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DAWSON TROTMAN'S PERSONAL SPIRITUAL
DISCIPLINES AS THE FOUNDATION FOR
HIS GREAT COMMISSION MINISTRY

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DAWSON TROTMAN'S PERSONAL SPIRITUAL
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To Erin Elizabeth,
my beautiful wife, who has loved, encouraged, and motivated me,
and Griffin Edward,
our strong son, whom we love and with whom we are well pleased,
and Reagan Ashley,
our precious little girl, who has captured our hearts:

May our family live and leave a legacy
of love for the Lord Jesus Christ
and faithful service to Him
all the days of our lives.

I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	ix
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Thesis	6
Background	13
Personal Interest	14
Literature Review	18
Methodology	24
Research Methodology	24
Definitions	26
Limitations and Delimitations	29
Conclusion	30
2. LIFE AND MINISTRY OF DAWSON TROTMAN	31
Biographical Sketch	32
Conversion to Christianity	34
Early Christian Life	36
Courtship and Marriage	39
Historical Context and Cultural Milieu	39

Chapter	Page
Trotman’s Response to Modernism	43
Spiritual Foundations for Ministry	46
Methods and Influence of Ministry	47
Death and Legacy	61
Trotman’s Understanding of Great Commission Ministry	62
Trotman’s Understanding of the Gospel	68
Trotman’s Understanding of Discipleship	79
Conclusion	90
3. TROTMAN’S PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES	93
Key Biblical Passages Trotman Used in Formulating His Personal Spiritual Disciplines	93
The Word of God	95
Scripture Memorization	104
Prayer	106
Other Sources of Influence on Trotman’s Personal Spiritual Disciplines	119
Early Christian Life	119
Missionary Biographies and Pastoral Works	122
Core Theological Beliefs Regarding Personal Spiritual Disciplines	130
The Wheel	131
The Word Hand	137
Summary of Core Theology of Personal Spiritual Disciplines	142
Summary of Trotman’s Practice of Personal Spiritual Disciplines	143

Chapter	Page
Time Alone with God	144
Time with Others and God	149
Struggles in Discipline	155
Conclusion	157
4. TROTMAN’S GREAT COMMISSION MINISTRY	160
Historical Sketch	162
Patten Blinn Lumber Company	162
Presbyterian Sunday School Boys Class	166
Expanding Opportunities	168
Minute Men	174
“And Then He Met a Hitchhiker . . .”	178
The Navigators	181
Billy Graham Evangelistic Association	193
Reflecting on Trotman’s Great Commission Ministry	197
Ministry Vision: The Big Dipper	199
The First Star: The Wheel	199
The Second Star: The Word Hand	200
The Third Star: Evangelism	201
The Fourth Star: Follow-Up	202
The Fifth Star: Pacesetting	203
The Sixth Star: Other Works	204
The Seventh Star: World Vision	206

Chapter	Page
Summary of the Big Dipper	207
Trotman’s Concept of Spiritual Reproduction	207
Conclusion	213
5. INFLUENCE OF TROTMAN’S PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ON HIS GREAT COMMISSION MINISTRY	216
The Man God Uses	216
God’s Man in Scripture	218
God’s Men in Church History	220
“Common Denominators for Spiritual Effectiveness”	222
Foundation	224
God’s Man is a Man of the Word	224
God’s Man is a Man of Prayer	234
Foundation for Great Commission Ministry	243
Motivation	245
God’s Man is a Man of Obedience	246
God’s Man is a Man of Witness	253
Motivation for Great Commission Ministry	258
Urgency	259
God’s Man Understands the Heart of God	260
God’s Man Understands His Commission	266
God’s Man Yearns to Carry Out His Commission	268
Urgency for Great Commission Ministry	269
Effectiveness	270

Chapter	Page
God’s Man Wiolds Well the Sword of the Spirit	273
God’s Man Finds Power through Prayer	276
Effectiveness in Great Commission Ministry	279
Conclusion	281
6. CONCLUSION	283
Summary of Argument	284
Implications of Argument	289
A Word of Caution	290
Lessons Worth Remembering	304
Areas for Further Study	309
Final Thoughts and Reflections	310
BIBLIOGRAPHY	312

PREFACE

Prior to the spring of 2010, I had never heard of Dawson Trotman. I had spent years following Christ in Protestant evangelical contexts and studying Christ in the most rigorous of Protestant evangelical academic institutions, but I was nevertheless unacquainted with the man whose ideologies had shaped my life of faith and whose methods I had been using for much of my Christian walk. An academic assignment—indeed the first of my doctoral studies—introduced me to the founder of the Navigators and the “Apostle of Follow-Up.” My life has not been the same since. I have now studied Dawson Trotman for half a decade, and in those five years, I have been disciplined by a man who died nearly a quarter century before I was born. I have read what others have written about his life, and I have read his own writings. I have listened to his voice on the few recordings he left behind, and I have been challenged in the twenty-first century by a man who spoke into an early twentieth-century American context. Dawson Trotman has compelled me to spend more time with the Lord, to pray more, to study more, to memorize more, to share more, and to disciple more. He has encouraged me to take better care of my body, which is the temple of the Lord. He has compelled me to follow Christ more closely and to lead others to do the same. I am thankful that I providentially “met” Daws five years ago and that he continues to speak into my life today.

The process of completing this doctoral program has no doubt been one of the Lord’s refining fires in my life. I have learned much, not only about various subjects of academic interest, but also about my life and those who have helped to shape me. John Donne’s observation that “no man is an island” has never been more true than in my own life, and the processes of completing this dissertation and this degree have made that truth

clearer than ever before. I could not have arrived here without the help of many, and I shall herein attempt to give adequate thanks where it is due. Any omissions are unintentional and deeply regretted.

I am first indebted to the wonderful saints who are Hillvue Heights Church in Bowling Green, Kentucky, who have not only generously funded this endeavor and allowed me to spend precious hours pursuing its completion, but who have also encouraged me so many times along the way. I am thankful for the elders, Business Administration Team members, and pastors who have not only allowed but also supported me as I have worked to complete this degree.

Words cannot express my thanks to Dr. Steve Ayers, our lead pastor, who has consistently pushed me to become all that God has created and redeemed me to be. Dr. Ayers has mentored me since I was a seventeen-year-old kid, and he graciously offered me the job that changed my life. He has provided opportunity, wisdom, motivation, and coaching along the way, and I am more than thankful for his mentorship and friendship in my life. His passion for Great Commission ministry is evident in every aspect of his life, and he continues to shape my life and ministry in innumerable ways on a daily basis.

I am greatly indebted to the other members of our Executive Staff at Hillvue, Dr. Mark B. Hale and Dr. Jamie Ward. Dr. Hale has proven to be a dear friend, sage mentor, and loyal advocate. He has encouraged me to make time to complete these studies. He gave me space to work, and he sought to ensure that distractions were minimized. He also pulled me aside when he could see that the process was causing me to be discouraged, and he lovingly led me back to the right perspective. He is a cherished friend to me. Dr. Ward was the first to draw my attention to Dawson Trotman by uttering the phrase “always holding someone up” as I came to Trotman’s name on the list of prospective paper topics during my first doctoral seminar, and he has been my chief encourager along the way. Having studied many of the same topics, he has been a sounding board for ideas and a refiner of my thought process in completing this

dissertation. He has also provided from his own library many of the sources used in this study, and he has been an incredible mentor to me in the field of Evangelism and Church Growth. On a personal note, he once told me that every man needs a Barnabas in his life, and without question, he has been mine for now more than a decade. I hope I have been as close a friend to him as he has been to me.

Many of my colleagues on staff at Hillvue have provided much help to me in this process. Pastor Ben Brewster, Pastor David Tooley, and Mrs. Pat Redmond have been faithful, honest, and thorough proofreaders, and their work in providing a fresh set of eyes for each chapter has been exceedingly helpful. This dissertation is more clearly communicated and better thought-out because of their input. Additional gratitude is due to Pastors Shane Blankenship, Andrew Eaton, Sean Pugh, Derek Royalty, and Jeremy Heming and to Dr. Kevin and Cary Cox, Garrett Cline, and Chris Young for their help in thinking through many of the themes herein discussed. I am indebted to the adult teachers and small group leaders at Hillvue, who have graciously received wisdom from Dawson Trotman and implemented many of his ideas in their own classes and disciple-making endeavors. Finally, I am thankful to Mrs. Joy Foley and the aforementioned Mrs. Redmond, who have served as my administrative assistants during this program and made it possible for me to spend time focusing on this project by taking on various responsibilities and fulfilling them with excellence.

I am indebted to Dr. Timothy Beougher for his supervision, not only in this dissertation, but also throughout the entire course of my doctoral studies. His love for the Lord and passion for disciple-making are contagious, as is his affinity for Dawson Trotman. In addition to providing expertise as a professor, he also gave me the opportunity to serve as Garrett Fellow at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and I am supremely grateful for his trust in allowing me to fulfill that role. I am also thankful for the valuable input I have received in this project from Dr. Adam Greenway and Dr. Rob Plummer. All of these men are brilliant scholars and faithful practitioners of

the Great Commission, and their influence has made this dissertation better in every way. I am thankful for the ministry of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry and for that of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary as a whole; I count it an honor to be a part of this faithful institution.

I am incredibly thankful for the work of Susan Fletcher and Patrick Kochanasz in the Archives at the Navigators International Headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado. As the historian, Susan has been instrumental in chronicling the storied history of the Navigator ministry, and she has done tremendous work in preserving a record that could easily have been lost. Both Susan and Patrick were incredibly hospitable to me as I completed research in their workspace, and they have been more than accommodating in every request I have ever made of them. The Navigators are blessed to have them on their staff. I am also thankful for the hospitality extended to me by the Navigators themselves as they welcomed me into their facilities and allowed me to explore the places about which I had read for so long. Because of their welcoming spirit, I was able to tour the castle and the grounds at Glen Eyrie, and I was able to spend time in prayer at Dawson and Lila's grave on a mountainside overlooking the incredible landscape. The Navigators have been wonderful people with whom to work over these past months, and I pray that God will continue to bless their ministry richly for decades to come.

Finally, I must thank my family for the indispensable role they played in my reaching this long-held goal. My parents, George and Juanita Reynolds, instilled in me a love for learning at an early age, and they pushed and encouraged me throughout the course of my life to seek to be the very best I could be. I am thankful for their love and guidance. I am thankful for our children, Griffin and Reagan, who have endured times when their daddy had to be away to pursue this calling. They have been great encouragers on nights when the writing process had taken its toll on their father, and their smiles have helped push me to carry on. I am profoundly grateful to be their father. Most of all, I am thankful for my wife, Erin—the one who has borne the greatest burden

in this entire five-year process. I cannot thank her enough. She has endured long nights, short tempers, being a single parent for at least a full month out of each year, and my being mentally absent although physically present on many occasions. She has lovingly pushed me to get everything done, and she has at times admonished me to realize that the world is bigger than this particular doctoral program. She is the perfect companion for me in study, in ministry, in parenting, and in life.

I pray that the Lord Jesus Christ would be lifted up in the pages that follow, and that this work would serve in some small way to help Christians fulfill their God-given commission to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things that Christ has commanded (Matt 28:19-20).

Jeffrey Paul Reynolds

Bowling Green, Kentucky

December 2014

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On the afternoon of June 18, 1956, a speedboat driven by Jack Wyrzten, director of Word of Life Camp, carried eight passengers swiftly across the cool waters of Schroon Lake in upstate New York.¹ Earlier in the day, Navigators founder Dawson Trotman had spent two hours waterskiing and had acquiesced to joyriding in the boat with several others who were attending the Navigators' East Coast Conference with him.² After several minutes on the water, Wyrzten and Trotman decided to return to the dock and pick up Trotman's wife, Lila, so that she too could enjoy the ride. As they turned toward the lakeshore, their boat struck a large wave and hurled two of its occupants—Dawson Trotman and Allene Beck—into the water.³ Because Beck could not swim, the 50-year-old Trotman made his way quickly to her and held her head above water until the boat could circle back around to retrieve her. After pulling Beck to safety, the rescuers reached for Trotman, but before they could take hold of him, he lost consciousness and sank into the deep.⁴

In the July 2, 1956, issue of *Time* magazine, Trotman's picture appeared above a story that told the world of his death. The caption under the picture read, "Evangelist Trotman: Always Holding Someone Up." The corresponding article said the following:

¹"The Navigator," *Time*, July 2, 1956, 58; Jim Downing, *Living Legacy: Reflections on Dawson Trotman and Lorne Sanny* (Colorado Springs: DawsonMedia, 2007), 44.

²"Dawson Trotman and His Navigators," *The King's Business*, August 1956, 10.

³Downing, *Living Legacy*, 45.

⁴"Dawson Trotman and His Navigators," 10; Robert D. Foster, *The Navigator* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), 1.

“So died Dawson Trotman, ‘the Navigator,’ light and power of a movement that echoes the words of the Scripture around the world.”⁵ One Navigator commented, “His death was just the way he would have planned it.”⁶

Dawson Trotman died doing the very activity for which he had lived—holding others up. Evangelist Billy Graham, a close friend of Trotman’s and the officiant at his funeral, made the following remarks during his private ceremony:

I sought his counsel often. I haven’t made a major decision in the last few years that I didn’t seek his counsel . . . I think [Trotman] touched more lives than any man I have ever known. We today are only representatives of the thousands of people of many races and languages and cultures that have been touched by this great man. I think that he more nearly approximated what our Lord must have been than any man I have ever known.⁷

Like the great preacher who presided over his memorial services, Trotman was exceedingly passionate for evangelism, but a few key events resulted in his growing to become equally as passionate about discipleship. He narrowed and redefined the term “discipleship” to mean a process or methodology of training a new believer to become mature in Christ.⁸ Touted often as the father of contemporary discipleship and the “apostle of follow-up,”⁹ Trotman is described by Billie Hanks and William Shell in this manner: “Of all the men in this century he was most used of God to rediscover the

⁵“The Navigator,” *Time*, 58.

⁶*Ibid.*, 59.

⁷Billy Graham, transcript of message given at the private funeral service for Dawson Trotman, June 27, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), quoted in Robert Walter Felts, “A Critical Analysis of Dawson Trotman’s Methodology of Discipleship for Contemporary Mission Strategy Among North American Evangelical Mission Agencies” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 36; Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: A Man Who Trusted God* (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 1974), 379.

⁸Felts notes that Trotman saw discipleship as having two components: a personal commitment and a methodology. Those before him had focused on the personal commitment; Trotman’s “redefinition” focused on the methodology. Felts, “Methodology of Discipleship,” 3.

⁹Foster, *The Navigator*, 118.

biblical principles of discipleship and disciple making and to restore them to the church of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

As an innovator in the field of discipleship, Trotman is credited with coining a new English verb—“to disciple”—by which he meant training or teaching others to observe the commandments of Christ.¹¹ Trotman was committed to such methods as strict daily devotional time, systematic Scripture memorization, and one-to-one discipleship. Throughout the course of his ministry and its multiplication, he touched the lives of millions, and in so doing, he established a ministry that continues to touch lives today. God used Dawson Trotman to reignite followers of the Lord Jesus Christ to do more than just harvest converts; he developed systems of disciple-making that sought to grow converts into deeply devoted, scripturally literate, reproducing followers of Christ who would change the landscape of American evangelism and touch lives all over the world.

The primary defining driver behind Dawson Trotman’s ministry was his personal devotional life. Ever the disciplinarian—particularly toward himself—he often illustrated that he would be willing to miss sleep, but he would not be willing to miss prayer and time in the Word of God.¹² Trotman reveals his attitude toward prayer and the larger work in the Kingdom of God: “I don’t think God has anything big for you if you can’t take 1/48th of your day to be alone with your Almighty God and Father. I rather doubt whether He is going to do very much for you.”¹³ Throughout his personal journal, Trotman reminds himself of the centrality of prayer for life and ministry:

¹⁰Billie Hanks, Jr. and William A. Shell, eds., *Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 178.

¹¹Felts notes that at approximately the same time and independently of Trotman, Donald McGavran also introduced the term, “to disciple.” Felts’ judgment, however, is that McGavran’s definition differed from Trotman’s so substantially that they meant two different concepts by using the same term. Felts, “Methodology of Discipleship,” 5-6.

¹²Foster, *The Navigator*, 32.

¹³*Ibid.*, 30.

Had a truly blessed time alone with the Lord. Early this morning. Again have I had the matter of prayer brought definitely to my attention as being vitally connected with accomplishing much business for God. I set my face again to pursue and persevere in habits of much time with Him. Truly our most difficult work, as refreshing and as wonderful as it is – Prayer.¹⁴

In addition to his supreme devotion to prayer, Trotman was convinced that the Word of God must be hidden in the hearts of those who would follow Christ. His own conversion had been the result of God’s bringing to mind the Scriptures that Trotman had previously memorized, and he kept this practice a priority in his life and in the lives of all to whom he would minister. Cliff Barrows, the close and long-time co-laborer of Billy Graham, recounts how Trotman impressed the importance of the Bible in his life at a young age:

When I was about 13 years of age and attending the Mt. Hermon Bible Conference in California, Dawson Trotman . . . sat me down on a rock by a creek bed. He told me, ‘Cliff, the most important book in your life is the Bible. I want to encourage you to memorize it, to hide it in your heart. It will be the greatest source of strength, encouragement and help to you in every situation of your life, particularly in times of temptation.’ I have found this to be true; Dawson was so right.¹⁵

Barrows was only one of many who received similar admonitions from Dawson Trotman.

Trotman saw prayer and time in the Scriptures as direct corollaries to evangelistic fervor. If one was immersed in prayer and the Word of God, he would be an effective witness for Christ. Once given the task of interviewing potential missionaries, Trotman questioned them about their devotional lives and their effectiveness in witnessing. He noted, “We traced back and found that never since they came to know the Savior had they had a period of victory in their devotional lives. This was one of the reasons for their sterility [in witnessing]—lack of communion with Christ.”¹⁶ To

¹⁴Dawson Trotman, personal journal, June 23, 1933 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹⁵Cliff Barrows, “Restoring Our Cutting Edge,” *Decision Magazine*, July/August 2004, accessed February 10, 2010, http://www.billygraham.org/DMag_Article.asp? ArticleID=460.

¹⁶Dawson Trotman, *Born to Reproduce* (1955; repr., Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 18.

Trotman, weak evangelistic fervor and ineffectiveness in witnessing were the direct results of a weak devotional life, and it was categorically inexcusable for a Christian to be weak in his devotional life.

To Trotman, personal devotion and Scripture memorization were catalysts to what he viewed as the primary task for all Christians: spiritual reproduction. Trotman saw evangelism as an essential command given by the Lord Jesus Christ to all who would follow after him. His passion for evangelism caused him to require himself and those he disciplined to share the gospel at least once a day, and he would even forego other commitments (including sleep) in order to find just one soul who needed to hear the gospel.¹⁷ He was a passionate evangelist, but he always battled the fears that often accompany such personal encounters.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Trotman was convinced that God is bigger than any of man's reservations, and he insisted that the task of every Christian was to take the gospel boldly to the nations:

[The need of the hour] is an army of soldiers, dedicated to Jesus Christ, who believes not only that He is God but that He can fulfill every promise He has ever made and that there isn't anything too hard for Him. It is the only way we can accomplish the thing that is on His heart—getting the gospel to every creature.¹⁹

Indeed, Trotman saw a lack of spiritual reproduction in the life of a believer to be a sure sign of spiritual immaturity and dysfunction. He noted, "Wherever you find a Christian who is not leading men and women to Christ, something is wrong. He may still be a babe."²⁰ Trotman believed unquestionably in the power of prayer and time spent in the Word of God, and he believed that such time had a profound impact on the Great Commission ministry of any follower of Christ.

¹⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 93-94.

¹⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 68; Foster, *The Navigator*, 104-5.

¹⁹Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 12.

²⁰Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 13.

Thesis

In the time since Dawson Trotman's death in 1956, there has been no shortage of emphasis on Great Commission obedience and the methodical implementation of measures that might be used to bring about evangelistic success and subsequent growth to the church. Untold numbers of books, seminars, conferences, and studies have been devoted to discovering what causes churches to grow and what hinders church growth.²¹ A chief criticism of the movement that has grown up around such studies—the Church Growth Movement—has been that it reduces ecclesiological practices to nothing more than effective business techniques and thereby removes the spiritual foundation for doing ministry.²²

Regardless of the intentions of the movement's founders, the fact is that many churches, associations, and denominations have adopted ministry techniques that are informed by the latest trends and not necessarily by scriptural precedents or prescriptions. As a result, many church leaders find themselves fully capable of “doing ministry” with

²¹Consider, for example, the titles of popular books on the topic. Donald McGavran and Winfield Arn penned *Ten Steps for Church Growth* in 1977, and Geoff Surratt published *Ten Stupid Things That Keep Churches from Growing* in 2009. George Barna writes about *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches* and *User-Friendly Churches*, whereas Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer provide *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*. Donald McGavran and Winfield C. Arn, *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977). Geoff Surratt, *Ten Stupid Things That Keep Churches from Growing* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009). George Barna, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1999). George Barna, *User-Friendly Churches* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1991). Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998).

²²Udo Middelmann gives a helpful analysis of the current state of many churches: “The church takes part in the competition in the market and advertises its expanding services. Where she once focused on right thinking and a moral life in all spheres of society from inside the church, she now competes for the time and dedication of the public with such offerings as schools and gyms, bingo halls and adult education programs. In the past she reached into the community. She has today become an alternative community among many others.” Udo Middelmann, *The Market-Driven Church: The Worldly Influence of Modern Culture on the Church of America* (Downers Grove, IL: Crossway, 2004), 50. Similarly, John Piper warns pastors to eschew the contemporary call toward a professional ministry and to embrace a ministry that is characterized by what only God can do: “. . . professionalization carries the connotation of education, a set of skills, and a set of guild-defined standards which are possible without faith in Jesus. Professionalism is not supernatural. The heart of ministry is.” John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*, updated and expanded ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013), x.

very little supernatural influence at all. Ministerial “best practices” are said to function almost *ex opere operato* in an American church culture that values religious production over spiritual reproduction.²³

Such was not the case with Trotman. Without question, Dawson Trotman was concerned about developing and using the best methods and materials to be used as tools for accomplishing the Great Commission, but he maintained a stalwart position that the greatest methods and materials were useless in the hands of spiritually dry Christians: “It’s not only the tools,” he said; “it’s the man who has the tools in his hands.”²⁴ Trotman believed that God worked through men and women who were devoted to God’s cause and in regular communion with the Almighty, and he shaped his life and ministry around this belief.²⁵ This dissertation seeks to discover how Dawson Trotman’s intensive and regularly practiced personal spiritual disciplines informed his Great Commission ministry. I argue that Trotman’s intensive regimen of personal spiritual disciplines including prayer, Scripture reading, and Scripture memorization provided the foundation, motivation, urgency, and effectiveness of his Great Commission ministry.

The notion that a Christian in history had a successful ministry because he was

²³Ample literature has been produced over the course of the past twenty years to decry the trend within the contemporary evangelical Protestant church in the United States of America toward a pragmatically driven ministry. In his diatribe against what he calls an embracing of worldly principles within the church, John MacArthur writes the following: “The role model for contemporary pastors is not the prophet or the shepherd—it is the corporate executive, the politician, or worst of all, the talk-show host. Much of the contemporary church is preoccupied with audience ratings, popularity polls, corporate image, statistical growth, financial profit, opinion surveys, demographic charts, census figures, fashion trends, celebrity status, top-ten lists, and other pragmatic issues. Fast fading is the church’s passion for purity and truth. No one seems to care, as long as the response is enthusiastic.” John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World*, expanded ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 80. Os Guinness echoes this sentiment in his 1993 *Dining with the Devil*. He notes, “Gone are the hard sayings of Jesus. Gone is the teaching on sin, self-denial, sacrifice, suffering, judgment, hell. With all its need-meeting emphases, there is little in the church-growth movement that stands crosswise to the world.” Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 78.

²⁴Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 18.

²⁵Foster, *The Navigator*, 190-91.

close to the Lord is certainly not unique. What, then, separates Dawson Trotman from the evangelical pack of those who spent daily personal time with the Lord and sought to expand the kingdom of God? Put simply, many of the most predominant figures in twentieth century evangelicalism owe much credit for their gospel ministry to Dawson Trotman. Although his name is not ubiquitous among twenty-first century evangelicals, it was certainly so to evangelicals just a few decades ago. Notation has already been made of Trotman's relationship with Billy Graham and his profound impact on Graham's life and ministry. Lorne Sanny records that, at the moment he heard of Trotman's untimely passing, Graham exclaimed, "O God, I want to rededicate my life!"²⁶ In a letter asking others to contribute to the Dawson Trotman Memorial Fund that would be used to pay off Glen Eyrie, Graham said, "Personally, I can think of no one with whom I have had closer fellowship and to whom I am more deeply indebted spiritually than this man of God."²⁷

Quick examination of the guest list at Trotman's private funeral gives some indication of his importance in the body of Christ. Among those present were Graham, Paul Mickelson, and George Beverly Shea of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association; V. Raymond Edman of Wheaton College; Jack Wyrzten of Word of Life Ministries; Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ; Henrietta Mears of Gospel Light Press and Forest Home, Inc.; Jim Rayburn of Young Life; Carlton Booth of Fuller Seminary; Bob Cook of Youth for Christ International; Dick Hillis of Orient Crusades; Al Kunz of Pocket Testament League; Jim Vaus of the Missionary Communication Service; and several other notable evangelical leaders of the time.²⁸ Other memorial services were held at

²⁶Lorne Sanny, "Dear Gang" letter, June 19, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

²⁷Billy Graham, fundraising letter, June 23, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

²⁸Lorne Sanny, "Dear Friend" letter, July 28, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2-3.

later dates in Colorado Springs with Rayburn and Bob Pierce of World Vision speaking; Los Angeles with Vaus, Hillis, Lewis Talbot, Irwin Moon, and Harold Chrisman speaking; Schroon Lake with Charles Fuller speaking; Norman, Oklahoma at the Wycliffe Bible Translators Camp with Cameron Townsend speaking; and others at mission outposts all around the world.²⁹ These leaders were not present in these services merely as official representatives at a dignitary's memorial; they were there as close associates and friends. Trotman had served on the Board of Directors or provided key assistance to Graham and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Townsend and the Wycliffe Bible Translators, Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ, Rayburn and Young Life, Cook and Youth for Christ, Fuller and the Fuller Theological Seminary, Talbot and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA), InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Overseas Missionary Fellowship, Africa Inland Mission, the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association, Operation Mobilization, and Overseas Crusades.³⁰ Trotman's work with these and other ministries was in addition to his primary vocation as leader of the Navigators, which at the time of his death, employed 140 staff members serving in the United States and twelve other countries.³¹

Trotman's legacy was palpable at the time of his death and in the years shortly thereafter. Elsie May, a former Navigator who transitioned to work with the Wycliffe Bible Translators in Peru, said the following regarding Trotman's impact in her own life: ". . . all of my spiritual growth is a result of the Nav ministry. It was through the Nav Bible study methods and Scripture memory that my spiritual hunger was first satisfied. I had been seeking for years, tried several things, but was never satisfied until I learned to

²⁹Sanny, "Dear Friend" letter, July 28, 1956, 3; Ethel Wallis, *Lengthened Cords: How Dawson Trotman—Founder of the Navigators—Also Helped Extend the World-Wide Outreach of the Wycliffe Bible Translators* (Glendale, CA: Wycliffe Bible Translators, 1958), 89.

³⁰Ken Albert, Susan Fletcher, and Doug Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2011), 28; Downing, *Living Legacy*, 39.

³¹Skinner, *Daws*, 386.

apply the Scriptures personally to my life as Daws had always taught.”³²

Contemporarily, Trotman’s influence is still evident. His impact has been noted by David Platt in his *Follow Me*, in which he opens his ninth chapter by saying, “One of the most influential things I have ever read is a little booklet called ‘Born to Reproduce’ by Dawson Trotman. . . . it changed my life.”³³ Platt goes on to corroborate Trotman’s notion that the call of every Christian is to reproduce spiritually, and he ends his chapter by encouraging Christians to create a personal disciple-making plan by cultivating closeness with God via time in the Word of God, Scripture memorization, prayer, and other personal spiritual disciplines that were practiced and championed by Trotman.³⁴

Carl Wilson, in his *With Christ in the School of Disciple Building*, finishes his chapter on the vital importance of prayer in Great Commission ministry by noting that “in modern times, those who have made great impacts for Jesus Christ have all been people of prayer.”³⁵ He then begins to list influential Christians whose prayer lives shaped their ministry. He speaks of Martin Luther, Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, David Livingstone, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and Billy Graham. He then says, “Dawson Trotman of the Navigators, from his first efforts at ministry, used to get a few other men to meet with him in the early mornings to pray, and prayed much with others throughout the development of his worldwide ministry.”³⁶ He finishes his list by discussing Bill Bright and Frank Barker, and then says, “Some men have a greater ability and calling to longer hours of prayer than others, but no one has ever had an effective ministry that

³²Wallis, *Lengthened Cords*, 88.

³³David Platt, *Follow Me* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2013), 203.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 211-26.

³⁵Carl Wilson, *With Christ in the School of Disciple Building: The Ministry Methods of Jesus* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 332.

³⁶*Ibid.*

honored Christ who has not been a man of prayer.”³⁷ The evangelical world knows of Luther, Taylor, Judson, Spurgeon, Graham, Bright, and Platt. Unfortunately, however, the evangelical world is largely ignorant of Trotman and the profound influence of his Great Commission ministry that was fueled so foundationally by the personal spiritual disciplines he so faithfully practiced and so ardently advocated. This dissertation seeks, not only to remedy to some degree the lack of scholarly research into Trotman’s life, but also to continue a small but growing conversation about the fundamental impact of biblical spirituality on the effectiveness of Great Commission ministry.³⁸ One of Trotman’s chief assertions regarding Great Commission ministry was that the man—not the methods or materials—was paramount in effective gospel ministry, and the man is shaped most fundamentally by his relationship with the Lord.³⁹

This investigation into the effects of Trotman’s spiritual disciplines needed to begin with a brief introduction to the man and his significance in the field. Who was Dawson Trotman, and what was his understanding of Great Commission Ministry? Attention has been given both to his understanding of the gospel message itself and to his understanding of discipleship. Second, Trotman’s personal spiritual disciplines have

³⁷Ibid, 332-33.

³⁸Closeness with God through personal spiritual disciplines does not always result in what is contemporarily noted as ministry “success.” Biblical figures such as Isaiah and Jeremiah—and even the Lord Jesus Christ himself—might not be noted as being “successful” by contemporary measures of crowd numbers, decisions, and budgets. Nevertheless, God commands all believers to be faithful witnesses to the world. Such is evidenced by the Great Commission’s appearance five times in the New Testament (cf. Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8). Trotman argued that “wherever you find a Christian who is not leading men and women to Christ, something is wrong. He may still be a babe.” Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 13. I agree with Trotman’s position on this matter. While not every faithful Christian will lead ministries of worldwide renown, every faithful Christian should obey the Great Commission. Such obedience, if carried out over the course of a lifetime, must inevitably result in disciples being made.

³⁹Trotman defined the effectively-used man of God as follows: “We mean men who are the embodiment of the message they carry; men who have a knowledge of the Word of GOD, and who lay hold of the promises of GOD, who are obedient to the will of GOD, and who then carry the message of GOD: men of whom it may be said, as was said of Haggai, that they are ‘the Lord’s messenger in the LORD’s message’ (Haggai 1:13).” Dawson Trotman, “Faithful Men” (unpublished manuscript, Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters, Colorado Springs), 4-6.

been examined. What key passages of Scripture and other influences shaped his view of personal spiritual disciplines, and what were his core theological beliefs regarding spiritual disciplines? Third, what was the extent of Trotman's Great Commission Ministries? What was his vision for ministry, and what theological concept drove his leadership of those whom God had placed under his care? Finally, the ways in which, and the extent to which, Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines founded and drove his Great Commission ministry have been examined to illustrate the inextricable link between the two seemingly disparate areas of his life and ministry.

In addition to the historical significance of this investigation, some emphasis has been placed on Trotman as a positive case study whose legacy continues to shape a worldwide movement and whose contribution to a focus on personal spiritual disciplines continues to influence Christians today. Without question, Trotman was a saint only because of the blood of Jesus Christ. Close examination of his life has shown several areas in which he was deficient. Not only did Trotman champion the importance of personal spiritual disciplines and of Great Commission ministry, but he was also at times very legalistic in his approach to both fields. His legalism, combined with a propensity toward micromanagement, also resulted in his being, at times, unduly harsh toward those around him. His intensity in ministry was a double edged sword that developed an international ministry whose influence continues today but that also left some amount of collateral damage in the lives of those closest to him. Nevertheless, much can be gleaned from the interface of Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines and his effective ministry of evangelism and discipleship, and this study should prove to be as helpful to the contemporary church as it is to the growing body of literature about the life and legacy of Dawson Trotman.

Background

As fellow Trotman investigator Kenneth Albert has noted, studying Dawson Trotman can be a challenging endeavor.⁴⁰ One of the few people that have written about Trotman, Robert Foster, begins his biographical account of Trotman's life by noting the following in the preface to his work: "Dawson did not do much writing. He was too busy making disciples. His monument was left not in marble, but in men; not in books, but in methods for living by scriptural truth; not in institutions, but in principles for multiplying Christian disciples around the world."⁴¹ This epitaph speaks to the nobility of Trotman's efforts and the lasting results of his work, but it also indicates some of the difficulties encountered in seeking to compile meaningful written evidence from his life and ministry. Few—indeed very few—have undertaken to provide an account of his life and ministry for posterity's sake, but the sheer lack of volume of biographical material results in a failure of the current available literature to provide a thorough and multi-faceted view of Dawson Trotman.

Trotman lived fifty years, and he spent thirty of those years following Christ. Without question, he packed more devotion and activity for God into those thirty years of Christianity than most do who are blessed with much greater longevity. Nevertheless, his period of time in ministry was relatively short and involved the rapid growth and expansion of a movement that began with a few youths in a Sunday school classroom in the late 1920s and ended at his death in 1956 with missionaries making disciples all across the globe. As a result, chronicling his life and ministry requires examining closely a man whose focus shifted quickly and whose methodology changed constantly.

As Foster notes, Trotman did not leave behind a great amount of published

⁴⁰Kenneth Albert, "Dawson Trotman's Theology and Methodology of Disciple-Making in Light of New Testament Discipleship Principles" (prospectus for Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 5.

⁴¹Foster, *The Navigator*, xiv.

material. He had been too busy making history to write about it. He did, however, leave behind a substantial body of private writings that, until recently, were largely unexplored from a scholarly perspective. Prior to 2009, the Navigators kept Trotman’s personal papers boxed up in a storage closet at their International Headquarters at Glen Eyrie in Colorado Springs, Colorado. In 2009, however, the ministry hired Susan Fletcher as historian, and with the help of doctoral students Ken Albert and Doug Hankins, Fletcher identified and catalogued the materials. In 2011, Fletcher, Albert, and Hankins published *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, which is a collection of Trotman’s own writings as they were recorded in “his personal journals, private correspondence, transcripts of conference sermons, and an unfinished book manuscript, “Faithful Men,” that was intended to be his *magnum opus* of disciple-making.”⁴² The work done by Fletcher, Albert, and Hankins in sorting through and cataloguing this material into accessible resources has greatly aided this present work but should also prove useful in helping others better understand this evangelical giant. Even in the preface to their work, however, the authors note that only about a “half-dozen people . . . have written about [Trotman] over the past half-century” since his death, thereby increasing the challenge of studying him.⁴³

Personal Interest

Prior to the spring of 2010, I had never heard of Dawson Trotman. Like many evangelical Christians, I knew of many people who had come under Trotman’s direct influence—evangelical giants like Billy Graham and Cliff Barrows and Bill Bright—but I neither knew of Trotman’s influence in their lives nor even of his existence. I did not come to know of Trotman until my first doctoral seminar with Timothy Beougher, Associate Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry at The

⁴²Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins. *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 14.

⁴³*Ibid.*

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. One of the assignments for the class was to choose an eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth century American evangelist and profile his life and ministry. The list from which students were to choose their subject was filled with notable evangelists that immediately caught my attention—names like Finney, Edwards, Whitefield, and Sunday. Because I knew those names would be quickly taken, I decided to choose a name from among those who remained—those, as it were, whom history had somehow seemed to forget. What remained were names like Jones, Tennent, Trotman, and Vassar, and despite my years of Masters-level study at Southern Seminary, I could not call to mind any details about the lives of any of these men. In an effort to make a more informed choice, I sought the counsel of a fellow pastor in hopes that he might direct me to an interesting subject. I read the remaining names to him with some sentiment of exasperation for each candidate, but after I read the name of Dawson Trotman, my friend interrupted me to utter a simple phrase: “Always holding someone up.”

Having never heard of Trotman, I was confused and inquired about the source of my colleague’s odd interjection. He explained to me that he had once seen an old article from *Time* magazine in which the life and ministry of Dawson Trotman were briefly chronicled to mark the occasion of his untimely death by drowning in New York state. I was intrigued. My friend and fellow pastor knew furthermore that Trotman had founded the parachurch ministry known as The Navigators, but such was the extent of his familiarity with this figure. I was far from captivated by his nugget of information, but what my friend gave me was enough of a spark to compel me to request that my paper be written on Dawson Trotman, thereby beginning my providential relationship with the Navigators’ founder.⁴⁴

⁴⁴My discussion was with Jamie Ward, who included a brief discussion of Dawson Trotman’s principles of disciple-making ministry in his D.Min. project on disciple-making in the local church. James William Ward, “Developing a Mentorship Program for New Converts at Hillvue Heights Church, Bowling Green, Kentucky,” (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 49-50.

Beginning, then, in the spring of 2010, I began to be discipled by a man who had been dead for fifty-four years. I read all that I could find about him—an embarrassingly small body of literature to be sure—and began to implement some of the faith practices and methods he espoused. Through his sermons and the recollections of others, Trotman challenged me to devote myself to following the Lord Jesus Christ more profoundly than ever before. His exhortations toward Scripture memorization, Scripture reading, prayer, and spiritual reproduction compelled me to evaluate not only my own life but also the lives of those to whom I have been called to serve as Associate Pastor of Adult Faith Development at Hillvue Heights Church in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Trotman’s philosophies have changed the way I approach my own growth in Christ, and they have changed the way I approach leading several thousand followers of Christ in their journey of discipleship. Trotman has become for me a powerful and influential voice that calls from the pages of history to shape my life and ministry today.

Academic exposure. The opportunity to write my first major doctoral seminar paper on Dawson Trotman introduced me to some of the challenges of producing scholarly historical works, but it also provided me with a good amount of the available material on Trotman. I discovered quickly that the amount of literature produced either by or about Dawson Trotman was small, so I purchased everything I could find that mentioned him. At the time, only two completed doctoral dissertations dealt with Trotman, and one of those devoted only one-third of its focus to him. I found a few of Trotman’s recorded messages online at Discipleship Library, and I retrieved every article I could find that mentioned him. I then decided to contact the historian for *The Navigators*, Susan Fletcher, and she was kind enough to send me photocopies of any resources I requested to help bolster the primary source content of my investigation.⁴⁵

⁴⁵I did not realize at the time that as I was contacting Susan Fletcher with material requests, she, Ken Albert, and Doug Hankins were sorting through the archival materials that had for years been stored away in boxes in a storage closet. They were in the process of unearthing and cataloguing a wealth

Because I was able to build a small but relatively complete library of materials about Dawson Trotman, I chose to continue investigating him over the course of the next several semesters. In the Spring of 2010, I wrote about Trotman's life and ministry in something of a biographical sense. In the Fall of 2010, a seminar in the biblical and theological principles of evangelistic ministry afforded me the opportunity to examine Trotman's understanding of the gospel from a biblical and theological perspective. In the Spring of 2011, a seminar focused on discipleship presented the opportunity to investigate Trotman's thoughts on and methodology of discipleship. In the process, my fellow doctoral students came to expect some discussion of Trotman in just about every seminar or colloquium we shared, and they too were discipled by "the Apostle of Follow-Up."

Personal affinity. I first trusted Christ as a child at the age of six, but as often happens, my seriousness about my relationship with Christ did not deepen until I was much older. At the age of seventeen, I recommitted my life to following Christ, and by the time I was a sophomore at Centre College in Kentucky, I had given myself fully to growing deeper in my relationship with Christ. My Christian growth during my college years took place in the context of a strong parachurch ministry that had emerged from the merger of two well-known and established ministries—the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Campus Crusade for Christ—into a new ministry called Centre Christian Fellowship. The merger took place because the student body of Centre College was composed of only about one thousand students, and having competing evangelical parachurch ministries seemed foolish. Regardless, Centre Christian Fellowship was committed to the discipleship practices of personal evangelism, small group prayer and Bible study, personal lifestyle accountability, and one-on-one discipleship. My faith was

of primary source material, and they were simultaneously compiling *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*.

therefore shaped, for some time, outside the context of the local church and deeply within the context of a local parachurch ministry.⁴⁶ As I have said, I had never even heard of Dawson Trotman, but I spent hours each day practicing the very disciplines and methods he so strongly advocated.

After graduating from college and leaving the ministry I had helped lead for the previous two years, I was hired to serve as University Pastor at Hillvue Heights Church in Bowling Green, Kentucky. My role as one of twelve associate pastors at this six-thousand-member church was to make disciples of the fifteen thousand students attending Western Kentucky University. Again, I had never heard of Trotman, but I employed those techniques that I had learned in college to reach and teach college students. I encouraged students not only to trust and follow Christ, but also to engage in daily prayer, time in the Word, Scripture memorization, and personally witnessing to and discipling others as the primary mechanisms by which they would grow to become more Christ-like. Five years later, I was promoted to the role of Associate Pastor of Adult Faith Development and charged with the task providing the avenues whereby adults of all ages would be discipled and thereby grow in their faith. It is no wonder, then, that the Lord providentially led me to the study of the man who arguably did more to shape a biblical view of discipleship in the twentieth century than any other.⁴⁷

Literature Review

Dawson Trotman did not leave much behind in the way of published materials. Those primary source materials he did hand down that are now incredibly more accessible than they previously were due to the work of Fletcher, Albert, and Hankins

⁴⁶I later became deeply involved with Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Danville, Kentucky, and was therefore influenced both by the local church and the parachurch. After I became a leader in Centre Christian Fellowship, I sought to engage local churches as much as possible so that students would not rely solely on the parachurch ministry for their spiritual nourishment.

⁴⁷Hanks and Shell, *Discipleship*, 178.

have provided a wealth of insight into Trotman's life and ministry. For this investigation in particular, Trotman's reflections about his personal devotional times as recorded in his personal journal have been of utmost importance. In addition, Trotman's personal correspondence with others has provided evidence of the high priority he placed on the Christian's personal devotional life as it pertains, not only to personal growth in Christ, but also to spiritual reproduction. My previous work on Trotman and the incredible gift provided by Fletcher, Albert, and Hankins in preparing for and compiling *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words* provided more than enough indication that sufficient primary source material existed to conduct a dissertation-level investigation into this aspect of Trotman's life.

Dissertations and theses. Very few scholarly investigations have been conducted wherein Dawson Trotman is the primary subject. At the time of this writing, there existed only three completed dissertations about Trotman, and one of those devotes only one-third of its focus to the Navigators' founder. One additional dissertation was in progress at the time of this undertaking, but that work has yet to be completed.

