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IMPLEMENTING AN EVANGELISM STRATEGY  
AT HORNSBY BAPTIST CHURCH  
HORNSBY, TENNESSEE

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Matthew Rhodes Emerson  
December 2013

**APPROVAL SHEET**

IMPLEMENTING AN EVANGELISM STRATEGY

AT HORNSBY BAPTIST CHURCH

HORNSBY, TENNESSEE

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To Kim, my partner and friend,  
for your love and support, and to  
Katelyn, Robert Connor, and Campbell,  
for your sacrifice, and to  
my parents,  
for your continued encouragement

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## PREFACE

I am indebted to those of my past and present who have instilled in me a heart for rural ministry. As a child, I was able to witness the dedication of Sunday School teachers and Training Union leaders as they sought to impact their small town for Christ. They demonstrated a love for God and compassion for their community. These unassuming saints taught the value of faith, family, friends, and neighbors. God's principles mattered, but so did the people next door. God has used their influence to burden my soul for the rural community.

The focus on small town missions was magnified through the lives of my family. I am thankful for grandparents who modeled a commitment to evangelism. They served in their communities and churches with dedication. They volunteered to lead local mission projects and took my brother and me to mission trips in the rural Appalachian Mountains. My parents have also remained a source of encouragement. They taught me how to serve and give with joy. They willingly sacrificed time and other resources to make this work a reality. This project would not have been completed without their prayers and support.

I am blessed to serve God through a gracious and loving church. Their prayers and participation have been a constant provision. Each person asked joyfully took part in the completion of the project. The evangelistic leadership team invested time and energy throughout the assignment's duration. This project is as much a product of their efforts as it is mine. A special thanks to Hugholene Barnes, whose patience and assistance through the writing phase was a tremendous asset.

I am also grateful to the faculty of the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism. Former Dean, Chuck Lawless, provided a calming assurance with humility and honest criticism. Tim Beougher has been a wonderful example of following theological truth with practical application. Jeff Walters, my faculty supervisor, provided instruction with reassurance. He led through each phase of the project as one who has traveled the same path.

My children, Katelyn, Robert Connor, and Campbell have been a joyous source of strength and determination. They have inspired their father to push ahead to the end with love and devotion. This work brought many sacrifices to them, and they took each one with stride. They did not complain about their losses but invested their hopes in the finished project.

Kim has been my partner for seventeen years. She has faithfully invested her life into our marriage, family, and ministry. This project is another testimony of her unselfish and giving heart. She has patiently read through every line that has led up to the completed work. Her corrections and criticisms are always delivered with love. I am blessed to receive her friendship, spiritual encouragement, and prayers. She remains my gift of joy.

Matt Emerson

Hornsby, Tennessee

December 2013

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Implementing an evangelism strategy at Hornsby Baptist Church, Hornsby, TN.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to aid Hornsby Baptist Church in developing and implementing an evangelism strategy suited to its rural cultural context.

#### **Goals for the Project**

Five goals served to evaluate the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to gain a greater understanding of the local context. The church sought to discover the religious and social views of its surrounding community. A survey was to be conducted on 50 percent of households within a five-mile radius of the church. This assessment focused primarily on persons not actively engaged in aspects of the church's ministry. A tract was left at each residence after the survey was completed.

The second goal was for church leaders to develop and unite behind an evangelism strategy. Members currently serving in the church were interviewed to assess their openness to participate in the project. It was planned that approximately fifteen persons would be selected to serve on the leadership team. This leadership team worked to select techniques that were suited for their rural environment. These techniques would guide the church in presenting the gospel to the community. The evaluation of this goal was twofold. First, the church formed an evangelistic leadership team that promoted and implemented the strategy. Second, there was a visible plan for church wide evangelistic efforts that was presented to the church. Through this plan, each church member had the

opportunity to be personally engaged in delivering the gospel to others.

The third goal was for the church to grow in understanding its responsibility for personal evangelism. Members were taught that God has called each Christian to share the gospel of Christ. To gauge the change in this understanding, a survey was conducted of the membership before and after the project. This survey attempted to judge the congregation's knowledge of both the biblical and practical aspects of evangelism.

The fourth goal was for the church to be more open and active in personal evangelism. Members were encouraged to participate in different methods and activities that were used through the strategy. This objective sought to lead the church in taking advantage of each opportunity to participate in evangelism. Measurements were taken on the number of persons involved in the efforts. Questions were also asked in the pre and post-survey of the individual member's actual involvement in sharing the gospel. At the conclusion of the project, five persons who actively participated in the strategy were interviewed concerning their openness and attitude in sharing the gospel in their community.

The final goal gauged my growth as an evangelistic leader and disciple-maker. I attempted to mentor leaders and others in the biblical and practical aspects of personal evangelism. This guidance was provided through small groups and one on one encounters with the leadership team. Leaders were also asked to submit comments on my personal effectiveness as an evangelistic leader throughout the project.

### **Ministry Context for the Project**

What is now known as Hornsby Baptist Church was organized in October 1880. The original church building was situated in the Crainville community. Life in this rural area changed when the Gulf, Mobile, and Northern Railroad came through the area. Soon, local residents moved the three miles northwest to be closer to the new

transportation. A new town quickly formed. It was named Hornsby after the land for the site was provided by Kimbrough Hornsby, Sr. In 1921, the church moved the building and congregation to the new town.<sup>1</sup> Over the last ninety-two years, the church has been rebuilt, remodeled, and redesigned but has remained in the same location.

### **Community Demographics**

Hornsby, a rural community in Hardeman County, is situated in southwest Tennessee. The town has thrived for much of its history. Early years saw the formation of churches, blacksmith shops, a train depot, two drug stores, two doctors, several general merchandise houses, a soda fountain, hotel, cafe, and the Bank of Hornsby.<sup>2</sup> The bustling activity of the area has changed. The town has become scattered with vacant buildings that once housed thriving businesses. The railroad and depot are gone. The main highway, which once traveled through the center of town, has been moved. Hornsby has been by-passed.

Most of the rural residents now drive to neighboring areas for employment. A few small businesses employ approximately twenty-five people in the Hornsby area. These jobs involve farming, forestry, car maintenance and repair, trucking, and a warehouse for hand-held power equipment oil. Another major employer is Big Buck Resort which provides areas for camping and outdoor sports. Each year this site welcomes hundreds of visitors from across the country. Travelers stop by to campout on their journey to another place. The resort is also home to a residential area.

In addition to these businesses, the town is the site for Hornsby Elementary School. This school is the community's largest employer with twenty-four teachers and

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<sup>1</sup>Fay Davidson, ed., *Hardeman County Tennessee* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1979), 43.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 25-26.

administrators. HES services 171 students from pre-kindergarten through the eighth grade. The school has a reputation as one of the best in the area. The school's reported test scores are some of the highest in the state. This standing makes the school zone attractive to families with young children. Many community members moved to the area so their children would have the opportunity to attend HES.<sup>3</sup>

HBC and HES have a unique relationship because of their location to each other. There are only fifty feet separating the two buildings. This closeness has allowed the church to partner and participate in the school environment. Both facilities are shared by each organization. The church is actively volunteering to help with school functions. There is a historic bond between the school and the community. Residents have always joined in to help with fundraisers or even to construct new buildings.<sup>4</sup>

The population of the town stands at 303 persons.<sup>5</sup> There are 1,559 people who live in a five mile radius of the church. This group occupies 621 households with 32 percent containing children. Fifty-one percent of the residents are female and the balance male. This division represents a very even split between the sexes. The population of this small town is not projected to drastically increase over the next five years. It has stayed relatively the same for the previous three years.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ted Kessler, Faculty and Staff, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 29 December 2009; available from <http://www.hardemancountyschools.org/hes/faculty.html>; Internet.

<sup>4</sup>Davidson, *Hardeman County Tennessee*, 25.

<sup>5</sup>United States Census Bureau, *Geographic area: Hornsby Town, Tennessee, Table DP-1, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2010*, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 1 January 2012; available from <http://censtats.census.gov/data/TN/1604736080.pdf>; Internet.

<sup>6</sup>ESRI Business Analyst, *Census 2010 Summary Profile*, 1, 3, 5 mile radius of 115 Fulghum Street, Hornsby, TN 38044, 2012/2016 Demographic Comparisons, ESRI uses U.S. Census Bureau to obtain their data. Information provide by Tennessee Baptist Convention; accessed 6 January 2012; available from [www.esri.com/ba](http://www.esri.com/ba); Internet.

Ninety-five percent of those in a five-mile radius of the church are white. The average household income in this area is \$46,652. The per capita income is \$18,012. Thirty-three percent of the households live with a total income under \$25,000. Fifty-two percent of the town is under forty-four years of age. Thirty-two percent of all households have children, with the average household size consisting of 2.51 members.<sup>7</sup> These community demographics point to a population that is young, white, and economically struggling.

### **Church Context**

HBC reflects much of its surrounding community to a great degree. Household income and race are similar to the area. It is estimated that 77 percent of those attending the church's Sunday school are under the age of forty-five. Fifty-two percent of households have young children. These statistics would put the church membership much younger and the percentage of children much higher than the community at large.

There is one full time pastor, a part time youth director, and a janitor on staff. The rest of the leadership is volunteer. The total receipts have maintained their current level even in a period of economic downturn. The yearly budget is \$135,000. The church has no debt.

In general, HBC seems to have a good reputation in the community. It has shown a caring and generous heart to those who are suffering through trials. Special financial gifts are often given to those who have lost jobs, experienced the destruction of fire, endured sickness, or other events. The church is consistently asked to provide help in school and community events. Adults who have not shown interest in coming to church themselves will readily bring their children to Vacation Bible School or Awana.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 10.



Much of the reputation exists because many in the community have family members who are active in the church.

### **Church Growth Trends**

In the last two decades, HBC has been stable but stagnant. The church is functioning to maintain its level of discipleship and outreach, but there have been only minimal changes in growth over this time period. Since 1991, the average Sunday school attendance has ranged between 70 and 85. In 1991, the average attendance was 73. In 2009, the average attendance was 81. This time period represents a total change of 10 percent. There is a consistency to the Sunday school program, but the church cannot seem to break through an invisible barrier of 100.

Other trends show this same stable but stagnant plateau. For the last ten years, the resident membership roll increased by only 13 persons. In 2009, the roll was purged of members who were deceased or had moved out of the ministry area and now stands at 237. This number is equal to that of the year 1995. Only 34 percent of resident members attend Sunday school on any given week. Baptisms at this same time period have also been varied. Fifty-three people were baptized in the last ten years. On average, it has taken 45 members to reach one new believer over the ten-year period.

There is some question as to why the resident member roll did not increase with the baptismal roll. For example, in 2007, 16 people were reported to be baptized, but the resident membership increased by only 11. At the very least, the comparison shows that although some are being reached, many more are leaving or falling away. No level of assimilation is maintained for newcomers. Sunday school leaders are attempting to address this problem by instituting care groups and prayer partners to bring the membership together.

Evangelistically, the church struggles with a consistent focus. The members have a presence in the community but are not actively connecting with others to the point

of giving a gospel message. Historically, there have been brief times when outreach methods have been implemented by the church. Revivals, special events, and visitations were conducted with varying success. These former methods would be used for a set period of time and then seem to fade away.<sup>8</sup>

A main bright spot in the growth trends has been the Awana program. Since it began in 2005, the average attendance has more than doubled. It now stands at 120. There is great excitement and involvement with the program. Awana has been such a success that it has strained the capacity of the current facility. To aid in the overflow, recreation activities have been moved to the gym of the local school. The church has begun to use its good financial standing to save funds for a future activity center to house the program.

On any given week, up to 50 adults participate in the program. This figure is more than half of the average adults attending Sunday school. There are more people attending a church service on Wednesday night than at any other time during the week. One down side to the program is the lack of outreach to many of the parents whose children attend. Individuals have seemed content to restrict their involvement to this midweek program. Only recently has any intentional connection been made with these parents. Presently, the evangelistic focus on this group is sporadic at best.

When Awana began, it occurred during the Sunday night discipleship time. It has since been moved to Wednesday night. This has left a void of any discipleship for adults. The active discipleship ministry at HBC consists of a preaching service on Sunday morning and night, Sunday school, and a small Bible study on Wednesday evenings. In the last year, two short term discipleship courses were offered to men and women. Attendance in the combined classes averaged roughly 20 persons. Occasionally

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<sup>8</sup>Hugholene Barnes, Raymond Cox, and Willis Hornsby, Interviews by author April 2011, Hornsby Baptist Church, Hornsby, Tennessee.

the church will also sponsor weekend Bible studies. These training events have experienced low involvement. Most attending members gain their scriptural training during morning worship service on Sunday.

### **Current Growth Efforts**

At present, there are few programs that are working toward a gospel giving focus. Other than the main worship services and some personal visitation by the pastor and leaders, the Awana program has been the primary means by which the lost have been reached. Most children and adults that have come to the church have entered through Awana. Revivals have also been a leading way to reach out to the community. Neighbors seem to be more willing to visit during a special service of the church. This willingness may be a historical cultural characteristic, or it may be that the church members make a greater effort to reach out during these events.

The level of personal evangelism among the membership is low. Very few have shared their faith over the last year. Most will admit that they lack understanding in knowing how to tell others of Christ. Some evangelistic training has been given to a small group over the last year, but even these struggle to relate the gospel message to friends and neighbors.

Since 2008, leaders have worked toward developing the church's core values and mission statement. The defined values are centered on prayer, preaching and teaching of Scripture, giving, family, community, and worship. These values were used along with the Great Commission to determine a church mission statement: "The mission of HBC is to bring people to Jesus and membership in his family. Our goal is to worship God through prayer, preaching and teaching Scripture, and giving, We want to help each individual develop to Christ-like maturity in service and to magnify God's holy name." At the end of the process, this statement was shortened to "Connecting you to Christ."

The church desires to aid individuals in their connection with God no matter where they may be in that relationship. This mission statement places a primary focus on the need for the church to be active in evangelism. Leaders have expressed an interest in starting and becoming active in an outreach strategy.

### **Rationale**

It is estimated that 86 percent of Hardeman county is unchurched.<sup>9</sup> There are seven churches of differing denominations in the five mile radius of HBC. Those churches account for approximately 232 regular attendees in Sunday school.<sup>10</sup> On an average week, eighty five percent of the greater Hornsby community does not attend any Sunday school group. Although this figure cannot be used to estimate the lost condition of the population, it does point to a great need for the gospel influence in the area. There is no visible relationship between community and the Creator. The people of Hornsby are dying without the hope of Christ. They must hear the message of hope before they can respond to God (Romans 10:14).

These lost and unchurched residents live in a rural cultural context. Hornsby has sociological features that are different from urban and suburban environments. The differences must be addressed when the church seeks to guide the membership to engage the community. Many of the available evangelistic training materials and programs are not suited for the rural setting. Too often, a one size fits all evangelistic plan is presented.

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<sup>9</sup>Steve H. Pearson, email from to Matt Emerson, May 26 2011, containing information from Glenmary Research held at Tennessee Baptist Convention in Brentwood.

<sup>10</sup>The seven churches are Hornsby Baptist, Walnut Grove Baptist, Hatchie Baptist, Brints Chapel Baptist, Little Walnut Grove, Forest Hill Pentecostal. I conducted research on the location of these churches through personal conversations with members of the churches. The 232 number represents a conservative estimate considering that some of the churches do not keep accurate records.

These programs may or may not be suited for the church's environment. A need is present for evangelistic principles and methods that will address ideas and relationships of the modern rural lifestyle.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28 puts the responsibility of sharing the gospel on every Christian believer. The members of HBC are failing to fulfill their duty to God as gospel messengers. The project is needed to help believers present this message of Christ to their friends and neighbors. It will help them to understand and deliver the truth about salvation in a manner that is suited for their rural context. This project is needed to lead the church into faithful obedience to the Lord and to present the only message that saves with culturally relevant methods.

### **Definitions**

This project concerns the meaning of the terms *rural* and *evangelism*. *Rural* is defined by the United States Census Bureau as "all territory, population, and housing units not classified as urban." Rural is considered the area of the country that is non-urban. *Urban* is defined with a population density of at least one thousand people per square mile and a surrounding population of at least five hundred people per square mile.<sup>11</sup> So, a rural context will constitute a smaller population of persons in a specific geographical area. Hornsby fits well into this rural classification since its five-mile population is below two thousand.<sup>12</sup>

This definition falls short of completely describing a rural community. Size can be just one determining factor. Locations, vocations, ethnic origins, and family ties

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<sup>11</sup>United States Census Bureau, *Definition: Urban and Rural*, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 5 May 2011; available from [https://ask.census.gov/app/answers/detail/a\\_id/623](https://ask.census.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/623), Internet.

<sup>12</sup>United States Census Bureau, *Geographic area: Hornsby Town, Tennessee*, Table DP-1, sec. 1.

are also factors.<sup>13</sup> These communities will show variations “in size, economic base, and patterns of transition. Rural places may rely on agriculture, mining, forestry, fishing, recreation activities, or retirement activities as the main industries. Rural places may be single homes in open country, small gatherings of dwellings and buildings, isolated and small communities, communities and towns along major transportation routes, recreation or retirement communities, or bedroom communities on the edges of large cities.”<sup>14</sup>

Being rural means a lot more than just not being urban.

The crucial basis for the project was to understand the different types of social, relational, and cultural characteristics that can be observed in these rural environments. Community size does affect the attitudes and behavior of its residents. Yet, more factors must be addressed when considering how rural people connect and relate to others. Knowing these facts will lead one to discover the best means to represent Christ to rural community. Greater discussion will be presented in chapter three on the openness and isolation of a rural community. The project showed that the close relationship of the rural community affected the presentation of the gospel.<sup>15</sup>

J. I. Packer expressed that “to evangelize is to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through him, to accept him as their Savior, and serve him as their King in the fellowship of his Church.”<sup>16</sup> This

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<sup>13</sup>Shannon Jung et al., *Rural Ministry: The Shape of the Renewal to Come* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 65.

<sup>14</sup>Alvin J. Luedke, “Opportunities Amidst Challenges: Denominations and Rural Ministry,” *Word and World* 23 (2005): 43.

<sup>15</sup>Norval D. Glenn and Lester Hill, Jr., “Rural-Urban Differences in Attitudes and Behavior in the United States,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 429 (1977): 36, 50.

<sup>16</sup>J. I. Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 37-38.

definition shows that the aim of the believer is to present the gospel message with the hope that one will accept Jesus as Lord.

The Lausanne Covenant of 1974 follows this thought by stating that “to evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe.” One is evangelistic when he engages in the “proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord.” The communication of this truth will be aimed at “persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God.”<sup>17</sup>

For the purpose of this project, evangelism is defined as communicating the gospel message. To evangelize is to share Jesus with others. It should be expected that once this message is given that the lost will respond with trust and obedience. The believer cannot control nor force this trust. One's measurement of participation in evangelism was gauged only by the activity of spreading the gospel.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This project was limited by its fifteen week duration. In the first week, instruction was given to leaders and research conducted to gauge the congregation's attitude toward evangelism. Weeks 2 through 4 were concerned with the development of the plan. During the first 5 weeks, sermons were given that discussed the biblical mandate for personal evangelism. The strategy was presented to the church on the fifth week. Nine weeks were dedicated to the implementation of the evangelistic strategy. The last week of the project was dedicated to a final analysis of the church's attitude and involvement in personal evangelism.

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<sup>17</sup>Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 77-78.

One delimitation dealt with participates in the planning stage of the strategy. This organizing and planning phase was guided by a group of 21 people who had shown an interest in the growth of the church. The members of the group were recruited based on their openness and commitment to participate in the evangelistic strategy. The team of leaders consisted primarily of deacons, teachers, and others currently serving in leadership roles.



CHAPTER 2  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES  
ON EVANGELISM

A relationship to God is tied to an individual's faith. The lost sinner humbly calls upon the Lord for salvation. This request comes through his belief that God does save. A humble faith is based on the facts of the gospel message in life, death, and the resurrection of Jesus. One must hear the good news of Jesus before he can respond in faith by calling out to God for mercy and grace (Rom 10:14).<sup>1</sup>

The church is to share this good news. As God's missionaries to the world, believers are charged with sharing the life giving knowledge of God's grace to others. The Lord uses the words of the gospel to convey an understanding, conviction, and a life changing commitment that is needed for salvation. This evangelism is of primary importance in seeing others connect to Christ. God desires his people to be engaged in personal evangelism. Those who know him and love him are to tell of the good news of their relationship with him.<sup>2</sup>

The following pages will present several biblical examples and exhortations of evangelism. Believers will be encouraged to present the gospel regardless of their cultural position. They shall discover the need to remove social barriers and put away personal preferences in fulfilling their responsibility to share Christ. Scripture will be presented which highlights the need of communicating the total truth of the gospel. The

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<sup>1</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38b (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 628.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

teaching should promote this communication through both word and deed. The biblical passages will also guide the church to actively prepare to engage the spiritually lost in their span of influence.

### **A Kingdom of Priests**

The nation of Israel was to be an example of this outreach with the good news that God saves. It was formed in part to extend the ministry of God's presence throughout the world. The Hebrews were separated from the nations to communicate to the nations the benefits of a connection with Yahweh.<sup>3</sup> At Mount Sinai, God formed his covenant with this group. He called them a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6). As priests, they were "to point others to God, intercede on the behalf of others, and teach the redemption of God to all people." Israel had an obligation to tell other people groups about the salvation and deliverance that the Lord provided. They were to be witnesses of power and providence of God.<sup>4</sup>

The fulfillment and failure of this duty can be recognized in the conversion of the Aramean general Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1-19). His achievements as the army's leader set the time period's definition of worldly greatness. Naaman was extremely successful in his military career. Under his guidance, the Aram nation saw victory over the other political powers, including the nation of Israel. God had blessed Naaman with his conquests (v.1). Great respect and admiration were given to him by his superiors and servants because of these triumphs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 263.

<sup>4</sup>Alvin Reid, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 54.

<sup>5</sup>Paul House, *1, 2 Kings*, The New American Commentary, vol. 8 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 271.

In the middle of his success, Naaman faced struggles. The great conqueror was also held captive by a demoralizing problem. Naaman had leprosy. This physical disease did not keep him from his duties, but it did cause him emotional and spiritual stress. His search for a cure had given him no relief. This powerful man labored against a loss of hope. He had tried every course of action that had been presented, but no cure was discovered. No healer, prophet, or false idol could provide the salvation he sought. Naaman was in agony. He had no peace in his soul. Over time, his distress became uncontrollable and unconcealable. Those around him were aware of his depression. His wife, servants, and king were concerned with his fight (vv. 3, 5).<sup>6</sup>

From this spiritual depression, Naaman began a path to discover physical and spiritual healing. He encountered three people who had knowledge of the true Lord of all the earth (v. 15). These three, a servant girl, a king, and a prophet, were examples of both positive and negative roles in personal evangelism.<sup>7</sup>

### **A Witness of Love**

The witness of the servant girl was key in the general's recognition and response to God.<sup>8</sup> She was a young maid who had been captured in a previous raid into Israel, taken from her home land, and forced to serve under the direction of Naaman's wife. This girl could have harbored hatred against her captor. In his commentary on the passage, Paul House compares the girl's situation with her compassion for the king. He points out that "despite her captivity, she is not bitter or unhelpful. Rather, she shares

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<sup>6</sup>T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 13 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 59-60.

<sup>7</sup>House, *1, 2 Kings*, 272.

<sup>8</sup>Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 42.

what she knows about the Lord and the prophet out of concern for Naaman and her mistress and desires to see God's glory magnified" (v. 3)<sup>9</sup>

There was a stark contrast between the positions of Naaman and the servant girl (vv. 1-4). She was from Israel, a weakened nation. He was from Aram, a strong force. She was a little girl, while he was a great man. She was a servant and he the commander of the army. She was bound to humble circumstances but he to great fame. Despite the differences, the maid made the choice to speak on behalf of her God. She was bold in her witness and did not allow fear to keep her quiet.<sup>10</sup> One must not allow the circumstance of life to dictate his service.

