holy Spirit goes ‘under the wire’ to every person, in every culture and time, convicting them of the truth. The Holy Spirit is not whistling in the dark, optimistically hoping someone will respond, but dancing in the light and actively engaging with all people.

The Holy Spirit is not whistling in the dark, optimistically hoping someone will respond, but dancing in the light and actively engaging with all people.

This is why we need to understand the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of not-yet-Christian people. We need to grow in our sensitivity both to the person we are reaching and to the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit's job to carry God's Word the distance between the head and the heart.

It is the Holy Spirit who convicts *everyone* in the world of sin, judgement and righteousness in light of the cross/resurrection event. This is necessary because nothing will satisfy the conscience of man which has not first satisfied the conscience of God.⁷

We must emphasise what it is the Holy Spirit is convicting people about. It is more than the reality of God as creator. What theologians call 'natural revelation', meaning the revelation of God through the creation, is sufficient to make human beings responsible (they are left "without excuse"), but it is not by itself sufficient to accomplish their salvation. That took the cross which is the ultimate revelation of God in his love and mercy. Christ alone the Word made flesh is our only true point of contact with God.

The Spirit is drawing not-yet-Christian people beyond their apathy to know God, or beyond their rebellion and anger at God, beyond merely thinking there is a god, to knowing who the true God is.

As Luther said, 'When God works in us, the will, being changed and sweetly breathed upon by the Spirit of God, desires and acts, not from compulsion, but responsively (Luther, 1823).'⁸

This is why the first best missional question to ask is, 'What was God doing in this person's life before I turned up?'

We conclude that what we can assume God is doing before we turned up is as follows.

- God the Father is always telling us who we are through the Holy Spirit; we are God's children by creation.
- God the Holy Spirit is always communicating to our conscience where we stand before God; we are living as sons and daughters or we are living as orphans of God.
- God the Son is always present through the Spirit to redeem us; he accepts us as we are but loves us too much to leave us that way.

Our role in the gospel sharing communication process is to live within the promises of God in Christ and encourage others to do the same. But what we say when we provide this encouragement is the theme of the next chapter.

Natural
revelation
is sufficient
to make
human beings
responsible
but it is not
by itself
sufficient to
accomplish
their
salvation...
that took
the cross.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Video: Watch this week's video. Video 7: Sent to communicate with the orphans of God. Accessed from www.lca.org.au/sent

Book: Discuss the main ideas, other biblical passages and concepts described in the book and introduction video for this session.

SOW AND REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the rest of the group doesn't need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?

.....
.....
.....

What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

.....
.....
.....

Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide, or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ?

.....
.....
.....

Prayer:

Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.

.....
.....
.....

Thank God for the continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

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.....
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Endnotes

- ¹ Sumitra. (2014). *The Whispering Wall of the Barossa Reservoir and Its Amazing Parabolic Affects*. (Para. 1). Retrieved 1st December 2016 from <http://www.odditycentral.com/travel/the-whispering-wall-of-the-barossa-reservoir-and-its-amazing-parabola-sound-effect.html>.
- ² Using a metaphor to describe our place in the often mysterious work of God in the process of revealing himself and producing faith in us has limitations. The Whispering Wall metaphor carries the same dangers.
- ³ *Your Church on Mission with God*. Newsletter. June 2007. Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, SBC.
- ⁴ Conscience is usually defined as a person's moral sense of right and wrong, viewed as acting as a guide to one's behaviour. In the New Testament it is also viewed as the voice of God within all people (Romans 2.15). The Christian has a moral responsibility to educate and develop his or her conscience (Heb. 5.14; 9.9; 9.14; 10.2; 10.22; 2 Cor. 1.12). See Packer, J.I. Ed. (1988). *New Dictionary of Theology* (p.161). England: IVP.
- ⁵ Calvin. J. (1960). *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. (p. 43, 45-46). Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- ⁶ Martin Luther's commentary on Jonah 1:4-5, W. XIX, p. 206.
- ⁷ A paraphrase of a statement by Rev John Favel in a sermon, *The Fountain of Life*, published in *The Whole Works of the Reverend Mr John Favel*, Vol. 2, Sermon IX, p 45. 1799. Puritan Press.
- ⁸ Luther. M. (1823). *Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will*. (p.60). Translated by Henry Cole. London: T. Bensley for W. Simpkin and R. Marshall.

Chapter 8

SENT: Talk with the Orphans of God

How do you participate with God in reaping the harvest of people coming to Christ?

So far we have answered this question by suggesting the following.

- Recognise that God the Father has reconciled himself to every person through Christ and now the Holy Spirit is drawing all people to God.
- Participate in seeking after and discovering the orphans of God within a missional community (Love Life Community).
- Discern the next appropriate stepping stones for the person you are leading to Christ based upon their spiritual profile (identity and progress).
- Understand your role in the Gospel communication process.

This leads us to the matter of how we speak to people at various stages of their journey to Christ. What do you say to people in the witnessing encounter?

Generally speaking pastors read, learn and pray the Scriptures with people who are growing in Christ, whereas evangelists read, learn and pray the Scriptures with people who are being drawn to Christ. This is not to say that pastors can't or don't evangelise, nor that evangelists can't or don't pastor people at times. The division of labour is only differentiated in keeping with Paul's claim that Christ gives to the church different people to do different things such as evangelists and pastors (Ephesians 4.11). Leaders in both areas are to teach the Gospel by reading, learning and praying Gods Word with people.

1. Read

Effective gospel sharers read the Bible with not-yet-Christian people. This is because good witnessing is *facilitating* a dialogue with God rather than a monologue from you.

Some evangelism training encourages a monologue by preparing you for witnessing encounters by asking you to learn a set Gospel presentation. No matter who you encounter, what stage of the journey to Christ they are up to, you give them the same brief Gospel presentation. Jerram Barr's suggests that such training in evangelism usually requires memorising some form of

Generally speaking pastors read, learn and pray the Scriptures with people who are growing in Christ, whereas evangelists read, learn and pray the Scriptures with people who are being drawn to Christ.

Gospel summary such as the Gospel ABC.

A – You are a sinner.

B – Christ died for you.

C – Repent and believe in Him (Barrs, 2001).¹

This is what I call the “Gospel download” approach. It can often be observed when someone expresses at least a polite interest in the faith and the zealous evangelist pulls out the memorised Scriptures and gives them a Gospel monologue. For example, as a boy I was taught to memorise all of the verses from the ‘Roman Road to Salvation’.

The following verses describe salvation: Romans 3:23; 3:10-18; 6:23; 5: 8, 10: 9; 10:13.

Then the following verses to describe the results of salvation: Romans 5:1; 8:1; 8: 38-39.

1 John 1: 9 was the verse then used to assure people of their salvation in Christ. “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and goes on cleansing us from all unrighteousness.”

Memorised Bible verses are very handy when sharing the Gospel. However, I have learnt that any set Gospel presentation quickly gets abandoned when sharing the Gospel. This is because you never get to dictate the direction of a real conversation.

For example, a young agnostic Japanese PhD student whom I met in Kyoto for several Gospel conversations over several weeks wasn’t interested in hearing my presentation of the Gospel. He was only interested in discussing all the biblical references to Abraham and his journey of faith. This was perplexing to me at first.

In our first conversation he told me he had already read Genesis and Galatians, confidently turning to the relevant passages about Abraham from a Bible he had borrowed from his local library. It turns out he had read the whole Bible in the few weeks prior to our first conversation. I was challenged and stretched in a good way by this encounter as I learnt more about Abraham in that few weeks than at any other time in my life. In time we came to study Romans 4 and 5 together, both of us seeing ourselves as justified by grace through faith in the righteousness of Christ who died for our sin.

Nothing prepared me for that encounter, except that I had bothered to be a consistent student of the Scriptures and was flexible, willing to go on the journey with a stranger to build up our shared understanding of the Gospel. His Baptism in Kyoto a few months later was an amazing celebration.

Set Gospel presentations are quickly abandoned when sharing the Gospel. This is because you never get to dictate the direction of a real conversation.



The back story was that he had been told by his very rich father that he would be disinherited if he believed in God and especially if he became a Christian. As he read through the Bible starting with Genesis, Abraham's story of being called to abandon everything and follow God resonated with him. Clearly, if I had stuck to my 'Roman Road' technique, our conversation would have probably have only frustrated him. A few years later this man's parents became Christians too.

Upon reflection, this experience taught me that a one-size-fits all Gospel presentation may not always be the best route to take. We cannot assume we will always be able to stick to a set-script or timetable. A tendency towards having the security of a one-size-fits all Gospel presentation may discount the need to walk and talk with the orphans of God from their starting point on the journey to Christ. More than this I learnt that if facilitating reading the scriptures is the primary task in our Gospel sharing conversations then this is to be a co-learning adventure to discover Gods amazing grace. John Mallison suggests, 'one of the prime roles of disciple makers is that of helping another to be expectantly, open to all the grace God has to offer them each day and in every situation (Mallison, 2010).²

2. Learn

Effective Gospel-sharers read the Bible with not-yet-Christian people with the goal of learning about salvation in Christ together. This is because good witnessing is about *participating* in a dialogue with God and the person you are witnessing to. Witnessing is a mutually transformative co-learning event. Witnessing as learning is not just about sharing information but being willing to join in on the conversation that God is already having with someone. Parallels can therefore be drawn between Gospel sharing and mentoring as experience based learning. John Mallison contends,

Enabling means to make able, to assist, to work alongside; to provide the resources, the support, the stimulus for a person to be dynamically involved in the learning process rather than being a passive listener... questioners, listeners and advisers rather than "tellers". Sessions together will be more inductive than didactic. Experience-based learning is foundational to mentoring. Therefore, mentors enable their mentorees to reflect on their life experiences (Mallison 2010).³

In the last chapter I described our role in the communication process. We learnt that we are not to position ourselves in the witnessing encounter as the 'sage on the stage', the religious expert. Rather we are co-listeners with people coming to Christ.

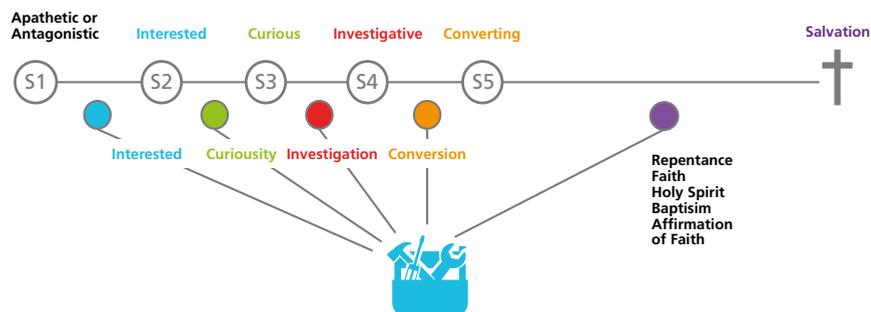
Good witnessing is facilitating a dialogue with God rather than a monologue from you

Witnessing as learning extends this idea to compare the experience to being like a trade (e.g. carpentry) apprenticeship relationship. In this scenario, Jesus is the master builder with you and your fellow spiritual sojourner being the apprentices. Over time you build up a shared toolbox containing not only what both of you knew prior to meeting, but what you have been learning together as spiritual sojourners who are learning now together from the master builder.

Becoming a Christian can therefore be likened to a process of apprenticeship associated with learning a trade or the discipline and competencies required in learning a foreign language. Conversion takes time, proceeds differently for different persons, and often includes periods of intense change when small changes over time can produce an entire shift in gestalt or worldview (Stone, 2006, p.74).⁴

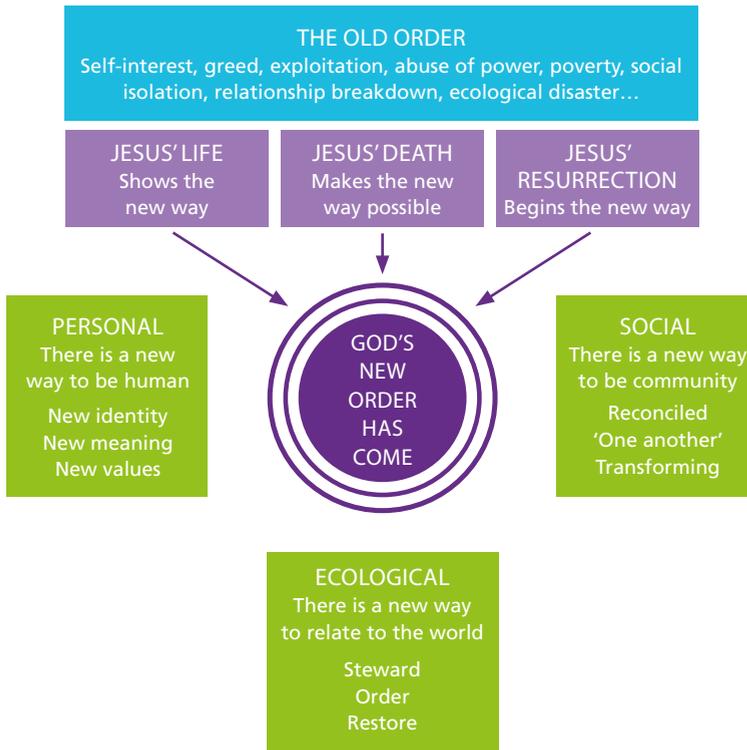
As you hear Gods word together over time you slowly add tools to this shared toolbox, learning together as you go, building a common understanding of the Gospel and its implications for everyday life. In other words, you and the person you are leading to Christ are engaged in a co-learning relationship.

Diagram 22. **Toolbox of Resources**



Gospel conversations with people at different stages of the journey will vary greatly. Stepping stones for people who are apathetic, antagonistic or interested involve a low-key Gospel-sharing approach. Whereas the curious, investigating or converting person will look for deeper and longer conversations and increased access to appropriate resources. The main thing to remember is the main thing – God’s word. You can talk to the orphans of God about a lot of things but witnessing is all about facilitating and participating in an engagement with the God who speaks to us in his son Jesus Christ. The Bible is our primary source for understanding the Gospel. The following overview may be helpful (Foster, 2014).⁵

Witnessing is facilitating and participating in an engagement with the God who speaks to us in his son Jesus Christ.



Two of the essential tools in your shared toolbox that will enable your learning journey together are finding a common language and the use of good questions.

Common language

When I first visited Japan in 1995 I had very little ability to speak Japanese. Most days I have trouble just speaking English properly before my first cup of coffee. It takes a certain kind of humility to go to a foreign land and start trying out your basic new language skills.

On my first trip to Japan two things immediately became apparent when I tried speaking Japanese. Firstly, I was told by an Australian missionary that my attempts at speaking Japanese sounded to the Japanese people like a small child or a person with limited aural or mental capacity. Secondly, I learnt that my limited formal Japanese was not the local dialect in the Kyoto and Osaka area, which is Kansai-ben, considered 'crude Japanese' by some. This is exactly how many not-yet-Christian people feel when they first attend church, especially if they are unchurched and have never really heard, spoken or understood 'Christianese'. Then of course there are 'local dialects'

Find common language to discuss spiritual matters



of Christianese just like I struck with my Japanese experience. For example, in Pentecostal churches if someone shouts ‘hallelujah’ during a high point in the sermon, this is deemed to be a good thing as it affirms the preacher and expresses joyous praise to God. But such affirmations of good preaching are expressed differently in different places. This expression is heard as the ‘evangelical grunt’ of approval in a conservative Baptist or Presbyterian setting, whilst Lutherans tend to reduce it to body language – an enthusiastic raised eyebrow. By the way two raised eyebrows means the opposite.

How do we find common language to discuss spiritual matters so that a Christian who speaks Christianese most of the time can easily engage in conversation about God with an unchurched person? As I have developed as a Gospel-sharer I have realised the need to regularly read the Bible from a not-yet-Christian person’s viewpoint. I’ve been helped by reading paraphrases of the Bible such as *The Message*, alongside a proper translation (e.g. NRSV). This expands your vocabulary for Gospel-sharing by hearing the truth expressed in more winsome language. For example, compare these two versions of the same passage, Matthew 11.28-30. Firstly, in the King James Version.

‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

Now in a paraphrase, from *The Message*.

‘Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.’

Explaining to my neighbour the meaning and application of the pre-industrial revolution agricultural language of this text is assisted by reading the paraphrase.

The art of seeking to be true to the Gospel and not “dumb it down” or compromise the message is a constant tension, but we must live with this tension in order to establish a common language with an un-churched person. After all, if I meet Japanese people with no English, it is better that I witness to them in poor Japanese rather than not at all.

Jesus used questions in ways that enabled people to experience an engagement with God rather than just hearing information about God

Questions that promote a grace discovery

Another key aspect of talking with the orphans of God is learning to ask good questions.

In his brilliant *Soul Food Café* Dr Paul Whetham outlines five types of questions we should ask to enable co-learning. He contends that your ability to ask the right questions is crucial.

‘Too many questions, or the wrong type of question, means that you take control of the conversation...It is very easy to get the wrong impression or information if the questioning is inept.’

- Open – ‘How is it going?’ (Open questions encourage more talking)
- Probing – ‘What do you mean by that?’
- Reflective – ‘You say difficult?’
- Closed – ‘Have you got a date for your operation?’ (Closed questions discourage more talking)
- Don't ask cued questions – ‘You've no problem with that, have you?’ (Whetham, 2016).⁶

We observe Jesus in the Gospels using questions in ways that enabled people to experience an engagement with God rather than just hearing information about God. Asking good questions is the first step in becoming a good listener to the people we are leading to Christ.

Asking good questions also encourages the person coming to Christ to ask you good questions. For example, in Acts 8:26-40 the Ethiopian eunuch asks questions because he desired to understand God's word. In this text he asks three questions.

- How can I, unless someone guides me?
- About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?
- What prevents me from being baptised?

Other examples can be cited such as,

- The curious Athenians asked Paul – ‘May we hear more on this matter?’ (Read Acts 17:16-34).
- The investigating rich young ruler asked, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ (Read Mark 10:17 – 27).
- The soon to be converted Nicodemus, in response to Jesus asked, ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ (Read John 3:1-21; 19:38-39).
- The ready for salvation Philippian jailer asked – ‘What must I do to be saved?’ (Read Acts 16:25-34).



To the Philippian jailer the disciples replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.' However, the initial one line simple summary of the Gospel led into a full-blown Gospel teaching session.

'Then they told him and all the members of his household the message of God. There and then in the middle of the night he took them aside and washed their wounds and he himself and all his family were baptised without delay' (Acts 16:32-34 Philips).

Clearly this Greek jailer from Philippi, was what Jesus called in Luke 10 a 'person of peace'; someone right on the brink of salvation. We know this because that very night the jailer and his whole household were 'baptised without delay'. Gospel sharers need to be prepared for any and all people who need to hear the Gospel. Those ready for salvation immediately, such as the Philippian jailer, and those who require a longer conversation over time.

As a person approaches the conversion process openly converse with them about what stepping stones – what resources might help them. On most occasions discerning what a person needs from you will come from the persons own lips. Listen well and ask good questions.

When a person is in the investigating or converting phase of their journey suggest to them that a Bible course like Alpha or the NEW Life & NEW Love courses would be a good navigator as you continue learning from God's word together. Many people find such courses lay a good foundational understanding of both the biblical basis of salvation as well as the implications of becoming a follower of Jesus Christ.

Learning Gods word together is only one side of a dialogue however. Therefore, we must explore our response to the God who is speaking to us.

3. Pray

Effective Gospel sharers read the Bible with not-yet-Christian people with the goal of learning about salvation in Christ together. This is because good witnessing is about *facilitating* a dialogue with God rather than a monologue from you and participating in a dialogue with God and the person you are witnessing to. Our response to the God who has spoken is to speak back. For 2,000 years Christians have spoken back to God in words in the form of common prayers, songs, and confessions.

God has spoken to you and your friend in His crucified, risen and now ascended Son Jesus Christ, and over a period of time you have been reading and learning together what this means. Now it is time to talk personally and directly to God.

Discerning what a person needs from you will come from the persons own lips. Listen well and ask good questions.