The first doctoral-level investigation into the life and ministry of Dawson Trotman was done by Robert Walter Felts at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1989. Felts' work, entitled "A Critical Analysis of Dawson Trotman's Methodology of Discipleship for Contemporary Mission Strategy Among North American Evangelical Mission Agencies," was undertaken as a result of the author's observation that "the majority of those involved in discipleship ministries reported as their foundation the thought of one man, Dawson Trotman."⁴⁸ Felts seeks to examine Trotman's methodology of discipleship and to analyze its validity in being used by contemporary missions agencies. He reports that "research exposed inconsistencies and

⁴⁸Felts, "A Critical Analysis of Dawson Trotman's Methodology," ii.

weaknesses in Trotman’s formulation of concepts” and that “Trotman’s inadequate ecclesiology precludes his strategy, in its original form, from being considered balanced for implementation in mission organizations.”⁴⁹ Felts nevertheless concludes that “Trotman’s concepts of follow-up and spiritual reproduction are appropriate strategies for contemporary missiology” if they are “appropriately modified and adapted”⁵⁰ by being “augmented to include the biblical concern for social justice and the church’s responsibility to fulfill the cultural mandate.”⁵¹ Felts’ conclusion seems merely to state that Trotman’s concepts and methods are biblical and practical enough as long as his biases are corrected for in contemporary application, but his work does provide a good first step in scholarly Trotman studies.

The second dissertation to deal with Trotman was penned by David Buckelew Hunsicker at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1998. Hunsicker’s work, entitled “The Rise of the Parachurch Movement in American Protestant Christianity During the 1930s and 1940s: A Detailed Study of the Beginnings of the Navigators, Young Life and Youth for Christ International,” is principally an historical work focused more on studying the parachurch movement by using the Navigators as a case study than it is concerned with exploring the life, ministry, and specific impact of Dawson Trotman himself.⁵² Hunsicker’s stated purpose is “to ascertain the goals of the original founders of the Navigators, Young Life, and Youth for Christ International . . . , [to give] these men a voice as to their own motives, desires and dreams . . . , and [to view] the structures

⁴⁹Ibid., 247.

⁵⁰Ibid., ii.

⁵¹Ibid., 248.

⁵²David Buckelew Hunsicker, “The Rise of the Parachurch Movement in American Protestant Christianity During the 1930s and 1940s: A Detailed Study of the Beginnings of the Navigators, Young Life and Youth for Christ International” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1998).

which developed out of these visions within the context of historic Protestantism.”⁵³

Hunsicker’s look into the birth of the Navigators comprises eighty of his more than four hundred pages, and although he provides good historical information about Trotman and his vision for ministry, he does not provide much more. His dissertation is helpful in contextualizing Trotman’s ministry within the larger Protestant framework and illustrating that Trotman was a key player in the rise of the parachurch movement, regardless of whether or not Trotman intentionally sought to develop such a ministry.

The third dissertation regarding Trotman was written by James Douglas Hankins at the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 2011. Hankins titled his work “Following Up: Dawson Trotman, the Navigators, and the Origins of Disciple-Making in American Evangelicalism, 1926-1956” and therein sought to illustrate that, “by virtue of his relationships with other key fundamentalist leaders, Dawson Trotman helped shape American evangelicalism’s understanding of discipleship ministry as a complement to evangelism.”⁵⁴ Hankins seemed motivated by a desire to tell Trotman’s story as the apparent “genesis for the modern discipleship movement”⁵⁵ that deeply impacted the practices of those who followed him in the second half of the twentieth century. Hankins’ work seeks to give Trotman his rightful place in history, and he accomplishes his task, noting that Trotman’s foremost contribution to evangelicalism was “a concrete concept and practical program for discipleship ministry.”⁵⁶

Each of these dissertations is helpful in that it accomplishes its stated goals, but the scope of Trotman’s contribution necessitates further study. Felts’ work is

⁵³Ibid., iii.

⁵⁴James Douglas Hankins, “Following Up: Dawson Trotman, the Navigators, and the Origins of Disciple-Making in American Evangelicalism, 1926-1956” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, 2011), iv.

⁵⁵Ibid., v.

⁵⁶Ibid., 188.

missiological in nature, and although his dissertation provides a sound look into Trotman's methodology of discipleship, it fails to provide a thorough theological critical examination of Trotman's methods. A study currently in process by Kenneth Albert at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary will greatly augment Felts' work and provide a more broad and complete theological examination of Trotman's theology and methodology of disciple-making.⁵⁷ The work done by Hunsicker and Hankins is very helpful in placing Trotman in his appropriate historical context and evaluating his contributions to historical and contemporary evangelical Christianity, but they do little to evaluate his practices in terms of their helpfulness for ministry today.

Secondary sources. Without question, the chief biographical work on Dawson Trotman was penned by his long-time communications assistant, Betty Lee Skinner. Titled *Daws: A Man Who Trusted God*, Skinner's account, in her own words, is designed to be "a definitive biography . . . [that] aims to present in true and balanced proportion Dawson Trotman's life as he lived it. People and events are seen through his eyes, his viewpoint expressed, with a minimum of author interpretation or comment."⁵⁸ Skinner compiled her work not only from her own recollections and recordings, but she also claims to have interviewed over seven hundred individuals whose lives were touched by Trotman. She had unique access to Trotman's personal journal, correspondence, and notes, and she was able to draw from those who were closest to Trotman. Unfortunately, however, the nature of her work did not require the thorough citation of sources, so her writing is anecdotally authoritative but lacking in scholarly value.

The second most significant secondary source is Robert Foster's *The Navigator*. Like Skinner's portrait of Trotman, Foster's biography is largely anecdotal and relies heavily on Skinner's work. Foster's contribution is different in that it arranges

⁵⁷Albert, "Dawson Trotman's Theology and Methodology," 4.

⁵⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 13.

Trotman’s biography thematically instead of chronologically and therefore systematizes the study of his life to a greater degree than Skinner’s *Daws*. Other significant biographical portraits include that presented by Jim Downing in *Living Legacy: Reflections on Dawson Trotman and Lorne Sanny*⁵⁹ and the tribute written by Ethel Wallis in *Lengthened Cords: How Dawson Trotman—Founder of the Navigators—Also Helped Extend the World-Wide Outreach of the Wycliffe Bible Translators*.⁶⁰ These and other secondary sources that were useful in this study served as helpful—if not occasionally hagiographic—depictions of Trotman’s life, legacy, and lasting contribution to American evangelicalism. Other secondary sources that were used in this study derived spiritual disciplines and/or Great Commission ministerial practices from Trotman’s ministry and offered insight regarding the usefulness of these practices in Christian life and ministry.

Primary sources. Without question, the most valuable source of information for this dissertation has been the primary source material that has recently become accessible at the Navigators International Headquarters at Glen Eyrie in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The archival material from and about Trotman only recently has been catalogued and includes copies of all of Trotman’s published writings, Trotman’s personal journals that he kept from 1933 to 1951, volumes of Navigator correspondence that Trotman sent to workers all over the world, Bible studies on Romans and the Gospel of John, and an unpublished manuscript entitled “Faithful Men” that was to serve as Trotman’s master work wherein he detailed Navigator theology and practice. Thankfully, Trotman made many records of his personal devotional times in his personal journal, so those moments that would otherwise be lost to the confidentiality of conversation between God and man have, to a helpful degree, been chronicled by

⁵⁹Downing, *Living Legacy*.

⁶⁰Wallis, *Lengthened Cords*.

Trotman and have served to enhance the view of his personal spiritual disciplines and the reflections that resulted from his time with the Lord.

Methodology

To the greatest degree possible, this dissertation has emerged from careful study of primary source material available at the Navigators International Headquarters Archives in Colorado Springs, Colorado. I spent a week immersed in investigation there in spring 2014, and I have been able to derive much from Trotman's own reflections both of his personal spiritual disciplines and his Great Commission ministry. I have augmented that which was gathered from primary sources with biographical material and conclusions derived from Trotman's ministry in secondary sources. I have gathered a wealth of material about Trotman himself, about his practices, and about lessons learned from his life and ministry, and I have used those materials to deduce a clearer and more complete picture both of Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines and their impact on his Great Commission ministry. I have also sought to show how those issues might be helpful for Christian ministry today.

Research Methodology

My research for this dissertation involved four major phases. First, I spent a significant amount of time in the archival materials at the Navigators Headquarters at Glen Eyrie in Colorado Springs. I have been in conversation with the Navigators' historian and archivist since 2010 and have developed a good working relationship with her. Due to the work of Fletcher, Albert, and Hankins in sorting through and cataloguing many of those primary source materials, I found that my time among the sources was incredibly profitable and allowed for much insight into Trotman's life and ministry.

Second, I have examined secondary source material on Trotman's life and ministry. This phase of the research involved the reflections of those who were closest to Trotman and who took the time to reflect on his life, ministry, and legacy in written form.

Special attention was given to the works of Betty Skinner,⁶¹ Richard Foster,⁶² Jim Downing,⁶³ Ethel Wallis,⁶⁴ and others who recorded biographical and anecdotal reflections on Trotman's life and influence. Additionally, I have been given gracious access to some family members, former Navigators, and other ministry associates who knew Trotman personally and were willing to discuss him with me.⁶⁵ During this phase, I also examined the work of those whose influence Trotman noted and sought to discover how they shaped his understanding of personal spiritual disciplines, Great Commission ministry, and the intersection thereof.

Third, I have conducted a brief survey of scholarly materials about biblical spirituality and Great Commission ministry. Recent years have shown a resurgence of evangelical interest in spiritual disciplines and practices, and attention has been given to both classical and contemporary sources regarding personal spiritual disciplines. There has also been a resurgence of interest in Great Commission ministry among evangelicals—and particularly among Southern Baptists—and I have briefly surveyed classical and contemporary materials regarding evangelism and discipleship. A noteworthy amount of twentieth and twenty-first century sources in these fields have been impacted to some degree by Trotman's influence, and examination of those sources has allowed me to gauge Trotman's legacy in these areas.

Finally, I have analyzed the intersection of Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines with his Great Commission ministry to show the degree of connection between the two seemingly disparate areas of life and ministry. I have sought to

⁶¹Skinner, *Daws*.

⁶²Foster, *The Navigator*.

⁶³Downing, *Living Legacy*.

⁶⁴Wallis, *Lengthened Cords*.

⁶⁵David Roberts, e-mail message to author, February 4, 2014.

extrapolate, particularly from primary source material, how Trotman felt his personal spiritual disciplines impacted his Great Commission ministry. An ample amount of evidence has illustrated how Trotman felt that his personal spiritual disciplines provided the foundation, motivation, and urgency of his evangelism and discipleship ministries, and I have found that Trotman viewed the effectiveness of Great Commission ministry—both his and that of others—to be based largely on those practices. I then used those findings to extrapolate prescriptions that should prove to be useful and helpful to contemporary followers of Christ as they carry out the callings of Christ as indicated by the Great Commandments and the Great Commission.

Definitions

Many terms needed to be defined in the course of this research. Some terms that would seem relatively straightforward in definition are often misconstrued in a Christian culture that understands Christian life and ministry in different ways. I have written this dissertation as an evangelical, Protestant, Southern Baptist, and I have written about a man who was an evangelical, Protestant, parachurch ministry founder and leader. As a result, certain terms that might be defined in different ways by Christians from different theological and ecclesiological backgrounds needed to be clearly defined as they are understood within this dissertation.

Church. This term can be used to define both the world-wide and eternal body of persons who have chosen to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and local expressions of that larger body. For the purposes of this dissertation, this term has been limited to focus most specifically on Western, Protestant, evangelical expressions of the local church in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Church growth. For the purposes of this dissertation, the term “church growth” is defined as by C. Peter Wagner in 1987:

Church growth is that discipline which investigates the nature, expansion, planting,

multiplication, function, and health of Christian churches as they relate to the effective implementation of God's commission to 'make disciples of all peoples' (Matt. 28:18-20). Students of church growth strive to integrate the eternal theological principles of God's Word concerning the expansion of the church with the best insights of contemporary social and behavioral sciences, employing as the initial framework of reference the foundation work done by Donald McGavran.⁶⁶

Church Growth Movement. Likewise, the term "Church Growth Movement" is defined as by Thom Rainer: "The Church Growth Movement includes all the resources of people, institutions, and publications dedicated to expounding the concepts and practicing the principles of church growth, beginning with the foundational work of Donald McGavran in 1955."⁶⁷

Disciple. This term is used to describe any person who, having begun a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ by repentance and faith according to the scriptural mandate, is actively learning from and seeking to follow Jesus. The definition assumed in this dissertation holds as its ideal that definition proposed by Trotman's successor as president of the Navigators, Lorne Sanny, in his *Marks of a Disciple*: ". . . a disciple is one who is openly identified with the person of Christ. Second, he is obedient to the Word of Christ. And third, he is bearing fruit in the work of Christ."⁶⁸

Discipleship. For the purposes of this dissertation, this term is used to refer broadly to being a disciple of Jesus Christ and the process of growing in that capacity toward the ideal prescribed by Lorne Sanny in the preceding paragraph.

Disciple-making. This term is used to describe the practices whereby a disciple seeks to make disciples of others using evangelism as defined below and discipleship as defined previously.

⁶⁶C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987), 114.

⁶⁷Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 21-22.

⁶⁸Lorne Sanny, *Marks of a Disciple* (1975; repr., Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 22.

Evangelical. For the purposes of this dissertation, this term is defined as by David Bebbington as having the four key ingredients of conversion, belief in the Bible, dedication to evangelism and missions, and a recognition of the centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ in reconciling God to man.⁶⁹

Evangelism. The definition of evangelism understood in this dissertation is that which is defined in article four of the Lausanne Covenant:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.⁷⁰

Follow-up. This term is used as Trotman defined it in the booklet he authored that bears the same name: “[Follow-up] covers the whole scope of bringing to spiritual maturity and fruitfulness young believers God has committed to one’s charge.”⁷¹ This term therefore refers to any actions taken following the conversion of an individual in order to help him/her begin and continue in the process of discipleship.

Great Commission ministry. For the purposes of this dissertation, this term is used to describe any of the activities stated or implied by what is commonly referred to as the “Great Commission” in Matt 28:18-20. Specifically, this term is used to describe ministry that involves making disciples of all nations, “baptizing them in the name of the

⁶⁹David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-17.

⁷⁰“The Lausanne Covenant,” The Lausanne Movement, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html>.

⁷¹Dawson Trotman, *Follow-Up: Conserving the Fruits of Evangelism* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1952), 7.

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [and] teaching them to observe all things that [Jesus has] commanded” (Matt 28:18-20). Put simply, this term will be used as an umbrella for anything dealing with evangelism, discipleship, and disciple-making as defined above.

Personal spiritual disciplines. Within the context of this dissertation, this term refers specifically to regularly practiced prayer, Scripture reading, and Scripture memorization. This term speaks specifically to those times of personal devotion wherein the practitioner engages with God privately and not within a corporate, public setting. It should be understood, however, that both Dawson Trotman and I would encourage corporate gatherings for prayer and study of God’s Word in addition to that done in private.

Limitations and Delimitations

This dissertation has been limited by the lack of precedent literature regarding Dawson Trotman. Little scholarly research on Trotman exists, and the work that has been completed provides a relatively limited portrayal of the man and his ministry. Further, no research into the intersection of his personal devotional life and his ministry of evangelism and discipleship has been done before, so no basis for comparison has been possible. This work is therefore unprecedented, original, and unique.

This work has also been limited by the extent and nature of Trotman’s personal record-keeping about his personal devotional life and the inferences he drew after reflection upon those times. Although Trotman kept an extensive journal and included much of his personal experience in his speaking and writing ministries, it would have been impossible for him to capture every aspect of his own spiritual life and record it in such a manner that those undertaking a study of his life would be able to interpret flawlessly every cause and effect. Put simply, this research is limited by an inability to

personally interview Dawson Trotman and a subsequent reliance upon the helpful but incomplete materials he left behind.

This dissertation has been delimited to the definitions set forth above, and it has been delimited to the context of Western Christianity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although the principles herein advocated should be somewhat universal in scope and have been practiced in many locations around the globe due to the worldwide influence and preponderance of the Navigators ministry, Trotman's expression of Christianity and his practice thereof was unquestionably shaped by his context, cultural milieu, and sources of influence. Discussion of the "church" and "contemporary Christianity" therefore speak to the Western, Protestant, evangelical context which most influenced Trotman and which Trotman most influenced.

Conclusion

Dawson Trotman believed that, while the church was looking for better methods to accomplish God's great assignment of reaching the world for Christ, God was looking for better men. Throughout the course of his Christian life, he sought to become the type of man God could use to accomplish his divine purposes in a lost and dying world, and he built a ministry devoted to reproducing Christians who would make an eternal difference in their world. Though he has been dead for more than half a century, the ministry he founded continues to pursue those same objectives today. The pages that follow examine the life and ministry of Dawson Trotman—an imperfect saint who sought close communion with God, who strove to make reproducing disciples all over the world, and whose Great Commission ministry was built upon the foundation of faith cultivated by his personal spiritual disciplines.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF DAWSON TROTMAN

Dawson Trotman is relatively unknown to the vast majority of the contemporary evangelical world, but his life and ministry have been instrumental in shaping some of the most important fundamentals of evangelical discipleship ministry still in practice today. An investigation into Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines as the foundation for his Great Commission ministry therefore needs to begin by introducing Trotman and localizing him within his context and cultural milieu. This chapter will provide a brief summary of Dawson Trotman's life, ministry, and understanding of Great Commission ministry. First, his fifty years of life will be chronicled briefly from limited biographies, personal journal entries, interviews, and correspondence archived at the Navigators International Headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado.¹ Second, his ministry endeavors spanning thirty years of Christian living and ministry will be recounted, beginning with his work within the lumberyards of Lomita, California and ending with the enduring legacy he left in the Navigators ministry and other works throughout the world. Third, Trotman's understanding of the gospel message and discipleship will be examined to provide a basis for his Great Commission ministry. Dawson Trotman was a revolutionary Christian who changed the landscape of American

¹One of Trotman's favorite sayings, which became something of a motto for his life, was "Never do anything that someone else can and will do, when there is so much of importance to be done which others cannot or will not do." Dawson Trotman, personal journal, February 14, 1933 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs). In that same spirit, I commend to the reader the scholarly historiographical depiction of Trotman's life and ministry set forth by James Douglas Hankins in his "Following Up: Dawson Trotman, the Navigators, and the Origins of Disciple Making in American Evangelicalism, 1926-1956." James Douglas Hankins, "Following Up: Dawson Trotman, the Navigators, and the Origins of Disciple-Making in American Evangelicalism, 1926-1956" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2011).

evangelicalism in the twentieth century, and though he died an early death in 1956, his teachings continue to challenge and shape Christianity in the United States and abroad.

Biographical Sketch

Dawson Earle Trotman was born prematurely and with a misdiagnosed defective heart valve on March 25, 1906, the second child and firstborn son of Charles and Mildred Trotman.² Charles Trotman emigrated from Great Britain to America in the summer of 1892, where he was driven by his exploratory spirit into the frontier West. Before settling in Bisbee, Arizona, Charles followed the prospect of adventure, moving from town to town and doing any work he found available to provide short-term sustenance. Copper mining—and the prospect of earning up to \$3.50 a day in so doing—lured him to Bisbee where he lodged with the Keller family, whose daughter, Mildred, became his wife in September 1902.³ He named his firstborn son “Dawson” after Berkeley Dawson, an atheist friend who had emigrated to America with him and had influenced his life profoundly.⁴ Lorne Sanny, a close friend and colleague of Dawson Trotman, later remarked, “Singular indeed was the fact that the son so named met Christ and later proved in his own life the power of God denied by the one whose name he bore.”⁵

Dawson Trotman’s young life was filled with fights with his sister, several relocations following his father, who continued to chase after his adventurous spirit, and a mother who loved him but who suffered from tension headaches and often took her

²The Navigators, “Personal Sketch—Dawson E. Trotman” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs); Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: A Man Who Trusted God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1974), 21.

³Skinner, *Daws*, 19-21.

⁴Lorne C. Sanny, *Dawson Trotman: The Pathfinder* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1958), 2; Skinner, *Daws*, 21.

⁵Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 2.

pain out as frustration toward him. Betty Lee Skinner describes the family in this way:

The Lord Himself must have been amused . . . at the rare combination of personalities and backgrounds He had brought together to produce a son who would fill a unique role in His kingdom. The disparate traits of the parents probably influenced and molded Dawson's life more than he realized, and God had added to the equation the quirky heart valve that pumped extra blood to his brain, giving energy and ideas faster than he could use them.⁶

Trotman used the extra energy provided by his faulty heart valve and the adventurous disposition he inherited from his father to his advantage. He developed the habit of rising early to eat breakfast with his father, and he would use the time after his father left for work to complete his schoolwork.⁷ He quickly excelled in each discipline he undertook. By his senior year of high school, Trotman served as student body president, captain of the basketball team, chairman of the student council, editor of the high school yearbook, and class valedictorian.⁸ Unfortunately, Trotman's smooth façade allowed him to cover up the burgeoning wickedness inside his heart. Though he had twice professed faith in Christ as a teenager and had been involved with both the Boy Scouts and the church Sunday School class, he found that he simply could not do right.⁹ Commenting later on the irony of his valedictory graduation speech, Trotman said, "My subject was 'Morality versus Legality,' even while I was stealing from the school funds. Such is the deceit of the human heart."¹⁰ He had struggled for years with his hidden inner desires that waged war against that which he knew he should be doing. According to Sanny, "He felt he must be one of those people who could not live a good life and he

⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 23.

⁷*Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁸Dawson Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory* (Colorado Springs: 1975), 6; Skinner, *Daws*, 23-24.

⁹Dawson Trotman, "Testimony," Discipleship Library, mp3 file, 6:15, accessed February 8, 2010, <http://turret2.discipleshiplibrary.com/1B.mp3>; Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 7.

¹⁰Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 6.

gave up trying. He began to drink.”¹¹ He had been taught to hate thievery, but he stole from both his own mother and his high school. He had been raised as a teetotaler, but he became a drunk. He hated what had become of his life, but he felt hopeless in his endeavor to improve and, therefore, rushed headlong into deeper debauchery.¹²

Conversion to Christianity

Although Trotman was not a Christian, he had been exposed to Christian principles through his involvement with Lomita Community Presbyterian Church as an adolescent. During his time at the church, Trotman had developed relationships with two of his schoolteachers, Irene Mills and Laura Thomas, who taught Sunday School at Lomita Presbyterian and led the “Fun and Study Club” in their home.¹³ Mills and Thomas developed a special concern for Trotman and were compelled to pray for him often throughout his adolescence and young adulthood. Trotman recalls that Mills “wrote my name on her prayer list and prayed for me every day for six solid years.”¹⁴ As Trotman veered further into a life of unbridled debauchery, Mills and Thomas prayed, above all else, that Trotman would be “convicted of sin and brought back to the Lord.”¹⁵ Their longsuffering efforts in prayer soon would be answered in a big way.¹⁶

¹¹Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 4. In his personal journal, Trotman wrote next to an entry dated Monday, March 16, 1925 that “this [entry] was written 1 yr and 3 months before I found my SAVIOUR.” The entry states, “Sherman and I went to Frisco. Two guys with a pull to look for us a job. Went show smoke in it. Back O.K. Took cousin to skatin rink. My pal an I met two girls, mine the cutest take home, make date.” Trotman, personal journal, March 16, 1925 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs). This passage was remarkably different from successive journal entries, reflecting the change in Trotman’s focus following his conversion. Original spelling and grammar have been retained in quotations from Trotman’s journal.

¹²Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 8-9.

¹³Skinner, *Daws*, 24.

¹⁴Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 10.

¹⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 29.

¹⁶Trotman was deeply impacted by Mills and Thomas, both before he received Christ and thereafter. He recorded in his journal that “Miss Mills has certainly been a wonderful help to me in my

Just two months after his twentieth birthday, Trotman was arrested for public intoxication and, having been benevolently released by the arresting officer, soon found his way once again to the Lomita Community Presbyterian Church. Mills and Thomas were leading a young people's event in which the youths were divided into competitive teams that could earn points by memorizing passages of Scripture. The ever-competitive Trotman embraced the contest and began memorizing his assigned verses. By the next youth meeting the following week, Trotman was the only one among all the youth to have memorized all of his verses. In so doing, Trotman was unwittingly committing to memory the very verses that would lead to his salvation. Mills and Thomas had purposefully chosen verses that dealt specifically with salvation. Trotman recalls the circumstances as follows:

Here I was, an unsaved fellow, learning, 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23); 'For the wages of sin is death . . . ' (Romans 6:23); 'And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment' (Hebrews 9:27); 'Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life' (John 5:24). John 1:12 was also in that group: 'But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.' . . . In the new group of ten verses [he received the next week] were these: 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new' (II Corinthians 5:17); 'But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil' (II Thessalonians 3:3); 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (I John 1:9).¹⁷

God used these verses, hidden unwittingly in Dawson Trotman's heart, to bring him to Christ.

The following week, Trotman was on his way to work, armed with twenty

Christian life thus far." Trotman, personal journal, August 28, 1929 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹⁷Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 12-13. Trotman used the Authorized Version of the Bible throughout his life and ministry, so the same pattern will be used when Scripture is quoted in this dissertation. At one point, Trotman enumerated five reasons why he chose to use the Authorized Version, and chief among the reasons was "It's the people's Bible—90% use it." Dawson Trotman, "Values of Scripture Memory," Navigators Seminar, July 11-12, year unlisted (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

verses of Scripture that he had inadvertently hidden in his heart. As he walked, the Holy Spirit brought to mind one of the verses he had memorized: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life...” (John 5:24). He was spellbound. Wondering at the magnitude of the verse he had just recalled, Trotman prayed, “O God, that’s wonderful—everlasting life!”¹⁸ Immediately, another memorized verse came to mind: “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name” (John 1:12). At that point, he prayed again: “O God, whatever this means to receive Jesus, I do it right now.”¹⁹ From that moment on, Dawson Trotman was never the same. Whatever his previous professions of faith had been, this moment was the defining instance in which he knew his life had changed for good.²⁰

Early Christian Life

Having received Christ, Trotman wasted no time in immersing himself in Christian service. As Robert Foster recalls, “Almost immediately he got busy in his local church, teaching a junior boys’ Sunday school class, helping in the activities of Christian Endeavor, and sharing his faith with others in public worship.”²¹ Additionally, he sought

¹⁸Trotman, “Testimony,” 21:53; Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 14.

¹⁹Trotman, “Testimony,” 22:54; Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 14.

²⁰Trotman, “Testimony,” 23:01; Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 15; Skinner, *Daws*, 29-30; Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 4-5. Graham Tinning, the son of the man who pastored the Presbyterian Church Trotman attended, recollected that Trotman’s transformation was dramatic and immediate: “[Trotman] went from extreme disbelief to strong aggressive belief.” Graham Tinning, “I Went to High School with Dawson Trotman,” *The King’s Business*, August 1956, 13.

²¹Foster, *The Navigator*, 65. Christian Endeavor is an interdenominational Christian youth organization founded in 1881. The organization’s pledge, which was recited at every meeting, likely formed part of the foundation for Trotman’s strong discipline in his own life and his expectation for the same in lives of others: “Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I promise Him that I will strive to do whatever He would like to have me do; that I will pray to Him and read the Bible every day; and that, just so far as I know how, throughout my whole life, I will endeavor to lead a Christian life. As an Active Member, I promise to be true to all my duties, to be present at and take some part, aside from singing, in every meeting, unless hindered by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. If obliged to be absent from the monthly consecration meeting, I will, if possible, send an

immediately to fulfill the biblical command to hide God's Word in his heart.²² He continued his efforts in memorizing Scripture, this time motivated by a hunger for God's Word as opposed to a hunger to win a contest. As he later recalled, "Immediately after my conversion, I began learning more verses from the Bible. I learned one a day for the first three years of my Christian life I made up my mind that I was going to get to know the Bible, and I did it."²³

Trotman wanted to accomplish much for God. He wanted to be used mightily in God's service and for God's glory, and that endeavor had to start in his current location.²⁴ He was tested in his determination to minister immediately, as documented by J. Robert Clinton:

[Trotman] prayed that God would allow him to witness at work. God tested his sincerity with a series of three checks. First of all, was his conversion secret or would he reveal it by taking his New Testament to work? Dawson took his Bible to work. Word quickly spread that Trotman had religion. God tested him again. Would he identify himself with other Christians, specifically a preacher who came to the lumberyard and preached once a week? Trotman did, and this led to another check. The preacher asked Trotman to give his personal testimony. Dawson agreed to this, and word spread quickly among his co-workers. Trotman's first public testimony turned out to be a preaching service to all 200 of his fellow employees. Through these three specific checks, God began to shape and prepare Trotman for an expanded ministry of evangelism.²⁵

Trotman was passionate about prayer, Scripture memorization, and evangelism. He began sharing his faith in the lumber yard where he worked, and he soon found a home in the Fishermen's Club organized by Vernon Morgan. Morgan

excuse for absence to the Society." "Christian Endeavor," *Time*, July 20, 1925, accessed April 30, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,881535,00.html>.

²²"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps 119:11).

²³Foster, *The Navigator*, 64-65; Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 15.

²⁴A Navigator sketch of Trotman's life attests to his passion for ministry early on in his Christian life: "To this young man, salvation was real. He began to live as strenuously for Christ as he had for himself." "Personal Sketch—Dawson E. Trotman" (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1.

²⁵J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 48; see also Trotman, "Testimony," 35:15.

emphasized the Word of God and evangelism, teaching the forty to fifty young men in his group to “fish for souls” following the Lord Jesus’ declaration in Matthew 4:19 that he would make his followers “fishers of men.”²⁶ Through his involvement with the Fisherman’s Club, Trotman became an avid personal witness for Christ and led many other young men on “fishing trips” during which they would share their faith with others. Walt Stanton, who had been a schoolmate of Trotman’s and later joined him in the Fishermen’s Club, recalled how focused Trotman was on winning souls during their fishing trips together. The two men, seizing on any opportunity to share the gospel with another soul, would pick up hitchhikers who were standing alongside the road. As Stanton recalls, “Within two minutes he would be witnessing, and everyone he picked up accepted Christ in the car.”²⁷

Realizing that God would use him somehow in Christian service, Trotman decided to pursue seminary. In the fall of 1928, he enrolled in the Los Angeles Baptist Theological Seminary. While there, he continued his involvement in teaching Sunday school, the Fishermen’s Club, and Christian Endeavor. Seminary proved tedious to Trotman, requiring him to spend too much time in study and too little in personal communion with God, so he ended his seminary career at the end of the school year.²⁸ The next year, he tried once more to further his formal education at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA), but he again felt that school was detracting from his devotional life and ministry, so he quit after one year.²⁹ Content that the Lord would use him outside the church and formal ordination, he never attempted to pursue higher education again.

²⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 36.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 37.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 46.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 58.

Courtship and Marriage

One of Trotman's responsibilities with Christian Endeavor was to pick students up for the meetings and take them home afterward. Many times, he found himself driving a carload of young women, and to ensure that he would not fall into temptation, he maintained a rule that no girl could sit next to him more than one time consecutively. Even so, Trotman met and fell in love with a young woman, Lila Clayton, whom he asked to be his sweetheart. She agreed, but mentioned that she was only thirteen years old and in the eighth grade at the time. Trotman was shocked but decided that she would be worth the wait.³⁰ After a five-year courtship, three years of which were spent in engagement, the two married on July 3, 1932, one month after Lila's high school graduation.³¹

Dawson and Lila Trotman decided early on that their lives and their home would be devoted to ministry. Just before they were married, Dawson and Lila dedicated their home to fulfill the promise of Isaiah 60:11: "Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought." Next to these words in his Bible, Trotman noted the following: "Our home—always—God willing."³² Throughout the life of their marriage, they would hold to that promise, always keeping a house full of men and women who were devoted to growing in grace and helping others do the same.

Historical Context and Cultural Milieu

The world into which Dawson and Lila Trotman emerged was anything but serene. They were married in the midst of the Great Depression—the greatest financial

³⁰Ibid., 48.

³¹Lila Trotman, "Life with Dawson Trotman," Discipleship Library, mp3 file, 9:40, accessed April 20, 2010, <http://turret2.discipleshiplibrary.com/AA218A.mp3>; Skinner, *Daws*, 72.

³²Lila Trotman, "Life with Dawson Trotman," 10:26; Skinner, *Daws*, 72.

catastrophe the United States of America had ever faced. They found themselves making a life in the aftermath of the First World War, under times of extreme national duress caused by the lack of jobs and resources, and on the eve of the largest war in modern history: World War II. Additionally, Christians were becoming increasingly polarized along theological lines by the emergence of Modernism and the subsequent response in favor of historically orthodox Christianity known as Fundamentalism.³³ According to Foster, “The great American cultural jalopy needed a pit stop. The financial crisis, the political unrest, and the theological upheaval left us out of gas, flat-tired, and in need of an overhaul.”³⁴

During the twentieth century’s first decade, a sharp undercurrent developed within the Christian church that embroiled Christians along decidedly distinct lines. “At the start of the century,” notes Mark Noll, “two opposing factions—modernists and fundamentalists—began to diverge as they provided dramatically different responses to the era’s intellectual and social pressures.”³⁵ Within a decade of Trotman’s birth, two highly influential and wildly controversial texts emerged upon the theological scene. In 1909, the Oxford University Press published the Scofield Bible, which according to Noll, became “the most influential publication promoting the theology of dispensational premillennialism.”³⁶ Between 1910 and 1915, the ideological war that had been brewing between theological liberals and theological conservatives was intensified by the publication of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, wherein traditional Christian

³³David Buckelew Hunsicker, “The Rise of the Parachurch Movement in American Protestant Christianity during the 1930s and 1940s: A Detailed Study of the Beginnings of the Navigators, Young Life and Youth for Christ International” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1998), 152-65; Foster, *The Navigator*, 9-10.

³⁴Foster, *The Navigator*, 10.

³⁵Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 142.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 296.

doctrines were defended against the assertions of modernists.³⁷

The modernists were a subset of the larger group of Protestant liberals who were seeking to reconcile the claims of Christianity with emerging scientific thoughts.

Douglas Sweeney notes the following regarding the modernist ideologies:

The two most devastating blows [to historically orthodox Protestant Christianity] came from Darwinism and biblical higher criticism. Charles Darwin was not the first to promote a theory of evolution, but his use of natural history to elucidate its mechanism of natural selection proved unusually impressive—both in its level of detail and by rendering God superfluous to the evolution of species—sparking ideological firefights throughout the Western world. Further, the publication of his famous *Origin of Species* (1859) gained a surpassingly broad hearing for evolutionary thought. By the end of the nineteenth century, avant-garde theology teachers raced to appropriate his views (and those of other evolutionists), rejecting the historicity of Adam, Eve, the Garden of Eden, Noah’s flood, the tower of Babel, and most of the rest of Genesis 1-11

German scholars did the most to develop the discipline of ‘higher’ critical study of the Bible—also known as historical criticism—the study, based primarily on extrabiblical sources, of the history *behind* the biblical texts In the late nineteenth century . . . biblical higher criticism began to *predominate* North American biblical studies. More significantly, the best higher critics now agreed that, for the sake of biblical science, they should treat the Bible ‘like any other book’ (as their mantra went), ceasing to privilege the Bible’s own accounts of its origins and authorship.³⁸

According to Noll, the modernists “moved with the times, conceded the hegemony of the new sciences, and sought a new alliance between modernized faith and the American way of life.”³⁹ More specifically, Skinner notes that modernism “labeled the then sophisticated notion that modern science destroys the credibility of the biblical miracles, the virgin birth, the infallibility of Scripture, and the Second Coming.”⁴⁰ In essence, the modernists made a sharp turn away from biblical orthodoxy, and a massive debate ensued.

The publication of *The Fundamentals* in the early twentieth century was the

³⁷Ibid., 297.

³⁸Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 157-58.

³⁹Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 242.

⁴⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 59.

result of spiritual angst generated by the modernists.⁴¹ In the mid-nineteenth century, orthodox Protestants had already begun to respond to the heresies of modernist thought and sought to re-establish what they felt to be the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Fundamentalists argued that the theological ideas presented by the modernists were so thoroughly unorthodox that they could not be considered Christian.⁴² *The Fundamentals* were initially introduced as a series of twelve booklets edited by R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon. According to Paul Enns, “The series responded to liberalism’s higher criticism; denied evolution; affirmed the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch; supported the unity of Isaiah; defended inspiration, the virgin birth, deity, and the atonement of Christ; and addressed many other issues.”⁴³ The booklets were highly influential among Protestants, and their publication resulted in many Protestants becoming fundamentalists.⁴⁴

Within the fundamentalist camp, a new theological system emerged that changed the way many Protestants read and understood the Bible. This new system called dispensationalism was a theological construct that divided the Bible’s teachings into seven periods of time during which God acted for different purposes but from

⁴¹R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, eds., *The Fundamentals* (1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

⁴²J. Gresham Machen, for example, decries the advent of modernism in his 1923 book, *Christianity and Liberalism*. He notes that “in the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religions is called ‘modernism’ or ‘liberalism.’” J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 2.

⁴³Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 649-50.

⁴⁴Noll notes the following regarding the popular impact of the schism among Protestants: “By far the majority of Protestants vacillated in the middle [between modernism and fundamentalism], nostalgic for the vanishing harmonies of society, mind, and religion. They were unsettled by the tendency of new ways to dismiss traditional Christian convictions, but also unwilling to decide for either the modernist or fundamentalist construction of true religion.” Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 243.

common principles.⁴⁵ According to dispensationalism, the Scriptures were to be approached from a highly literal hermeneutic that recognized an emphasis on the glory of God throughout the text. Enns explains the dispensational hermeneutic in the following:

Dispensationalists follow a consistently literal method of interpretation . . . [and] apply the literal scheme of interpretation to all of the disciplines of theology Dispensationalists teach that God has a distinct program for Israel and a distinct program for the church. The commands given to one are not the commands to the other; the promises to the one are not the promises to the other In every age or dispensation God has revealed His glory, which is the unifying theme of Scripture.⁴⁶

In essence, dispensationalists insisted that the Bible be interpreted literally, but that literal interpretation applied only to those to whom God was speaking in the particular dispensation during which he spoke.

Trotman's Response to Modernism

As Dawson and Lila Trotman began their life together, many American churches were embroiled over the emergence of *The Fundamentals*. Modern biblical criticism had reshaped some of the foundational theological underpinnings of the Christian faith in America, and the Fundamentalist movement was sounding the clarion call for Christians to embrace classical and essential Christian doctrines such as the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, Christ's atonement on the cross and resurrection from the dead, the necessity of new birth, and Christ's second coming.⁴⁷ The Modernists, who rejected these doctrines, were seen as the enemy of the gospel. Nevertheless, the general mood of the country (and the churches) was one of apathy toward spiritual matters and, according to Foster, "indifference to spiritual needs here at home and abroad."⁴⁸

⁴⁵Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 144.

⁴⁶Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 554-55.

⁴⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 59.

⁴⁸Foster, *The Navigator*, 9.

Trotman's life and theology were profoundly impacted by the new systems of thought that emerged in his youth, although he was not faced with the fundamentalist-modernist battle until twenty years after the publication of *The Fundamentals*. Five years after his conversion, Trotman was involved in a church split at Lomita Community Presbyterian Church that occurred along the lines of the fundamentalist-modernist conflict.⁴⁹ Trotman had started four boys' clubs in which he taught the boys how to memorize Scripture and how to witness. The clubs were highly successful—in 1931, for example, he had 141 boys attending regularly—and served as a training ground to get young men serious about their faith.⁵⁰ The fundamentalist-modernist struggle became “an undercurrent simmering in the church as factions built along modernist-fundamentalist lines.”⁵¹ A fundamentalist faction within the church upheld the authority of the Bible and sought to teach orthodox Christian doctrines, but a growing modernist faction had a very low regard for the Bible. Trotman decided that the growing disregard for the Word of God in the church warranted his leaving the church. Along with the boys in his boys' clubs, Trotman left the church and sought to establish a new work that would adhere to fundamentalist doctrine.⁵² Trotman maintained a highly orthodox view of

⁴⁹Irene Mills recalls the conflict: “The pastor of the church and the board of elders called upon Laura Thomas and me and told us that they did not approve of the Bible studies we were giving—they standing [*sic*] for the teaching of evolution and against the coming of the Lord. If we were not willing to change, we were asked to relinquish the leadership of the young people, which we did.” Irene Mills, letter to Betty Skinner, October 14, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

⁵⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 58-59.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 59.

⁵²In his personal journal, Trotman records the progression of his leaving the church. On April 12, 1931, he records that “the Lord lays upon my heart the need to leave the L. C. P. C. with its worldliness and take my 4 boys' clubs elsewhere. I state my purpose and reason in church—bombshell!!” On April 16, 1931, he records that “the session of the L. C. Pres. Ch. vote that it would be best for Miss M[ills] and Miss T[homas] to leave the church.” On April 28, 1931, he discusses the new church plant that would adhere to fundamentalist principles: “New church has congregational meeting, make plans for future. God is with us in this new venture of faith. I believe many other cities will see such happening in these coming days.” The new church was organized on October 4, 1931, and Trotman recorded the following: “So[uth] Lom[ita] Ch[urch] was organized, and 26 members joined. May GOD be pleased to unite our hearts in holy love for

Christian doctrine and refused to be a part of any group that did not maintain the same doctrinal purity.

Although he aligned himself with the fundamentalist camp, Trotman could not go so far as to embrace all the tenets of dispensationalism. Trotman was very practical in his faith, and he did not see the merit in relegating some of God's most powerful promises to another group of people at another time. Skinner records his sentiments in the following:

With due respect to dispensationalists, [Trotman] still did not feel Scripture should be apportioned to certain peoples for certain times exclusively. In the margin above Jeremiah he wrote, 'Is it possible that God wrote this whole Book to one small people, or did He, knowing the end from the beginning, write to others herein.' And beside Isaiah 58:12, 'Given many times when praying about my life work.' Why should Christians who claim God's promise of peace from Isaiah 26:3 or forgiveness of sin from Isaiah 1:18 consider the promise in Isaiah 58:12 off limits? Even Isaiah 58:11 'And the Lord shall guide thee continually . . .' was commonly claimed and quoted. Telling later of God's promises to him from Isaiah for his life work, he explained with a light touch, 'Some say the Book of Isaiah is for the Jews. Well it's full of promises, and as I looked around, I didn't see the Jews claiming them—somebody should be using them!'⁵³

Although he held to a very literal interpretation of Scripture—including, like the dispensationalists, an understanding that biblical history was divided into dispensations⁵⁴—Trotman was unwilling in his lay-theology to exclude certain parts of the Bible from being specifically applicable to contemporary believers. In a message he preached in 1949, Trotman said the following:

Israel's job was to get the Scriptures to all the nations, to all the families of the earth, to the Gentiles And now comes along the church, or certain Christians in

one another. We need to fight hard for and with one another these days." Trotman, personal journal.

⁵³Skinner, *Daws*, 63.