The complete theological knowledge of the servant girl is unclear. What is evident is her belief in the saving power of God. The reputation of God's work through the prophet Elisha had become widespread (v. 3). The miracles were even "the subject of talk by young maidens of Samaria."<sup>11</sup> The girl shared the knowledge she possessed and gave renewed hope to her master.

### **A Witness of Pride**

With this new found hope, Naaman took the next logical step. He prepared to travel to Israel and find the prophet of God. The Aramean king drafted a letter of introduction to his counterpart in Jerusalem. The letter was very specific in its charge that the army commander was coming to seek a healing for his leprosy (v. 6).<sup>12</sup> The king of Israel was not happy to receive this call of a cure (v. 7). His first thoughts were of

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<sup>9</sup>House, *1, 2 Kings*, 272.

<sup>10</sup>B. O. Long, *2 Kings*, *Forms of Old Testament Literature*, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 70.

<sup>11</sup>Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 63.

<sup>12</sup>House, *1, 2 Kings*, 272.

self-preservation. Naaman was the general who had been warring with his country and army for many years. The king believed he was being led into a trap. The Jewish king saw the letter as a call for him to personally come up with a miracle cure. Knowing of his inability to perform such an act, the king was convinced the letter was a trick. Instead of relying on the power of God, his mind was trapped with fears of political intrigue.<sup>13</sup>

This failure to give a personal witness for God was especially tragic considering the king's position. He was the leader of the nation specifically called to teach the world about the Creator God. It was obvious that he had knowledge of God's ability to heal. The king quoted from the Law in his rebuke to Naaman (Deut 32:39). That passage stated that God is the One who holds the power of life and death. God is the One who wounds and heals. The king used this statement to show that he was not God and did not have this power.<sup>14</sup> He refused to help Naaman continue on his journey.

There was a great contrast in the witnesses of the Israelite king and the servant girl. The young girl gave a personal testimony from the knowledge in her possession. She did not have an abundance of wisdom, but her compassion led her to give freely of what she knew. The king would have had access to much more knowledge than the maiden, but he was reluctant to share. He provided no substantial direction to Naaman. He was an example of a self-centered and pride filled person. His main concern was over his own preservation and position.<sup>15</sup>

### **A Witness of Praise**

Hope was not lost for Naaman. The servant girl was correct in stating that there was a prophet of the Lord in Samaria (2 Kgs 4:3). That prophet now appeared and

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<sup>13</sup>Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 44.

<sup>14</sup>Hobbs, 2 Kings, 64.

<sup>15</sup>Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 43-44.

reached out for the soul weary general. Elisha took the initiative and called the man to his home (v. 8). However, before Naaman arrived a servant told him Elisha's message was to wash seven times in the Jordan (vv. 9-10). Reluctantly, the great leader followed the humbling command. Naaman arrived at the river and began the symbolic bath. He emerged from the seventh dip cured of his disease (v. 14). The cleansed man returned to the prophet to offer great gifts which Elisha refused to accept (v. 15).<sup>16</sup>

Elisha's distant approach to Naaman at the beginning and end of their encounter demonstrated the power of healing did not rest in the hands of the prophet. Elisha could take no payment for the healing.<sup>17</sup> The healing and salvation of Naaman had little to do with the prophet himself. Elisha had "distanced himself too far from the scene to get the credit. So to whom does he give the credit? It could not be in the special properties of the waters of the Jordan, for had that been true, why would there be any lepers left in Israel? The answer had to lie elsewhere."<sup>18</sup>

It was clear in Naaman's response that he understood God was the source of his healing (v. 15). His act of the humiliating dip in the Jordan was not to the prophet but to the Lord (v. 14). Naaman acknowledged the supremacy of Yahweh and forsook his master's gods (v. 17). He learned that salvation was found only in Israel's God.<sup>19</sup> Through Elisha's witness, God received all praise for salvation and healing of the general. He was not a miracle worker who expected something for his time. He was not a political operative to settle disputes between Aram and Israel. Elisha was a man who

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<sup>16</sup>Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 65.

<sup>17</sup>House, *1, 2, Kings*, 272.

<sup>18</sup>Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 45.

<sup>19</sup>Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *2 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 11 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 67.

would give witness to the honor of the Lord. His personal desire rested in the glorification of God.<sup>20</sup>

The church is to be a kingdom of priests in the same tradition of Elisha and the servant girl. Every believer is a member of the “royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5, 9). As God’s priests, Christians are to give of their service in spreading the good news of God’s salvation. They are to offer up spiritual aid that points others to the name of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> A faithful witness of God’s salvation should be given regardless of a believer’s social position or level of influence. This witness should be done through compassion for the condition of the lost soul. That compassion is related to the love one has for others lost in sin and for God’s glory. Each witness is also ultimately grounded in a desire to see God honored and worshiped. Like the prophet and the servant girl in 2 Kings 5, the church is to be concerned with the glorification of its Lord.<sup>22</sup>

### **Worshipping and Witnessing**

The church is to be consumed with the worship of God. It is the driving issue for Christians both individually and corporately. Nothing should hinder worship. There can be no rival in our hearts for the Lord’s glory. Worship is the main goal. Any thought, action, or passion that interferes with worship must be confronted and removed. Believers must practice self sacrifice and self control as they keep the focus on the honor of the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>House, *1, 2, Kings*, 272.

<sup>21</sup>Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2009), 106-07.

<sup>22</sup>House, *1, 2 Kings*, 272-73.

<sup>23</sup>John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 21.

This concentration on the glory of God should push the church to see more saved and involved in worship. Believers are to strive, as priests, to bring more people to actively engage in a heart that honors their Creator. The love for God is the driving force for missions and evangelism.<sup>24</sup> Nothing should hinder worship and nothing should hinder the labor to see some saved.

God has provided an example of this devotion to worshiping and witnessing through the life of the apostle Paul. This servant of the Lord expressed that “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). This imperative is grounded in the mission of salvation. Paul would further write, “give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved” (1 Cor 10:32-33). The Christian seeks the ultimate good for others, their salvation. Salvation is a testimony to the great love, mercy, and grace of God.<sup>25</sup>

### **To See Some Saved**

Paul was respected in the early church. He was an apostle and a free Roman Citizen. He had an eyewitness account of the living Lord (1 Cor 9:1). Paul had a right to receive pay for his spiritual service (v. 11). He also had the authority and status to expect and even demand material support.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the apostle refused any payment for his work at the church in Corinth. He rejected financial support because of his love for the glory of God and his passion to witness. By not claiming his rights, the advancement of the gospel received the spotlight (v. 12). Paul practiced self sacrifice and self control so that

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 205-06.

<sup>25</sup>Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 487-88.

<sup>26</sup>Raymond R. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), 341.



others could freely hear the message of salvation. The apostle was not concerned with fairness and equality. He refused to let his status and position take away from his responsibility to share the gospel.<sup>27</sup>

Preaching was his reward (v. 18). Paul refused to do anything that would hinder the message of Christ. He would not exercise his rights so that the gospel could be offered without any obstacle. His joy and payment were to deliver the good news of salvation. This same thought of removing financial barriers to the gospel was also expressed in his social relationships.<sup>28</sup>

**Paul became a slave to save some.** Paul was legally a free man but indentured himself for the sake of the gospel (v. 19). The apostle enslaved himself to all people in order to gain them for Christ. He intentionally sought to lower himself to make an appeal to those of lower status. Paul had endured himself to the Lord Jesus. He also endured himself to all that the Lord sought to reach. “Slavery to Christ necessitates slavery to all.”<sup>29</sup>

Paul’s remarks of self-slavery were similar to the thoughts of Jesus in the synoptic (Matt 20:25-28; Mark 10:43-45; Luke 22:25-27). Jesus came to serve and not be served. His ultimate service was to provide access to worship the Father through the cross. The disciples were not above their Master. Believers were to follow Paul’s example by serving others through the gospel.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 421.

<sup>28</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 421.

<sup>29</sup>Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 428-29.

<sup>30</sup>Collins, *First Corinthians*, 352-53.

**Paul became a Jew to save some.** In reaching out to the Jews, Paul conformed to practices that would aid him in delivering the gospel to that racial group (1 Cor 9:20). For example, he led Timothy to be circumcised (Acts 16:1-3) and to participate in Jewish purification rites (Acts 21:23-26). The apostle of Christ respected Jewish conscience. He monitored his behavior so to avoid offending others he sought to reach. He would not alienate them with respect to their customs as long as those customs did not violate the gospel.<sup>31</sup>

This attempt to conform to Jewish social structure did not interfere with the claim that Christ is Lord. Paul knew that Christians were not servants to the law as the Jewish leaders would teach. Believers existed under the grace of God (Rom 6:14-15). There was freedom from the law as they lived in the Spirit of Christ (8:1-2). The law was insufficient in bringing salvation (v. 3). These statements did not mean that Christ's followers were not to observe the Law. The Jewish law was the catalyst that led to faith in Christ (Gal 3:23-25). The Jewish Christians are no longer under the law, even though they may observe the law. Believers are to understand that the "Jewish law is no longer the norm according to which they are to pattern their lives."<sup>32</sup>

**Paul became a Gentile to save some.** This group, which included all ethnic races other than the Jews, was considered outside the Law (1 Cor 9:21). They did not possess the law as part of their heritage or national identity. Paul was a missionary to these Gentiles. He understood that those who did not have the law were still under the law of God (Rom 2:14; 3:19-20). They were lawless and must be reached with the message of grace.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 135-36.

<sup>32</sup>Collins, *First Corinthians*, 354.

<sup>33</sup>Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 431.

The apostle did not become lawless to reach this lawless group. He did not join their pagan worship of idols or other heathen acts; nor did he ignore the law of God and encourage sinful behavior (1 Cor 7:10). The gospel was not lawlessness (Rom 3:8). Instead, Paul gave up what culturally would point to his Jewish nature. He forsook distinctly Jewish practices and Jewish food laws. He would use a gospel presentation suited for a non-Jewish world (Acts 17). Even more, he behaved as a Gentile would to other Gentiles.<sup>34</sup>

This Jewish apostle “became like a Gentile, as one without heritage, without the merit of the fathers, without works of law to set him apart from others or to justify his salvation.” Paul lived among the Gentiles, “simply as a Christian, not as a Jew or a Pharisee of Pharisees.”<sup>35</sup> The cultural barriers that would have separated the Jews and Gentiles were removed so that Paul could communicate the love and law of Christ.

**Paul became weak to save some.** The idea of being “weak” was connected again to a social and relational class among the people (1 Cor 9:22). The apostle was reaching out to those who were not of a higher level socially by relating to them on their own level. It should be remembered that Paul did not accept any payment for his ministry. He worked alongside others for financial stability. This work was a means of connection to a socially weaker class in hopes of opening a door to present the gospel.<sup>36</sup>

### **To Represent Salvation**

Paul conducted himself as a slave, a Jew, a Gentile, and in a weaker social class in order to reach those groups with the gospel. His actions would have been

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<sup>34</sup>Hans D. Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 223.

<sup>35</sup>Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 432.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 434-35.

identical to his social companions but with one key difference of purpose. The missionary was not acting on his own accord. Paul was under the authority of Christ to win the lost (v. 22). He loved those “under the law” (v. 20) and those “without the law” (v. 21). He wanted both groups to respond to the love of God. The action or inaction he displayed was for the sake of the gospel because he was a representative of Christ (v. 23).<sup>37</sup>

As a representative of Christ, Paul understood that he was a steward of the gospel (4:2). He was entrusted with the most valuable investment available to mankind. The gospel had been handed over to his care, and he was accountable for its distribution. He was to act in a trustworthy manner to see its proclamation.<sup>38</sup> Believers are to see every aspect of life as gifts from God for worship and witnessing. Every social connection is to be an open door to represent Christ to the world. All Christians are held accountable in the ways they invest the gospel.

Paul was faithful to his task. His actions were never a sign of inconsistency. The apostle was uncompromising on the truths of salvation (1:17-25). Paul simply let the power of the gospel take precedent over cultural issues that did not matter. He would not let subordinated characteristics overrule the central concern of his life, worshiping and witnessing for God.<sup>39</sup> The church must understand the core elements of the gospel and strive not to let cultural trends be related as biblical truths.

### **To Work Toward Salvation**

The choice to break from cultural norms and “do all things for the sake of the gospel” will not be easy (9:23). Believers must exercise self sacrifice and self control in

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<sup>37</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 429.

<sup>38</sup>Collins, *First Corinthians*, 172.

<sup>39</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 431.

their responsibilities of witnessing. Paul encouraged Christians to give the needed effort as representatives of the gospel. He provided images of athletes who endured great training to compete for a prize (9:24-27).<sup>40</sup>

Like a runner, one must discipline his will to accomplish the task before him (vv 24-25). The athlete's focus is on winning. The effort to practice self control must be continuous. The Christian is to enter spiritual training daily as he prepares to be a witness for Christ.<sup>41</sup>

The believer also follows the path of a boxer who is ready to step in the ring (vv. 26-27). He is not a "shadow-boxer sparring with the air." This boxer has prepared himself by rigorous practice and self-sacrifice. He has sacrificed his body and mind to gain greater ability and confidence. The training has prepared him for the coming battles. Both of these images exhort one to give the needed effort in living the Christian witness.<sup>42</sup>

David Garland cautions in his commentary of 1 Corinthians that a Christian witness "requires effort and the suppression of appetites and longings." He continues by stating that the "crux of the argument is that simply entering a race and running does not automatically qualify one as a winner. Christians not only must join the race but also must put forth every effort to finish it well."<sup>43</sup>

Paul's goal to win others did not remove his understanding of God as power and sovereignty in the work of salvation. The apostle stated that God caused spiritual growth (1 Cor 3:6) of the church. Those who witness were the servants of God. They

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<sup>40</sup>Collins, *First Corinthians*, 357-59.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 361.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 361-62.

<sup>43</sup>Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 438, 440.

represented Christ and his message. It was the activity of God that brought one to faith and caused him to grow.<sup>44</sup>

The church exists to worship God. Part of this worship is giving a witness of God's greatness to the world. Worship is the praise of God and witness is the proclamation of God. No barriers should separate the believer from either of these tasks. Social separations and personal preferences should be removed so that God can use his servants to expand his kingdom. Christians are to give their effort and labor to see some saved and join the worship of God.<sup>45</sup>

### **Light to the World**

A believer's evangelistic efforts are not accomplished in a vacuum. God has not formed his church to live in isolation. Instead it is to be focused on connecting others to Christ in every facet of life. While Christians live in a culture, they are to act and influence that culture for Christ. The world should be confronted with the holiness and love of Christ through the Godly presence of believers. This presence can provide the opportunity for nonbelievers to experience a small part of God's glory and greatness. A Christian's righteous lifestyle and compassionate acts of service can provide an opportunity for the gospel to penetrate the heart of the lost.<sup>46</sup>

Jesus addressed this call to influence by referring to his disciples as salt and light (Matt 5:13-16). Both salt and light were vitally important for everyday life during

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<sup>44</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 132.

<sup>45</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Our Guilty Silence: The Church, the Gospel and the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 27-28.

<sup>46</sup>Robert Lewis, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 57.

the first century. In a spiritual sense, Christ's disciples are essential to the world in their witness of God. Their presence is used by the Lord for spiritual influence.<sup>47</sup>

### **A Purifying Influence**

In antiquity, both salt and light could be understood as symbols of purity. The primary purpose of salt at the time was as a preservative. It would be applied to food to prevent and slow decay. Light was viewed as a way of protection in the face of darkness. Darkness was the place of evil. Light cut through that evil and brought clarity and purity.<sup>48</sup>

These symbols point to the disciple's role in a sinful world. A Christian's presence can rein in the evil of society. This restraint is possible because one's lifestyle points to the holiness and purity of God. Believers provide moral and spiritual illumination to individuals and the culture. Their holy living highlights the failures of sin. Through their actions and attitudes, a purifying influence is shared with the surrounding world. This influence will grow as they grow in living by the will of God.<sup>49</sup> It is a lifestyle that points to evangelism.

When the church is living this holy life, some people will respond positively and be saved. Christians have a mandate to influence the world for Christ. Believers must acknowledge that "God's only witnesses are his children, and the world has no other way of knowing of him except through the testimony of what we are."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 97, 99.

<sup>48</sup>Daniel M. Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 37-38.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 37-38, 45.

<sup>50</sup>John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 237.

## **A Proclaiming Influence**

Christ's disciples are to be a testimony that stands for God's holiness. They are also to point others to a path of knowing that testimony through Christ. When Jesus stated that his followers were the light of the world, he wanted them to shine the truth of salvation into the world (5:14). Those who have received the gospel are indispensable in proclaiming the gospel. God has chosen to work through them to share the good news of eternal life.<sup>51</sup>

This illumination is realized as the church works to reveal the will of God. That will is for man to confront his sin through the cross and repentance. One is to submit to Jesus as Lord and Savior. Only through the light of the gospel can man be brought into a right relationship with God. The church accomplishes this task of shining the gospel light through its deeds of helping and loving others.<sup>52</sup>

God pointed to this work in the ministry of the apostle Paul at the Thessalonian church (1 Thess 2:8). Paul wrote to the church of his fond affection for them. He had imparted to them the gospel but he did so through a connection and relationship. Because of his love, he proclaimed the message of salvation. He worked among them in deeds to deliver God's good news. It was a loving action to impart oneself to those in need for the sake of the gospel. Paul put his life at their disposal. He had a relational influence that allowed him to proclaim Christ as Lord.<sup>53</sup>

The unsaved seek after their own wants and needs. They are concerned with their own righteousness and chase after their own wills. The church is to seek after the

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<sup>51</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 100.

<sup>52</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 103.

<sup>53</sup>F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, *World Biblical Commentary*, vol. 43 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 32-33.



will of God. Believers should seek to change their desires to reflect the desire of their Lord. They are to be more concerned with the needs of others. Christians know that the world's greatest problem is a separation from the Creator. The Disciples of Christ are to serve and influence the world as a bridge in proclaiming salvation.<sup>54</sup>

### **A Praising Influence**

Jesus instructs his disciples to “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). David Wheeler suggests that Christ's words call believers to let their acts of service aid in connecting the lost to the gospel. He observes that “this verse serves as the climax of the entire periscope. Since the disciples are the light of the world (5:15), they are now exhorted to let their light shine, that is, they are to let the light accomplish its purpose.”<sup>55</sup>

The purpose of these good works is the praise of God. The Christian does not seek a virtuous life or do good deeds to bring attention to himself. He is not seeking to gain the favor of other men. Rather, the intent is to guide other men to honor God. The goal of the church is to aid others in recognizing its opportunity and responsibility to glorify the Lord.<sup>56</sup>

Good works allow the world to see Christ in the believer's life. The church demonstrates the love of God by living according to the mercies and righteousness of God. When the lost witness our good deeds, “they will realize that there must be a source

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<sup>54</sup>David Wheeler, “Servanthood Evangelism as a Bridge to the Gospel,” in *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church for Harvest*, ed. Thomas P. Johnston (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 158.

<sup>55</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 100.

<sup>56</sup>MacArther, *Matthew 1-7*, 246-47.

for our goodness, and conclude that God is that source. They will praise God for his work in us.”<sup>57</sup>

### **A Practiced Influence**

Jesus’ direction to be salt and light reveals the great task of the church. His words are not about individual gifts or promises. Those who claim Christ as Savior are to follow his commands to influence the world. They are to obediently practice being salt and light. Their role is to bring others into contact with the gospel. The hope of this mission is for the lost to turn and glorify God. This order from the Lord cannot be denied.<sup>58</sup> Jesus affirms that believers who do acts of mercy and good deeds to others are serving him (Matt 25:34-40). These acts of kindness demonstrate a right relationship with Christ. Those who live in this manner are living the gospel message with humility in their daily actions.<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the salt and light narrative, Jesus warns against those who fail to influence. Salt that has become defiled and fails to preserve is thrown away (Matt 5:13). A city on a hill cannot be hidden (5:14). The light of a lamp is not to be covered. It is contradictory that salt would not be salty or that light would not shine. Christians are by their very nature called to influence the culture for Christ. It is inconceivable that believers do not guide others to honor and worship God. One’s influence can have great possibilities, but it means very little if those possibilities are not engaged and practiced.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 46.

<sup>58</sup>Dale C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 180-81.

<sup>59</sup>Blomberg, *Matthew*, 377-78.

<sup>60</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 99-100.

The church is to be spiritually and morally distinct from its surrounding culture. It cannot be an influence for Christ while it resembles the sinful darkness of the world. Authentic disciples of Jesus must live by his righteousness. Their character must be different from the world. Their love is to be greater than that of their pagan neighbors.<sup>61</sup> Too often, the church has conformed to the world's standards. It has adopted the culture's sinful habits instead of being counter-cultural. Society will have no reason to glorify God if it does not see any difference between its actions and the church's actions. Failure to be salt and light will mean a failure to influence others for Christ.<sup>62</sup>

The evangelistic role of the Christian is to be given from every aspect of his life. A believer should influence the world for the Lord. One is to share Christ and his love through a righteous lifestyle, relationships, and good deeds. The church resembles salt and light as it acts to purify and restrain the culture from sin. It also proclaims the mercy of Christ through its works and words. All of these actions are to aid others in glorifying God. To accomplish this influence, the church must lovingly confront the changing culture. It must practice being salt and light by studying biblical principles and applying them to specific situations. Influential Christians must engage the world with an honest gospel and a servant's heart.<sup>63</sup>

### **Teach the Gospel Truth**

The church has been given a mission to communicate the gospel to the world (Acts 1:8). Christians are called to follow the commands of Christ and share the good

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<sup>61</sup>Jeffery P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer, eds., *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), 255-57.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 255-56.

<sup>63</sup>Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 31.

news of salvation. They are to teach others how to be followers of Jesus (Matt 28:18-20). The Scriptures give the undeniable truth that all believers have received this mission from Christ. This task is not selective to one group or fraction. The church was established to teach the complete gospel truth.<sup>64</sup>

This understanding leads one to question the content of the gospel. What exactly is the church to communicate to others? Believers want the lost to be saved. They want others to know the joy of God's presence. They want to share their hope and excitement in eternal life. But, what are the essential truths of the gospel message? What is the evangelistic message? How can the church know that it is engaged in evangelism?<sup>65</sup>

J. I. Packer states that "in a word, the evangelistic message is the gospel of Christ, and him crucified; the message of man's sin and God's grace, of human guilt and divine forgiveness, of new birth and new life through the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a message made up of four essential ingredients."<sup>66</sup> Believers are to teach others about God, sin, Christ, and faith and repentance.

### **Teach the Truth about God**

The evidence for this fourfold message is witnessed through the apostle Paul's visit to the city of Athens (Acts 17:15-34). As he entered this prestigious city, Paul was horrified by the pagan images he encountered. The city was full of idols (v. 16). He recognized that the people were religious to a fault. The city leaders sought to construct a statue to every false idol in the world. They worshiped everything imaginable but did not

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<sup>64</sup>Mark Dever, *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 46-50.

<sup>65</sup>J. I. Packer, *Evangelism & The Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1961), 37.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 57, 58-70.

honor the one true God. The horror and dismay he felt toward the idolatry drove him to give a gospel witness.<sup>67</sup>

This educated city was ignorant about the true God (v. 23). They were groping around in dark for the true Creator (v. 27). He was close to them. They had an idea that he existed, but they were lost from his presence. Paul insisted, “he must proclaim the truth about his God’s nature and activities to his audience. Without such proclamation they would not really know it.”<sup>68</sup>

God’s moral character tells the need and availability of the gospel. His holiness teaches that man is accountable to the Creator. His love points to the accessibility of forgiveness and mercy. The work of Christ has no meaning until one has a true picture of God as Creator. The church must convey that the world is responsible for its actions and attitudes. The message of salvation begins with God as our Maker. Man has to conform to his standards and will. Jesus conveys this concept by saying “you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48).<sup>69</sup>

Paul wanted to adequately share with the Athenians the person of God. He did so in hopes that they would know him personally. His goal was to prevail on them to turn from their idols and to the living God. The goal of the gospel is always to lead others to know and worship God. The church proclaims his greatness in hopes that others will recognize it and give him the honor and glory he deserves.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 329.