At every stage of the journey God's word is not only addressing a person's rational mind but also the conscience. When someone is in the conversion/salvation phase of their journey remember that salvation doesn't come merely because ideas are exchanged. Conversion comes when a person understands the promises of God in Christ and repents due to the convicting work of the Spirit, is then baptised and receives the fullness of the Holy Spirit.⁸

Why do some people get emotional at the point of conversion?

Some people on the brink of conversion may appear to have regressed back into antagonism, but in reality they may be upset and angry due to the heat of God's love pressing in on their guilty conscience. We need to be wise spiritual directors and allow such people time, or we may through our own impatience, short circuit the work of God upon a person's soul. Be sensitive to God's Spirit because he is working upon the conscience of a person.

Many people at some point experience intense feelings of sadness for their past sins, even weeping tears of repentance. The key thing is to realise that we want people to have such an experience of Christ that afterwards they remember nothing about the experience but everything about Christ. In other words, keep Jesus the focus, not people's personal sins. Remember, the only place to look upon our sin is on the cross. When the Holy Spirit convicts us it is never to condemn. In the moment of repentance, the Spirit brings conviction of our need for Christ coupled with the hope we have in Christ. He whispers in the deepest recesses of our being when we sin – 'you were made for better things.'

Some people will cross the line imperceptibly. One day they come to you and say something like, 'I'm not exactly sure when it happened but I have realised that I believe Christ alone has forgiven all of my sins.'

Others will need your clear invitation to enter into the experience of salvation in Christ. If that happens, what does that invitation sound like? It is simply an invitation to pray.

The Jesus Prayer

We only get to talk to God because of Jesus. That is why I prefer to use the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray as the best way to start and continue in the Christian life.

Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

(Matthew 6:9-13 NLT)

Coupled to this is the need for a personalised approach in which the converting person is taught that confessing specific sins is necessary based upon John 20:23, 'If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven' (NLT).

The practice of confession and absolution is well known to Christians in more traditional Christian churches. However, this practice is often adapted in a more ad hoc manner by Free Churches, including Baptists and Pentecostals, who tend to ask converting people to say a "sinners prayer" at the start of their Christian life, followed by the receiving of counsel to bring assurance of salvation. Typically, a so called sinner's prayer would go something like the following.

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite you to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow you as my Lord and Saviour. In Your Name. Amen.

The potential risk with replacing the Lord's Prayer and Confession and Absolution with a "sinner's prayer" is that the focus may end up being upon our actions in the moment of confession rather than Gods proclamation. We also run the risk of repentance being viewed as a one-off event that gets repeated only when we feel so inclined.

However you do it in your tradition, perhaps we all need to take Jesus' words in John 20:23 very seriously and see that confession and absolution is exactly what is needed at the point which a person is experiencing salvation, and as they grow in Christ.⁹ How you begin is how you will continue in the spiritual life.

In churches, like the Lutheran Church, that feature confession and absolution in their liturgy (worship), they do so precisely because of a view that we are

We only
get to
talk
to God
because
of Jesus

saints and sinners until the day we die. Daily repentance is therefore required for a healthy spiritual life. This frees us from the tyranny of seeking moral perfection in this life rather than a constant grace discovery which leads to dependence upon God for salvation and the motivation to love others.

To advance further I then like to pick up on Paul's great exhortation to live a new life with God. Having spent eleven chapters of Romans expounding the Gospel, in Romans 12:1-3 Paul offers a great description of what it means to be converted, to repent (turn around) and to live with God. Here it is in a modern paraphrase.

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.¹⁰ I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him. Romans 12:1-3 (MSG)

These verses from Romans in the Message paraphrase could be used to help the person understand what life with God is like. I turn these words into a prayer that I encourage the person to pray every day as they reflect upon and pray the Word of God. What we are now doing is teaching our new disciple in Christ to pray God's word; the promises of God in Christ. For example,

Lord please help me in my everyday, ordinary life—my sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life to daily place it before you as an offering.

Help me to fully embrace and understand what you have done for me through Jesus Christ. Through his birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and promise to return.

Don't let me become so well-adjusted to my culture that I fit into it without even thinking. Instead, remind me to fix my attention on Jesus the author and finisher of my faith.

Turn
God's
Promises
into
Prayers



*God, I thank you for your daily work of changing me from the inside out.
Enable me to readily recognise what you want from me, and by your Spirit empower me to respond to it.
Lord help me to remember that the only accurate way to understand myself is by knowing who you are and what you have done for me in Christ. Amen.*

What happens next?

Baptism or a public affirmation of one's Baptismal vows

Baptism or a public affirmation of one's Baptismal vows is next, depending upon whether the person has been baptised already. In preparation, pastoral instruction in the shorter Catechism or some similar resource is now essential.

For teen or adult converts a public affirmation of faith may be considered pastorally wise. Most churches don't re-baptise people who have already been baptised, making the idea of a testimony and or public affirmation of faith important to schedule during a time of worship. This also serves to enable the congregation and or Love Life Community (missional community) the opportunity to celebrate together.

Baptism is like Communion, it is a means of grace not a means to grace. We don't earn God's favour by doing it. In other words, if you repented of your sins trusting Christ alone for your salvation but died before being baptised or partaking of your first communion, you are no less accepted by God.

Christ is a real presence in the bread and the wine, sustaining the people of God in every time and place. It is the pastor's role, along with the whole congregation, to teach new converts the meaning and significance of the sacraments.

*Christ is a
real presence
in the bread
and the wine,
sustaining the
people of God
in every time
and place.*

Watch your language

As a footnote to what to say when a person is at the salvation stage of their journey, there are a couple of bad habits evangelists sometimes pick up and use which should be avoided.

For example, don't tell a converting person to ask Jesus into their hearts, or to make a commitment to Christ.

- Ask Jesus into your heart

Some take Revelation 3:20 out of context (it was written to Christians) and use it to say that Christ is knocking on the door of your heart and the handle is on the inside and you must open the door and let him in. However, salvation happens the other way around. It is not that we ask Jesus into our hearts, but rather that God the Father, Son and Spirit invite us into their shared life. This also helps prevent anyone thinking that they get different members of the Trinity in their life at different times or in different forms. Using the Jesus prayer (the Lord's Prayer), as described above, overcomes this problem.

- Make a commitment to Christ

You are not asking them to 'commit their lives to Christ'. This language could lead them to think that the basis of their relationship with God is their commitment to God, rather than God's commitment to them. Even though evangelists that use this terminology don't usually mean this, it is easy for converting people to take it that way. For example the famous 20th century evangelist Billy Graham would explain that to 'commit your life to Christ' means to have faith – trust in, rely on, cling to – Christ alone for salvation. In other words, commend your sinful soul to a gracious forgiving God. However, I have met plenty of new converts who battle with the basis of their salvation because they took it to mean that their acceptance by God depended somehow upon the measure of their religious performance post baptism. I therefore suggest you avoid using this approach. Again, using the Jesus prayer overcomes this problem.

In this chapter, we explored how to talk with the orphans of God by reading, learning and praying God's word together as the best way to collaborate with the Holy Spirits agenda for our lives.

By moving forward in our growth in Christ *together with* the orphans of God we experience a whole of life transformation involving our head, heart and hands. Together we grow as disciples of Jesus. Thus the need for us to explore in the next chapter the whole matter of discipleship because we are sent to walk, talk *and grow* with the orphans of God.

The basis of a relationship with God is his commitment to you, rather than your commitment to him.

Small Group Gathering #8

SENT: To talk with the Orphans of God

Start with an opening prayer.

Listen Together

Indwelling the Word

Begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud in a good translation (e.g. NRSV) or if you prefer a paraphrase such as the Message. Read it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: Romans 12:1-3 (MSG)

Write your thoughts & reflections here

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Conversations

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report what your partner said back to the whole group.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Video: Watch this week's video. Video 8: Sent to talk with the Orphans of God. Accessed from www.lca.org.au/sent

Book: Discuss the main ideas, other biblical passages and concepts described in the book and introduction video for this session.

SOW AND REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the rest of the group doesn't need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?

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What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

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Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide, or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ?

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Prayer:

Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.

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Thank God for the continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

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Endnotes

¹ Barrs, J. (2001). *The Heart of Evangelism*. (p.169). Illinois: Crossway.

² Mallison, J. (2010). *Mentoring to Develop Disciples and Leaders*. Found in *My 3D Support Workbook, Life Boat Stories*, 2016, p.35. See www.soulfood.cafe

³ Ibid. p.35.

⁴ Stone, B. P. (2006). *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Kindle Locations 3430-3670). Kindle Edition. MI: Brazos Press, Baker. A worldview is defined as a person's ideas and attitudes about what human beings are and what our purpose is for being alive.

⁵ Foster, T. (2014). *The Suburban Captivity of the Church: Contextualising the Gospel for Post-Christian Australia*. (Loc. 356-358).

⁶ Whetham, P. (2016). *My 3D Support Workbook, Life Boat Stories* (p.27.). Adapted from Noela Maletz, (2016) See www.soulfood.cafe

⁷ For further reading on asking questions in the Gospel sharing context see *Questioning Evangelism* by Randy Newman (2010).

⁸ Being 'filled with the Spirit' is not like filling a glass with water. It is a metaphor for an ongoing realisation of the fullness of relationship with God that is possible through Jesus Christ.

⁹ Lutherans and others from a similar view of 'the office of the keys' may at this juncture question how any 'gospel sharer' may in fact involve themselves in hearing and pronouncing forgiveness of sins to a repenting sinner. Shouldn't this always be done by a called and ordained servant of the Word, meaning an ordained Pastor? If this is your view then get your Pastor involved with your friend at this juncture. If not, then enjoy the freedom a correct understanding of Martin Luther's teaching on the priesthood of all believers brings. Which is not that every believer is a priest but that all believers are called to point one another to Jesus Christ and echo the announcement of our great high priest.

¹⁰ For further reading on this topic see *Commitment Theology* by Grant Thorpe (New Creation, SA). Available as a free download by emailing dean.eaton@lca.org.au

Chapter 9

SENT: Grow with the Orphans of God

Growing people in Christ involves a process of formation over time through consistently inviting them further into God's transformational adventure and including them in yours. Paul describes his lived experience of this with his friends in Thessalonica,

We know that God not only loves you but has selected you for a special purpose. For we remember how our Gospel came to you not as mere words, but as a message with power behind it—the effectual power, in fact, of the Holy Spirit. You know how we lived among you. You remember how you set yourselves to copy us, and through us, Christ himself. You remember how, although accepting the message meant bitter persecution, yet you experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit. You thus became examples to all who believe (1 Thess. 1:4-6 Philps).

Thus relational evangelism becomes relational discipleship.

As Miroslaf Volf states, '...even God needed human people to make more people (Volf, 1998).'¹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer concurs that, 'a truth, a doctrine, or a religion needs no space for themselves. They are disembodied entities. They are heard, learnt and apprehended, and that is all. But the incarnate Son of God needs not only ears and hearts, but living [persons] who will follow him. That is why he called his disciples into a literal, bodily following, and thus made his fellowship with them a visible reality...Having been called they could no longer remain in obscurity, for they were the light that must shine, the city on the hill which must be seen (Bonhoeffer, 1959).'² This echoes Paul's words to the believers in Corinth:

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Corinthians 3: 2–3, NLT).

In the New Testament spiritual formation is encapsulated in this idea of discipleship. But what was discipleship in its original Jewish context and how do we apply this idea to forming people in Christ today?

Growing people in Christ involves a process of formation over time through consistently inviting them further into God's transformational adventure and including them in yours

Jewish discipleship

The roots of the idea of Christian discipleship are Jewish.

Where did the Jewish rabbis in Jesus time develop their ideas of discipleship? 'They found their model in Scripture, especially in the relationship of two men — the prophets Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21). Elijah and Elisha lived together, served one another, and engaged in a journey of learning for mutual transformation (Spangler, 2009).'³

By the time Jesus Christ was born the Jewish rabbinical tradition was already well established. Besides his quotes from various Old Testament books there is in the sayings of Jesus lots of hints of his familiarity with the writings of various rabbis in the same way that some of my readers might notice various influences upon my writings (e.g. C.S. Lewis, Martin Luther). Some scholars believe Jesus' teaching occasionally has echoes of the Jewish scribe Shimon ben Yeshua ben Eliezer ben Sira of Jerusalem.⁴

What if Jesus was your rabbi?

Imagine for a moment if Jesus was your rabbi and you were his disciple in the original Jewish context.⁵ Project yourself back 2,000 years into the society in which Jesus Christ was raised. At the time Jesus Christ was calling his disciples to "come follow me" a Jewish disciple or students (*Talmidim*) were those who dedicate themselves to learning a rabbi's understanding of Scripture and *his way of living it out*.⁶ Becoming the disciple (*Talmidim*) of a rabbi however was the result of a much longer process that commenced in childhood.

The Jewish context of discipleship commences when you are a six year old in Beit Sefer which means, house of the book. A local synagogue Torah teacher would teach the children *the Torah*⁷ between the ages of six and ten. Jewish boys would memorize the Torah. The best of the best students would continue on, memorising the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures in the house of learning (Beit Talmud) from ages ten to fourteen.

By fourteen years of age, the best of the best students had the entire Hebrew text memorised. Students would also at this age begin learning the Jewish art of questions and answers. In Luke 2:46 – Jesus was in the temple listening to the teachers and asking them questions. Students learned "remez" which means "hint" in Hebrew. The rabbis would call out a passage of Scripture and the student would have to give the Scripture before and after that passage. This process was designed to help them indwell the text!

The next phase was called Beit Midrash.⁸ At the end of study at Beit Talmud, when a Jewish boy was 14 years old, if the rabbi believed that the student was the best of the best, that he was able to become a rabbi, he would say,

In the New Testament spiritual formation is encapsulated in this idea of discipleship

"Lech Acharai – Come, follow me." The boy would leave his family and his village. He would leave the local synagogue. He would leave everything and follow that rabbi. He would become a talmudim, a disciple, a student. *He would devote his life to becoming exactly like that rabbi.*

When the rabbi quizzed some Jewish boys, however, they did NOT say, "Lech Acharai – Come, follow me." instead they said "Ah, my son, you do know Torah. And you know Torah well. But you are not able to be my talmudim, my disciple, my student." So the rabbi would say, "Go, home to your village. Make babies. Pray that they become rabbis. Go home and learn the family business - fishing, farming, carpentry. Because you won't be studying to be a rabbi."

The significance of the disciples Jesus called is that they are the ones who were never selected by any other rabbi. That's why they were at work (e.g. fishing) in the family business when Jesus said to them, "Lech Acharai – Come, follow me." In Matt. 4:18 Jesus saw two brothers, Peter and Andrew. They immediately dropped their nets. Here was a rabbi who believed they could be just like him!⁹ Jesus accepted them as they were, but he loved them too much to leave them that way!

Evidence of how effective Jesus was at transforming a fairly rag tag group of men and making them his disciples was acknowledged when Peter proclaims the Gospel before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4. 'When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus (Acts 4.13).

The call today into God's family is not a call into a Jewish rabbinical School. This is why the New Testament describes discipleship in terms of Jesus being our rabbi (Pastor/Teacher) rather than Jesus being 'my' Rabbi. We can only know God as one living in the family of God. Plus this family theme is seen by the way Jesus called God 'Father' and his followers his 'brothers and sisters, his friends'. These elements made Jesus approach to being a Rabbi an eternal family relationship rather than a short term coaching arrangement. This was a radically different approach and broke the expected mould of Jewish rabbis. The Apostles continued this kind of evangelism and Pastoral teaching ministry.

Calling disciples today

Much has changed in the world but in the process of making disciples today there is much about the call of Jesus that remains the same. From what we learn about the way Jesus called disciples we realise that there were certain inherent qualities about discipleship that we still must imitate today.

The significance of the disciples Jesus called is that they are the ones who were never selected by any other rabbi

- Grace

The call is not based upon personal merit but grace.

The Apostle Paul understood this grace.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:8-10 NLT)

- Formation

The call to discipleship is a call to character formation not moral perfection.

The turning point season or moment in a person's life that we label 'Christian conversion' is just the beginning of a life long journey of discovering who they are in Christ. Jesus approach to discipleship is about a whole of life transformation that affects every aspect of our lives; *social, cultural, emotional, economic, political*. This is because at the cross the great exchange has taken place; our life is exchanged for His. Therefore following Jesus will cost us everything; all of our versions of reality, security and what it means to be a human being.

It is a different (false) Gospel that insists people get instantly changed at conversion into morally perfect people. 'It is not an insistence on conversion that is the problem but rather the reduction of conversion to the moment of entrance and a fixation on that moment of entrance as the goal of evangelism (Stone, 2007).'¹⁰

This way of Jesus discipleship still means to live humbly and to be teachable, being an example to one another of life in Christ (1 Cor. 4:6; 11:1) not a moral perfectionist or infallible source of wisdom, but a fully alive human living in the promises of God. Spangler contends,

...ancient and modern Christians have sometimes been confused about what discipleship is, equating it with "discipline." Of course discipline is vital to the spiritual life. Jesus himself said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). But the overall goal of discipleship is not simply to grow in self-discipline, but to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Imagine for a moment if someone were to define parenting only as discipline. Of course children need discipline. But we would have great cause for worry if discipline was the only thing a parent focused on (Spangler, 2009).'¹¹

Discipleship forms people over time by inviting them further into God's transformational adventure and including them in yours!

Jesus approach to discipleship is about a whole of life transformation that affects every aspect of our lives; social, cultural, emotional, economic, political.

- Christ centred unity

The disciples call is to unity in Christ not our cultural preferences.

Cultural colonialism, whereby the lifestyle of one cultural group is foisted on to new converts as the essence of Christianity has been a common problem throughout church history. Discipleship today therefore requires that we are careful not to confuse our cultural preferences for markers of holiness, thus setting up a list of man-made rules for new Christians to adhere to.

- Co-learners

Disciples who make disciples are life-long co-learners.

In Jesus day a gathering of students is called a *havruta*, and each student is studying with a *haver* (pronounced hah-VAIR; literally a 'friend') to master the text. A female study partner is a *haverah* (plural, *haverot*). Was Jesus aware of this approach to studying Scripture? Consider the words of the early rabbis, who said: "When two sit together and exchange words of Torah, then the Divine Presence dwells among them." Now, listen to the words of Jesus: "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). You can hardly miss the similarity. Like other Jewish teachers of his time, Jesus affirmed his followers' need for community. What's more, since Jesus is himself the Word of God, it makes sense that he would promise to be present as we come together to study the Scriptures (Spangler, 2009).¹²

Becoming each other's *haverim* is an effective way to fulfil Jesus' command to raise up disciples. 'Rather than viewing ourselves as the rabbi and others as our disciples, becoming *haverim* allows us to take on the role of co-disciples. We can help others grow by learning right alongside them (Spangler, 2009).'¹³

It is essential that this learning occurs in community because, 'It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what the Lord left behind was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community (Newbigin, 1995).'¹⁴

- Spirit-filled

The call of Jesus today is to be reliant upon the power of the Holy Spirit

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8 NLT).

Thus we are sent not to obsess over whether or not we have the Spirit, nor whether anyone else does. Rather we are called to be open, and sensitive, welcoming of the Holy Spirit's work which was seen in Acts 2 to be about

It is a different (false) Gospel that insists people get instantly changed at conversion into morally perfect people



gifts that enable communication of God’s invitation to new life in Christ.

Today some want to use the gift of languages (tongues) as a test for checking one another’s level of spirituality. It was not given for the purpose of assuring the individual of reception of the Spirit, as most Pentecostals teach. The Holy Spirit is given for the redemptive purposes of God who has poured out the Spirit on all flesh to convict every person of their *sin*, God’s *judgement* upon us and God’s *righteousness* that is available to all as a free gift through Jesus Christ the crucified and risen saviour of the world (John 16:8). This is why all of the gifts of the Spirit listed by the Apostle Paul in various passages of the New Testament are linked to building one another up, “A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other...,and we should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:7, 31; 14 NLT).

Whenever someone comes to us with a different, more novel purpose for the outpouring of the Spirit on all people, then the conversation quickly descends into subjective self-indulgence. The real question in regards to the Holy Spirits work through us is, are we available to God to sow the seed of the Gospel in people’s hearts and minds in order that by the Spirit they will confess Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:1-3)?