⁵⁴In a twenty-seven-page document entitled "Contact Instructions" for training Navigators, Trotman affirms the delineation of biblical history into dispensations as follows: "The necessity for 'rightly dividing' [the Word] is seen still more clearly when we consider that the Word reveals seven major periods of time (dispensations) during which GOD is dealing with man, and that HIS dealing with man is different and unique for each dispensation." He then quotes Lewis Sperry Chafer and C. I. Scofield, who were central figures in the dispensational movement, in a manner that affirms them and at least a portion of their teaching. Trotman, "Contact Instructions" (unpublished manuscript, Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs, 1949), 21.

the church, and they want to assign certain of the things back to the Jews. But they're not doing the job. God has put in the hands of the seed of Abraham—Christ—and seed, us, the job that He originally gave to Israel. That's not very profound, but it's sure the antidote for that poison of hyperdispensationalism to remember.⁵⁵

Trotman certainly could not stand for the abundant promises of God to go unused, so if Israel would not claim them, he would.⁵⁶

Even though the national and ecclesiastical moods were suffering because of the preponderance of tension and anxiety, God was preparing the United States for a period of great new growth. People were forced to reevaluate their values due to lack of financial abundance, and World War II became a unifying cause to which the entire country could devote its collective life. According to Foster, “The twenty-year period from 1926 to 1946 might have looked like a disaster for the church, but God was secretly at work. . . . He was preparing His chosen men for the new things He was planning to do during the next half century.”⁵⁷ The conditions, while certainly dire, were ripe for revival. People's hopes and dreams had been destroyed by unemployment, financial disaster, and war. “While our nation's mighty political, economic, and religious oak trees had fallen, the Lord caused a grove of young saplings to spring up,” said Foster.⁵⁸ Dawson Trotman was among those young saplings, and he had devoted his life, his marriage, his home, and all he had to the kingdom of God. The Lord was about to do something great.

Spiritual Foundation for Ministry

In the midst of an anxious world, Trotman began to pray more earnestly than ever before. After reading and meditating on Jeremiah 33:3—“Call unto me, and I will

⁵⁵Dawson Trotman, “World Evangelization,” transcript of taped message given in July 1949 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1.

⁵⁶Foster, *The Navigator*, 67.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not”—Trotman decided that he needed to claim the truth of this Scripture in his own life.⁵⁹ He found his friend Walt Stanton, and the two “covenanted to pray together every morning until they felt assured that God was going to fulfill His promise in their lives.”⁶⁰ For forty-two days, Trotman and Stanton travelled to a nearby canyon every morning at 5:00 a.m. and prayed until 7:00 a.m. (adding a four-hour session from 5:00 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. on Sundays).⁶¹ Lorne Sanny records the progression of their prayer:

They prayed at first for the boys in the Bible clubs by name . . . and for the towns nearby from which requests had come for help with their boys. Then they prayed for cities up and down the California coast. As they prayed, God enlarged their vision, and they began to ask that God would use them and other young fellows in each of the 48 States.

During the sixth week God put it into their hearts to pray for the world. With a map before them they put their fingers on Okinawa, Formosa, Germany, France, Turkey, Greece . . . praying that God would use them in the lives of men in those places.⁶²

Through this time of extended prayer—a turning point in Trotman’s life—God shaped his life and the lives of many others for years to come.⁶³

Methods and Influence of Ministry

Based on his private and communal times of prayer, Trotman formed a group for men who would be always ready to dispatch the gospel message of Christ at a moment’s notice.⁶⁴ Dubbing themselves “Minute Men,” they followed the guidance of their leader and developed a strict daily regimen of required tasks: “They agreed to

⁵⁹Dawson Trotman, “Believing God,” Discipleship Library Web site, mp3 file, 0:01, accessed April 20, 2010, <http://turret2.discipleshiplibrary.com/AA001.mp3>.

⁶⁰Foster, *The Navigator*, 43.

⁶¹Dawson Trotman, *The Need of the Hour* (1957; repr., Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 23-26.

⁶²Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 8-9.

⁶³Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 25-26.

⁶⁴The Navigators, “Personal Sketch—Dawson E. Trotman,” 2.

spend an hour each day in prayer, read the Bible, memorize one verse of Scripture daily, touch one life daily for God, and keep business matters and correspondence up to date.”⁶⁵ Trotman saw prayer and time in the Scriptures as direct corollaries to evangelistic fervor. If one was immersed in prayer and the Word of God, he would be an effective witness for Christ. Once given the task of interviewing potential missionaries, Trotman questioned them about their devotional lives and their effectiveness in witnessing. He noted the following: “We traced back and found that never since they came to know the Savior had they had a period of victory in their devotional lives. This was one of the reasons for their sterility [in witnessing]—lack of communion with Christ.”⁶⁶ To Trotman, weak evangelistic fervor and ineffectiveness in witnessing were the direct results of a weak devotional life, and it was categorically inexcusable for a Christian to be weak in his devotional life.

Scripture memory system and the Hand. To help himself and other Christians grow in Scripture memorization, Trotman developed a Scripture memory system that, although revised several times, is still in print today.⁶⁷ In addition, he developed and taught a metaphor for right treatment of the Scriptures based upon the human hand. Using the four fingers of his hand to illustrate means of acquiring biblical knowledge, Trotman exhorted his followers that they must hear the Word, read the Word, study the Word, and memorize the Word. The thumb, the stabilizing factor on the hand

⁶⁵Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 13.

⁶⁶Dawson Trotman, *Born to Reproduce* (1955; repr., Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 18. A portion of this article was recently published again in the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s *Decision Magazine* under the title, “Why Some Christians Are Ineffective.” Dawson Trotman, “Why Some Christians Are Ineffective,” *Decision Magazine*, May 2014, 40.

⁶⁷Trotman advocated, not only Scripture memorization, but also other key disciplines with the Word of God. These practices are still in place today. The most recent revision of the Navigators’ *Topical Memory System* carries four goals: “1) How to memorize and meditate on Scripture most effectively; 2) How to apply in your life the verses you memorize; 3) How to review the verses so you can always recall them easily; and 4) How to continue memorizing Scripture after you finish this course.” The Navigators, *Topical Memory System* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 6.

that allowed it to grasp the Word, represented meditating on the Word.⁶⁸ He reminded his audiences, “Each of these is not only recommended in the Bible, but each is also commanded.”⁶⁹

Trotman’s methods of Scripture interpretation were subjective and intuitive, but according to Felts, “his emphasis upon allowing the Word to become personal for every believer was reported to be a refreshing change for many who had never experienced the Bible personally.”⁷⁰ He maintained that the Word was personal and was to be personally applied in the life of every believer. Everything God had ever promised could be activated in the lives of believers who would simply embrace the promises and walk in them. Trotman was not a big proponent for the extensive use of commentaries and extra-biblical materials; rather, he exhorted his hearers to “take that Book [i.e., the Bible] and a piece of paper and a pencil and get alone with God.”⁷¹ Although some questioned his hermeneutics and felt that “his approach was one of questionable exegesis and was excessively subjective in nature,”⁷² he nonetheless maintained his position that the Word of God was personal for every believer and, if embraced, would result in the promises of God being fulfilled.

Spiritual reproduction. To Trotman, personal devotion and Scripture memorization were catalysts to what he viewed as the primary task for all Christians: spiritual reproduction. Trotman saw evangelism as an essential command given by the

⁶⁸The Navigators, “The Hand” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs); Francis Cosgrove, *Essentials of a New Life* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1988), 55-73.

⁶⁹Foster, *The Navigator*, 80-81.

⁷⁰Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 65.

⁷¹Dawson Trotman, “Follow-Up,” transcript of a taped message given on June 27, 1949 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 13.

⁷²Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 62.

Lord Jesus Christ to all who would follow after him. His fervor led the Minute Men to share the gospel at least once a day, and in seeking to keep this commitment, Trotman would even forego other commitments (including sleep) in order to find just one soul who needed to hear the gospel.⁷³ He was a passionate evangelist, even though he always battled the fear that comes with such a personal encounter.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Trotman was convinced that God is bigger than any of man's reservations, and he insisted that the task of every Christian was to take the gospel boldly to the nations:

[The need of the hour] is an army of soldiers, dedicated to Jesus Christ, who believes not only that He is God but that He can fulfill every promise He has ever made and that there isn't anything too hard for Him. It is the only way we can accomplish the thing that is on His heart—getting the gospel to every creature.⁷⁵

Trotman saw a lack of spiritual reproduction in the life of the believer to be a sure sign of spiritual immaturity. He noted, "Wherever you find a Christian who is not leading men and women to Christ, something is wrong. He may still be a babe."⁷⁶

Birth and strategy of the Navigators. The biggest transition in Trotman's ministry focus was initiated by a friend who requested that Trotman contact Les Spencer, a young sailor who was serving aboard the U.S.S. *West Virginia*. Trotman contacted Spencer, invited him over for dinner, and afterward took him out to the Palos Verdes Hills to discuss spiritual matters. A police officer approached the car to investigate the activities of these men who were just sitting in their car, and in a matter of minutes, Trotman led the officer to Christ. Les Spencer was amazed. He told Trotman, "I'd give my right arm to be able to do what you just did."⁷⁷ After testing him to ensure that he

⁷³Skinner, *Daws*, 93-94.

⁷⁴Skinner, *Daws*, 68; Foster, *The Navigator*, 104-5.

⁷⁵Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 12.

⁷⁶Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 13.

⁷⁷Trotman, "Testimony," 43:57; Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 17; The Navigators, "Personal Sketch—Dawson E. Trotman," 2.

meant what he said, Trotman began teaching him how to use the Scriptures to win others to Christ. He incorporated Spencer into the Minute Men and instructed him to carry out the Minute Men assignments aboard his ship.⁷⁸ After three months, Spencer brought another sailor to Trotman and asked if he would teach the new man the same things he had been teaching him. Trotman sternly declined, assigning Spencer the task of reproducing himself in the new sailor. “Before long,” recounts Trotman, “he got his man and began to teach him the same things.”⁷⁹ Foster records the following: “In the years to come, Dawson often challenged his men with the words, ‘You’re not going to park your babes on my doorstep.’ He was trying to awaken his spiritual offspring to their responsibility as parents in reproducing more spiritual offspring.”⁸⁰

Trotman’s encounter with Spencer opened the way for a ministry to the sailors who were stationed just miles from Trotman’s home. He dissolved the Minute Men in order to focus his energies on the Navy, essentially transitioning the same principles he had used in the Minute Men to sailors. Jim Downing, a young sailor who was part of the original Navigator group and later served the Navigators for nearly thirty years, recalls the beginning days of the Navigators:

When the Trotmans first began ministering to a handful of sailors, their home was a garage-like structure behind the gas station where Dawson was employed. He often compared his ministry to filling cars with gasoline so they could get on their way and accomplish their task. He said his role was not doing ministry on the warships like the sailors did, but getting the men spiritually refueled to get on with their mission.⁸¹

The Navigators adopted as their mission statement the simple phrase, “To know Christ

⁷⁸Trotman, “Testimony,” 42:00; Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 20-21; The Navigators, “You Teach Him” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs); Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 15; Foster, *The Navigator*, 113-16; Skinner, *Daws*, 75-78; Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 51-52.

⁷⁹Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 17.

⁸⁰Foster, *The Navigator*, 116.

⁸¹Downing, *Living Legacy*, 9.

and make Him known.”⁸² In Trotman’s mind, their task was simple: “Lead people to Christ and build them up to where they can repeat the process.”⁸³

Navigator Homes. When Dawson and Lila Trotman were married, they dedicated their home, wherever it may be, to the work of the Lord. As the Navigators developed, the Trotman home served as the home base for sailors from which they would study the Bible, share meals, and encourage one another in ministry as a close knit family of co-laborers. To the sailors, the Trotman home comforted them in times when they had to be away from their own homes and families.⁸⁴ Those who were able stayed the night as long as they had leave from the ship.⁸⁵

Recognizing the profound impact their home had on sailors, Trotman developed a plan to station Navigator Homes strategically near U.S. Naval bases all over the world. Because his home had served not only as a place of rest and encouragement but also as a place of diligent training, Trotman sought to ensure that any couples who would lead Navigator Homes were right for the job.⁸⁶ In his personal journal, Trotman listed eight characteristics that were essential for any couple that would lead a Navigator Home; they were as follows:

1. A yielded couple. They must have the proper understanding of the demands on one’s personal time and possessions.
2. Straight in doctrine.
3. Without denominational peculiarities or denominationalism such as Nazarene or Pentecostal.
4. Ability to contribute to spiritual growth. The home must not be a recreational center or a hangout.
5. There must be a proper financial understanding.
6. The man must definitely be the head of the home.

⁸²Foster, *The Navigator*, 144; Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 18; Skinner, *Daws*, 106.

⁸³Downing, *Living Legacy*, 8.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁸⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 88.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 151.

7. A real ability to meet personal needs of the men.
8. A willingness to work with headquarters in a definite way.⁸⁷

With such stringent qualifications, Trotman sought to ensure that the Navigator homes were serious places of training that simultaneously provided places of respite for weary sailors. Trotman believed adamantly that a setting such as the Navigator home provided an ideal venue for personal, emotional, and spiritual development that surpassed that which was offered by formal theological institutions.⁸⁸ By 1958, Navigator Homes were being used as centers for the strategic work of the Lord in the main cities of the United States and in several other countries.⁸⁹

The Wheel. Trotman was endowed with significant creativity that he used to strengthen his ministry throughout its course. His foundational illustration was the Wheel. To Trotman, the wheel represented forward motion, which he deemed to be an essential aspect of life in Christ.⁹⁰ His wheel would have an outer rim, four spokes, and a central hub that held it all together. The hub of the wheel, holding all things together, was Christ. Without Christ, it is impossible to live the Christian life. He must be the center. The four spokes would represent the Word, prayer, living the life (i.e., obedience), and witnessing. According to Sanny, “These four elements, used in balance in the Christian’s life with Christ in the center, comprised his most frequent message to Christians—no new principle, but a focus on spiritual laws as common and sustaining as bread and butter.”⁹¹ The result of these spiritual disciplines was the outer rim that was

⁸⁷Trotman, personal journal, December 28, 1939.

⁸⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 171, 299; Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 122.

⁸⁹Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 17.

⁹⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 46. Trotman had begun with a stool illustration that involved three legs signifying the Word, prayer, and witnessing. In a message in August 1955, Trotman told his audience at Glen Eyrie why he moved from a stool illustration to a wheel illustration: “Christians [are] not to ‘sit on’ [their faith] like [on a] stool.” Dawson Trotman, notes for message, August 1955 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

⁹¹Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 12.

moved and supported by the entire device: the Spirit-filled Christian in action. Skinner notes that “Dawson believed that The Wheel . . . was a graphic model of the kind of disciples God wanted. If it was truly God-given, it would stand the test of time.”⁹² He was correct in his assumption, as The Wheel is still central in Navigator teaching today.⁹³

Advent of follow-up emphasis. Trotman was making a significant impact in the lives of many with whom he shared the gospel message, but his life and ministry focus were forever changed by a witnessing encounter in which he picked up a man in his car while on his way to a golf course. As the man climbed into Trotman’s car, he took the name of the Lord in vain. Upon hearing it, Trotman presented the man with a tract and instructed him to read it. The presentation must have jogged the man’s memory, because he inquired at that point as to whether he had previously met Trotman. After some discussion, it turned out that the two had indeed met about a year earlier while on the same road. Trotman had shared the gospel with the man, led him in prayer, and was confident that he had received Christ. He left the man with the promise that God, who had begun a good work in him, would finish the job.⁹⁴ Now, a year later, Trotman found no evidence of new life whatsoever in the man. This encounter with a man whom he had “won to Christ” but who illustrated no change in his life devastated Trotman. As he later recalled, “Winning souls was my great passion. But after I met this boy the second time on the way to the golf course, I began to go back and find some of my ‘converts.’ I want

⁹²Skinner, *Daws*, 46.

⁹³NavPress, “The Wheel Illustration,” *Discipleship Journal*, September/October 1998, accessed May 4, 2010, <http://www.navpress.com/magazines/archives/article.aspx?id= 15389>.

⁹⁴Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 29. Early in his ministry, Trotman was fond of finishing his one-to-one witnessing encounters with those who had received Christ by quoting Phil 1:6, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” He would later realize that he was taking the verse out of its context.

to tell you, I was sick at heart. It seemed that Philippians 1:6 was not working.”⁹⁵

The idea that he had been ineffective in his witnessing encounters drove Trotman to become just as passionate about follow-up as he was about evangelism. He realized that his task in fulfilling the Great Commission was far greater than simply leading others to Christ and leaving them. He had a responsibility to “make disciples” (Matt 28:18-20), not mere converts; as a result, he became an ardent proponent of discipleship. He said the following: “You can lead a soul to Christ in twenty minutes to a couple of hours. But it takes from twenty weeks to a couple of years to get him on the road to maturity He must learn how to make right decisions.”⁹⁶ From this point forward, the scope of Trotman’s ministry changed drastically. He remained a fervent evangelist, but he sought to ensure that his converts became disciples by exerting himself toward that end.

One-to-one ministry. Leading the Navigators taught Trotman that his ministry must be two-pronged: extensive and intensive. Extensively, he would cast his nets as wide as he possibly could, seeking to win men and women to Christ by whatever means available to him. As Skinner notes, “He would sow beside all waters, teaching a YMCA group or Fishermen’s Club, witnessing to a hitch-hiker, leading a couples’ Bible study or a student group on campus.”⁹⁷ Intensively, he would focus as much attention as possible on one-to-one discipleship. He felt that the missing link in the church’s chain was follow-up, and it was critical that this link be restored.⁹⁸ He quickly implemented this focus into the Navigator ministry, teaching each of his men to pattern their lives after

⁹⁵Ibid., 27-28.

⁹⁶Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 31.

⁹⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 78.

⁹⁸Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 3-6; Foster, *The Navigator*, 117-18.

the principle taught in 2 Timothy 2:2.⁹⁹

Trotman adopted 2 Timothy 2:2 as the fundamental verse of the Navigators: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Trotman saw four generations of trained Christians in this verse: Paul first, Timothy second, faithful men third, and others fourth.¹⁰⁰ Each Navigator was to find his own man whom he could disciple.¹⁰¹ After six months of intensive work, the man being disciplined would then find another whom he could disciple, and so forth. Trotman recounts how this process began in the Navigator work as one whom he was discipling found his own man to disciple: “He worked with his new babe in Christ, and those two fellows began to grow and spiritually reproduce. On that ship 125 men found the Savior before it was sunk at Pearl Harbor. Men off that first battleship are in four continents of the world as missionaries today.”¹⁰² Trotman recognized that this manner of discipleship, prescribed and practiced by the Apostle Paul, would lead to the exponential growth of the Kingdom of God.¹⁰³ By the end of his ministry, he had seen his hypothesis confirmed in multiple spiritual generations of Navigators who were stationed all over the world.

Trotman’s focus on one-to-one discipleship accomplished two great tasks in his ministry. As Ethel Wallis notes, “By teaching from the inception of the Nav work the responsibility of committing the Word to other faithful men, Daws insured two inevitable

⁹⁹Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 6; Skinner, *Daws*, 156; Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 18; Foster, *The Navigator*, 143; Wallis, *Lengthened Cords*, 45; Felts, “Methodology of Discipleship,” 54.

¹⁰⁰Foster, *The Navigator*, 76.

¹⁰¹In a personal sketch of Trotman dated March 1953, the high priority placed on this principle is noted: “The guiding principle behind the Navigators work is to equip one man to reach and teach another to reach another and so on, as expressed by the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2.” The Navigators, “Dawson Trotman—Personal Sketch, March 1953” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1.

¹⁰²Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 21.

¹⁰³Felts, “Methodology of Discipleship,” 52-58.

results: multiple evangelism . . . and the elimination of himself as indispensable to the work.”¹⁰⁴ Trotman was not only an effective fisherman; he was also a master teacher of fishermen. He did more, however, than just teach them how to fish; he taught them how to teach others as well. Downing asserts that the ministry of Dawson and Lila Trotman “was not only the foundation of the Navigators ministry today, but was part of one of the greatest missional leaps forward in all of history.”¹⁰⁵ Ralph Winter, president of the World Mission in Pasadena which Downing served in the 1980’s, remarked, “It is hard to find a missionary leader today whose life has not been significantly impacted by The Navigators.”¹⁰⁶

Mass follow-up: work with Billy Graham. Trotman’s changed view of evangelism and discipleship impacted the way he viewed other ministries, particularly those for whom mass evangelism was key. He said the following:

Why is it that organizations today can spend tens of thousands of dollars a year renting auditoriums, bringing in speakers, getting special music, and setting up a business office? Then they get a quality emcee, have some marvelous music, a solid message from the Bible, extend the altar call, and get the folks down to the front. Is all that money spent, and all those hours of energy exhausted, to say a few words of encouragement, a short prayer of commitment, shake some hands, say ‘good night and God bless you,’ and that’s the end? How could men and women who know their Bibles do it that way?¹⁰⁷

Trotman’s view of mass evangelism would later soften, due in large part to his work for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in their crusades. He came to realize that the work of men like Graham was fundamental in getting the gospel message out to the masses, and he reluctantly recognized that God would use him to provide the necessary follow-up. Trotman recalls that the beginning of his work with Graham

¹⁰⁴Wallis, *Lengthened Cords*, 45.

¹⁰⁵Downing, *Living Legacy*, 28.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Foster, *The Navigator*, 126.

stemmed from the evangelist’s inability to sleep at night as a result of wondering what would happen to those whom they had seen come to Christ. Graham pleaded with Trotman that he might come and help coordinate massive follow-up efforts for the crusades. Trotman was reluctant due to the rigorous demands of his own ministry, but after being implored by Graham three times, he decided to pray about the opportunity. He would later recall that “[Graham] took me by the shoulders and said, ‘Who is majoring in this?’ I had been majoring in it.”¹⁰⁸ As a result, Trotman accepted the task. He was willing to spend six months a year doing crusade work, and according to William Martin, he strove earnestly to ensure that those who made decisions met with trained counselors who would help them “clarify their decisions and direct them into Bible-believing churches.”¹⁰⁹ He employed his Navigators—now stationed all over the world—to train indigenous counselors to conduct the follow-up effort.¹¹⁰ His impact was substantial. In his biography of Billy Graham, Lewis Drummond reflects on the impact Trotman had as a part of the Billy Graham Crusades: “Much is owed to Dawson Trotman . . . and Charlie Riggs [who succeeded Trotman after his death], who for years developed the entire program of follow-up for the inquirers at the crusades.”¹¹¹ Trotman also developed a follow-up program for Christ for America, for whom he published a book detailing his methods.¹¹²

Trotman’s influence on Billy Graham shaped Graham’s ministry for its duration. In *The Holy Spirit*, Graham recalled the vision that Trotman had given him

¹⁰⁸Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 25-26; Wallis, *Lengthened Cords*, 106-7.

¹⁰⁹William Martin, *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 113, 141.

¹¹⁰Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 27.

¹¹¹Lewis Drummond, *The Canvas Cathedral: Billy Graham’s Ministry Seen through the History of Evangelism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 400.

¹¹²Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 1.

regarding one-to-one ministry based on 2 Timothy 2:2:

[2 Timothy 2:2] is a little like a mathematical formula for spreading the gospel and enlarging the church. Paul taught Timothy; Timothy shared what he knew with faithful men; these faithful men would then teach others also. And so the process goes on and on. . . . Mass crusades, in which I believe and to which I have committed my life, will never finish the great commission; but a one-by-one ministry will.¹¹³

Graham devoted his life to preaching the gospel to unprecedented masses across the world, but he recognized that, if his results were to last, he must provide effective and lasting means of follow-up with those who turned to Christ through his ministry. Dawson Trotman was the man he believed God had appointed to complete that task. Trotman reveled in the fact that so many new Christians were provided with the means to grow in Christ, but he was even more pleased to see established Christians become foster parents to these babes in Christ. According to Sanny, “Some who had never been used to bring anyone to a saving knowledge of Christ now became soul winners and counselors to others.”¹¹⁴ In the March 2006 edition of “Decision” magazine, Gary Cobb noted that the course of counselor training developed by Trotman, Lorne Sanny, and Charlie Riggs “is still being taught today in preparation for Franklin Graham Festivals. Why has this training had such longevity and been accepted by Christians of every culture? Because it is largely based on Scripture. The principles are timeless.”¹¹⁵

Cooperation: Wycliffe and others. Ever passionate about the Word of God and its power in bringing men and women to Christ, Trotman developed a hunger to see the Bible translated into the native tongues of people groups all over the world. In the Fall 1942 edition of the *Navigators Log*, he gave a report of a trip to Mexico during

¹¹³Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit* (Waco: Word, 1978), 147.

¹¹⁴Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 27.

¹¹⁵Gary Cobb, “Become an Effective Witness for Christ,” *Decision Magazine*, March 2006, accessed February 10, 2010, http://www.billygraham.org/DMag_Article.asp? ArticleID=666.

which the Lord showed him this need:

This being my first trip to foreign lands with an opportunity to see the tragic results of being without the Gospel, my heart was greatly touched. The burden of those whose eyes have been blinded by idolatry, traditions, and the precepts and false teachings of men, the burden of seeing and hearing of whole tribes . . . who have never had a single sentence from the Word of God translated into their own tongue—began to grip me.¹¹⁶

From this point forward, Trotman devoted time and energy—his own and that of the Navigators—to assisting the ministry of the Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Trotman devoted himself to larger works of the body of Christ, because he firmly believed that the church was one entity. He outlined his concern in the following: “If the Navigators will not work just for The Navigators . . . but if we will work for the church—not *a* church, but *the* church . . . all churches. Maybe they don’t agree on certain other points, but any church where Jesus Christ is Lord [is to be served].”¹¹⁷ As always, Trotman sought both to proclaim and to live his vital notion that ministries should help one another. Although supremely busy with the work of The Navigators, Trotman devoted time to Wycliffe, Billy Graham, the Missionary Aviation Fellowship, the Missionary Communication Service, International Students Incorporated, and Youth for Christ International.¹¹⁸ Regarding his time-consuming service to these ministries, Trotman declared that “none of this is Navigator business, but is the King’s business, and that’s what we are involved in.”¹¹⁹ His influence, propagated by both himself and his Navigators, was felt across the globe.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶Wallis, *Lengthened Cords*, 21.

¹¹⁷Dawson Trotman, “The Big Dipper,” Discipleship Library, mp3 file, 32:30, accessed April 20, 2010, <http://turret2.discipleshiplibrary.com/NET00510.mp3>.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰Wallis, *Lengthened Cords*, 126.

Death and Legacy

From a naturalistic perspective, Dawson Trotman's life was cut short by the accident on Schroon Lake on June 18, 1956, but Lila and the Navigators never viewed his death from such a perspective. To them, Trotman's death was not an accident, and his life was not cut short. They believed God gave Dawson Trotman the exact number of days he should have had, and they believed God took him home in just the right way. Four hours after Trotman's death, Lila addressed the attendees at the Navigators East Coast Conference being held at the Word of Life Camp at Schroon Lake. She said the following:

Many of you who know me and know me well have often heard me say that heaven gets richer all the time, and tonight it's richer—the dearest possession I own, home with Him. And I'm sure that there isn't one person in this room tonight that will ever be the same—to be on hallowed ground, seeing God at work, and He makes no mistakes

I know my future isn't going to be easy. I know that, and it might interest all of you to know that Dawson last night, in the providence of God, shared with me what was on his heart for my life. Also, it might interest you to know that the reason it was brought up was that I shared with Dawson that the Lord had spoken to me very definitely that He was going to take him home, and today as Dawson was being taken home, I was sitting on the side of a street about 8 miles from here, looking out into the water and struggling with those very words. Thus God prepared my heart for the news I received upon coming back to the place.¹²¹

The telegram the Navigators sent out to outposts all over the world read that "Today He who only doeth wondrous things took our beloved Daws to be with Himself. Schroon Lake drowning. Full report follows. Lila and all victorious."¹²² They were victorious. In the midst of their grief, they were victorious. Upon hearing the news from Lorne Sanny, Billy Graham said he wanted to rededicate his life to Christ, but then followed that statement by saying, "If we had sat down and planned the way that God might take Dawson Home, we certainly could never have conceived of any more appropriate way

¹²¹The Navigators, "Lila Trotman's Testimony Just Four Hours After Dawson's Home Going" (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹²²Telegram from Sargent to Robertson, YFCI, Tokyo, Japan, June 18, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

than that he whose life was given to help others should be taken saving another.”¹²³

Dawson Trotman was born March 25, 1906. He placed saving faith in his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ twenty years later in June, 1926.¹²⁴ He went home to be with his Lord on June 18, 1956. He lived fifty years—thirty of which were spent following Christ and leading others to do the same. In fifty years, he married the love of his life, became father to five children, and launched a ministry that changed the landscape of American evangelicalism for years to come. He was buried at the Navigators International Headquarters at Glen Eyrie in Colorado Springs at a site overlooking the Glen where he went often to pray. Lila was interred next to him some forty-eight years later in 2004. Their joint epitaph reads, “Dawson and Lila had a passion to know Christ and to make Him known—and to help generations of others do the same through the worldwide ministry of The Navigators that began in their home and continues to this day.”¹²⁵

Trotman’s Understanding of Great Commission Ministry

As a young man, Dawson Trotman was exposed to highly divergent theological views via his involvement with different Christian traditions. His pre-conversion involvement with the Lomita Community Presbyterian Church where Misses Mills and Thomas taught Sunday School in the church and “Fun and Study Club” in their home had provided some foundation for his theological framework. Although he did not personally receive Christ until he reached the age of twenty, he became very involved

¹²³Lorne Sanny, “Dear Gang” letter, July 19, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹²⁴Skinner, *Daws*, 31.

¹²⁵Dawson and Lila Trotman’s gravesite is open to guests of the Glen Eyrie Conference Center and requires about a half-mile hike up onto the side of a mountain. I had the opportunity to visit the site and attest to the magnificence of the site where Dawson would often go to spend time with his Lord in prayer and Scripture reading. Further information about Glen Eyrie is available online at <http://www.gleneyrie.org>.

with the church's various youth ministries as early as age fourteen.¹²⁶ Trotman's parents were not involved in the Lomita Community Presbyterian Church—his father was an atheist and his mother preferred the budding charismatic movement—but his mother nonetheless encouraged his involvement “lest he be lost to the Christian faith altogether.”¹²⁷ Trotman's mother, Mildred, had become enamored with Pentecostalism and embraced the teaching of evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, who had founded the new Foursquare Tabernacle in Los Angeles.¹²⁸ Trotman's theological foundation, then, included a strong influence of Presbyterian theology that was augmented—purposefully or not—with the charismatic influence of McPherson through his mother.

Trotman was also influenced to some degree by his two one-year attempts to obtain a theological degree via the Los Angeles Baptist Theological Seminary and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA). His most profound influence, however, came through his own study of the Bible. By means of countless hours spent pouring over and praying through the Scriptures, Trotman developed a theology that would consistently compel him with the majesty and power of God. Foster recalls Trotman's theology in the following:

Dawson's theology of God was exciting. He reveled in God's greatness, His holiness, His power, His sovereignty, His grace, His love for all mankind. He spent hours in Genesis 1-3 discovering the God of Creation, and in Genesis 12 discovering how Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, gained his view of Jehovah God. He devoted extensive time to the major prophets, finding out what

¹²⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 24.

¹²⁷Ibid. In a letter to Skinner, Mills recalls the brand of Pentecostalism embraced by Dawson's mother: “His mother had gone into a form of extreme Pentecostalism which D. could not tolerate. His mother was most generous in her attitude. The Pentecostal group left the Pres. Church. When Mrs. Trotman saw that Dawson did not go in for the emotionalism to which their group had turned, she was willing to have him remain in our Y. P. group—without criticism or pressure from her. Dawson was much burdened for his mother.” Irene Mills, letter to Betty Skinner, October 23, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹²⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 23.

they had to say to their own times as well as what they predicted for the future. He loved the message of the four gospels.¹²⁹

Trotman's methodology of Scripture interpretation involved three steps: first, he would seek the primary interpretation; second, he would look for secondary applications; and third, he would keep in mind that there may be prophetic revelation.¹³⁰

The sovereignty of God. From a vast array of influences, including the teaching of Lomita Community Presbyterian Church, Aimee Semple McPherson, two seminaries, and significant amounts of personal time spent studying the Bible, Trotman developed a theological understanding that spanned the various camps. According to Skinner, "Dawson's doctrinal persuasion seemed to be a combination of Presbyterian and Methodist. Along with a settled sense of destiny and of God's immutable purpose, he held an equally firm duty to obedience and good works, as though all depended upon him."¹³¹ Trotman placed a great deal of emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, but he also maintained that human beings were responsible for their decisions and actions.

One of the most poignant illustrations of Trotman's belief in the sovereignty of God came during one of the most difficult times in his life. In 1944, Trotman was personally and publicly attacked by one of his fellow Navigators regarding various deficiencies he perceived in Trotman's life.¹³² Just before these attacks reached their

¹²⁹Foster, *The Navigator*, 28. Examples of Trotman's profound wonder before God are found throughout his personal journal. On Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1931, he wrote, "In the light of GOD's Word we may give thanks *in* everything. For we know that all things work together for good to them that love the LORD. Oh I do love Him more, yes infinitely more and anyone or anything in the universe which includes Heaven, my home. And why should I not? First I cannot help loving Him so. Next I love Him because He is so wonderful, and without I would be lost, miserable, hopeless. He's mine, and I am his." Trotman, personal journal, November 26, 1931.

¹³⁰Foster, *The Navigator*, 74.

¹³¹Skinner, *Daws*, 74.

¹³²In 1944 and 1945, Oran Bell mailed several letters to Trotman wherein he not only critiqued Trotman's philosophy and theology of ministry based upon New Testament principles, but he also harshly criticized Trotman's personal and family life. Furthermore, Bell carbon copied his letters to several members of the Navigators board and other key Navigators, and he was successful in recruiting several others to deride Trotman. Trotman made every effort to address the concerns and repent appropriately for

zenith, Trotman and his wife welcomed a new child into their family. Although they had been confident of their child's health prior to and just after his birth, Dawson and Lila were shocked to learn early on in his life that their son, Chuckie, would never be healthy and strong. Close friend and colleague Jim Downing recalls that Chuckie's "growth was stunted mentally and physically. Until Dawson's death, Chuckie wore diapers, ate baby food, and lived in a cradle at the foot of Dawson and Lila's bed. He never learned to walk or recognize anyone."¹³³ Trotman was deeply affected by Chuckie's poor estate but nevertheless leaned heavily on God during that time. In a V-Mail letter dated February 1945, Trotman wrote to his Navigators the following message:

CHARLES TROTMAN: Seconds after the announcement of Chuckie Trotman's birth, the LORD gave me Luke 2:40, 'And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of GOD was upon him.' I opened my Bible and there it was in bold letters before my eyes. I was not so impressed with this until the next day when I was talking to Lila I picked up her Bible, only to find that it fell open to the very same verse. Then we said, 'Thank you, LORD.' We accepted this as from HIM. Not, however, until the other day when consulting doctors informed us that there was little hope for Chuckie to ever recover, did this passage come home with force. The diagnosis was that probably as a result of some injury at birth which no one seems to know anything about, a blood clot had formed which is causing the convulsion for which there seems no apparent remedy, humanly speaking. All that can be done is to give him relief from tension by the applications of Pheno-barbital. As we faced the possibility of Chuckie being invalided for life, Lila and I found ourselves thrown completely upon the LORD. With such verses as the above as well as Psa. 115:3; Isa. 55:8, 9 and Psa. 72:18, we were strengthened to say, 'Thy will be done.' Our prayer is that HE will do the thing that will bring the greatest glory to HIS name.¹³⁴

any offensive way in him, but Bell was not satisfied. In a public statement dated August 27, 1945, five men from the Old Fashioned Revival Hour came to Trotman's defense by saying, "In the light of the unscriptural and unchristian character of this accusation, and in the light of the true evidence in hand bearing on all the various accusations made, we rejoice that our confidence in Dawson Trotman is unshaken and most gladly commend both him and the work of the Navigators to the prayers and confidence of all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in truth." The document was signed by Charles E. Fuller, Louis T. Talbot, I. A. Moon, Wm. G. Nyman, and Arthur Glasser. Old Fashioned Revival Hour, "Statement, August 27, 1945" (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs). For further information regarding the Bell incident, see Hankins, "Following-Up," 103-6.

¹³³Downing, *Living Legacy*, 40.

¹³⁴Dawson Trotman, V-Mail, February 1945 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs). On March 1, 1945, Trotman wrote the following in his journal: "God says HIS grace is sufficient for us, HIS strength is made perfect in weakness. Not long after the

As Skinner records, “The undergirding conviction of God’s sovereignty cast him and Lila wholly on the Lord. They acknowledged His ways and thoughts as higher than theirs and clung to Psalm 115:3 – *But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.* They had said ‘Thy will be done’ and meant it.”¹³⁵ On December 22, 1945, Trotman logged the following in his journal: “Chuckie’s birthday. Dear little fellow. We certainly do not understand what GOD is doing, but we trust and are not afraid.”¹³⁶

The responsibility of man. Regarding salvation, Trotman maintained the sovereignty of God but nonetheless held firmly to a belief that each individual must come a decision as to whether or not he would receive the salvation offered in Jesus Christ. He agreed with Billy Graham that “*every man* must face his personal hour of decision alone.”¹³⁷ God is sovereign, but every person is accountable. To Trotman, this accountability applied both to the evangelist and the person being evangelized. Trotman’s position can be seen in his sermons—particularly in one of his most famous sermons entitled “The Need of the Hour.” Preaching not long before his death in 1956, Trotman listed several needs that, for many, were the need of the hour in evangelistic endeavors. After citing examples such as more missionaries, more money, and more time, Trotman said the following:

What is the need of the hour? Frankly, I don’t believe it is any of these. I am convinced that the God of the universe is in control, and He will supply all of these needs in His own way and in His own time, all else being right.

LORD clarified this in my mind and gave me quiet trusting faith to believe, HE brought home Romans 4:20, 21 with great force. Especially did this thrill me in light of the fact that it referred to Abraham who thought he was about to lose his son. Regardless of circumstances or the way things appear to be, I shall always believe and trust the LORD with regard to Chuckie in the light of Luke 2:40. I shall not be surprised if my faith is tested as was Abraham’s but I shall live to testify that GOD was not mocking me or giving a false promise that day HE gave this passage, but a few seconds after Chuckie came into the world.” Trotman, personal journal, March 1, 1945.

¹³⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 266. Italics original.

¹³⁶Trotman, personal journal, December 22, 1945.

¹³⁷Foster, *The Navigator*, 131.

Let me tell you what I believe the need of the hour is. Maybe I should call it the *answer* to the need of the hour. I believe it is an army of soldiers, dedicated to Jesus Christ, who believes not only that He is God but that He can fulfill every promise He has ever made and that there isn't anything too hard for Him. It is the only way we can accomplish the thing that is on His heart—getting the gospel to every creature

The need of the hour, as far as I'm concerned, is to believe that God is God and that He is a lot more interested in getting this job done than you and I are. Therefore, if He is more interested in getting the job done, has all power to do it, and has commissioned us to do it, our business is to obey Him—reaching the world for Him and trusting Him to help us do it.¹³⁸

In short, God is in control and, in his sovereignty, he governs the universe. God has also commissioned believers with the task of carrying the gospel message to every tribe, tongue, and nation. The task of Christ's followers, then, is to trust God and move forward in obedience, trusting God to "help us do it." In other words, God does the work, but he does not work alone. Individual believers must decide to respond to his Great Commission call, and unbelievers must decide to respond to his gospel call.

Further evidence of the weight Trotman placed on individual responsibility is seen in another of his most famous sermons, "Born to Reproduce." In it, Trotman asserts the following:

Wherever you find a Christian who is not leading men and women to Christ, something is wrong. He may still be a babe. I do not mean that he does not know a lot of doctrine and is not well informed through hearing good preaching. I know many people who can argue the pre-, the post-, and the amillennial position and who know much about dispensations but who are still immature. Paul said of some such in Corinth, 'And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual [or mature], but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ' (1 Corinthians 3:1).

Because they were babes, they were immature, incapable of spiritual reproduction. In other words, they could not help other people to be born again.¹³⁹

Again, God is sovereign, but Christians who are not leading others to Christ have failed to grow in Christ, to follow in obedience, and to carry out that which God expects from them. During a Navigator summer conference in 1949, Trotman again pointed to the responsibility God has placed on individual Christians to propagate the gospel and see the world come to Christ when he said, "The entire world was populated as a result of God's

¹³⁸Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 11-12, 21.

¹³⁹Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 13-14.

command to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply; it makes sense that if Christians would be fruitful and multiply the entire world could be evangelized.”¹⁴⁰

Trotman’s Understanding of the Gospel

To Dawson Trotman, a man who was equally passionate for evangelism and discipleship, the gospel was much more than the simple formulas to which it had been reduced by many. The gospel was to carry a person from unbelief to conversion to sanctification to glorification, and faithful Christians had been commissioned with the task of making disciples, not gaining converts. He commented that “you can lead a soul to Christ in twenty minutes to a couple of hours. But it takes from twenty weeks to a couple of years to get him on the road to maturity He must learn how to make right decisions.”¹⁴¹ Trotman had learned the hard way that leading someone through a prayer and then leaving him to himself was not being faithful to the Great Commission, so his entire ministry was shaped around the holistic nature of the gospel that required both initial evangelization and discipleship.

Trotman was pragmatic about theology and sought to embody it instead of merely espousing it.¹⁴² As an orthodox evangelical, however, Trotman maintained certain doctrinal positions that adhered to the evangelical positions. According to Robert Felts, “Trotman accepted basic evangelical doctrines about evangelism. He endorsed the

¹⁴⁰ Skinner, *Daws*, 305.

¹⁴¹Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 31.

¹⁴²In a document entitled “History—Trotman, Dawson” held at the Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Skinner records the following: “Although the Navigators espouse a conservative fundamental theology in the Reformed tradition, the principal emphasis is upon a clear, practical approach to the Christian life demonstrating the centrality of Jesus Christ and the supreme authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures. The Navigators motto is ‘To Know Christ and to Make Him Known.’ The stated objective of the movement is to help fulfill Christ’s Great Commission (Matt 28:19, 20) through multiplying disciples.” Betty Skinner, “History—Trotman, Dawson” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2. The theology of the Navigators was the theology of Dawson Trotman, and although it was a faithful expression of orthodox Christian belief, it focused heavily on the outward expression of theology in Christian life and witness.

lost state of man, the deity and humanity of Christ, the atoning work on the cross, and salvation by faith alone.”¹⁴³ Although Trotman apparently never published his own step-by-step delineation of the gospel message according to his views, he deferred regularly to materials published by other leading evangelists. For example, in *Follow-Up: Conserving the Fruits of Evangelism*, Trotman directs would-be counselors for Christ for America Crusades to purchase *Helping Others Find Christ*—a booklet containing material condensed from Billy Graham Crusade counselor classes—rather than detailing the gospel message himself.¹⁴⁴

The fact that Trotman himself never published his own step-by-step delineation of the gospel message does not mean, however, that he did not espouse a systematic approach—based on key passages of Scripture—in leading persons to Christ. The first Navigator to serve as a full-time overseas missionary, Roy Robertson, took Trotman’s early teachings and developed one of the most well-known and widely used gospel illustrations still today: the Bridge to Life.¹⁴⁵ Robertson recalls the history of the Bridge illustration as follows:

During his early ministry, Dawson Trotman taught his Sunday school class of junior high boys to present the gospel by using the following set of verses:

1. The fact of sin—Romans 3:23
2. The penalty of sin—Romans 6:23
3. Judgment is certain—Hebrews 9:27
4. Christ paid the penalty—Romans 5:8
5. Salvation is a free gift—Ephesians 2:8-9
6. You must accept Christ—John 1:12

. . . In my Navy days, we used Daws’ same sequence of six passages, but by then there was a seventh point. This was the assurance of salvation, with John 5:24 as the key reference.

Later, while I was working in Asia, we thought of combining Daws’ logical sequence of verses with a dramatic poster used by China Inland Mission workers in order to present God’s plan of salvation to people who knew little of the gospel

¹⁴³Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 69.

¹⁴⁴Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 18.