<sup>68</sup>Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostle, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 523.

<sup>69</sup>Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 56-57.

<sup>70</sup>John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 280.

## **Teach the Truth about Sin**

God's creatures are to be confronted by his holiness and their sinfulness. Man must see his failures in their proper context. He is responsible to live by God's standards and to give God honor in all things. Paul sought to lead the Athenians to admit their sin before God. He pointed to God's high and mighty position as Creator. Now he speaks of the creation's submission to that position. He tells them that God "has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness" (Act 17:31). All men will be guilty before God's just judgment.<sup>71</sup>

Teaching a person about sin involves both awareness and conviction. One must be aware that he has a wrong relationship with God. He must recognize that his personal failure is not just with self or others but with his Creator. Each person is to understand the brutal facts that he has violated the holiness of God. This violation means that he now stands guilty. God has the responsibility to maintain his holiness by judging each sin and sinner.<sup>72</sup>

To teach about sins also leads one to confront the specific need to right that relationship and reconcile with the Lord. The person should deal with conviction. There is to be a sense of guilt for particular wrongs. One is burdened that his righteousness is not equal to that of God. There is now a feeling of helplessness in doing right by the Creator. Man's mind and heart are weighed down by his inability to live rightly with God.<sup>73</sup>

Each person has to see that he is a created being that conforms to the Lord's laws. He must acknowledge his failure to live by God's holiness. This failure will be

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<sup>71</sup>Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostle*, 530-31.

<sup>72</sup>Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, 66.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

judged. One's unrighteousness must be punished if the Creator is to remain perfectly holy. This reality leads man to work to fix the failure. But no amount of work can overcome his state of sin. God will judge him with a holy justice that cannot be removed.<sup>74</sup>

### **Teach the Truth about Christ**

God gives grace to man's helpless situation. His love overpowers conviction, guilt, and the effects of sin. This love is given through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus provides the only path by which one can escape the righteous judgment of God. An unbeliever must not only acknowledge his sin but also "apprehend the grace of God, thus laying hold of Christ crucified and risen."<sup>75</sup>

To the Athenians, Paul spoke of Christ as the "Man" whom God "has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (v. 31). By speaking of the resurrection, we can be confident that Paul also spoke of the death of Jesus. John Stott suggests that this passage in Acts is a very short excerpt for a larger sermon that the apostle gave. He asserts that "Luke provides only a short extract from his speech which takes less than two minutes to read. Paul must have filled out this outline considerably and his conclusion must have included Christ crucified."<sup>76</sup> This sermon would have included the entire view of Christ's work, which included his crucifixion and ultimate resurrection. The message of Christ is his person and work. To present the whole gospel is to present Jesus completely.

Believers are to teach that the death and following resurrection of Jesus are the tools by which eternal life is provided. God gave his Son as a bridge from sin to

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<sup>74</sup>Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostle*, 530-32.

<sup>75</sup>Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, 67.

<sup>76</sup>Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 289.

salvation. Jesus came to earth and perfectly obeyed God's law. At the end of his ministry, he died on a cross. He died a sinner's death, which he did not deserve. He bore the sins of the world and took the world's punishment. The church seeks to explain that "Jesus is the sinner's substitute, reconciler, and liberator. He is the only Lord and Savior."<sup>77</sup>

### **Teach the Truth about a Response**

The last essential ingredient of the gospel involves a call to change. "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent" (v. 30). Paul had already reminded the Athenians of their lack of knowledge about God (v. 23). Now their ignorance must be transformed by the knowledge of Christ. There is a certainty of coming judgment (v. 31). No one should delay. People everywhere should respond to the goodness of Jesus. This response is through faith and repentance.<sup>78</sup>

The church is to teach all men to turn away from their false ideas about God. Unbelievers must repent from rejection of God's will. Instead, the lost must put their trust in the One True Savior. It is through faith in Jesus that the lost find their way to God. They are to embrace the true knowledge of his being that is made available in the gospel.<sup>79</sup>

Repentance and faith will always accompany each other. They are joined in the same manner as the crucifixion and resurrection. One cannot simply turn away from sin to connect to God. Nor does belief that Jesus is God's Son, without any life change,

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<sup>77</sup>Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, 235.

<sup>78</sup>Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 287.

<sup>79</sup>Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 29.



lead to a relationship with the Creator. Both must be joined together. Trusting in Christ and committing to him as Lord is the only path to God.<sup>80</sup>

Believers must never forget that “repentance before God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21) are goals of the gospel.”<sup>81</sup> No gospel presentation is complete if it does not lovingly urge people to respond. Christians have a duty to encourage unbelievers to pray and seek God’s mercy. Without a response, the message does not achieve its desired outcome.

The church should teach the truth openly and honestly. Paul’s life displayed this teaching in the city of Athens, as he approached the task of telling others with boldness and conviction. He met people at their personal level in understanding the gospel (vv. 18-20). As he gave the presentation, it was adjusted to fit the cultural formalities and preferences of his audience. He showed himself sensitive to their level of understanding. The message of Christ is to be understood. One accomplishes nothing speaking with words and in ways the audience will not understand.<sup>82</sup>

Paul presented the gospel with all honesty. The church must guard against any coercions or manipulations. The good news should not be changed to better accommodate certain groups. No part can be added or removed to make the lost feel better about themselves. Instead, believers are called to faithfully give the essential of the gospel and to give the results to God.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 289.

<sup>81</sup>Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, 58, 75-76.

<sup>82</sup>Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, “The Truth of Scripture and the Problem of Historical Relativity,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 173-75.

<sup>83</sup>Carey Hardy, “Just As I Am: A Closer Look at Invitations and Altar Calls,” in *Fool’s Gold?*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 143.

The worth of relating the essentials of the gospel is not measured in the number of converts. Rather, “the value is in knowing that we have obeyed our Lord and have been a reinforcer of his truths.” It is in knowing these truths, living them, giving them, and “making God’s name famous.”<sup>84</sup> The church gauges success by its faithfulness in teaching the gospel truth.

### **Prepare Yourself**

Teaching the gospel truth defines a believer’s mission for Christ. In every situation and circumstance, one must look for ways to communicate Christ and the cross. The apostle Peter teaches this fact when he calls the church to be ready and prepared to share their hope in Christ (1 Pet 3:13-17). The responsibility of Christ’s disciples is to give helpful answers and sensible reason for what they believe. They have been given a burden from God to deliver the essential elements that let others know and respond to his Son. This burden is a daily calling. Christians are to equip themselves in a manner that allows for the realization of gospel giving opportunities. When an opening presents itself, they are to share their faith. Christians must be ready.<sup>85</sup>

### **Be Ready to Trust**

The reality of hurt and pain is assured in a world corrupted by sin. Most people, regardless of religious attitudes, understand that doing bad leads to harmful consequences. Sin damages and harms ones relationship with God and others. Mankind admits that wrong acts will normally result in harm, pain, and suffering of some kind. The opposite of this fact is true as well. It is natural to expect those who do good to

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<sup>84</sup>Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, 199.

<sup>85</sup>Lewis Drummond, “When You Don’t Have the Answers,” in *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook*, ed. Scott Dawson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 93.

receive some good. One does not assume that those who are engaged in good will be given harm (v. 3).<sup>86</sup>

This conflicting thought is what can happen to those who live under God's righteousness. Christians are to expect the opposite of the nature. Spiritually speaking, they are to anticipate suffering, hurt, and pain when living for the good of God. They may "suffer for the sake of righteousness" (v. 14). This abnormal exception of receiving emotions and physical hurt is received because they choose to stand for the righteous Christ as the only Lord and Savior.<sup>87</sup>

Christians facing difficulties from family, friends, or foes are to depend on the power of Christ. They are not to fear the intimidation of others (v. 14). They are not to be shaken up or disturbed or frightened or plunged into emotional turmoil. Instead, believers are to "sanctify Christ as Lord" in their hearts (v. 15).<sup>88</sup>

Christ is to be honored and revered. A believer is not to fear his adversaries. When discussing the meaning of discipleship, Jesus said, "do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). Persecutors may kill the body, but God has power over the soul and the body. God alone, and not human beings, is to be feared and obeyed.<sup>89</sup>

A disciple of Jesus replaces the fear of the world with fear of his Lord. Jesus is trusted because of the faithful protection he provides. He is a sanctuary for his people.

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<sup>86</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 502-04.

<sup>87</sup>Grudem, *1 Peter*, 158.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 159-60.

<sup>89</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 285-86.

The man who trusts in him as Lord may stumble, but he will never fall.<sup>90</sup> His faith, hope, and love are exclusively grounded in a connection with Christ.

Christians are able to sanctify Christ in their hearts because they know of his absolute authority to save. He is the sovereign God. He is the ruler of all. He is in control. Christians believe that, through his sovereignty, God will bring about their good in all things (Rom 8:28). They acknowledge that being submissive to the will of God is right even when they endure hardship (1 Pet 3:17). God is Lord of all and will deliver those who love him.<sup>91</sup>

### **Be Ready to Tell**

God's holiness is not to be hidden in the disciple's heart, but should be given to others. Believers are to declare their holy God. This proclamation has to be a constant theme through our time and Scripture. The Jewish nation was to make God's holiness known among the Gentiles. Christians, who confess Christ as Lord, are to make his holiness known to the world. They are, as holy people, to point the lost world to the Holy One.<sup>92</sup>

Christ is the hope of a Christian. He is the One from whom salvation is possible. He is the living hope that believers will be reborn through the resurrection. Believers have a hope in the deepest darkest despair. They have hope in a future with Jesus and the Father in eternal glory. When they experience persecution, hurt, and pain,

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<sup>90</sup>Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 229-30.

<sup>91</sup>John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" in *Still Sovereign*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 119-20.

<sup>92</sup>Ramsey J. Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 187.

there is still hope because Christ is honored in their hearts. In the greatest oppression, believers have a great expectation of eternal deliverance through Jesus.<sup>93</sup>

Christians are never called out of this harsh world. Their hope is not that they can retreat from the hostilities or escape times of pain. Believers stay in a hopeless world to give a witness because they have hope in Christ (v. 15). They are beacons of light that shine in darkness. They turn times of hurt into moments of sharing the gospel. They tell others why there is confidence and assurance of a better life through Christ. Even persecution is to be an opportunity to turn others toward the hope of their holy God.<sup>94</sup>

Peter said, “always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope” (v. 15). The word “defense” is used in the sense of replying to an accusation. It is not so much that one uses it when a formal accusation is made against the faith. The accompanied words of “always” and “to everyone” give it a broader meaning. Christians are constantly to be prepared to give an answer for what they believe. They should seek out opportunities to be on spiritual offense and seek ways to bear witness to Christ. Even “in hostile situations the opportunity for witness to Christ often comes unexpectedly; the Christian who is not always ready to answer will miss it.”<sup>95</sup>

Defending the faith should not be done with pride or bitterness. The Christian who is criticized should stand before his accusers with meekness and respect. His hope in Christ is to be lived with humility. One does not suffer persecution in silence nor does he lash out in anger.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Jobes, *1 Peter*, 230.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 230-31.

<sup>95</sup>Grudem, *1 Peter*, 161.

<sup>96</sup>Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 190.

Believers are to have a clear conscience when they testify to the reason they have hope in Christ (v. 16). This moral integrity involves both their walk and their talk. A testimony with a clear conscience is backed up with personal integrity. One cannot explain hope in Christ if he is living outside that hope. An immoral lifestyle will destroy ones credibility to share the holy God. A clear conscience is also witnessed in the delivery of the hope. It cannot be offensive in manner or approach. If someone takes offense of the Christian, “it should be over the content of the gospel, not because the message was offered in a manner that invalidates Christ love for seekers.”<sup>97</sup>

Being ready to share the gospel is not a passive action. A defensive of ones hope does not just happen without an active engagement. Each believer is to have knowledge about the gospel and his relationship to Christ. He should be capable of effectively sharing the fundamentals of the faith. Disciples should be able to answer basic questions about Christian belief. Being ready to give a defense does not mean that one will know all the answers, but he should know the central components of his faith. A Christian should be able to give a personal witness of the hope that changed his life.<sup>98</sup>

This need to be ready involves practice and training. Believers are to study the Scriptures. They are to learn answers to biblical questions. They are to discover different methods to communicate those answers. They are to pray for the opportunity to share their faith and demonstrate their hope. All Christians must be ready with the gospel. They are to be ready to trust God through worries, fears, and doubts. They are to be ready to tell others of their great hope in Christ.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Jobes, *1 Peter*, 231.

<sup>98</sup>Renee Sanford, “Recent Immigrants: God’s Heart for the Immigrant,” in *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook*, ed. Scott Dawson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 283.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 283-84.

## **Conclusion**

All believers must accept their individual responsibility in giving the gospel message. The church is an assembly of priests called to bring a faithful witness and worship of the One True God. They sacrifice their own personal needs to see others saved. Their influence is felt through a righteous lifestyle, loving relationships, and good works. They take every opportunity to present the complete truth of the gospel. Through training and practice, they prepare themselves to do the work of Christ.

Believers have a responsibility of serving Christ by giving the message of grace. That responsibility does not mean that they can force others to respond. They cannot argue anyone into heaven. Nor should they mislead some with flattering words of coercion. Christians are to honestly present Christ and allow the Spirit to work. They are to ask their Lord for boldness and trust in his power. The church is to be submissive to its Savior and always give him the praise for those who accept his message.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 177-80.

CHAPTER 3  
SOCIAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES IN  
RURAL EVANGELISM

The desire to reach rural America with the gospel was established long ago. Settling pioneers brought with them faith in Christ that they would share with others. They were joined by circuit-riding preachers who would cover the frontier on horseback proclaiming the gospel. These early evangelists understood they must reach people where they lived. They entered into small communities teaching the message of salvation and establishing churches.<sup>1</sup>

Today, more than two hundred thousand congregations are serving in rural America. They are a testimony to God's faithful work in the past. These churches have witnessed great spiritual growth, but their work is not finished. Living beside these rural congregations are now more than sixty-one million people. This non-urban population is the largest concentration of its kind that has ever existed in the United States. The majority of these rural people are lost and unchurched.<sup>2</sup>

The rural congregation must continue to penetrate its surrounding culture with the gospel. It must work to connect those with secular values, beliefs, and behaviors to Christ. The church must examine the historical characteristics and modern changes of its

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<sup>1</sup>Alvin J. Luedke, "Opportunities Amidst Challenges: Denominations and Rural Ministry," *Word and World* 23 (2005): 43.

<sup>2</sup>Shannon Jung et al., *Rural Ministry: The Shape of the Renewal to Come* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 14, 58.



surrounding country side community. These rural characteristics can lead to methods and techniques that are better suited to evangelistically reach this unique group.

### **Historical Characteristics**

The rural community has been defined in different ways. Some base it on population size and density. Others define it as a faraway place with many farms and open spaces. In reality, a rural community has many characteristics that set it apart from its urban counterpart. The people have their own curiosities, habits, and ideas that shape their relationship and openness to the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

The following historical features may not be totally unique to rural people. There is some overlap with other groups. No group can be defined perfectly. Yet, these distinctions give a common idea of “ruralness.” There are common traits that can apply to people from West Virginia to Missouri. These qualities are ingrained in the past and tell us what it means to be part of a country community in the present.<sup>4</sup>

### **Relationally Driven Life**

Rural communities were driven by relationships. Relationships provided the energy that kept life going. They often dictated what the community would do and how it would do it. Relational bonds were more important than activities, events, places, or professions. Great worth was placed on personal connections with people. Other involvements were valued, but they meant nothing if they were not shared with friends, family, and neighbors.<sup>5</sup> Life revolved around community bonds. These connections were the underlining fabric that gave the community its purpose and meaning.

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<sup>3</sup>S. John Roth, “Challenges in Rural/Small Town Ministry: Palmquist Memorial Lecture on Ministry in Town and Country,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 23 (1996), 272-73.

<sup>4</sup>Kent R. Hunter, *The Lord’s Harvest and the Rural Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1993), 18, 39.

These community bonds were first established by close-knit families. Rural towns came into existence as families moved to the area. These families would soon form connections with their neighbors based on needs. Neighboring families needed each other to survive. They had a common interest in each other's welfare. After a number of years, sons and daughters from different families would marry. These marriages caused the connection to others in the community to become even greater. It also caused the members of the small town to take the form of a large family group. A strong solidarity and friendship were established that dictated how each individual related to his neighbors.<sup>6</sup>

The community's bond extended to distant relatives as well. Those sons and daughters who married stayed in the same place for generations. The family connections widened to more and more people. Soon the entire town was joined through some type of family relationship. Newcomers often said "it seems like everyone around here is related." These bonds allowed the larger community to continue to see itself as a close connected family unit.<sup>7</sup>

### **Open and Closed Cultures**

Fellowship was natural in rural communities. It was an open culture that reached out to others. It was not uncommon for people who passed one another on the road to wave and say hello to everyone they met. They waved even if they were not sure to whom they were waving. Drop-in visits were also normal and enjoyed. Those who

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<sup>5</sup>Glenn Daman, "Understanding the Small Church, Part One," *The First Premise*, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 31 January 2012; available from <http://thefirstpremise.blogspot.com, /2009/09/dr-glenn-c-daman-understanding-small.html>; Internet.

<sup>6</sup>Hunter, *The Lord's Harvest and the Rural Church*, 19-21.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 19.

were busy with work would stop and share part of their lives with the visitor. There was great pleasure involved in spending time with friends and neighbors.<sup>8</sup>

These small townships prided themselves in being there for one another. There was an unspoken rule that one had to care for others in the town. In the face of terrible “disasters such as droughts and storms demanded that the community band together to help each other. The common occurrences of fires, accidents, and deaths gave the people of the community numerous opportunities to be supportive and caring. They understood that what happened to a neighbor today might happen to them tomorrow. All of this brought a closeness and neighborliness to the rural community.”<sup>9</sup>

This openness did not always extend to outsiders or newcomers. Those deep relationships of the community took time to grow. This slow evolving process made it difficult for “first timers” to be included. The rural community thought of itself as a friendly place where everybody knew your name. Outsiders struggled to see the personal warmth and concern.<sup>10</sup> In many cases, the relationship between long-timers and outsiders became an “us versus them” conflict.<sup>11</sup> Community members did not trust those they did not know. They were polite but did not open up their lives to those they saw as intruders.

### **Natural Communication**

Communication in rural communities was spontaneous, informal, and natural. No one relied on formal news services to find out what was going on. The main avenue

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 109-10.

<sup>9</sup>Kevin E. Ruffcorn, *Rural Evangelism: Catching the Vision* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994), 12-13.

<sup>10</sup>Daman, “Understanding the Small Church, Part One,” sec. 5.

<sup>11</sup>Ron Crandall, *Turn Around Strategies for the Small Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1955), 61.

of relaying information was through the grapevine. Everyone knew what had happened because they talked about it on a regular basis. Negatively, this type of communication meant that there were no secrets. What was spoken of in private would also be available in public. Positively, it allowed people to know what was occurring in the world around them. They could prepare themselves to face obstacles or responsibilities.<sup>12</sup>

This grapevine message system did not mean that every aspect of life was discussed in polite company. Neighbors prided themselves on being involved with one another without being pushy or demanding. There was a strong respect for privacy on certain issues. Financial conditions, marital problems, and other family matters were not openly mentioned. A person might speculate upon these items privately, but they were not discussed with those involved.<sup>13</sup>

Religion was one of those topics that was balanced between private and public conversations. Community members did not want to offend their neighbors, so they kept personal discussion about faith to a minimal. Spiritual lostness and salvation were rarely discussed. A group might bring up something the preacher mentioned in a sermon or a general truth about God, but personal belief was beyond reach.<sup>14</sup>

### **Tradition Mattered**

Rural communities valued tradition. Traditions were more than old stories; they were bonds to a past generation. The past provided a heritage for the present and future. What had been done in previous generations set the structure for the community of the present day. Former customs provided a foundation for the current community to live and grow. These traditions were also ways of expressing value for family members

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<sup>12</sup>Daman, "Understanding the Small Church, Part One," sec. 6.

<sup>13</sup>Ruffcorn, *Rural Evangelism*, 12-13.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

who had passed away. Sons and grandsons could show they loved their fathers and grandfathers by keeping the same practices. They served as a symbol of love and devotion. To end tradition was to signify that the one who started that tradition was not important enough to follow.<sup>15</sup>

The love for tradition made change a struggle. New activities were often construed as fads that only interrupted what was acceptable. The community was comfortable with its habits and resisted new ideas that were too far outside the usual behavior. This apprehension about change was rooted in a fear of the unknown. People did not want to leave what had been dependable. The old days were considered the good days and there was no need to change.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Land was Loved**

Land has always been crucial to those in the country. The pioneers came to settle a new frontier. They planted small farms that covered the region. From the beginning, their existence was tied to their ability to work the land. Even as new types of business emerged, they remained grounded to agriculture in some form. Stores sold to the farmer and often bought his produce. Local supplies and services depended on what was taken from the ground. The welfare of the entire community was sustained by the land.<sup>17</sup>

Living off the land involved hard work. The population never ran away from this work. They were willing to do what it took to make their way of life prosper. Rural people were very pragmatic. They were not high on theory and did not spend much time

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<sup>15</sup>Daman, "Understanding the Small Church, Part One," sec. 7.

<sup>16</sup>Anthony Pappas and Scott Planting, *Mission: The Small Church Reaches Out* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1993), 10-11.

<sup>17</sup>Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 102-03.

in speculation or dreaming philosophy. They were a practical group determined to finish the task at hand. Work was a constant presence. Time was spent calculating the best way to accomplish it. The task was finished with the least amount of effort and financial investment. The work was done with diligence because there was always more work to do.<sup>18</sup>

The land was not just a place to work. It was part of the people's identity. The land defined them. This is where they lived and died. Their children were born there and parents were buried there. The land provided not only their livelihood but also their pleasure. They spent time enjoying the land through activities such as hunting and fishing. Even those who were not directly involved in farming were fundamentally bound up with the land.<sup>19</sup>

**Historical foundations will dictate future engagements.** Sharing the gospel in the present environment has to take into account the past culture. Churches are wise to use the relational bonds that already exist in the community. They can form these bonds as a bridge to witnessing. The close relationship will allow believers to share Christ in an informal manner. The ingrained openness to care and help neighbors can be a time for both showing and speaking the gospel. Congregations must be aware of past traditions, customs, and behaviors as they lead others to the saving message. They can often use these backgrounds in the service of Christ's mission.

### **Modern Changes**

The countryside community finds itself in the midst of a great cultural change. In describing a common view of the rural township, Kent Hunter explained that "many of

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<sup>18</sup>Hunter, *The Lord's Harvest and the Rural Church*, 38.

<sup>19</sup>L. Shannon Jung and Mary A. Agria, *Rural Congregational Studies: A Guide for Good Shepherds* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 30-31.

us may have a picturesque view of the rural life. We visualize people living off the land and enjoying a close community and a slow-paced, stress-free life. The reality, however, is often far different.”<sup>20</sup> The sparse population has endured wave after wave of social and economic adjustments. These events have reshaped the view of the country life.

### **The Rural Economy**

Poverty has remained a constant struggle among rural families. The average country town has never been known as an economic center. This economic hurdle has been ever increasing over the last several decades. Agricultural communities face the reality of living after the farm crisis of the 1970s and 80s. They are now competing with world markets. Many farmers were forced out of business as they battled international commodities, trade agreements, pricing, and global weather conditions. Those who remain have to farm more and more ground to make the same profit. They work with larger and more expensive equipment and other increases in cost. The growth of their required investments translates to larger debt loads. These committed farmers often have to take on other forms of work to supplement their farming operation.<sup>21</sup>

The obvious result of this economic change is the greater diversity of the rural work force. Farmers are no longer the largest segment of the rural population. Agricultural employment counts for less than 4% of all jobs in the United States.<sup>22</sup> Some have left their rural homes to find better jobs in the city. Many people who have stayed are not involved in agriculture but in small factories, local schools, or service industries.