I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It’s not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What’s important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. (1 Corinthians 3:6-8 NLT)

In summary, discipleship is about growing people in Christ and involves a process of formation over time through consistently inviting them further into Gods transformational adventure and including them in yours. By moving forward in our growth in Christ *together with* the orphans of God we experience a whole of life transformation involving our head, heart and hands. Together we grow as disciples of Jesus. Thus we are sent to walk, talk, grow and form community with the orphans of God now awakened to being children of God. Therefore in the next chapter we will discuss how and why the core purpose of any church is to make disciples that make disciples.

Are we available to God to sow the seed of the Gospel in people’s hearts and minds in order that by the Spirit they will confess, ‘Jesus is Lord.’

Small Group Gathering #9

SENT: To grow with the Orphans of God

Start with an opening prayer.

Listen Together

Indwelling the Word

Begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud in a good translation (e.g. NRSV) or if you prefer a paraphrase such as the Message. Read it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1

Write your thoughts & reflections here

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Conversations

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report what your partner said back to the whole group.



Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Video: Watch this week’s video. Video 9: Sent to grow with the Orphans of God. Accessed from www.lca.org.au/sent

Book: Discuss the main ideas, other biblical passages and concepts described in the book and introduction video for this session.

SOW AND REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the rest of the group doesn’t need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?

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What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

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Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide, or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ?

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Prayer:

Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.

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Thank God for the continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

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Endnotes

¹ Volf, M. (1998). *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. (p.24). Grand Rapids: Erdmans.

² Bonhoeffer, D. (1959). *The Cost of Discipleship*. (p.248). UK: Touchstone.

³ Spangler, Ann; Lois Tverberg. (2009) *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith*. (Kindle Locations 1004-1008). USA: Zondervan.

⁴ "The Book of the All-Virtuous Wisdom of Joshua ben Sira, commonly called the Wisdom of Sirach or simply Sirach, and also known as the Book of Ecclesiasticus is a work of ethical teachings from approximately 200 to 175 BCE written by the Jewish scribe Shimon ben Yeshua ben Eliezer ben Sira of Jerusalem. Some people claim that there are several allusions to the *Wisdom of Sirach* in the New Testament. These include the Virgin Mary's *Magnificat* in *Luke* 1:52 following *Sirach* 10:14; the description of the seed in *Mark* 4:5,16-17 following *Sirach* 40:15, Christ's statement in *Matthew* 7:16,20 following *Sirach* 27:6 and *James* 1:19 quoting *Sirach* 5:11. The distinguished patristic scholar Henry Chadwick has claimed that in *Matthew* 11:28 Jesus was directly quoting *Sirach* 51:23, as well as comparing *Matthew* 6:12 "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (KJV) with *Sirach* 28:2 "Forgive your neighbour a wrong, and then, when you petition, your sins will be pardoned." Sited at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sirach_16/11/16

⁵ Thirteen times in the New Testament Jesus is called a rabbi (*Matthew* 26:25,49; *Mark* 9:5; 11:21; 14:45; *John* 1:38,49; 3:2,26; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8). 41 times He is called a teacher and only once is he called a carpenter (*Mark* 6:3).

⁶ 'In Hebrew disciple is Talmidim Talmid (tahl-MEED; plural, talmidim, tahl-mee-DEEM). In Greek, a disciple is a mathetes (plural, mathetai). In both languages the words mean "student" or "learner." A female disciple would be a *talmidah* in Hebrew, or *mathetria* in Greek. But were there any female disciples? Surprisingly, in *Acts* 9:36 Dorcas (Tabitha) is called a *mathetria*, a (female) disciple.' Spangler, Ann; Lois Tverberg (2009). *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith* (Kindle Locations 935-936). USA: Zondervan.

⁷ The Torah teacher who would begin teaching the children with – "May the words of God be sweet to your taste, sweeter than honey to your mouth" (*Psalms* 119:103) Retrieved 5th December 201 from <http://www.jewishrootsofchristianity.org/pdfs/discipleship-in-jesus-day.pdf>.

⁸ 'Attached to every synagogue is a place devoted to the study of sacred writings and Holy Scripture. This area is called the Beit Midrash, the house of learning or study. Midrash literally means "investigation." Here the Jewish people would gather to investigate, study, learn and argue the meanings and proper applications of their revered texts. In this environment, rich spiritual opportunities for learning are given to the participants that can never be obtained alone, or by simply listening to a lecturer give his or her own opinions. The opportunity to express one's own thoughts and feelings, and engage in often time's very passionate and heated debate is a very stimulating intellectual and spiritual experience. It is also an extremely necessary and vital part of studying the Word of God, and growing in your personal relationship with the Lord. Without it the opportunities for "iron to sharpen iron" (*Proverbs* 27:17) will be limited and spiritual growth stunted. Being part of a Beit Midrash can literally transform not only the way you learn the scriptures but your personal relationship with the Lord.' Retrieved 6th December 2016 from <http://howardmorganministries.org/beitmidrash.html>.

⁹ [jewishrootsofchristianity.org](http://www.jewishrootsofchristianity.org/pdfs/discipleship-in-jesus-day.pdf). Retrieved 12th December 2016 from <http://www.jewishrootsofchristianity.org/pdfs/discipleship-in-jesus-day.pdf>

¹⁰ Stone, B. P. (2006). *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (p.77). MI: Brazos Press, Baker. Bryan Stone further contends, 'The problem is that it is always possible to abstract conversion from that to which we are to be converted, to reify that abstraction into something like a "decision" or an "experience," and then to aim evangelism at this. While this process of abstraction has, throughout most of Christendom, been focused on the rite of infant baptism, it has increasingly been shaped in modernity by a voluntarist psychology in which the private decision of the autonomous self to "be saved" is determinative of one's salvation. In both cases, the point of entry into the Christian life is conceived as the goal of evangelism, with tragic consequences for the way evangelism is practiced, for now evangelism will take the form of any activity that is capable of securing this point of entry. Evangelism ceases to be a practice and becomes a mere "technology." (Stone, 2007, p.261)'



¹¹ Spangler, Ann; Lois Tverberg. (2009) *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith*. (Kindle Locations 1120-1121). USA: Zondervan.

¹² Ibid. (Kindle Locations 1168-1173)

¹³ Ibid. (Kindle Locations 1321-1323)

¹⁴ Newbigin. L. (1995). *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, revised edition. (p.20). London: SPCK.

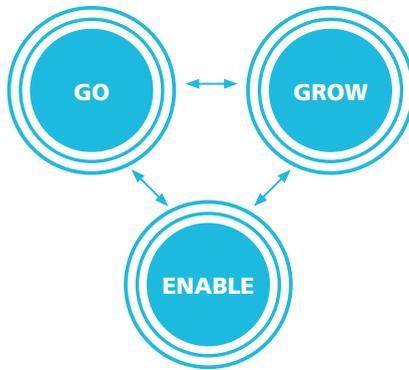
Chapter 10

US: Sent to build up the Church

The core purpose of any church is to make disciples who make disciples. But what does this look like in terms of how human resources are allocated and supported? It involves the establishing of three teams in any congregation and in some cases across a parish.

The Missional Ministry Matrix does not portray the structure of the parish but rather it is a description of the spheres of ministry in which the pastor, church staff and volunteer members are involved.

Diagram 23. **Missional Ministry Matrix**



- GO: a team focused upon seeing people come to Christ (evangelism). This is Love Life Communities or what some prefer to call Missional Communities.
- GROW: a team focused upon growing people in Christ (pastoral care). One on one follow up and or small group Christian growth communities.

Love Life Communities are designed to be the core team for focusing completely upon these two areas of evangelism and pastoral care; making disciples who make disciples.

- ENABLE: a team that serves to enable us to Go and Grow through good Governance and facilitating regular Worship opportunities. Worship is the framing event which gives definition and meaning to all three dimensions of service.

In the Go space the skills required to do this work are different from those



required in the Grow and Enable spaces. In the Go space words like flexibility, adaptability, creativity, and innovation come to mind. This is because you are not primarily engaged in this space with running a program but are engaged in dynamic human relationships with people on their way to Christ. Lesslie Newbigin says,

My own experience as a missionary has been that the significant advances of the church have not been the result of our own decisions about mobilizing and allocating of 'resources.' The significant advances in my experience have come through happenings of which the story of Peter and Cornelius is a paradigm, in ways of which we have no advance knowledge. God opens the heart of a man or woman in the gospel. The goal of evangelism, as a practice of witness, is not initiating people into the reign of God, but simply and definitively participating with God. Witness, is first and foremost a practice done 'with God' rather than one done 'to people.' (Newbigin, 1995)¹

By contrast, in the Grow and Enable spaces words like regularity, consistency, faithfulness and stability come to mind. Why? Because in this space you are dealing with far more predictable people, those already in Christ, who are generally willing to form regular social and spiritual habits together in a highly co-ordinated manner, e.g. common times and places scheduled for activities like worship, leadership training, administration or doing good works for the community.

Where you spend the God-given time, energy and resources of your congregation staff and members is an important issue requiring regular review.

The more intentional you are as a whole congregation about where and how people serve in one of these three spaces, the more you will be fit for the purpose of receiving the people God is saving and desiring to weave into the life of your congregation.

If no one in your congregation is released and supported to walk and talk with the orphans of God, working in the 'Go' space, then you probably won't gain many converts. If you only wish to engage in being a church that intentionally sets up its pathway of discipleship, support, training and care ONLY for people already in Christ, then be prepared that this is exactly what God will grant you.

If no one
in your
congregation
is released
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to walk and
talk with the
orphans of
God, working
in the 'Go'
space, then
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many
converts

The church where everyone does everything

In my opinion one of the most damaging approaches to ministry, especially for volunteers, is to say that everyone does everything; that they may have roles in all three spaces of go, grow, and enable. A pastor's natural tendency is to include people and bring them together in ministry. It is one of the main reasons, apart from being a sound biblical scholar that we call them to our congregations to serve. However, this pastoral strength carries the potential to burn out people who may willingly over-commit to ministry opportunities. It also may create an expectation that because all of us can and do witness to Christ that everyone is therefore potentially gifted or called to be evangelists.

It is true that all believers are called to witness and share the Gospel, to play their part in sowing and reaping. 'There are three New Testament references to specific people called evangelist, and there are one hundred and twenty references to all members of the church sharing the gospel. In other words, of these 123 verses, 2.5 percent pertain to evangelists and 98.5 percent pertain to everyone else' (Johnson, 2009).² So all must in their own way sow the seed of God's word, and when opportunity arises be willing to share the reason for the hope we have in Christ.

If with heart and soul you're doing good, do you think you can be stopped? Even if you suffer for it, you're still better off. Don't give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy (1 Peter 3:15-16 MSG).

It is also important to note that around 3% of people in the Body of Christ are natural evangelists and a further 4% like to support and work with evangelists. This tells us that although we are all called to share the Gospel, even our public worship is Gospel proclamation, not everyone is called to focus their time, energy and resources on reaping the harvest directly. There is a culture of shame that can develop in churches when people are told that we are all meant to be evangelists. The diversity of gifts and various forms of service in the Body of Christ should all be seen as a facet of the colourful mosaic we call mission; *evangelism is just one facet.*

All believers
are called
to witness
and share
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to play
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sowing and
reaping

What is an Evangelist?

So then what is an evangelist?

God Himself is an evangelist, for He "preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham" (Galatians 3:8). Jesus Christ was an evangelist, for he also "preached the gospel" (Luke 20:1). Paul was an evangelist as well as an apostle (Romans 1:15). Philip the deacon was an evangelist (Acts 21:8). Timothy, the pastor (2 Timothy 4:5) and, all the early disciples who, on being driven out of Jerusalem, "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4 KJV). In the 2nd century Eusebius described people who 'laid only the foundations of the faith before appointing shepherds and moving on (Eusebius, 2016).'³ They were itinerant teachers of the Gospel who invited people to see and hear the living Word of God through the way they lived and the message of salvation history they taught.

Ephesians 4:11 teaches that one particular order of the ministry, distinguished from every other, is singled out by the Head of the church for this work in a distinctive sense. All may possess the gift of an evangelist in a measure, and be obligated to exercise its privilege and duty, but some are specially gifted with it. 'He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.' Doubtless Ephesians 4 is directing us to see that these five distinct gifts are all teachers of God's Word who equip Gods people to do the work of the ministry in different contexts. There appears to be no rational or practical reason, based upon Scripture alone, for collapsing all five ministry gifts into one called 'pastor'. This would deny the variety of people required to carry out the full equipping of the saints ministry as described by Ephesians 4:11 and is a recipe for pastoral burnout due to unrealistic expectations. Christians who belong to a Sacramental tradition in regards to the role of pastor need not see an acknowledgement of people who are called by the church to be evangelists as a denial of the pastor's unique role in regards to word and Sacrament.

Just as a pastor will consistently teach Gods people who they are in Christ, so an evangelist spends time teaching people who they can be in Christ.

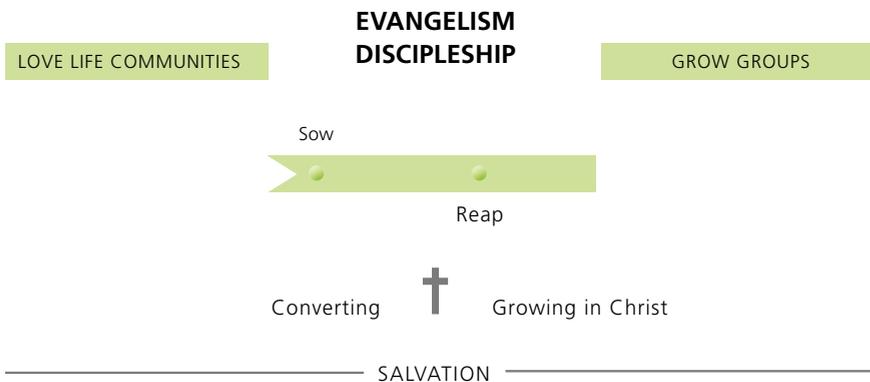
Just as a pastor will teach (equip) believers how to follow Christ, so an evangelist will teach (equip) not-yet-believers how to follow Christ.

Just as a pastor will exhort believers to love God and neighbour, so the evangelist will exhort not-yet-believers to understand the true source of love.

Just as a pastor will call all people to repentance and faith in Christ, so the evangelist will call not-yet-believers to repentance and faith in Christ.

Same Gospel, different audience. In the end it's not about what part we play, but that we play our part.

Diagram 24. **Role of Love Life Communities and Discipleship Groups**



Setting up a Love Life Community

It doesn't matter what size you are now, a church of 20 or a mega church of 20,000. Just find at least three and hopefully more like seven other people with a sense of calling to go on this journey of growth with you and do the eight week Love Life Community study followed by doing the SENT Seeking the Orphans of God bible studies if you haven't already done so. The Love Life Community study is found in the resources section of this book and also available as a free download. Here - www.lca.org.au/sent

Obviously larger churches may form a number of groups at once. Smaller churches may work across a whole parish or even ecumenically inviting a number of small congregations to initially form one group to get the ball rolling.

Without such an intentional team approach designed to train people how to work in the missional space, it is highly unlikely you will successfully and consistently reap a harvest.

Pastors can easily facilitate such support by providing the opportunity for people to explore how to set up the Go space in your congregation by doing the eight week Love Life Community Bible study that follows this chapter. Many or all may do the Bible study to gain an understanding of what Love Life Communities do in the context of an existing congregation or new church plant. Only some will feel led to continue on and join that ministry.

If pastors and leaders provide the space in their structure and program for this to form and pray the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to reap the harvest, then the Good Shepherd will speak to his people.

Without an intentional team approach designed to train people how to work in the missional space, it is highly unlikely you will successfully and consistently reap a harvest.

Why converting your existing small groups won't work

A classic error is to try to convert existing Christian growth or Bible study groups into Love Life Communities, either permanently, or for a season (e.g. special Mission Month). British researcher Mike Moynagh (U.K. Fresh Expressions) has evidence that this does not work in terms of reaping the harvest. Why? Because the groups purpose and the required skill set of the leaders is quite different. According to Moynagh, in practice when churches try and get existing Christian growth groups to 'become missional', it mostly doesn't work and only compounds a sense of discouragement about reaping the harvest.

The solution is simple. It is better to set up separate Go and Grow groups.

The Pastor's role

Pastors are overseers of all three circles, Go, Grow and Enable, however, primarily they focus upon Enable (worship and governance) and Grow (pastoral care, teaching) as this is what the vast majority of pastors are trained to do. It can be observed that some pastors find themselves called to be evangelists for specific seasons of their lives, as in the case of Paul saying to Timothy 'to do the work of an evangelist' (1 Timothy 4:12). Even though Timothy's primary gift was to be a pastor he was being asked to be an example of someone passionate about lost people, willing to connect with people of faith and those without, at least for a season. I have observed the need for pastors to blaze the trail in the 'go' space by pioneering a congregation's first Love Life Community with the clear intention of withdrawing after six or twelve months handing it over to others. Ideally every congregation would call a pastor and an evangelist to work together.

Ideally every congregation would call a pastor and an evangelist to work together

A Warning to Church Leaders

Prior to commencing Love Life Communities it is essential that congregational leaders understand how to develop the churches ministry structures and resources to support receiving the harvest. The ten devotions called, RENEW Missional Leadership, in the last section of this book were designed for this purpose. It is suggested that you use these during the devotion period time slot in regular leaders meetings, when you would presumably have a devotion anyway.

It is essential for pastors and leaders to recognise that people entering into the evangelism team ministry (Love Life Communities) must be released from other ministry duties. This doesn't have to happen right away, however, if



they are not released from other ministry duties within the local church or wider Body of Christ, this often leads to a lack of reaping the harvest. Why? Because God loves your church members too much to burn them out. In the fields of harvest unless you have the energy margin for being an active presence in the lives of people coming to Christ, God will rarely engage you in reaping, and occasionally only in sowing. 'One person one ministry'; it's a good principle, especially for volunteers serving the Lord.

If a person is not working a full time job or is retired then they may have the energy and time to continue, for example, as both the church treasurer and be involved in reaping the harvest. However, this should be seen as the exception rather than the rule.

A note to the next generation

Jesus sends us to reap the harvest!

What are we waiting for?

I have been observing the Body of Christ for five decades. In that time I have experienced a number of generational changes in the church. It seems to me that each generation finds the last a disappointment in regards to evolving ministry style.

I do not discount the frustrations and anxiety that some church cultures create amongst young people honestly seeking to reach their friends with the Gospel. I too experienced this in my youth.

It seems to me that the whole matter of styles of ministry gets debated too much in the church in general; *either because the current style seems culturally irrelevant or because it seems sold out to relevance.*

If you are a Christian teenager or young adult reading this I wonder what you will look back on and remember in your old age about this period of your life in service to God.

Imagine if you got to be Pope for a day and fixed everything you felt was wrong about the Church.

Imagine if lots of Christians joined your church because it became the most relevant looking, sounding and growing church in town.

Imagine if you got to win many social justice battles.

Imagine if you did many good things to edify the saints.

Imagine if you built many homes for the homeless.

Imagine if you started great social enterprises that liberated the poor.

Jesus
sends us
to reap
the
harvest!



Will there be something more than these many 'good things'?

As you look back many years from now, will there be something eternal, something you take with you into eternity?

Like your neighbour, your school friend, your work mate, your best friend, your lover... people who need the Lord?

Above all else, Jesus sends us to reap the harvest!

And so we begin, in the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Small Group Gathering #10

US: Sent to build up the Church

Start with an opening prayer.

Listen Together

Indwelling the Word

Begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud in a good translation (e.g. NRSV) or if you prefer a paraphrase such as the Message. Read it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: Ephesians 1

Write your thoughts & reflections here

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Conversations

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report what your partner said back to the whole group.



Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Video: Watch this week’s video. Video 10 US: Sent to build up the Church. Accessed from www.lca.org.au/sent

Book: Discuss the main ideas, other biblical passages and concepts described in the book and introduction video for this session.

SOW AND REAP TOGETHER: (15 minutes)

Debrief: Without sharing confidential or private information the rest of the group doesn’t need to know, share what you can about the people you are witnessing to.

Where do you think they are on their journey to Christ?

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What signs have you seen that they are moving forward or backward in their journey to Christ?

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Stepping Stones: What is the next action we can take or opportunity we can provide, or resource we can offer that will assist that person to move them closer to salvation in Christ?