¹⁴⁵The Navigators, “The Bridge” (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1969).

message. The poster pictured many people traveling down a broad road that ended abruptly at a cliff. Their hands reached frantically upward trying to escape the burning abyss at the foot of the cliff, into which they were tumbling.

However, there was also a Cross at the edge of the cliff. A few people turned and, using the Cross, went on to an upward path that led to heaven. Chinese evangelists certainly know how to paint vivid pictures of heaven and hell! . . . This combination became the Bridge Illustration.¹⁴⁶

Trotman's understanding of the gospel was simple but profound, and it was based wholly on Scripture. Trotman's understanding of the gospel message may therefore be ascertained by examining the six verses taught in his Sunday School classes and subsequently in the Bridge to Life illustration, and by inspecting the key verses referenced in the Topical Memory System he developed.

All are sinners. Early in his ministry, Trotman expressed his belief in the teaching of Romans 3:23 that all are sinners in a recorded encounter with a young man on a fishing trip. Skinner records the event as follows:

On a fishing trip with his friend Harold Chrisman, Dawson asked a young man in Pershing Square if he were a Christian. After the usual "I didn't ask if you were a churchian . . .," Dawson asked if he was a sinner.

"Oh no," the lad answered.

"Harold, come quick," Dawson called. "I found one!" He continued, "The first one I have met in my whole life. Wallace here says he's not a sinner. Wallace, this man is president of his class at the Bible Institute. He is a sinner. He has lied and stolen."

The enlightened Wallace said, "Oh. Oh, I am a sinner." He listened while Dawson explained the Gospel and made his decision within the hour.¹⁴⁷

Further, Trotman believed in accordance with the teaching of Romans 6:23 that the result of universal sin was universal death.¹⁴⁸ Making use of the metaphor Christ gave to his first disciples in telling them that they would become fishers of men, Trotman noted that "the difference between catching men and catching fish is that you catch fish that are

¹⁴⁶Roy Robertson, *The Timothy Principle: How to Disciple One-on-One* (Singapore: The Navigators Singapore, 1986), 57-58.

¹⁴⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 54-55.

¹⁴⁸"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6:23).

alive, and they die; you catch men that are dead and bring them to life.”¹⁴⁹ Trotman believed fervently that Isaiah 59:2 was paramount in revealing the results of man’s sinfulness: “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”¹⁵⁰ What followed this separation in life was imminent judgment in death according to Hebrews 9:27—“and it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” To Trotman, all were sinners, all were separated from God, all faced certain judgment and destruction, and all were in dire need of the precious gospel message.

Christ’s death the atoning sacrifice. The truth of Christ’s atoning work on the cross was an essential component of Trotman’s gospel presentation, but as with other components of the gospel message, he included this truth as an “understood” component in his sermons and in his writing. In the Navigators’ *Topical Memory System* that was first developed by Trotman, a major section of the Scripture to be memorized is devoted to training believers to proclaim Christ. After several verses that describe the universal nature of sin and the awful penalty for sin, two verses are given to illustrate that “Christ paid the penalty” for sin. The two verses are Romans 5:8, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” and 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.”¹⁵¹ Trotman held to the evangelical view that Christ’s death was the substitutionary atonement whereby Christ paid the full penalty of sin for human beings.

On a trip to Israel in 1952, Trotman felt the magnitude of Christ’s sacrifice as

¹⁴⁹Foster, *The Navigator*, 98.

¹⁵⁰The Navigators, *Growing in Christ: A Thirteen-Week Course for New and Growing Christians* (1957; repr., Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007), 10.

¹⁵¹The Navigators, *Topical Memory System: Hide God’s Word in Your Heart* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), B-5, B-6.

he stood in the places where Jesus had walked. Skinner records the event as follows:

Tracing his Lord's footsteps through places he had read about for twenty-six years—the Mount of Olives, Gethsemane, up Calvary's hill—Daws could not describe his emotions. 'I expect to walk through these places about every day,' he wrote from Jerusalem, 'read and pray and *listen*.' In this land where the Son of God gave His life a ransom for every person, he saw hundreds who never heard, 'who have no idea the predicament they're in or the marvelous means of escape which came through The Great Event.'¹⁵²

The Great Event to which Trotman referred was certainly the atoning work of Christ on the cross, which Trotman felt was applicable to all people who would turn to Christ and receive his free gift of eternal life.

Salvation in Christ, not works. The passages of Scripture selected by Trotman, along with the topical headings he gave them, reveal Trotman's concept of the heart of conversion. To illustrate that salvation is not by works, believers are instructed to memorize Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast," and Titus 3:5, "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."¹⁵³ In accordance with the notion that salvation is not by works, Trotman then instructs unbelievers that they must receive Christ by citing John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name," and Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."¹⁵⁴

The Navigators continue to teach today that three results emanate from hearing and believing the gospel. Based out of John 5:24—Robertson's seventh point—the Navigators assert that those who hear Christ's word and believe him who sent Christ have

¹⁵²Skinner, *Daws*, 335.

¹⁵³The Navigators, *Topical Memory System*, B-7, B-8.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, B-9, B-10.

eternal life: “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life.” First, the new believer has passed from death into life. Second, he does not come into judgment. Third, he has inherited eternal life from Christ.¹⁵⁵ The believer therefore has assurance of eternal life based on the promises of God given through the Scriptures.

Understanding of evangelism. Trotman maintained that evangelism was the universal command of God given to all believers. Even though he is primarily remembered for his emphasis on follow-up and discipleship, Trotman’s first priority was evangelism. He believed with everything he was that the Great Commission was given to all believers, and he believed just as firmly that the Great Commission could be fulfilled in his generation. In a 1948 letter, Trotman said the following:

The secret of fulfilling Mark 16:15¹⁵⁶ is in the last verses of Matthew—making disciples. My heart is set on this I verily believe within five to seven years we can double the number of souls won, to say nothing of the succeeding few years There are two billion people in the world and a big, tough job ahead—not too big, however. I believe we can get the Gospel to the ends of the earth in this generation.¹⁵⁷

Trotman took seriously the call to carry out the Great Commission, and he believed there was an urgent need for the propagation of the gospel. Early in his ministry, he had written the following in a letter to his Navigator servicemen:

Time is short. Even God cannot bring back lost opportunities and precious hours. We read in the Word that we are to redeem the time because the days are evil . . . and to ‘awake to righteousness and sin not for some have not the knowledge of God, I speak this to your shame.’ Oh, if we could only get a glimpse of the wonders of heaven and Life Eternal and the contrasting view of a lost soul . . . without hope, we might take this business more seriously. There is hope for men, and it is our blessed privilege to tell men of the way of escape God has made through the atoning death of His only begotten Son. Whatever you do, don’t let the Thief of time rob you of

¹⁵⁵The Navigators, *Growing in Christ*, 12.

¹⁵⁶“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

¹⁵⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 296-97.

the Joy of leading precious souls out of Darkness and into His Marvelous light.¹⁵⁸

To Trotman, the need was great and the call was urgent to get the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Trotman was so passionate about spreading the gospel message that he often got ahead of himself when witnessing. Foster records that “one of Dawson’s problems was in the ‘how to’ of telling the story. He was so excited about it himself, he would often get carried away.”¹⁵⁹ Early in his walk with Christ, Trotman’s eagerness had all but alienated his own father from the gospel message, because he so aggressively pursued him with matters of salvation. It took his father twenty-three years to come to a place where he would be willing to talk with Dawson about the gospel, and at that point, the elder Trotman thankfully received Christ.¹⁶⁰ Later in his life, Trotman had learned the benefit of remaining calm in evangelistic endeavors and allowing God to move through him. He encouraged others by saying, “Just relax. Don’t try to cook yourself up a good deal. Don’t do anything to get something for yourself. You let the Lord do that. Don’t try to maneuver, don’t use flattery. Don’t do anything to attempt to get an edge Let the Lord do all the giving of profit.”¹⁶¹ Although age had calmed his presentation of the gospel, his passion for souls never faded.

Examination of Trotman’s teachings and practice of evangelism reveals that he saw three keys in evangelistic endeavors: a solid foundation in the Word of God, a deep rooting in prayer, and a presentation of the simple gospel. The Scriptures were paramount in Trotman’s methodology of evangelism. Since Trotman had come to Christ through Scripture memory, he felt that every would-be evangelist—and that number

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 123.

¹⁵⁹Foster, *The Navigator*, 106.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 109.

included *all* Christians—must have a solid foundation in the Word of God. Skinner notes that “memorized Scripture had brought him to Christ, and he was convinced it was a must for the would-be soulwinner.”¹⁶² Trotman could not stand any brand of evangelism that did not rely almost solely upon biblical texts and felt that those who sought to evangelize without the Word were committing something of a mortal sin.¹⁶³

Trotman believed that training in apologetics for the Bible was equally important to a solid foundation in the Word of God in a world that was increasingly skeptical of the validity of Scripture. He encouraged his men to be ready to prove the Bible to be the Word of God in any situation, as is evidenced by his letter to Dick Hightower in 1934:

I am sending your book ‘All About the Bible.’ Now this book covers more territory than would be needed to gain knowledge on the study ‘How to prove the Bible is the word of God.’ However as I look over it I do not believe you had better skip any of it. Your future assignment will be to read this book through one time thoroughly, not hastily. Then browse thru it and note chapters or pages that are valuable for use, then go through and underline each line you believe you will use in the future, then read all lines underlined. By then you will be ready for the next assignment which is to go to Fred . . . and attempt to prove to each other verbally that the Bible is the word of God. In the meantime, be reviewing in your mind each point that you believe points to the truth of the Word.¹⁶⁴

Trotman’s passion for the Word was fueled by his ardent belief that it was through the Word that the Spirit of God changed people, and he sought to ensure that his men were good stewards of that precious Word.

Trotman believed that there was power in the Word of God, and that power shaped everything he was and everything he saw the Navigators become. His almost poetic words regarding the ministry of the Navigators form a moving tribute to the power of the Word of God in the lives of men and women:

We started out on the battleships of the United States Navy, getting men to

¹⁶²Skinner, *Daws*, 44.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 97.

spend time in the Bible. By the time the war was over, we had fellows on a thousand ships and on scores of bases throughout the world, faithfully serving and witnessing for the Lord. I suppose there was no greater secret than that these men were in the Book and the Book was in them. The Word of God is the mighty force within, that enables men to do whatever it says.

I am absolutely convinced that the Bible completely changes the lives of men and women It has completely changed my life. I'll never be the same again since I was introduced to God's Holy Word, the Bible.¹⁶⁵

Trotman loved the Word, sought to plant the Word deeply in the hearts and minds of those whom he influenced, and believed that salvation and new life were found in the pages of the Word. Trotman always conceded that the Word was powerful because it pointed to Christ, but he never diminished its importance.¹⁶⁶ The Word is, after all, the avenue through which Christ is revealed to the human heart.

Along with his emphasis on the Bible's importance in personal evangelism, Trotman also elevated the discipline of prayer. Early in his Christian life, Trotman had gleaned much from the writings of powerful men of God like Hudson Taylor, George Mueller, and E. M. Bounds. Foster records that "perhaps no one statement, aside from Scripture, had greater influence on his praying than this short paragraph from the classic, *Power through Prayer*, by E. M. Bounds."¹⁶⁷ Bounds' statement was as follows:

Men are God's method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. . . . What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, nor new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not . . . come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer.¹⁶⁸

Trotman believed firmly that those who were unwilling to devote at least half an hour to prayer on a daily basis were thereby excluded from doing great things for God. He said, "I don't think God has anything big for you if you can't take 1/48th of your day to be alone with your Almighty God and Father. I rather doubt whether He is going to do very

¹⁶⁵Foster, *The Navigator*, 78.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 55.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 33.

¹⁶⁸E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 1-2; Foster, *The Navigator*, 33.

much for you.”¹⁶⁹ To Trotman, any spiritual power was derived from prayer, and because of that, prayer was essential in the life of any soulwinner.

As Trotman mentored others, he kept the importance of prayer ever before them. Skinner records one particular incident when a student came to Trotman for help in winning souls. Skinner recalls that “the help he received was unexpected. ‘How’s your prayer life?’ Dawson asked abruptly. It was not good. ‘Get that straightened out and then we’ll talk about winning souls,’ was the terse prescription.”¹⁷⁰ In *Born to Reproduce*, Trotman recounts an incident that occurred while he was interviewing twenty-nine missionary candidates. His first questions—“How is your time with the Lord? Do you feel that your devotional life is what the Lord would have it to be?”—were met with successive negative replies. The candidates cited busy schedules and rigorous demands to justify their lack of time spent in prayer and the Word, but Trotman would not accept their excuses. “We traced back,” said Trotman, “and found that never since they came to know the Savior had they had a period of victory in their devotional lives. That was one of the reasons for their sterility [in witnessing]—lack of communion with God.”¹⁷¹ If Christians were unwilling to pray, they were unwilling to win souls for Christ. To Trotman, this lack of prayer was inexcusable.

Trotman’s bluntness in witnessing is seen in his often repeated statement, “I didn’t ask if you were a churchian.” Perhaps the most poignant example of Trotman’s straightforwardness in witnessing came when he was leading Lila Clayton—the woman who later became his wife—to Christ. Skinner recounts the incident as follows:

Taking her home last after C. E. [Christian Endeavor] meeting, he let her out of the car, then asked, ‘Are you a Christian?’ ‘I’ve gone to church all my life,’ she answered without hesitation. ‘I didn’t ask if you were a churchian, but are you a Christian?’ he replied. ‘Well, I was baptized,’ she said, a little less confident.

¹⁶⁹Foster, *The Navigator*, 30.

¹⁷⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 54.

¹⁷¹Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 17-18.

Opening his New Testament, Dawson explained verses describing the salvation Christ offers without conditions to those who receive Him. ‘Don’t go to sleep tonight until you have settled it,’ was his parting word.¹⁷²

At 2:00 a.m. that next morning, before she had gone to bed, Lila received Christ. Trotman refused to allow her an opportunity to excuse herself from the gospel simply because she had taken part in church attendance or baptism. He would use the same pattern for others. “I didn’t ask if you were a churchian” was a straightforward method whereby Trotman could move past popular misperceptions of what it meant to be a Christian and get to the heart of the gospel—the simple gospel that began the journey of a radically changed life.

Follow-up and spiritual reproduction. Trotman recognized that Christ had built into the Great Commission measures for the growth of Christians and the subsequent propagation of the gospel. Once a person received Christ and began to grow in him as he was mentored by a more mature Christian, that new believer was then to replicate the same process in the lives of others. Trotman felt this was the key to developing a healthy church that embraced *both* evangelism and discipleship. In concluding *Follow-Up*, he delineated his perspective:

A strong follow-up program is as necessary to your church for maintenance of normal health and growth as adequate nutrition and medical care are to the family. As you build solidly in the lives of those who are the central force of the local assembly, the church grows in strength and number, becoming an academy of strong, rugged soldiers of the Cross whose multiplied influence can eventually reach to every nook and corner of the world.

God is permitting us to see the beginning of a new era in the ministry of the church. Before long we may rejoice that the final command of our Lord Jesus Christ has been completely carried out.¹⁷³

No better summary statement of Trotman’s firm belief in the holistic nature of the Great Commission exists than what he wrote to conclude *Follow-Up*. In his mind, the Great Commission was given as a command that was meant to be fulfilled, and this concept

¹⁷²Skinner, *Daws*, 48-49.

¹⁷³Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 21.

was what he believed to be the mechanism for its fulfillment: evangelism and discipleship seen as two constituent parts of a marvelous whole.

Trotman's Understanding of Discipleship

Early on in his ministry, Trotman found that he did not agree with the prevailing theological interpretations of the Great Commission. Some theologians had focused their interpretation of Matthew 28:18-20 on “going” and therefore emphasized the evangelistic and missiological implications of the Great Commission. Others introduced a bifurcation of the Great Commission by separating its mandate into two separate but equally important tasks: evangelism and discipleship. Trotman rejected both of these interpretations and argued for a more holistic understanding of the text. According to Felts, “[Trotman] suggested there were not two separate tasks, evangelism and discipling, but one great overarching mandate incorporating both tasks, that of making disciples. He . . . vigorously asserted that neither should be neglected, but rather both kept in balance.”¹⁷⁴ Because he believed making disciples was the central thrust of the Great Commission, he consistently encouraged Christians to be about both evangelism and discipleship, and he maintained that Christians were required to be obedient in both arenas.

To Trotman, discipleship had two components: a personal commitment and a methodology.¹⁷⁵ Many of his contemporaries were focusing on the personal commitment required by discipleship—what David Hunsicker calls “an individualistic concept of ‘total surrender’”¹⁷⁶—and were therefore emphasizing its inward focus. Trotman, however, concentrated on a more outward focus—that is, a methodology whereby new

¹⁷⁴ Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 110.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷⁶ Hunsicker, “The Rise of the Parachurch Movement,” 168.

believers become mature in Christ.¹⁷⁷ According to Hunsicker, “[Trotman] saw disciples as ‘converts followed-up’ and argued that new believers needed to be ‘discipled into a life of prayer and Scripture study’ by more mature Christians.”¹⁷⁸ According to his view, Trotman gave his life to developing methods whereby new Christians could be nurtured to maturity in Christ via the one-on-one, intentional care provided by a more mature believer.

Personal journey of discipleship. Trotman’s journey of discipleship began largely before he was converted to Christianity when he was unwittingly exposed to twenty passages of Scripture by Irene Mills and Laura Thomas as part of their Young People’s program at the Lomita Community Presbyterian Church. As a result of his Scripture-driven conversion, Trotman became a staunch advocate of Scripture memorization as the primary means of his own discipleship. Having given his life to Christ, Trotman decided resolutely that he would hide the Word of God in his heart. Immediately following his conversion, he committed himself to learning a different Scripture verse each day. “I learned one a day for the first three years of my Christian life,” he recalled. “I learned my first thousand verses driving a truck for [a] lumber company in the Harbor area of Los Angeles . . . and would you believe—I never ran over anyone with that truck!”¹⁷⁹ Trotman summarizes the stalwart nature of his resolution to memorize Scripture in the following:

I made up my mind that I was going to get to know the Bible, and I did it. None of this, ‘I’ll give it a try,’ ‘I sure hope I can memorize ten verses,’ ‘I’m not very good at memory but I’ll see what I can do.’ The point is this, folks, if you say you *will*, then you will *do* it. I’m going to review my Scriptures even if I have to hang by one leg from the chandelier to stay awake.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

¹⁷⁹Foster, *The Navigator*, 64-65.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 65.

Trotman’s strong foundation in the Word of God shaped his own life and the ministry he developed for the next thirty years. One of his greatest legacies was his development of the Topical Memory System for Scripture memorization that is still in print fifty-eight years after his death.¹⁸¹

As he grew in Christ, Trotman continued to devote time to Scripture memorization. Skinner records that many people were awed by Trotman’s discipline in devoting time to memorizing Scripture and prayer; she records the words of Dick Hightower: “. . . just disciplining himself to get up. To get the Word into his heart, to take the time to do it. Discipline to meet the Lord in prayer—and it takes real discipline to get up at four or five in the morning and get out in the cold hills to pray.”¹⁸² In his journal, Trotman records several instances in which he escaped to the hills surrounding Los Angeles, San Diego, or Colorado Springs for time alone with the Lord in prayer and Scripture memorization. The following example comes from a week in 1930 that Trotman spent tent-camping in a canyon:

Up 5 – cold – pray. . . . I am memorizing 7 passages a day. . . . Memorize Psalms 103 . . . time of prayer . . . am eating only two meals a day to the end that might have more time. Memorize a number of passages in Isaiah a.m. – namely 1:3, 7:14, 8:10, 14:24, 17:7, 24:1, Review 2:11, 2:20,21, 6:5, 6:8, 11:9, 14:27, 26:3,4, 19:19,20, etc.¹⁸³

In a statement given in Honolulu in 1945, Trotman said, “I went off alone up in the hills with the LORD. I hope you . . . learn the secret of getting alone with the LORD. I like to lie flat on my back and let the LORD speak to me and HE speaks to me out of the pages of HIS WORD.”¹⁸⁴ Hunsicker asserts that “this *is* Trotman’s theological framework: he

¹⁸¹The Navigators, *Topical Memory System*.

¹⁸²Skinner, *Daws*, 40-41.

¹⁸³Dawson Trotman, personal journal, May 1-5, 1930, quoted in Hunsicker, “The Rise of the Parachurch Movement,” 184.

¹⁸⁴Dawson Trotman, untitled message given in Honolulu, Hawaii on January 19, 1945 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs)

interpreted the events in his life by his daily reading and memorization of Scripture.”¹⁸⁵

Trotman’s theological framework became the pattern for discipleship in his own life, and he felt that the same framework was fundamental for anyone who would follow Christ. He was unwavering in his commitment to God’s Word such that each conversation he had with just about anyone centered around memorized Scripture. Skinner records an incident in which Trotman and a young Billy Graham had a very public exchange over Scripture memory while Graham was pastoring a small church as he attended Wheaton College:

At Wheaton a second encounter with Billy Graham included an incident which was rough on the young ministerial student but typical of Dawson’s use of the crude tactic of humiliation to make a person think. Invited by Graham to speak at the small church where he was pastor, Dawson in his message bore in on the importance of having memorized Scripture ready to use. He compared the ill-prepared Christian to a grocery clerk who assures the customer an item is in stock but does not know where to find it. ‘How long would that clerk survive? For instance, here’s a preacher,’ and quoting a verse of Scripture he wheeled to ask, ‘Billy, where’s that found?’ Flustered, Billy could not say, and Dawson pressed further. ‘If this is an important verse, you ought to know where it is.’ Graham was embarrassed but recovered sufficiently to quote a verse for which Dawson could not supply the reference. The congregation enjoyed the volley, but the point was made.¹⁸⁶

Trotman’s passion often led him to embarrass others publicly in the name of exhortation. Downing recalls how Trotman would compel anyone within the sound of his voice to begin a program of Scripture memorization:

He would make a convincing argument for memorizing Scripture, during which he would make eye contact with every one of his listeners. He could tell by their body language where they stood regarding Scripture memory. Some would look him in the eye and beam and nod approval. Others would look away and avoid his piercing eyes. He would then zero in on this crowd and multiply the reasons for memorizing. He would continue this barrage until several had raised their heads in resolve, silently acknowledging, ‘You have convinced me. I am ready to start memorizing.’¹⁸⁷

Trotman was so committed to Scripture memory that he would begin conversations by

¹⁸⁵Hunsicker, “The Rise of the Parachurch Movement,” 215.

¹⁸⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 188-89.

¹⁸⁷Downing, *Living Legacy*, 7.

asking people what the Lord had given them that morning in their devotional time, and if they had no response, he would give them a sharp rebuke. Among those who were closest to him, Trotman began and maintained the practice of “His Word the Last Word” (dubbed “H.W.L.W.”) which dictated to both Trotman and anyone around whom he was retiring for the night—most often his wife, Lila—would end the day with a passage of Scripture in an effort to fix their thoughts on Christ.¹⁸⁸

What was the basis for Trotman’s unwavering advocacy for Scripture memorization? Put simply, he had seen the power of God’s Word in his own life, and he believed that a strong foundation in the Bible was necessary for all followers of Christ.¹⁸⁹ Trotman believed, as do the Navigators today, that Scripture memorization would lead the believer to overcome worry, obtain victory over sin, gain confidence in witnessing, and maintain spiritual fitness.¹⁹⁰ Trotman understood and appropriated Scripture subjectively and sought to live according to what the Word of God was promising, commanding, or exhorting him personally, and he taught that the Bible was personal to every believer.

Biblical considerations. Trotman’s methods of discipleship were based largely on what he observed in the ministries of Jesus and Paul in Scripture. In fact, he felt that Jesus’ example with the Twelve was so crucial to biblical ministry that he considered it to be a part of what Jesus commanded in the Great Commission. According to Felts, “Trotman believed Jesus’ pattern of making disciples was as much a part of the command of the Great Commission as the content of what they were to do.”¹⁹¹ In other

¹⁸⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 103.

¹⁸⁹Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 6.

¹⁹⁰The Navigators, *Topical Memory System*, 5-6.

¹⁹¹Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 49. Felts based his assertion on an article written by Trotman in 1953 for the *Far Eastern Gospel Crusader*. The original article appeared as follows: Dawson Trotman, “Making Your Witness Count,” *Far Eastern Gospel Crusader* (Spring 1953): 3, 7.

words, Jesus' entire life was an illustration of his commands, so Trotman believed that followers of Jesus should pattern their lives, not only after Jesus' teachings, but also after Jesus' example. Trotman was fond of referring to the "with Him" principle illustrated by Jesus' ministry, for he believed that by being with Jesus, the disciples were able to absorb teachings that were not attainable via mass communication or verbal instruction alone.¹⁹²

The New Testament example given by Jesus was one of almost constant interface with his disciples. Jesus taught his disciples as he walked with them, so they were able to observe his life in addition to embracing his verbal teachings. In *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, Bill Hull notes that the cultural understanding of *disciple* was different at the time of Jesus' ministry in the first century from what it typically is today: "The lexical definition of *disciple* is 'learner.' But in the first century, the cultural understanding of *disciple* was 'follower.'"¹⁹³ Indeed, Jesus' call to his disciples was always, "Follow me."¹⁹⁴ His invitation meant a change of lifestyle and vocation to those whom he called; Simon, Andrew, James, and John, for example, left their fishing businesses; Matthew left his vocation as a tax collector. Jesus' call was a life-encompassing call to follow him in every aspect of life, and he devoted himself to those who left everything to follow him.¹⁹⁵

Trotman felt that the church had lost the discipleship methods that Jesus introduced during his ministry. "He believed," notes Felts, "that many evangelical churches emphasized preaching and *telling* people what they were to do in the Christian

¹⁹²Ibid.

¹⁹³Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 67.

¹⁹⁴See Matt 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 10:38, 16:24, 19:21; Mark 1:17, 2:14, 8:34, 10:21; Luke 5:27, 9:23, 9:59, 14:27, 18:22; John 1:43, 10:27, 12:26, 21:19, 21:11.

¹⁹⁵See Matt 19:28-30, Mark 10:29-31, and Luke 18:29-30.

life, while Christ majored on *showing* them what to do.”¹⁹⁶ In *Follow-Up*, Trotman insists that the manner of discipleship he observed in the ministry of Jesus is normative for discipling new believers contemporarily:

In getting young Christians established in the Word, no one is more qualified than older Christians who are practicing in their lives the same things. Those who are your personal counselors, the ones who may even have had a part in bringing them to Christ, should be among these. But are the new Christians to be encouraged to start daily habits of prayer and Bible study merely by being told? No, they must be shown. The person who seeks to do follow-up must be what he is trying to teach, for the learner will follow the example of the teacher sooner than he will his word.¹⁹⁷

Trotman felt strongly that God had supplied the church with this emphasis and method of discipleship in the life and ministry of Jesus, and he found it appalling that the church had abandoned what God had given.¹⁹⁸ In a message he delivered on follow-up in June 1949, Trotman said, “How the Christian world could have bypassed that simple message is more than I can understand.”¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, Trotman felt that the contemporary system of ministerial education was a failure. As a pragmatist, he struggled to see the practical value in formal theological education. In remarks he delivered to Billy Graham’s follow-up team in 1949, Trotman asserted the following:

I won’t say the majority, but a great host of Bible students . . . got a strange idea that suddenly they’re gonna, after three years something’s gonna happen and they’re gonna suddenly become workmen. . . . [We] are not saying we shouldn’t have Bible Institutes or books . . . we’re saying these have their places. . . . Now then, the failure of mission today is based, two key failures, on the fact of making disciples, and you make disciples not by the batch. [To] make disciples you gotta live with them. Jesus did it, and He didn’t send ‘em off to, to seminary. He didn’t put them inside a room for three hours. . . . He didn’t wait’ll they’d graduated from the three year course to send them forth. . . . Paul lived with them [his converts]. Maybe not

¹⁹⁶Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 52.

¹⁹⁷Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 11-12.

¹⁹⁸Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 48, 52.

¹⁹⁹Dawson Trotman, transcript of untitled message on follow-up, June 29, 1949, 1-2, quoted in Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 48.

three years, but he lived and ate and walked and slept and fought the heat and practiced and prayed together.²⁰⁰

Trotman's assessment of Jesus' ministry was that he taught and trained his disciples on the job, ensuring that they gained experience as they absorbed his teachings. He was therefore not fond of a system wherein young ministers received theological education with no practical mentoring and supervised ministry experience. He saw the goal of theological education as something more than making "Bible quiz kids;"²⁰¹ instead, he believed seminaries ought to be about producing fruitful ministerial workers.

In addition to Jesus' ministerial example, Trotman found a great deal of motivation in discipleship by studying the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. Trotman saw in Paul the perfect combination of evangelism and discipleship. Paul was a faithful and exceedingly fruitful evangelist, but he always took time to follow-up with those whom he had seen come to Christ. Indeed, Trotman noted that "the New Testament is largely made up of Paul's letters, which were follow-up letters to the converts."²⁰² When Trotman first turned his focus from evangelism-only to evangelism followed by immediate and intensive follow-up measures, he focused his study on the life and teachings of Paul.

Trotman had a particularly disturbing meeting with one of his Navigator men in 1940. George was a fruitful Navigator who had seen several men on his ship give their lives to Christ, and he kept their names recorded in a notebook. One evening, Trotman was going over George's list of names with him to see how the new converts had fared since coming to Christ. George's answers were disheartening to both men. Skinner

²⁰⁰Dawson Trotman, "Reproducing Reproducers," transcript of message delivered to Billy Graham's follow-up team, Minneapolis, September 30, 1949, quoted in Hunsicker, "The Rise of the Parachurch Movement," 183-84. "Evangelization of the World," transcript of message given at the Navigator Home at 536 South Hope on July 7, 1949, quoted in Hunsicker, "The Rise of the Parachurch Movement," 183-84.

²⁰¹Dawson Trotman, transcript of untitled message given at Westmont on July 11, 1951, quoted in Hunsicker, "The Rise of the Parachurch Movement," 186.

²⁰²Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 33; Foster, *The Navigator*, 121.

records the conversation as follows:

‘George, let me see the names of your men,’ Dawson asked. George opened his notebook. ‘Tell me about them—are they growing?’ ‘Well, this one, he seemed sincere when he made his decision, but he doesn’t come to Bible class. I don’t see him much. This one sort of avoids me; I think he may not want to give up some things. I guess none of these nine are really down to business, Daws,’ he admitted finally.²⁰³

Trotman was indignant with himself and the evangelistic system he had created for his men. He decided then that both he and the Navigators must shift their focus to include extensive follow-up measures.

In order to craft his new methods of follow-up, Trotman turned to the Pauline Epistles. Foster records that Trotman turned to the first letter written in the New Testament: 1 Thessalonians. Trotman recalls, “I put twenty-four stars in this one little epistle. It indicates that at least twenty-four times Paul recognized his responsibility to follow up on the young church at Thessalonica. Why didn’t I see this truth before?”²⁰⁴ Trotman continued on in the New Testament, spurred along by each mention of some sort of follow-up measure exhibited by the Apostle. He noted that Paul was active in follow-up through his letters, but more than that, Paul longed to have personal time with his people. Paul’s correspondence was effective, but Trotman was riveted by Paul’s desire to return to those to whom he had preached. In Acts 15:36, Luke records that “. . . some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.” To Trotman, this verse illustrated that “after his extensive evangelistic journey in Asia, Paul was anxious to care for the new Christians.”²⁰⁵ Trotman, therefore, would embrace the same concern regardless of how much time, energy, and money it required. He had seen in Acts just how much time Paul had spent in follow-up measures—“certain days . . . many days . . .

²⁰³Skinner, *Daws*, 157; Foster, *The Navigator*, 119-20.

²⁰⁴Foster, *The Navigator*, 122.

²⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 123.

a whole year . . . a long time . . . three Sabbath days . . . a year and six months . . . a good while . . . three months . . . two years”²⁰⁶—and he decided that Paul’s example was normative for his life and ministry.

Trotman drew his inspiration for follow-up primarily from Jesus and Paul, but he felt that the entire New Testament should be used as a manual for follow-up with new believers. Felts records that “when asked why he did not write a book on follow-up, Trotman replied that another one was not needed since the entire New Testament was a book of follow-up.”²⁰⁷ In *Born to Reproduce*, Trotman illustrates his claim:

James believed in it. ‘But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only,’ he said in James 1:22. Peter believed in it. ‘As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby’ (1 Peter 2:2). John believed in it. ‘I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth’ (3 John 4). All the writings of Peter, Paul, James, and most of John’s are food for the new Christian.²⁰⁸

Although he later wrote a booklet on the subject of follow-up, he nevertheless maintained his insistence that the best manual for follow-up was the New Testament. The first Christians were able to take the gospel to the world, because their “fruitful lives had been built up in the faith by the patient, tender care of those able to instruct and equip them for the Christian walk.”²⁰⁹ If the contemporary church were to follow the same pattern, Trotman asserted, its impact could be just as powerful.

Practical implementation. As has been noted, Dawson Trotman was a pragmatist. He often remarked that he would rather see a sermon than hear one, and his ministry was motivated in large part by a drive to produce fruit for the kingdom of God.²¹⁰ Lorne Sanny recalls about Trotman that “always there was that unhesitating

²⁰⁶Ibid., 124.

²⁰⁷Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 55.

²⁰⁸Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 35.

²⁰⁹Idem, *Follow-Up*, 4.

²¹⁰Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 52.

confidence that there was nothing too hard for the Lord.”²¹¹ He was a man of great faith, vision, and passion, and he was contagious. In a conversation with Morena Holmes that left her in awe of the possibilities of God, Trotman laid out his vision for world-wide Great Commission ministry:

Just think of having . . . clubs all over the U.S. in every high school and college in America, with fellows and girls digging into the Word and memorizing it and learning to witness to their friends and fathers and mothers and being real soul-winners! If we can get them into this Book and get the Book into them . . . there’ll be no way to stop it.

But what we’ve got to do is not just give ‘em a dozen verses and tell ‘em to go get ‘em. We’ve got to raise up young men and women who will yield *everything* to Him, who are willing to go all out like these guys on the ships [Navigators]. Then we’ve got to feed ‘em and train ‘em and give ‘em time to grow till they have the Word so deep in their lives it will be like fire in their bones and they’ve got to give it out. We’ll have to help them with their little problems and teach them how to look to the Lord for wisdom and guidance and everything else they need.²¹²

Trotman believed in a big God, and he believed that the church had been entrusted with the task of carrying his God’s message to the ends of the earth. He believed the Great Commission mandated that disciples—not converts—be made, and he believed that the dissemination of the gospel message to the whole world was possible in his lifetime.²¹³

Trotman consistently maintained that the fundamental aspects of discipleship were time spent in the Word, in prayer, and with others who had grown to maturity in their Christian faith. Hunsicker notes that Trotman felt effectiveness in evangelism and discipleship stemmed from two sources: “(1) one’s personal devotion to prayer, along with Bible memorization and study; and, (2) being nurtured to Christian maturity by someone who not only had developed the disciplines of prayer and effective Bible study, but also was committed to ‘reproducing’ themselves.”²¹⁴ He composed a beginner’s Bible study that he named simply *Introductory Bible Study* in which he sought to lead

²¹¹The Navigators, *Great is thy Faithfulness* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1957), 1.

²¹²Skinner, *Daws*, 155-56.

²¹³Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 21.

²¹⁴Hunsicker, “The Rise of the Parachurch Movement,” 184-85.

new (or established) Christians to a deeper understanding of and appreciation for God’s Word. He said, “The most important thing in a new Christian’s life is to learn the great truths of God’s Word and how to appropriate them. The Bible not only claims to be the Word of God and is the means by which we are saved, but actually plays a very important part throughout our Christian life.”²¹⁵ In the study, Trotman addresses four primary aspects of the Christian life to which God’s Word speaks explicitly and forcefully: eternal life, temptation, prayer, and the Christian life and witness. Each section presents a list of questions regarding some biblical truth along with Scripture references to which the student can refer in formulating an answer in his own words. The study, according to Trotman, was designed to direct the reader “to spend time daily in the Word of God,” approaching it “with a responsive heart, expecting the Holy Spirit to guide [him] into its truth.”²¹⁶

Conclusion

In his fifty short years, thirty of which were spent following Christ, Dawson Trotman achieved a global evangelistic and discipleship impact. At the time of his death in 1956, the ministry of The Navigators had 140 staff members and representatives in twelve countries around the world.²¹⁷ While these numbers seem modest in comparison to the vast ministries of others, the Lord used Trotman to initiate a ministry that, as of March 2014, had almost five thousand missionaries of seventy nationalities speaking over 130 languages and serving in more than one hundred countries throughout the world.²¹⁸ Each of these missionaries is committed to living out the principle taught in 2 Timothy

²¹⁵Dawson Trotman, *Introductory Bible Study: Personal Research on the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1951), 5.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*, 4.

²¹⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 386.

²¹⁸The Navigators, “About Us,” 2014, accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.navigators.org/us/aboutus>.

2:2 and advocated by Trotman, devoting their lives to Christ and teaching others to do the same.

Trotman's redefinition of discipleship and the use of his newly coined term, "to disciple," can be heard in Christian vernacular all around the world. Robert Felts' research indicates that Trotman's methods of discipleship have been picked up by the Wycliffe Bible Translators, the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Overseas Crusades, Mission Aviation Fellowship, and Campus Crusade for Christ, and his influence has been noted in the ministries of Overseas Missionary Fellowship, African Inland Mission, Greater Europe Mission, and World Vision.²¹⁹ Without question, Trotman's focus on the 2 Timothy 2:2 principle, one-to-one discipleship, and personal discipline in devotional times has impacted the world profoundly both through the Navigators and various other mission agencies.

Trotman's unique ministry vision was passed on to men and women of great discipline and zeal for the kingdom of God who would be used by God to reach into many different sectors of society. Following Trotman's death, *The King's Business* magazine commented that "[Trotman's] followers have a dedication and precision that would make the Hitler Youth Movement look like a disorganized band of gypsies."²²⁰ Sanny notes that Trotman left a life principle of "multiplication person to person, with each person so reached becoming a soul winner and teacher of others, who will reach others."²²¹ Today, Navigator staff scattered on college campuses, in metropolitan areas, and on military bases throughout the world are seeing tens of thousands of people trust Christ and begin the life-long process of growing in him.²²²

²¹⁹Felts, "A Critical Analysis," 132-68, 245.

²²⁰"Dawson Trotman and His Navigators," *The King's Business* (August 1956): 10.

²²¹Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 30.

²²²The Navigators, "About Us."

Trotman shaped the field of evangelism by reintroducing evangelists and churches to the vital importance of follow-up. As Skinner notes, “After Graham adopted systematic follow-up in his crusades, other evangelists and churches followed his lead and follow-up became the norm.”²²³ The fundamental importance of not leaving babes in Christ to fend for themselves is an essential component of biblical teaching, and Trotman reignited the passion for this practice.

Contemporary churches and evangelists who are blessed with new converts have a responsibility to walk alongside them, to encourage them in the Scriptures, and to help them grow in Christ. Trotman’s passion for evangelism and follow-up leading to discipleship is seen in *Born to Reproduce*:

If I were the minister of a church and had deacons or elders to pass the plate and choir members to sing, I would say, ‘Thank God for your help. We need you. Praise the Lord for these extra things that you do,’ but I would keep pressing home the big job – ‘Be fruitful and multiply.’ All these other things are incidental to the supreme task of winning a man or woman to Jesus Christ and then helping him or her to go on.²²⁴

If the church is to flourish, it must return to the biblical call to make disciples of all nations. The primary task of the church is captured in the mission statement of the Navigators: “To know Christ and make Him known.” Trotman correctly taught that the church must focus, not on evangelism alone or discipleship alone, but on both as critical elements to the very commission that it received from the Lord Jesus Christ to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19 ESV).

²²³Skinner, *Daws*, 388.

²²⁴Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 31-32.

CHAPTER 3

TROTMAN'S PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Perhaps the chief defining characteristic of Dawson Trotman's Christian life was his faithful devotion to an intense regimen of personal spiritual disciplines. Trotman came to Christ through Scripture memorization, and the foundation was thereby set in his life that he would always be a staunch advocate of Scripture's power to change lives. This chapter will focus on Trotman's own practice of personal spiritual disciplines. Before his routines are chronicled, however, the chapter will first investigate the foundations of his practices. The chapter will look first to the key scriptural passages that informed Trotman's insistence on daily spending time with the Lord, and then it will look to the other sources of influence on this area of his life. Trotman's core theological beliefs regarding personal spiritual disciplines will then be examined, followed by a summary of his practice of those disciplines. Thankfully, Trotman was a dedicated journal-keeper, so much of this chapter will be derived from his own recollections of his time with the Lord and others' observations of his intense devotion.

Key Biblical Passages Trotman Used in Formulating His Personal Spiritual Disciplines

Dawson Trotman's walk with Christ began because two women were led by God strategically to choose specific passages of Scripture that would capture his rebel heart. Misses Mills and Thomas, two of Trotman's schoolteachers who had been praying for him for six years, were choosing specific verses of Scripture to have the young people at their church memorize as part of a competition. Trotman recounts, "On the Friday night I was arrested, [Miss Mills] was home with Miss Thomas, looking up verses in the Bible, trying to find ten on the subject of salvation which they could give to the young

people to memorize. Little did she know that the boy for whom she had been praying for six years was going to memorize those verses.”¹ Trotman realized that his conversion to Christianity was the result of God’s sovereign movement, Misses Mills and Thomas’ faithfulness in teaching God’s Word, and the powerful prayers of God’s people being answered. Trotman recalls that his behavior had taken a turn for the better just prior to his salvation, but God was not interested in his becoming only a little better: “Going to young people’s meeting on Sunday had not changed me,” he said. “I was spending Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights at the taverns and the beer joints, and going to church on Sunday and feeling, ‘Well, I’m a little better. I guess a little of this good won’t hurt me, after all.’”² In retrospect, Trotman could see the powerful influence of unseen forces working on his yet unsaved soul. He notes, “But Miss Mills was praying, and the Word of God was working.”³ With those forces in play, his sinful soul did not stand a chance at remaining that way.

God used twenty verses of Scripture and the prayers of two spinster schoolteachers to bring Dawson Trotman to Christ, and he never forgot it. The biblical basis for his personal spiritual disciplines begins with those twenty verses that were selected specifically to relate the message of the gospel. Trotman credits his unwitting possession of those twenty verses in his heart with keeping him out of trouble as a young Christian:

The Bible teaches that if any man can bridle his tongue, he can bridle his whole body. That was one of the first lessons I learned at the beginning of my Christian life. That is one of the reasons why I love to see a brand-new Christian begin to get the Word of God down into his heart. If it had not been for those 20 verses, I would have been back in the dance hall and the beer joints.⁴

¹Dawson Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1975), 10.

²Ibid., 13.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 15.

He had been transformed by the Word of God, and he sought immediately to hide more of it in his heart. Within the first three years of his journey as a follower of Christ, he had memorized one thousand verses.⁵

The Word of God

Trotman's own experience had taught him that the Word of God must be paramount in the Christian life. Such was his devotion to Scripture that biographer Robert Foster recalls, "Daws really had only one string on his guitar, and he would pluck it often and loud: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' (Colossians 3:16). Dawson wanted the Bible to be so at home in his life that he could obey it anywhere and handle it as a master swordsman, wielding the 'sword of the Spirit.'"⁶ To the believer, whether young or old, Trotman's clarion call was just that—to let the word of Christ dwell in him, and increasingly so. To Trotman, a believer could never say he had hidden enough of the Word in his heart. He saw this pattern prescribed in Scripture:

Peter, as pacesetter for the saints, was not negligent to put them always in remembrance of the things in which they had already been established. He exhorted them to take heed to the written Word of God, holding it up as a 'more sure Word' (II Peter 1:12-19). Paul too challenged both pastor and people to continue taking in the Word of God. He himself was never satisfied to rest on either the knowledge or accomplishments which were already his. 'Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended . . . I press toward the mark . . . be followers together of me . . . ' (Philippians 3:13-17).⁷

Trotman found these patterns to be normative and contended that Christians must continue ingesting and digesting the Word of God, regardless of their longevity in Christ.