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<sup>20</sup>Glenn C. Daman, *Leading the Small Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 60-61.

<sup>21</sup>Roth, “Challenges in Rural/Small Town Ministry,” 273-74.

<sup>22</sup>Patricia A. Daly, “Agricultural Employment: has the decline ended?” *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 15 February 2012; available from <http://www.bls.gov, /opub/mlr/1981/11/art2full.pdf>; Internet.

Most of these non-urban residents drive long distances to work in other communities. They live in the countryside and commute to the city or neighboring towns for employment.<sup>23</sup>

Rural community members know that the “trauma of this economic upheaval is measured not only in dollars and cents or bankruptcies and foreclosures. The loss of the farm is far more personal than that. It represents an emotional as well as physical homelessness.”<sup>24</sup> This economic devastation is producing harmful effects such as those experienced by the urban poor. The stress and loss of self-esteem have cut through the fabric of the people. The financial distress causes a ripple effect through other areas of life. It is destroying families and entire communities.

With a casual drive through the countryside one can note that “many of these towns are a much shrunken version of their former selves. Saturdays were once lively on Main Street as farmers came to shop.”<sup>25</sup> The populace now must drive to see such evidences of life. Most streets are filled with abandoned stores that are in disrepair. Businesses are often closed never to reopen. Families are constantly surrounded with the reality of better days.

### **The Rural Exodus**

A historical look at rural communities has revealed a low level of movement of people from one place to another. The family farms “were passed down from parents to children to grandchildren. Small town businesses were handled in a similar manner. Few people moved into or out of the community.”<sup>26</sup> In the last half of the twentieth century,

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<sup>23</sup>Chris Edmondson, *Strategies for Rural Evangelism* (Bramcote, England: Grove, 1989), 5-6.

<sup>24</sup>Jung and Agria, *Rural Congregational Studies*, 77.

<sup>25</sup>Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 82.



this continuity stopped. Young adults left the country side to seek education and employment in the city. Birth rates, that had been higher in the past, dropped. The children who used to carry on the family farm were gone.<sup>27</sup>

In the past it “was not uncommon for grandparents, parents, and several siblings to live just down the road from one another. This clustering of extended families is no longer common.”<sup>28</sup> Instead, there is a major break in family relationships. In times past, the family was always together. They lived, worked, and went to church as a family. As the younger generation is moving away, the amount of family time has diminished. There is no family cohesion. This lack of togetherness causes pain on both sides of the spectrum. Parents are mournful that they cannot provide a stable environment for their children. The children, on the other hand, feel guilty in giving up on what their parents had worked so hard to save.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Rural Resurgence**

The 1990s saw a resurgence of sorts in rural population growth. As a whole, growth numbers moved from declining to acceleration. Population totals that had been plummeting were now rising. This growth did not come from the natural growth of births but from migration into these rural areas. People were leaving the city to live in the country.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ruffcorn, *Rural Evangelism*, 13.

<sup>27</sup>Annabel Kirschner, E. Helen Berry and Nina Glasgow, “The Changing Demographic Profile of Rural America,” *Occasional Policy Brief Series*, sec. 3 [on-line]; accessed 15 February 2012; available from [http://www.lgu.umd.edu, /lgu\\_v2/homepages/attachs\\_Homepage/1095\\_Kirschner%20Berry%20Glasgow%20V3%20-%20Oct.html](http://www.lgu.umd.edu, /lgu_v2/homepages/attachs_Homepage/1095_Kirschner%20Berry%20Glasgow%20V3%20-%20Oct.html); Internet.

<sup>28</sup>Ruffcorn, *Rural Evangelism*, 78.

<sup>29</sup>Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 113-15.

City dwellers have left their apartments for hobby farms in the country. They are not coming with plans to make a major agricultural impact but to enjoy the rural environment.<sup>31</sup> For many, this is the best of both worlds. They are able to keep an economic connection with their urban job and a country home which provides more space and outdoor opportunity. The new rural migrants use their surroundings as a bedroom community. They come home to sleep and then travel thirty to sixty miles to work.<sup>32</sup>

New migrations to the country have not always been accepted well. The new comers arrive with different ideas and values. The mix of the old ways and new beliefs can bring tensions. These recent city dwellers sometime have a difficult time being accepted by those who are established in the community. Strangers have typically been looked upon with suspicions and are kept at an acceptable distance. They will be treated hospitably, but they may not be fully trusted. It can take years for a new comer to completely feel accepted by the existing community.<sup>33</sup>

It is also apparent that the newcomers have a different view of the community. Long term residents were grounded in the life of the area. They shopped locally, volunteered for services, and supported events and activities. Building up ones community was a deeply defined responsibility. Those who have recently moved to the area do not have the same loyalty and affection for the past or the present. They work, shop, and play closer to the urban centers. There is no loyalty to home town stores or area churches.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Kenneth M. Johnson and Calvin L. Beale, "The Rural Rebound Revisited," *American Demographics* 17, no:7 (1995): 46, 48.

<sup>31</sup>Hunter, *The Lord's Harvest and the Rural Church*, 56-57.

<sup>32</sup>Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 78-79.

<sup>33</sup>Ruffcorn, *Rural Evangelism*, 78-79.

This separation from the community also leads to a greater isolation. Spending time with neighbors is not a priority, nor is it needed. Anyone can easily travel to faraway places to visit family and friends. Members of a rural community may now live only a few miles away from people they will never contact. Isolation comes not because of distance or environment but by choice.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Rural Conversation**

There is still a small group of rural residents that remember life without electricity. This same group has seen the rise of the information age. They have ushered in the use of radios, televisions, and cellphones. They now live in a world where ipads and personal computers are common. Almost no one in rural life is without some type of electronic gadget. Small town pastors across the country have notice that “rural America is being impacted by the same information technology breakthrough as the rest of the world.”<sup>36</sup> This technology is shaping people’s work, relationships, and values.

New technology has changed the way members of the country community communicate. Adults use their electronic toys to tune into the entire universe. They are part of a global village. The biggest events of the world scene are immediately available. The hottest events on stage at metropolitan centers are watched in their living rooms. They can email people from other countries and receive an immediate reply. Even conversation with close friends has changed. Texting and Facebook keep people connected much more than face to face chats.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 102.

<sup>35</sup>Hunter, *The Lord’s Harvest and the Rural Church*, 68.

<sup>36</sup>Shannon O’Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America: Breaking all the Rurals* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf, 2010), 171-72.

<sup>37</sup>Paul E. Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 14-15.

These modern innovations have allowed small town members to engage with others like never before. But, they have also led to more loneliness and isolation. People spend more time with gadgets than they do growing closer to their neighbors. They learn about morals and values from the bombardment of data. Rural communities are caught up in the same pressure and cultural drifts that characterize the urban society.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Rural Pace**

There is a myth that rural means a slower pace of life. Many believe that the small town atmosphere is more peaceful and has a higher level of religious commitment. In reality, small town life is as hectic and hard as its urban counterpart. The financial and relational struggles put tremendous pressure on community members.<sup>39</sup> Individuals face great demands upon their time. School (especially sports), community life, church service, work, and other family matters all fight for space in one's daily life. The stresses of society leave families scattered and tiered.<sup>40</sup>

The hectic pace means people no longer stop by a neighbor's home on Sunday afternoon or for summer evening visits. The time spent enjoying each other's company has vanished. Conversations are limited to brief encounters. Now, no one wants to say more than a few words because one fears being slowed down. Interaction is not intentional; it just happens as families on the go run from one place to another.<sup>41</sup>

The quickening of the pace of life has altered the country church immensely. It is impossible for congregations to run Vacation Bible Schools in the morning because the VBS workers are not available. Events must be scheduled around other

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 15-18.

<sup>39</sup>Luedke, "Opportunities Amidst Challenges," 46.

<sup>40</sup>Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 30.

<sup>41</sup>Ruffcorn, *Rural Evangelism*, 63-64.

responsibilities in society. Special worship times, such as revivals, that use to last weeks are now given only a few days. Members are constantly on the run and struggle to maintain their connection to the Church.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Rural Change**

Change is not always a good thing in rural communities. Change brings empty store fronts on Main Street. It results in grocery stores and gas stations that are gone. It means people must drive forty five minutes to work and shop in a larger town. Change comes when children move away, or when the family farm has to be sold to a bank over a debt.<sup>43</sup> Rural residents believe that “change overwhelmingly means school consolidation and the loss of the local school, loss of businesses, shrinking population, loss of industry, the closing of the local hospital and the like.”<sup>44</sup>

People who experience this change respond in destructive ways. Their hurt and pain are often directed outward though domestic violence and child abuse. Inward the expressions of personal trouble result in alcoholism or substance abuse. The suicide rate for rural males is higher than for the nation’s population as a whole.<sup>45</sup>

**Modern changes need a historical perspective.** Small communities are not distrustful with change itself. They do not want to hold on to traditions for tradition sake. Past experiences have simply shown them the hurt of change. Therefore, they want to move very slowly and cautiously when going to the new and unknown. The church must learn to adapt to the modern change while being grounded in its historical context. In the

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<sup>42</sup>Roth, “Challenges in Rural/Small Town Ministry,” 274.

<sup>43</sup>Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 15.

<sup>44</sup>Roth, “Challenges in Rural/Small Town Ministry,” 275.

<sup>45</sup>Jung and Agria, *Rural Congregational Studies*, 77.

midst of hurtful circumstance, there is an opportunity to show the love of God. Positive change is possible.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Rural Church and Evangelistic Barriers**

The church has been a powerful symbol of rural life. The building itself points to greater days. It has been viewed as the center of community life. In the past, it was the hub of weekly fellowship and a place where relationships could grow. The church was an anchor of stability. It remained while many other building lay abandoned. Today, people who have never worshiped in the church believe it to be important to their community. It has acted as a spiritual face to generations.<sup>47</sup>

The modern rural church should mold that physical standing into a spiritual catalyst to God. It is essential that the church reach out to the community with the transforming gospel message. Members must think evangelistically and move outwardly. They are to engage in methods and techniques that will aid them in fulfilling the Great Commission in their local context.<sup>48</sup>

To implement an evangelistic strategy, the church must overcome several barriers. All believers have fears and misgivings about sharing their faith.<sup>49</sup> Many of these fears are directly related to the culture around the church. There are several types of these barriers in country life. They are not unique to rural context but do affect that context specifically.

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<sup>46</sup>Roth, "Challenges in Rural/Small Town Ministry," 275.

<sup>47</sup>Pappas and Planting, *Mission*, 19-20.

<sup>48</sup>Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 50-51, 239.

<sup>49</sup>Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 172-73.

## **The Barrier of Morality**

Small town people see themselves as good people. The community's moral conduct is not noticeably different from Christian values. The prevailing culture is based on a moral code seen in God's Word. Country neighbors do not look bad from the outside. This good behavior leads many believers to think of their friends as Christians. Faith in God becomes a legalistic check list of do's and don'ts. Family members, friends, and close neighbors do good deeds, so they must be connected to God.<sup>50</sup>

This attitude views salvation through a cultural perspective and is not based on Scripture. The standpoint causes a barrier that prevents the church from sharing with those who are morally good but eternally lost. If a person makes the judgment that his friend is saved, there is now no pressure on him to talk about the gospel.<sup>51</sup> Believers must be cautious not to make judgment calls that only God can determine.

## **The Barrier of Rejection**

A fear of rejection is common in any location. Fear or a rebuff from others is a fact that affects believers throughout the world.<sup>52</sup> This fear is compounded when a person is related to just about everyone in the community. Like other cultural situations, "small towns have their own psyche. People are very concerned about what their neighbors think, since they know them by first name and may even be shirt-tail relatives. The idea of radical change is suspicious from the start and that obviously includes the life altering change of spiritual repentance."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Kenneth Veters, "Evangelism in a Small Town," *Leadership* 5 (1984): 77.

<sup>51</sup>Daman, *Leading the Small Church*, 18.

<sup>52</sup>Scott Dawson, "Don't Be Afraid!," in *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 99-100.

<sup>53</sup>Veters, "Evangelism in a Small Town," 75.

No one wants to cause problems with other members of the family. They do not want to enter subjects that will lead to conflicts with friends they see on a daily basis. The fear persists that if their neighbors reject the gospel, they will reject and withdraw from the relationship. Rural believers know that this rejection will not be from a stranger or casual acquaintance but by one who is dearly love and treasured.<sup>54</sup>

Ministry in any form, including evangelism, “is not anonymous when the population is 2000 or less.”<sup>55</sup> It takes great courage to share Christ in a small town. The barrier can only be breached when the church faces the true state of those separated from Christ. This fear will be defeated as believers experience the joy of seeing their close friends transformed by God’s love.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Barrier of Strangers**

Not only do rural churches fear sharing the gospel with friends but also with strangers. Being a close net group can mean closed doors to outsiders. New people are not naturally adopted into the church family. This resistance to reaching new comers does not originate from hate but from convenience. Individual members already have strong bonds with each other. Their relationships have been established over long periods of time. They love and are committed to connecting and supporting other members. The inward focus leaves little physical and emotional connection opportunities to outsiders. The church unintentionally seems cold and distant to anyone who does not already belong at some point.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Ruffcorn, *Rural Evangelism*, 62.

<sup>55</sup>Edmondson, *Strategies for Rural Evangelism*, 17.

<sup>56</sup>Vetters, “Evangelism in a Small Town,” 78.

<sup>57</sup>James E. Cushman, *Evangelism in the Small Church* (Decatur, GA: CTS Press, 1988) 4, 9-19.



The rural church cannot give a verbal commitment to the gospel without action. The congregation must be “willing to pay the price of opening up their fellowship to new comers.”<sup>58</sup> Most notably, this kind of outreach will seek to intentionally form relationships with outsiders. It is incumbent on believers to take steps that will adopt strangers into the social makeup of the church family.

### **The Barrier of Social Structure**

The presence of rural poverty and racial differences has led to social separations in small communities. It is natural for people to reach out to others in the same social lines or class.<sup>59</sup> Problems erupt when the church allows social differences to block its mission to certain people or groups. Instead of hurling past these barriers, the church’s mission is stopped and limited.<sup>60</sup>

Small town believers must stretch their attitudes and actively reach out to all people. They must look to their neighbors through the eyes of Christ and not from social constraints. The gospel is to be shared with all in the community including those “from a different social class or from a family not highly reared in the community.”<sup>61</sup> Spiritual and physical aid should be offered out of love that the church has received from God.

### **The Barrier of Involvement**

The rural church will not start a new evangelism strategy on a whim. Individual involvement is not guaranteed simply because the program is available.

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<sup>58</sup>Gary L. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 15.

<sup>59</sup>Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 35.

<sup>60</sup>Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith*, 74.

<sup>61</sup>Vetters, “Evangelism in a Small Town,” 76.

Instead, members want to be involved in making the decisions. They want to know that any changes that are made are based on good information. This information cannot be forced upon them nor require them to act. Change should come from the inside. Country people have something legitimate and important to say. They may seek information from the outside, but the decision to make any change should come from them. Their commitment is an extension of the American democratic way of thinking. Loyalty to a decision is grounded in their involvement in making that decision.<sup>62</sup>

Church leaders need to provide opportunities for evangelistic ownership. Any method or program cannot be that of the pastor alone. The congregation has to identify it as its own. If they have been involved in its creation, then they will also be dedicated to its implementation. A congregational led initiative has life and vitality even in the absence of the pastor.<sup>63</sup>

The role of the pastor should be to facilitate involvement. He not only can provide needed information but also he equips others for the work of the ministry. Training and encouragement have to be offered. Evangelism in the small town church happens most effectively when a large percentage of the congregation is involved. Engaging more people in the ministry allows the mission to grow.<sup>64</sup>

Evangelism strategies should involve the whole church to win the community. Rural towns and the churches in them are highly relational. They center on family bonds that span over generations. Therefore, the entire family will be needed in the mission for

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<sup>62</sup>Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 50.

<sup>63</sup>Ruffcorn, *Rural Evangelism*, 37.

<sup>64</sup>Royal Speidel, *Evangelism in the Small Membership Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 77.

Christ. Rural evangelism is a family operation that involves multiple age groups in sharing the gospel.<sup>65</sup>

### **Rural Methods**

The church must be careful when selecting any method to transmit the gospel. In the past, many denominations standardized outreach methods. Churches in different parts of the country were encouraged to use the same technique without thought to the surrounding community. Another failure is to pattern a rural approach after a program located in the suburbs. Leaders see the numerical success from churches using particular methods and they simply try to adopt that approach. Still other failures are to focus on methods that produce results regardless of their fit with Scripture. Many think if something works, it is acceptable and should be used.<sup>66</sup>

However, methods must be based on principles grounded in God's Word and guided toward a particular people group.<sup>67</sup> A good delivery method has to work well in a particular setting. It should be selected because it fits the makeup of the community. The idea may come from a number of sources, but it is contextualized to the people it seeks to reach.<sup>68</sup>

Five areas of application seem ideally suited for the modern rural church: prayer, relational, servant, event, and technological evangelism. Each approach should be

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<sup>65</sup>Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 102-04.

<sup>66</sup>Geoff Surratt, *Ten Stupid Things that Keep Church from Growing* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 138-42.

<sup>67</sup>Ken Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 10-11.

<sup>68</sup>Doran McCarty, *Leading the Small Church* (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 142.

structured in a manner that allows for personal engagement by church members. These techniques should be selected by the church body and not by one leader, group, or denominational office.

### **Prayer Evangelism**

Prayer is the key to evangelism. The work of salvation is accomplished through the hands of God. It is his activity, strength, and will that opens hard hearts to embrace grace. Believers cannot accomplish something for God if they are depending on their own strength. Christians need an all-day, ongoing dialog with the Father. They need to talk to him as the ever-present Lord of reconciliation and ask God to use them in his mission work.<sup>69</sup>

Prayer is the means by which God changes the hearts of his people. It opens the mind to God's active presence. The church becomes increasingly aware of what God is able to do through ones submission to him. Prayer leads to personal and corporate spiritual renewal.<sup>70</sup> To develop an evangelistic spirit, the church has to seek spiritual revitalization. Members have to focus their attitudes toward God's work. Prayer is the catalyst that transforms a negative mindset to a renewed focus on sharing Christ.<sup>71</sup>

Prayer is also the means by which the world's hardened hearts are opened. "God has ordained intercessions as the primary way he works to save the lost and empower the church."<sup>72</sup> Believers are to intercede through prayer for the salvation of

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<sup>69</sup>Ken Hemphill and Paula Hemphill, *Splash: Show People Love and Share Him* (Tigerville, SC: Auxano, 2007), 7-8.

<sup>70</sup>Crandall, *Turn Around Strategies for the Small Church*, 47-48.

<sup>71</sup>Cushman, *Evangelism in the Small Church*, 17-18.

<sup>72</sup>Gregory R. Frizzell, *How to Develop a Powerful Pray Life* (Memphis, TN: The Master Design, 1999), 31-32.

others. They are to ask God for help in presenting the gospel and for the response of those who hear. It is an act of pleading on behalf of others who desperately need God's grace.

Church leaders should seek out creative ways to engage members in evangelistic prayers (Appendix 1). Intentional guidance should be given toward eternal needs rather than temporal needs. These intercessions should be built and grounded on the church's love for family, friends, and neighbors. Believers should focus on specific people and spiritual needs and pray for boldness as they seek to share Christ in these close relationships.<sup>73</sup>

A commitment to prayer evangelism will be realized as members learn what it means to pray with intercessions. Many Christians do not know how to pray for their lost friends. An evangelistic prayer ministry can direct and motivate them. It can teach them God's biblical mandate of intercession and guide them to actively participate in this ministry on a daily basis. The more one learns the greater dependence can be place on God. The church will be empowered to pray through His guidance.<sup>74</sup>

### **Relational Evangelism**

There has been much interest in relationship or relational evangelism in church circles. Questions have risen to the effectiveness of confrontational, door to door outreach.<sup>75</sup> For many, cold call evangelism does not match with their personality. They have been pressured into believing that there is only one method and feel inadequate in

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<sup>73</sup>Alvin Reid, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 166, 173-80.

<sup>74</sup>Chuck Lawless, *Serving in Your Church Prayer Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 13-16.

<sup>75</sup>Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 215-16.

participating in that method.<sup>76</sup> Those who are shy and more introverted are not willing to attempt this confronting method. There is also evidence that a majority of first time attenders to church come from a personal invitation by friends. A witness inside the bounds of a relationship has been more effective than those with strangers or even casual acquaintances. The unchurched are more willing to trust someone they know as opposed to a stranger.<sup>77</sup>

The uneasy feelings with cold call visits are heightened in rural environments. Would be evangelists often feel as if they are intruding on their neighbors. They resist involvement in outreach for fear of harming established relationships. They long for techniques that are more personal.<sup>78</sup>

Relational evangelism also recognizes that conversions seldom occur immediately.<sup>79</sup> God can change a person instantly, but “he most often chooses to work over a longer period of time. There is a process of evangelism and not just an evangelistic event.”<sup>80</sup> This view corresponds to the human desire for authenticity and credibility. Believers can share Christ by modeling the Christian life. They evangelize

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<sup>76</sup>Tony Whittaker, *Escaping from evangelism methods that don't suit you* (book review of *Got Style? Personality-based Evangelism*, Jeffery Johnson, Valley Forge: Judson Press) sec 1 [on-line]; accessed 29 December 2009; available from <http://www.internetevangelismday.com, /blog/archives/1001#>; Internet.

<sup>77</sup>Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 48.

<sup>78</sup>Crandall, *Turn Around Strategies for the Small Church*, 94-96.

<sup>79</sup>Edward Pearson, “Effective Methods for Reaching College Students,” in *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church for Harvest*, ed. Thomas P. Johnston (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 202.

<sup>80</sup>Graeme Codrington, *Evangelism: Methods of Evangelistic Contact*, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 8 January 2010; available from [http://www.youthpastor.com, /lessons/index.cfm/Evangelism-Methods\\_of\\_/Evangelistic\\_Contact\\_10.htm](http://www.youthpastor.com, /lessons/index.cfm/Evangelism-Methods_of_/Evangelistic_Contact_10.htm); Internet.

both by talking and showing the love of Jesus in a one on one relationship.<sup>81</sup> The need to live a Godly lifestyle before others is a must in a community where everyone knows who you are and what you are doing. The church cannot say one thing and do another and still have hope to reach out relationally.

Believers must give the gift of time. They have to be willing to include others in their activities and to participate in activities where others are involved. It is wise to “establish relationships on natural nonthreatening ground and then later, in the context of that relationship, open up the conversation to spiritual issues.”<sup>82</sup>

Rural believers are fortunate to have many of these connections currently established. The church has to aid them in taking the next step to intentionally share Christ in their relational bonds (Appendix 2). They must use their personal contacts as saving contacts. The emphasis should be placed on delivering the gospel message inside ones existing network of trusting relationships.<sup>83</sup>

### **Servant Evangelism**

Servant evangelism involves intentionally sharing Christ by modeling biblical servanthood.<sup>84</sup> The goal is to show the love of God in practical ways to a lost and hurting

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<sup>81</sup>Chris Walker, *What is the biblical way to do evangelism?*, Evangelism Coach International, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 7 January 2010; available from <http://www.evangelismcoach.org/2009/what-is-the-biblical-way-to-do-evangelism>; Internet.

<sup>82</sup>Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Become a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 84, 99.

<sup>83</sup>Tom Stebbins, *Friendship Evangelism by the Book* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1995), 72, 113-15.

<sup>84</sup>David Wheeler, “Servanthood Evangelism as a Bridge to the Gospel,” in *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church for Harvest*, ed. Thomas P. Johnston (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 156.

world. This servant or social evangelism is grounded in small acts of kindness. Believers go into the world to do good. They are to show kindness which “builds the bridge for the person to receive a touch of love from God.”<sup>85</sup> This principle allows the gospel to be presented with both speech and action. Persons are introduced to God as believers show and tell of his love.