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Prayer:

Pray specific prayers for specific people you know who need to know Christ.

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Thank God for the continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling you to witness.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Newbigin, L. (1995). *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, revised edition. (p.67). London: SPCK.
- ² Johnson, J. A. (2009) *Got Style? Personality Based Evangelism*. (Kindle edition location 2033). US: Judson Press.
- ³ ccel.org. Eusebius Pamphilius n.d. NPNF 2-01 Church history, life of Constantine oration, CHAPTER XXXVII.—The Evangelists that were still Eminent at that Time. Verse 3. Retrieved 5th December 2016. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.viii.xxxvii.html>.





RENEW

LOVE LIFE
COMMUNITIES

**Biblical reflection and practical advice for forming, developing
and growing missional communities that edify congregations
through relational evangelism**



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Renew Love Life Communities.

Through biblical reflections and practical advice these eight small group studies are designed to facilitate the formation, development and growth of a new kind of small group in your congregation or Parish – Love Life Communities (missional communities).

The purpose of a Love Life Community is to grow your congregation through doing relational evangelism.

Evangelism is about learning the art of discipleship for the 'lost'; spiritual direction for the orphans of God. Participating in such work requires developing relational skills, Christ like attitudes and biblical/cultural knowledge rather than one singular 'catch all' technique. Therefore, developing to be an effective witness is a lot more like gardening than rocket science. Most people can do gardening and do it very well if they commit time and energy, learn shared knowledge, have patience and a constant desire to improve.

You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand.

Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. (Matthew 5.14-16)

As you gather for your first Love Life Community Bible study, may you hear the call of Father, Son and Spirit beckoning you to echo this invitation to "keep open house; be generous with your lives..." so that people may discover our "...generous Father in heaven! Opening up to others...so that we prompt people to open up to God."

Across the world a grassroots people movement, a community of practice in Evangelism is growing. I am looking forward to discovering together with you how the Holy Spirit will teach and lead us to become more effective in evangelism in the years ahead.

Love Life ☺ Enjoy the journey!

Dean Eaton



Church Planting Mentor and Mission Facilitator.

Lutheran Church of Australia, Board for Local Mission.



PREPARATION

SCHEDULE

Meet once a week for the full eight weeks. Whatever else you plan to do (e.g. a shared meal, prayer, play) allow at least 60 minutes each time for doing the bible study discussion together.

At least the first week should commence with a shared meal or snacks and some dialogue about what is written in the introduction. At this first meeting you will be asked to make decisions together about,

- When the group will meet together.
- Where the group will meet.
- Who will take on the various functional roles of host and group leader (discussion navigator)? These roles can be shared around.

You will also do the first study so please read and reflect upon it *prior* to the first meeting.

BENEFITS

Upon completing RENEW: Love Life Communities bible studies participants will have been introduced to the skills, attitudes and resources that are needed to develop a successful evangelism team in your Congregation.

INVITATION

At the conclusion of these eight studies participants will be invited to become on-going members of a Love Life Community (LLC). This will involve prayerful dialogue with your Pastor to discover what this might mean for your existing ministry commitments in the church. You will need time and energy to engage in relational evangelism.

If you do decide to join an LLC there will likely be a phase out period from what you are currently doing in the congregation so that someone can replace you in your current role and a proper handover can occur. Let your Pastor guide you in this matter.

NAME

Your Congregation may choose to call such a group something other than a Love Life Community (e.g. Missional Communities). In these studies we will use the term Love Life Community (LLC). Many people have adopted the working title, 'Love Life Communities', however what you choose to call these new evangelism teams is up to you. The purpose however remains the same – participation with the Holy Spirits active drawing of people *into* Christ. This is another way of describing relational evangelism.

EVANGELIST

Do you have to be an 'evangelist' to join a Love Life Community (LLC)? No. But you do need to have a passion to use your gifts, time and energy to see people come into God's family. These bible studies will help you work through the question of how your gifts can best be used to serve in a team doing relational evangelism together. The personal skills required to do



relational evangelism are explored fully in the book *Sent Seeking the Orphans of God* by Dean Eaton.

LEADERSHIP

Who will lead the eight weeks of Bible study? Some Pastors will choose leaders from within their Congregation to lead these studies. If not then leadership tends to show itself naturally and in most cases, whoever starts the group will be considered the main facilitator. However, many groups get started with a handful of friends who share the role of group discussion leader or group navigator. This person organises a venue (e.g. home, café), ensures the group starts and finishes on time, and involves all group members in bible readings and discussions.

PREPARATION

Each person should do the bible study at home and write down personal reflections prior to each Love Life Community's bible study meeting.

FORMAT

When the group comes together the person elected to lead the group will guide you through a pattern:

- **OPENING PRAYER:** by the group leader or someone else.
- **SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES:** Ask different group members to read this section. This section shares wisdom gathered from research, missional literature and ideas from mission practitioners.
- **INDWELLING THE WORD:** Ask someone in the group to read the bible reading. Then follow the instructions given to lead that section.
- **CONVERSATION:** The group leader can use the discussion questions provided to open up the conversation about the group members' reflections. The group leader (navigator) is required to allow free discussion but also seek to keep the group on track so that the whole study is completed within the time limit and that all members get to participate.
- **CLOSING PRAYER:** Have an open prayer time at the end praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel and praying specifically by name for people that you know who need the Lord.

What happens the first time the new Love Life Community bible study group meets?

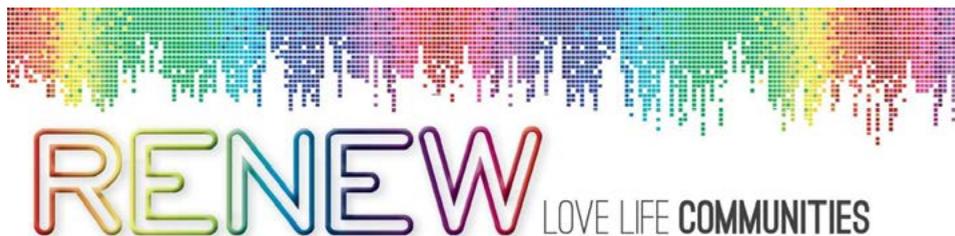
Come together for a shared meal and open dialogue.

1. Over dinner ask each person to say a little about themselves in regard to their own spiritual journey. For example, when did you become a Christian and how? Who has been a positive spiritual influence upon your life?

- 
2. Discuss group members functions:
 - a. Who will lead (navigate) the bible study discussions each week?
 - b. Who will host by providing a venue (their home), or finding a suitable venue (e.g. Café) each week?
 - c. Who will communicate with all group members on-going? For example sending a reminder email or sms as to time, venue, and other necessary arrangements.

 3. Then after dinner progress to doing the first study, session one: purpose.

Remember, prior to each Love life Community gathering it is expected that every group member would have already read through the coming weeks study and written down some personal reflections and ideas to share with the group during the CONVERSATIONS period of the study.



FORMING

SESSION ONE: PURPOSE

Forming a community of practice whose purpose is to participate in echoing God's invitation to the world.

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

The Church Universal shares the Gospel in Word and deed in so many ways.

- Public Worship is at its core Gospel proclamation; Christ gives Himself to us through Word & Sacrament.
- Every Church-based community service (e.g. Schools, Chaplains, and Charities) or media ministry (e.g. Gospel radio, TV, YouTube) is proclaiming and demonstrating the Gospel.

However, the reason many churches are not seeing more people come to the Lord, despite our best efforts in all of these areas, is a lack of **intentional relational evangelism**.

Missionary Lesslie Newbigin in his classic book, *The Open Secret* describes intentional relational evangelism.

"My own experience as a missionary has been that the significant advances of the church have not been the result of our own decisions about mobilizing and allocating of 'resources.' The significant advances in my experience have come through happenings of which the story of Peter and Cornelius is a paradigm, in ways of which we have no advance knowledge. God opens the heart of a man or woman in the gospel. The goal of evangelism, as a practice of witness, is not initiating people into the reign of God, but simply and definitively participating with God. Witness, is first and foremost a practice done "with God" rather than one done "to people."¹

¹ Lesslie Newbigin. *The Open Secret*. p. 67

INDWELLING THE WORD

This is why Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day." (John 6.44 NRSV) The word 'drawn' in this text is the same word used in other passages (John 21.11) to describe fisherman drawing in their fishing nets full of fish. God is not shouting at people from heaven but drawing them in by His power. Later in this passage Jesus says, "...no one is capable of coming to me on his own. You get to me only as a gift from the Father." (John 6.65b) J.B. Phillips translation says, "No one can come to me unless my Father puts it into his heart to come." (John 6.65b)

If God is already actively drawing people to Himself, what if anything can we do to participate in the process? Isn't it enough just to show people God's love and not necessarily echo God's invitation personally?

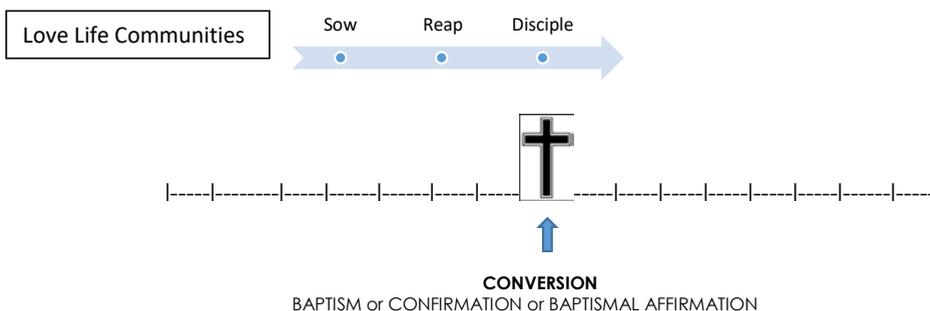
The Apostle Paul affirms that God is making his appeal through us, "...since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5.20b)

"For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." ¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" ¹⁶ But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" ¹⁷ **So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.** (Romans 10.13-17)

Therefore we are sent by God into the fields of harvest to speak the word of Christ, to appeal or ask people to be reconciled to God. This involves both calling *back into life in Christ* those who have abandoned faith (the already baptised) and calling *into Christ* those who have never been baptised, as illustrated in Diagram 1. **Conversion Pathway**

EVANGELISM (Sowing & Reaping)

CHURCH LIFE (Worship & Serve)





Love. Life (Mission) Communities work on the left hand side (of diagram 1) bringing people *into* Christ and people involved on the right side build people up *in* Christ. Both are essential.

This assumes a biblical view of what God is up to in your neighbourhood.

- God desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2.3-4)
- Every person you encounter is being drawn by our Heavenly Father to Himself through Christ, under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit (John 6.44).
- We are called to echo God's invitation to love, to life, to reconciliation with God through Christ crucified (2 Corinthians 5.14-21)
- Every person is being drawn into God's family.
"...the contemporary scene is dominated by evangelism enterprises that reduce the practice of evangelism to earning the emotional, and momentary consent or prayer of an individual, or recruiting individuals into consumption of the religious goods and services the church has to offer...Evangelism seeks to participate in Trinitarian action as it calls, welcomes, and forms persons into the body of Christ and the people of God."²

Jesus lamented at the lack of people willing to both sow the seed of the Gospel AND reap the harvest. "He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." (Luke 10.2-3).

CONVERSATIONS

If God is already actively drawing people to Himself what if anything can we do to participate in the process?

What has happened for you in the last week as you have reflected on this material?

What is something we can take away from this session together?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

² Stone. B. (2007), p 36.

FORMING

SESSION TWO: IDENTITY

Forming a community who are constantly discovering their new identity in the mission of God.

OPENING PRAYER

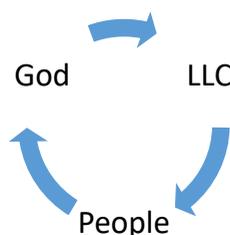
SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

In Luke 10 Jesus sent out teams not individuals to do mission. The 70 (or 72 depending upon the translation) were sent out in pairs and as part of this larger team. This team approach to mission continued throughout the Acts of the Apostles and is just as essential today. Evangelism, like any other ministry, is to be done in teams.

The word team infers that we have a task to perform together. However, beyond the task of learning how to more effectively witness to the Gospel, we are, like Jesus first disciples being continuously shaped by the people we encounter and the God who is constantly at work in us. This is an identity voyage, a journey of discovery on the job. Therefore forming a team who are willing to be shaped by God, to discover who they are becoming in their particular missional context is essential for effective relational evangelism.

By starting a Love Life Community you are entering into and continuously making room for others to enter, a transformational conversation with God. That is why we call the discussion time 'conversations'. This material aims to start a cycle of conversation that commences with you and God, develops with the Love Life Community, and continues in the missional setting with the people you are engaging with the Gospel. This action-reflection cycle of conversation throughout the eight weeks of these studies is the first step in developing your Love Life Community's capacity to enter the mission of God *together* and invite not-yet-believers to do the same.

Love Life Community (LLC) Conversation Cycle



INDWELLING THE WORD

Read 1 Corinthians 9.19-23.

In a letter to the Corinthian believers Paul reflects upon his own identity voyage (1 Corinthians 9.19 – 23). The Apostle Paul is demonstrating the first set of skills required by followers of Jesus who want to “bring many to Christ”.

1. **Adaptability**

Who you are in the church space is not the same as who you need to become in the missional space. In the church space we need consistency, predictability, stability, routine balanced by creativity. For example, when you turn up for Sunday worship you like to know that the Pastor has prepared a sermon, that the Treasurer will do the right thing with your financial offering, that someone will bother to plan ahead for volunteers by doing team rosters. That all children’s workers have had a Safe Place (Police) check.

On the other hand, in the relational evangelism (missional) space you need to be adaptable, innovative (without being novel) and flexible because you are dealing with dynamic human beings on their way into the Kingdom of God. This means that you may do ‘outreach programs’ but more than likely the Spirit will guide you into simple relationships in which you share God’s love in practical ways (e.g. someone needs a meal you give them one). Then in time, in various ways you clearly invite them to experience salvation in Christ. This may mean inviting them to a program such as a playgroup, Messy Church, or even Sunday worship, but experienced evangelists report today that for most people this is a leap too far.

The answer is relational evangelism which involves you entering into their world rather than the other way around.

Paul understood this and gave up many of his cultural comforts (e.g. language, customs, and routine). This is not just living *with* people but *like* them. This takes sacrificial love to give up our own cultural identities to identify with others. Remember, you don’t have to be all things to all people, but you do need to be one thing to some people.

Baptism understood as communion in the suffering and death of Christ means also a communion in the suffering and death of the world, our neighbour, the “other.”³

In the church we talk about how people who come to faith will need to adapt and change their behaviour, habits and even learn a new language (Christianese). We rarely discuss Paul’s idea that being on mission with God will require an intentional willingness for us to be shaped by the people we are bringing to Christ. This will likely mean adjusting our approach and ministry style to accommodate their culture and needs rather than our personal cultural preferences. It may also mean less programs and more participation in whatever God is up to

³ Dirk G Lange, *A Baptismal Example: Communal Prayer and the Missional Church*, in Zscheile, D.J. Ed. *Cultivating Sent Communities, Missional Spiritual Formation*, WM.B.Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Cambridge. P.198



in their lives as He draws them to Himself. Remember its relational evangelism not a one size fits all evangelism strategy!

2. **Common ground**

It's easy to discern differences but can we find common ground with people? Paul did not focus upon differences in moral codes or man-made rules but upon common human pain, aspirations, desires, and our underlying need for the One (God) in whom we commonly 'live and move and have our being' (Acts 17).

3. **Fellow sojourner**

Paul came to people as one willing walk alongside them on their journey to God. He was not 'dumbing down' the Gospel or compromising his morality but rather humbling himself to be a friend and servant like Jesus Christ (Philippians 2).

The great 17th Century physicist Newton was an intellectual genius who, according to his contemporaries, was nonetheless often arrogant and difficult. Yet as he gazed upon the Universe he was humbled by the extent and complexity of the research endeavour. "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but as to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."⁴ May we be like a small child gazing out at the great ocean of God's love; standing on the edge of the undiscovered possibilities! David wrote in Psalm 40,

*More and more people are seeing this, they enter the mystery,
abandoning themselves to GOD*

This means inviting all people on an identity voyage whereby we discover together our true humanity, nurturing human flourishing by indwelling Father, Son and Spirit. This is the invitation at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus, the attitude of the Apostle Paul which we should imitate.

CONVERSATIONS

What did you understand Paul to be saying to the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 9.19-23?

What do you think will be the greatest challenges for you on this missional community formation journey?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

⁴ Grigson & Gibbs-Smith 1954, p.303.

FORMING

SESSION THREE: SHAPE

Forming a community who are willing to be shaped by God

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

At the heart of the discipleship process is a community of people willing to be shaped by God and inviting others into that life journey.

This goes way beyond inviting our friends to be fellow consumers of religious goods and services. It radically invites them into an engagement with the most dangerous thing in the Universe, the love of God.

God's love is a danger to a life that has fallen asleep to the grand adventure of living in God. As humans loved by God we are more than the sum total of our own thoughts and desires, more than a bundle of impulses to be gratified. We are born with dignity and made in the image of God. We can be born again and changed into the likeness of Christ.

This occurs when our lives are centred upon the Cross. In Word and Sacrament Christ is giving Himself to His people. This is an important priority because conversion is more than giving mental assent to a set of doctrines. It involves a process of turning from a self-oriented life to a God-centred, other people focused life. Through indwelling God's Word we experience a renewing of our minds; a re-orientation over time in every aspect of our lives, including the social, economic and political dimensions.

Those who are becoming disciples of Jesus need mature disciples to engage in mutually transformative relationships of co-learning and co-serving centred in the great promises of God in Christ. The Love Life Community is therefore a community of practice engaged in an action-reflection learning process which develops skills as the team works together, listening, discerning, and acting with God on mission.

This is a complete change of ministry paradigm for many people, especially if we have been in the church for a long time. It is transitioning from training people to run programs of evangelism and discipleship to resourcing people to live in relationships of evangelism and discipleship? Church Planter Greg Gibson challenges us,

We may talk about making disciples and even hope to make disciples, but until we actually invite someone to become a disciple, we have only a stated value, not a true value. If you were to invite someone to be a disciple and teach them what it means to abide in Christ, who would it be? Perhaps a struggling couple in your church, a neighbour down the street, an unbelieving co-worker, or even the barista at your local coffee shop? Begin to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to someone you can disciple—and when he does, extend an invitation.⁵

⁵ Smith 2014, p. 55.

That is why Mike Breen says,

That's why it is crucial that we have a life worth imitating! We are inviting people into our lives and asking them to imitate the parts of our life that look like Jesus. Giving people access to our lives doesn't necessarily mean we constantly schedule additional time for coffee or drop everything for them at a moment's notice (though depending on the situation, it could mean that). If someone is struggling spiritually, invite him or her to go to the grocery store with you and talk with you on the drive there and at the store as you shop. Fold the person into your normal comings and goings. It doesn't have to mean more work. This is exactly what we see Jesus doing. He ate. He taught. He laughed. He healed. He prayed. He told jokes. He told stories. He visited friends. He fed thousands. He partied. He went to weddings. He went to the local synagogues. He went on retreat with his disciples. He cried. He went to funerals. He gave advice. He answered questions. And in all of his comings and goings, his disciples watched him doing this and observed. They were immersed in a life with Jesus. It should come as no surprise, then, that we see them doing the exact same things in the book of Acts. Discipleship didn't stop simply because it wasn't "intentional discipleship time." That kind of compartmentalizing is detrimental to the discipleship process. You are inviting someone into your life to learn how you follow Jesus in all aspects of your life. **Giving people access to your life is a necessary component to making this happen.**⁶

INDWELLING THE WORD

Reading: Romans 12.1-3 (Message)

"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.³I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him."

It is God who draws people to Himself and into the Love Life Community which is forming into a community which seeks to 'work out our [common] salvation in fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12) and by 'becoming all things to all people' (1 Corinthians 9:19), existing so that many may hear the Word and see the Way of Jesus and respond to His call.