Trotman's insistence on the importance of the Word of God in people's lives transcended age, spiritual maturity, and even language. During his first missionary

⁵Ibid.

⁶Robert Foster, *The Navigator* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), 61. Foster herein references the "sword of the Spirit" as an unstated reference to Eph 6:17, in which the "sword of the Spirit" is "the Word of God."

⁷Dawson Trotman, *Follow-Up: Conserving the Fruits of Evangelism* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1952), 13-14.

journey outside of the United States, Trotman was particularly gripped by the lostness of the people he encountered and the apparent hopelessness of their situations. He recounts his experience in the Fall 1942 edition of the *Navigators Log*: “The burden of those whose eyes have been blinded by idolatry, traditions, and the precepts and false teachings of men, the burden of seeing and hearing of whole tribes (small nations of people) who have never had a single sentence from the Word of God translated into their own tongue—began to grip me.”⁸ Those people—indeed, all people—need to hear and experience the powerful Word of God, and Trotman intended to do something about it. Lorne Sanny would later recall that “the experience of coming to know Christ in reality and then beginning to grow in the Christian life through the Word of God hidden in his heart demonstrated a principle he would use with thousands of people in years to come.”⁹

On the truthfulness of Scripture. Scripture is replete with passages that not only affirm its truthfulness and power, but also passages that call those who would hear to listen intently to its message. Trotman was particularly fond of Scripture’s self-attestation in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Foster records that “Dawson took 2 Timothy 3:16 to heart. He dissected it, meditated on it, memorized it, and took a good look at its context. Then he went to work to apply it. ‘All Scripture is profitable.’ . . . ‘All’ meant ‘all’ to Dawson. It was his obligation to read it all, study it all, and hear, memorize, and meditate on ‘all Scripture’ as much as possible in his lifetime.”¹⁰ Trotman recognized not only the truthfulness of the Bible, but he also

⁸Dawson Trotman, *Navigators Log*, Fall 1942 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

⁹Lorne Sanny, *Dawson Trotman: The Pathfinder* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1958), 6.

¹⁰Foster, *The Navigator*, 66.

had a deep hunger to receive its full benefit in his life. He once remarked, “I must learn his Word. I must know it. I must believe it. I must let it run its full course in my life.”¹¹

Further, Trotman often mentioned the power inherent in the Word of God, to which the Bible itself testifies in Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” After a particularly poignant time with the Lord on March 2, 1931, Trotman recorded the overflow of his heart in his journal. He notes:

Sin has been confessed. The following passages flood my soul. God’s Word is alive, powerful, sharper than a sword, piercing, discerning; it is cleansing (John 15:3) like rain, bringing forth, budding, giving bread to the eater, seed to the sower These are His words, alive, coming forth from His mouth. They’re His. They’re mine. I’m His, He’s mine. John 15:1-7. I must, I can abide. John 14:21. John 15:10. 1 John 5:3.¹²

Trotman not only believed the Word to be alive, powerful, sharp, and active; he experienced its power in his own life. On another occasion, Trotman was moved by reading the narrative of God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. He records the following:

While waiting upon the Lord and reading His Word he speaks to me very definitely. I was reading II Sam the first 7 chapters. I was strangely aware that God was nigh unto me. God was, in the account in Samuel, with David for His people, Israel’s, sake. II Samuel 5:10-12. David enquired many times of the Lord. I am and was then peculiarly and especially aware of mine own insufficiency and dependence upon the Lord. Chapter 7 wherein David was promised what God should verily do, burst with special significance before me. While reading the second time Heb. 6:16-18 flashed into my mind; not knowing what it was I look up. I cannot explain how definitely the Lord spoke to me in view of the boys’ work in the light of America’s, yea the world’s, need. O, but that through Chap. 7, also Isa. 41:10 and Heb. 6:16-18, Rom. 4:20, 21 He did speak. I am as sure as that Carey the missionary knew. I trust God, His Word, not myself nor my feelings.¹³

¹¹Dawson Trotman, *S.T.S. Bible Study*, quoted in Ken Albert, Susan Fletcher, and Doug Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2011), 104.

¹²Dawson Trotman, personal journal, March 2, 1931 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹³Trotman, personal journal, March 17, 1931. Note that 2 Sam 5:10-12 says the following: “And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him. And Hiram king of Tyre

Trotman felt resolutely that any inconsistency between his emotions and God’s Word was solved easily by giving the victory to God’s Word and seeking to adjust his life accordingly. According to Foster, “[Trotman] believed in the verbal plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Inerrancy had not become an issue in his day, but he certainly would have maintained that the Scriptures were without error of any kind. He came to his conclusion, however, not by a doctrinaire approach, but through the influence of the memorized Word of God on his life.”¹⁴

On the efficacy of Scripture. Trotman believed not only in the truthfulness of Scripture but also in its effectiveness. Skinner records one instance in particular during which Trotman was dreaming about the possibility of having two million souls saved as a result of the Navigator work. As he dreamed, he said, “Just think of having Dunamis and Martures clubs all over the U.S. in every high school and college in America, with fellows and girls digging into the Word and memorizing it and learning to witness to their friends and fathers and mothers and being real soul-winners! If we can get them into this Book and get the Book into them . . . there’ll be no way to stop it!”¹⁵ Trotman believed in the power of the Word of God in the lives of human beings—not only in the lives of those being directly affected by its power, but also in those lives they would touch.

sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David a house. And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel’s sake.” Heb 6:16-18 says, “For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” Isa 41:10 records God’s words to Israel: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” Finally, Rom 4:20-21 says the following: “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.”

¹⁴Foster, *The Navigator*, 72.

¹⁵Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: A Man Who Trusted God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1974), 155. By “the Book,” Trotman meant the Bible.

Trotman believed the Word of God was powerful enough to bring a sinner to repentance. The Navigators are responsible for creating the Bridge to Life illustration. Trotman learned that Roy Robertson had devised this method of sharing the gospel message in China, and he immediately implemented it in the United States. Further, he insisted that this method be used to train Navigators to share their faith.¹⁶ In “The Bridge” tract, very little text is included that is not Scripture itself.¹⁷ In an article he wrote for *Vision and Venture* in August 1954, Trotman related the story of a sailor who felt as though he did not know how to win others to the Lord. This sailor understood what had happened in his own life, but he did not know how to explain that process to another. Trotman records what happened next in the following:

As he pondered the question, one of his buddies walked by. The first sailor handed him the verse cards [used in the Navigator Topical Memory System]. ‘Will you check me on these? Listen while I quote them.’ A surprised buddy reached for the cards. As he listened, a reflective look crossed his face. ‘The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life . . .’ ‘Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature . . .’ and so on. Each verse seemed to drive straight home to his heart the story of God’s wonderful plan of salvation; and before long, he asked the Lord Jesus Christ to come into his life. Thus, the one who did not know how to witness for Christ found that the Word of God written upon his own heart was the effective instrument in reaching another life.¹⁸

Trotman believed that “through the good seed of the Word dropped into a prepared heart, God perform[s] the miracle of the new birth.”¹⁹ He asserted in his “Faithful Men” that human beings “are born again through the Word (I Pet. 1:23).”²⁰

¹⁶Ken Albert, Susan Fletcher, and Doug Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2011), 25.

¹⁷The Navigators, “The Bridge” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹⁸Dawson Trotman, “Hidden Power,” *Vision and Venture* (August 1954): 7.

¹⁹Dawson Trotman, “Making Your Witness Count,” *Far Eastern Gospel Crusader* (Spring 1953).

²⁰Dawson Trotman, “Faithful Men” (unpublished manuscript, Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 42. 1 Pet 1:23 states, “[Ye have been] born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.”

On developing the Christian. Trotman’s entire ministry was shaped by his insistence that conversion to Christianity is not the final step in one’s dealings with God; rather, it is the first step. “It is God’s plan,” insisted Trotman, “that these new babes in Christ grow. All provision is made for their growth into maturity”²¹ According to Jim Downing, Trotman’s favorite text to preach—the one Downing heard him preach more than any other—was Colossians 1:28: “[Christ] whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”²² Trotman wanted to see converts mature, and he believed that a chief component in their Christian growth was getting the Word of God rooted deeply in their lives. In *Going on with Christ*, the follow-up pack of memory verses that was distributed to new believers after they had completed *Beginning with Christ* (i.e., *B Rations*),²³ Trotman said, “We cannot too strongly emphasize that His Word is the source of daily victory for you. To describe fully the part that the Word plays in your daily walk, work and worship, this booklet would have to become a volume.”²⁴ He went on to describe just a few ways in which the Bible is used by God to bring about growth in Christians, noting the following:

It is through God’s Word that—He directs your paths (see Psalm 119:105); Your faith is strengthened (Romans 10:17); You are fed (I Peter 2:2, 3); You grow (Acts 20:32); Joy is brought into your Christian life (John 15:11); Obedience is made possible (John 14:21); You have the means wherewith to witness (Proverbs 22:17, 18). II Timothy 3:16 sums it up by saying that the Scriptures were given to you for ‘instruction in righteousness.’²⁵

The “instruction in righteousness” mentioned by the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16 is

²¹Trotman, Dawson Trotman, *Born to Reproduce* (1975; repr. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 13.

²²Downing clarifies, “The footnote in Dawson’s Bible cross-referenced Matthew 5:48, which explained that the word *perfect* means ‘to be fully mature.’” Downing, *Living Legacy*, 24.

²³Dawson Trotman, *Beginning with Christ* (Los Angeles: The Navigators, 1945).

²⁴Dawson Trotman, *Going on with Christ* (Los Angeles: The Navigators, 1943), 1.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 2.

given so that, according to the subsequent verse, “the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:17). That perfection—the end to which Paul strove in Colossians 1:28—was the same end to which Trotman labored, and it took the Word of God being deeply rooted in the believer to reach that point.

In devising his scheme for follow-up with new Christians, Trotman argued that the first need of a spiritual babe—much like one of the first needs of a newborn infant—is food. Trotman combined two verses to provide evidence for his point: “The first and continual need in the spiritual life is for food: ‘. . . brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up . . . As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby’ was the advice written to those who had tasted God’s grace (Acts 20:32; I Peter 2:2).”²⁶ Trotman believed in the transformative power of the Bible—provided that those who heard the Word also obeyed it—and he committed himself to getting it into new converts’ lives as quickly as possible. He said, “I am absolutely convinced that the Bible completely changes the lives of men and women. . . . It has completely changed my life. I’ll never be the same again since I was introduced to God’s Holy Word, the Bible.”²⁷

Unsurprisingly, Trotman commented about the Bible’s place in a new Christian’s life in his *Introductory Bible Study* that, according to Trotman, had been devised to be “a plan from which [a new believer] would not soon graduate, but which he might use for months or years if he so desired. This study plan was sent without charge to members of the armed forces who made application to [the Navigator] office.”²⁸ Trotman opens the study by noting the importance of knowing the Bible for oneself and referencing the commendation Luke gave to the Bereans who heard the Apostle Paul’s

²⁶Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 8.

²⁷Foster, *The Navigator*, 78.

²⁸Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 23.

words in Acts 17:11: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” Having quoted Acts 17:11, Trotman avers that many Christians of his day often struggle in their faith because they fail to search the Scriptures, and even when they do look to the Bible, they do so with a mind that is closed to the truth that is therein revealed. Such should not be the case with those endeavoring to undertake this study.²⁹

Trotman furthers his argument by noting that “the most important thing in a new Christian’s life is to learn the great truths of God’s Word and how to appropriate them. The Bible not only claims to be the Word of God and is the means by which we are saved, but actually plays a very important part throughout our Christian life.”³⁰ He cites Romans 10:17—“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”—to show that faith comes through the Word. He also references three verses from Psalm 119 to further his argument. He first references Psalm 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,” to illustrate that God directs believers through His Word. Second, he lists Psalm 119:9—“wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word”—to affirm that believers are cleansed as they follow God’s Word. Third, he cites Psalm 119:11, which says “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee,” to show that victory over sinfulness is made possible by storing God’s Word in one’s heart.³¹ He further mentions

²⁹Dawson Trotman, *Introductory Bible Study: Personal Research on the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1951), 3.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 5.

³¹*Ibid.* See also Trotman’s admonition to new converts using these same verses in *Beginning with Christ*. He notes, “Now we want to be even more specific with regard to partaking of the Word of God. In the 9th and 11th verses of Psalm 119 we read, ‘Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word,’ and then the Psalmist speaks to the Lord saying, ‘Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.’ So we challenge you to hide it in your heart—to memorize it. Accompanying this booklet we have prepared a few passages with which you may begin.” Trotman, *Beginning with Christ*, 4.

the Word's place in spiritual warfare by noting that "[Christians] can overcome [Satan] only as [they] use the weapon which God has provided. Ephesians 6:17 says 'Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.' Not only is the Word of God spoken of as the sword of the Spirit but it is that through which faith comes as a shield to ward off the darts of the enemy (Romans 10:17, Ephesians 6:16)."³²

On gospel propagation. Trotman's motto, which continues today as the motto of the Navigators, was "To Know Christ and Make Him Known."³³ According to Downing, the ministry of Dawson Trotman and of the Navigators has always been and shall always be to "lead people to Christ and build them up to where they can repeat the process."³⁴ Trotman believed that once Christians had the Word of God in them, the next step was for it to come out of them as they witnessed for Christ. He admonished each individual believer to "load [his] heart with this precious Seed" in the expectation that "God will direct [him] to those whom [he] can lead to Christ."³⁵ Trotman believed that the end of studying the Bible was the glory of God, and he noted that Jesus himself told how God is glorified: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (John 15:8). After citing this verse in an article for the *Park Street Spire*, Trotman asked his readers pointedly, "Are you studying the Word of God and hiding it in your heart, so that you will have something to give out? Are you giving it out?"³⁶ Trotman insisted that the

³²Trotman, *Beginning with Christ*, 5-6. The back cover of the original booklet contains the following unattributed quotation: "God's Word will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from God's Word."

³³This motto graces the primary signage in front of the Navigators Headquarters at Glen Eyrie in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the front page of the Navigators website at www.navigators.org, and several of the Navigator publications.

³⁴Jim Downing, *Living Legacy: Reflections on Dawson Trotman and Lorne Sanny* (Colorado Springs: DawsonMedia, 2007), 8.

³⁵Dawson Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 36.

³⁶Dawson Trotman, "Discipleship," *Park Street Spire* (June 1956), quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 211.

Bible be used for each of its stated purposes in the lives of all Christians.

Scripture Memorization

Alongside his insistence that followers of Christ immerse themselves regularly in the Word of God, Trotman maintained that God demanded more than merely giving consistent attention to the Word. Such was just the beginning of the process. To prove his point, Trotman pointed to the greatest commandment as denoted by Jesus in Matthew 22:37: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” He recognized that Jesus was therein quoting that passage of Scripture in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 that says, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Trotman, however, did not stop at the end of the fifth verse. He implored his readers to continue to verse 6: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart.” He continued, “The command to memorize God’s words is linked to the greatest commandment in the Bible!”³⁷

Trotman found further justification for his insistence on Scripture memorization in the Proverbs. Quoting Proverbs 6:20-21—“My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck”—he said, “God’s Word must be ‘bound continually’ on the heart! Just as a farmer binds hay with bailing wire, throwing bind after bind around the bundle until it is secure, so are memorized verses to be secured in the heart by continual review.”³⁸ He then quotes Proverbs 22:18, which says, “For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips.” This verse, he

³⁷Dawson Trotman, “How to Memorize Scripture,” quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 212. See also Dawson Trotman, “Explanation of ‘The Hand,’” transcript of message given April 5, 1946 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 10.

³⁸Trotman, “How to Memorize Scripture,” 218-19.

says, reminds Christians that “it is only as we *keep* (retain) His words within that they are made available for instant use by the Holy Spirit.”³⁹ Trotman believed not only that the Word was to be memorized, but that it was to be reviewed and thereby kept on the lips of believers.

Often when Trotman referred to memorized Scripture, he referred to it as being “written on the table of thine heart.”⁴⁰ This reference comes from Proverbs 7:1-3, wherein the writer encourages his son as follows: “My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.” In “Faithful Men,” Trotman listed Deuteronomy 11:18—“Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes”—in addition to John 15:7—“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”—as proofs that God at least “commends” the memorization of Scripture, if not explicitly “commanding” it.⁴¹

Perhaps the most well-known passage associated with Scripture memorization is the one Trotman used as the reference for “Memorize” in his “Hand” illustration. Recall that the index finger of the hand that grasped the Bible was labeled “Memorize,” and the Scripture reference provided is Psalm 119:9, 11. Trotman explained,

³⁹Ibid., 219.

⁴⁰Trotman used this phrase many times when completing his Bible studies. In an undated AlphOmega Bible study on Ps 1, he was encouraged by Ps 1:2 to “have [the Word] on the tables of my heart that I can meditate and thus produce fruit for my GOD.” Dawson Trotman, AlphOmega Bible Study on Ps 1 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 4. Elsewhere, in an undated S.T.S. Bible Study on John 14—specifically in response to John 14:26—Trotman said, “So oft when I am memorizing Scripture and writing it on the tables of my heart and know that these passages are the Word of God, this promise comes to my mind . . .” Dawson Trotman, S.T.S. Bible Study on John 14 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 6.

⁴¹Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 45.

“Memorizing God’s Word enables us to use the sword of the Spirit to overcome Satan and temptations . . . to have it readily available for witnessing or helping others with a ‘word in season.’”⁴² On the back of his *Going on with Christ* booklet sent to new converts, Trotman included Psalm 40:8—“I delight to do thy will O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.”⁴³ This verse enhanced the message of the booklet’s eighth chapter, which emphasized the biblical command to witness. Skinner recalls how Trotman felt about the influence of memorized Scripture in his own life and the practical value of hiding God’s Word in his heart; she recounts, “Dawson’s own store of the Word hidden in his heart had greatly enriched his life, and he noticed how often a verse of Scripture came seemingly out of nowhere to answer a problem of the moment or a question raised in witnessing. Memorized Scripture had brought him to Christ, and he was convinced it was a must for the would-be soulwinner.”⁴⁴

Prayer

Based on his high view of Scripture, Trotman’s view of God was as theologically conservative and magnificent as anyone could have. When, for example, he was visiting Glen Eyrie in August 1953 not long after the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association had backed out of a partnership with the Navigators to purchase the sprawling estate in Colorado Springs, Trotman climbed to the top of an area known as Razorback Ridge that overlooked the manor.⁴⁵ The Navigators record that “with Bible open to 1 Chronicles 29:11-13 he scratched the reference on the sandstone rock face to

⁴²Dawson Trotman, “The Hand” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

⁴³Trotman, *Going on with Christ*, back cover.

⁴⁴Skinner, *Daws*, 44.

⁴⁵Lorne Sanny, “Sketch of Dawson Trotman” in “Memorial Service for Dawson Trotman – Glen Eyrie Castle Auditorium, Wednesday, June 27, 1956” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

witness his pledge [to purchase the Glen].”⁴⁶ The words he referenced are those of King David:

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might, and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

Those were not empty words to Trotman; they were true. He believed them with every fiber of his being, and he sought to instill the truth of the principles therein listed in everyone he met. He believed God to be the ultimate power in and beyond the universe, citing often Psalm 115:3: “. . . our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.” Dawson held to that truth in light of struggles in his own life, and his wife uttered those same words to the Navigator staff the day he died.⁴⁷

Power of God through prayer. With such an overwhelming trust in the power of God, Trotman relished the opportunity to connect with the Almighty through prayer. “Prayer,” he said, “is the means by which we talk to God. No life is strong without it.”⁴⁸ To be clear, he did not believe in the power of prayer; rather, he believed in the power of God. In the December 1940 edition of *Timely News Tips*, Trotman noted, “Someone has said, ‘Prayer changes things.’ This is true in a sense, but it should rather

⁴⁶The Navigators, *The Glen Eyrie Purchase* (1973; repr. Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 2013), 19.

⁴⁷Lorne Sanny, Letter to Navigator “Friends,” July 28, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1. Robert Coleman was with Lorne Sanny when he received word via a messenger from Lila Trotman that her husband had perished. In *The Heart of the Gospel*, Coleman reflects on this occasion by saying, “I thought of that dear wife and mother standing at the lake there watching men grapple for her husband’s body. I could imagine what was going through her mind—the agonizing unanswered question, *Why?* Yet, amid the heartbreak, there was a quiet confidence that God was still in control, that even in this tragedy, he would somehow bring forth good to those who love him . . .” Such was the attitude of Dawson and Lila Trotman about God; they believed him to be preeminent and supreme, and they trusted him completely. Their trust allowed them most often to dwell in God’s peace regardless of life’s circumstances. Robert E. Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel: The Theology Behind the Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 248.

⁴⁸Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 42.

be, ‘GOD changes things through prayer.’ Now, if this is true, there will be things that never shall change because we have not prayed.”⁴⁹ Skinner records that he wrote in his Bible next to 2 Samuel 7, “Prayer is God speaking things into existence through human lips.”⁵⁰ One of the chief ways in which those closest to Trotman remember him is as a man of prayer.⁵¹ As prayer was one of the spokes of his Wheel illustration that is still used by the Navigators today, so was it one of the cornerstones of Trotman’s own life.

Without question, the primary passage of Scripture to which Trotman clung regarding prayer was Jeremiah 33:3. To understand the context of this important verse, it is necessary to examine two preceding passages: Jeremiah 32:27 and 32:38-41. God, speaking to Jeremiah, first says in 32:27, “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?” Then, following his diatribe against a disobedient Israel, God proclaims the future he has for Israel after the impending exile in 32:38-41:

And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul.

These verses were part of the promise. They declared the character and power of Almighty God, and they declared the intentions of God for his people. As one who did

⁴⁹Dawson Trotman, “On the Subject of Prayer,” *Timely News Tips: Full of Dynamite* 1, no. 6 (December 1940): 2.

⁵⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 62.

⁵¹Foster, *The Navigator*, 30. Several times in his personal journal, Trotman recalled situations in which circumstances looked bleak but were trumped by God after prayer. On February 15, 1945, for example, Trotman records an incident that occurred while traveling. He was informed just before boarding his plane that he did not have the necessary paperwork to leave the island where he had been. He writes, “I am informed that unless a certain man gives the word I am stuck, so I lay the matter before the LORD. Stand by the Naval Intelligence Officer—hear the phone ring—nobody answers—I pick it up and hold it until the officer comes and, sure enough, it is my release. Praised the LORD many times for letting me through.” Trotman, personal journal, February 15, 1945. Likewise, on February 2, 1946, Trotman records, “Informed plane would be 4 hours late into Chicago. Prayer is made. Arrive 1-3/4 hours late, just right. Trotman, personal journal, February 2, 1946.

not relinquish God's promises just because they were made in another dispensation, Trotman maintained that those passages were meant not only for Israel but also for him and his contemporaries.⁵²

The statements and promises of God in Jeremiah 32:27, 38-41 were the precursor. The gem, according to Trotman, came in the third verse of the next chapter. God, speaking again to Jeremiah, says, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3). In *The Need of the Hour*, Trotman recounts the process by which this passage so deeply impacted his life:

In the previous chapter Jeremiah had said to the Lord, 'Ah Lord God! Behold, thou has made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee' (Jeremiah 32:17). Ten verses later the Lord says to Jeremiah, 'I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?' Then just a few verses later He says, 'All right, if you believe me, call unto me and I will answer.'"⁵³

This promise, which Trotman received as if the Lord had begun his statement by calling Daws by name, became the foundation of Trotman's prayer life. Foster recalls that "because he believed God's promise in Jeremiah 33:3 to answer those who call upon Him, the word 'impossible' was not in his vocabulary."⁵⁴ Not only was this promise the foundation of his prayers, but it was also the foundation of his ministry. He would come to celebrate many times seeing God's hand in showing him "great and mighty things" which he formerly did not know.

Trotman taught that Jeremiah 33:3 had a complementary passage in the New Testament. He maintained that the same idea was presented in Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now

⁵²Skinner recounts the following regarding Trotman's stance toward dispensationalism: "With due respect to the dispensationalists, he still did not feel Scripture should be apportioned to certain peoples for certain times exclusively. In the margin above Jeremiah he wrote, 'Is it possible that God wrote this whole Book to one small people, or did He, knowing the end from the beginning, write to others herein.'" Skinner, *Daws*, 63.

⁵³Dawson Trotman, *The Need of the Hour* (1957; repr. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 23.

⁵⁴Foster, *The Navigator*, 39.

unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” In a sermon entitled “Call Unto Me—Jeremiah 33:3,” Trotman said of this verse, “All I have to do is say, ‘Father,’ and I’m hooked into heaven. And I am talking to Somebody who really knows what it’s all about and can do anything He wants.”⁵⁵ Sanny recalls that “[Trotman] found promises like Jeremiah 33:3 and Ephesians 3:20 and wondered at their depthless possibilities.”⁵⁶ He believed his life, and by corollary every life, was strengthened by intimate connection with Almighty God, and he insisted that believers should both believe in and receive that power through prayer.

Attitude of prayer. Trotman’s recognition of God’s greatness and power led him to espouse and encourage others to maintain an attitude of complete confidence in God during prayer. Put simply, Trotman learned not to ask for small things from a big God. In his recorded sermon on Jeremiah 33:3, he asked his audience what they had asked their big God for the last time they prayed. He prefaced his question by saying, “You know, I often ask Christians, what’s the biggest thing you’ve asked God this week?” He then exclaimed:

You’ve gone to God the Father, the Maker of the universe, the One who holds the worlds in His hand! What did you ask for? Did you ask for peanuts . . . toys . . . or did you ask for *continents*? I want to tell you, it’s a tragedy, the little bitty, itsy bitsy things we ask an Almighty God, when he says, ‘You call unto me, and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you know not!’⁵⁷

One of the young men who was involved in Trotman’s Dunamis clubs later recalled, “He always said, ‘Ask for big things. Take God at His Word and ask big. Attempt great

⁵⁵Dawson Trotman, “Call Unto Me—Jeremiah 33:3,” Discipleship Library, mp3 file, 7:20, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://turret2.discipleshiplibrary.com/NET00032.mp3>.

⁵⁶Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 8.

⁵⁷Trotman, “Call Unto Me—Jeremiah 33:3,” 10:00. Emphasis original.

things for God; expect great things from God.”⁵⁸ Lorne Sanny recalls that Trotman’s attitude toward God’s promises in the Word is that they were meant to be claimed in prayer.⁵⁹

To see Christians failing to claim God’s promises in Scripture through prayer seemed not only to bother Trotman theologically, but also to anger him to some degree. He felt that it was senseless for Israel to neglect and reject what God had promised them in the Old Testament, and he asserted firmly the scriptural notion that every promise of God finds its “yes” in Christ.⁶⁰ In a seminar message delivered in July 1951, Trotman cited 2 Corinthians 1:20 and then said, “All the promises of God in Christ to us are absolute. . . . when God promises something, He’s gonna fulfill it at any cost But I wanna tell you heaven and earth’s gonna pass away before God will fail of any one (knocks to emphasize each word) word.”⁶¹ Having recognized God’s provision to his children by way of the promises made in the Word, Trotman lamented that most of his Christian contemporaries failed to embrace that which God had so abundantly given them by saying, “And today we’ve got Christians . . . ask ‘em what they got. About all they got is a Book full of unclaimed promises.”⁶² Such a reality was inexcusable to Trotman.

⁵⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 142-43. I recognize that this quotation includes Trotman quoting William Carey. Daniel Akin notes that the original Carey quotation was “Expect great things. Attempt great things.” He then adds parenthetically, “Later tradition would add ‘from God’ and ‘for God,’ though this is undoubtedly what he meant.” Daniel Akin, *10 Who Changed the World* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 2.

⁵⁹Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 8.

⁶⁰Skinner records Trotman’s attitude by saying, “Why should Christians who claim God’s promise of peace from Isaiah 26:3 or forgiveness of sin from Isaiah 1:18 consider the promise in Isaiah 58:12 off limits? . . . Telling later of God’s promises to him from Isaiah for his life work, he explained with a light touch, ‘Some say the Book of Isaiah is for the Jews. Well it’s full of promises, and as I looked around, I didn’t see the Jews claiming them—somebody should be using them!’” Skinner, *Daws*, 63.

⁶¹Dawson Trotman, “Possessing the Promises,” transcript of message given on July 17, 1951 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 7. 2 Cor 1:20 says, “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”

⁶²*Ibid.*

In addition to trusting the possibilities of a limitless God, Trotman believed Christians should approach God with an attitude of faith. He based his assertion on Hebrews 11:6, which says “. . . without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Not only must the one who approaches God believe God, but he must also seek him diligently. Trotman later noted, “Prayer is the privilege of every CHRISTian. Few avail themselves of this wonderful heritage as a child of the King to enter into His presence, however, because prayer is hard work: it is taxing work: and flesh and blood shrink from such.”⁶³ He went on to reference the disciples’ weakness during Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane as proof that prayer is no easy task—that “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41)—but that those who understand who God is and the privilege of approaching boldly his throne of grace must do so diligently.⁶⁴

Finally, Trotman viewed God not as a stingy deity who must be coerced into giving good gifts to his children; rather, Trotman trusted in the goodness of God and his desire to bless those who belong to him. The fundamental text affirming this notion is Matthew 7:7-11, which notes the following:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Affirming the truth of this passage, Trotman asserted that “prayer is not conquering God’s reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness.”⁶⁵ Trotman was convinced of

⁶³Trotman, “On the Subject of Prayer,” 2. The pattern of capitalization is original to Trotman.

⁶⁴“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

⁶⁵Trotman, *Introductory Bible Study*, 15.

God's love for his children, his passion to accomplish his purposes in the lives of his people, and his ability to do it. He encouraged believers with the following:

Just relax. Don't try to cook yourself up a good deal. Don't do anything to get something for yourself. You let the Lord do that. Don't try to maneuver; don't use flattery. Don't do anything to attempt to get an edge—or you have had the course. Let the Lord do all the giving of profit . . . Why? The Eternal God . . . is watching over you. He has your future at heart.⁶⁶

Part of the attitude of prayer, according to Trotman, was to understand not only the power of God but also his good will toward his children.

Fundamentals of prayer. Because he felt it to be such a vital part of the normal Christian life, Trotman made significant efforts to ingrain in new believers the centrality of prayer as a regular and necessary practice. Trotman often taught Scripture reading and prayer together as two parts of an inseparable whole, and in one of the Bible studies he and Theodore Epp developed for new believers, they discussed how the two disciplines function together by saying, “We begin to know the mind of God as we carefully read the pages of the Book which He has given us; and we enter into His purpose and plans, as revealed in the Book, when we reach Him through prayer.”⁶⁷

Trotman expected the Christian's early prayer life to be something of a struggle as the new believer came to understand the fundamentals of prayer and became comfortable in its regular practice, so he sought to provide a firm foundation for babes in Christ by noting several passages of Scripture he deemed as essential to the practice.

First, Trotman emphasized the basis of prayer by noting that Christians are able to boldly approach the throne of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, he asserted, such a posture in prayer is essential:

⁶⁶Trotman, “Immutability of God,” quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 204.

⁶⁷Dawson Trotman and Theodore Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, vol. 2 (Lincoln: The Good News Broadcasting Association, 1964), 11.

Unless one prays to God the Father in the Name of Jesus Christ, His Son, that prayer does not rise higher than the head of the person who utters it. God can be approached only in the Name of Christ (John 16:23, 24). We have no merits of our own which give us the right to come to Him. The way into God's presence is through Jesus Christ, who was crucified and raised again from the dead for us (Hebrews 10:20).⁶⁸

In his *Introductory Bible Study*, Trotman asks new believers how they should approach God in prayer, and the answer is given by direction to John 14:13—"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."⁶⁹

Trotman affirms heartily that the reason for believers' practice of approaching God through Christ is given in 1 Timothy 2:5, which says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."⁷⁰

Second, Trotman emphasized what he dubbed the prerequisites to answered prayer. The principal prerequisite, as prescribed in Scripture, is personal righteousness before the Lord. Trotman quotes 1 Peter 3:12—"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil"—and Psalm 66:18—"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"—in making his point that "sin breaks fellowship between us and God. The

⁶⁸Ibid. John 16:23-24 states, "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Heb 10:20 records that believers have access to God "by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." Trotman here seems to assert boldly that no prayers should be lifted to God the Son nor to God the Spirit but that all prayers should be directed to God the Father through God the Son. Theologian Wayne Grudem argues that, while the prayers recorded in the New Testament are overwhelmingly addressed to God the Father, nothing in the New Testament forbids addressing prayers to the other members of the Trinity. He says, "There is . . . clear enough scriptural warrant to encourage us to pray not only to God the Father (which seems to be the primary pattern, and certainly follows the example that Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer), but also to pray directly to God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Both are correct, and we may pray either to the Father or to the Son." Grudem then notes that prayer to God the Spirit seems allowable based on New Testament teachings and lack of prohibitions, but that "this is not the New Testament pattern, and it should not become the dominant emphasis in our prayer life." Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 380-81. Trotman seems here to be seeking to simplify matters for new believers by setting of the basic New Testament pattern for prayer. Based on his general forthrightness in addressing such important matters, it is no surprise that he writes in such emphatic terms.

⁶⁹Trotman, *Introductory Bible Study*, 15.

⁷⁰Trotman and Epp, *Foundational Studies in Christian Living*, 14.

Christian who has not repented of his sin, has not confessed his wrongdoing, hinders God from answering his prayers.”⁷¹ The next prerequisite to answered prayer is a believing heart. Trotman asserts, “A man must ‘ask in faith, nothing wavering’ (James 1:6) God will not honor unbelief. When a person will believe God and ‘stagger not,’ as Abraham staggered not, God will answer (Rom 4:20).”⁷² Trotman also affirmed the necessity of faith by referencing Matthew 21:22: “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”⁷³

Third, Trotman taught that Christians ought to pray with the recognition that even their prayers ought to glorify God. He believed that the chief end of the Christian life was to glorify God, and quoting again John 14:13 he and Epp asserted that “God is glorified as we pray according to His will.”⁷⁴ He continued,

God desires to guide our prayer, though His Word and through the Holy Spirit; consequently, we need to keep His Word always before us in our thinking and praying, so that we will not miss His plan. ‘And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him’ (1 John 5:14, 15).⁷⁵

To know God’s will, Trotman affirmed that believers needed to read God’s Word. In his manual for work with prospective Navigators, Trotman prescribed that discussion of prayer should follow immediately after discussion of the Word. He said, “Response from the Child of God should naturally follow GOD’s speaking to him thru the Word. Prayer is direct and personal communion with GOD. It is ‘asking and receiving’ (John 16:24); it

⁷¹Ibid, 12.

⁷²Ibid. Romans 4:20 says, “[Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.”

⁷³Trotman, *Introductory Bible Study*, 15.

⁷⁴Trotman and Epp, *Foundational Studies in Christian Living*, 12.

⁷⁵Ibid.

is ‘being with Jesus’ (Acts 4:13), etc.’⁷⁶ As believers ingested God’s Word through study and embraced God’s will through prayer, God glorified himself by answering their prayers according to his will.

Fourth, Trotman believed that Christians should set specific time aside each day for personal communion with God through prayer. Ever the planner, Trotman believed that Christians who failed to plan time to meet with the Lord each day planned to fail in their devotional lives. He said, “Because we are likely to neglect something for which we do not specifically plan, a place and a definite time should be set aside for this [practice].”⁷⁷ Trotman believed verses like Psalm 55:17—“Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice”—and Daniel 6:10— “[Daniel] kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God”—were prescriptive, perhaps not in exact proportion, but in urging believers to set aside daily times to pray. He instructed new believers that “true fellowship is God talking to us through His Word and our talking to Him through prayer. The best way to begin your time is to read a portion of the Word and then pause to pray over the truths that you could apply.”⁷⁸

Fifth, Trotman believed that the Scriptures instructed Christians how to pray. Certainly, Jesus taught his disciples very specifically how to pray in the Lord’s Prayer as recorded in Matthew 6:9-13, but he also noted other passages that prescribed various elements to prayer that he encouraged Christians to include in their times of prayer. Trotman summarized his view in the following:

There are several elements in prayer. One is *confession*—admitting to God our complete dependency on Him and acknowledging our sins before Him. Often this is necessary to clear the way for the rest of the prayer. *Praise* includes worship and

⁷⁶Dawson Trotman, “Contact Instructions” (unpublished manuscript, Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

⁷⁷Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 12.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 13.

reverence toward Him for who He is, and *thanksgiving* is our expression of appreciation for what He has done for us. Through *petition* we ask for things for ourselves, and through *intercession* we make requests for others. Praise and petition are clearly seen in such Bible prayers as Colossians 1:9-14 and the model prayer given by our Lord in Matthew 6:9-13. In Psalm 51, on the other hand, confession takes up a greater part of the prayer, showing us that we should pray according to our present need and as the Lord leads us. In all of these prayers dependence is the keynote, the very requests indicating that neither the person praying nor the person prayed for is able to meet his needs, either material or spiritual.⁷⁹

Trotman believed that confession in prayer was prescribed by 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”⁸⁰ Thanksgiving and praise were commended by Psalm 100, which persuades God’s people to “enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise.”⁸¹ He found the call to intercession in Ephesians 6:18, wherein God calls believers to “[pray] always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and [watch] thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”⁸² Petition, Trotman believed, was prescribed in Matthew 7:7, in which Jesus himself says, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”⁸³

Beyond the elements of prayer listed above, Trotman also provided what he called “Helpful Hints” to prayer in which he listed various guidelines for prayer based on scriptural examples and instructions:

1. Concentrate—be conscious of His listening ear. 1 Peter 3:12.
2. Avoid repetition. Matthew 6:7.⁸⁴
3. Ask great things—we have a great GOD. Matthew 21:22; Jeremiah 33:3.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Trotman, “On the Subject of Prayer,” 2.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matt 6:7).

4. Pray outside of your own little realm. Spend the bulk of your time on others. Philippians 2:4-5.⁸⁵
5. Don't look at prayer as a good-luck charm. It is not something to be indulged in to keep our conscience from being annoyed.
6. We should learn the secret of secret prayer. Matthew 6:6; Mark 1:35.⁸⁶
7. To avoid loss of time and to avoid being defeated, we should have 'set aside' times for prayer. Daniel 6:10; Psalm 55:17.
8. Experience proves that a prayer list is most helpful and practical. GOD keeps records (see Revelation 20:12).⁸⁷

As with his previous prescriptions, Trotman not only advocated these practices but also embraced them in his own personal devotional life. He believed strongly in the believer's privilege of prayer, and he practiced his prayer life with the utmost sense of discipline and devotion.⁸⁸

Finally, Trotman believed in the power of the body of Christ coming together to pray in agreement for whatever end they believed the Lord desired. His life illustrated his belief not only in solitary prayer but also in times of corporate prayer with other believers, and this belief was likewise derived from Scripture. In the May 1949 edition of the *Navigators Log*, Trotman wrote, "It was encouraging the other day to notice that Daniel called upon his co-laborers to pray with him (Daniel 2:17-19). Just why GOD is pleased to answer the united prayers of His people is more than we can fully understand, but He does. Experience proves it, the Word teaches it (Matthew 18:19)."⁸⁹ Examination

⁸⁵"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:4-5).

⁸⁶"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt 6:6). "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35).

⁸⁷"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev 20:12). Trotman, "On the Subject of Prayer," 2.

⁸⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 384-85.

⁸⁹Dawson Trotman, *Navigators Log*, May 1949 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 4. Dan 2 relates the story of Daniel being asked to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and within that context, Dan 2:17-19 says, "Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish

of Trotman's practice of personal spiritual disciplines will show that Trotman practiced prayer with others often and that he found the exercise to be supremely edifying and effective.

Other Sources of Influence on Trotman's Personal Spiritual Disciplines

The most profound influence on Trotman's intensive regimen of personal spiritual disciplines was the call presented to all Christians in the Word of God, but Trotman did not come to heed that scriptural appeal without the influence of others. His Scripture-driven conversion to Christianity was directed by the strategic planning of Misses Mills and Thomas as they led the Young People's Group at Lomita Community Presbyterian Church, and his early Christian life was directed by people whose love for the Lord and devotion to personal spiritual disciplines greatly influenced Trotman's own practices. This section will examine two major extrabiblical influences on Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines. Attention will first be given to those who instilled in Trotman a love for prayer and the Word from an early age and near the beginning of his walk with Jesus Christ. Then, the impact of those who had long been dead before Trotman's time will be examined as the profound influence of missionary biographies and pastoral works will be noted. It is impossible to make disciples without first being made a disciple, and several people—both living and dead—played key roles in developing Trotman's practice of personal discipleship.

Early Christian Life

After giving his life to Christ, Trotman wasted no time in getting down to business with God. Foster records that "many people and organizations played strategic roles in helping him realize [his] desire [to know God]. His home church influenced him

with the rest of the wise men in Babylon. Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven." Matt 18:19 records the words of Jesus: "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

greatly, both the pastor and his high school teachers Misses Mills and Thomas, who along with his mother had ‘prayed Dawson into the Kingdom.’”⁹⁰ He got involved in ministry immediately, and the ministry leaders with whom he surrounded himself continued to push him toward an intimate relationship with God characterized by deep and regular communion with the Almighty. Even before his conversion, he had served as president of Christian Endeavor at Lomita Presbyterian, so the foundation of discipline in daily Bible-reading and prayer had already been laid.⁹¹ After his conversion, he continued in his involvement with the ministry and continued to be impacted by Mills and Thomas. An excerpt from the minutes of the Lomita Presbyterian Christian Endeavor chapter indicate that Trotman was elected president of the group on January 11, 1923—three years before his conversion—and again on January 14, 1927—about seven months after he came to know Christ.⁹² He served actively in the Christian Endeavor ministry until Lomita Presbyterian split in 1931.⁹³

Pastoral direction. In recounting his conversion, Trotman recalled that very shortly thereafter, he wanted to lead others to Christ but often encountered objections from nonbelievers that he could not answer. In his distress, he consulted his pastor and

⁹⁰Foster, *The Navigator*, 27.

⁹¹Skinner, *Daws*, 24. Recall from chap. 2 that the C. E. pledge, which was recited at every meeting, likely formed part of the foundation for Trotman’s strong discipline in his own life and his expectation for the same in the lives of others: “Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I promise Him that I will strive to do whatever He would like to have me do; that I will pray to Him and read the Bible every day; and that, just so far as I know how, throughout my whole life, I will endeavor to lead a Christian life. As an Active Member, I promise to be true to all my duties, to be present at and take some part, aside from singing, in every meeting, unless hindered by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. If obliged to be absent from the monthly consecration meeting, I will, if possible, send an excuse for absence to the Society.” “Christian Endeavor,” *Time*, July 20, 1925, accessed April 30, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,881535,00.html>.