Servant evangelism works because people are more open to spiritual needs when experiencing physical or emotional difficulties. God is often preparing their hearts for the gospel through struggles.<sup>86</sup> The vulnerability caused by illness, financial problems, job losses, family conflicts or failure opens ones heart to the good news of Jesus. When individuals are aware of their own limitations, they are more willing to hear new options for their lives. Evangelism can take place when a church makes an effort known and ministers to the needs of the community.<sup>87</sup>

The small town church that wants to grow will discover the needs around them. They will diligently look for areas where they can make a difference in the lives of their community. These churches will create opportunities for their members to plug in with the community (see Appendix 3). They will lead people to serve through volunteerism. Individuals will be encouraged to be “a part of an organization where they can make a difference through acts of service.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Editors of *Servant Evangelism* comps., *About Servant Evangelism*, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 29 December 2008; available from [http://www.servantevangelism.com, /about](http://www.servantevangelism.com/about); Internet.

<sup>86</sup>Stebbins, *Friendship Evangelism by the Book*, 127.

<sup>87</sup>Speidel, *Evangelism in the Small Membership*, 5-7.

<sup>88</sup>Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 143, 155.



The church can take inspiration from Jesus as an example of demonstrating the Gospel by providing physical food. Yet, they must also remember that he pointed “the hungry crowds to himself as the spiritual bread which gives eternal life.”<sup>89</sup> Ken Hemphill has stated that the church “cannot assume that people will make the natural connection between our acts of kindness and the grace of God that prompts them. We must join salt to light, words to action, behavior to explanation. We must provide the conjunction between a loving action and the loving Savior.”<sup>90</sup>

### **Event Evangelism**

Rural churches have seen the benefit of events for ages. They have used festivals, homecomings, and special days to attach community members. Many of these occasions have centered around food. Members have discovered that if you feed them, they will come. Church meals, picnics, dinners, and the popular potlucks are considered a mainstay in a healthy church.<sup>91</sup>

The challenge for modern rural congregations is to expand on this tradition and use the events with a greater focus toward evangelism. The church must provide opportunity where believers can join with others in the community that have common interests (see Appendix 4). These activities are opportunities to have fun and provide a chance to share Christ. Leaders should be creative and use events that will fit well in the lives of their neighbors.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Hemphill and Hemphill, *Splash*, 64.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>91</sup>Speidel, *Evangelism in the Small Membership*, 35.

<sup>92</sup>Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, *Finding Them, Keeping Them* (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 79.

Evangelistic events need two primary concerns. First, it is a tool by which the church can discover prospects. Each activity should require some type of registration so that leaders can keep track of who is attending. The attendees then can receive follow-up contacts from the church. The church body needs to understand that the purpose of special events is to reach the unchurched.<sup>93</sup>

Second, these activities are also a tool by which to communicate the gospel. The church can send evangelistic teams into the event itself. Their goal will be to intentionally mingle with the crowd and seek out opportunities to begin a spiritual conversation. Another option is to hold events with a large evangelistic focus. Vacation Bible Schools and revivals have remained some of the top outreach actions for many years.<sup>94</sup> Regardless of the activity, the church cannot be complacent to only hold an event. Christian leaders must keep the main theme of connecting others to Christ.

### **Technological Evangelism**

A new area of outreach is immediately available to the rural church in technology or web based evangelism. The web has opened avenues of communication to people all over the world. Technology can now be used for mass evangelistic events without leaving home. People no longer have to come and see a gospel presentation nor do Christians have to go and serve. These new innovations allow for a type and send approach for sharing the biblical message.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 240-41.

<sup>94</sup>Jake Roudkovski, “Keys to Benefiting from a Revival Meeting,” in *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church for Harvest*, ed. Thomas P. Johnston (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 85.

<sup>95</sup>Internet Evangelism Coalition, *The web a unique medium*, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 13 January 2010; available from <http://www.internetevangelismday.com/medium.php>; Internet.

Country communities are already connected to these new technologies. The rural church itself can embrace these resources as a natural part of its gospel strategy (Appendix 5). There is a reasonable cost to using this approach because many of these new technologies are already in the hands of leaders, lay people, and the lost. The expense is often far less than that of events or servant outreach. Training with any new gadgets can also be minimized by using local youth and young adults who are familiar with the technology.<sup>96</sup>

The greatest downside to using this new media is the danger of losing authentic, personal communication with others. The church can never choose convenience or easy over intimacy. Christians must find a balance that allows for the spread of the gospel without forgetting that the goal is a relationship. Technology should support a real connection with Christ and his church.<sup>97</sup>

### **Training the Rural Church**

Believers must remember that their goal in each approach is to share the gospel with the lost world. Ministry projects or events are not evangelistic if they do not advance the mission of Christ in some form. The church is to express its faith in words and deeds. Yet, it is evident that many struggle to verbalize their faith. They feel inadequate to participate in evangelism.<sup>98</sup>

Training is needed. Congregations need help in vocalizing their belief. They need an opportunity to talk about their fears and aid in overcoming any barriers. The

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<sup>96</sup>O'Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America*, 172-73.

<sup>97</sup>Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 80.

<sup>98</sup>Ruffcorn, *Rural Evangelism*, 28.

basis of this training should be theological and practical instruction. Greater knowledge of God and how to share him will lead to great boldness as a witness.<sup>99</sup>

### **God and the Gospel**

“The greatest motivation for evangelism is our own relationship with God, compelling us to love those He loves.”<sup>100</sup> The congregation must gain a greater understanding of God and Scriptural truths. They must learn the need for evangelism and that the only hope for those they love dearly is grounded in the gospel. Correct doctrines on holiness, sin, love, grace, faith, and repentance, lead to real evangelism.<sup>101</sup>

This theological training is not simply remembering a presentation that delivers doctrinal high points. It is not giving facts about the gospel that have no personal meaning. It is sharing Jesus and a love for him that flows from one's own life. It is about sharing a person's connection with the Creator. Those who are seeking to evangelize others should be encouraged to learn what makes God great. They should learn why God is glorious and how they participate in that glory. A deeper connection with Christ will lead to greater evangelistic boldness.<sup>102</sup>

### **Practical Practice**

Believers need practical training in evangelism. The truth is that most Christians have never taken the first step in sharing Christ. They do not know where to start. Good training material that applies theological content with appropriate techniques

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<sup>99</sup>Edmondson, *Strategies for Rural Evangelism*, 25.

<sup>100</sup>Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 100.

<sup>101</sup>Donald A. McGavran, *Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reform Publishing, 1988), 29, 37, 57.

<sup>102</sup>Hemphill and Hemphill, *Splash*, 73-74.

is needed. All would be evangelists should rehearse and practice situations that can prepare them to actively engage their world with the gospel.<sup>103</sup>

Every Christian has a story of how he came to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Leaders should train one to understand that story as an opportunity to share with others. Excitement in one's salvation experience can be a powerful witnessing tool.<sup>104</sup> Other practical helps include marking verses in the New Testament, learning to share gospel tracts, role playing, memorizing a presentation, praying for spiritual needs and tips for starting a spiritual conversation.<sup>105</sup> Every person will have a different way of sharing that he prefers. By presenting a variety of practical helps, leaders are able to better equip the church as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

Rural is a mindset. "It is a way of life. It is not poor or rich; not educated or uneducated. It is not necessarily better or worse than other lifestyles. The rural orientation to life carries with it characteristics that have enormous impacts on a Christian church."<sup>106</sup> Believers cannot ignore these ingrained qualities. They must be aware of the context in which they are seeking to serve the cause of Christ. Cultural characteristics and behaviors can be the ally and not the enemy of the rural church mission.<sup>107</sup>

These rural characteristics should serve as a natural guide as the church delivers the goodness of Jesus. Prayer, existing and new relationships, servant opportunities, events, and technology techniques can be quickly assimilated in the

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<sup>103</sup>Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, 180-82.

<sup>104</sup>Speidel, *Evangelism in the Small Membership*, 42-43, 47.

<sup>105</sup>Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 180, 252-69.

<sup>106</sup>Hunter, *The Lord's Harvest and the Rural Church*, 16-17.

<sup>107</sup>Pappas and Planting, *Mission*, 11.

congregation. The whole church should be led to participate in an evangelism strategy. All can be involved in prayer, bringing their friends to church, telling their story, giving a helping hand, or participating in an event. The evangelistic strategies in the rural church should encourage, train and mobilize all believers to be on-mission for Christ.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 104.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION OF RURAL EVANGELISM

The implementation of a personal evangelism strategy in a rural setting was conducted in three interconnected phases. The first involved the formation and involvement of a church leadership team. Church members were empowered to make decisions on their evangelistic efforts. The second centered on discovering information used to guide the church's outreach actions. This step allowed the team to obtain and evaluate data and establish a general direction to the evangelistic strategy. The final phase concerned the application of rural evangelistic methods by church members. The church engaged in evangelistic actions. The initial steps of the project began the last week of 2012 and continued for fifteen weeks. The primary target of application was the rural community of Hornsby in southwest Tennessee.

#### **Empowering Leaders to Lead**

The principal component of the project was the development of a leadership team. This evangelistic committee made the overall decisions in the formation and application of the strategy. They were brought together through personal invitations. Visits were made to each potential committee member. These recruitment contacts provided time to discuss the project. The leadership team's responsibilities and duties were also presented. Each person was asked to complete a leadership survey and commit to the duration of the strategy.

Twenty-one individuals committed to participate in the project. They represented a diverse sample of the entire congregation. Sixty percent were female.

Most were married. They varied in occupations from administrative assistants and business people to housewives and those retired. The team also showed diversity in its connection to the community and church. Some had lived their entire lives in the community and grew up attending Hornsby Baptist. Some had experienced the move into the area and knew the feeling of being an ‘outsider’. Others had lived in the area for many years but had started attending HBC only recently.

The first collective meeting of the leadership team involved a deeper introduction of the upcoming weeks. The overall project was presented as two broad sections. The first half of their commitment would concern forming an evangelistic plan for their community. The second half would involve the practical implementation of the strategy they had formed.

### **Creation and Ownership**

All leaders had stated through the surveys that personal evangelism was needed. Yet, only a few admitted to being regularly involved in witnessing for Christ (Appendix 6). The most common reason they did not share their faith was fear. To combat these fears, the group was given the assurance that they would be deciding and directing all evangelistic outreach. They created and owned the strategy with nothing forced upon them. They had the authority to choose how they shared their faith. As the project advanced, the group decided for themselves the approaches that fit them and their neighbors.

With this ownership also came responsibility. The team was promised the support of the pastor and church body. Training and other preparations would be given to help them engage evangelistically. Guidance and help would always be available, but the strategy was theirs to implement. They were not to develop plans for the pastor, Sunday School teachers, or deacons if they were not willing to participate. Through each meeting, the group was reminded of the need for them to become personally active in



evangelism. The formation of the strategy was to be a catalyst for the church to share Christ.

### **Established in Prayer**

Prayer remained an integral part of the project. From the beginning, the group was encouraged to pray for themselves, the team, the church, and the community. Eighty-three percent of the leaders said they did not witness out of fear (Appendix 6). This response led me to spend time during the first meeting encouraging them to spend quality time with God. They were reminded that the most important need of personal evangelism was a growing, personal relationship with their Lord. The team was encouraged to let its love for God drive its evangelistic actions.

The team took time to pray for different parts of personal evangelism each week. Often they asked God to work in their own lives. They were guided to pray for greater confidence and commitment. Fears were confessed to the Lord and supplications made for his strength. Evangelistic prayers were also offered for the community. These prayers would range from a general desire that God would open their hearts to the gospel to very specific prayers for individuals. This dedication to prayer would continue through the next two phases of the project.

### **Establishing the Right Plan**

This rural evangelistic strategy had to match the culture of small town life. The leadership team was encouraged to base their decision on their personal experience of living in the rural south. As members of a small community, they had the experience to know what methods worked well. They were experts on the surrounding culture. Research was conducted of the congregation and community to aid this group in establishing the right plan. The collection and evaluation of this information gave the team confidence in forming the strategy.

## **Discovering the Church**

Research was first conducted on the church's understanding of personal evangelism. A survey was taken during a Sunday morning service on the second week of the project. Fifty-two people participated in the survey. Members of the leadership team collected and assembled the data.

The results indicated that those attending the service understood a Christian's responsibility to tell others about Jesus (Appendix 2). They knew that no one can be saved lacking a saving relationship with God's Son. The congregation also affirmed that those who died apart from Christ go to hell. The responses were less certain when it came to evangelistic participation. The surveys indicated that the church members were not as confident in sharing the gospel or their personal testimonies.

These results reflected the sentiments of the leadership team. The group discussed the church at large and themselves in particular. The open dialog brought out the desire to have training and simple steps to help each believer share his or her faith. The group knew that evangelism was needed but did not know how to proceed. They were ready to take the actions need to personal participate in sharing Christ.

## **Discovering the Community**

An additional survey was conducted in the surrounding community during the fourth week. This research established the basic understanding of our neighbors' religious and social views. Members of the leadership team identified the names and address of each household in a five mile radius of the church.<sup>1</sup> The entire community was then divided into equal portions that resulted in thirteen areas.

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<sup>1</sup>I was blessed to have members of the church involved in county government that could help in obtaining these names and addresses. Our primary resources were internet based: <http://tn.hardeman.geopower.com> and <http://www.assessment.state.tn.us>.

Team members met on a Sunday afternoon for prayer and brief instructions before conducting the survey. They divided into groups of two to three. Each group went to a different area to retrieve the desired information. The visitation teams introduced these surveys as the churches attempt in learning how to better serve the community.

Members were already sharing the gospel with others during these visits. A tract was left at each home at the conclusion of the survey. These tracts had been selected earlier by members of the leadership team based on gospel content and ease of understanding.<sup>2</sup> Labels with additional information about Hornsby Baptist Church were included with the tract. A total of 74 visits were made.

The leadership team met the following Sunday afternoon to discuss the findings and their perceptions of the community (Appendix 8). Almost everyone who worked did so away from the community. Many were retired or not working for one reason or another. Several responses were given that highlighted the need for relationships. The leadership team discussed their busy lifestyles. The group felt there was little connection to their neighbors.

The team and those who took the surveys were dissatisfied with the lack of relational bonds in their small town. People longed for a personal and active role of the church supporting and aiding the community. The surveys contained comments that more events and activities could be provided for various age groups. Surprisingly, 15 percent of those surveyed asked for the church to visit community members. There seemed to be a real hunger for relationships.

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<sup>2</sup>EvanTell, "May I Ask You a Question," sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 3 January 2013; available from <http://evantell.org/TrainingOutreach/OtherResources.aspx>; Internet.

The leadership team spent time discussing the loss of a community gathering place. The local restaurant, Sharecroppers, had closed several years ago. It had served as a relaxing atmosphere to meet friends and neighbors for several decades. With its absence, there was the loss of opportunity to create and build the town's relational bonds. The people had no place to go.

The surveys also pointed to a discrepancy in the community's spiritual responses. It is estimated that only 13 percent of the population attended a church on any given Sunday.<sup>3</sup> Yet 66 percent of the surveys stated that they attended a church. The leadership team made a judgment that this attendance was not regular. If a community member went one time a year, then they considered that they attended church. Many in the community had their names on a church roll. This membership status was a way claimed an attachment to a particular congregation regardless of faithful participation.

The same discrepancy was noted in a discussion on knowledge of God and Christ. An overwhelming number of people knew of Jesus. Almost all believed there is a god and life after death. Yet, the team struggled to see any evidence of a true connection to Christ. The community had been exposed to the right words of the gospel but had not accepted those words personally. One team member stated, that our neighbors "know the right answers, but it's not personal or real."

The discussion continued to focus on a strategy with a personal touch. The methods that emerged would be based on relationships and opportunities to connect to others. There would also be an influence for an authentic response to the Gospel. The stage would be used to have the message of Christ truly change the hearts and minds of community members.

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<sup>3</sup> Steve H. Pearson, email from to Matt Emerson, May 26 2011, containing information from Glenmary Research held at Tennessee Baptist Convention in Brentwood.

## **Developing the Strategy**

The leadership team was given an overview of the project during their first meeting. At that time, the group was presented with general and specific information on rural evangelism contained in the previous chapter (Appendix 1 through 5). As the project progressed, they were encouraged to survey that material and develop their ideas. The information was to be an aid and guide as the group personalized the way they would share the gospel.

Their next step combined the research from the community and church with their thoughts on rural methods. Time was spent discussing the best approach the team could take in connecting themselves and the gospel to their neighbors. This open dialog was dominated by a desire to have real relationships with others and the tradition of community events. Four general principles emerged from this conversation. Evangelism at Hornsby Baptist would be conducted with an emphasis in prayer, relationships, events, and service opportunities.

The team spent time brainstorming and listing specific evangelistic methods. Every thought was collected and recorded on posters which were positioned around the room. Cost, time, and needed resources were not considered. The only prerequisite was that the idea had a possibility of working in rural context. A broad range of evangelistic ideas emerged at the end of this session (Appendix 9).

The following week the strategy was completed. The leaders reviewed the list of methods and evaluated their potential. A discussion was conducted at this point on the limit of time and money. The group was reminded that each method had to be completed by the end of the project. The church had committed to providing the financial resources needed in forming the strategy. These resources would only be used if agreed upon by the entire group.

Focus questions were also asked to help the leadership team assess each method (Appendix 10). These questions helped the group evaluate the ideas from the stand point of the church, community, and the gospel. The team had to accept the idea. It would be their responsibility to lead others to use this method. There was a need for the method to be received by the church in a positive manner. The method must also appeal to the community. The leaders had to consider the openness of the method by the unchurched. The group was also asked if the method would allow them to effectively communicate the gospel.

The next step allowed the leaders to select the individual methods they preferred to use for the project. Each person chose his or her top five ideas. They placed a mark beside the method on the recorded poster boards. These selections were tallied at the end of the session. This selection process produced a list of the leadership team's chosen ways to share the gospel. Ten methods would be taken from the list and employed in the strategy.

Before the team could move forward, they had to accept accountability and greater ownership. Members volunteered to guide the implementation of each evangelistic idea. These leaders formed small evangelistic committees. The only requirement set before these committees was involvement. No one person would serve as a leader in more than one area of method implementation. The reason of this limit was to gain a greater involvement from the team and church. The burden for guidance and direction would be balanced across the leadership team.

These smaller groups took on the task of forming action plans. They selected appropriate dates to begin, calculated the needed cost, and recruited the involvement of other church members. The individual committees would report their progress back to the leadership team each week, but ultimate effort of implementation was their responsibility.

## **Engaging with Evangelistic Actions**

The leadership team worked diligently to design the strategy. They had formed the methods and were working toward the final stages of planning. Now work began on bringing others from the church into the effort. Each smaller evangelistic committee would seek to involve as many people in the implementation of the methods as needed.

This step would begin with a day of promotion to the church body. The work of the leadership group had been presented to the church throughout the beginning of the project. Sermons on evangelism were preached during the first weeks of the project. The church as a whole was informed of the planning and preparation taking place by the evangelistic group. It was the team's turn to report to the church the results of their efforts.

Four members of the team were selected to share the four general principles of prayer, relational, event, and servant evangelism. These individuals gave a personal testimony of their love for each area of outreach during a Sunday morning service. The different methods of the strategy were highlighted and explained following the testimonies. Now the team was ready to apply the ten rural evangelistic techniques to the lost and unchurched in their lives.

### **Young Adult Sunday School Class**

A specific area of need was an active outreach to the young adult community members. A class was formed and used to build relationships with unchurched young men and women. As these relationships were formed, it allowed opportunities for members to share their personal relationship with God to their lost friends.

I served as a temporary teacher to expedite the start of the class. Three young adult church members met to form a 37 person prospect list. These members also discussed ideas for connecting to those prospects to the class. The class began the

eleventh week of the project with 8 in attendance. This group began making personal invitations to friends and neighbors. They promoted the class with a party where friends were invited to connect on a social level.

Part of the class time each week was used to discuss the gospel message. Information was given to aid those present in sharing their testimonies. One class member gave his personal witness of Christ during each of the last three weeks of the project.

### **Men's Basketball Outreach**

A short term project was centered on men's basketball. A group of men secured access to the local middle school gym. Informally, friends and neighbors were invited to come play one night each week. A total of 23 men participated throughout the activity. Most of these attended on a regular basis for the eight weeks the method was used.

Five of the men involved were church members who helped in leading devotions and spiritual conversations. A gospel presentation or testimony was presented before each game. The players were challenged to accept Christ as Savior and to attend church services. The church members also made personal contacts to the group encouraging them to attend Easter services and offered help in their walk with Christ.

### **Community Newsletter**

One of the more prominent desires of the leadership team was to use a monthly newsletter as an evangelistic tool. This letter communicated the gospel and information about the church and community. Volunteers began to meet to discuss the content of the letter. They chose to involve town officials and school administrators to provide information and local activities. The front page of the letter presented the truths about God, sin, Christ, and how to respond with faith (Appendix 11).



## **Prayer Chain**

Prayer chains have been used by churches in the past. Members would convey individuals and needs to each other through consecutive calls. This method borrows from this procedure with one primary change. All persons on the prayer chain list would be those separated from Christ. The church would use this ministry for the sole purpose of offering intercessory prayers for community members.

Three people from the leadership team met to pray for and plan the implementation of this method. Their primary focus was the involvement of Sunday school classes. Two sign up lists were circulated through the church. They first asked for members to participate by receiving a text or call. The second list requested names of individuals in the community who were lost and needed a relationship with the Lord.

Twenty-eight people committed their time to the prayer chain. The large majority of this group requested a text and not a call. The list of individuals in need of intercession began to be distributed during week 8 of the project. One person was passed through the prayer chain each week day. On the weekends, a reminder message was sent to pray for every person who had been mentioned the previous week. The prayer chain concluded on Good Friday. This day was set as a special day of fasting and prayer for the lost. A final message was delivered asking members to spend the day focused on the salvation of their friends and neighbors.

## **Prayer Breakfast**

In the same theme as the prayer chain, the team desired to gather on a specific day to pray for their friends and neighbors. The church's prayer coordinator and others from the leadership team selected a Saturday morning as the best time for this meeting. They enlisted church members to promote the event and provided items for a light breakfast.

The morning was an opportunity for fellowship, spiritual direction, and intercession. Thirty-four individuals of all age groups participated in the breakfast. Scripture was presented (Phil 4:6; Col 4:2-3) along with encouragements to be faithful in prayer. The highlight of the morning centered on the prayers offered for the leadership team and lost. Each member of the evangelistic leadership team was mentioned during the service. Prayers were offered for their involvement and boldness. Those present also asked for God's blessing on the church's role in connecting the community to Christ. Prayer request cards were distributed during the breakfast. Each person present was asked to give the name of one unsaved person. These cards were collected and intercessory prayers were offered on their behalf.

### **Ladies Tea and Recipes**

The women of the leadership team desired to reach out to other women through a regular gathering and fellowship. These relationship based events would provide speakers to address different topics and present the news of salvation. The first of these events was a women's tea.

Members of the team contacted potential volunteers from the church body. These women were provided with a name of an unchurched woman in the community to invite. Group leaders faced a lot of difficulty in finding the needed participation for this method. Many of the women contacted were not able to commit. Fourteen women attended the function with three of those being outside the church body.

The party involved a light dinner, games, and, tea. During the time of welcome and introduction a devotion was presented on the life of Abraham. The difficulties of his life were contrasted to the faithfulness of God's promises. The women were encouraged to accept the promise of God's forgiveness through Christ.

A second event was held the last week of the project. This women's night out used the theme of recipe sharing. Each person was encouraged to bring a favorite recipe

that could be given to others. A potluck dinner was provided where those recipes were sampled. Thirty-two women participated in the relational event. Almost all present were members of a church even though only half attended HBC. The women were encouraged to embrace their responsibility to radiate the glory of God by being a light for Jesus (Matt 5:16).