CONVERSATIONS

1. What happens to the complexion of Congregational life if you to shift your paradigm from training people to run programs of evangelism and discipleship to resourcing people to live in relationships of evangelism and discipleship?
2. Is it possible to develop a one size fits all approach to discipleship?
3. Someone once said that we should always be discipling at least one person, and being disciplined by another. Who are you being disciplined by? And who are you discipling?⁷

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.



DEVELOPING

SESSION FOUR: CONTEXT AND ROLES

Developing the missional community context and roles

OPENING PRAYER

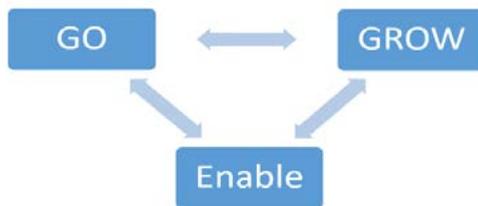
SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

At the completion of this eight week bible study you will be asked if you want to form a Love Life Community, mission community (or whatever you wish to call it). This session will seek to introduce how to develop the context and the kind of roles required to make a missional community function.

1. CONTEXT

There are three spheres of ministry involvement for volunteers in any local congregation.

Missional Ministry Matrix



The overall core purpose of every congregation is to make disciples that make disciples. But what does this look like? At its foundation it means establishing three teams.

- **GO:** a team focused upon seeing people come to Christ anytime (Evangelism)
- **GROW:** a team focused upon growing people in Christ anytime (Pastoral Care)

Love Life Communities are designed to be the core team for focusing completely upon the areas of GO – Evangelism, and the initial stages of GROW - Pastoral Care needed by new believers. However, after new believers have been introduced to a Congregation then an invitation to join a small group designed for on-going growth through bible study and fellowship is required. This is needed to keep the discipleship process going and to help new converts with social inclusion in the wider Congregation. The 2006 and 2011 National Church Life Survey (Operations Survey) reflects that only about 20% of Australian churches have a group or program for new converts or new members.⁸ Therefore, to reach the goal of making disciples

⁸ Sited at <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=640>



who you will also need to set up small groups within your congregation designed for on-going Christian growth and ministry training.

The third sphere of ministry involvement needed to grow a Congregation is called enable.

- **ENABLE:** this refers to the various teams that serve to enable public worship, good governance (administration) and on-going Christian growth resources and fellowship opportunities. The people serving to enable are vital to the on-going health and development of a congregation. If these things are done well then new converts and new members can keep growing in Christ.

2. ROLES

Commonly people assume you have to be a natural evangelist to join a Love Life Community. This is not true. However you do need to have a passion to use your gifts, time and energy to see people discover salvation in Jesus Christ and come into God's family. Practically it does mean giving up doing other ministry within the congregation so that you have the energy margin in your life for relational evangelism.

US based Mission Community *Missio* prescribes the following roles needed in a Love Life Community,

1. **Communication Person:** Someone who will keep the online and phone communication going through emails, web support, etc.
2. **Hospitality Co-coordinator:** This person is generally the one whose house is the warmest. This person is about food, ambiance, and helps create a place of social belonging for the group.
3. **Caregiver:** Someone who naturally has the spiritual mojo to lead discussion, share devotions and care for spiritual needs that come up. Often, many people can share this role so don't lock it in, but designate someone who will keep a pulse and make sure that spiritual growth is happening.
4. **Social Co-coordinator:** This person tends to keep the group moving and always has an ear for social connections, service and blessing opportunities, etc.
5. **Gospel Sharer:** All team members will share the Gospel with people in different ways, this person has an ability and passion to proclaim the Gospel and invite people to receive God's free gift of salvation in Christ alone.

Discuss together where each member feels a natural affinity to serve.”⁹

⁹ This material is adapted from a resource from *Missio* who have produced some really useful resources, based on feedback from starting thousands of Missional Communities - they call them Incarnational Communities. <http://www.missio.us/>



Starting a Love Life Community requires between 3 – 7 people. If you only start with three then some of the five roles described above will need to be combined until you grow (e.g. Hospitality and Communication could be the one person, Caregiver and Social Coordinator could be the one person). If you have more than have 14 adults wanting to start an LLC then immediately form two groups of seven. It is suggested that anyone with a Gospel Sharer role should not have combined roles as this person is a natural evangelist who needs to maximise their time and energy for engaging not yet believers with the Gospel.

In session eight of these studies some practical instruction will be provided for setting up a Love Life Community. Appendix A will help answer many of the practical questions that the group will inevitably have.

INDWELLING THE WORD

Pray together. Then begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud from the New Revised Standard version (NRSV) of the Bible. Do it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 12

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Write your thoughts & reflections here



¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

CONVERSATIONS

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Then as a whole team discuss,

What has your listening to God speaking through his word shown us about our,

Mission – that is, our *purpose*; why God has put us here in our communities?

CONVERSATIONS

What role might you see yourself fulfilling if you joined a Love Life Community?

Is there another role not listed that you think would be needed?

Have you prayed about transitioning from your current ministry role in the Enabling space (Worship and Governance) into a GO (Love. Life Community) ministry role? If so, do you feel the need at this stage to talk this through with your Pastor or another congregational leader?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

DEVELOPING

SESSION FIVE: DISCERNMENT

Developing listening and discerning

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

What is God up to in the world? How can we join God in God's mission?

Experienced church planter Paul Sparks suggests these three strands of listening to discern what God is up to in our time and place.

- a. Listening in Scripture to God's desire for all creation is vital. It calls you to act faithfully in the present even as you long for the promised restoration.
- b. Listening to your own story in light of God's story helps you accept your limitations with gratitude while setting you free to take responsibility for what is uniquely yours. It is the ground for personal meaning-making and vocational clarity.
- c. Listening to the story of your place opens you to the possibility of genuine relational encounter, which is mutually transformative.¹⁰

When meeting together for bible study, prayer and sharing the Love Life Community is constantly engaging in this listening process; to God's Word, one another's stories and to the story of our place; our neighbours and social networks.

Come close, listen carefully: I've never kept secrets from you. I've always been present with you." And now, the Master, God, sends me and his Spirit with this Message from God, your Redeemer, and The Holy of Israel: "I am God, your God, who teaches you how to live right and well. I show you what to do, where to go. If you had listened all along to what I told you, your life would have flowed full like a river. (Isaiah 48:16-19 MSG)

Love Life Community Team Exercise: PRAYER WALK

Intentional, regular, specific prayer for the people you are sharing the Gospel with is a major component of how a Love Life Community becomes effective in reaping the harvest.¹¹

Traditionally we sit in rooms and pray but this can be supplemented by something that many evangelists and church planters find very helpful - prayer walks. Why? Because it is a helpful way of spiritually connecting you with your local neighbourhood.

The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood (John 1.4 Message)

¹⁰ Sparks, Soerens & Friesen 2014, p. 127

¹¹ The Geneva Push Church Planting Report 2016 reflects a much higher success rate amongst church planting teams that engage in intentional, regular prayer walks.



The task is simple. Get on your walking shoes at least once a week, walk your neighbourhood in pairs, talking to God and engaging with anyone you meet who may be open to saying 'hi'.

- Pray asking God to give you His heart and perspective for the people of your community or relational network. Wherever and whenever you pray, prayer improves your sensitivity to the movement of the Spirit in people's lives.
- Pray asking for God to enable you to be sensitive to the opportunities that He will bring your way to sow the seeds of the Gospel and participate in the movement of God's Spirit in the lives of people you meet.
- Pray asking God to pour out His Spirit on the next person (or family) that He is asking you to invite into God's family. Remember, specific prayers get specific answers. Present the names of specific people who need to become followers of Jesus.

When you meet as a Love Life Community always spend a few minutes sharing about what you saw, sensed, felt, thought, and who you encountered on your prayer walk.

Remember the Holy Spirit is working in so many people's lives all around you.

Counting against restrictivism is not only God's nature as Father and the universality of the atonement of Christ but also the ever-present Spirit, who can foster transforming friendships with God anywhere and everywhere. The Holy Spirit is present in the farthest reaches of this wonderful, ambiguous world. The Lord and giver of life broods over the depths of creation and renews the face of the land. The Spirit is present everywhere, both transcending and enfolding all that is, present and at work in the vast range of happenings in the universe. The Spirit meets people not only in religious spheres but everywhere—in the natural world, in the give-and-take of relationships, in the systems that structure human life. No nook or cranny is untouched by the finger of God. His warm breath streams toward humanity with energy and life.¹²

Remember the process of listening, discerning and acting is never really finished. Nor is it always so cyclical. It's not as if there is a point where you can check off the listening box and forget about it.¹³ Thus we need an LLC to establish this positive habit of a continuous cycle of listening, discerning and participating in what God is up to in the world?

¹² Ibid. 197

¹³ Sparks, Soerens, Friesen 2014, pp. 131-132



INDWELLING THE WORD

Pray together. Then begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud from the NRSV. Do it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: Luke 10:1-12

¹After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' ¹²I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

Write your thoughts & reflections here



CONVERSATIONS

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Then as a whole team discuss,

What has your listening to God speaking through his word shown us about our,

Mission – that is, our *purpose*; why God has put us here in our communities?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

DEVELOPING

SESSION SIX: EVANGELISM

Developing team capacity for social inclusion and Gospel invitation

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

So far in these studies we have discussed improving the team's effectiveness in relational evangelism through,

- Developing a biblical understanding of our purpose (session one),
- Defining team member's roles (session four) and,
- Developing Christ like attitudes towards lost people (session four).

In this session we will add to this picture by discussing some practical ways to develop the team's capacity for social inclusion and Gospel invitation.

1. Setting Up The Rhythm for Social Inclusion

Love Life Communities turn relational evangelism and discipleship into a reality rather than simply an ideal. This happens because the social inclusion of enquirers or new believers is done in ways that are relevant to them. This requires setting up a Love Life Community which is flexible and adaptable but also living in a consistent rhythm of missional life together. An established rhythm of life together as a Love Life Community for bible study, prayer, listening and discerning was introduced in session five, but now requires further detail. Here are some practical suggestions for setting this up? (Many more practical suggestions are given in Appendix A).

Love Life Communities Weekly Rhythm: Love Life Community (LLC's) may meet whenever it suits them. In many cases Sunday is the best day. Start the day by attending Sunday morning worship in your home Congregation, then meet afterwards in a home for a meal, play, bible study, prayer and debriefing about who you are reaching with the Gospel. This debriefing is a conversation which features dialogue about specific people you know who are on their way to God and discerning together how to provide them with appropriate stepping stones to move them forward on their spiritual journey. This means that LLC group members are not only witnessing individually but also with one or more members of the Love Life Community to pairs or groups of people who are not yet believers. The Lutheran Church of Australia NEW Evangelism workshops trains you how to do discern and define the stepping stones people need you to provide.

Once the Love Life Community realises a few converts then they add to this timeframe a discipleship session for new believers. For example, if you decide the easiest time to meet as an LLC is on Sundays, then the group members Sunday schedule could look like the following:

- **Worship at church** – depending upon when your worship is held, for example 9am – 10.30am
- **Love Life Community Discipleship bible study/prayer/conversations** -11am – 12 noon - Meet in a home or other venue (e.g. a park with swings for the children). This is the



team member's fellowship, bible study, prayer, de-briefing session and is closed to new believers and sojourners (not-yet-Christians).

- **Love Life Community Open House Lunch** - 12noon – 2pm – including the Love Life Community members, friends who are not yet believers and new believers. This could also be in a park or local café.
- **New Believers and Sojourners bible study/prayer/conversations** - 1pm – 2pm - Some of the team to meet with new believers and enquirers for bible study and pastoral care and other team members hang out with the lunch visitors who are not yet believers or not yet desiring to accept an invitation to bible study.

The wisdom of doing all of this on Sundays is that many people, especially young families who you will reach with the Gospel, are more likely to be open to attending either a Worship service or related event on a Sunday rather than during the week.

This may appear to be a big time commitment on Sundays but as outlined previously (Introduction) Love Life Community members should have no other ministry related responsibilities. You ideally have no responsibilities in assisting at the Worship event or during the week in any other church related commitments. This is because you have allocated any extra energy and time in your life for doing one thing - relational evangelism.

2. Gospel Invitation

The LCA NEW Evangelism workshops unpack how to invite people into God's family more fully. Therefore, this section is not so much about the particular skills needed to develop the LLC's capacity for effective Gospel invitation but rather the practical lifestyle issues encountered in doing effective relational evangelism.

Relational evangelism takes place 24/7! However, it doesn't have to be a burden on your time if you do relational evangelism by including people into the normal rhythms of your weekly schedule. For example, if you go to the Gym, a Playgroup, play a sport, walk your dog locally, go shopping, spend time eating lunch at work or school with someone, these are all opportunities to fold into your normal schedule meaningful relationships that become the context for Gospel sharing and discipleship of new believers.

Love Life Communities break this realistic rhythm if they try to also serve in a ministry in the Enabling (church) space (see session 4), or, if they get drawn into doing 'outreach programs' which have great goals but often end up simply providing religious good and services for a local community based upon felt needs. Many experienced evangelists and church planters know that this can often spell the death of evangelistic effectiveness in either an existing congregation or a new church plant. This is because the energy margin of the team gets taken up with running the outreach program, leaving little time for actually reaping the harvest through relational evangelism. In the short term outreach programs can make the team feel like they are doing something, but it can too often become an energy and time wasting exercise. Remember, if you offer the public bread and circuses you will always gather a crowd of consumers. If you take the time to slow down, meet as a Love Life Community for listening and discerning what God is up to, discover Gods activity it in the flow of your everyday life, then you will never have to create opportunities for witnessing as you take the ones God gives you.



In this ministry of relational evangelism flexibility and availability are essential as opposed to being committed to a singular 'outreach program'. You need the time and energy to hear the call of Jesus to relate to the one lost sheep God is wanting you to connect with next. Unless such intentional social inclusion and patient Gospel invitation occurs, fruitful relational evangelism may remain an ideal rather than a reality in your life.

INDWELLING THE WORD

Pray together. Then begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud from the NRSV. Do it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14 – 6:2

¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Write your thoughts & reflections

¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

Write your thoughts & reflections

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's co-workers we urge you not to _____



receive God's grace in vain. ²For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

Write your thoughts & reflections

CONVERSATIONS

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Then as a whole team discuss,

What has your listening to God speaking through his word shown us about our,

Mission – that is, our *purpose*; why God has put us here in our communities?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

GROWING

SESSION SEVEN: DISCIPLESHIP

Growing skills in making disciples that make disciples

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

The turning point season or moment in a person's life that we label 'Christian conversion' is just the beginning of a life long journey of discovering who they are in Christ. This is why discipleship is the task of forming people over time through consistently inviting them further into Gods transformational adventure and including them in yours!

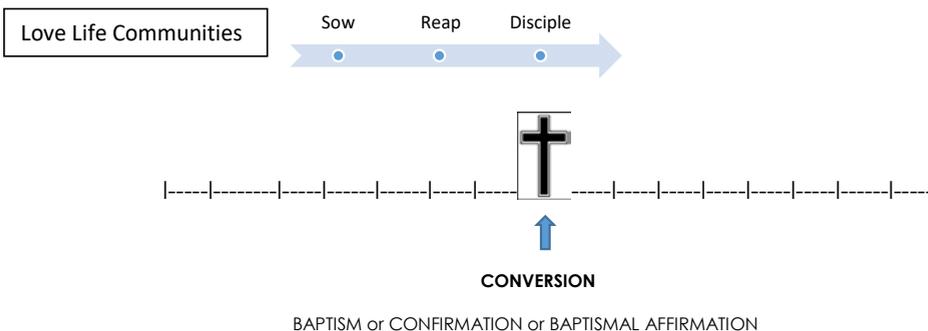
We may gather many converts but not grow many disciples

Previously (session one) we described the role of Love Life Communities as bringing people to Christ through relational evangelism.¹⁴ The aim of evangelism is not simply conversion but the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ. Following Christ is therefore a life of continuous co-learning about how to grow in Christ and how to lead others to live in the promises of God in Christ. When Love Life Communities succeed in reaping the harvest, new converts experience a small group environment that commences the discipleship process with them, however the goal is to integrate them relationally into an on-going discipleship process. Therefore every congregation needs to develop small groups that aim to build up people in Christ post conversion. GROW Ministries provides plenty of resources for families to do discipleship at home. Further small group bible study resources need to be provided or at least sourced by every Pastor for their congregation. Without this intentional continuation of the discipleship pathway for people post-conversion you will gather many converts but not grow many disciples.

Diagram 1. **Conversion Pathway**

EVANGELISM (Sowing & Reaping)

CHURCH LIFE (Worship & Serve)



¹⁴ In depth understanding of how this occurs can be pursued by your Love Life Community doing the Lutheran Church of Australia's NEW Evangelism twelve week series.



Therefore what gets added to the Discipleship Pathway (Diagram 1) now is the place of the existing congregation in growing new converts brought in by the Love Life Communities.

Although some new converts may take time to come to and feel they belong within the wider congregation, in time it can happen. This is somewhat easier for converts who are what our Lutheran Confessions describe as a 'reconvert'. This is someone already baptised who experiences an awakening of their faith in Christ. Often such people are more familiar with and accepting of church culture. On the other hand converts who have never been to church (a growing number in our society) often take time to move towards attending Sunday worship and joining the congregation because they feel insecure in an unfamiliar setting. Patience is required by Love Life Community members and the congregation to which they belong when this apprehension towards attending Sunday worship is observed amongst new converts.

What can all congregation members do to assist new believers moving into an existing congregation?

1. **Pray:** When we rely upon God's Spirit to draw people into fellowship with God's family in the same way He draws them to God in the first place, then it happens organically. Therefore, existing congregation members can pray the Lord of the harvest to not only send forth labourers into the fields of harvest to reap, but also to send pastoral carers to disciple these new believers. **Spiritual Health Warning:** such prayer requests often receive an answer in the form of a mandate from the Spirit to be the answer to that prayer.
2. **Socialisation:** If the receiving congregation goes beyond the initial welcome and actually integrate people socially, then the evangelism work of the Love Life Communities is more likely to grow an existing congregation. "A culture of inclusion is as important as a culture of inviting if new people are to stay, and eventually consider themselves belonging to the church. Churches that provide ways to intentionally include new people have significantly more success in retaining them (*Enriching Church Life*, p28). The National Church Life Survey Operations Survey asked whether a church had planned procedures to follow up new people and help them to become integrated into the congregation. The results for churches in Australia and other comparisons are shown here."¹⁵

Table 6: Percentage of local churches with planned procedures designed to help integrate new people.

	All NCLS in 2006 %	All NCLS in 2001 %	All Prot in 2006 %
Follow-up visits by clergy or other people from church	67	67	70
People extend hospitality and invite them for meals	50	45	55
Group or program for new Christians or new members	20	18	22
Invitation to join a small group, fellowship or similar	57	52	59
Invitation to take up a task in the life of the church	43	35	42
Other	3	4	3
<i>At least one of the above</i>	86	84	88
Source: 2006 NCLS Operations Survey Based on Operations Surveys responses from the following number of locations:	4,400	6,148	4,212

This table reflects that only about 20% of Australian churches have a group or program for new converts or new members. Could this be a reason why so few congregations are successfully socializing new people into church life?

- 3. Teach them the dance moves:** Increasingly in our society new believers have little previous exposure to church culture; our history, liturgy, biblical language, rituals, signs, symbols and governance. It is vital that during the initial stages of discipleship these things, alongside the Gospel itself, are patiently explained so that the rich meaning, significance and benefits of belonging to a congregation can be understood.
- 4. Cultural intelligence training for church leaders:** Increasingly in the Australian and New Zealand context it will be necessary to contextualise ministry styles amongst the cultures and sub-cultures within the majority of the population (Anglo-Celts and Anglo Saxons) in the same way we have to with minority cultures. Therefore cultural intelligence training for congregational leaders is needed to ensure that local congregations develop ways of doing Lutheran worship and discipleship that remain true to the Gospel and the Confessions of the Church while being contextualised for the people being reached. This is available through the LCA Board for Local Mission NEW Evangelism workshops, specifically Evangelism workshop 4.

INDWELLING THE WORD

Pray together. Then begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud from the NRSV. Do it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: Philippians 3

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence.