⁹²Irene Mills, letter to Betty Skinner, October 14, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

⁹³On April 28, 1931, Trotman recorded the theological decline of their particular Christian Endeavor group: “C. E. is being drawn into modernism. God must it seems provide something to take its place.” Trotman, personal journal, April 28, 1931.

received the following advice: “I’ll tell you something, lad. There is an answer in the Bible for every excuse that any man can give for not coming to Christ.”⁹⁴ Trotman took his pastor’s word to heart and vowed to the Lord that he would never be caught by the same question twice. Trotman recalls, “That is a little promise to make, but it changed the course of my life. After all, there are only so many excuses.”⁹⁵ Keeping this promise meant work, and Trotman sought diligently to store the Word in his heart so that he would always be prepared to give an answer for the hope he possessed. Skinner records that “at lunchtime he read books on doctrine; as he hitchhiked to work he memorized verses, then sped up a nearby hill to pray before the workday started.”⁹⁶ He wanted to be sure that he was not stumped by the same objection twice, and he promised the Lord that he would do his best to make sure that such a phenomenon never happened.⁹⁷

Vernon Morgan’s Fisherman Club. Trotman was also profoundly impacted by a group called the Fisherman Club led by Vernon Morgan. The club, named after Jesus’ call to make his disciples “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19), was devoted to developing young Christians into passionate witnesses for Christ. Skinner recalls Trotman’s first visit to the Long Beach Fisherman Club: “. . . the young men gave testimonies of their witnessing experiences, then heard a Bible message and instruction in soulwinning Dawson was so moved by the challenge that he and his friend stopped on the way home, knelt under a tree, and prayed, ‘God give us a burden for souls, one that will last until we die!’”⁹⁸ The Lord indulged their request. Downing records that Morgan was Trotman’s “chief mentor in his early Christian life” and instilled in him the

⁹⁴Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 16.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 33.

⁹⁷Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 16.

⁹⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 36.

notion that “in order for people’s Christian lives to be strong and vital, they needed ample input of the Word, a meaningful prayer life, and consistent outreach, which he called witnessing.”⁹⁹

Trotman embraced Morgan’s stool illustration for the Christian life with which Morgan argued that a vital Christian must be supported by the three “legs”—the Word, prayer, and witnessing—and Dawson used the same illustration in teaching others how to live the Christian life.¹⁰⁰ Trotman later found himself to be dissatisfied with the image of a Christian resting upon the stool and prayerfully developed the Wheel illustration to show the Christian in action.¹⁰¹ With the exception of “living the life,” which he added, Trotman kept the three legs of the stool as the foundational elements of the Christian life in the illustration he devised. Trotman was also impacted by Tom Olson, a lay minister who often spoke at the Fisherman Club meetings. Olson seemed to possess an uncanny mastery of the Word of God that had come by Scripture memorization, and Trotman’s own conviction regarding the power of the memorized Word was strengthened by Olson’s example.¹⁰²

Missionary Biographies and Pastoral Works

As he taught Trotman and the other members of the Fisherman Club what it meant to follow Christ, Morgan encouraged them to read biographies of men who had been used by God in powerful ways.¹⁰³ Trotman developed the habit of reading the biographies of missionaries and other effective Christian leaders to, as he put it,

⁹⁹Downing, *Living Legacy*, 123.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Skinner, *Daws*, 46.

¹⁰²Ibid., 44.

¹⁰³James Douglas Hankins, “Following Up: Dawson Trotman, the Navigators, and the Origins of Disciple Making in American Evangelicalism, 1926-1956” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2011), 67.

“challenge and inspire and humble” himself.¹⁰⁴ His favorite subjects included great men like David Brainerd, George Müller, Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, E. M. Bounds, and Charles Spurgeon.¹⁰⁵ Skinner records how these stories touched him:

David Brainerd kneeling in the snow to pray for the salvation of the Indians. Dawson knew no such hardship but felt he could at least spend time out in the Lomita hills praying for the lost. George Müller’s thrilling experience of faith, seeing God provide in answer to prayer, was an example he determined to follow, along with that of Hudson Taylor, whose remarkable trust in God underwrote his venture of founding a pioneer mission in China. He also was challenged by reading about the famous prayer meetings of the Haystack Group in the early 1800s, with which Adoniram Judson and others launched the American student missionary movement.¹⁰⁶

These powerful stories, much like the great “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11, served to inspire Trotman to run his own race of faith by fixing his eyes on Jesus through regular and intensive times of prayer, Scripture reading, and Scripture memorization.

Although he was affected by each of these great stories, a few works seemed to exert a deeper impact in Trotman’s life. His journal reveals that he often returned to the life and teachings of three men in particular: Edward McKendree Bounds, Hudson Taylor, and Dwight Lyman Moody. Trotman’s life and ministry were profoundly shaped by Bounds’ comments in his *Power through Prayer*, by Taylor’s biography penned by his son and daughter-in-law entitled *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret*, and by Moody’s biography entitled *Bush Aglow* by Richard Ellsworth Day. So great was the influence of these men that each deserves individual attention regarding the manner in which his life impacted Trotman.

E. M. Bounds. During his one-year stint at the Los Angeles Baptist Theological Seminary, Trotman was assigned to read a short book penned by this

¹⁰⁴Trotman, personal journal, October 15, 1939.

¹⁰⁵Hankins, “Following Up,” 67.

¹⁰⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 38.

nineteenth century minister.¹⁰⁷ Foster records that “perhaps no one statement, aside from Scripture, had greater influence on [Trotman’s] praying than [one] short paragraph from the classic, *Power through Prayer*, by E. M. Bounds.”¹⁰⁸ That one paragraph reads as follows:

We are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the gospel. This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man or sink the man in the plan or organization. God’s plan is to make much of the man, far more of him than of anything else. Men are God’s method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.¹⁰⁹

Bounds, who had served as a lawyer, pastor, and Confederate Army chaplain during the United States Civil War, was most known for being a man of intense prayer.¹¹⁰ In this brief paragraph, Trotman found not only the motivation for his own life to be one of prayerful submission to God, but he also found the paradigm for his ministry. Quoting this paragraph in the June 1950 edition of the Navigators Log, Trotman said, “To this proposition we heartily subscribe. We are not out to raise monuments to man’s creeds and accomplishments, but we are looking to GOD to raise up living stones—monuments to His grace—yielded young men and women whose eyes are singled to His glory.”¹¹¹ Trotman returned often to Bounds’ seminal work in *Power through Prayer*, and even as he waited on the dock for the boat ride that would lead to his earthly demise, he was reading it yet again. Sanny records that “as they walked down to the dock Dawson mentioned his desire for more time alone with the Lord. He had been giving out and

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁸Foster, *The Navigator*, 33.

¹⁰⁹E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 1-2.

¹¹⁰E. M. Bounds, *The Classic Collection on Prayer* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos Foundation, 2001), xi.

¹¹¹Dawson Trotman, *Navigators Log*, June 1950 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

giving out, and felt a great need now to do more taking in.”¹¹² Little did he know that his desire would be granted eternally in just a few moments.

Hudson Taylor. If Bounds’ words about prayer were the most important verbal inspiration Trotman received from his evangelical predecessors, the example of faith illustrated in the life of Hudson Taylor was the most important living illustration. Trotman was captivated by the portrayal of Taylor’s life set forth by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor.¹¹³ He mentioned this work many times over several years in his personal journal, and he always discussed the great impact it had on his life. In October 1938, for example, Trotman recorded, “Lila reads to me from the life of H. T. again tonight and again our hearts are stirred. No book outside of the Bible that quite stirs one at every glance at it.”¹¹⁴ Almost a year later, he wrote, “Again the Lord speaks to me today both through Scripture and through the life of Hudson Taylor of possible difficulties.”¹¹⁵ Nearly another year later, he mentioned Taylor again: “Found a quiet spot on the ship where I could be absolutely alone. Had a great time of fellowship with the Lord. Read Hudson Taylor, and was enabled to ask some great things of the Lord. Had about six hours alone.”¹¹⁶ In February 1941, he wrote, “Have been reading Hudson Taylor of late. I am now on the ‘Exchanged Life’ chapter and I am praying that the Lord may again help me come into the consciousness of this marvelous truth. It has not been as real in these past months as it was once.”¹¹⁷

¹¹²Lorne Sanny, “Dear Friend” letter, July 28, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1.

¹¹³Howard and Geraldine Taylor, *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009).

¹¹⁴Trotman, personal journal, October 9, 1938.

¹¹⁵Ibid., September 30, 1939.

¹¹⁶Ibid., May 11, 1940.

¹¹⁷Ibid., February 20, 1941.

The “Exchanged Life” chapter Trotman mentioned is the fourteenth chapter of *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret*. In it, Dr. and Mrs. Taylor recount Taylor’s epiphany regarding what it means to abide in Christ and the wonderful realization that struggling to remain in Christ is not necessary. What is needed, Taylor found, is surrender to Jesus and the quiet assurance that Christ has hold of the believer and will not let go. Most of the chapter is composed of Taylor’s letter to his sister, Mrs. Broomhall, in which he recounts to her his glorious discovery:

The sweetest part, if one may speak of one part being sweeter than another, is the rest which full identification with Christ brings. I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize this; for He, I know, is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest position He must give me His grace, and in the most difficult His grace is sufficient. It little matters to my servant whether I send him to buy a few cash [*sic*] worth of things, or the most expensive articles. In either case he looks to me for the money and brings me his purchases. So, if God should place me in serious perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? No fear that His resources will prove unequal to the emergency! And His resources are mine, for He is mine, and is with me and dwells in me.¹¹⁸

Taylor came to understand the power and grandeur of his union with Christ, and from that point forward, he built his life around that truth. In his autobiography, he wrote, “It is always helpful to fix our eyes on the God-ward aspect of Christian work; to realize that the work of God does not mean so much man’s work for God, as God’s own work through man.”¹¹⁹ Taylor maintained that as he and fellow Christians carried out the Great Commission and took the gospel message to the entire world, “we should never lose sight of the higher aspect of our work—that of obedience to God, of bringing glory to His Name, of gladdening the heart of our God and Father by living and serving as His beloved children.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸Howard and Geraldine Taylor, *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret*, 165.

¹¹⁹J. Hudson Taylor, *J. Hudson Taylor: An Autobiography* (Cedar Lake, MI: Readaclassic.com, 2010), 4.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

Trotman was captivated by this message. He later wrote retrospectively about the years he spent pouring over the life of Taylor and his contemporary, George Müller. He said, “I was impressed by the Life of the man Hudson Taylor—he was a man of faith—also, I was impressed by the Life of the Man George Mueller—a man who trusted God.”¹²¹ In February 1931, Trotman recorded, “While reading the life of Hudson Taylor, God lays it upon my heart to take all money I get and clear up debts.”¹²² Taylor believed that “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply,” and Skinner notes that his axiom was tested and proved true in Trotman’s life.¹²³ Taylor and Müller both believed that God would supply for the needs of those whom he had called into ministry, and Trotman patterned his beliefs about finances after their reliance upon the Almighty for resources.¹²⁴

Again, in 1933, he was impacted by Taylor’s life—this time in a profoundly literal way. He recorded the incident:

This noon while beginning to read H. T. for a little, I asked God to direct where I should read. I was led to read the chapter which told of his being stricken to his bed during a most busy season, through the wisdom and providence of God. About 2 PM I was thinking of the possibilities of being stricken for a season to enable me to have time for God to speak to my soul. Not many minutes after the drive shaft broke loose, striking my left foot. I will be unable to use it for at least a week. I thank God, who works all things purposefully, wisely and to His own glory. A good deal of pain. (Off for 3 ½ weeks).¹²⁵

Taylor found solace in God’s sovereign power, love for him, and ability to work in any

¹²¹Dawson Trotman, “Dawson Trotman on Fundraising” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2. Interestingly, Skinner used the subtitle Trotman ascribed to the life of Müller as the subtitle of her book about Trotman: *Daws: A Man Who Trusted God*.

¹²²Trotman, personal journal, February 6, 1931.

¹²³Skinner, *Daws*, 253.

¹²⁴Skinner records that “for his occasional need when funds ran short, he determined to follow the example of George Müller and Hudson Taylor, trusting God to supply through prayer.” Skinner, *Daws*, 57. Likewise, when Dawson and Lila were expecting their first child and funds were scarce, Skinner recalls that “. . . Hudson Taylor and George Müller had trusted God for provision, and they would too.” *Ibid.*, 88.

¹²⁵Trotman, personal journal, January 13, 1933.

circumstances to accomplish the desire of his heart. Trotman inherited the same spirit from his study of Taylor's life, and this attitude cast him wholly upon communion with the Lord via personal spiritual disciplines.¹²⁶

Dwight Lyman Moody. In the later 1930s and early 1940s, Trotman's focus shifted from Hudson Taylor to the great Commoner of Northfield, D. L. Moody. The first indication that Trotman was being touched by Moody's life and ministry came in January 1937, when Trotman recorded that "Lila reads to me from the Life of Moody. My heart is mightily stirred."¹²⁷ The specific Moody biography from which his wife was reading was *Bush Aglow* by Richard Ellsworth Day, which was published in 1936 and was therefore the most recent biography of Moody available.¹²⁸ The next day, Trotman was again stirred by Day's account of Moody's life; he wrote,

Today, while reading *Bush Aglow* my heart is tremendously stirred. I see so many things happening in this man's life that are like events of my own that I am strengthened as I realize that others whom God has used have had the same heart struggles that I have. Paul in Rom. 7 speaks of this but it seems to bring it so near to me to read concerning the life of one of His Servants who lived such a short time ago. It has been so long since my heart condition has moved me to tears, but these came as I saw the sinfulness of my life in view of the Holyness of God and the preciousness of souls.¹²⁹

Trotman's journal indicates that he returned to Day's work again in July 1939, as he noted that "I am having my heart stirred much these days by reading *Bush Aglow*, by

¹²⁶In an edition of the *Navigators Log*, Trotman included a quote from Taylor under the heading, "Believest Thou?" The quote read, "'We have been asked to do an impossible task, but we work with HIM WHO can do the impossible' (Hudson Taylor)." Trotman, *Navigators Log*, Summer Edition, year unknown (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹²⁷Trotman, personal journal, January 11, 1937.

¹²⁸Richard Ellsworth Day, *Bush Aglow: The Life Story of Dwight Lyman Moody, Commoner of Northfield* (Powell, TN: Crown Publications, 2003). With due respect to Day's work, I commend Lyle Dorsett's *A Passion for Souls* to any who would like to read a Moody biography. Dorsett's work, published in 1997, is much more thorough and much easier to read. Lyle W. Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1997).

¹²⁹Trotman, personal journal, January 12, 1937.

Day.”¹³⁰ Two weeks later, he said, “Finish reading *Bush Aglow* which has certainly been strengthening my heart of late. Have been able to dig into the early morning schedule with more fight than I have been.”¹³¹

In opening his work, Day recounts the famous Moody quote that “The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in and by the man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him”¹³² and then notes that the heart of D. L. Moody was that Christians would “become convinced that our beleaguered age stands in need, not so much of ten-talent men as God-conquered commoners.”¹³³ Skinner records that Trotman took Moody’s sentiment to heart, praying “O God, let me be that man.”¹³⁴ As Skinner notes, he would later come to realize that Moody’s quote was not quite large enough in scope to capture what God really wanted. At a Navigator conference in September 1955, Trotman said, “Remember, God is looking for men. Moody felt God was still looking for a man to show what He can do through one 100% yielded and determined by the grace of God he would be that man. But God is looking for more than one.”¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the requirements for becoming the sort of man that God would use were clear. Trotman wrote, “. . . one characteristic common to all men GOD had ever used down thru the ages was an effective prayer life. This meant, of course, only one thing: I must give myself to prayer.”¹³⁶

¹³⁰Ibid., July 16, 1939.

¹³¹Ibid., July 23, 1939.

¹³²Day, *Bush Aglow*, 9. Other versions of that same quote express it a bit cleaner as “God has yet to show what He can do through the life of a man who is wholly yielded to Him.” Skinner, *Daws*, 38.

¹³³Day, *Bush Aglow*, 9.

¹³⁴Skinner, *Daws*, 38.

¹³⁵Dawson Trotman, “Knowing the Will of God,” transcript of message given at a Navigator Conference, September 14, 1955, 7:30 p.m. meeting (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹³⁶Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 8.

Day ends *Bush Aglow* with a series of reflective questions that, although no explicit evidence illustrates this assertion, must certainly have been used by God to stir Trotman's heart toward a greater devotion. Day concludes his work with the following:

Strangely, it seems as if certain questions keep rising up, insisting upon an answer; questions which must be answered by *myself* before this book concludes—it may be, friend reader, you can hear them, too!

“Does not the Word seem precious to you, now that you've seen how God honors it, and honors His servants who are loyal to it?”

My laughing heart replies, “More than all the world!”

“Does not Jesus appear worthy, worthy of your human best, since you've found how D. L. loved Him? Do you love Him, too?”

I just want to shout, “Well, I *guess* I *do*!”

“But, do you consider your human best is enough?”

I don't try to answer *that*; my soul cries, “Oh, God! give *me* Thy Holy Spirit!”

And one last question, “What do you think of gospel preaching *now*? Do you feel it can *ever* fail? Do you want to preach anything else?”

My whole being joins in repeating a phrase, which I'm sure is caught up by the angels of God,

“NO! A thousand times, No!”¹³⁷

Such words almost perfectly describe the catechism that must have resonated deeply within the heart of Dawson Trotman, ever compelling him to draw near to God through prayer and the Word. His practices attest to it. “O God,” he prayed, “let me be that man.”¹³⁸

Core Theological Beliefs Regarding Personal Spiritual Disciplines

Trotman's core theological beliefs regarding personal spiritual disciplines have been recorded in the two most abiding illustrations he left behind: the Wheel and the Hand. Having been influenced by Hudson Taylor's reliance on the presence of Christ in the believer, Trotman said, “Although the believer can do nothing about the ‘Presence of Christ’ in him, it is gloriously certain that he can do much about the ‘Prominence of Christ’ in his life.”¹³⁹ The presence of Christ in the believer was a fact of salvation; the

¹³⁷Day, *Bush Aglow*, 332-33.

¹³⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 38.

¹³⁹Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 2.

prominence of Christ was a factor of spiritual discipline. The purpose of the Wheel was to direct believers in their spiritual disciplines so that they could be useful workers in the kingdom of Christ. The Hand was a deeper explanation of one of the Wheel's four foundational spokes. Taken together, the two illustrations provide a powerful summation of Trotman's theology of spirituality.

The Wheel

Trotman's foundational illustration, which is still central to the Navigators' ministry today, is the Wheel.¹⁴⁰ He developed the Wheel after becoming dissatisfied with Vernon Morgan's stool illustration—the Christian life should be characterized by moving, not sitting¹⁴¹—and it became the object lesson to which he returned time and again in teaching settings. In honor of the Navy men for which it was devised, the Wheel was patterned after the wheel used to steer ships. It had a hub, four spokes, and an outer rim, and each of these elements signified some aspect of the Christian life. The hub was Christ—the center of the Christian life without whom no spiritual life exists. Trotman said,

CHRIST indwelling the believer is the supernatural aspect of his life and the ONE MAIN FACTOR distinguishing the believer from all other men (Col. 1:27). The 'Presence of Christ' in the believer is purely a doctrinal fact, accomplished by initial faith, and has nothing to do with the way the believer lives, and will not be changed no matter how he lives. Once saving faith has been exercised, the believer can do nothing one way or the other about the 'Presence of CHRIST' in him.¹⁴²

With a physical wheel, the hub provides the base upon which the rest of the structure relies; the same is true with Christ in the life of the Christian. He is the center and foundation of the entire structure, and without him, everything falls apart.

¹⁴⁰Downing notes that "the Wheel may well be Dawson's most lasting legacy." Downing, *Living Legacy*, 8.

¹⁴¹Foster, *The Navigator*, 50.

¹⁴²Trotman, "Contact Instructions," 1-2. Col 1:27 says, "to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The outer rim represented “the well-rounded Christian, living his life in the power of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁴³ which was labeled “The CHRISTian in Action.”¹⁴⁴ Trotman believed that Christianity was not a destination but rather a way of living, and he believed that all Christians were called to live the kind of life Christ commanded and enabled them to live by Scripture and the Holy Spirit. He believed, according to Bounds’ assertion, that God worked through men and women who were submitted to him and willing to do what he asked. He found that pattern portrayed in Scripture, noting that “the story of the Bible (though it is the textbook on redemption, thru [sic] which the scarlet thread of the blood of CHRIST is traced) is in one sense the story of what GOD [did] thru men.”¹⁴⁵ He continued, “It should here be noted that it is through these chosen, yielded, and obedient men that HE is accomplishing HIS redemptive work, and we see why HE places such an importance on key and faithful men.”¹⁴⁶ Trotman believed that God meant to use faithful men and women to accomplish his purposes, and he believed that all who were called CHRISTian (by his pattern of capitalization) should strive to be the kind of person that God could use.

If the hub represented Christ—the central core of all Christians—and the outer rim represented “The CHRISTian in Action”—the central call of all Christians—then the means by which the two components were connected were the spokes. Trotman included four spokes in his Wheel illustration—two vertical and two horizontal. The vertical spokes were indicative of the vertical relationship between God and man, and the

¹⁴³Foster, *The Navigator*, 51.

¹⁴⁴The Navigators, “The Wheel – History,” The Navigators Tools, accessed May 23, 2014, <http://www.navigators.org/Tools/Discipleship%20Resources/Tools/The%20Wheel-History>. The current Wheel illustration now calls the outer rim “The Obedient Christian in Action,” because a slight change in one of the spokes required moving obedience—still an important component of the structure—to add in the spoke of “fellowship.”

¹⁴⁵Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 1.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*

horizontal spokes were meant to speak to the relationship between godly man and the rest of the world.¹⁴⁷ Trotman reflected: “Now the wheel made sense. It was balanced with two vertical spokes and two horizontal spokes. These were the four basics of the Christian life, with the Lord Jesus Christ right in the middle. If any one of the four is missing or is out of proportion, the entire wheel gets off balance and you have a lop-sided Christian¹⁴⁸” The two horizontal spokes were obedience and witnessing; the two vertical spokes were prayer and the Word. He saw the pattern depicted in the life of Ezra: “Ezra 7:10 gives us this picture: prayer—Ezra prepared his heart; the Word—to seek the law of the Lord; obedience—and to do it; witnessing—and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”¹⁴⁹

Trotman believed that, although the Christian could exert no control over the presence of Christ in his life, he was in relatively complete control of the prominence of Christ in his life. He said, “The spokes represent those factors of human responsibility over which the believer does have much control, and which must be functioning in proper balance in his life if it is to be Victorious, CHRIST-centered and SPIRIT-controlled.”¹⁵⁰ The spokes were the spiritual disciplines that would bring the influence of the hub to the experience of the rim, but the spokes did not all function in the same way. Trotman explained,

The WORD and PRAYER represent INTAKE (usually unseen by the world); OBEDIENCE and WITNESS represent OUTLET, or the outward expression of the CHRISTian life in action which may be viewed by the world; OBEDIENCE is the

¹⁴⁷In teaching the Wheel today, the Navigators discuss three dimensions of ministry: The Volitional Dimension—how one relates to oneself—that includes the hub and the outer rim; the Vertical Dimension—how one relates to God—that includes the Word spoke and the Prayer spoke; and the Horizontal Dimension—how one relates to others—that includes the Fellowship spoke and the Witnessing spoke. The Navigators, “The Wheel,” The Navigators Tools, accessed May 22, 2014, <http://www.navigators.org/Tools/Discipleship%20Resources/Tools/The%20Wheel>.

¹⁴⁸Foster, *The Navigator*, 51.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 2.

silent expression of the CHRIST-life through CONDUCT, while WITNESS is the actual spoken testimony about the CHRIST-life. By one's OBEDIENCE (conduct) he may win a hearing for his WITNESS (spoken words).¹⁵¹

To put it simply, intake produced outlet, so the Christian life depended greatly on the Christian's intake through prayer and the Word.

Trotman believed he had developed an illustration that set the paradigm for the Christian life so profoundly that he dictated how his Navigators were to present it to others. The hub was to be presented first, followed by the spokes. Even the spokes had a particular order in which they were to be presented. Intake led to outlet, so the presentation of the spokes would follow that pattern. The first spoke to be presented was the Word, and Trotman's instructions regarding its presentation were the following:

1. The Word is first in point of time, it being thru the Word that we learn of our sin condition, CHRIST's death for us, and our urgent need of HIM.
2. We must be born again before exercise of any of the other three basics are possible, and we learn how to be born again and are actually born again by the Word (John 1:14; I Pet. 1:23; James 1:18, etc.).
3. The Word spoke may be emphasized according to the needs and capacities of the two men involved, including, of course, its over-all importance and esteem in the mind of GOD (Psalm 138:2) and its particular place in salvation, personal growth and witness. At this point, however, no mention will be made concerning how we get the Word (that is taken up later in the Hand). Emphasize, rather, our NEED FOR IT.¹⁵²

Trotman held that Christians were utterly dependent upon the Word made flesh—Jesus Christ—and the Word in print—the Bible—for life.

Trotman believed that salvation came through the Bible's testimony of Christ and its appropriation in the life of the believer, and he believed that sanctification was carried out by the Spirit through the Word. He said, “. . . it is insufficient to reach souls

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid. Note the content of the listed verses: John 1:14 says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. First Pet 1:23 declares that Christians, “being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” Jas 1:18 says, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” Ps 138:2 records David's words: “I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.”

for CHRIST—they must be strengthened in the Word.”¹⁵³ New believers were strengthened by the Word in the same way that new babies were strengthened by food: “The Word of GOD is spiritual food (Mt. 4:4),” he said. “As we absorb the Word we grow spiritually. Little time in the Word means little growth. However, much time in the Word doesn’t necessarily mean much growth! The secret is in obtaining full value from every minute spent in the Word.”¹⁵⁴ To help believers learn how to maximize their time in the Word, Trotman developed the Word Hand illustration with which he instructed Christians how to ingest and digest the spiritual food of the Word.¹⁵⁵

The next spoke to be presented was the other vertical spoke that referenced the relationship of the Christian with God: prayer. In his “Contact Instructions,” Trotman taught, “Response from the Child of GOD should naturally follow GOD’s speaking to him thru the Word. Prayer is direct and personal communion with GOD. It is ‘asking and receiving’ (John 16:24); it is ‘being with JESUS’ (Acts 4:13), etc.”¹⁵⁶ Trotman maintained that many people struggled in prayer because they did not know how to pray in response to the Word of God—hence the order of spoke presentation. He said, “[The Christian] will discover GOD’s Word to be a most excellent source of prayer material and subject matter. And, prayer according to the will of GOD as expressed in HIS Word may carry with it additional assurance that HE will hear and answer.”¹⁵⁷ In defending

¹⁵³Dawson Trotman, Navigators News Letter no. 27, January 1946 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 3.

¹⁵⁴Ibid. Matt 4:4 records Jesus’ words to Satan during his temptation in the wilderness: “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

¹⁵⁵Further discussion of the Word Hand is forthcoming.

¹⁵⁶Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 2. John 16:24 records Jesus’ words to his disciples: “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” Acts 4:13 records the response of the Jewish rulers to Peter and John: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 17.

this assertion, Trotman turned to the words of Andrew Murray in his *Hints for the Inner Chamber*:

Read a few verses from the Bible. Do not concern yourself with the difficulties contained in them. You can consider these later; but take what you understand, apply it to yourself, and ask the Father to make HIS Word light and power in your heart. Thus you will have material enough for prayer from the Word which the Father speaks to you; you will also have the liberty to ask for things you need¹⁵⁸

Prayer was the result of time spent in the Word, and prayer helped the believer appropriate that which he had read in his own life.

After the vertical spokes were presented, Trotman then instructed that the horizontal spokes should be discussed. Obedience came first. Trotman said, “After the heart has been prepared thru the Word and Prayer, the result hoped for is, of course, OBEDIENCE. The over-all importance of OBEDIENCE in the Word may be stressed (both sin and salvation hanging upon it—Rom. 5:19), and any passages desirable may be called to the Contact’s attention.”¹⁵⁹ Witnessing was next. Trotman explained this spoke as follows:

The last words of the LORD JESUS CHRIST while HE was on the earth were on the subject of witnessing (Acts 1:8), and no CHRISTian is enjoying the fullest health and usefulness unless he is actively engaged in the exercise of holding forth the Word of Life (Phil. 2:16). Witness may be in two directions:

- A. To the unsaved, in order that they might be saved;
- B. To the believer, in order that he might be challenged to increased holiness and effectiveness for Christ.

Any number of passages may be used by the Contactman to demonstrate the blessing of and necessity for witnessing.¹⁶⁰

Obedience and witnessing were the outflow of a life characterized by time spent in the

¹⁵⁸Andrew Murray, *Hints for the Inner Chamber*, quoted in Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 18.

¹⁵⁹Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 3. Rom 5:19 says, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

¹⁶⁰Ibid. Acts 1:8 records Jesus’ words to his disciples, saying, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Phil 2:16 says, “holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain.”

Word and prayer. Trotman said, “You are only as strong as your devotional life, your walk with the Lord”¹⁶¹

Trotman believed that the Word was the foundational spoke in the entire Wheel. Not only did “The CHRISTian in Action” rim depend in part on the Word spoke, but so also did the other three spokes. He averred, “Having begun with the Word Spoke to show its primacy . . . it will be well to finish the ‘unit presentation’ of the Wheel with an emphasis upon the Word as it RELATES to each of the other three spokes—that is, pointing out that the Word is necessary for an effective function of any of the other Spokes.”¹⁶² He then listed several passages of Scripture that indicate how the Word is foundational to prayer, to obedience, and to witnessing. Everything began with the Word, and to Trotman, everything continued on through the Word.

The Word Hand

Because of the centrality of the Word in every spiritual discipline Trotman advocated, he developed the Hand to provide an easy way to remember how best to receive and process the nourishment found therein. He wanted to be sure that followers of Christ learned how to feed themselves the precious Word of God instead of merely being fed,¹⁶³ and he bemoaned the contemporary practice of Christians excusing their lack of knowledge for lack of being told. In a letter to the Navigators in January 1953, Trotman wrote,

There is a great tendency on the part of almost every Christian to feel that if he’s going to learn something, he’s going to have to be told. You know as well as I do that if I had felt this way in the beginning, there are many things I would not have learned because they were not currently being taught. Let us teach our men to look

¹⁶¹Trotman, “Knowing the Will of God,” 1.

¹⁶²Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 3.

¹⁶³Skinner records that while in Honolulu in January 1945, Trotman recognized a problem with his methodology. She notes, “Watters recalled that Daws’ message in Honolulu five years before had been ‘Feed My sheep;’ now he was preaching ‘Teach the sheep to eat.’” Skinner, *Daws*, 262.

to the Lord constantly for revelation of the truth in His Word.”¹⁶⁴

The Hand resulted from this desire to help Christians learn how to feed themselves the Word of God.¹⁶⁵

The Hand, which is still used by the Navigators today,¹⁶⁶ was illustrated by the human hand grasping a copy of the Bible. Four fingers are on top of the Bible, and the thumb grasps the underside of the book.¹⁶⁷ Trotman wrote, “. . . there are four, and only four, means by which it is possible to receive a knowledge of the Word of GOD. Notice, we are not now speaking about prayer or any other activity of the CHRISTian life—but only, how can we receive the Word. The four avenues of intake are: HEARING, READING, STUDYING, and MEMORIZING.”¹⁶⁸ These methods of Bible ingestion were represented by the four fingers on top of the Bible. Trotman insisted that meditation, which was represented by the thumb, was not a method of “ingestion” but rather of “digestion,” thereby indicating how the illustration was used to help people receive nourishment from the Bible as they learned how to “ingest” it and “digest” it.¹⁶⁹

The first method of Bible intake was represented by the pinky finger, because although it was likely the most prevalent form of intake, it was also typically the weakest. “Hearing,” wrote Trotman, “is the means by which most of us received our first knowledge of the Word of GOD, even tho it may have been from the mouth of a parent

¹⁶⁴Dawson Trotman, “Dear Co-Laborers” Letter, January 7, 1953 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

¹⁶⁵Trotman’s daughter-in-law, Madeline, recalls Trotman’s disdain for what he referred to as “Mommy Bird Bible Study” wherein the students sat like baby birds with their mouths open to receive whatever their teacher—the “Mommy Bird,” as it were—delivered to them. The baby birds must learn to feed themselves, or they would never survive. Telephone interview with Madeline Trotman, May 15, 2014.

¹⁶⁶The Navigators, “The Word Hand,” The Navigators Tools, accessed May 23, 2014, <http://www.navigators.org/Tools/Discipleship%20Resources/Tools/The%20Word%20Hand>.

¹⁶⁷Dawson Trotman, “The Hand” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹⁶⁸Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 43.

¹⁶⁹Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 6.

or Sunday School teacher when we were tiny children. Somebody spoke the Word and it entered our ears.”¹⁷⁰ Trotman recognized the importance of hearing—faith, after all, “cometh by hearing . . . the Word of God” (Romans 10:17)—but he also noted that most people stop there. He bemoaned this observation by saying,

It is perhaps lamentably true that many people receive their first knowledge of the Word thru hearing, they believe and are saved, and then continue to spend most of the remainder of their CHRISTian lives in the realm of hearing only. It should be noted that little ‘skill’ is developed in the Word thru hearing only, and therefore it is not surprising that these CHRISTians remain babes in CHRIST for many years (Heb. 5:13).¹⁷¹

Nevertheless, hearing remained an important method of Scripture intake, and Trotman maintained that “the contact is urged to keep this channel of intake open by frequently availing himself of any of these various means to HEAR the Word.”¹⁷²

The second method of Scripture intake—reading—was represented by the ring finger, which was slightly stronger than the pinky. Trotman found scriptural encouragement for reading the Word in the Apostle Paul’s first letter to Timothy: “Till I come, give attendance to reading . . .” (1 Timothy 4:13). He noted that Scripture reading is useful in that it helps believers move quickly from chapter to chapter and from book to book and thereby retain some sense of the flow of Scripture; that it has a cleansing effect to keep believers from sin; that it is a stimulus to devotion in helping the believer know how to pray; and that it is a source of future memory verses that can be hidden in the believer’s heart for regular use.¹⁷³ Trotman noted, however, that as valuable as reading the Word was, it was not enough; he said,

It isn’t particularly uncommon to hear of believers who read their Bibles sporadically . . . yet it is by no means usual to find those who are pursuing any

¹⁷⁰Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 44.

¹⁷¹Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 7. Heb 5:13 says, “For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.”

¹⁷²Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 44.

¹⁷³Ibid., 44-45.

definite or regular plan of reading progress thru the Word. There are perhaps many who consider reading (along with hearing) a very natural CHRISTian activity, but who appear to have almost no awareness of the value and practical availability of the other two¹⁷⁴

To Trotman, the other two fingers were the ones that really made a difference in the Christian life.

The third method of Scripture intake, represented by the third finger, was Bible study. Based upon the scriptural admonition to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth” in 2 Timothy 2:15, this method built upon the foundation laid by hearing and reading the Word. Without hearing and reading, study was impossible; without study, hearing and reading were less effective. Trotman said,

There is usually a considerable distinction to be made between reading and study, although some reading may be a form of study, and most reading is, over a period of time, an aid to study. As II Tim. 2:15 indicates, study is to be the WORK—the work of rightly dividing the Word of Truth; and among other things, this may involve searching the Scriptures (Acts 17:11), and a comparing of Scripture with Scripture (I Cor. 2:13, and Isaiah 28:10).¹⁷⁵

Studying the Bible meant to put oneself to work in seeking to understand what God was saying through it. Studying was a necessary step on the road to appropriating the material in one’s life, but it was only one step. Regarding the method of study, Trotman maintained that study of the Bible itself should precede the use of commentaries and Bible helps—not that they should not be used, but that they should be consulted only after due diligence was done with the Bible by itself.¹⁷⁶

The fourth and final method of intake—the one represented by the index

¹⁷⁴Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 7.

¹⁷⁵Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 45. Acts 17:11 records, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” First Cor 2:13 says, “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Isa 28:10 says, “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.”

¹⁷⁶Foster, *The Navigator*, 81.

finger—was Scripture memorization. This method, according to Trotman, was “perhaps the most neglected channel of Bible intake” but the one that “offers the greatest return in useful Scriptural knowledge per unit of time devoted to intake.”¹⁷⁷ Trotman hated the idea that “it is hardly unquestionable that the Church knows less and does less about memorization than any of the four means of intake. In fact, the very idea that memory may and should be as natural in the life of the believer as hearing or reading is almost revolutionary.”¹⁷⁸ Scripture memorization made it possible for the believer to continue being nourished by the Word even without the presence of a printed Bible, and it prepared the believer to be ready in any moment to appropriate the Word of God in everyday life.

In completing the Hand illustration, Trotman maintained that the four fingers on top of the Bible were useful only as means of ingesting the Word. Digestion of the Word could happen only through the thumb, which represented Scripture meditation. He said,

It may be re-emphasized that the four fingers demonstrate the only four means of Scripture intake and that the thumb designates what should be done with the Word after it was been taken in. The four fingers may correspond to the act of eating and the thumb to the process of digestion. Only as food is digested is it converted into blood, muscle, bone, and strength for the body. Similarly, only as the Word taken in is meditated upon, obeyed, and applied to the life will it ‘build up’ the believer and produce full spiritual strength.¹⁷⁹

For Scripture to be useful in the life of a believer, it must be synthesized and applied.

Meditation allowed for such processing to happen and for the Word to be adopted fittingly in the believer’s life.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 46.

¹⁷⁸Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 9.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., 10. For a primer on Scripture meditation, see Jim Downing, *Meditation* (1976; repr., Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2011).

¹⁸⁰Trotman prescribed the following amounts of time for each method of Bible intake represented in the hand. Five hours each week should be given to hearing the Word of God, two hours to

Summary of Core Theology of Personal Spiritual Disciplines

In his “Contact Instructions,” Trotman suggested two paradigms for presenting the Wheel to new believers. The first was based on the notion that the great end of the Christian life was fellowship with Jesus Christ, and the Wheel represented the mechanism by which that fellowship was made ever closer and ever sweeter. Trotman explained,

If fellowship with JESUS CHRIST is the real end of the CHRISTian life and purpose, then The Wheel may be presented with this thought in view. It may be pointed out that the most important thing in the World for any person is to come to know JESUS CHRIST—that is, to come into RELATIONSHIP with HIM. This, of course, is salvation—the HUB—or the presence of CHRIST in the person. The next most important thing in the World for any person after coming to know JESUS CHRIST is to come to know HIM better—that is, to come into close communion and FELLOWSHIP with HIM. Through faith, and faith alone, RELATIONSHIP with the HUB (JESUS CHRIST) is established. However, certain definite factors of human responsibility are involved if close FELLOWSHIP (a CHRIST-centered life) is to be maintained. These factors of human responsibility and activity are represented by the spokes which must be of the right balance and proportion in The Wheel. It should be noted that RELATIONSHIP (The Presence of CHRIST in the believer) never changes, but that FELLOWSHIP (The Position of CHRIST in the believer) may change from moment to moment depending upon the walk of the CHRISTian. The CHRIST-centered life is the one lived in perfect fellowship. It becomes apparent, then, that the chief purpose of the spokes in proper length and strength is to insure that the fellowship remains close and constant—or, in other words, to keep the HUB in the center of The Wheel.¹⁸¹

In this model, the spokes are the means by which the believer maintains a Christian life that is centered in Christ and moves smoothly on in victorious Christian living, unencumbered by imbalance.

Trotman also suggested another paradigm for presentation of the Wheel, this time proposing that the Wheel represented the basics for spiritual health. He explained:

If there are certain essentials for the strong, healthy, physical life, it follows that

reading, two-and-one-half hours to study, and three hours to review and memory. “The Word,” he said, “is the foundation to our Christian life—[it] gives strength, courage, cleanses, [and] strengthens faith.” Much time—at least more than twelve-and-a-half hours per week—should therefore be given to ingesting the precious word each week. Dawson Trotman, “The Word” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹⁸¹Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 4.

there may also be basics essential to the well-balanced, healthy, spiritual life. The Presence of CHRIST (the HUB) represents life. The Power of CHRIST in the life (thru [*sic*] the spokes) represents growth. Life may mean merely existence. It may be said that many people are definitely alive who do not seem to be vitally useful in the World. This is existence. However, buoyant health—made possible by growth, and not possible apart from growth—may mean vital, joyful, useful living. It will stand repeating that the believer has no control over the Presence of life in him (the HUB); but he has much control over the Power of that life as manifested through him (by means of the spokes). It should again be stressed that three spokes are not enough. Each of the four essentials is so vital that the absence of any one may seriously impair the function of the entire Wheel.¹⁸²

In this model, the spokes represent the elements of the spiritual life that are necessary for vibrancy, health, and spiritual growth, and all spokes are needed.

Taken together, these two paradigms for presentation of the Wheel provide a summary of Dawson Trotman’s core theological beliefs regarding personal spiritual disciplines. Jesus is the center of all spiritual life, and as a result of his position, everything must revolve around and find its foundation in him. The presence of Jesus in the believer must mean that the believer’s life looks different as a result—the believer should be “living the life” before a watching world and thereby glorifying Christ. The means by which this life, which is founded in Christ, is lived before others is by the Wheel’s spokes. Time in the Word—particularly through hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on Scripture—leads to prayer, obedience, and witnessing. The horizontal elements are influenced in every way by the vertical elements, and all four spokes serve to connect the Christian to Christ (to receive) and to the world around him (to display).

Summary of Trotman’s Practice of Personal Spiritual Disciplines

Dawson Trotman had much to say about the importance of personal spiritual disciplines in the lives of those who would follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but his relationship with those disciplines was deeper than mere instruction. Trotman lived

¹⁸²Ibid. Trotman used the “Spiritual Basics” paradigm of Wheel presentation to discuss the four spokes in his “Faithful Men” manuscript. Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 41-47.

what he taught, and he taught what he lived. He spoke not as an observer but as a participant; not as a theorist but as a practitioner. When he discussed the great spiritual value in spending time in the Word and in prayer, he could cite what God had done in his life via those disciplines. When he adjured his Navigators to hear, read, study, memorize, and meditate on the Word, he spoke with the authority of one who diligently practiced those disciplines. Billy Graham said of him that “he was a man of discipline. His life seemed a rebuke to this undisciplined, loose-living age. He disciplined his own life, and he demanded discipline in others. . . . that’s the way a Christian should be.”¹⁸³ Trotman himself wrote in a personal Bible study that “the thing to remember is that it is all HIS now and it is a matter of putting my life in HIS hands at the beginning of each day.”¹⁸⁴ Trotman sought diligently to maintain the practice of putting his life in the Lord’s hands as each morning began. This section will summarize Trotman’s practice of personal spiritual disciplines by first discussing his times alone with God, by then examining his times of corporate devotion, and finally by chronicling some times when he struggled to maintain what he felt to be an adequate devotional life.

Time Alone with God

Trotman’s personal journal is filled with accounts of time spent with his Lord. The very first page of the journal, in fact, opens with this entry: “12 p.m. Just arrived home from the hills where I confessed again the sin that has overwhelmed and confused me, has caused others to suffer and I daresay has been a great hindrance to the work (that wonderful work of winning souls). Anew has He assured me that I am forgiven. II Cor.

¹⁸³Skinner, *Daws*, 385.

¹⁸⁴Dawson Trotman, AlphaOmega Bible Study on Rom 12, May 17, 1944 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives). Donald Whitney notes that Trotman’s devotion to personal spiritual disciplines is not only inspiring but also instructive for Christians today. Regarding the importance of Scripture memorization and the amazing manner in which Trotman memorized one thousand verses in three years of truck driving, Whitney writes, “If he could memorize over three hundred verses a year while driving, surely we can find ways to memorize a few.” Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 44-45.