### **Parent's Night Out**

The leadership team decided to host a parents' night out in an attempt to bring the gospel in contact with the entire family. The youth of HBC, along with adult supervision, were asked to lead this outreach idea. A letter was sent encouraging participation. The primary recipients included those parents involved in the church's Awana ministry as well as a few other families in the community. This letter contained a short presentation of the gospel (Appendix 12). It would be the means of presenting Christ to the parents in this method.

The night of the event, children arrived and were registered. They attended a short opening followed by break out sessions of games, food, crafts, and a movie.<sup>4</sup> The youth led in sharing the good news of Jesus with the children after the movie. Members of the leadership team had spent three sessions training the youth about the gospel and how to present it to others. Twenty-two children were present for the night. A third were from families that did not normally attend any service at HBC. This group of children was led by 14 youth.

### **Easter Egg Hunt**

HBC hosts an Easter egg hunt each year as part of the Awana ministry. This event has become a community activity with many non-churched families attending. The

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<sup>4</sup>Student Life, *The Most Awesomest Jesus Play Ever* [DVD] (Birmingham, AL: Student Life Inc., 2013). For more information contact [www.studentlife.com](http://www.studentlife.com).

leadership team made the decision to highlight the night with an evangelistic outreach. Three actions were taken to open the door for a gospel presentation.

First, all families were registered at the start of the event. This act allowed leaders to develop a prospect list. This group of names was passed along to a Sunday school class for a follow up contact. Second, each age group of children and their accompanying parents were given a lesson over the reason of Easter. A message on the love of God and the resurrection of Christ was presented. The children were also given a tract that explained how God's love was demonstrated through the resurrection of Christ.<sup>5</sup> The third action used small groups to act as a welcoming committee. These two-person groups mingled throughout the event greeting any strangers and non-attenders. Their goal was to start a spiritual conversation and explain the church's belief about God and Christ.

### **Visitation**

The positive reception from the community survey visits led the team to incorporate a small visitation program into the project. The purpose of this method was to expose members to sharing the gospel during a home visit. Leaders signed up for a variety of dates during the last several weeks of the project.

The persons visited during this method were selected from the prayer request list formed in the prayer breakfast and prayer chain. Many were retirees. Twenty-seven were visited in all. I served as primary leader for each visit. The members of the leadership team were encouraged to participate in each home. Many were able to share their testimonies and engage in the spiritual conversation.

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<sup>5</sup>Christian Book and Toys, "F.R.O.G. Fully Rely On God" (Norwich, OH: Christian Book and Toys LLC, 2012). For more information visit [www.christianbookandtoys.com](http://www.christianbookandtoys.com).

## **Buy Sharecroppers**

One of the most prominent desires from the leadership group was to answer the need for a community center. The group planned on purchasing the closed restaurant Sharecroppers and to use this building for community events. The building would be open to anyone but would be directed and controlled by the church. With this oversight, members could use the center to build relationships and share the gospel with neighbors and friends.

After further inquiries, team members discovered that the building required many repairs. The asking price and repairs would put the total expense beyond what the church felt was financially feasible. This idea still remains on the heart of the leadership team. The community center proposal has been postponed for the present but will be revisited at a later time.

## **Training**

Training was conducted throughout the fifteen-week project. This teaching covered a wide range of topics, from biblical instruction to practical application. The training also covered a wide audience for a broad church service to specialized, individual preparation.

### **Church Training**

Instruction over a biblical understanding of evangelism was given to the church body. The basis of this material is contained in chapter two. The training was conducted over consecutive weeks at the beginning of the project and presented during a Sunday morning worship service.

Members were taught of the believer's responsibility to engage in personal evangelism. The congregation was encouraged to let their lifestyles, relationships, and actions influence the surrounding community to Christ. This training also conveyed the

need to teach the complete truth of the gospel. The training focused on the need to verbally communicate Christ to others. The church was reminded of its mission to connect others to Christ so that more people would participate in the worship of God.

### **Leadership Training**

Instruction in evangelism was given to the leadership team throughout the duration of the project. Beginning with the first recruitment visits, I encouraged these future team members to embrace and accept their responsibility in personal evangelism. Together, we admitted our fears. Each participant was encouraged to be honest and open about his action or inaction in Christ's mission. Motivation and encouragement were also provided for their future participation. These visits served as a platform for the training that would follow.

The need for an active relationship with God was presented during the first gathering of the team.<sup>6</sup> The group was led to embrace an active and on-going connection with their Lord throughout the project. They were taught that a personal connection with Christ was a must if they were to engage in personal evangelism. Practical instruction was presented on having a private time of worship and a personal time of prayer. The group was encouraged to let their love for God be the means of overcoming fears and barriers to being a witness.

The community surveys served as a teaching time for making a meaningful visit in the community. Instruction was given on how to prepare and conduct a visit to a community member.<sup>7</sup> The group discussed how to effectively use a tract during this

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<sup>6</sup>Timothy Beougher, "Personal Evangelism" (classroom lecture notes, 32100, Version 1.05 – Personal Evangelism) The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 2006, 8-11.

<sup>7</sup>Bobby H. Welch and Doug Williams, *A Journey in Faith* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2000), 26-27.

session.<sup>8</sup> The leadership team was able to leave this training session and use the information they had gained.

The use of tracts brought out the opportunity to employ other evangelistic tools such as the evangecube.<sup>9</sup> Awana teachers joined with the leadership team for a brief training on using this tool. These teachers shared this gospel message during a regular Awana meeting. Each of these witnessing moments was conducted inside the class of approximately twelve persons. Seventy children and adults heard these presentations.

Evangelistic prayers became a central focus of the project. This emphasis required greater instruction on how to intercede for the lost and ask God for a bold witness. The team was led to uncover the link between prayer and evangelism.<sup>10</sup> Scriptures were presented that directed them to pray for specific areas of intercession. Time was given to practice these types of prayers throughout the project. Each week, the team participated in praying for those who would witness and those who would hear the witness.<sup>11</sup>

Several weeks were provided to help team members form their evangelistic testimonies. This teaching called the leaders to prepare their personal story of salvation

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<sup>8</sup>World Tract Ministry, *Tips for Using Gospel Tracts*, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 7 December 2012; available from [http://www.tractministry.com/tract\\_tips.html](http://www.tractministry.com/tract_tips.html); Internet.

<sup>9</sup>e3 Resources, “Evangecube” (Franklin, TN: e3 Resources, 2010). For more information contact e3 Resources at 615-791-7895 or [www.e3resource.org](http://www.e3resource.org).

<sup>10</sup>Alvin Reid, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 166, 173-80.

<sup>11</sup>NAMB, “Praying Your Friends to Christ, A Guide to Praying Evangelistically,” *God’s Plan for Sharing*, sec. 1 [on-line]; accessed 4 February 2013; available from [http://www.namb.net/uploadedFiles/namb/Content/MMO\\_Navigation/Sharing\\_Christ/Spiritual\\_Awakening\\_Mass/Call\\_to\\_Urgent\\_Prayer\\_for\\_SBC/PYFTCPPTRRevised.pdf](http://www.namb.net/uploadedFiles/namb/Content/MMO_Navigation/Sharing_Christ/Spiritual_Awakening_Mass/Call_to_Urgent_Prayer_for_SBC/PYFTCPPTRRevised.pdf); Internet.

and the basic truths about Christ.<sup>12</sup> The participants learned practical ways to share their journey to Jesus using a three point outline (Appendix 13).<sup>13</sup> Discussion was given on how to begin and end the witness (Appendix 14).<sup>14</sup> This time of instruction also incorporated practice times. Several team members volunteered to share their finished testimonies publicly. Each group member partnered with another to go through his story in a relaxed and comfortable setting.

During the final week, the leadership team viewed the movie *The Gospel Blimp*.<sup>15</sup> A discussion followed that incorporated the information learned throughout the project. The group examined their actions of personal evangelism before and during the project. They were led to think about the names of friends and neighbors they have visited and prayed for over the last several weeks. Each individual was challenged to continue having gospel centered conversations with those prospects.

### **Small Group Training**

The smaller evangelistic groups in charge of implementing each method were given specialized training and help. This instruction corresponded to the technique being used. For several groups, the training was a small extension of the information given during the leadership training sessions. Activities for the prayer chain, prayer breakfast, ladies tea, and men's basketball flowed naturally from the material covered in teaching times. More help was provided for other methods.

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<sup>12</sup>Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 209-12.

<sup>13</sup>Welch and Williams, *A Journey in Faith*, 43-45.

<sup>14</sup>Beougher, "Personal Evangelism," 21.

<sup>15</sup>Gospel Films Inc., *The Gospel Blimp* [DVD] (Muskegon, MI: Gospel Communications, 1967).



Youth involved in the parent's night out method were given particular training in sharing the gospel. They meet for three sessions to discuss the principles of Christ and how to present that truth. Members of the leadership team taught these young church members the core aspects of salvation.<sup>16</sup> They were also provided with practical instruction on giving that information to others.<sup>17</sup> The last session was a night of practice. The youth formed pairs and practiced telling the story of Christ to their peers.

Another area that used specialized training was the Easter egg hunt. This evangelistic group took on the task of mingling with others in hopes of starting a spiritual conversation. The small group met before the event to discuss introducing themselves to strangers. They would act as a welcoming committee during the event. Part of their responsibility would be to tell visitors what the church believed about God. This group used a tract which contained selected Bible verses from the book of Romans, often called the "Roman Road."

The young adult Sunday school class also presented an opportunity to train others in sharing their story. The majority of those attending were involved in the leadership team meetings. This class was taught how to share their evangelistic testimony in a similar manner as the leadership group. This training allowed the new class members the ability to share their connection with Christ with each other and their unchurched prospects.

The visitation portion of the project offered training to leadership members through a mentoring atmosphere. I guided members on these visits where spiritual conversations and gospel presentations were shared. Each visiting team was encouraged to talk and give their witness as they felt led. The visits offered an opportunity for the

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<sup>16</sup>Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 40-42, 48, 52, 69-70, 75-81.

<sup>17</sup>Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, 37, 228, 234-41.

leadership team to observe someone giving a gospel presentation in a real life situation. Many of the members were able to personally participate in these evangelistic visits.

### **Conclusion**

The project ended with a time of evaluation and future planning. The church, leadership team, and selected individuals reported on any changes that had occurred in their understanding of evangelism.

A post-project church survey was conducted on the last Sunday during the fifteen weeks (Appendix 15). The goal of this survey was to measure any change in the membership's understanding of its responsibility for personal evangelism. The survey was conducted in a similar manner as its pre-project counterpart. Members of the leadership team collected and recorded the data.

The team evaluated my growth as an evangelistic leader throughout the project. A pastoral survey was conducted during the second, tenth, and this final week (Appendix 16-18). These surveys helped me to focus on the clarity and substance of the information that I presented. These evaluations will be addressed in the next chapter. On the last of these surveys, the group was encouraged to share additional comments. These comments addressed the general scope of the project and my leadership (Appendix 19).

The final week also included post-project interviews. Five members of the leadership team were asked to express their changes toward personal evangelism. These members were selected because of their active participation in the strategy. Their responses will be used in discovering what methods and information helped or hindered their evangelistic growth (Appendix 20).

The last night of the project was a time of celebration. The leadership team gathered to discuss the different methods they used. An open conversation occurred over their likes and dislikes. Other evangelistic techniques were also presented for future use. The meeting ended with the goal of continuing to implement the strategy based on times

of prayer, events, relationship building opportunities, and community service. A future meeting was scheduled to plan outreach efforts for the next year.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION

The final chapter will evaluate the project and seek to gauge its benefit to the church. Assessments will be made on the original purpose and goals presented in chapter one. The overall strengths and weaknesses will be determined along with theological and personal reflections.

#### **Introduction**

The impact of this project has been significant. A greater evangelistic awareness has gripped the church. Those who actively participated in developing and implementing the strategy felt a sense of accomplishment (Appendix 19). There is more encouragement to engage in the church's mission. They do not want this focus and action to end.

Members of the leadership team have grown in their connection to Christ. The times of evangelistic reflection and engagement have been a catalyst for spiritual maturity. There is a greater comprehension of the gospel. This understanding became deeply ingrained and personal as the group worked through their testimonies and were more involved in service.

This impact has spread to the church body. The congregation has realized that evangelism does not just happen (Appendix 15). Very few people will naturally connect their friends and neighbors with the gospel. I have long realized my personal responsibility in personal evangelism. I have also failed many times to live God's

mandate in my life. This failure resulted from the lack of purposeful action. I have realized that there must be intentional determination and participation to fulfill the responsibility of evangelism.

The project has guided the church to have this intentional outreach. The congregation has taken the steps needed to present the gospel. This was the first moment of involvement for many believers. Even those who understood their evangelistic role were led to greater participation. The structure of the strategy allowed the leadership team to guide others in purposeful evangelistic actions.

### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of the project was the implementation of an evangelistic strategy for Hornsby Baptist Church. This plan was to suit the particulate rural cultural context of the surrounding community. It was also a strategy that would engage the congregation in personal evangelistic actions.

A strategy has been developed and applied. The church did not have a consistent evangelistic focus in the past. Brief times of outreach were conducted but soon vanished. The presentation of the gospel was normally centered around various events, such as revivals. The project has provided the congregation with specific direction. The general principles of prayer, relational, event, and servant evangelism have given the church a platform to share their faith. This framework will guide the application of future methods and techniques.

The church can revisit this process in a simplified form each year. The yearly evangelistic focus will be a time to review and readdress the core principles. Older methods can be evaluated and new ones developed. The leaders can highlight the evangelistic approaches through a mission fair. The strategy should be a growing

structure that helps the church move forward. This project will allow the church to continue to determine the ongoing direction of its evangelistic responsibility.

The strategy was conditioned by the culture. The leadership team guided their selection of methods based on their rural context. As members of a small community, they understood what appealed to their neighbors. They spent time talking to and thinking about the people they sought to reach.

An example of the strategy's cultural adaptation was observed in the visitation method. Many in the church, including myself, did not feel that visitation ministry would be accepted well by our neighbors. The responses that were obtained during the communities surveys made the leadership team adjust that determination. The group was reminded that the rural culture is relationally driven. People desired to connect. They wanted to socialize with others. Often, the longing was only for social contact and to know that someone cares. Yet, this desire opened the door for an effective way to present the gospel in community member's homes.

The strategy involved individual members. The purpose was not focused on church staff or a small group. Aid was given to the congregation to become personally evangelistic. The church has grown more active in being a witness for Christ. Many of the leadership team testified to their growing confidence and engagement (Appendix 19). Others in the church were also involved. The small groups that implanted each method worked to increase the participation from church members.

HBC has developed and implemented an evangelistic strategy. This strategy was designed to suit the rural context in which the church exists. The intended purpose has been achieved; however, the purpose did not end with the project. The project started the church's engagement in the evangelistic plan. The strategy itself will be changed and adapted as the church feels necessary.

## **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

Five goals were established to evaluate the project. The first sought to understand the rural context of the surrounding culture. Surveys were conducted to obtain the religious and social views of the community. It was planned that fifty percent of the houses would be surveyed. The leadership team fell short of this percentage. Two main issues caused this short fall.

The day of visitation conflicted with a death of a community member. The relationship bonds in the church dictated that several of the leadership team had to attend the funeral. Family connections are unavoidable in a small town. Therefore, several of the leadership team members were unable to participate in the community surveys.

The more important obstacle involved the visits themselves. We spent too much time talking. It is difficult to make a quick visit in a community that wants to form deeper connections. Most of the homes asked team members to come in and visit. It is hard to say no for fear of offending the neighbor one is seeking to reach. This positive reception became the leading motivator for including a visitation program in the project.

Community members want the visit to be meaningful. The church cannot simply use the visitation program as a way to check off their responsibility of witnessing. They must approach their neighbors with compassion. These social calls are a way of offering hope and help to the people closest to the church. Through these visits, we can provide the message of real hope in Christ.

The smaller percentage of surveys did not distract from the data collected. It is believed that a fair representation of the community's views was obtained. The survey results showed a similarity in many of the responses (Appendix 15). The community held the same mindset, especially on social needs and issues. The leadership team was able to confirm this correlation. They held the same social views as their neighbors.

The second goal involved the formation of the leadership team and their development of an evangelistic strategy. Personal invitations and interviews were made to potential team members. The total participation in this group expanded to twenty-one members, although the original proposal planned on a number of fifteen. It was hard to limit this group. I felt it difficult to exclude people that God had placed on my heart to be a part of the project. The number of persons included worked well in the end. They provided a wide but cohesive organization.

The team was the driving force behind the project. They did the work of selecting the overall principles and individual methods used in the strategy. This evangelistic plan was their plan. Their ownership of the strategy allowed for them to easily unite behind its promotion and implementation. They made the choice in how they would engage their culture. This ownership led to an easy acceptance of responsibility. The team planned each technique and promoted the strategy to the church body and encouraged participation.

The third goal was to increase the understanding of the church in its responsibility of personal evangelism. There existed some comprehension of this duty before the project began. The leadership team expressed an awareness of its role in God's mission. This group also affirmed that those who died without Christ would spend eternity in hell (Appendix 6).

The same understanding was present at various degrees in the congregation as a whole. The pre-project church survey showed that a majority of the attending members knew that they should express their faith (Appendix 7). A change was recognized when these results were compared to the post-project church survey (Appendix 15). The percentages slightly increased. There were fewer individuals who disagreed or were uncertain in God's plan and their role in that plan.



The sheer bulk of teaching and promotion on the subject could account for the change. Evangelistic responsibility was taught and promoted for fifteen weeks. At every gathering of the church, some aspect of the project was preached or presented. The congregation absorbed this information. The church has gained a greater understanding of biblical evangelism through a lot of repetition over the subject matter.

The area where little change was realized involved the practical aspects of evangelism. The church body still struggles with confidence and action. This area of concern addressed the fourth goal of the project. The church was to be more open and active in personal evangelism.

An increased participation was easily recognized in the leadership team. They were active in learning and sharing their connections with Christ. Their comments at the end of the project reflected the greater action (Appendix 19 and 20). Some of my most enjoyable moments in the project have been to witness the beginning steps of the church family in reaching out to the lost. Some who made their first evangelistic visits overcame long held fears. Men, who had never spoken of Jesus publically, shared their testimony with friends. Self-described introverts learned that giving a witness of Jesus was possible for everyone.

There was some change in the congregation at large as well. Many in the church have taken an active role in several of the methods. Church members not participating in the leadership team were involved in each of the ten evangelistic techniques that were used. Naturally, there were several members who were not engaged through the project.

I believe, any change that has occurred has been supported by the leadership team. A rural church will have a greater chance of embracing evangelistic actions when led from within. The team members were able to share their work and excitement with

family and friends. This guidance opened the door of opportunity to the congregation. Future involvement of others will come as those involved personally invite others to join.

The final goal of the project centered on my growth as an evangelistic leader and disciple-maker. I began to work toward this goal the first week during the recruitment visits with the leadership team. This meeting served as an occasion to encourage their commitment toward personal evangelism. These mentoring contacts continued throughout the project. I sought out one on one opportunities to discuss the biblical truths of the gospel. The visitation method provided a good occasion for these mentoring moments. It was here that I could practically demonstrate the presentation of the gospel. It also allowed the group to critique me and the way the visit was handled. I would ask them to evaluate how the time was spent and what they would have done differently.

I worked with those sharing in the small groups to practically and easily present their faith. Many hours were spent meeting with these small evangelistic groups. We discussed how they would relate the gospel to their potential targets. I gave ideas and advice when needed but allowed them to take control of the individual methods. I wanted to serve as a support person on whom team members could, yet not taking away their opportunity to lead.

The leadership team was asked to evaluate my effectiveness as an evangelistic leader on three occasions during the project (Appendixes 16 through 18). I am blessed to serve a gracious people. Their responses were very positive. These surveys served as a great encouragement to me through the progression of the project.

One area addressed in the first survey concerned the presentation of the subject matter. Several stated difficulty in comprehending the material discussed. There was also low percentage on my work to clearly communicate personal thoughts and ideas.

There were times when the group dialogue and my presentation moved rapidly. This pace could have been slowed and a recap time added to review what was covered. Through much of the discussion time, I had a volunteer take notes for my personal use. Giving these notes to the team could provide a means of keeping the material fresh in their minds between sessions.

A lower response than desired was given concerning the adequate address to questions. At times I sought to be intentionally vague. I did not want to take the role and responsibility away from the team as they formed the strategy. Perhaps this accounted for the lack of proper responses. Regardless of the reason, my work to address the concerns of others was not where it should have been by the end of the project. More effort should be given in understanding and answering the questions of others.

A consistent area of improvement, according to the team, was in my example as an evangelistic leader. I presume that much of this view came because I took the initiative to do this project. Many did not have a chance to witness my actions in sharing the gospel away from the pulpit ministry. One team member commented through the first pastor survey that she had not witnessed an evangelistic example from me. She assumed that I was involved but had not been able to see me in visible action. The project allowed for an ongoing evangelistic conversation. It forced me to engage in this leadership focus each week.

I was also pleased that all of the team members realized my concern for their evangelistic growth. The formation of the strategy was centered on empowering and encouraging the church. The ownership given to the team was the catalyst for the plans completion. The project would have been meaningless without their action and engagement in Christ's mission.

## **Strengths of the Project**

The most foundational strength of the project was a commitment to prayer. Prayer was used during the recruitment visits. It was a key focus each time the team gathered. Intercessory prayer was a main topic of the training times. Prayer was the primary basis of two of the methods used in the strategy. This strength recognized God as the ultimate authority in salvation. Moments of prayer helped the church keep an evangelistic humility. It paired the church's responsibility with God's sovereignty.

The prayer focus was an encouragement to me through the project. I knew that the church was seeking God and seeking the salvation of others. They were praying for God's mission to succeed. As a pastor, I was excited to see them growing in dependence on Christ. I felt that the prayer times, whether through methods, training, or practice, were the most beneficial for the church.

People were also a strength. An important asset was the first interaction with members of the leadership team in the recruitment visit. Personal invitations seemed to be much more effective than a broad, open call to the congregation. Those invited had a sense of importance and ownership. The person to person contacts helped to build excitement and a higher level of commitment. Evidence of this personal involvement was observed in the continued participation of the team. Leaders were engaged in the project from start to finish. The participation the last week was as high as the first. They had personally invested themselves in the completion of the strategy.

The interaction with the team opened doors for mentoring. I had the opportunity to meet with a wide range of members to discuss their personal evangelistic role. Many of these conversations would not have occurred if it were not for the project. These encounters allowed me to be a sounding board for persons presenting the gospel to a friend or a group.

Starting with the personal invitations focused the group on their task. The initial visits provided a time for evangelistic discussions and questions. As leaders were asked to join, they were already thinking about forming the plan. Many had begun informally discussing methods that sparked their interest before the first meeting of the group.

This informal dialogue was carried over in the strategy meetings. There was an openness to discuss any topic or method that a member of the group felt was relevant. Everyone could participate, as most did at one time or another through the process. This openness to receive all ideas reinforced the ownership and responsibility of the leaders. They were more excited and comfortable in carrying out the methods because the methods belonged to them. The strategy belonged to the church and not the staff. This control by the team provided the strength of the project's implementation.

The leadership also delivered strength through diversity. The individuals on the team represented a wide range of community members. There were male and female participants both old and young. A few of the members were relatively new to the community and others had lived here all their lives. This wide range of involvement benefited in the implementation of the methods. It allowed the church to reach out to different demographics inside the culture. Evangelistic methods directly targeted young males, ladies, parents with young children, and those retired. It prevented a one-sided view to the strategy and allowed a broader prospect range.

It was also an advantage to see team members promoting personal evangelism before the church. The strategy was not about one person. The leadership publically showed their heart and commitment to reaching the lost. Members were willing to stand before others and share their love for each principle of outreach. They gave personal

testimonies for particular techniques. The church could witness that this strategy was not only about the church staff but also about all the members.