If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:
⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

¹⁵ All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their



destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

CONVERSATIONS

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Then as a whole team discuss,

What has your listening to God speaking through his word shown us about our,

Mission – that is, our *purpose*; why God has put us here in our communities?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

GROWING

SESSION EIGHT: PLANTING

Growing a people movement that simultaneously builds up existing congregations and starts new ones

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

In the Australian and New Zealand context congregations tend to grow as the result of three things;

Organic growth – church members have offspring – approximately 52% of church growth.

Transfer growth – Christians from other churches transferring in – approximately 41%.

Newcomer growth – New believers in Christ – approximately 7%.

As Love Life Communities reap the harvest and the congregation grows, the possibility exists to either just keep drawing people into the one Congregation, or, when various factors warrant it, to set up new church plants as a spillover effect.

The church planting (forming new congregations) option is worth considering for the following reasons.

1. **If you want to realise a greater overall number of new converts.** Church plants have greater average levels of new converts than churches undertaking other mission strategies. In mainstream churches (e.g. Lutherans) church plants achieve 32% new converts whereas established congregations at best achieve 7%. Clearly church plants achieve 25% more converts than do established congregations.
2. **If you want to be more effective in evangelising the next generation.** Not only are newly planted congregations realizing more converts, they are reaching a younger demographic with more than 69% aged between 15-49 years, compared with only 48% in congregations generally. There is also a slightly higher proportion of males in church plants.
3. **If you want to be more socially inclusive.** Church plants will often involve the break-up of existing networks of relationships among attenders, making it easier for newcomers to be included.
4. **If you don't want to get too big.** For various reasons you may decide as a congregation that you don't want to grow beyond 200 regular men, women and children. It can be argued that around 200 you are big enough to be sustainable yet small enough to still know most of the people in the congregation.
5. **If you cannot or don't want to face a building program.** If you grow to a point whereby the existing congregation's venue has reached its capacity and you don't want to or legally cannot extend the building facilities, then church planting is a good option.



Many growing congregations however accommodate growth through multiple weekend worship services (e.g. two Sunday am, one Sunday pm and one Friday pm). This can mean for example that a church building that seats 120 people can accommodate a congregation of up to 480-600 regulars (people that attend at least once every three weeks). Clearly at that size you would require two full time pastors. However, for the reasons already mentioned you may sense that starting new congregations is a more effective way of realising the maximum number of converts through your congregations God given time, energy and resources.

6. **If you find the style of ministry in the existing congregation too narrowly focused.** In the last session we said that as we have in the past, in the future we will need to develop ways of doing Lutheran worship and discipleship that remain true to the Gospel and the Confessions of the Church while being contextualised; conducted in a language and cultural style that is applicable to those who we are reaching with the Gospel. The need to plant new congregations within the structures of an existing congregation becomes most obvious if we effectively bring people to Christ from culture and language groups other than the dominant one in the existing congregation. What may be less obvious is to recognise the need to do this with converts from subcultures within the dominant (e.g. Anglo-Saxon) culture. The planting of a new congregation in this situation allows the existing one to maintain a style of ministry relevant to its needs, whilst creating a new situation most relevant to the style of ministry discerned as most effective to converts from various sub-cultures (or demographics). For example if the existing congregation is dominated by young families who find that one or more of the Love Life Communities starts to reap a harvest amongst a much older generation in let's say an aged care facility. It will be necessary to consider offering a worship style, service time and venue that could be significantly different from what the existing congregation enjoys. In such a case for example you may opt to meet in a room or Chapel at the Aged Care facility not your church, sing well known hymns instead of contemporary songs, and not offer a children's talk or program during worship. Of course the generations in this example may be reversed, with an older generation realising the need to change their ministry style in order to effectively reach young families. This is why Love Life Communities, whether in an existing Congregation or in a new Church plant are not as bound to previous conventions of congregational life and are in a better position to experiment. (Bellamy & Castle, 2003, p.17)¹⁶

These pragmatic reasons for having a church planting vision incorporated into a Congregations vision for growth are common sense. Discerning how the Spirit is leading in these matters is always essential. We can ask God for a 'word of wisdom' (1 Cor. 12) in every circumstance.

It could be argued that every congregation should have a vision for growth through reaping the harvest. As Missiologist David Hesselgrave asserts,

Paul considered the preaching of the gospel and the establishment of churches as his primary task. The biblical record leaves no room for thinking

¹⁶ The more recent studies by NCLS (2014) only confirm these previous findings.



that either Paul or the members of his team were basically engaged in raising living standards, ameliorating social conditions, imparting secular knowledge, or dispensing aid from previously established churches. There can be no doubt that allegiance to Christ on the part of converts in the churches entailed these effects as by-products of faith even to the sending of needed aid back to the Jerusalem church (a kind of reverse flow). That the missionaries were concerned about social relationships, and about minds and bodies as well as souls, is patently true. But Paul's primary mission was established when the gospel was preached, people were converted, and churches were established (Hesselgrave, D. J, 2000, p.24).

The Apostle Paul used an agricultural image to portray the concept of starting new congregations, *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow* (1 Corinthians 3:6). This planting and watering of communities of disciples that God is growing is where we get the concept of 'planting churches'.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28.19-20)

Some people feel that the Church is dead and have abandoned the institutional church. Others think that the Church has become irrelevant to the mission of God. However research by Australian National Church Life provides evidence that local churches remain the key instrument that God uses to bring in the harvest. The evidence reflects that people who come to faith in Australia do so primarily through attending a local church. The research also indicates that church plants (new congregations) are the most effective churches for reaching people with the Gospel and growing the Church through new converts.

When you think of church planting, don't think of another option in a shopping mall food court, think of a new farm in a starving country.

This doesn't mean that we abandon putting energy into existing congregations in preference for planting new ones. On the contrary, every child needs to be born from a Mother. Thus every new congregation needs to be birthed by an existing one who is willing to become an effective 'Mother Congregation', or what we commonly call a Sending Church. So if you are currently a small congregation (e.g. between 20 – 60 people), mostly of an older demographic and concerned about the future, don't give up. Perhaps between three to seven of you will now form a Love Life Community where you spend time praying for people you know who need the invitation of God to salvation. Pray also for the Lord of the harvest to send forth more labourers to help you reap the harvest and welcome them when He answers that prayer. Continue seeking help from the LCA Board for Local Mission and get ready to receive the harvest. Perhaps through doing this you will realise that it may be possible to achieve a much higher rate of growth through conversions that you ever thought possible. If established congregations at best grow by 7% through new converts, why not start praying about, training for and preparing for the kind of harvest new church plants get -- 32%?

If you are sensing this call, make an appointment soon to talk to your Pastor about becoming part of your congregation's first Love Life Community. Remember this will mean phasing out of the ministry you are currently doing to take on this new calling. If you don't sense this ministry is



for you then tell your Pastor and the other group members who have been doing these studies with you. Perhaps God wants you to continue in whatever ministry you've done in the past or even some other new role in the Enabling aspect of congregational life (e.g. governance or worship). Either way tell your Pastor how your feeling and seek his prayerful guidance.

INDWELLING THE WORD

Pray together. Then begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud from the NRSV. Do it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: Acts 11

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God.² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him,³ saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?"⁴ Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying,⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me.⁶ As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air.⁷ I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.'⁸ But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'⁹ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.'¹⁰ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven.¹¹ At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were.¹² The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.¹³ He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter;¹⁴ he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.'¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning.¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'¹⁷ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?"¹⁸ When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

Write your thoughts & reflections here

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews.²⁰ But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch,



spoke to the Hellenists^[a] also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. ²¹The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. ²²News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; ²⁴for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord.²⁵Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with^[a] the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.”

Write your thoughts & reflections here

²⁷At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius. ²⁹The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers^[a] living in Judea; ³⁰this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

CONVERSATIONS

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said.



Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Then as a whole team discuss,

What has your listening to God speaking through his word shown us about our,

Mission – that is, our *purpose*; why God has put us here in our communities?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

Appendix A – What Next? How to form a Love Life Community¹⁷

Talk to your Pastor. The first thing to do is get together with your Pastor to discuss how to form a permanent Love Life Community. Specifically use the practical information below as navigation points for your discussion.

1. Who should join a Love Life Community?

Refer to the section on ROLES in SESSION FOUR: CONTEXT AND ROLES to identify what your role in a Love Life Community might be.

In general you definitely want to avoid people joining the group who are either Pharisaic bible thumpers; people that would rather teach than listen, or who have a tendency to be judgemental.

The types of people you want are hospitable, warm and winsome with people who are not yet believers, not freaked out by alcohol, swearing, or weird spiritual philosophies, and who are loving and helpful. Introverts can be great because they are great listeners, but they also have to be relationally warm.

2. How many people should we start with? When do we multiply?

We recommend that you start with 3-7 people. Most communities will start to be too big at around 15- 20 simply because that's all that you can fit in a home or around tables at a local coffee shop. If you start with too many Christians, the weight of that will make newcomers uncomfortable so start with a small number to avoid that factor.

Unlike most small groups, we don't recommend that you multiply based on getting to a certain number. Relationships and spiritual trust take a long time to form - usually, at least a year. Therefore, to just clinically multiply based on numbers fails to take the relational connections into account. We recommend that all groups look and pray to expand and multiply but that it should be based on a new "mission." For instance, if one couple says, "I really feel it's time for us to go on a new mission and form a new Love Life Community for our friends that live across town." That's a great reason to split off between 3-7 people.

3. How important is proximity for Love Life Communities?

Obviously, the closer you live, the better it will be. Spontaneous life together is critical to the natural flow of a community so work hard to be as close as you can. However, every city and culture is different. People connect through their work associations, recreation, kids athletic teams, etc and often people are used to driving 30 minutes to link these relationships. So some Love Life Communities can function quite well with members living further apart, especially in country areas, but we still feel that there's a 30-minute drive point. We would recommend you avoid trying hold people together if they have more than a 30-minute drive. Urban environments where people live in the same neighbourhood work the

¹⁷ This material is adapted from a resource from *Missio* who have produced some really useful resources, based on feedback from starting thousands of Missional Communities - they call them Incarnational Communities. <http://www.missio.us/>



best and suburban environments where people can get to each other within 5-10 minutes also works well.

4. What about kids? (This is the most asked question)

As we think about parenting our little ones and integrating them, we've learned they can be a huge asset but also our biggest dilemma. On a philosophical note, we have to remember that our Christian faith is an eastern faith and most eastern cultures have learned much better than we "westerners" how to integrate children into the spiritual lives of adults. Old Testament and New Testament writings indicate that parents are to pass down the story and experience of the Christian faith to their children, not the children's ministry at one's local church. Here are some practical ways we've seen this work.

- Have different Love Life Communities take turns babysitting each other kids.
- Have older kids (teens) watch the younger one's while the big people have their discussion time.
- Learn to integrate the kids during parties or "mission" times where you're out helping people together. This gives them memories of a much more holistic Christian life.
- Let the little kids run the Love Life Communities once every month or two. For example, one set of third graders created invites for other kids at the school to come by and watch Shreck on the side of the house using their parent's projector and also made invites for the parents to come over for coffee and refreshments. 60 kids showed up and as many parents! Encourage your little ones in praying for their friends and finding ways to be on mission with you. Even let them lead!

5. What about teenagers in a Love Life Community?

We find that middle school and high school students thrive in a Love Life Community (mission community). They love to be a part of an adult community to do service projects, helping ministry and also love a good party. Reality is, however, that most don't necessarily want to be with their parents for communion or bible study type of activities. Here are a few options.

If you're in an existing youth group context, consider encouraging them to take leadership in forming a Youth Love Life Community. Some youth groups actually have moved their program-oriented youth ministry to a Mission Community focus and have adult mentors lead the communities. We also find that if the teens love being with their parents, even for spiritual study you can easily integrate and even form communities around the needs and desires of teens. If your Congregation or Parish doesn't have a Youth Group then encourage your teens to be a part of a Youth Group in a good church of another denomination in your area.

**Addendum for teens.* As with any community, we all have to learn how to interact with non-Christians. Some teens are too weak and may fall to the temptations associated with deep integration with unchurched teens, but many teens have strong values and can dive deep into the culture of their friends. For example, one group of teens took the incarnational call very seriously and asked their parents if they could be at all the parties they hear are going on so that they could make sure their friends don't drink and drive or get too out of hand.

They committed to go as a servant team together in groups of at least 3-8 students and they eventually became known as the kids that were keeping an eye on the others. Parents and



even other teens started to call to ask if this servant team was going to be at the party and they were responsible to drive the kid's home, call parents if they needed help, and actually became highly valued and respected by even the "party-kids." This is what we should all be aiming for our children. Part of our role is to protect them, and the other part is to prepare them to live a life influencing culture instead of being influenced. Have this talk and ask them to decide where they feel they are at.

6. How do we schedule Love Life Communities in the context of our Congregation?

It's up to you and your Pastor. In SESSION SIX – EVANGELISM under the heading 'Rhythmn', it is suggested that the schedule of a Love Life Community could be as follows.

Sunday Worship attendance followed by,

- a. Love Life Community Discipleship bible study/prayer/conversations** - 11am – 12 noon - Meet in a home or other venue (e.g. a park with swings for the children). This is the team member's fellowship, bible study, prayer, and debriefing session and is closed to new believers and sojourners (not-yet-Christians).
- b. Love Life Community Open House Lunch** - 12noon – 2pm – including the Love Life Community members, friends who are not yet believers and new believers.
- c. New Believers and Sojourners bible study/prayer/conversations** - 1pm – 2pm - Some of the team to meet with new believers and enquirers for bible study and pastoral care and other team members hang out with the lunch visitors who are not yet believers or not yet desiring to accept an invitation to bible study.

Even these sessions should be a time of growth for Love Life Community team members who may already be mature believers. Here's a truism. Christians struggle with the same things non-Christians do and visa-versa. (How to parent, marriage issues, financial stress, fighting inner demons and vices, depression, dealing with in-laws, and everything related to developing our faith, spirituality, etc.) Once you settle this issue, you can simply dive into scripture and struggle with it and anyone can be in the room.

Beyond the Love Life Community bible studies doubtless your home Congregation will have other Christian Growth courses and recommended Ecumenical events to attend for further growth. If someone wants more intense bible teaching, simply ask your Pastor and or suggest that they download sermons from the Lutheran Church of Australia's Media Ministry, attend conferences and courses provided through the various Lutheran Church of Australia departments (e.g. Board for Local Mission, Grassroots, Australian Lutheran College, Grow Ministries, etc). You don't have to try to be a seminary class! Remember a Love Life Community exists to lead people to Christ and assist them in the initial stages of discipleship. When they are ready for the next step in their 'conversion process' a new believer will be taken through either a Baptism or Confirmation class by your Pastor. After that it's up to your Pastor and other congregation members to assist the new believers in their Christian growth.

The Board for Local Mission will be releasing two new courses designed for new believers.



New Life is an introduction to Baptism and Communion and will act as either a good replacement for traditional Baptism/Confirmation classes or as a good pre-requisite.



New Life is an introduction to the relational purpose of being Church together and serving God in our life's vocation.

Available from the Lutheran Church of Australia, Board for Local Mission.

7. How do I navigate moving my friends from our Love Life Community to the larger Congregation?

Some people will surprise you and come quickly into Sunday worship with you, others will take lots of time even after their Baptism. Some will prefer the home based intimate setting of a Love Life Community and take time to travel the cultural distance it often takes 'unchurched' people to adjust to sitting in rows listening to someone they probably don't know yet up the front speaking, singing songs they've never heard, following an order of service they are unsure of, and meeting lots of people that are new to them. Don't underestimate how overwhelming socially this can be for some people (especially introverts) and underwhelming for others who may not feel as excited or spiritually stimulated by the various aspects of worship we feel at home with and inspired by. Remember these people are both 'new babes in Christ' and quite possibly very new to any church culture.

If your gathered community or "church service" is appropriate you'll have no problem inviting people to get to know the larger church community. Just let it happen naturally. But if you're concerned that your sojourning friends would be freaked out or turned off by the corporate atmosphere, you're wise to keep separation, at least for now. You may need to bring up concerns with your Pastor so they can address issues that keep the integration from happening. Sadly, if the larger congregation simply won't work, you're going to have to make a hard decision because you're called to mission to the world and that must take precedence over "getting people to the existing church." The best solution is to consider planting a new congregation as well as growing the existing one. This will solve this issue without unnecessarily disrupting people who prefer one over the other. This is a positive interdependent 'both and' not 'either or' solution.

8. What happens if an enquirer or new believer asks weird questions during a Bible study?

How do you study scripture if everyone has weird or alternative beliefs?

By the time someone moves from the relational connection to the spiritual aspects, they will be ready to process the scriptures. You don't need to lighten anything up, but you do need to be careful, sensitive and dignified in how you process their questions, and concerns. As your group is walking through the scriptures, if a weird question comes up or they share beliefs that are not in line with that of the Christians, the best response is to listen, thank them for sharing their thoughts, and then say, "as we're trying to understand the Christian faith, it's challenging because it teaches this".....and then share the scriptural thoughts. As long as you don't come across offended or arrogant, you'll have a great dialogue. In the case of those who are against the Christian doctrine, they simply won't be there or they'll leave after their first time. If they keep coming, it means they want to be challenged so just do so as a learner and someone who is struggling through it as opposed to coming across like they're idiots for believing what they believe.

Remember, if a sojourner (a not-yet-Christian) has actually come to your New Believers and Sojourners bible study/prayer/conversations, it means they want to know what a Christian believes and struggles with. So be yourself, and be a learner of scripture with them instead of coming across as the guru bible teacher of scripture and everyone should be able to go deep and also be appropriate with sojourners.

9. What do we do when some of our missional people start to slack off on missional living?

Missional life is hard and people will have good months and bad months. Think of ways to inspire people toward a more consistent focus. Consider sending out weekly encouragement emails and use your weekly or bi-weekly rhythm to let people assess their own struggles or successes. Remember, this a lifestyle not a program so give grace and only in the event that someone clearly doesn't want to participate, should you call them out. We always say "raise the bar" on the front end while you're recruiting people, but lower it on the back end so you don't become a legalistic experience.

10. What about alcohol?

As with any issue of life, many things can be dangerous but God doesn't outlaw them. For instance, woman can be dangerous for men, men for women, money can be dangerous to people, and even food. But God doesn't forbid them. He just asks us to learn how to navigate them. Alcohol will probably be the main struggle your community will have to work through. Here are a few suggestions.

If the people you're on mission for are recovering alcoholics, we suggest you have a "dry community." That is, we would avoid having people bring alcohol to meetings, etc. If there is some sojourners who aren't struggling with this, then feel free to have a glass of wine on other times where it's not the whole group. In many cultures if you were invited to come over and they served wine, it would be inappropriate NOT to receive their invitation. However, like any other freedom, be careful, but don't make it more of an issue than any other freedom you've got to learn to be careful with.

11. What are some ideas for relational evangelism which can be done by the Love Life Community?

The *SENT Seeking the Orphans of God* by Dean Eaton book and small group studies will enable your Love Life Community to be trained in relational evangelism. Now available from Amazon in hard copy or as a free E-book through the Lutheran Church of Australia or go to: <http://www.lca.org.au/sent.html>

In brief, however, please don't dive quickly into doing programs. Most people strike out too far and too fast in getting the whole team to do something together. They try to move an entire small group downtown to help the homeless, or give food away at a food shelter. These can be good, but they tend to be unrealistic and don't sustain over time. Teach people that their "mission" each month should be helping practical needs of our friends. Whenever you get together ask, "Has God presented any need to you through the relationships you currently have?" If not, then surely you can pick a more general way to bless the down and out, but we find that people become more organic and intuitive if your first line of offence is to meet the needs in your present spheres of relationships. For instance if you find out a friend lost their job, or got sick, then that becomes your mission for the month.

12. How should we handle collecting and blessing people with financial help?

Encourage people to continue to grow in their understanding and commitment to trusting God with their money, but we allow them freedom to give through their communities to practical needs or to the main church gathering. We find that people enjoy both and realize that it's a joy to bless people spontaneously as needs come up, but it's also deeply meaningful to give to a larger vision and support the whole congregation.