2:14.”¹⁸⁵ The next day, he recorded that “I went to the old church about 9 o’clock p.m. and prayed until I could stay awake no longer and laid down on the floor and slept until daybreak at what time I again poured out my heart before the Lord.”¹⁸⁶ Trotman’s personal devotional life was the key to his life and ministry. Foster records,

The most significant influence on him was his own personal time alone with his Savior. For though he outwardly appeared to be strong and self-sufficient, inwardly Daws was utterly dependent on God. He spent many hours in Bible study, prayer, memorization, and systematic working through of the great doctrines of Scripture, ‘building himself up in the most holy faith.’¹⁸⁷

This rugged leader who purposely cultivated the “man’s man” image in his own life to illustrate that Christianity was not just for women and children¹⁸⁸ recognized his helplessness apart from his Lord, and he returned often to his source of life and power through personal devotional time. On November 15, 1929, he recorded, “Definite memory of Scripture—definite continual reading of Scripture—builds the prayer life, which growing makes the working vital Christian, and indeed fruitful.”¹⁸⁹ He leaned heavily upon Christ through spiritual disciplines so that his life might be vital and fruitful in ministry.

In the morning. Trotman made time for prayer, typically seeking to rise early in the morning to spend time alone with God. He believed that his strength and usefulness depended upon it. He wrote reflectively in his “Faithful Men,” “I had been taught from the beginning that one characteristic common to all men GOD had ever used down thru the ages was an effective prayer life. This meant, of course, only one thing: I

¹⁸⁵Trotman, personal journal, August 21, 1929. This page bears the title, “Beginning of Journal, Dawson E. Trotman.” 2 Cor 2:14 says, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.”

¹⁸⁶Ibid., August 30, 1929.

¹⁸⁷Foster, *The Navigator*, 28.

¹⁸⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 12.

¹⁸⁹Trotman, personal journal, November 15, 1929.

must give myself to prayer. This was done by meeting with the LORD day after day, month after month, year after year, in the early morning hours.”¹⁹⁰ His journal reflects this reality in his life. On May 1, 1931, he wrote, “Up 5—cold—pray. . . . Find it most difficult to pray. I am memorizing 7 passages a day.”¹⁹¹ Three days later, he wrote, “3:45. Arise, climb further to summit of one of Sierra Nevada Mountains—see sunrise, great. Pray in snow. Back camp exhausted—quiet day. God is great. Memory work. Especially concentrating on one book at a time. Now in Isaiah.”¹⁹² This pattern continued—albeit not unbroken—throughout the course of his life.

Alone. Trotman realized the primacy of spending time with the Lord over and above spending time with even those he loved the most. On December 2, 1931, he recorded, “The LORD had enabled me to arise early these past few mornings. My soul thirsts for fellowship which He alone can give. I love to be with Lila, she is so sweet and dear, yet he alone can satisfy my soul longings.”¹⁹³ On January 5, 1933, he writes that while on a trip with Buddie—his nickname for Lila—he broke away for time alone with God. He wrote, “In prayer, alone, my heart was strengthened, blest. What a wonderful season I enjoyed. Some lessons previously learned but forgotten were again brought to mind.”¹⁹⁴ In a handwritten journal entry marked simply with the year 1934, Trotman

¹⁹⁰Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 8. Trotman was not dogmatic about what time of day people devoted themselves to prayer and study of the Word, but he found that the morning hours were the most profitable for him. As a result, he highly suggested the same for those he disciplined. He wrote, “There are probably no two human schedules exactly alike and, therefore, one person may find a suitable and quiet time and place at a different hour from another. However, experience will probably demonstrate that in the lives of most people the Morning Hour offers more quietude and suffers fewer interruptions than any other time of day. Therefore, for those who are having any difficulty at all with their daily reading, the Morning Hour is strongly recommended.” Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 19.

¹⁹¹Trotman, personal journal, May 1, 1931.

¹⁹²Ibid., May 4, 1931.

¹⁹³Ibid., December 2, 1931.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., January 5, 1933.

penned,

Lila is certainly sweet to me these days. Each morning about 5 o'clock I hike up above the cabin to an oak tree where are great rocks [and] there have an hour with my Lord. I've read Acts, Amos, John, I & II Chronicles, Colossians, I & II Corinthians in the last couple of weeks. I find a lot of unswept crevices, which have been passing by unnoticed because I have not had the searchlight of God's Word upon my heart like I ought to have had¹⁹⁵

On March 2, 1937, he wrote, "Spend a happy two hours alone on a ridge with my Lord. What a pleasure to get out alone away from the hurry of city life. How I would that I were able to have more such time alone with the Lord in these days" ¹⁹⁶ The pattern continued throughout his life, as evidenced by representative journal entries throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

In a systematic manner. The materials Trotman developed for others to follow in developing their own patterns of personal spiritual discipline indicate clearly his championing of structure in maintaining those disciplines, but he also cultivated those same habits in his own life. On December 3, 1931, he recorded that "this has been a blessed day. I was enabled to map out a systematic prayer list which makes it possible for me to pray for hundreds, both missionaries and friends, boys, etc. viz. Mon.—Africa, Asia, Australia; Tues.—China, Japan, etc."¹⁹⁷ On February 19, 1937, he documented that he was able to spend a "good deal of time in study. For quite some time I have been marking my Bible in such a way as to enable me to remember many of the wonderful truths the Lord brings to my mind that will be of use to those that I teach the Word to."¹⁹⁸ Records of Trotman's systematic methods of completing personal spiritual disciplines are maintained at the Navigators Headquarters Archives in the form of completed Bible

¹⁹⁵Ibid., undated, 1934.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., March 2, 1937.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., December 3, 1931.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., February 19, 1937.

studies he wrote out for his own personal benefit. He refused to ask others to do anything he was unwilling to do himself, so he completed the same studies he devised and assigned to others.¹⁹⁹ Trotman believed that Satan was opposed to the establishment of discipline in the lives of Christians because such discipline opposed his purposes, so Trotman insisted that he and other believers strive valiantly—with the help of those who would keep them accountable—to maintain such practices.²⁰⁰ Developing a system helped, even in his own life.

Redeeming the time. Trotman also found that Romans 8:28—“. . . that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose”—was true in his devotional life. Mention has already been made of his providential temporary crippling after reading of Hudson Taylor’s being beneficially bedridden and how useful that time proved to be in his life.²⁰¹ That incident was not the only time when God providentially sequestered Trotman and provided him time to focus intently upon the Lord for an extended period. On November 2, 1931, Trotman recorded that he was “down and ‘in’ with poison oak. I am taught in the Word, in everything to give thanks, so I thank my GOD for this affliction.”²⁰² During that period of time, Trotman reflected honestly on what the Lord had done in his life as he had concerted time to listen intently without outside interference:

After spending a somewhat profitless day filled with no real desire for GOD’s glory and then a change in circumstances which enabled me to be alone, I unburden my heart to GOD. I confess the tremendous failure in practically everything that I have been and wait upon GOD to reveal the cause. He plainly shows me wherein lies the reason for my apparent deadness. I am surprised. Little have I realized these past months the cause. In the background of all this lies the heart of the whole failure,

¹⁹⁹Dawson Trotman, “Discipleship,” *Park Street Spire* (June 1956), quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 211.

²⁰⁰Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 12.

²⁰¹Trotman discussed this time in his January 13, 1933 journal entry.

²⁰²Trotman, personal journal, November 2, 1931.

suppressed workings of GOD in and through me. Plainly speaking, while tying myself up to others by reason of financial support, etc., I have gradually slipped off onto a tangent and have been spending time to please men and women. ‘GOD forgive me.’ These men and women are real CHRISTians, not realizing their part, meaning their part, no doubt, for good. I confess the sin and definitely make plans to change.²⁰³

He recorded three days later that, upon reaching the end of his affliction, he was grateful for the Lord’s work even in his trial: “I am just recovering from a severe case of poison oak, covering a period of 2 weeks, through which while having time to think and pray, real and marked changes have come into my life. My life is in the King’s hand.”²⁰⁴

Trotman certainly did not revel in suffering, whether at the hands of other men or of natural phenomena, but he saw the hand of God in whatever circumstances he encountered and sought to redeem the time for the best purpose possible—God’s purpose.²⁰⁵

Time with Others and God

Although Trotman spent much time alone with God, he also recognized the power in joining together with other Christians to come before the Lord in the agreement of faith. Not only did he find this time edifying in his own life, but it also provided him the opportunity to model personal spiritual disciplines for others. Foster records that, as his inner circle of those who would be most influential in his life and ministry grew, so grew his faith:

He gathered around him men who trusted God as well. It was a team effort:

²⁰³Ibid., November 11, 1931.

²⁰⁴Ibid., November 14, 1931.

²⁰⁵During the time during which Oran Bell was continually pursuing Trotman in 1945, Trotman maintained that God’s hand was evident in the affliction. He recorded, “Have a wonderful season upon on the hill alone with my LORD. He speaks many words of comfort and peace and challenge and heart-searching. I know that I cannot possibly kick against what the LORD is doing. HE is doing a work that I cannot possibly forget that will have a bearing on all the future. One passage that has been brought home repeatedly is this: ‘Every branch in ME that beareth fruit, HE purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit.’” Trotman’s journal entries and correspondence indicate clearly how difficult that period of time was in his life, but he nevertheless maintained a trust in and dependence on God throughout the process. Trotman, personal journal, August 15, 1945.

Dawson and God; Dawson, Lila, and God; Dawson, his family, his ‘Gang’ of collaborators, and God. The wider his circle of influence spread, the more his faith grew to nurture the added responsibility. It was not a one-way street. He was also stimulated by the faith of his growing team. Together they diligently sought God, convinced that ‘He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that *diligently* seek him’ (Hebrews 11:6).²⁰⁶

Some of the most profound moments in Trotman’s life—those moments that had the most lasting impact on his life and ministry—were spent with others in the presence of God.

Walt Stanton. Perhaps the most foundational corporate prayer time in Trotman’s life was spent with a young man named Walt Stanton in 1931.²⁰⁷ For forty-two days, Trotman met together with Stanton near a canyon outside Lomita every day to pray. In *The Need of the Hour*, Trotman records how this time came about and how it impacted his life. He had been reflecting on Jeremiah 32-33, focusing particularly on the message of his favorite verse, Jeremiah 33:3.²⁰⁸ Trotman recounted:

I asked a buddy, ‘Do you believe this verse?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ I said, ‘I do, too, but I’ve never seen these great and mighty things, and I’d like to.’ So we started a prayer meeting every morning. We decided to meet at a certain spot, have a fire built, and be in prayer by five o’clock—not one minute after five. We just made it a date. We prayed two hours on weekdays but met at four on Sundays to pray for our Sunday school boys by name and for the Sunday school. We prayed for Harbor City, Torrance, Long Beach, San Pedro, Los Angeles, Pasadena, and the surrounding cities from which I had received calls from young Christian fellows saying, ‘Come over here and show us how you’re reaching those boys.’

The third and fourth weeks we started to include cities up the coast—San Francisco, Oakland, Seattle, and Portland. We said, ‘Lord, use us in these cities.’ By the fourth or fifth week we had covered every state in the Union. As we listed them we prayed, ‘Lord, use us to win young men to You in the state of Oregon. Use us to win young men in Massachusetts.’ Every morning we prayed for every one of the forty-eight states. Then about the sixth week one of us said to the other something like this: ‘If we believe God is big enough to let us win men in every one of the forty-eight states, let’s go all out!’

We bought a world map and left it up on the Palos Verdes hills. Each morning we’d pull this old map out and pray that the Lord would use us in China and Japan and Korea. At the end of the forty-two days, I felt a burden lift. We stopped asking

²⁰⁶Foster, *The Navigator*, 35.

²⁰⁷Ibid., 42. Foster refers to this experience as “the turning point” in Trotman’s life.

²⁰⁸“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not” (Jer 33:3).

God to use us and began thanking Him that he was going to do so.²⁰⁹

This season of protracted prayer with a fellow believer was neither Trotman's first nor his last, but it was instrumental in increasing Trotman's faith and his proclivity to make big requests of a big God. No less importantly, it was foundational in shaping Stanton's life. Skinner records Stanton's words as he later reflected on that time with Trotman, noting that Daws believed "God could do great things through the apostles and prophets, and he had faith God would do them through him."²¹⁰ Time would prove his assertion.

Lila Trotman. Any mention of Trotman's patterns of prayer with others would be woefully incomplete without some discussion of the one with whom he prayed the most over the years of his Christian life. From the time he was twenty—and she was thirteen—Lila Clayton bewitched Dawson. When they were married five years later, they devoted themselves to the Lord's ministry and their household to the Lord's service. She was his primary partner in ministry, and she often provided the unsung elements of their ministry by keeping their home, hosting Christians, preparing meals for bands of Navigators that filled their home constantly, and raising their children.²¹¹ Perhaps nothing she did, however, was so valuable in shaping her husband's life as those times of devotion with him. In 1931, for example, she joined him in praying for the boys to whom he was ministering and their friends.²¹² In 1939, he recorded that they were struggling to keep their devotional times together, but they were pressing on in the struggle to spend precious time together with their Lord. He wrote, "Up early and have Devotions with

²⁰⁹Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 23-25.

²¹⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 62.

²¹¹Skinner records that Dawson "was delighted with her oneness of heart with him and her involvement in the ministry God was giving them . . . Her high-spirited cooperation in doing her part in this work, her modest, discreet manner, and her warm personal interest in the fellows who came regularly to the Bible studies were only a few of the qualities he appreciated in this woman God had fashioned for him." Skinner, *Daws*, 87.

²¹²Trotman, personal journal, October 4, 1931.

Lila. We are fighting thru to have this time with the Lord each morning. Strange how easily Christians are sidetracked from the things that are known to be essential. We have both felt it very much in our two lives that is the lack of this time together.”²¹³ They pressed on, seeking to maintain their practice of devoting time to the Lord alongside one another.

The spiritual connection Dawson and Lila had was perhaps best portrayed in her words to the Navigators East Coast Conference just four hours after he died. She said, “Praise God for 23 and almost 24 (it would have been 24 July 3 [1956]) of the most blessed years of my entire life with this man of God. He led me to the Lord and he fed me from the Word and he certainly through the Spirit has helped me to establish my goings.”²¹⁴ Dawson was used instrumentally by God in shaping the spiritual life of his wife, but there is no question that he would say the same of her influence in his life. Even though she never quite felt that she could speak with complete honesty to him about his struggles and shortcomings, she nevertheless loved him dearly and filled the gap so many times in the lives of her children while their father was away.²¹⁵ Her personal epitaph reads simply, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4). Lila received from her devotional times with her husband the secret to discipling others, and she passed it on to her children—all of whom now walk with the Lord.

Key Christian leaders. Trotman was not only instrumental in passing along principles and methods that shaped the ministries of key Christian leaders of the

²¹³Ibid., January 9, 1939.

²¹⁴Lila Trotman, “Lila Trotman’s Testimony Just Four Hours After Dawson’s Home Going” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

²¹⁵Madeline Trotman, telephone interview with author, May 15, 2014. Madeline is married to Burke Dawson Trotman, the third child and second son of Dawson and Lila Trotman. Additionally, Madeline was discipled for many years by Lila both before marrying her son and certainly thereafter.

twentieth century, but he was also responsible for joining with them in developing their own spiritual lives. Perhaps the most remarkable moment during which Trotman joined together with other Christian leaders for prayer occurred on a mountainside in Beatenberg, Switzerland in August 1948. Trotman had been invited by Torrey Johnson, founder of Youth for Christ, to speak at the first Youth for Christ World Congress on Evangelism.²¹⁶ While there, Trotman convened a meeting with three other Christian leaders for prayer. Skinner records Hubert Mitchell's recollection of the event:

Daws had called us together for prayer and meditation. Billy [Graham] was there, and Bob Evans. We had kind of a time of confessing our needs, our shortcomings, our lack of power and effectiveness among people. And we made a covenant that we would know much more of the Bible by heart—dig in. We shook hands four ways and covenanted to really get down to business in the Scriptures, not know about the Bible but know the Bible.²¹⁷

Imagine the implications of this particular prayer meeting. Just over a year later in 1949, Billy Graham launched the “Christ for Greater Los Angeles” Crusade that propelled him into national acclaim, and he has since become the most prolific evangelist the world has ever known.²¹⁸ That same year, Bob Evans founded his Greater Europe Mission to reach into France and then throughout Europe.²¹⁹ Hubert Mitchell, who was already serving as the director of the Southeast Asia Youth for Christ, went on to make a substantial impact for Christ in India and Indonesia.²²⁰ Foster—obviously in awe of what God accomplished through this Trotman-called prayer meeting—notes, “It would be a fascinating study to discover how God brought each of those four men to that spiritual altar in Switzerland where the wood of man and the flame of God broke into white heat.

²¹⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 296.

²¹⁷*Ibid.*, 298.

²¹⁸Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, “History,” accessed May 28, 2014, <http://billygraham.org/news/media-resources/electronic-press-kit/bgea-history/>.

²¹⁹Greater Europe Mission, “GEM Beginnings,” accessed May 28, 2014, <http://gemption.org/gem-beginnings>.

²²⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 289.

What God did for these four men in answer to prayer, He also did for the entire delegation at the Congress. God moved in mightily!”²²¹

Others. Trotman’s times of prayer with fellow Christians was not limited to those who would become regional or worldwide Christian leaders. He invited many others into his spiritual prayer closet and petitioned the Lord with them. His journal reveals several times of protracted prayer with fellow believers. He spent nine days, for example, in Rock Creek Canyon with Louie Bardwell in 1931, recording that “Louie and I are eating only two meals a day to the end we might have more time [to pray and memorize Scripture].”²²² March 1937 provided a time of protracted prayer between Trotman and Jim Downing, who still serves with the Navigators today even though he is now over one hundred years of age.²²³ Trotman recorded, “As the days have gone by [Jim] and I have had increasingly blessed fellowship and the Lord has used the time together to the Edification of both of us.”²²⁴ In February 1940, Trotman had a prayer meeting with Ken Yott, who had been negligent several times in attending because, according to Trotman, “the alarm clock [that failed] must be in control of the Devil.”²²⁵

In 1942, Trotman made a habit of taking men with him to pray. Skinner records his influence on the lives of these men: “Monthly half-days of prayer were a highlight, when Daws met with his staff men, club leaders, pastors, and other friends for early breakfast at 175 [the Nav Home], then all went to the park to pray until noon.

²²¹Foster, *The Navigator*, 36.

²²²Trotman, personal journal, May 5, 1931. Skinner discusses this time in her work as well. Skinner, *Daws*, 61-62.

²²³The Navigators, “The Word of God,” The Navigators Tools, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://www.navigators.org/Tools/Newsletters/Featured%20Newsletters/Disciple-%20Monthly/April%202014/April%202014/The%20Word%20of%20God>.

²²⁴Trotman, personal journal, March 8, 1937.

²²⁵*Ibid.*, February 10, 1940.

Consciously or not, he followed Jesus' example of teaching those with whom he worked to pray by praying with them."²²⁶ On December 3, 1943, Trotman wrote that "this morning 5 a.m. met [Charlie] Cooper, [George] Cowan, [Lorne] Sanny, [Hubert] Mitchell, [Dick] Hillis, for a precious season of real prayer. These times have been a terrific challenge to all of us and it is thrilling to see Cooper and [Ernie] Mintie getting a world-wide vision."²²⁷ In 1946, Trotman recorded a time of prayer with Torrey Johnson after dinner with Johnson, Chuck Templeton, and another member of the Youth for Christ staff. He wrote that after Templeton and the other staff member left, "Torrey and I have a couple of hours together in his car, especially talking over Youth for Christ and Torrey's problem. The Lord draws our hearts closer together and prepares me for additional opportunity to work toward unity in leaders in National youth groups."²²⁸ Trotman also prayed often with Billy Graham as the two came to work closely together in the early 1950s.²²⁹ There is really no telling the impact on the world that was wrought though Trotman's diligence in praying with others, but there is no doubt that the impact has been substantial in countless lives.

Struggles in Discipline

Although Trotman's commitment to maintain a rigorous regimen of personal spiritual disciplines in his own life was exemplary, he was by no means perfect in his practice. Just like the disciples who struggled to stay awake during the Lord Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, Trotman found that "the spirit indeed is willing, but the

²²⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 209.

²²⁷Trotman, personal journal, December 3, 1943. Skinner mentions this entry in her work. Skinner, *Daws*, 242.

²²⁸Trotman, personal journal, February 4, 1946.

²²⁹Trotman's personal secretary records in a letter dated October 29, 1951, "Today, [Trotman] and Billy were to breakfast together, then maybe golf and probably take a horseback trip into the woods to spend time in prayer." Addie Rosenbaum, "Dear Co-Laborers" letter, October 29, 1951 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Trotman struggled with his devotional life throughout 1931, and he recorded his struggle in his journal. On March 31, he wrote simply, “I cannot pray.”²³⁰ The next day, he continued by recording, “Prayerless—I struggle.”²³¹ Six days later, his desperation was clear: “Oh the conflicts of my soul as I try to pray! Shall I let God use me. I must learn to pray, to wrestle by the hour for souls. Oh Jehovah—catch me, hold me, strengthen me. I need Thee every moment.”²³² His struggle continued in July of that year: “Slept till 7 o’clock (shame). Because of this I must begin the day with but a few minutes of prayer. This is sin.”²³³

In July 1933, Trotman lamented, “I find the hardest thing for me to do is to get to prayer. God is able to make me a man of prayer if it pleases Him.”²³⁴ Skinner notes that “maintaining lifelong disciplines was a lifelong struggle for Dawson, with sustained victories dwindling often to defeat. Yet failures never dampened his enthusiasm for new beginnings, which dot his journal like mileposts—a new schedule for morning prayer, for Scripture memory and review, for study, with no shade of doubt that he would follow it through indefinitely.”²³⁵ In an undated AlphaOmega Bible study on Luke 5:1-16, he recorded a prolonged reflection he titled simply, “All Night in Prayer.” In it, he noted the following:

Somehow I am not satisfied with the time that I am having in prayer, and I believe it is that I am not utilizing my evenings to the best advantage and to His glory.

Never in all time has been there greater need with all the modern inventions we are in touch with the world and know the awfulness of sin and heathenism, and yet I am not burdened for the souls of men as I ought to be.

²³⁰Trotman, personal journal, March 31, 1931.

²³¹Ibid., April 1, 1931.

²³²Ibid., April 7, 1931.

²³³Ibid., July 15, 1931.

²³⁴Ibid., July 14, 1933.

²³⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 112-13.

Lord, give me a ‘burden burning within’ that will bring me to my knees, to the place where I desire and am able to spend all night in prayer to see Thy hand move in the lives of many throughout the world.²³⁶

Therein lies the secret of Trotman’s success in personal spiritual disciplines. Although he struggled to maintain the regimen to which he believed God had called him, he returned willingly and often to a posture of repentance in which he presented his struggle honestly to the Lord. Even when he lacked the desire to engage in personal spiritual disciplines, he nevertheless maintained a desire for that desire. In short, he wanted to want to spend time with the Lord, even when his flesh did not want it. As a result, God used him to teach many how to pray and pursue the disciplines of godliness.

Conclusion

On September 15, 1957, the Wycliffe Bible Translators held their biennial conference in Sulphur Springs, Arkansas. Trotman had been a member of the Wycliffe Board of Directors since 1942, and as a man committed to the Word of God, he sought as a Board member to ensure that as many tribes, tongues, and nations as possible received the Bible in their native language. He believed in the Word’s power, and as a result, he labored diligently to help get it to others. The September 1957 conference was the first Wycliffe meeting since Trotman’s death in June 1956, so Cameron Townsend and the Board invited Lila Trotman and several Navigators to be a part of it. Unbeknownst to Lila, Wycliffe was planning to honor Trotman’s memory and his devotion to the Word by naming their base in Ecuador after him—the Dawson Trotman Memorial Base. Townsend opened his remarks during the ceremony by explaining how Trotman always sought to focus the Board on the Word and prayer, saying, “Daws would come to our Board meetings with a real desire to find the mind of the Lord—not to tell us what he thought was God’s will, but to seek that will together.”²³⁷ At that same ceremony, Ken

²³⁶Dawson Trotman, *AlphaOmega Bible Study on Luke 5:1-16* (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

²³⁷Ethel Wallis, *Lengthened Cords: How Dawson Trotman—Founder of the Navigators—Also*

Watters discussed why Trotman approached the Board meetings in that manner. He said,

. . . Daws was a man of the Word. He was saved by memorizing the Word. He delved into it. He appropriated it. He quoted it. He lived in it—and the Word in himself. In every decision he turned to the Book. And more than that, he, should we say, gambled on the Word, as you are gambling on the Word as you go to other tribes and you realize that there’s only one thing that can turn these people and that’s God’s Word. Your whole life, and your whole time is based upon what the Word of God will do.²³⁸

After discussing the Hand illustration Trotman had developed, Watters went on to discuss Trotman’s devotional life:

We go on to another point which is the second point . . . and that is his devotional life. The impossibility of living a fruitful, successful, vivacious life apart from time with God. And this was emphasized and re-emphasized by the hour. In the early days we read about how he used to get up at four o’clock in the morning for week in and week out to meet God, beginning to pray over at Lomita and Lomita moved to Glendale and Pasadena and that moved up the Coast and that moved from one state to the other and that moved to Hawaii and Formosa. Countries they never heard of.²³⁹

No one questioned the validity of naming the Ecuadorian base of the Wycliffe Bible Translators after Trotman, but not just because Trotman had been a part of the Wycliffe Board. No one questioned it, because it made sense. Wycliffe was dedicating a base that was to be devoted to getting the Word of God to people, so that they might fall in love with Jesus through it. The base was devoted to helping people come to an understanding of God’s will for them in Christ Jesus, and it was an outpost of hope to a people who did not even realize they needed it. Such was the life of Dawson Trotman. He was a man of the Word, and he was a man of prayer. In his *Power through Prayer* that so deeply impacted Trotman’s life, E. M. Bounds said, “. . . the greatest benefactor this age could have is the man who will bring the preachers and the Church back to

Helped Extend the World-Wide Outreach of the Wycliffe Bible Translators (Glendale, CA: Wycliffe Bible Translators, 1958), 115.

²³⁸Ken Watters, “Dedicating Memorial Base,” September 15, 1957 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1.

²³⁹Ibid.

prayer.”²⁴⁰ Trotman filled just such a role. Drawing inspiration from many who had passed on to the great cloud of witnesses discussed in Hebrews 11—men like Moody, Taylor, Bounds, Paul, and most importantly, Jesus—Trotman brought Christians back to prayer and the Word of God. In so doing, he profoundly influenced great men whom God used to shape twentieth century evangelicalism—men like Johnson, Townsend, Evans, Hillis, and Graham. Whatever his contributions to discipleship were, his contributions to biblical spirituality were just as great, and the implications of those contributions reverberate still today.

²⁴⁰Bounds, *Power through Prayer*, 108.

CHAPTER 4

TROTMAN'S GREAT COMMISSION MINISTRY

Until 2013, Tom Phillips served as Vice President for Crusades and Training in the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and was responsible for leading the follow-up ministry of the BGEA. Phillips is a fourth generation disciple of Dawson Trotman. Trotman discipled Lorne Sanny, who in turn discipled Charlie Riggs, who then discipled Tom Phillips. Trotman and Sanny were instrumental in devising and overseeing the BGEA's follow-up ministry, and upon Trotman's death, Riggs took over as leader of that arm of the ministry.¹ Phillips followed Riggs. When asked if the principles taught by Dawson Trotman still had any impact on the BGEA today, Phillips replied, "The guy that's running [the follow-up ministry] now is Gary Cobb, and Gary would be the generation below me. We all go back to Dawson. We're all trained in the Navigator mentality: Scripture memory, small groups, commitment to the Word of God, commitment to discipleship, and when you're running that program, you live that program."² Fifty-eight years after his death, Trotman's influence is still palpable in the most successful evangelistic ministry the world has ever known. Before he died, Trotman made much of the fact that Billy Graham himself carried a verse pack containing verses from the Topical Memory System.³ Phillips still carries his packs in his traveling briefcase. Ruth Graham persisted in memorizing Scripture until she died,

¹Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 300; John Pollock, *The Billy Graham Story*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 88.

²Tom Phillips, telephone interview with author, May 2, 2014.

³Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: A Man Who Trusted God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1974), 327.

noting that in so doing, she was preparing herself for heaven.⁴

The full scope of Dawson Trotman’s impact on disciple-making ministry is difficult to discern simply because his reach was so incredibly vast. Billie Hanks and William Shell attest to the fact that many people who were influenced by the Navigators’ ministry have developed good, workable models for church-based discipleship ministries, but they maintain that “Daws remains the one who put it all together a few decades before others in this century even began thinking about discipleship.”⁵ Trotman did not write the book about *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*,⁶ but he was instrumental in discipling the one who did.⁷ Trotman brought the attention of many evangelicals back to making disciples—not just converts—and his principles regarding Great Commission ministry are still influential today.

This chapter will chronicle Trotman’s Great Commission ministry by first providing a more in-depth historical sketch of his ministry endeavors beginning with his conversion to Christianity in 1926. Attention will then be given to his Big Dipper illustration by which he delineated the Navigator ministry strategy and sought to ensure that the Navigators consistently engaged in evangelism, discipleship, and strategic kingdom partnerships to reach greater impact in the world. This chapter will conclude

⁴Tom Phillips, telephone interview with author, May 2, 2014.

⁵Billie Hanks and William Shell, eds., *Discipleship: Great Insights From the Most Experienced Disciple Makers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 178.

⁶LeRoy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978). Eims’ work contains detailed explanations of the principles taught by Trotman in the Wheel, the Hand, and spiritual multiplication.

⁷LeRoy Eims, *Be the Leader You Were Meant to Be* (1975; repr. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2012), 13. Eims dedicated this particular book to Mrs. Dawson Trotman, whom he described as a “woman of God, spiritual mother to thousands, in every corner of the earth.” The Navigators publication about the miraculous purchase of Glen Eyrie in Colorado Springs includes a photograph of Eims bowling at the Glen. The caption reads, “Navigator LeRoy Eims knocks ‘em [*sic*] down in what is now Glen Eyrie’s King James dining room.” The Navigators, *The Glen Eyrie Purchase: The Miraculous Story of How the Navigators Acquired Glen Eyrie in 1953* (1973; repr. Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 2013), 34-35.

with an examination of Trotman’s understanding of spiritual reproduction and the legacy of disciple-making he left after his untimely passing.

Historical Sketch

After giving his life to Christ in June 1926, Trotman wasted no time in getting involved in ministry. Perhaps the fact that he had been involved in ministry to some degree before his conversion influenced this pattern in his life. Regardless, he immediately began exploring how God might use him in Christian service. He believed that Jesus was speaking quite literally and emphatically in the Great Commission, and he sought to live accordingly. In *The Need of the Hour*, Trotman explained why he felt so many Christians failed to fulfill their purpose in serving God:

I believe with all my heart that the reason so many wonderful Christians don’t accomplish more in their lives is they don’t believe Jesus meant what He said. They have never come to the place where they believe that the all-powerful One who commissioned them could enable them to do these greater works. The last thing He said was, ‘All power is given unto Me. I’m giving you all your orders now. Go and teach all the nations and see that every created being hears the Word.’”⁸

Trotman received his orders gladly and obeyed as quickly as possible.

Patten Blinn Lumber Company

Trotman was so well known among his community—his fame sometimes better described as infamy because of his many hijinks—that word of his conversion to Christianity in 1926 spread quickly. Skinner recalls that the lumberyard where he worked bustled with the report that “Pork’s got religion!”⁹ Here, at the Patten Blinn Lumber Company in San Pedro, California, Trotman found his first mission post.¹⁰ He

⁸Dawson Trotman, *The Need of the Hour* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 2008), 16.

⁹Skinner, *Daws*, 31. Lorne Sanny records that Trotman had been given the nickname “Porky” because he was “slight of stature, with reddish hair that stood somewhat on end.” Lorne Sanny, *Dawson Trotman: The Pathfinder* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1958), 2.

¹⁰Graham Tinning, “I Went To High School with Dawson Trotman,” *The King’s Business* (August 1956): 12.

knew that if he were serious about his decision and about the Lord's commission in his life, his witness would have to begin right there. It was not easy. He had been known as something of a trickster, as he would often drive his Model T Ford wide open down the main drags of Lomita, California while sitting in the back seat and steering with only his feet.¹¹ His fondness for alcohol had resulted in his being picked up by the police four times during his twentieth year alone.¹² Though he had been lauded throughout his high school years as a model citizen—even if his wholesome appearance had been nothing more than a façade—he had more recently given himself over to debauchery, unwholesome talk, and, according to Sanny, a life that was characterized by being “all out for pleasure.”¹³

Having given his life to Christ, however, Trotman knew his reputation had to change. He was no longer the foul-mouthed drunk he had been, and people needed to know the reason. He confessed that “the Bible teaches that if any man can bridle his tongue, he can bridle his whole body. That was one of the first lessons I learned at the beginning of the Christian life.”¹⁴ He knew he had to bridle his tongue and get it under the control of his Lord. He further knew that he had to identify publicly with Christ, but doing so meant that he would likely be associated with the preacher who came to the lumberyard on Thursdays at lunch to preach. Skinner describes that man of God as “dry but sincere” and records that he was often met by the men physically moving away just to

¹¹Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 3.

¹²Dawson Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1975), 8.

¹³Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 3.

¹⁴Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 15. He further adds, “That is one of the reasons why I love to see a brand-new Christian begin to get the Word of God down into his heart. If it had not been for those 20 verses, I would have been back in the dance hall and the beer joints.”

get “out of earshot.”¹⁵ Trotman was therefore faced with a series of tests.¹⁶ The first was whether or not he would take his New Testament to work with him and, in so doing, publicly identify with Christ. He brought it. The second was whether he would allow others to identify him with other Christians, particularly the lunch-time preacher. He decided that he would attend the preacher’s service. Skinner records the incident as follows:

Dawson listened eagerly, strangely warmed by the preaching of the Word, whereas before this he would not have stayed for a moment. *I’d better step out and shake hands with him*, he thought—but *imagine what the fellows will think. No, I have to do it.* He strode up to the man, shook his hand, and acknowledged that he, too, was a Christian. “Good,” said the evangelist. “I’ll expect to see you here every Thursday. Bring some of the boys.”¹⁷

The third test came next in his volley with the preacher. The evangelist asked him if he would be willing to get up in front of his coworkers and deliver his testimony at the next week’s meeting. He was reluctant, but he had prayed that God might use him to bring the gospel to the men in the lumberyard. He accepted the invitation and shared with one or two friends that he would be carrying out the evangelist’s request the next week. Word spread quickly among his colleagues. The company bulletin board was graced with a sign that read, “Pork’s Gonna Preach,” and that next Thursday, all two hundred men who worked in the lumberyard were present.¹⁸

The profundity of simple obedience. At first glance, the events surrounding Trotman’s preaching on a Thursday afternoon at the Patten Blinn Lumber Company seem relatively insignificant. A young Christian decided to make public his decision for Christ

¹⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 32.

¹⁶J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and States of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 48.

¹⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 32.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

and his willingness to follow him. Public speaking was not new to Trotman, so the importance of this occasion seems easily diminished. What Trotman found, however, was that accepting the preacher's invitation was a small but important first step in embracing the ministry to which God was calling him.¹⁹ Skinner records that it was a small step but "a step that God honored."²⁰ As the capstone to the three tests he faced right at the outset of his Christian life, it set Trotman on a course of obedience and willingness to do what God asked, even when it was not comfortable. Clinton asserts that "through these three specific checks, God began to shape and prepare Trotman for an expanded ministry of evangelism. Great usefulness in the future hinges on little issues like these."²¹ Skinner recalls that Trotman's sermon—a treatise on hellfire and brimstone—was unpolished but effective. "In the weeks following," she said, "this [sermon] paved the way for personal conversations with men he would not have dared approach coming to ask him questions."²² Obeying God led Trotman to step out of his comfort zone, to proclaim boldly the truths of God's Word, and then to follow-up with people in individual, one-on-one meetings. This pattern—although not intentional at the time—would remain largely the same throughout the rest of his ministry.

First evangelistic fruit. The very first person Trotman ever led to the Lord came to Christ as a result of his ministry in the lumberyard. Jim Cullen was a coworker of Trotman's who had confronted him about his apparent practice of talking to himself while he drove his carrier truck around the lumberyard. Cullen wanted to know what he

¹⁹Robert Foster records that Trotman later reflected on that experience by saying, "If I hadn't made that decision, I think my whole Christian life would have been hurting." Robert Foster, *The Navigator* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), 97.

²⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 32.

²¹Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 48.

²²Skinner, *Daws*, 32.

was doing, and Trotman replied that he was reviewing Scripture.²³ Trotman had invited Cullen to an Easter sunrise service that he and Graham Tinning had organized, and this interaction about Trotman’s apparent lunacy in talking to himself led to a providential exchange. Skinner records it as follows:

The next day Dawson bought a New Testament and inscribed it “To my pal Jimmy.” Jim was touched by the gift. After that, every day as he drove by on the carrier, Dawson tooted the whistle and reached down a stick with a verse card wedged in the end of it. One day he missed, and Jim asked, “Where’s my verse?”

Some time later, Jim had a verse to give Dawson. It was 2 Corinthians 5:8—“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” Daws read it, swung quickly back around the corner of a lumber pile, and asked, “What do you mean? Have you found the Savior?”

“Yes,” Jim replied. “After you took me to the Easter sunrise service I went home and that night my wife and children and I all accepted Christ.”²⁴

Cullen was the first evangelistic fruit Trotman saw, and his conversion had been the result—humanly speaking—of personal invitation, personal interaction, Scripture memorization, and daily check-up. Trotman was thrilled, and Cullen’s family was filled with new creations in Christ. More of Trotman’s co-workers received Christ in that lumberyard—including seven of the twelve bosses—but this first conversion always remained a vivid memory for him.²⁵

Presbyterian Sunday School Boys Class

At the time of Trotman’s conversion, Irene Mills was serving as junior department superintendent of the Sunday School at Lomita Community Presbyterian Church. In early 1928, she invited Trotman to serve as teacher for a Sunday School class of six boys. Sanny recalls that the invitation was hedged by a warning that the particular

²³Recall that Trotman learned his first one thousand verses while driving that truck around the lumberyard.

²⁴Skinner, *Daws*, 35.

²⁵*Ibid.*

class being offered had already run two teachers away from the group.²⁶ Mills likely knew what she was doing by pairing the boisterous Trotman with a bunch of rambunctious little boys, but the warning was given nonetheless. Trotman was in for a challenge, but he knew his God was big enough. He recounted the season as follows:

I had taken a Sunday school class of six boys. I had just been a Christian a short time, and the superintendent says, “Now, we’re going to give you this Sunday school class, and we’re going to pray for you because this class has killed off two teachers already.” I said, “What do you mean?” She said, “Well, two teachers have already given up. They can’t get these boys to listen.” Well, I had prayed about that, that the Lord would give me the hearts of about three of these kids. The first Sunday, they didn’t listen, and I went back and I met the Lord. And I said, “Lord, how am I going to get these kids? Three of them didn’t listen. One had a bean-blower, and just whenever I’d look down at the Bible, he’d come up with it, you know, and he’d shoot across to the other class. And it took the boys’ attention; in fact, it took mine: I looked up to see if he’d hit! I said, “Lord, what’ll I do?” And then the Lord gave me an idea

I went back that second week, and I said, “Lord, I had my lesson prepared, and those boys didn’t listen. How am I gonna get ‘em? Give me some idea. You made little boys!” And he gave me an idea. I went down to see George, and I said, “George, you know Sunday, the Devil used you.” I saw him alone, and I learned something right off the bat: a boy loses his stinger when you get him alone. He’s different. Boy, he was just little Lord Fauntleroy there. He wasn’t blowing any beans while I looked him in the eye. I read him Mark 4 where it said that the sower tried to sow the seed but the Devil snatched it away. And I said, “You know, the Devil didn’t have to be there. He just used you. While I was trying to give those other boys the Word, you were drawing their attention away and they never got it. And those other five boys failed to hear what God wanted them to hear because of you!” [He replied,] “What’ll I do?” Now this isn’t very good theology, but I told him, “Well, you come back next Sunday, and you be a good boy and act like an angel and maybe the Lord will forgive you. The better angel you are, the more he’s apt to forgive you.” Now that’s not very good theology, but I wasn’t very good on theology. But it worked!”²⁷

This experience made a deep impact on Trotman’s view of ministry. He recognized several truths about what transpired in this little Sunday school classroom in the lives of six little boys. He learned that God was more interested in reaching those boys than he was, so his source for inspiration was the Lord himself. He learned the

²⁶Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 6.

²⁷Dawson Trotman, “Call Unto Me—Jeremiah 33:3,” Discipleship Library, mp3 file, 14:45-18:00, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://turret2.discipleshiplibrary.com/NET00032.mp3>.

power of one-on-one ministry and individual interaction.²⁸ He learned, perhaps most importantly, of the power of prayer for ministry. He concluded the story by telling of the results:

Boy, you should've seen the Sunday school superintendent! She said, "What did you do?" The class listened. George got saved, and so did Jimmy and his other buddy that helped him in his escapades. And this little Sunday school class, we didn't get through our lesson. We found that we had to meet in the middle of the week. And that little class of six boys had grown to where 225 boys had accepted the Lord. The whole "C" football team [came]. The Sunday school had grown from one hundred to four hundred!"²⁹

God used the training ground of this small class to prepare Dawson Trotman for ministry endeavors he could never have imagined. Sanny asserts that "God had found a man who would hide His Word in his heart, learn how to bring others to Christ, and who would pray, 'Lord, You made little boys. Give me an idea.'"³⁰ This event was used by God profoundly, not only to reach the four hundred boys immediately affected, but also to set the foundation for greater works that would reach thousands.

Expanding Opportunities

Trotman's positive experience while speaking to his coworkers in the lumberyard and leading a burgeoning Sunday school movement led him to engage in further speaking opportunities. Tinning records that "everywhere that Daws went he talked about Christ and what experiences he was having as a believer. He went from extreme disbelief to strong aggressive belief. Even in those days Daws was a dominant figure in any group. His language was not always the King's English but everyone knew

²⁸Roy Robertson recalls that "Dawson Trotman once changed a bunch of rowdy boys who had driven off their former Sunday school teachers, into disciplined little scholars who loved the Word of God and who helped bring scores of other youth to Christ. How? By individual attention. By teaching them how to think and study. By challenging them to learn." Roy Robertson, *The Timothy Principle: How to Disciple One-On-One* (Singapore: The Navigators, Singapore, 1986), 38.

²⁹Trotman, "Call Unto Me," 18:00-18:30.

³⁰Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 7.

Dawson and what he thought and why.”³¹ Trotman was not averse to speaking to groups, but he struggled with his lack of skill in the proper use of the English language. Hankins records that Miss Mills encouraged him to speak at Christian Endeavor and other fundamentalist churches in the area, and she also coached him in the fundamentals of public speaking.³² In addition, he quickly ascended to positions of leadership within Vernon Morgan’s Fishermen Club. He had learned much from Morgan and readily put into practice that which he had learned. Skinner records that “the Fishermen Club . . . became the main vehicle for his early ministry. For more than three years he attended and taught Fishermen Clubs, always challenging young men to ‘get into the Word’ and get out and fish for souls.”³³ Mills, who continued to lead the Christian Endeavor groups, was concerned with Trotman’s frenetic approach to ministry during that time. In a letter to Skinner after Trotman’s death, she documented her concern:

Then came a period, a bit disconcerting to us, when he would suddenly decide upon a new field of labor and testimony. When he had built up the boys’ club work it seemed inexplicable to see him drop all that to form a new type of organization. Of those, you may have a record. He was a leader in the local Fishermen Clubs in neighboring towns He set out with a quartette in costume, in the days before that had been done. They held evangelistic meetings in many cities.³⁴

The quartet, named the “Fishermen Four,” would drive from city to city on motorcycles to sing and speak in different churches about the core principle of the Fishermen work—proclaiming Christ boldly and frequently.³⁵

³¹Tinning, “I Went to High School with Dawson Trotman,” 13.