An added benefit was beginning the project with a low risk method, such as the community surveys. Members went to homes simply to ask the opinions of the owners. There was no agenda but only concern for what others thought. Once the survey time was finished, the groups returned to the church to debrief. There was a lot of excitement. Everyone was in a celebratory mood. This first step in visiting allowed the team to gain confidence. They were encouraged to visit again because of the good reception that they received. Many who described themselves as introverts learned that it was possible to connect to others without disastrous consequences. One of the participants stated she was “not afraid of visiting anymore.”

A small step in outreach allowed for a bigger movement later in the project. The confidence that was gained turned into a larger commitment later in the project. The leadership team was less afraid of taking on the responsibilities for other methods because they had participated with success in the visits.

One of the training strategies used was helping church members to share their stories of Christ. Different people were guided in this study, but the primary focus was toward the leadership team. Several weeks were spent explaining how to share an evangelistic testimony. This work proved to be a strengthening moment for the church. Members felt empowered to tell others of their relationship with Jesus.

The conclusion of this teaching provided a time for the leadership team to express their personal testimonies to one another. This night was for practice, and the group would rehearse their stories in preparation to share with a lost friend or neighbor. Time was given for practice in small groups and then an opportunity for members to share with the entire team. It was a very emotional night. Many recounted hard

struggles of the past. Others expressed the joy of their present connection with Christ. The group grew closer through this sharing. It served as an evangelistic bonding time. The team heard others express in different ways the same story of salvation. The evening of sharing served as another encouragement to help individuals present the truths of Christ to others. It was easier for those present to go out sharing a testimony of Jesus that others would be telling as well.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The training provided during the project was a good start. This was the first practical instruction for many of the leaders. I believe we covered a basic way of presenting the truths of the faith through testimonies, tracts, and short verbal presentation. Yet, much more was needed. The church surveys revealed a desire for evangelistic training (Appendix 15). I learned through conversations with leaders that they wanted to know how to interact with the lost in a conversation style witness. No one wanted a canned style approach or memorized outline. They wanted to know how to present Jesus naturally and answer the questions that friends may have about God.

A deeper focus on apologetics should have been added to the program. Leaders of the congregation are not secure in defending the truth. They know the core principles of the gospel. All of the leadership team understood that life without Jesus will lead to hell (Appendix 6). I am confident that this group of the congregation grasped God's saving message, but they struggle to defend it. The church avoids entering conversations where that truth is challenged. Even in the post-project church surveys the presence of those confident in sharing the basics of the gospel message was low (Appendix 15). Not only more training but also the right training has to be delivered.

The goal of the training was to help the church make personal evangelism a way of life. Focus was placed on developing the testimonies and presenting the core message of the gospel. This teaching was to aid the team in an ongoing work of witnessing to friends and neighbors. Through this time of reflection, I felt this was not achieved for most members. Some have shared their continued contacts with friends and other divine appointments. For most it seems that testifying for Christ is still driven by a church event. It is not an action that enters their daily lives. Evangelism has not truly become personal for many.

This weakness will be overcome with repetition. Members will become used to witnessing as they participate more through training, practice, mentoring relationships, and church outreach. The duration of the project limited the number of opportunities for persons to participate in verbally communicating the gospel.

It was also a struggle to involve more congregational members. The church as a whole was not fully engaged. The leadership team took on a great active role. Some, not a part of the team, did plug in and connect to certain methods. However, the church-wide participation was low.

The leadership team was structured to involve each person. The small evangelistic groups were formed as catalysis to action. No one person could take an active role in two of the groups. This meant that each of the methods was under the responsibility of different people. The structure moved individual team members to engage. No such organization was available to those outside the team. The only way to know who was involved from the congregation was to look at the method after it was used. The church was invited to come and join, but there was no level of personal encouragement or accountability.



The project utilized a lot of different techniques at one time. All the methods were initiated at the end of the fifteen weeks. It was too much to do at once. I wanted to be involved in as many of the methods as possible. I felt we were doing a lot in a short period. Adding more activities to a busy life can be overwhelming and tiring. Others who wanted to participate in multiple methods would have experienced the same busyness. The limited nature of this project forced the church in this situation.

The visitation technique was a great example of this hectic lifestyle. Several planned visits had to be rescheduled because of conflicts with myself and others. Through this weakness, the leadership team discovered that Sunday afternoons seemed to be the best time to organize group activities. Scheduling training and methods around this day would help us avoid these problems in the future.

Poor communication was addressed under the evaluation of my evangelistic leadership. There were times when the information was not presented effectively or questions answered adequately. Some in the church did not know the extent of the project or the use of the methods. Even members of the team felt they did not know all the functions and methods that were happening (Appendix 19). I did not sufficiently communicate the strategy and each opportunity to the church body. This weakness should have been avoided through greater promotion and repetition.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

Many of the changes I would make stem directly from the weakness above. Training would take on a greater priority. I would look for additional resources that guide us toward an apologetics basis teaching. Topics could be covered that addressed some of the primary issues facing rural culture. For example, the origin of the land, that is so valued in rural life, would be explained with a creationist worldview. Church

members would be taught how to defend God as the Creator against the theory of evolution that is taught in the local schools.

I would also incorporate more practice time in the project. The leadership team only spent about three hours rehearsing how to share their faith. For many it was one of the most enjoyable moments of the project. This area would be expanded and paired with a lesson on defending the faith. Role playing situations would allow the learners more experience in a controlled environment.

More time mentoring would be used from the start of the project. I would have visits scheduled for every week where members could observe and participate in presenting the gospel. Starting earlier in the project would allow time for team members to become evangelistic mentors. Some of those who felt confident sharing their faith would be encouraged to lead groups on visits.

I would take efforts to provide better promotion and communication. The substance of the project was not presented to the church until after the work of the leadership team. I spent several weeks preaching on personal evangelism at the beginning of the project. Halfway through the project team members presented the principles and methods of the strategy. Changing the way the strategy was presented would build greater anticipation in the church. I would outline the work of the church leaders before they began. The congregation would be told what to expect, and how they would be asked to participate. This upfront information would continue for several weeks before the team made its presentation.

I would also change the way the congregation was asked to participate in the strategy. Their involvement would have greater organization instead of being an open invitation to serve. The small evangelistic groups would make personal contacts to different church members. These private invitations would be structured around the same

way they were asked to join the project. A goal would be set for each small group to recruit a certain number of church members to serve through their method. This personal plea would bring them a greater realization of their evangelistic responsibility.

### **Theological Reflections**

I was shocked at the community's affirmation of Christ (Appendix 8). The surveys of the surrounding area showed that a large majority of the community believed in God, Jesus, and life after death. The culture has been shaped by a biblical heritage. Almost all the residents of the area have some familiarity with God. It is socially acceptable to confess a connection to Jesus at some level.

This past exposure to scriptural truths has led to a marred view of Christianity. One survey stood as a representation of the discrepancies in the communities spiritual responses. The respondent affirmed belief in a god and stated that Jesus was Lord and Savior. But when asked about life after death, an answer of reincarnation was presented. This person was a member of a local church but did not have any regular attendance.

The people are confused about true faith in Christ. They know many of the right answers. They truly believe they are spiritually saved and yet the majority seems spiritually blind. They see the message and hear the words but do not comprehend the truth (Ezekiel 12:2; Jeremiah 5:21). The confession that Jesus is Lord has no bearing on the rest of their lives.

The church must confront this social faith. Members must seek to live an authentic life with Christ. They must also know the core truths of the gospel. A new goal of digging deeper in spiritual relationships with others should be formed. The evangelism must be personal and based on the truth of sin and salvation. Community members must be confronted not only with the right knowledge but also with the real

relationship to Christ. This work will not be easy. Our neighbors believe that they are spiritually grounded. This thought makes it harder to penetrate their conscience with the gospel. They first must realize their need before they can respond to the truth of Christ.

The church and its leaders must guard against a belief that has no consequence in their actions. The second chapter was a reminder of all believers' responsibility to be a witness. It paired the believer's theological understanding with proper action. The leadership has to lead in this evangelistic work. They cannot allow their belief to be meaningless banter.

Church leaders understand the consequences of a false faith. All members of the leadership team stated that a person who has no relationship with Jesus will go to hell (Appendix 6). The church has to confront this truth by addressing the reality of an eternity apart from God. The truth of hell has to be a guiding factor in one's evangelistic motivation. God was and is moved to act because of his love for men (Romans 5:8). The rural church must share this great love in the community and let this love drive their actions.

God is concerned with his glory (Isa 42:8). He is also concerned that his creation would show this glory (Isa 43:21). The church is to have a heart for the glory of God. The Lord's people are compelled to honor their God in praise and proclamation. The end of this project has reinforced this truth in my personal thoughts. I have been reminded that one's personal love of God is the driving focus of witnessing. God's love compels us to be active and personal in evangelism. As men grow in their love of God, their desire to see others saved will grow.

One member of the leadership team gave good advice to those struggling to engage in personal evangelism. She said "stay prayerful" and "spend time in study of the

Word” (Appendix 20). An increased relationship with God brings an increase acceptance of ones responsibility in his mission.

### **Personal Reflections**

I love to see members of my church family grow in their relationship with Christ. It is one of the greatest gifts I can receive as a pastor. This maturing effect occurred throughout the duration of the project. Individuals who were engaging in evangelism have become more vocal for Christ. Those who have never shared their faith participated in the Lord’s mission for the first time. Leaders were expressing their joy to be closer in their connection with Jesus. This growth has given me excitement and energy in my own relationship with God. I have begun to look at every aspect of the church with thoughts of outreach. There is a sense of freedom in my heart to try new ways of connecting the community to Christ. The church’s overwhelming support has encouraged a greater boldness in my personal witness.

Forming the strategy had the same effect on the congregation as well. The leadership seemed especially encouraged and focused. Their work toward the common goal gave the group a stronger bond. The team grew closer as they served together. They were collectively emboldened as they sought to overcome their fears. I believe we have a stronger fellowship as a result of our work.

The project brought out the reality of the church as a group of different individuals. Each person is at a different level of connection with Christ. There are various personalities among the different members. Some are actively growing with God and others are not. Some are extroverts and some are introverts. Some are comfortable speaking to groups while others prefer one on one conversations. The evangelism strategy has to take these variations into account. I tend to structure plans and actions

around my own disposition. Care should be given to include all levels of growth and the various natures of the church members.

The leadership team became a great positive of the project. However, their formation of the strategy also affected me negatively. I had to give up control. I had to restrict my involvement as they took the responsibility of selecting and leading the methods. I did not want to force my thoughts and ideas on the group. This leadership from the church meant that some of the methods that gave me personal excitement were left out. I did not have the ability to implement some of the methods I care deeply for.

Going forward, I want to incorporate some of these ideas into my personal outreach. I am going to take the initiative to lead some of these just as other church leaders are leading in different areas. The strategy has provided an added level of benefit by balancing the work across the church body. I can spend time on projects that matter more to me. At the same time, the church is able to address methods that are meaningful to them.

### **Conclusion**

As the project came to a close, the natural question was to ask what type of fruit was realized through the church's efforts. Numbers are important. The outcome of any rural method has to be evaluated. Yet, numerical growth in attendance or baptisms cannot be the determining factor of a successful evangelistic project. Metzger observed that "the value of sharing as much of the gospel as we can with as many people as we can is not measured in numbers of converts. I have not been privileged to be the last link in the chain of witness to very many people. The value is in knowing that we have obeyed

our Lord and have been a reinforcer of his truths to many consciences. The value can be seen in how your experiences of witness change your Christian life.”<sup>1</sup>

The rural church must guard itself against false vision and expectations of growth beyond the proportion of its community. Speaking on this view of rural church growth, Ruffcorn mentioned that “congregations have burdened themselves unnecessarily by trying to measure the result of their evangelistic activities. Rural congregations have looked out upon fields that, although ripe for harvest, are not plentiful, and they have despair.”<sup>2</sup> Instead, the congregation needs to take joy in the privilege of being a light and sharing the good news of Jesus with those they know and love.

Hornsby Baptist Church was able to participate in this joy. There was excitement from the membership as it gathered each week. The attendance of the leadership team was as strong in the last week as it was the first. Members were joining together learning to accomplish their responsibility in Christ’s mission. By the end of the project, the church was able to celebrate the salvation of a new believer.

In all, 62 individuals engaged in the various methods. Specialized evangelistic training was provided to 52 church members. The leadership made 103 visits. The gospel was personally presented 123 times to different persons or groups. The newsletter and other mailings shared the message of salvation in over 350 homes. Approximately 250 parents and children heard of Christ’s death and resurrection during the Easter Egg Hunt. It is estimated that church reached out with the gospel to 780 people in its rural community.

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<sup>1</sup>Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 199.

<sup>2</sup>Kevin E. Ruffcorn, *Rural Evangelism: Catching the Vision* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994), 15-16.

This combined evangelistic effort was a great accomplishment that will provide momentum for the future. Plans have already been made to have a church mission fair. This event will allow a greater emphasis to be placed on the methods that have been used in this project. The church can also use this fair to focus on other areas of outreach such as VBS and Awana. The basis of the project will become a yearly activity. Church members will be asked to assemble and evaluate the methods that they are using and others that might be available. They will take ownership of the strategy. Commitments will be made to lead others in evangelistic involvement. Training will be provided to equip members in the tools they need to faithfully share the gospel. This shortened process will end with a mission fair that highlights each area in which the congregation can participate.

The project provided a huge first step in the church's local evangelistic mission. This fifteen-week venture was the first time of active engagement for most members. It was a new start that should lead to a consistent involvement. The church now knows which principles will guide its methods of the future. Members can confidently select and participate in methods that suit them and their community. The foundation has been established to move the church forward. The end of the project is not a time to quit. This rural church must continue the implementation of its strategy.



## APPENDIX 1

### PRAYER EVANGELISM METHODS

1. Prayer Driving (Walking) with Stops – Drive or walk through the community stopping by homes and asking for any needs that the group can pray over. A survey can be included that will ask for any prayer requests.
2. Prayer Notes – Send written card to people for whom the church is praying.
3. Porch Praying – Have a group gather on a church member’s porch and pray for neighbors in the vicinity.
4. Targeted Prayer – Enlist different groups to pray for particular demographics (example, senior prayer for seniors, moms for kids, dads for dads).
5. Email Prayer – Have a prayer email address that is advertised in the community and used to receive requests.
6. Prayer Progressive Dinner – Plan a progressive dinner with a time for evangelistic prayers after the meal.
7. Prayer Drive Ins – Set up a prayer booth where drivers can stop by and have a moment of prayer on their way home from work.
8. Prayer Teams – Enlist prayer team members that meet for the purpose of interceding for a particular person or persons.
9. Pew Prayer – Have a group of prayer warriors meet at the church before services and pray over each pew.
10. Prayer Cards – Select specific individuals to pray for on a daily basis and keeping their names on a card as a constant reminder.
11. Prayer Chain (voice or text) – Have a group that will pray for a specific person daily. Share the prayer need in a chain that notifies the church continually.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Inspiration for the evangelistic pray methods came from Chuck Lawless, *Serving in your Church Prayer Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 68-60, 86-91.

## APPENDIX 2

### RELATIONAL EVANGELISM METHODS

1. Friend Day – Ask everyone to bring one friend to Sunday School.
2. Throw Parties – Members invite the same number of non-Christian friends to a party.
3. Begin a Hobby – Build relationships by joining others or inviting others to engage in hobbies or free time activities (jogging, exercise, fishing, watching the game).
4. Start a New Sunday School Class – Begin a class around a particular interest or age group. The class should automatically build in relationship opportunities as well as biblical study.
5. Start Home Groups – Have members invite neighbors and friends to a small number (four-five) of meetings that discuss the overall content of Scripture. Each home will be trained by the church staff. Home members will provide refreshments.
6. Adopt a Family – Have church families adopt non-attending families. Invite them to a movie, over for dinner, or to a special activity. Spend time together so that coming to church and worshiping together will come naturally.
7. Participate in Community Events – Find out what is going on around you and be present (Festivals, Little League Games, School Events). Look for someone you know or a familiar face and start a conversation.
8. Join a Club or Service Group – Build new relational bonds by reaching out to groups such as PTO, Ruritan, Lion's Club, Volunteer Fire Department, Boy Scouts, or Voting District Volunteers.
9. Pay for Lunch – Invite a neighbor or coworker to lunch. You pay for the meal and gain an opportunity to start a new relationship.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Inspiration for the evangelistic relational methods came from Ken Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 14, 102-03; Kent Hunter, *The Lord's Harvest and the Rural Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1993), 20-21, 41, 114; Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 109-13.

## APPENDIX 3

### SERVANT EVANGELISM METHODS

1. Take a Survey – Have members survey their road or community concerning physical and spiritual needs of their neighbors and friends. Be prepared to help with any discovered needs and provide spiritual guidance.
2. Clean Up – Spend time walking around town cleaning up trash. Spend a morning at the community garbage disposal center helping community members unload their trash.
3. Give a Light Bulb – During Daylight Savings Time change, go door to door giving away light bulbs and reminding people of the time change.
4. Gift Baskets – Deliver gift baskets to shut-ins, elderly, or other community members during holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas).
5. Clothes Closet – Create a clothes closet or food pantry to assist community members in meeting basic needs.
6. Rake Leaves – Spend a Saturday cleaning up yards in the community (raking leaves, mowing grass, picking up limbs).
7. Home Repairs – Organize a home fix-it-up group. Lead members to repair, paint, and do light construction on needy homes in the community.
8. School Volunteers – Have a volunteer hub for local school projects and needs. A selected group of leaders should make regular contact with school (and community) officials to discover any opportunities for service.
9. Baseball Tournaments – Sponsor a sporting event to raise money for community organizations.
10. Community Garden – Plant a community garden. Invite members of the community to participate in planting and harvesting produce.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Inspiration for the evangelistic servant methods came from [www.servantevangelism.com](http://www.servantevangelism.com).

## APPENDIX 4

### EVENT EVANGELISM METHODS

1. Children's Program – Invite children in the community to participate in a special program such as a Christmas Play or Awana Celebration Day. Children will bring their parents.
2. Festival/Holiday Events – Provide games and food during special days such as Easter, 4<sup>th</sup> of July, or Halloween.
3. Community Events – Engage evangelistic teams to attend events already scheduled in the community.
4. Special Evangelistic Events – Sponsor activities (Vacation Bible School, Revival) that have a gospel presentation at the center of its program.
5. Block Party – Hold a block or neighborhood party at the home of a church member or public area.
6. Wild Game Supper – Invite community members to cook their favorite wild game meal. Provide judging and prizes as well as an evangelistic speaker.
7. Crafts Fair – Sponsor a crafts fair for local artists.
8. Sporting Event – Hold a sports clinic for community members to attend. Ask coaches and players from local schools and colleges to provide sports training and a Christian testimony.
9. Film Night – Show a Christian film outdoors with popcorn and drinks.
10. Homecoming – Sponsor a community homecoming where each family is asked to bring a potluck dish.
11. Parents Night Out – Give community parents a well-deserved break and share the gospel with their children.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Inspiration for the evangelistic event methods came from Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, *Finding Them, Keeping Them* (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 79; Thom Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 240-41.

## APPENDIX 5

### TECHNOLOGICAL EVANGELISM METHODS

1. Testimony Vodcast – Produce videos on a church website where church members can share their testimony and the gospel. Tracts or cards can be given to the community with directions to the messages. The community can learn about God even if they don't come to church.
2. Facebook Friends for Christ – Start a Facebook discipleship group which will discuss biblical and practical themes of outreach. An open page can be used for community members to ask questions about the church or Christ. Have church member invite friends to an online chat about God, salvation, heaven, or other gospel centered topics.
3. Gospel Tweets – Send the key components of the gospel through Twitter. Have members repost the tweets on their accounts.
4. Outreach Blog – Create a blog that will discuss practical issues in sharing ones faith. Include how to begin a spiritual conversation, share testimonies, biblical verses, and common problems.
5. Text Salvation Prayers – Send out the names of individuals who need spiritual prayers. Also send answered prayers and spiritual victories so members can celebrate the work of Christ in their community.
6. Email Tract – Form a gospel message inside of an email. Send to church members who will forward it to friends and family on their list.
7. Website Evangelism – Format a website that is evangelistically driven. Others who visit the site will be quickly and easily presented the gospel.
8. Technology Sunday – Have church members invite social networking friends on a special technological service. Send out text messages during the sermon and have people instant message questions for discussion during the service.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Inspiration for the evangelistic technological methods came from Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes. *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 82, 179; Shannon O'Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America: Breaking all the Rurals* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf, 2010), 172-74.

## APPENDIX 6

### LEADERSHIP TEAM INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your view of personal evangelism?

Many commented that personal evangelism was what God had told us to do and we were to do it. It is our duty to share our faith with others. All in one form or another communicated the need to be active in personal evangelism.

Others stated that it was sharing our relationship with Jesus with others. They focused on teaching or explaining how to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. Personal evangelism was talking directly with others, one on one, and telling them about the Lord.

Several partnered personal evangelism with their testimony. They responded that it was telling others how God has affected their lives and how they became a Christian.

2. In the past, how often have you shared your faith?

16% stated they regularly engaged in evangelism. This percentage included those who shared a couple times a week to those who shared at least once a month.

28% responded they do not share their faith as often as they should or not nearly enough.

56% confessed they seldom have shared their faith or have done so only a few times.

3. What keeps most church members from engaging in personal evangelism?

83% responded that fear, in one form or another, kept them from witnessing. The fear most commonly cited was rejection.

Other comments included: not having enough knowledge; caught up in earthly things; no guidance or direction.

4. What happens to those who die without a relationship with Jesus?

100% of the team stated that a person without a relationship with Jesus would go to hell.

5. Are you willing to give the time and effort needed in completing the fifteen week project?

100% of those who returned the survey responded with a yes.

APPENDIX 7

PRE-PROJECT CHURCH SURVEY

Possible Responses:            1 = Strongly Disagree  
     2 = Disagree  
     3 = Uncertain  
     4 = Agree  
     5 = Strongly Agree

Statements	Responses (expressed as percentage)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Every Christian should be active in telling others how to be saved.	0	0	8	18	74
2. I feel confident sharing the basics of the gospel message.	0	4	20	44	26
3. I want someone to teach me more about how to share Christ.	2	0	8	39	51
4. Only qualified church leaders are to tell others about Jesus.	67	16	16	1	0
5. I share my faith on a regular basis.	5	9	27	52	7
6. I feel confident in sharing my personal testimony.	8	8	16	47	21
7. I am comfortable starting a spiritual conversation with other people.	0	10	18	47	21
8. A person can be saved without knowing about Jesus.	67	23	6	2	2
9. Those who do not accept Jesus as Lord will go to a place of torment called Hell.	12	0	4	12	72
10. I worry that I do not know enough to tell others about Jesus.	9	12	22	50	7
11. I have told someone how to have a connection with Jesus in the last three months.	16	12	22	29	21

## APPENDIX 8

### COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

How long have you lived in this area?

- 20% said 1-10 years
- 22% said 11-20 years
- 11% said 21-30 years
- 7% said 31-40 years
- 40 % said 40 plus years

In which town or city do you work?

38% are retired or do not work. Only 3 people (4%) work in Hornsby. 22% work in Bolivar. Bolivar is the neighboring town and many of those surveyed would have a Bolivar address.

Other towns mentioned included Jackson (12%), Middleton (7%), and Memphis (5%).

What is the greatest problem or need in our community?

Many responses mirrored problems in our nation. 24% stated jobs. 18% said drugs.

Several responses dealt with local governmental issues. They expressed concerns over garbage collection, the water system, and the need for a closer grocery store.

A few mentioned a need to 'focus on Christ,' to engage in 'prayer' or to 'get right with God.'

For many, it was other social issues, such as: no activities for kids, activities for seniors, activities for young adult, lack of personal contact with others, no connection with neighbors, the need for a community center, need for community events, and the problems of those in difficult circumstance (death, single parents, finances, divorced, elderly)

How do you believe the local churches should be active in the community?

23% said the church should help the needy or those with problems. The comments addressed every issue from hunger and finances to abuse and troubled families. Many simply responded that church should help without specifying where and with whom.