13. What's the best way to confront major lifestyle issues? Both Saint and Sojourners.

The scriptures teach Christians to hold each other accountable to lifestyle and sin issues, but not to hold sojourners accountable. This is a bit tricky but can be natural if sojourners start to integrate in. They will hear the Christians processing issues of holiness and lifestyle issues and hopefully begin to take their cues from the group. Once they begin to follow Jesus their behaviour issues will change naturally as the group interacts. If someone however, is clearly sinning it affects the whole community so authenticity requires that you confront in love and hope it changes. In the case that someone wants to continue in the group but won't submit to basic and healthy scriptural advice and wisdom, then you'll have to ask them to leave and you must explain that the witness of the true gospel is compromised with them in an unrepentant condition. This should be a last resort so don't consider every transgression a reason to boot someone out. Most of life is about becoming a disciple and people respond very well when confronted in love.

14. What happens the first time the new Love Life Community meets?

Come together for a shared meal and open dialogue. Discuss group members' functions:

- a. Who will lead (navigate) the bible study discussions each week?
- b. Who will host by providing a venue (their home), or finding a suitable venue (e.g. Café) each week?

- 
- c. Who will communicate with all group members on-going? For example sending a reminder email or sms as to time, venue, and other necessary arrangements.

POSTSCRIPT

God is on mission. God is the true Evangelist. He seeks his lost children who are already in the Covenant (Baptised), "For thus says the Lord God, "I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among the scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep... I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again" (Ezekiel 34:11, 12, 16). We see Jesus doing this with Jews such as Zacchaeus calling him back into the Covenant, proclaiming, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). We see him seeking those who are as yet outside of the Covenant (unbaptised) such as the non-Jewish Samaritan woman at Jacobs Well in John 4.

Wherever Jesus went and whoever he met he *announced the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* Today we are invited to participate with him in reaping this harvest. He said to his disciples, "*The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields*" (Matthew 9.35-38 NLT).

Some have responded to this call. *After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us* (1 Corinthians 3.5 NLT).

- Are you one of Gods servants who desires to be someone through whom people believe the Good News? Is evangelism *the work the Lord is giving you?*
- Could your congregation develop its capacity to receive new converts and effectively disciple them?
- Is it possible that your congregations could transition from telling individuals that they must go into the world alone and evangelise to developing a local evangelism team; a Love Life Community?

Just as we need small groups for edifying people who are in Christ, we also need small groups dedicated to bringing people into Christ. Developing this new kind of small group in your congregation who bring people into Christ has been the aim of these studies.

Lastly, Love Life Communities in any context – whether in a new church plant or an existing congregation - find it is easy to overestimate what can be achieved in one year but underestimate what can be achieved in five in their mission. Be patient. Trust God and go reap the harvest.

Love Life. Enjoy the journey!

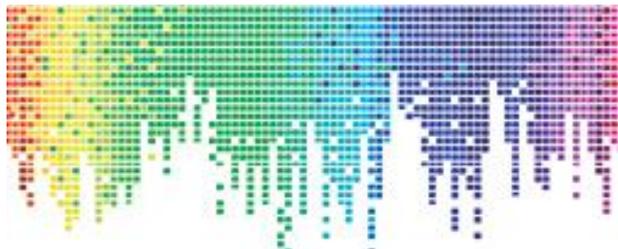
Dean Eaton



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RENEW

MISSIONAL LEADERSHIP

**Opening the conversation about how leaders develop
Congregations to echo God's invitation to the world and live as a
sign and foretaste of the Kingdom of God**





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INTRODUCTION

RENEW Missional Leadership

Upon completing the Missional Leadership devotions it is expected that the participant will be introduced to,

- how leaders embody the change they want to see happen
- understand the differences between evangelism and mission
- set up a structure for making disciples who make disciples
- facilitate training and support for the church to reap and receive the harvest
- develop the skills to discern and plan the developmental steps God desires in your particular context.
- leverage the supportive resources of the Lutheran Church of Australia to Go and Grow

These devotions are designed to be used for the period of devotions already set aside in your scheduled leadership meetings during the year. Each person should read and reflect upon the devotion prior to the meeting to maximise the discussion opportunity. In this series we call the discussion questions 'conversation'. This is because this material aims to start a cycle of conversation that commences with the individual leader and God, develops with the leadership team, continued in the ministry setting, reflected upon together with God, leading to discernment and fruit bearing. This action-reflection cycle of conversation is the first step in developing your leadership team's capacity to improve your Congregations local mission.



Grow and *Go* are ongoing tasks that intertwine. There is no linear sequence that says first we *grow* until we reach maturity, after which we begin to *go* into the world. If we wait until we feel ready, most of us will never *go*. Rather it is **as we go that we grow**. We don't seek to learn a whole lot of things just in case we need them, but as we *go* we discover what we need to study and how we need to be equipped and so we *grow*. As Paul says to Philemon, "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." [NIV v6]



DEVOTIONS

NUMBER ONE: **RENEW MISSIONAL MINISTRY**

Readings: Ephesians 4.11-16; Hebrews 6.1-12; 1 Timothy 4.16

Enter the mission of God

Everything we do as the Church is a participation in the mission of God. Evangelism is the Church echoing Gods invitation to the world and living as a sign and foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

You are a missional leader because you are on mission with God. You lead a Congregation or Parish already engaged in God's mission in the world. The good news is that God wants to take you deeper into mission. To bear more fruit. To reap a greater harvest. To be awakened, renewed and engaged in the fullness of the blessing of Christ (Romans 15.29).

The most high impact change that can occur in the identity of a church leadership team is when they see themselves as no longer being 'elected officials' or nominated 'program directors', but rather as a gift of Jesus Christ to the church; equippers of Gods people to do the work of ministry, to enter the mission of God in the world (see Ephesians 4, I Corinthians 12-14; Romans 12.3-8). Therefore, the primary role of servant leaders entering the mission of God is to enable others to do so. This occurs when leaders:

- **EMBODY the change they want to see happen.** The relational health and spiritual vitality of the leadership of a Congregation or Parish can determine what gets perpetuated into the life of new converts and the next generation of church members. This is important because, how the leadership goes is how the church goes. How goes the church, is how goes the mission. But where does relational health and spiritual vitality of the leadership come from?

A man in the USA attempted to keep bees in the middle of one of the big American cities. In his early bee-keeping trials in the city this particular apiarist encountered a strange thing that initially stumped him. One morning, early in the active season he tasted some of the honey his bees were making, it had an unexpectedly stale and revolting taste unlike the honey his bees usually made. He could not figure the problem out, how could honey taste like that? Was it some illness in the bees themselves? Then one day he found the answer, he discovered that his bees were making visits to the local garbage dump. He observed them collecting sugar from the small amounts of coke and other soft drinks left in hundreds of discarded paper cups, from dozens of abandoned ice cream wrappers, in fact, from any residual sweetness that they could find anywhere on that vast dump left by a 'disposable consumer society'. When I read this, it entered my mind that what we produce, from the least word to the most important thing, is very much dependant on what we take in. Bees collect the sweet nectar from flowers and produce honey, both a preservative and a food. However, in this instance, they took in garbage left over from junk food and produced garbage-honey, a stale, unpleasant imitation of the real thing. To use biblical language, the honey was the 'fruit' of the bees work, the product of their labours. So it is for us, our fruit will come out of what we are taking

in, the way we live comes from what we feed on, whether we collect true nectar (Christ) or waste sugars (sin and idols). This is why Paul advised Timothy to “pay close attention to yourself and your teaching (1 Timothy 4.16).”

“Oh taste and see that the Lord is good.” (Psalm 34.8)

- **INSPIRE people to participate in the work of the ministry.** Good missional leaders believe in the Holy Spirit in people and remind them regularly that the seeds of God’s preferred future for the world reside in them. This is way beyond ‘permission giving’, this means pro-active encouragement.
- **FACILITATE ministry and leadership training.** You don’t always need to provide this yourself just curate great resources by pointing people in the right direction (e.g. Lutheran Church of Australia’s Board for Local Mission, GROW, Australian Lutheran College) Dann Spader contends that “...leadership training is necessary for multiplication to occur. Simply having a church-growth strategy is not sufficient. A church can grow without leaders in place (Titus 1:5). But a church committed to multiplication needs leaders to multiply. So a church’s leadership has to be committed not simply to growth but to the multiplication of leaders”.¹
- **DEVELOP structures that serve the mission.** As a body needs a functional skeleton, a mission needs a structure. In Churches that are reaping the harvest successfully today the structures always remain flexible and adaptable to serve the goal of mission - making disciples who make disciples. To paraphrase Anglican Church planter Mike Breen, if you just aim to build the church you rarely get disciples, but if your aim is making disciples who make disciples, you always get a growing church.

Conversations

1. Discuss the statement - *How goes the leadership is how the church goes. How goes the church, is how goes the mission.*
2. If we could make two changes in the next six months to create an environment more conducive to attracting and retaining leaders, what would we change?
3. In Romans 16, Paul writes out his greeting list of friends. How can we build friendship into our leadership development plans?
4. Discuss the statement - *If you just aim to build the church you rarely get disciples, but if your aim is making disciples who make disciples, you always get a growing church.*
5. As you commence another season of serving in leadership what have you considered as areas of growth,
 - a. In your own leadership development?
 - b. In the leadership development of the whole congregation?

NUMBER TWO: RENEW CONGREGATIONAL EVANGELISM

Reading: Luke 10.1-12

The harvest is ripe but are we mission ready?

In Luke 10 Jesus sets out how a congregation becomes mission ready. Jesus trained and sent his disciples to be a community of people who know how to both reap the harvest and plant new communities of faith. What can we learn from his approach?

- **Send Teams:** Jesus never sent out individuals but pairs, who were part of a greater community of practice (70 or 72 depending upon which Gospel you read). This team approach to local evangelism was continued by the Apostles in Acts as they evangelised and planted new congregations. According to George Barna only one in three Congregations today engage their members in intentional evangelism training and 'sending'. Have we consciously 'sent' teams to do evangelism or only exhorted individuals? Could the development of such a team be realised in this Parish through inspiring people to do the Love. Life Communities training?
- **Believe God is at work in your neighbourhood or social network:** Jesus sent his disciples to reap the harvest as a participation in something God is already up to in every human life. Today this fact has not changed. This means you have to discern as you go rather than have a predetermined plan. In Luke 10 Jesus did not commence with a joint strategic planning day but rather he introduced a cyclical process often referred to today as reflective practice. The training involved on the job learning and discerning as a community of practice. In going they would grow; reflecting on action and discovering who and what they needed to know to reap the harvest. Perhaps the first best question to ask in any local mission venture is, what was God doing before I arrived?
- **A person of peace is ready:** Jesus told his disciples to go and share the Good News and that in the midst of this they would discover the 'person of peace'; a person responsive to the invitation to enter God's Kingdom of peace right now. From such a person the disciples were to receive (not offer) hospitality. Apparently it was not about setting up a program based upon a felt needs analysis but rather making room for relationships. From within the relationships of such a person the Gospel would be spread into that persons 'household' (approximately 35 people in those days) and into that town or region. Jesus simple contextualisation strategy was that the best people to reach the locals are the locals!
- **Why strategic planning is only half the answer:** It's not that we shouldn't plan or that we can't have regular opportunities to serve our community in a structured program that meets a legitimate need. As long as we offer people the Bread of Life (Jesus Christ) as well as a meal, the Living Water (Holy Spirit) as well as the cup of water to drink.

Overall we learn from Jesus' training method that 'doing mission' is not a program we implement but rather a series of transformative relationships we enter. Figuring out who you and your congregation are sent to invite into God's Kingdom is not a mystery to be solved



but an opportunity to be discerned. Drawing people into your congregation is not a question of how you attract them into your weekly events (e.g. Worship, Youth) but rather making space for them to be included in your everyday lives.

- Is it possible that our personal energy margin for relationships with not-yet-Christians may be used up because of a quiet obsession with running programs?
- Could it be that we need less 'outreach programs' and more training and sending of people in teams to reap the harvest in the way that Jesus taught us to?
- How does Jesus approach to local outreach change the complexion of the Parish? Could it mean that the Parish looks more like a dynamic worshiping, training and sending community, rather than a single geographically located program in which ministry is centred upon one main event (Sunday Worship) and one or two paid professionals (Pastors)?

Conversations

1. What do you think about Jesus approach to evangelism that he taught his disciples in Luke 10?
2. What implications might it have for the way we approach the development of our local outreach?
3. If we were successful in reaping the harvest Jesus infers is always there to reap, do we have the people and support structures in place to receive the harvest?
4. What is the Lord saying to you today as you reflect upon the scriptures and questions included in this devotion?

NUMBER THREE: RENEW MISSIONAL SHAPE

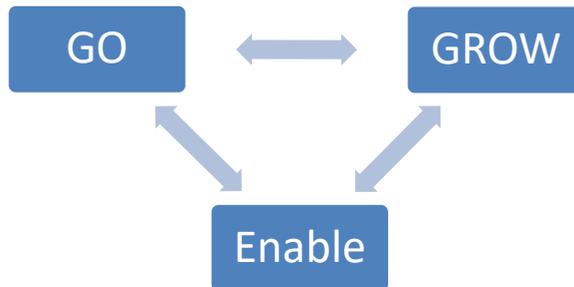
Readings: John 15.1-17; Ephesians 4.11-16

The harvest is ripe but is the Parish structure and planning “mission ready”?

A primary calling of leaders in the Parish is to facilitate, resource, pray for and encourage people to be involved in making disciples who make disciples? This is an important priority because conversion is more than giving mental assent to a set of doctrines. It involves a process of turning from a self-oriented life to a God-centred, other people focused life. Through indwelling God's Word we experience a renewing of our minds; a re-orientation over time in every aspect of our lives, including the social, economic and political dimensions (see Romans 12.1-3 Message). Therefore new disciples of Jesus need mature disciples to engage in mutually transformative relationships of co-learning and co-serving. How does this effect the shape of our structure and planning priorities?

Structure: The core purpose of the Parish structure is to make disciples that make disciples. But what does this look like? At its foundation it means the establishing of three teams.

Missional Ministry Matrix



- GO: a team focused upon seeing people come to Christ (Evangelism)
- GROW: a team focused upon growing people in Christ (Pastoral Care)

Love. Life Communities are designed to be the core team for focusing completely upon these two areas of Evangelism and Pastoral Care; making disciples who make disciples.

- ENABLE: a team that serves to enable us to Go and Grow through good Governance.

Pastor and people involved in enabling weekly Worship (e.g. Word & Sacrament, music, children, catering, cleaning, welcoming/ushering) create the framing event which gives definition and meaning to all three dimensions of service (see Romans 12.1-3 Message).

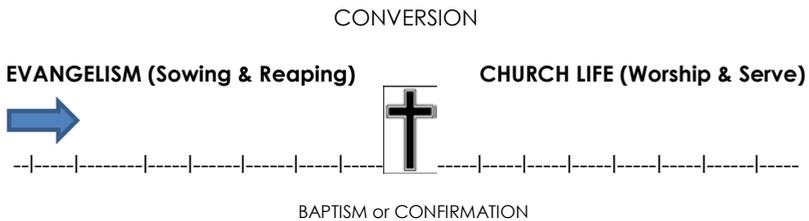
The first two (GO & GROW) are about growing what Jesus called the vine. He is the vine we are the branches (John 15). This vine image represents the people whom God is saving and renewing by His grace. An enabling parish governance, supplemented by District and National support facilities, are therefore like a trellis for the vine. Once the vine grows the trellis becomes invisible because all you can see is the vine bearing fruit. Take the trellis away



and the vine cannot grow and reach its full potential for bearing fruit. Therefore developing all three inter-dependent teams (Go, Grow, Enable) are necessary for the foundation for making every congregation mission ready! All three are bound together by Gods love (John 15.17; 2 Cor. 5.14).²



Another helpful way of looking at Congregational structure is to see it from the perspective of someone coming to Christ and then growing in Christ.



This assumes that God desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2.3-4) and that all people are being drawn by our Heavenly Father to Himself (John 6.44).

Love. Life Communities (Missional Communities) work on the left hand side of the Cross doing Evangelism and people involved in Pastoral Care (discipleship) work on the right side of a person's pathway. Pastors and leaders teach and train in order to fulfil the Ephesians 4.11-16 mandate to equip the entire congregation to 'do the work of the ministry'.

Planning Priorities

It is likely that you already have a Congregational or Parish Council taking care of the 'trellis', but what about the other two areas – Go and Grow?

What does it look like if we shift our paradigm from training people to run programs of evangelism and discipleship to resourcing people to live in relationships of evangelism and

² Some people in the 'house church' movement have experimented with an independent approach, doing away with the 'trellis' (institutional church) altogether. This approach has often lacked lasting fruit-bearing capacity compared to an interdependent church planting or multi-site movement approach.



discipleship? It involves initially setting up initially at least one Love. Life Community (Missional Communities) with between 6-10 people who desire to see lost people coming to Christ. However, the challenge for Congregations of any size is that the people released to develop evangelism through establishing a missional community (Love. Life Community) are often already doing something crucial in ministry in the 'congregational space' (e.g. musician, Treasurer).

- Do you have all of your most committed people who may be fruitful if released to concentrate upon either evangelism or pastoral care tied up in governance or management responsibilities?
- What happens if we are successful in seeing people drawn into the Kingdom by our heavenly Father? Are we ready to receive the harvest or too busy running 'outreach programs'? Therefore are there ministries we need to close that are not bearing fruit?
- Could it be that God cares too much about new babes in Christ to deliver them into a Parish that is not ready and willing to invite them in to God's Kingdom (evangelism) and care for them as He would have them cared for?

Conversations

1. What happens to the complexion of Congregational life if you to shift your paradigm from training people to run programs of evangelism and discipleship, to resourcing people to live in relationships of evangelism and discipleship?
2. In light of this understanding of how to shape our congregational structures and priorities to become mission ready, what changes do we need to make to our programming, structures and planning priorities?
3. If people desire to leave their current ministry role to work in evangelism how will we support them to transition well? How will we provide a pathway to hand over responsibilities and how will we recruit a new people into those roles? Do we need to add more staff to make up the shortfall? Or will we give up now and say that we are too busy maintaining the trellis to do evangelism?

NUMBER FOUR: RENEW CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH

Reading: Hebrews 12:12-19

When mission potential is being strangled by the internal health issues of the Congregation how will the leaders react?

A Parish judged as healthy, perhaps due to size, facilities and budget may in reality still have internal health issues which later manifest and cripple mission development *if unchecked*. This can occur when a lack of self-awareness has led to the breakdown in one or more of the following internal health systems of the congregation, leading to systemic health problems that are difficult to heal.

- **Communication** – Communication is the medium for relationships, community and culture. Do we have a communication strategy? Does it feature opportunities for feedback, requests, open forums and listening to creative ideas for developing ministry from both existing members and newcomers? Do we negate the need to communicate to a digital generation in relevant ways?
- **Cultural** – Do we as a leadership have an ‘open door’ for people of all cultures? How many different cultures that are a part of our congregation are represented on the leadership team? Does our culture mix influence the way we communicate? As leaders do we pro-actively seek to gain cultural intelligence so as to ensure that the only thing that offends people is the Gospel itself? How well do we cater for various cultures and sub-cultures in our style of ministry? Is listening well to the ‘other’ a developing part of our congregational life?
- **Economic** – Do we share our wealth? How wealthy do you have to be to exist socially in our church programs? Are opportunities for receiving welfare matched by opportunities for contributing to the welfare of others in ways that don’t necessarily require money?
- **Social** – Do newcomers experience a warm welcome initially but find it hard to ‘break in’ socially? Is there a sharp division between generations in our programming limiting our capacity for intergenerational relationships to develop? Have we over programmed our church so that our members have no time left to socially engage with people who are not yet believers?
- **Political** – Do people of both sexes have an equal voice in decision making? How well does the leadership deal with complaints, relational problems and failure (actual or perceived)? Do people who require discipline have their dignity maintained? Do we respect people’s privacy? Is gossip deemed to be a sin or a tolerated pass-time?
- **Emotional** – From our relationships (past and present) we bring attitudes, anxiety, ongoing burdens, unfulfilled expectations, unspoken family of origin rules, pain, and positive strengths such as resilience, joy, hope, peace, gift’s with which to serve. How aware are we that everyone brings into the room a web of relationships which influence not only the person concerned but also the congregation’s life? How might such family systems thinking influence the way we view the depressed, the



compulsive, the anxious, the apathetic and even the 'troublemakers' in our midst?
See 1 Peter 4.8.

All of these areas are a normal part of church life that require prayerful monitoring and conscious development. They only become *systemic* health issues when the leadership ignore them, thus creating the possibility of the development of a 'root of bitterness', or a lack of peace and holiness which may negatively affect the whole congregation.

Conversations

1. Hebrews 12.15 exhorts us to ensure that "no one fails to obtain the grace of God?" What does this mean in practice? How does anyone 'obtain' the grace of God?
2. Should these internal health issues referred to above be on the rolling agenda of the leadership team in the same way that budgets, buildings and programs are? If not why not?
3. What is the Lord saying to you today as you reflect upon the scriptures included in this devotion?

NUMBER FIVE: RENEW MISSIONAL LEADERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Reading: 1 Chronicles 12.32 (NLT)

Pioneer leaders are finding new ways of doing leadership in the 21st Century context!

Based upon social researcher Rex Miller's³ suggestion that there have been four different eras defined by media, Table 1 summarises Church Planter J R Woodward's interpretation of Miller's ideas in regard to how the different eras influence approaches to leadership.

Table 1. **Leadership Viewed Through the Millennium Matrix**⁴

	Print Age 1500-1950	Broadcast Age 1950-2010	Digital Age 2010-
Kind of Leaders	Intellectual leaders	Motivational leaders	Impartational leaders
Kind of Structures	Functional units, division of labour, a hierarchical chain of command; view organisation as a living machine; maintain cohesion through structure and inertia	Purpose driven, empowerment, information driven, buildings and programs; maintain cohesion through psychological stimulation and sense of mission	Collaborative, grass roots oriented, roving leadership, open-source approach, dispersed authority; maintain cohesion through relationship and collaboration
Focus of Leadership	Like field generals, they seek achievement and efficiency, using tried and true methods; they teach by instruction	Like motivational speakers, they seek to harness the potential of the organisation around the mission; they teach by exhortation	Like gardeners they cultivate a collaborative approach to current conditions, opportunities and challenges; they teach by example
Nature of relationships with others	Hierarchical	Appointment oriented; relationships often become a functional way to complete objectives	Unscripted, personal, familial; people use organisations to fulfil their missions for mutual benefit
Approach to Discipleship	Takes place in the classroom; logical presentations	Takes place in the sanctuary; programmatic, seminar oriented	Takes place in the living room and streets; relational, interactive, mentorship
Qualifies and skills needed	Intellectual expertise, maintaining predictability, achieving stability	Communication, persuasive, high profile image, innovative, interpersonal skills, novelty, ability to think on one's feet and utilise the big event	Approachable, agile, networker, touchable, accessible, missional, transparent, advocate, sustainability, resilient, collective achievement, storytelling

³ Rex M. Miller, *The Millennium Matrix: Reclaiming the Past, Reframing the Future of the Church*, San Francisco: Joey-Bass, 2004, p. 114

⁴ J.R.Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, Downers Grove, IL, IVP, 2013



The fascinating thought is, today we have people who have been living through three of these eras, predominately shaped by three different forms of media. Pastors and church leaders all over the world are realising their need to pioneer new ways of doing leadership in the 21st Century context. Spirit-shaped leaders create missional culture, and *our approach* to leadership and structure is not neutral.

Conversations

1. As a leader have you lived through two or more of these eras? If so how has it caused you to evolve in your approach to doing leadership in the church and in the work place?
2. What qualities do you think are important about the approach to leadership in the digital age?
3. What might be the impact of this approach upon future staffing, volunteer leadership training, discipleship in general?

NUMBER SIX: RENEW CONGREGATIONAL PRIORITIES

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:19 – 23 (NLT)

The seeds of Gods preferred future for the church and the community reside in you

Our mission involves leading people to Christ and pastoring them in Christ. This is primarily why any Congregation exists. Good governance of the Parish honours God and brings integrity to a ministry, it is not however our central purpose. Missiologist David Hesselgrave asserts:

Paul considered the preaching of the gospel and the establishment of churches as his primary task. The biblical record leaves no room for thinking that either Paul or the members of his team were basically engaged in raising living standards, ameliorating social conditions, imparting secular knowledge, or dispensing aid from previously established churches. There can be no doubt that allegiance to Christ on the part of converts in the churches entailed these effects as by-products of faith even to the sending of needed aid back to the Jerusalem church (a kind of reverse flow). That the missionaries were concerned about social relationships, and about minds and bodies as well as souls, is patently true. But Paul's primary mission was established when the gospel was preached, people were converted, and churches were established (Hesselgrave 2000, p. 24).

In 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 Paul reflects upon the qualities of a leader that renews a congregations missional priorities.

Adaptable: Paul describes a willingness to adapt and change so as to meet new people who are coming to Christ where they are. How often do we expect people to adopt our culture, our taste in music, our timetable, attend our places and programs rather than us being willing to adapt and change, to find common ground with them in order to 'save some'.

Relational: Paul led by example as a church leader who was more interested in relationships in which he was willing to "...do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings (v23)". How does this influence our approach to congregational programming? Have we taken up all of our personal and congregation members' energy with church programs that leave no room for relationships in which we spread the Good News to the lost?

Sacrificial: Even if we created space in our lives for lost people what would inspire us to live the way Paul did? If we had more time would we do more 'reaping of the harvest' (Luke 10) or just end up watching more television or fishing? If we as leaders don't make sacrifices to live like Paul; a servant leader, seeking to be in Gospel sharing, Gospel centred relationships, how do we expect existing church members, new converts and the next generation to do so? What values around mission do people 'catch' from you as a person and from the leadership team as a whole? Beyond balancing the budget, keeping the buildings functional and generally supporting the ministry, do existing members hear and see the leadership as having a burning desire to be people who will "...do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings (v23)"?



Conversations

1. How does the leadership team keep the priority of people-centred evangelism alive in the Congregation?
2. Is it enough to seek 'converts' or is there much more to obeying Jesus command to "make disciples"?
3. What is the Lord saying to you today as you reflect upon the scriptures included in this devotion?

NUMBER SEVEN: RENEW MISSION DISCERNMENT

Reading: Psalm 32.8; John 10.27; Revelation 2.7

'Not called!' did you say? 'Not heard the call,' I think you should say. Put your ear down to the Bible, and hear him bid you go and pull sinners out of the fire of sin. Put your ear down to the burdened, agonized heart of humanity, and listen to its pitiful wail for help. Go stand by the gates of hell, and hear the damned entreat you to go to their father's house and bid their brothers and sisters, and servants and masters not to come there. And then look Christ in the face, whose mercy you have professed to obey, and tell him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish his mercy to the world."⁵

William Booth – Salvation Army⁶

Being on mission with God means that the process of listening, discerning and acting is never really finished. Nor is it always cyclical. It's not as if there is a starting line where you can check off the listening box and forget about it (Sparks, Soerens, Friesen 2014, pp. 131-132).⁷ Therefore the need for strategic conversations about strategic intentions must become a habit of the leadership team and mission communities. As Moynagh asserts,

If church is a drama of four interlocking sets of relationships – with God, the living Christian tradition, the world and within the gathering – then conversations will be at the heart of the experience of church. Conversations about plans will occur in the context of these four sets of relationships as the mission community dialogues with God in prayer and study, consults prayer partners and appropriate ecclesial authorities, converses with other partners (especially the people it is called to serve) and discusses what is being learnt from all these interactions. Planning becomes strategic conversation about action-based learning. Planning as learning works with the unpredictable nature of the world; takes seriously the experimental, even playful nature of much human activity; allows conversations to modify existing 'plans'. This gives planning an experimental feel. Planners learn as they go. They try something. If it works they build on it. If it does not, they try something else (Moynagh 2012, p 142)⁸

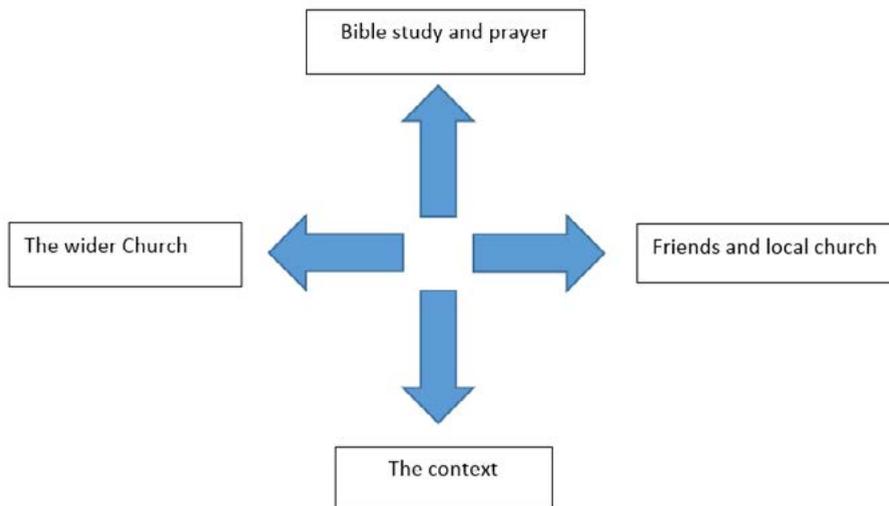
⁵ Sited at <http://christian-quotes.ochristian.com/William-Booth-Quotes>

⁶ William Booth was a British Methodist preacher who founded The Salvation Army and became its first General.

⁷ Sparks P, Soerens T, Friesen DJ 2014, *The new Parish: How neighborhood churches are transforming mission, discipleship and community*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove IL, Kindle Edition.

⁸ Moynagh M 2012, *Church for every context: An introduction to theology and practice*, SCM Press, Norwich UK.

The UK *Fresh Expressions* team suggests a 360° (four way) listening scope.



Moynagh also suggests a possible framework for what he calls milestone reviews: PEDAL

Purposes: What are we trying to achieve? Are we shifting from our original goals?

Environment: Are we learning new things about the environment in which we are working?

Direction: What was our original vision? Are we still travelling in that direction? Are we getting the necessary support?

Actions: Have we taken the actions we agreed at our last milestone review? Why not? What have we done that we didn't expect?

Learning: What have we learnt as a result of this review? Should we modify our purpose and priorities in the light of this? So what? In the light of this review, what specific steps should we take between now and the next review? Does this require an updated Mission Action Plan? When shall we hold our next review?

Conversations

1. Discuss what can happen when groups of Christians jump to action without deep listening and collective discernment?
2. What is valuable about the approach suggested by Moynagh that "...planning as learning...where planners learn as they go"? What skills do we need to develop to do mission planning in this way for? (e.g. P.E.D.A.L.)

NUMBER EIGHT: RENEW CONGREGATIONAL MULTIPLICATION

Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:6; Matthew 28.19-20

When you think of church planting, don't think of another option in a shopping mall food court, think of a new farm in a starving country

The Apostle Paul used an agricultural image to portray the concept of starting new congregations. 'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow' (1 Corinthians 3:6). This planting and watering of communities of disciples that God is growing is where we get the concept of 'planting churches'. The Church has a long mission heritage of pioneering and church planting. Our pioneering heritage is rooted in the command of Jesus who called and formed his disciples into a community on mission and sent them into the whole world to do the same. This work of church planting continues today as people in every nation are still hearing Jesus call to 'make disciples' and plant new Congregations (mission communities).

Some people feel that the Church is dead or has become irrelevant to the mission of God. However, there is evidence¹⁰ that local churches remain the key instrument that God uses to bring in the harvest. The evidence reflects that people who come to faith do so primarily through attending a local church. Not house churches, boutique forms of mission or so called para-church groups, but local churches. The research also indicates that church plants (new congregations) are the most effective churches for reaching people with the Gospel and growing the Church through new converts. In the following 'newcomers' are defined as new converts.

- Church plants (new congregations) reach younger people: Not only are new churches reaching all newcomers more effectively they are reaching a younger demographic with more than 69% aged between 15-49 years, compared with only 48% in churches generally. There is also a slightly higher proportion of males in church plants.
- Church plants have greater average levels of newcomers than churches undertaking other mission strategies. Up to 32% of attendees at church plants are newcomers whereas the average in established churches is only 9.6%. The very best newcomer attendance rate that an established church can achieve is 11.7% and that is with highly effective evangelism programs and follow-up in place! The difference between new congregations and established congregations becomes even more marked when Pentecostal churches are removed from the data. Mainstream church plants achieve 32% newcomers whereas established churches achieve only 7%. Clearly church plants are way out in front of established churches in reaching newcomers!
- Church plants will often involve the break-up of existing networks of relationships among attenders, making it easier for newcomers to be included. Church plants are



not as bound to previous conventions of congregational life and are in a better position to experiment (Bellamy & Castle 2003, p. 17).¹¹

This research is telling us that you get more mission 'bang for your buck' if you invest in planting new Congregations. Therefore every Congregation needs to think about becoming a Sending Church (Mother Church) giving birth to new Congregations. If you don't have the capacity for becoming a Sending Church at this stage consider becoming a Partner Congregation who prays, finances and possibly even sends people to be involved in planting a new Congregation.

Conversations

1. What is the Lord saying to you today as you reflect upon the scriptures and research included in this devotion?
2. Why is it important for established congregations to plant new congregations? What is preventing your Parish or Congregation from becoming either a Sending Church or a Partner in a new church plant?

NUMBER NINE: RENEW MISSION VISION

Reading: Colossians 1.27-29

“Vision Leaks” (Anonymous)

As a missional leader it is important that you are continuously renewed in your vision for local mission and communicating that to those whom you serve. This is important because vision is all about keeping the main thing the main thing.

Have you ever gathered the Congregational members together and asked them what their values and dreams are for the future in a strategic planning session? The gathered thoughts then distilled into a vision and mission statement everyone must learn off by heart as a kind of mantra? Usually such statements are derivative of the Great Commission (Matthew 28. 19-20) but expressed in local lingo.

The efficacy of such an exercise carries the promise of delivering otherwise apathetic hearts and minds into vision alignment (unity), motivation and eventually greater fruit bearing. For a short time it seems to ‘work’ in gaining some momentum, however, from such experiences comes the cliché – vision leaks!

Is there an alternative approach to maintaining mission direction and momentum?

- 1. Maintain good governance:** Through the implementation of policies and procedures for maintaining treasury, facilities, information management, duty of care (Safe Place), rostering, training of volunteers and Synodical responsibilities you will set the stage for ministry to occur with integrity. This requires regular, consistent, structured activity.
- 2. Facilitate a community of Gospel learning:** Indwelling God’s Word together as a whole community of faith demonstrates that the Gospel carries its own cargo, inspiring people’s desire to worship and serve. We search the New Testament in vain to find anything equivalent to strategic planning retreats. What we see is a people compelled by the Word and the Spirit towards witness, worship and working for the restoration of the broken down walls of human society. Paul says, “The love of God compels us...” (2 Cor. 5.14). In this context planning becomes strategic conversation about action-based learning; a continuous cycle of discernment and ministry improvement. Revisit devotion seven.
- 3. Learn the skills of how to walk with people as they walk towards God.** How many of our Congregational leaders see this as their primary role? What would your missional effectiveness look like if when people in your Parish used the word ‘leader’ their first thought was someone engaged in making disciples who make disciples? To change the culture current leaders will need to show by example how to make disciples who in turn make disciples. How?
As you engage with people who are on their way into the Kingdom you aim to discover what they need as their next stepping stone to move them forward in their relationship with God. Mostly it’s about being a good friend, praying for them, listening to them and offering appropriate resources. Even after their conversion the same flexibility, adaptability and resourcefulness is required as you meet people



where they are rather than simply running 'one size fits all' outreach and discipleship programs. This means as a leader you have to learn the skills of how to walk with people as they walk towards God then how to help them grow up into maturity in Christ. The Pastor's job, along with the members of the congregation, is to equip every leader and member to do this work (Ephesians 4.11).

Throughout the Old and New Testaments above all people longed to see the Lord! Perhaps we need to get away from chanting 'Let's get the vision' to singing together again, *Lord, be thou my vision?*

Conversations

1. What is the Lord saying to you today as you reflect upon the scriptures and questions included in this devotion?
2. What do you find helpful in keeping your heart fresh and your mind aware of the mission of God?
3. Who are you currently discipling and who are you being disciple by?
4. What do you think about the suggested approach to visioning?

NUMBER TEN: RENEW THE SONG OF THE LORD

Read: 1 Corinthians 2.1-10; Isaiah 40.28-31; 43.19

Dependent on God, disciplined in our preparation for mission, listening for God's redemption song!

A musician and composer was at a low point in his life. His money was gone. His creditors had seized his belongings. He was facing the threat of debtor's prison. The stress in his life literally paralysed him—he couldn't walk or move or feel anything on his right side. For a brief time, he considered giving in and giving up. But, he decided to try one more time, returning to what he knew best: writing music. In the midst of despair, George Frederick Handel wrote *The Messiah*, an oratorio considered to be the greatest piece of sacred music ever written.

We often think of success in any area as the product of sheer human will and ingenuity; the resilience of human beings against all odds. However, it is often when we are at our greatest point of vulnerability that we witness the greatest miracles.

The invitation of the Gospel is not to ask God into our lives but to share in His eternal abundant life, discovering every day that we are not 'self-made' people but rather a people made and redeemed by a kind Creator.

The famous French Cellist Yo-Yo Ma (paraphrasing Achille-Claude Debussy) once said, "Music is what happens between the notes". Making an instrument worth playing takes a lot of time and energy. Learning to play an instrument well takes much more time and effort. As a musician moves hands across wood and strings or measured breath across a reed, in anticipation she assumes a posture that seeks one thing – *to hear the music*.

For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty saviour. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs." (Zephaniah 3.17)

As leaders called to play their part in the orchestra of God, perhaps our greatest gift to the people with whom we worship and serve is to be vulnerable, dependent on God for everything, disciplined in our preparation, always sitting forward in anticipation to hear the tune of the Spirit.



Conversations

1. What is the Lord saying to you today as you reflect upon the scriptures and reflections included in this devotion?
2. What have you considered as areas of growth for the year?
 - a. In your own leadership
 - b. In the missional life of the congregation?
3. Having completed the ten Missional Leadership devotions and as you anticipate another season of serving in leadership what areas of study or experience have you considered as requiring further study and reflection?

This is how it's done

Sent Seeking the Orphans of God is for anyone concerned about how to participate with God in sowing the gospel and reaping the harvest.

Many books on missional living describe how to form missional communities and the people within them, but this book goes beyond this to describe how a missional community does relational evangelism together.

It provides small group Bible studies and activities at the end of each chapter, introduced through online video interviews with experienced evangelists. These activities facilitate dialogue and discernment about how to approach the task of relational evangelism amongst your relatives and friends.

Plus, there are two supplementary bonus resources included in this book.

RENEW Love Life Communities: an eight week small group Bible study designed to enable the formation of a team who engages in relational evangelism within your congregation or church planting team.

RENEW Missional Leadership: ten devotions for congregational leaders designed to set up a structure for making disciples who make disciples and facilitate training and support for the church to reap and receive the harvest

Believers feeling confused or apathetic about reaping the harvest will discover here a practical resource which is an encouragement to see, hear and become involved in what God is already up to in people's lives.

Dean Eaton is a faithful guide who gives us concrete ways to join God in helping to bring people into God's family in everyday kind of ways. This book reflects a missional theology that will help you cultivate an inclusive loving community that invites all to live into the divine dance of the Father, Son and Spirit. **J.R. Woodward**, National director, V3 Church Planting Movement. Author, *Creating a Missional Culture*, Co-author, *The Church as Movement*.

Sent Seeking the Orphans of God and the accompanying *Love Life Community* studies are quite possibly the spark that could bring your church alive. **Dr Andrew Menzies**, Principal Stirling Theological College - University of Divinity.

If you hear God calling you to bring Jesus to your friends, neighbours and workmates, then this is a must-read book for you. **Dr Steen Olsen**. Director for Mission for the Lutheran Church in South Australia and the Northern Territory former Bishop of the Lutheran Church of New Zealand.

Dean Eaton is an experienced church planter, missional trainer and mentor. He has participated with Christ in church plants in rural, suburban and urban settings in Australia and Japan. Formerly the Principal of Tabor College Australia he is keen to train a new generation of evangelists.