18% called for help in more activities. Many of these wanted children focused activities but others saw the need for senior and young adult programs as well.

15% stated that church should visit more. One person who had lived in the area for 5 years said “no one had been out to visit me since I lived here.”

There were also a variety of comments for the church to support and engage in community events. “Have community based and not church based functions. Form a “community recreation center.” “More activities that involve the community.”

Do you attend church?

66% said Yes.

In your opinion, is there a God?

93% said Yes. One call said a Higher Being.

Do you believe in life after death?

89% said Yes. The response indicated that different people had different interpretation about life after death. One said “I believe you come back as something else.” Others made reference to the soul or spirit.

Have you ever heard about Jesus Christ and what do you know about Him?

85% said they had heard of Jesus in some way.

Many of the comments were conflicting. Some simply said ‘yes’ without telling what they knew of him. Others stated he was the Savior, Lord, a Friend, a good Man, or that he died for sins.

It was interesting that the response that life after death was reincarnation was followed by the response that Jesus is Savior and Lord.

## APPENDIX 9

### RURAL EVANGELISM BRAINSTORMING IDEAS

#### Prayer

Prayer Cards – Send cards to community members that are prayed for during a special service.

3-1-6 prayer ministry – Select and commit to pray for three unsaved persons.

Prayer Breakfast – Join together to pray specifically for the lost and unchurched.

Prayer Walking/Driving – Drive or walk through the community stopping by homes and asking for any needs the group can pray over.

Targeted Prayer – Enlist different groups to pray for particular demographics (examples: seniors praying for seniors, moms for kids, dads for dads).

Prayer Chain – Have a group that will pray for a specific person daily.

#### Service

Senior Outreach Meal – Serve meals to seniors at church or in their homes.

Support Groups (divorcees, single moms, drugs, etc.) – Form a group to minister to those in a crisis situation.

Open Communication among the church body for needs.

Bus Ministry – Pick up elderly (home bound) for services.

Community Clean-up – Serve community with yard clean up, trash pick up, or other project.

Job Fair – Partner with others to host a county job fair.

Home Repairs – Organize a fix it up group to repair, paint, and do light construction.

Clothes Closet/Food Pantry – Collect items to assist community members with basic needs.

Night Watch – Provide a community watch program that gives attention to visiting neighbors.

#### Events

Sunday Night Kids Activity – Children's Choir.

Awana Parents Night – Invite parents to spend the night at Awana with their child.

Easter Egg Hunt - Engage evangelistic teams during the even to identify unchurched visitors and to share the gospel with them.

Ladies Tea/Bunko/Zumba Night – Open church up for activities as way to communicate Christ (self-defense class, cooking class).

Dave Ramsey Course – Help young adults (and others) with financial planning.

Young Adult Basketball – Have weekly basketball games that share the gospel.

Parent's Night Out – Teach children gospel and allow parents a night out.

Christian Comedian/ Illusionist – Invite Awana parents .

Wild Game Supper – Bring different dishes based on local game.

Drug Awareness – Have Christian police officers share about local drug problems and their relationship with Christ.

Large Quarterly Event – Hold an evangelistic event four times a year.

### Relationships

New Sunday School Class - Begin a class around a particular interest or age group (Youth Adults)

Visitation to Community – Visits to be made on a regular basis.

Newsletter – Send information of the church and gospel sent to those wishing to receive the letter.

Sermon on CD to shut-ins – Deliver sermons to home bound community members.

Friday parties – Invite nonchurched community members to your home for fellowship.

Brotherhood/ Men's Breakfast – Conduct a men's program focused on reaching out to men.

Yada Sisterhood/ Women's Ministry – Women's program focused on reaching out to women with a 'tea' type atmosphere.

Relationship Building Time – Have Friendship breaks between Sunday school and Church (doughnuts and coffee).

Men's Basketball – Play basketball with a church member providing an evangelistic message.

Buy Sharecroppers – Purchase the local restaurant which had closed and use the building as a community center where church members could share the gospel.

APPENDIX 10  
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Does this method appeal to you?

What do you like about this method?

What do you dislike about this method?

If you were an unchurched member of this community, would there be an openness to this method?

What does our community enjoy?

To what activities do you devote your time?

How will this method enhance or diminish these actions?

Will this method allow you to effectively communicate the gospel?

What hindrances will be involved?

Are you willing to commit to using this method and encouraging others to do the same?

## APPENDIX 11

### COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends,

Life is special. Life in Hornsby is special. We have our problems. We are not a perfect people but we are blessed to have life and live with friends and family. God has given me opportunities to travel across our nation and to other countries in the world. It is great to see new places and people. At the end of the trip, I love to come back to Hardeman County. There is something here that you cannot find anywhere else, you! Other people make life special. Your family and friends give you the gift of their presence. Those relationships provide times of peace, happiness, and excitement.

In the same way, your relationship with God makes life truly worth living. God is the source of true peace, joy, and hope. A connection with God leads to eternal life with him forever in heaven. It is the most important and most satisfying relationship you can know.

So how can you have this special relationship with God?

First, seek to know God.

The Bible says that God is perfect. He is completely good and righteous in all things. God is our Creator and gives us all good blessings. It should be our goal to know and connect to God in a real and meaningful way. Our purpose in life is to honor God above all.

Second, be honest with yourself.

None of us are perfect. We are all sinners. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). To sin means to miss the mark. When we lie, hate, lust, or gossip we have missed the mark that God has set for us.

Suppose you and I were to stand on the side of Highway 64 and throw a rock at the North Pole. You might throw farther than I, but both of us would miss. When the Bible says we have fallen short of God's glory, it means we have missed God's standard of perfection. No one is perfect, not one.

Even one sin in your life brings a penalty. The penalty for sin is death. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). We have earned death. That means we deserved to die and be separated from God forever.

Third, know Jesus.

We can never do enough good to take away our bad. Because of sin, we can never come to God. But God has come to us.

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

The Bible says Jesus took the penalty that we deserved for sin, placed it upon Himself, and died on a cross in your place. He was buried but three days later Jesus came back to life to prove that sin and death have been defeated and that His claims to be God were true.

God provides you the gift of Himself and heaven through the death and resurrection of Jesus. “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23b).

Fourth, respond to God now.

God calls you to respond to the gift of Jesus with faith.

“For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Faith is trust.

Just as you trust a chair holds you up with no effort of your own, so you must trust Jesus to get you to heaven through no effort of your own. You believe that his death and resurrection are all that is needed to have a relationship with God.

There is nothing more important than your need to trust Jesus. Talk to God now and ask Him to save you from eternal death. Admit to Him that you are not perfect and are a sinner. Tell God you are trusting in Jesus as your Savior. As you pray, express your belief that Jesus died for you and rose from the grave. Thank God for his forgiveness and the everlasting life you now have.

Several years ago a dear friend helped me understand these truths of God. My relationship with Jesus provides the peace needed to face a world of problems and pain. Hornsby Baptist Church wants to help you connect to Jesus as well. Please allow us to serve you in your relationship with God.

Bro. Matt  
658-5909  
mattmerson@bellsouth.net

APPENDIX 12  
PARENTAL LETTER

March 6, 2013

Dear Parents,

Life is hectic! Every day we feel rushed just to keep up. We go, go, and go until it seems we can go no more. This busy lifestyle increases with children. As parents, we feel the need to involve our kids in activities that consume their time and ours. In this rushed world, we need a time to relax. We need a time to slow down and unwind. Hornsby Baptist Church wants to help with a special gift to parents and children.

On **Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>**, HBC will provide a **Parents Night Out**. Bring your children (Birth through 6<sup>th</sup> Grade) to the church building beginning at 5:00pm. They will watch a movie, play games, eat a great meal, and learn about God. We ask that each child be brought to the worship center at the north entrance of the church. You will be asked to sign your child in and out of the activity. The night will end at 9:00pm.

It is our privilege to partner with you in teaching your children about God. We understand the great responsibility of pointing them to Christ and eternal life in heaven. We hold ourselves accountable to God to give the truth about him and his Son Jesus.

Enclosed with this letter are some of the great Bible truths about God. It is our mission to help you and your children connect to Jesus. Please look over this material at your convenience. If you have any question contact me or one of the servants at HBC.

Enjoy your night,

Bro. Matt Emerson  
731-212-1044  
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So how can you have this special relationship with God?

First, seek to know God.

The Bible says that God is perfect. He is completely good and righteous in all things. God is our Creator and gives us all good blessings. It should be our goal

to know and connect to God in a real and meaningful way. Our purpose in life is to honor God above all.

Second, be honest with yourself.

None of us are perfect. We are all sinners. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). To sin means to miss the mark. When we lie, hate, lust, or gossip we have missed the mark that God has set for us.

Suppose you and I were to stand on the side of Highway 64 and throw a rock at the North Pole. You might throw farther than I, but both of us would miss. When the Bible says we have fallen short of God’s glory, it means we have missed God’s standard of perfection. No one is perfect, not one.

Even one sin in your life brings a penalty. The penalty for sin is death. “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a). We have earned death. That means we deserved to die and be separated from God forever.

Third, know Jesus.

We can never do enough good to take away our bad. Because of sin, we can never come to God. But God has come to us.

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

The Bible says Jesus took the penalty that we deserved for sin, placed it upon Himself, and died on a cross in your place. He was buried but three days later Jesus came back to life to prove that sin and death have been defeated and that His claims to be God were true.

God provides you the gift of Himself and heaven through the death and resurrection of Jesus. “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23b).

Fourth, respond to God now.

God calls you to respond to the gift of Jesus with faith.

“For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Faith is trust.

Just as you trust a chair holds you up with no effort of your own, so you must trust Jesus to get you to heaven through no effort of your own. You believe that his death and resurrection are all that is needed to have a relationship with God.

There is nothing more important than your need to trust Jesus. Talk to God now and ask Him to save you from eternal death. Admit to Him that you are not perfect and are a sinner. Tell God you are trusting in Jesus as your Savior. As you pray, express your belief that Jesus died for you and rose from the grave. Thank God for his forgiveness and the everlasting life you now have.



## APPENDIX 13

### EVANGELISTIC TESTIMONY

#### In Writing your Personal Testimony

1. Do not use “churchy” words. Even common words for you may be unknown by the person with whom you share.
2. Make it short. No longer than four minutes.
3. Give a honest introduction :  
Begin with an attention getting sentence.  
“You and I have been friends for a long time. I want to share something with you that is personal to me.”  
“I used to think I really knew what was going on in life. Boy was I wrong!”  
“I used to be afraid of dying but not anymore.”  
“I grew up in a church but did not understand its purpose until a few years ago.”  
“I wasn’t always interested in Christian things...”
4. Add a transition phrase:  
“I had a life changing experience that ...” (Complete this statement using one of the life changes on the opposite side of this page as a guide, such as “gives meaning to my life,” “gives me comforts in times of need,” or “gives me courage to face death.”)
5. Tell why and how you accepted Jesus as your Lord.  
“I need help from God. He showed me His Son, Jesus.”  
“I understood that I could not save myself. I need Jesus in my life.”
6. End with a transition into the Gospel  
“Can I share with you how Jesus Christ changed my life?”  
“Can I share my journey with God?”

#### Example:

You and I have been friends for a long time. I want to share something with you that is personal to me...

I had a life changing experience that...

...has put my worries, insecurities, and problems into a new perspective.

I need help from God. He provided that help through His Son Jesus.

I now have an inner peace and comfort that someone else is taking care of me.

Can I share with you what has changed?

### Life Changes

Out of Control	vs.	Under Control
No Direction	vs.	Purpose for Living
Confusion	vs.	Meaning
Emptiness	vs.	Joy
Fear	vs.	Courage
Loneliness	vs.	Never Alone
Rejection	vs.	Acceptance
Depression	vs.	Hope
Guilt-ridden	vs.	Free from Guilt
Uncertainty	vs.	Confidence
Anger – Bitterness	vs.	Contentment
Timid – Ashamed	vs.	Boldness
Worries - Insecurity	vs.	Peace

### Do It Yourself

Introduction/Transition Phrase/Bridge to the Gospel:

My life before Christ (Pre-conversion experience):

How you submitted to Jesus:

My life After Christ (Benefits of Conversion):<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bobby H. Welch and Doug Williams, *A Journey in Faith* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2000), 43-45.

## APPENDIX 14

### BRIDGES TO THE GOSPEL

1. CHURCH Bridge  
“Were you brought up in a particular religious tradition?”  
“What does your church teach about the way a person becomes a Christian?”
2. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE Bridge  
“Through the years have you come to know Christ in a personal way, or are you still on the way?”  
“What is your current level of interest in spiritual things?”  
“Where are you in your own personal search for meaning and purpose in life?”
3. INTELLECTUAL Bridge  
“Is there a specific question or concern that is hanging you up in your spiritual journey?”  
“Has anyone ever shared with you what the Bible teaches about?”  
“Has anyone ever shared with you how to have a personal relationship with God?”
4. PERSONAL OPINION Bridge  
“In your personal opinion, what is a Christian?”  
“What do you think of?” (God, Jesus Christ, religion, the Bible, meaning of life, etc.)
5. CURRENT ISSUES Bridge  
“Rob, the Bible is a remarkably relevant book. Would you like to see what it has to say about this issue?”
6. SPORTS Bridge  
“Did you know that (name of well-known athlete) is a Christian?”
7. FELT NEEDS Bridge  
(Used to show how the Gospel answers the deepest needs of people)  
“You know, I still have my share of problems, but having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ has made all the difference in how I handle them! I used to worry myself sick; God is teaching me how to have peace in the midst of the storms of life.”  
“Yes, Mary, I have experienced great loneliness in my life. I used to wonder if anyone would miss me or even care if I died. But I have found a special Friend who loves me just as I am, who will never leave me.”
8. PRAYER Bridge  
“Is there something I could pray about for you?”
9. RELATIONSHIP Bridge  
“Bill, we've been friends for a while now. We have talked together about so many things, yet there is a very important part of my life I have never shared with you.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy Beougher, “Personal Evangelism” (classroom lecture notes, 32100, Version 1.05 – Personal Evangelism) The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 2006, 21.

APPENDIX 15

POST-PROJECT CHURCH SURVEY

Possible Responses:            1 = Strongly Disagree  
     2 = Disagree  
     3 = Uncertain  
     4 = Agree  
     5 = Strongly Agree

Statements	Responses (expressed as percentage)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Every Christian should be active in telling others how to be saved.	0	0	0	22	78
2. I feel confident sharing the basics of the gospel message.	0	0	22	52	26
3. I want someone to teach me more about how to share Christ.	0	0	5	38	57
4. Only qualified church leaders are to tell others about Jesus.	69	26	5	0	0
5. I share my faith on a regular basis.	0	26	38	26	10
6. I feel confident in sharing my personal testimony.	4	4	9	70	13
7. I am comfortable starting a spiritual conversation with other people.	0	4	17	57	22
8. A person can be saved without knowing about Jesus.	86	14	0	0	0
9. Those who do not accept Jesus as Lord will go to a place of torment called Hell.	9	0	4	9	78
10. I worry that I do not know enough to tell others about Jesus.	17	22	26	26	9
11. I have told someone how to have a connection with Jesus in the last three months.	13	13	13	26	35

APPENDIX 16

FIRST LEADERSHIP SURVEY OF PASTOR

Possible Responses:            1 = Strongly Disagree  
    2 = Disagree  
    3 = Uncertain  
    4 = Agree  
    5 = Strongly Agree

Statements	Responses (expressed as percentage)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. The pastor clearly communicated his thoughts and ideas.	0	0	0	36	64
2. I have been positively challenged to be active in personal evangelism.	0	0	0	54	46
3. The pastor seemed knowledgeable about the information presented.	0	0	0	9	91
4. I feel that the pastor is personally encouraging me to share my faith.	0	0	0	36	64
5. All questions that have been asked were adequately answered.	0	0	0	40	60
6. My pastor leads by example in evangelism.	0	0	9	18	73
7. I easily comprehended the subject matter.	0	9	27	0	64
8. The pastor was open and concerned with me and others.	0	0	0	36	64
9. The information presented seemed sound and of good quality.	0	0	0	36	64
10. I feel that the pastor is honestly interested in my evangelistic growth.	0	0	0	27	73

APPENDIX 17

SECOND LEADERSHIP SURVEY OF PASTOR

Possible Responses:            1 = Strongly Disagree  
    2 = Disagree  
    3 = Uncertain  
    4 = Agree  
    5 = Strongly Agree

Statements	Responses (expressed as percentage)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. The pastor clearly communicated his thoughts and ideas.	0	0	0	40	60
2. I have been positively challenged to be active in personal evangelism.	0	0	0	20	80
3. The pastor seemed knowledgeable about the information presented.	0	0	0	20	80
4. I feel that the pastor is personally encouraging me to share my faith.	0	0	0	20	80
5. All questions that have been asked were adequately answered.	0	0	0	55	45
6. My pastor leads by example in evangelism.	0	0	0	20	80
7. I easily comprehended the subject matter.	0	0	0	30	70
8. The pastor was open and concerned with me and others.	0	0	0	40	60
9. The information presented seemed sound and of good quality.	0	0	0	40	60
10. I feel that the pastor is honestly interested in my evangelistic growth.	0	0	0	20	80

APPENDIX 18

THIRD LEADERSHIP SURVEY OF PASTOR

Possible Responses:            1 = Strongly Disagree  
     2 = Disagree  
     3 = Uncertain  
     4 = Agree  
     5 = Strongly Agree

Statements	Responses (expressed as percentage)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. The pastor clearly communicated his thoughts and ideas.	0	0	0	26	74
2. I have been positively challenged to be active in personal evangelism.	0	0	0	33	67
3. The pastor seemed knowledgeable about the information presented.	0	0	0	20	80
4. I feel that the pastor is personally encouraging me to share my faith.	0	0	0	20	80
5. All questions that have been asked were adequately answered.	0	0	6	53	41
6. My pastor leads by example in evangelism.	0	0	0	6	94
7. I easily comprehended the subject matter.	0	0	6	40	54
8. The pastor was open and concerned with me and others.	0	0	0	20	80
9. The information presented seemed sound and of good quality.	0	0	0	4	96
10. I feel that the pastor is honestly interested in my evangelistic growth.	0	0	0	0	100

## APPENDIX 19

### COMMENTS FROM LAST SURVEY OF PASTOR

“I was truly inspired to do more, and also gave me more confidence to witness.”

“More confident in sharing my personal testimony.”

“After having the opportunity to share in this it has made me more comfortable and less afraid to visit and witness in our community.”

“Not as scared about visiting.”

“I have done more than I ever thought I could or than I ever really wanted to. I still feel nervous about sharing the gospel with others but I have come a long way.”

“I feel like I am more willing to share my faith with others.”

“I feel I can be a stronger witness to go out and reach others.”

“You need to do more informing on Sunday mornings from the pulpit. More detail about functions. There were many things that I missed out on because I just didn’t know.”

“These meetings were very interesting and we need to find several programs that would involve the public, such as ball games, prayer breakfast, 4<sup>th</sup> July, and others. It may take 4-6 months to get these started.”

“I feel more burdened to share the gospel after seeing the lostness of the people in Hornsby.”

“This whole experience has been uplifting and I am feeling much better (closer to the Lord) and excited about church and prayer. I am waiting with anticipation to see how Jesus works in the lives of those we have prayed for. I pray that each of us is willing to be used in any way that he wishes.”



## APPENDIX 20

### POST-PROJECT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe your attitude toward personal evangelism.
  - a. I think it is our call to be willing to share the gospel wherever we feel the Lord is directing us to do so.
  - b. I have always felt I the need to share my faith.
  - c. Personal evangelism is important. I have always been fearful of approaching others.
  - d. I believe that personal evangelism is a very important part of being a Christian and living for Jesus.
  - e. I definitely see the importance of it. I believe every person who is a Christian should take an active role in it. Regardless of how big the role, all Christians have a part. I feel it brings you close to the Lord in your own individual relationship and keeps you more focused on the Lord in your own life.
  
2. Has your attitude changed in the last three months? If so how?
  - a. Yes. Prior to our meetings I have known I should share the gospel in my community but didn't really know how to begin the process. Now I feel like I could do some visitation and hopefully open the conversation to share Christ. It gave us a boost. No one ever told us how.
  - b. I am more comfortable. I gained this comfort through personal study and conviction. The project fell into place to help me change.
  - c. Yes, not the importance of personal evangelism but in my feeling more confident of sharing.
  - d. No, I have always believed this. However, I really want to make it a part of my everyday life.
  - e. Yes. I am aware of my actions and my attitudes. I realize younger guys and my friends are watching me. I do not want to be a stumbling block.
  
3. How confident are you in sharing Christ with a family member, friend, neighbor, and stranger?
  - a. I am pretty confident in sharing my faith with all of the above. I pray my life exemplifies my faith in Christ and hopefully that would create the open door for sharing Christ. My struggle is with making sure I introduce them to Christ by using the right Scriptures and not confuse them by using my favorite Scriptures.
  - b. I find myself talking about Jesus all the time; in many more conversations than I ever have.
  - c. More than before. I still am fearful of approaching strangers but with friends, family, and people I know I am much more confident.
  - d. Still not as confident as I would like to be. Hopefully this will come with time as I practice.

e. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the most confident I would say I'm on a 4 right now. But going from 0 to 4 in three months is pretty good.

4. What methods and/or actions of evangelistic strategy help you the most in sharing Christ with others?

- a. The format was comfortable. I allowed everyone to participate. I enjoyed the visitation. It feel like it removed much of my fear. We visited some who attended church but some that did not. I also feel like being in charge of the prayer breakfast forced me to get out of my comfort zone because I was totally responsible for the material to be used.
- b. I really enjoyed the visitation. I have learned to include Scripture into my testimony. I am able to use Scripture to back up my testimony.
- c. The personal testimonies we did and shared with team members.
- d. Examples, role play, conversational strategies that you shared with us. Also use of tracts.
- e. I enjoyed the testimonies and hearing from others. Everyone has a different experience but the same result.

5. What methods and/or actions of the evangelistic strategy harmed your growth in sharing Christ with others?

No harm was caused to any of those interviewed. One person stated that he was not comfortable with all the methods but that no harm was felt in his evangelistic growth.

6. What would you tell another Christian who is struggling in actively engaging in personal evangelism?

- a. The only way to get more comfortable with it is to practice and to prepare yourself and go. Finding someone to go with you would make it more comfortable and provide support.
- b. Don't give up. Stay prayerful. Continue with what you are doing because the Holy Spirit will give you direction. It may come slow but it comes. It is a growth process and not something that happens immediately. Spend time in study of the Word and witnessing will help it come. Start with small relationships.
- c. Depend on the Lord and He will guide you. Prayer before witnessing is essential. Confidence comes with doing.
- d. Live your testimony. Be a friend. Love others as Christ loves us. Be natural, share as the opportunity comes or as God leads. Don't be pushy.
- e. Be real with people. Be yourself. They want what is real not what you think you need to be. Be honest with where you are.

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## ABSTRACT

### IMPLEMENTING AN EVANGELISM STRATEGY AT HORNSBY BAPTIST CHURCH HORNSBY, TENNESSEE.

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jeff K. Walters

The project explores an evangelistic interaction between Hornsby Baptist Church and its surrounding community. A strategy is developed for the church to be evangelistically active in a rural context. Chapter 1 describes the purpose, goals, ministry context, rationale and definitions, limitations and delimitations.

The second chapter presents the biblical and theological basis for personal evangelism. God's desire for personal evangelism is established by providing examples and instruction from both the Old and New Testaments.

Chapter 3 provides the theoretical and sociological support. Characteristics of a rural context are presented and evaluated. This section explores the methods and techniques that are best suited for a rural church and community.

The final chapters explain the creation and implementation of the rural evangelistic strategy. Detail is given to the church's role in establishing the plan and putting the strategy in place. An evaluation of the project gauged its helpfulness and benefits. This assessment included both strengths and weaknesses, along with adjustments that could be made for future use.

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