³²James Douglas Hankins, “Following Up: Dawson Trotman, The Navigators, and the Origins of Disciple Making in American Evangelicalism, 1926-1956” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2011), 59. Skinner records that Trotman and Eber Hazelton—a Christian youth from the lumberyard—would stand at one end of Mills’ living room, preaching and leading singing as she coached them. Skinner, *Daws*, 36.

³³Skinner, *Daws*, 39.

³⁴Irene Mills, Letter to Betty Skinner, October 14, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 4.

³⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 39.

Boys' clubs. In addition to these works, Trotman also led two new types of boys' clubs: the Junior Fisherman's Club and Prospectors Club. The Junior Fisherman's Club was designed specifically for training junior high boys in witnessing techniques like those taught by Morgan in the Fishermen Club. The Prospectors Club was developed for boys who were still in elementary school and was devoted to helping young boys learn how to "mine nuggets" from the Word of God.³⁶ Trotman had been trained by Don Milligan in how to employ various techniques to capture the attention and enthusiasm of young boys—using methods like membership cards, ranks, graded Bible lessons, songs, pins, and salutes—and he used them with overwhelming success. One account from former Prospector Norge Cook indicated that the Lomita club of which he had been a part grew to a size of at least fifty boys.³⁷ Trotman recorded in his journal that, although he was supremely thankful for what the Lord was doing through these clubs, he still believed more could be done. He wrote, "In considering the boys' work we saw that counting all Prospectors and Junior Fishermen possible we could account for only 200 in clubs. This led us to ask for one thousand."³⁸

Preaching. Word spread regarding Trotman's fiery pulpit presence, and he received several opportunities to preach in various churches in the region. Between 1930 and 1933, Trotman preached multiple times in multiple places, including Trinity Methodist Church in Los Angeles and on the radio show hosted by their pastor, Bob Shuler; for Pastor Louis Bauman at the First Brethren Church of Long Beach; and for

³⁶Ibid., 41.

³⁷Ibid., 42.

³⁸Trotman, personal journal, April 22, 1932 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs). This request came only after he had prayed to be able to touch two million young men through the Fishermen Club for older boys. As considered in Chapter 3, Trotman sought never to limit God by any paltriness in his prayers.

Pastor Irwin Moon at Montecito Park Union Church.³⁹ The topic of his first sermon was “The Seven Churches of Revelation,”⁴⁰ but he spoke most often on the principles of evangelistic ministry in seeking to recruit young men to participate in evangelism training.⁴¹ While he remained busy with his work with the Fishermen Club and as president of the local chapter of Christian Endeavor, he continued to take on additional responsibilities. He served as a personal worker in the Lomita tent campaign conducted by Brittain Ross in 1927, and Mills records that he was “one of the most earnest” of the crusade’s workers.⁴² He also spend a good amount of time at the Hollywood Presbyterian Church, sitting under the teaching ministry of Henrietta Mears.⁴³ In his speaking, he exhibited a naturalness and a giftedness that attracted many. Tinning records that “his meetings which he led in Christian Endeavor were completely thought out and probably over the heads of some of his listeners. The whole gang came, however, when Daws was leading as they could expect some good laughs and Dawson would certainly bring up some amazing ideas.”⁴⁴ Trotman’s charisma and magnetism, which had served his flesh so well before his conversion, were being honed for use in service to his Lord.

Perhaps a missionary? While he was a student at BIOLA, Trotman got involved with a student team that went out and shared the gospel with anyone who would listen. He garnered quick attention from his fellow students because of his tenacity in

³⁹Hankins, “Following Up,” 60-61.

⁴⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 36.

⁴¹Hankins, “Following Up,” 61.

⁴²Mills, Letter to Betty Skinner, 6.

⁴³Hankins, “Following Up,” 61.

⁴⁴Tinning, “I Went to High School with Dawson Trotman,” 13.

witnessing. Skinner records one unnamed student's reflections of Trotman's evangelistic ministry during that time: "You had the feeling that *all* of his spare time he was down on Skid Row working with bums. He was tremendously admired and loved in the student body, and was always one of the first to pop up with a testimony or to stop and talk to anyone."⁴⁵ Trotman soon became president of the Student Missionary Union at BIOLA and, stirred by the testimonies of foreign missionaries, considered the possibility that he might be called to carry the gospel message to distant soil. These thoughts were crushed by a physical exam wherein he was declared unable to serve in that capacity, so he resolved that he if could not go, he would ask the Lord to help him send others in his stead.⁴⁶ He prayed that prayer faithfully, likely not realizing at the time the scope or magnitude of God's eventual answer.

Pastoral work. Trotman also spent some brief time in pastoral work and church planting. While he was a student at BIOLA, he became pastor of a small church in Manhattan Beach, California.⁴⁷ Later, when the Lomita Community Presbyterian Church split over theological matters rising out of the Modernist and Fundamentalist schism, Trotman was instrumental in planting a new work among those who adhered to Fundamentalist doctrine. He recorded in his journal that Misses Mills and Thomas were asked to leave L.C.P.C. on April 16, 1931⁴⁸ and that the new church held a congregational meeting less than two weeks later to "make plans for the future."⁴⁹ The new church was formally organized on October 4, 1931 with twenty-six members in

⁴⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 54.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 58.

⁴⁸Trotman, personal journal, April 16, 1931

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, April 28, 1931.

attendance. Trotman wrote, “May GOD be pleased to unite our hearts in holy love for one another. We need to fight hard for and with one another these days.”⁵⁰ Trotman served the church in whatever manner he could to help reach the community around him, including playing a key role in organizing a three-week evangelistic campaign that boosted attendance to just under three hundred people.⁵¹ The success was short-lived, however, and Trotman reached the decision that pastoral ministry was not the specific calling God had for him.⁵²

As noted by Mills in her letter to Skinner, Trotman’s pathway to his specific role in God’s kingdom was somewhat frenzied. He knew God had called him to ministry, and he had learned and developed several techniques that became staples in his own life and ministry. What was lacking was his niche—how God would use him specifically to impact the world for Christ. Sanny believed that this period of time in Trotman’s life, chaotic as it may have been, was essential in the making of God’s man. He asserted the following:

His vision was growing during these formative years, and as soon as a new or more effective means of service appeared he was likely to abandon the former direction of his energies and throw himself into the new project. With single-minded devotion to the cause he would be absorbed in exploiting every possibility to the full. For this he was often criticized, for many things half done were left for others to carry on while he went on to a new field. Yet in doing so he drew many people into

⁵⁰Ibid., October 4, 1931.

⁵¹Skinner, *Daws*, 60. Mills asserts that the experience of planting this church was used by God to teach Trotman a foundational lesson about ministry. She reflected, “I verily believe that the Lord used that as much as any other one thing to show Dawson what it meant to step out on faith. I remember his arguing with me one day, as we walked up Cypress St., asking where we would get a building, a piano, etc. etc. etc. As the Lord provided each need, that opened a great vista before him—and he was enabled to step out on faith so far surpassing our thimble full that there was no comparison!” Mills, “Letter to Betty Skinner,” 6.

⁵²Skinner, *Daws*, 61. Skinner records the disappointing trajectory of the South Lomita Church in the following: “. . . in later years Daws looked back at the breakaway church as a mistake. It never became the lighthouse for truth it was meant to be. And though most of the older boys moved to the new church, many others quit church altogether and dropped out of club as well. Parents forbid their boys to return to club, calling Dawson a church-splitter.” Ibid., 60.

leadership in his wake, while he pioneered new fields of opportunity for others—always driving himself with strict discipline and keeping ‘everlastingly at it.’⁵³

Not only was God training Trotman for greater impact, but he was also using him to plow new ground and create opportunities for others to minister in the new paths he created. Trotman was an innovator and an entrepreneur, and even if he did not stay with some sort of ministry he started, others often did—and thereby made a positive impact in the kingdom of God.

Minute Men

Seeking to determine what God wanted specifically from him led Trotman to covenant with Walt Stanton to pray in the hills outside Lomita, California every day for six weeks in 1931. After forty-two days, the two men ended their time together with the belief that God would use their lives to accomplish the purposes for which they had prayed, but they were still not sure exactly how God would reach those ends. They were nevertheless confident in their Lord’s ability. Trotman recorded that “it seemed as though the LORD was saying: ‘You have prayed; now go to work.’”⁵⁴ He was ready to get down to business for God. God was ready, however, to give him a couple more weeks of introspective reflection via a severe case of poison oak. He reflected, “Of course, this gave time to think and to think through and lay plans, for I verily believed in those days that GOD was going to accomplish [his purpose] thru some plan of attack or thru some method.”⁵⁵ The plan the Lord gave him became clear during his incapacitation. He was to further his work with young men, training up an army of Christian soldiers who would fight valiantly for their Lord. They would invade the darkness of sin with the light of the gospel, and they would work diligently to take

⁵³Sanny, *The Pathfinder*, 7-8.

⁵⁴Dawson Trotman, “Faithful Men” (unpublished manuscript, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 9.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 10.

ground for their King.⁵⁶ Not knowing exactly where to begin, he directed his efforts first through the Fishermen Clubs, gaining permission from Morgan to form his new group under the banner of the International Fishermen Club.⁵⁷ He chose six men for the team, and the group dubbed themselves “Minute Men” following their desire to be ready at a moment’s notice to go out and “do spiritual battle for the Lord.”⁵⁸

High standards. The Minute Men were to be passionate gospel-wielding warriors who invaded the world’s spiritual darkness with the light of Christ, and in so doing, they were to “take cities” for the Lord.⁵⁹ To prepare themselves for the important task of gospel ministry, the group adopted a list of standard responsibilities to which each member was held accountable. Trotman later reflected on the importance of establishing such a strict regimen: “Because of the very noticeable lack of time alone in prayer and the lack of understanding of the Word of GOD and how to use it effectively, each man on this newly formed ‘Minute Men’ team (Minute Men for GOD) was to check himself on a dozen different matters”⁶⁰ The first recorded list of duties was adopted at BIOLA on March 3, 1932 and including the following items:

1. One hour of prayer daily
2. Daily Bible reading
3. Touch one soul a day for GOD
4. One fishing trip a week
5. Teach a boys’ club
6. Always be equipped, i.e., Testament, Gospel of John, tracts, F. C. information
7. Memorize one verse a day⁶¹

⁵⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 64.

⁵⁷Trotman would later disassociate his group from the International Fishermen Club due to the death of founder “Daddy” Horton and fear that subsequent leadership would not adhere to Fundamentalist doctrine. Skinner, *Daws*, 64.

⁵⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 66.

⁵⁹Hankins, “Following Up,” 65.

⁶⁰Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 10.

⁶¹Trotman, personal journal, March 3, 1932.

By the end of August that same year, the list had grown to nine responsibilities that were placed in a definitive hierarchy:

1. Memorize a verse a day
2. Have an hour a day with the LORD
3. Touch a life a day
4. Have a definite work to do each week
5. Keep a journal
6. Have ammunition ready
7. Have team business up to date
8. Read 2 hours a week
9. Tackle own task⁶²

A week later, three more tasks were added. Trotman records that these extra responsibilities were added after a time of check-up, saying the following:

From 11 until 12 we read, either the Word or some spiritual book. This followed by prayer and then we had lunch. The business of the afternoon consisted mainly in checking up on our MM duties and this was surely profitable.

Three more duties were discussed and added.

10. Memorize ½ hymn a week
11. Review seven verses a day
12. Spend some definite time on our filing system⁶³

Trotman noted that the men had expressed the sentiment that their work was being hindered, so they therefore felt compelled to expand their regimen to twelve essential tasks in order to refine themselves all the more.⁶⁴

Being a member of the Minute Men was no easy task. The men were required

⁶²Ibid., August 28, 1932.

⁶³Ibid., September 4, 1932.

⁶⁴Ever passionate for young people, Trotman used many of the Minute Men principles in the formation of groups for teenage students in junior and senior high school. He dubbed the boys' clubs "Dunamis" based upon the Greek word for power from which the English term "dynamite" is derived. Trotman recorded in his journal that the name was selected because it represented "the idea of Power, Force. It is the word translated power in Rom 1:16, the Gospel of CHRIST which is the power of God." Trotman, personal journal, February 2, 1938. The girls' groups were called "Martures," which is Greek for "martyrs" or "witnesses." Robertson records that "these groups were the ones with whom Daws started the disciplines of the quiet time and the spiritual notebook." Robertson, *The Timothy Principle*, 23. The point of these clubs, according to Trotman, was to engender "simplicity, efficiency, and . . . [preparedness] to serve the Lord Jesus in a way truly becoming of a soldier of Christ." Dawson Trotman, "From Whence the Dunamis Plan?" *Timely News Tips* 2, no. 2 (ca. 1941): 2.

to maintain this twelve-point, ultra-disciplined regimen that they dubbed the “Trust ‘N Tackle” (TNT) in order to keep themselves sharply prepared for ministry at any moment.⁶⁵ Mills records that the men “zoomed around on motorcycles to various So. Calif. points,”⁶⁶ and as a result of their labors, they were able to take the three cities of Long Beach, Whittier, and Pasadena after nine months of work.⁶⁷ Trotman reflected that “these ‘Minute Men’ were formed into a Gospel Team, and for the following year experienced the blessing of GOD in challenging young lives thru group meetings and thru the relating of experiences and thru the preaching of the Word to stir young hearts to get down to business for the LORD JESUS CHRIST.”⁶⁸

God was using the ministry of the Minute Men to change lives, but not as many lives were changing as Trotman had anticipated. He was disappointed. He began to notice the distinct difference between what he dubbed “mere believers” and laborers in the harvest, and he knew that he needed to cultivate laborers. He began to preach that “God can do more through one man who is 100 percent dedicated to Him than through 100 men who are only 90 percent.”⁶⁹ Trotman needed laborers, but even with the strict regimen of daily spiritual disciplines he required of the Minute Men, he had not yet discovered the secret to reproducing such men and thereby winning the world for Christ. In God’s providence, an event was about to transpire that would change his life and ministry forever.

⁶⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 65.

⁶⁶Mills, “Letter to Betty Skinner,” 4.

⁶⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 69.

⁶⁸Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 10.

⁶⁹Skinner, *Daws*, 69.

“And Then He Met a Hitchhiker . . .”

Everything about Trotman’s young Christian life and nascent ministry was pointing him to a passionate career of soul-winning. Hankins writes, “The bible [*sic*] training at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, the young people’s meetings, and the church revivals all suggested that soul winning was the key to ministry. Trotman believed in this method, applied it to his daily life, and was quite successful at evangelism.”⁷⁰ Trotman believed that he was carrying out God’s calling on his life as well as he could, and he was seeing many people make decisions for Christ. He maintained the practice of giving his new converts Philippians 1:6 after leading them to the Lord: “being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” He felt that, once he led the person to Christ, his work was complete, and he could move on to the next prospect. Then, in the providence of God, Trotman stumbled upon someone who needed a ride.

One hot day as Trotman was driving to a golf course, he stopped to pick up a hitchhiker. He had made a practice of picking up those who needed a lift, because he found that they were a captive audience for gospel presentation. On this particular day, when Trotman stopped to pick up his next unwitting gospel recipient, the man took the name of the Lord in vain while entering the car. He said, “Jesus Christ, it’s hard to get a ride today.”⁷¹ Navigator Scott Morton recalls what followed:

[The man’s cursing] broke Dawson’s heart So he pulled the car over to the side of the road and said, ‘Here, lad, read this,’ and within an hour had led that young man to faith in Christ. A year later, he’s driving down the same hot, dusty road, sees a hitchhiker, [and] picks him up. The hitchhiker gets in the car, curses in the same way: ‘Jesus Christ, it’s hard to get a ride today.’ Then they recognized

⁷⁰Hankins, “Following Up,” 188. The title of this section, “And Then He Met a Hitchhiker,” was original to Hankins and describes perfectly the providential turn of events that reshaped Trotman’s ministry for the remainder of his life.

⁷¹The Navigators, “Early Navigators History,” accessed June 10, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RQieknF_eU, 2:15.

one another. The young man said, ‘Don’t I know you?’ It was the same kid he’d picked up a year before.⁷²

Trotman’s view of Great Commission ministry was rocked. He had believed that those whom he led to Christ would somehow automatically grow into mature Christians. He said, “Winning souls was my great passion. But after I met this boy the second time on the way to the golf course, I began to go back and find some of my ‘converts.’ I want to tell you, I was sick at heart.”⁷³ From that time on, Trotman resolved that he would never again leave a precious, newly re-born child of God without the immediate care he needed. Skinner records the impact in his life: “The hitchhiker convert startled him into realigning his ministry—less emphasis on getting the decision and more on growing up into Christ.”⁷⁴

Rethinking the Minute Men. Trotman’s encounter with the hitchhiker also caused him to re-evaluate the Minute Men strategy. He began to understand why the plan was not working as he had hoped. The Lord was showing him the difference between “mere believers” and laborers in the kingdom, and his ministry was never the same as a result. He recorded why he felt the Minute Men ministry, while not a failure, was not as successful as it could have been in the following reflection:

Up to this point, it had seemed to us that GOD would enable us to perhaps travel as a team, going from place to place and challenging lives. This might have been all right had that challenge which we gave been followed by the necessary follow-up on the part of the people in the local community. We had not yet discovered, however, that an area, or a church, or an organization that was incapable of accomplishing the initial challenge was certainly incapable of showing the young

⁷²Ibid., 2:24-2:53.

⁷³Dawson Trotman, *Born to Reproduce* (1975; repr. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 28. Trotman said, “Do you know what was wrong? I had been taking the sixth verse out of context, verses 3 through 7. Paul was not just saying, ‘All right, the Lord has started something. He will finish it.’ But you know, that is what some people tell me when they win a soul. They say, ‘Well, I just committed him to God.’” He then goes on to decry this practice and make an analogy between that practice and failing to provide care for one’s family in light of “leaving them with the Lord.” The idea is preposterous, he asserted, and so is the idea that new Christians do not require care. Ibid., 29.

⁷⁴Skinner, *Daws*, 70.

people how to live up to that challenge once it was given. We have since discovered that challenge produces decision, and decision, though important, is but five percent of the job. Ninety-five percent is working the decision, which demands that the one challenged be shown the ways and means by which he can obey and fulfill the challenge. We had yet to discover that this cannot be accomplished in mass production. In the “Minute Man” plan, we had made no provision for the thorough type of follow up which has since proved to be necessary.⁷⁵

Trotman began to realize that follow-up was the answer for which he did not know he had been looking, and this realization transformed his ministry. He insisted that the Minute Men plan failed to thrive because he had not led his men to follow up with their converts. He learned the hard way that he needed to help nurse the spiritual babes God entrusted to his care into mature followers of Christ who could replicate the process in others.

Five percent to 95 percent. The notion that leading people to a decision was five percent of the work while providing the necessary follow-up in their lives was ninety-five percent of the work became a staple in Trotman’s teaching. In an article that appeared in the *Park Street Spire* the very month he died, Trotman wrote about the transition from the Minute Men’s evangelistic strategy to what would become the central thrust of his ministry from that point forward: “We [the Minute Men] tried to get decisions. And we got them. Yet, as I took inventory and checked back, I found a year later that those decisions that had been made hadn’t been followed through. I reached the conclusion in talking to many that perhaps challenge might be considered 2%, getting the decision 5%, getting that decision carried out 95%.”⁷⁶ Trotman realized that the bulk of the work in a new convert’s life came after his decision for Christ, not before it. He recognized the importance of follow-up, which he defined as “stick[ing] with a convert until he is a disciple. To teach him all you know about the Bible so that he

⁷⁵Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 11.

⁷⁶Dawson Trotman, “Discipleship,” *Park Street Spire* (June 1956), quoted in Ken Albert, Susan Fletcher, and Doug Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2011), 207. Trotman was a minister, not a mathematician.

can then go out and teach someone else all he knows.”⁷⁷ This discovery, alongside a providential meeting with a sailor, led to the birth of an entirely new ministry that profoundly changed the trajectory of Trotman’s life and legacy.

The Navigators

In 1933, Lester Spencer was a seaman second class in the United States Navy serving aboard the battleship U.S.S. *West Virginia* stationed at San Diego, California. A Christian family living in San Diego met Spencer and, desiring to see him grow in the Word of God, asked Trotman if he would be willing to contact him. He was willing. A message was radioed to the ship, and the meeting was set.⁷⁸ Following a dinner meeting at Trotman’s home, the two men traveled by car into the Palos Verdes hills to discuss spiritual matters. While they were talking, a police officer approached the vehicle to check on them. Trotman recounts the event as follows:

I pulled up my Bible. When he looked at the sailor, the Bible and me, he couldn’t put all three together.

“You believe the Bible?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“I used to believe the Bible.”

I looked at Spencer. It was the first evening we had spent together. He looked at me like he wanted me to talk to the policeman. So the three of us sat down together.

The policeman had about six excuses. You could smell them coming. The sailor saw all this man’s excuses met with the Word of God—not just human logic. The policeman did not become a Christian that night but on the way home Spencer said, “Daws, if I could do what you did tonight, I’d give my right arm.”

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 12. Foster records Spencer’s perspective of this meeting and Spencer’s first impression of Trotman. The meeting almost did not happen, because Spencer, not knowing anyone named Trotman, thought perhaps this invitation would lead him into “some kind of a con game to separate a sailor from his money.” He therefore ignored the message at the moment but later found himself intrigued by the situation. He recalled, “The thought kept needling me all afternoon: How did Trotman know me? Where did he get my name? How did he know I was on the *West Virginia*? Curiosity got the better of me, so I arranged to have a buddy of mine serve the evening meal, secured a pass, and headed for the beach. I made sure to leave all my money aboard ship except for thirty-five cents for water taxi back to the ship later that night.” Foster, *The Navigator*, 114. But for the providential “needling” of God, that meeting might never have taken place. The history of evangelical Great Commission ministry changed because it did.

I said, “No, you wouldn’t.”

“Yes, I would.”

Since there were just the two of us riding along I said, “No, you wouldn’t” again.

“I said I would,” he repeated emphatically.

I turned to him and thought he meant business. “Lad, you can do what I did tonight. It’ll mean setting your face like a flint. It’ll mean saying ‘I will.’”

“I will,” Spencer said.⁷⁹

A new ministry was born. Trotman spent the next three months teaching Les Spencer everything about following Christ. He taught him how to study the Bible, how to memorize Scripture, and how to pray.⁸⁰ More than simply teaching him how to engage in those disciplines, Trotman showed him how to do so. He said, “My role seemed to be that of a coach, more than just teacher. The emphasis was not so much upon teaching him what the Bible said, as it was upon showing him how to get into the Word himself and thus continuously discover what it said. . . . As coach, I was prescribing the training program and directing him in it, but Spencer was expected to do the practicing.”⁸¹

“You teach him!” After three months of working with Trotman, Spencer found another man whom he felt needed to be exposed to the same type of spiritual coaching he had been receiving. He brought Gurney Harris to Trotman and said, “Daws, this man is ready for what you have given me. How about it?”⁸² Trotman’s response was short and blunt: “You teach him!”⁸³ Trotman later reflected the reasoning behind his answer: “We believed that if Spencer who lived with this man seven days a week, nearly 24 hours a day, had learned anything in the past three months, then surely he could impart much of that to another, and it would not require as much original time in strengthening

⁷⁹Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 16-17.

⁸⁰The Navigators, “You Teach Him!” (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, undated).

⁸¹Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 13.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³The Navigators, “You Teach Him!”

Harris as had been necessary with Spencer. We acted upon this conviction, and I had very little contact with Harris.”⁸⁴ After three months of intensive training, Navigator number one (Spencer) was now teaching Navigator number two (Harris). Next came Ed Goodrick, who received Christ in the Trotman home after being brought there by Spencer and Harris. Fourth was John Detrick, who had been with Spencer, Harris, and Goodrick the night Goodrick received Christ but was not yet willing to surrender his life.⁸⁵ The fifth man to become a Navigator was Jim Downing, who had joined under the influence of Goodrick and Detrick even though he had professed faith in Christ some time previously.⁸⁶ Before long, 125 men aboard the U.S.S. *West Virginia* had given their lives to Christ and were being trained in the principles of faith Trotman had imparted to Spencer.⁸⁷

From 1933 to 1941, Trotman’s Navigators continued to grow. The five men of God stationed on the U.S.S. *West Virginia* made an impact that spread to other ships. Trotman recalls that by 1935, men from thirty-seven states in the United States of America had become Navigators, and by 1937, Navigators were serving on nearly every ship in the Los Angeles Harbor.⁸⁸ He could see that God was answering the prayers he had prayed with Walt Stanton and others years before. Men from nearly the entire nation

⁸⁴Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 14.

⁸⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 86.

⁸⁶LaVerne Tift includes an extended quotation from Goodrick in his book, *Valiant in Fight*. Goodrick tells the story of his and Detrick’s coming to Christ as a result of the ministry of the “Dawsonites” (the sailors’ pre-Navigator name), and then he relates how they brought Jim Downing into the fold. The author commends the entire book as a fascinating read from, as Tift puts it, the “ship-side” of the Navigators. LaVerne E. Tift, *Valiant in Fight: A Book of Remembrance* (Fresno: Valiant Publications, 1990), 39-45.

⁸⁷The Navigators, “You Teach Him!”

⁸⁸Trotman listed specifically that Navigators were serving on the California, the Texas, the Maryland, the Lexington, and the Saratoga. He added, “It is true that many of those ships have gone to Davey Jones’ Locker, but not without the testimony which was made possible by strong, faithful men of the crew.” Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 16.

were coming to Christ, growing as his disciples, and replicating the process in others. Men from the Navigators could be found on one hundred ships in the Navy.⁸⁹ Then an event transpired that neither Trotman nor anyone in the United States had imagined—an event that has been remembered as occurring on “December 7, 1941, a date which [has indeed lived] in infamy.”⁹⁰ Romans 8:28, which had been so often quoted by Trotman and his men, took on an entirely deeper meaning on that day and during the years that followed.

Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor and the United States’ entrance into World War Two changed everything for Trotman and his Navigators. Unbeknownst to them, God had been preparing men to serve on one hundred ships in the Navy, surely in part because he knew those ships would be scattered all over the world in a very short amount of time. The work that had been done on the U.S.S. *West Virginia* mattered supremely in the lives of those who served aboard that battleship, because many of them perished when it was sunk by five torpedoes during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.⁹¹ Those who survived the attack were then distributed to various posts all over the world. In recalling the events, Trotman quotes Acts 8:4—“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the Word”—and says, “One man went to Australia; another to New London, Connecticut to the submarine base; a couple of others were assigned to other battleships where there was not a solid work and where new, raw recruits were getting ready for the big push, the warfare between GOD and Satan in their own lives.”⁹²

⁸⁹The Navigators, “Personal Sketch—Dawson E. Trotman, March 1953” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1.

⁹⁰Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Proposed Message to the Congress,” December 7, 1941, National Archives website, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/day-of-infamy/images/infamy-address-1.gif>.

⁹¹Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 17.

⁹²*Ibid.*

On December 7, 1941, Navigator men could be found on board one hundred ships. By the end of the war in August 1945, Navigator men could be found on one thousand ships.⁹³ In addition, contacts had been made on at least one thousand Army camps around the world.⁹⁴ Trotman recalled that the mechanism of ministry propagation was relatively simple: “teaching them by word of mouth, man-to-man, the basic elements of a CHRIST-centered, SPIRIT-filled life, viz. a usable knowledge of the Word, a life of prayer, obedience to the known will of GOD, and a strong witness.”⁹⁵ In short, the Wheel worked, and it was being used to transform lives all over the world.⁹⁶ Trotman and the men could see that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose”—even the horrors of war.⁹⁷ Through a thoroughly unexpected turn of events, Trotman’s prayers in the Palos Verdes Hills had been answered.

Second Timothy 2:2. Watching the process of gospel propagation from man-to-man and ship-to-ship during World War Two brought Trotman to a critical observation. He said, “The work as we watched it grow aboard these ships and stations

⁹³The Navigators, “Personal Sketch—Dawson E. Trotman, March, 1953,” 1. Trotman records the manner in which the Navigator infrastructure had to grow as a result of the remarkable ministry growth. He wrote, “In 1941, a staff of three people were handling the Navigators Headquarters Office in Los Angeles. At the close of the War in 1945, it took sixteen people to handle the business of the Headquarters Office. To maintain contact with, and to render the personal help necessary to the thousands of contacts, it became necessary to have an ever-growing staff.” Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 21.

⁹⁴Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 18.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of The Wheel.

⁹⁷A journal entry on April 13, 1945 records a poignant story Trotman received from the fight. Trotman recorded, “Norm overhears a serviceman on the train speak of the LORD. He strikes up a conversation and is finally shown a couple of letters by the fellow whose brother was found dead on the battle fields of Belgium. He was highly commended by his commanding officer and chaplain with regards to his fine CHRISTian life. One letter spoke of finding on his body a testament and a packet of verses. They were the Topical Memory System.” Trotman, personal journal, April 13, 1945.

seemed, at least to a degree, to be the outworking of 2 Timothy 2:2: ‘And the things that thou has heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.’”⁹⁸ Although Trotman had read much about Paul’s intensive personal time in discipleship spent with Aristarchus, Gaius, Titus, Sopater, Ephaphras, and others who traveled with him,⁹⁹ he had become particularly captivated by Paul’s relationship with Timothy. Trotman saw listed in this one verse of Pauline instruction four generations of Christians: first, Paul; second, Timothy; third, faithful men; and fourth, others. In response, he embraced the burden to raise up “Timothys and Timothettes” who would take the gospel message, lead others to Christ, teach them by word and example what it means to follow Christ, and train them to repeat the process with others.¹⁰⁰ He saw this pattern not only prescribed in 2 Timothy 2:2 but also modeled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ himself and profitable in his current age. He discussed the potential in this pattern of ministry in the *Park Street Spire* in 1956:

In the New Testament, the Gospel was carried from lip to lip, from life to life. If one person taught another for six months, and those two went out and won two more, and those reproduced, do you know how long it would take to evangelize the world? Fifteen and a half years! And do you know how many would have heard the Gospel? 2,176,000,000—all the people in the entire world with the exception of the three-year-olds and under. Fifteen and a half years!

We think we have to have a dozen Billy Grahams. No. That isn’t God’s plan. Why under heaven cannot we see the fact that every true believer is a potential reproducer!¹⁰¹

Trotman was convinced that the Great Commission was meant for every believer, and he

⁹⁸Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 18.

⁹⁹Robert Walter Felts, “A Critical Analysis of Dawson Trotman’s Methodology of Discipleship for Contemporary Mission Strategy Among North American Evangelical Mission Agencies” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 54.

¹⁰⁰Second Timothy 2:2 remains the mission statement of the Navigators today. From that one verse, they developed the idea of “generational multiplication” through which they “seek to forward the grace and teachings of Jesus Christ from one believer to the next.” The Navigators, “What We Do,” accessed May 8, 2011, <http://www.navigators.org/us/aboutus/what-we-do>.

¹⁰¹Dawson Trotman, “Discipleship,” *Park Street Spire* (June 1956), quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 206.

found in the 2 Timothy 2:2 methodology the secret to evangelizing the entire world. It was working with his Navigators in incredible proportions, and he believed it could work for any Christian who followed it through.

At the most fundamental level, the Navigators were about fulfilling the Great Commission by multiplying disciples. They believed their purpose was “To Know Christ and Make Him Known,” and to accomplish their purpose, as Skinner put it, they were characterized by “individual multiplication, whereby one teaches another to teach another, and so on, achieving a cell-division type of multiplication of disciples.”¹⁰² According to Trotman, this type of mitotic multiplication was “the guiding principle behind the Navigators work”¹⁰³ and drove each individual Navigator to feel that “it is not enough to introduce a friend to Christ but that he must teach him the things concerning Christian growth and maturity, that he may in turn teach another.”¹⁰⁴ On July 7, 1949, Trotman remarked frankly that missions agencies were failing because they did not employ these biblical principles: “The failure of missions today . . . is on the fact of

¹⁰²Betty Lee Skinner, “History—Dawson Trotman, The Navigators” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2-3. In a different work, Skinner recalls part of Trotman’s epiphany that resulted from the work of his own “Timothy”—Lorne Sanny. Trotman had sent Sanny to Seattle to establish a Navigator presence there, but Sanny found only one man who would get down to business for the Lord. Trotman’s instruction to Sanny was to invest in that one man and to help him replicate the process. By contrast, the Navigator group among those stationed in Honolulu was committed to larger group work. Skinner records that “there in Honolulu, something struck Dawson like an avalanche—these men were living heroically for Christ on their ships and stations. They were in the Word. They prayed. They witnessed wherever they went. But how many were investing deeply in one man, helping him mature, equipping him to reproduce spiritually?” Trotman felt that the greater work was being done by Sanny with his one man in Seattle, and he was further convinced that the 2:2 model of ministry was the way to go. Skinner continued, “No doubt Daws reflected that, as different as he and Sanny were, God had given them a Paul-Timothy rapport that transcended personality, being rooted in Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit. The same could be said of Lorne’s mentoring relationship with Charlie Riggs. God was fulfilling His good promises to these who were wholly committed to do His will and His work in the world.” Betty Lee Skinner, *With Integrity of Heart and Skillful Hand: Insights from the Life and Teaching of Lorne Sanny* (Singapore: The Navigators of Singapore, 1998), 29-30.

¹⁰³The Navigators, “Personal Sketch—Dawson E. Trotman, March, 1953,” 1.

¹⁰⁴The Navigators, “Personal Sketch—Dawson E. Trotman” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 3.

making disciples and you make disciples not by the batch. You can make them in a small group, but . . . you've got to live with them. Jesus did it."¹⁰⁵ Trotman's emphasis on individual work was directed specifically toward the 2:2 paradigm. Two disciples merely meeting together was not the key; rather, each of his men developing a spiritual lineage was the end to which he now strove:

Man-to-man is basic to the 2:2 ministry but won't reach the uttermost parts of the earth; 2:2 will. And I hope none of you fellows will be satisfied until you see your great-grandchildren in the Lord. It's a goal every one of you could aim at. I'm no longer concerned about accomplishing a lot for God. If I can see my great-great-great-grandchildren strong, in the Word, reproducers, that's all I want.¹⁰⁶

Trotman did not discount large group meetings, but he admonished Christians not to let the large groups replace the small groups where he felt real work was done.¹⁰⁷ Further, the small groups need to be precisely focused toward building disciples who could then build disciples who could carry on the work in the life of another.

How to navigate. On an individual level, each man was instructed in the basics of the Christian life. Trotman developed the metaphor of navigating life in Christ extensively:

Each man was being taught how to navigate—that is, first of all he was to have JESUS CHRIST not only aboard in his life, but captain of his vessel. He was to take orders from the Captain 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. He was to sail by the Navigation Almanac and the charts—that is the Bible, which had been made possible thru holy men of GOD as they were moved by the HOLY SPIRIT. They were to have a goal or harbor toward which they were constantly driving. Not only were they to push onward in their chosen direction regardless of heavy seas or driving winds, but also, if possible they were to take others aboard and direct them

¹⁰⁵The Navigators, "Dawson's Vision" (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 3.

¹⁰⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 305. Trotman was emphatic about the effectiveness of 2:2 ministry in reaching the world. He said, "If [missionaries] had our vision of 2:2 instead of one or two people and the fact that these 500,000 were not going to be reached merely by great numbers of missionaries, but by the planting of the seed and the propagation of the gospel from within . . ." The Navigators, "Dawson's Vision," 4. He developed a strong desire to "plant the flag of 2 Tim. 2:2 in other parts of the world." "They Navigate – By Land and Sea," *The Christlike Magazine* (December 1952): 14.

¹⁰⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 304.

concerning how they might do the same. An illustration of the SPIRIT of GOD's quiet work in navigation is seen in the fact that even as the compass always points in one direction regardless of where it is and at all times ever toward the NORTH STAR, so, the HOLY SPIRIT in the life of each Navigator was constantly enabling him to understand his position in relation to the proper direction by ever pointing toward and keeping uppermost in his mind the LORD JESUS CHRIST.¹⁰⁸

Navigating meant following Christ. It meant engaging in personal spiritual disciplines of Scripture hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, meditating, and praying, and it meant allowing those disciplines to serve as a conduit of communion between God and man by which God prepared the man to “bring many sons into glory.”¹⁰⁹ Trotman was insistent that “a man was known as a Navigator, not because of membership, but because he was Navigating for CHRIST and it was obvious to all around.”¹¹⁰

Post-war navigation. Because being a Navigator did not require men to be in active duty naval service on a ship—or even in the military for that matter—the transition from wartime navigation to peacetime navigation was relatively smooth. Skinner records that “when these men left the Armed Forces their positive spiritual influence was felt in their home churches, in Bible schools and colleges, in their businesses and professions and on mission fields in many countries.”¹¹¹ Many Navigators left the service with a strong sense of missionary urgency in their new civilian lives.¹¹² The physical war might have been over, but they knew that a greater spiritual battle continued to rage throughout the world. They had been trained to do something about it. Trotman recorded that

¹⁰⁸Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 19-20.

¹⁰⁹Trotman, “Dawson’s Vision,” 1.

¹¹⁰Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 20.

¹¹¹Skinner, “History—Dawson Trotman, The Navigators,” 2.

¹¹²In December 1944, Trotman published an article entitled “America’s Responsibility in a Post-War World” wherein he asserted that the role of faithful American Christians after the war was threefold: get missionaries ready, send missionaries to the field, and enable missionaries to stay on the field. He was passionate about reaching out around the world, and that passion was passed on to those whom he influenced. Dawson Trotman, “America’s Responsibility in a Post-War World,” *Christ’s Ambassador’s Herald* (December 1944): 11.

“conversations with many men returning to civilian life indicated that one of the common results of living the down-to-business life in the armed forces was the development of a real missionary vision.”¹¹³ Ten of the Navigators who had been on the U.S.S. *West Virginia* went into full-time ministry after leaving the Navy. The first five Navigators all entered vocational ministry: one served the American Sunday School Union; one became a pastor; and three became international missionaries around the world.¹¹⁴

The Navigators’ re-entry into civilian life provided a great opportunity for Trotman to expand the umbrella of Navigator ministries and take the Navigators’ reputation to places of prominence, but he wanted nothing to do with that idea. He wanted his Navigators to be known as Christians willing to serve the kingdom of God, not as ministry representatives seeking to serve their brand. The work that had been done prior to and during the war had been phenomenal and had resulted in tremendous organizational growth, but Trotman was more interested in seeing his men fold into Christian ministry where God placed them after the war’s end. Skinner records his attitude:

Dawson knew the Navigators had helped to bring about this change in the serviceman’s image [from negative to positive]—and indeed in changing the image of a soft and permissive Christianity to one of virile and vigorous commitment. Yet he was more determined than ever to suppress the Navigator name, to take none of the glory from God who had promised to make a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, and to raise up foundations of many generations. This was partly behind his charge to Navigators going back to home churches and to schools: ‘Don’t go back there as a Navigator. Don’t hang out a shingle. Just live the life, throw your weight into helping your pastor, your Inter-Varsity group, win hearts and set the pace. God will give you a ministry.’”¹¹⁵

Trotman’s attitude was reflected in his own life as well. Communications from the Navigators Headquarters increasingly promoted other ministries and sought to provide

¹¹³Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 22.

¹¹⁴The Navigators, “Personal Sketch—Dawson E. Trotman,” 3.

¹¹⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 272.

opportunities for Navigators to connect with and serve the kingdom of God in different ways.

A fair critique. One side effect of the Navigators' re-entry into civilian life was the development of their reputation—earned honestly from their leader—as “super-religious snobs.”¹¹⁶ The men gained this reputation by carrying forth the same exacting standards which had been imposed upon them. *The King's Business* cites the reason behind this assumption as follows:

After the war the Navigator work branched out to include men and women not in the service. But the invitation to join the inner circle was never wide open. The Navigators have never been interested in cluttering their organization with lazy Christians. Only the dedicated are tolerated. Because of this rigorous spiritual discipline a few outsiders have felt the organization was made up of super-religious snobs. When many a Christian, (and this was more true a few years back) sees a fledgling Navigator heading his way an uneasy sense of guilt seems to engulf him as he braces himself for the more or less standard greeting: ‘Here’s a verse the Lord gave me today.’ (Then he repeats the verse, letter perfect with the reference before and after.) After the verse comes a big smile: ‘And what verse has the Lord given you today?’ By now the sense of guilt is complete and the Navigator’s friend can only squawk out some gibberish about not having such a good memory.¹¹⁷

The criticism, while seemingly harsh in an article published to mark Trotman’s death and supposedly to honor his life, was accurate. Trotman did expect much from his Navigators, and he instilled in them the same attitude. Trotman was notorious for publicly humiliating people in an effort to encourage them (and others) to get serious about their commitment to the Lord. Navigators often warned each other about Trotman’s “airplane tests” wherein he would grab a Navigator’s Bible or notebook, shake any loose materials out onto the ground, confiscate their memory pack, and require them to recite a verse he chose.¹¹⁸ No one, including Trotman’s own family, was immune from his method of public “encouragement,” and the result was the reputation mentioned in

¹¹⁶“Dawson Trotman & His Navigators,” *The King's Business* (August 1956): 12.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 271.

The King's Business.¹¹⁹ Trotman's exacting standards produced a sharp breed of strong Christians, but his methods of creating the type of Christian he wanted were not without some collateral damage.

Expanding and clarifying. The criticism notwithstanding, the post-war years provided Trotman with the opportunity to solidify those principles that had characterized the Navigators' ministry and to state them clearly to wider audiences. The Wheel continued to provide the essential framework for the Navigator view of the Christian life, and the centrality of 2:2 ministry was emphasized in venues all around the world.¹²⁰ Trotman's desire was to see the kingdom of God expand, and he knew that the best way he could assist in that effort was to build men and women whom he could then deploy to the services of other ministries that were getting the job done. Skinner recalls Trotman's sentiment that "concern for other members of the body of Christ was biblical but he also made it part of the Nav credo to assist other works in fulfilling their ministries."¹²¹ During this time, Trotman allocated Navigator-trained men and women to the Wycliffe Bible Translators, Word of Life Fellowship, Inter-Varsity, Young Life, Youth for Christ International, and several churches.¹²² Navigators were in high demand.¹²³ Sanny wrote

¹¹⁹Madeline Trotman, telephone interview with author, May 15, 2014.

¹²⁰In recalling a time during his service in the Navy when he asked Trotman to be clear about what he expected of him, Jim Downing records, "When I insisted that he verbalize his expectations, he raised his voice and said, somewhat impatiently, 'Do what you have always done. *Lead people to Christ and build them up to where they can repeat the process.*'" Downing then reflected that "the ministry of the Navigators never got more complicated to [Trotman] than that. He had observed that in every culture he knew of, when Christ-centered Christians started memorizing Scripture, praying, studying the Bible, and witnessing, spiritual revolution was obvious." Jim Downing, *Living Legacy* (Colorado Springs: DawsonMedia, 2007), 8.

¹²¹Skinner, *Daws*, 278.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 278-79.

¹²³While on a missionary tour in 1948, Trotman recognized and reported to the Navigators that there existed a "cry from people everywhere for help from The Navigators." He recognized the enormous amount of requests they were receiving and quickly deferred to God's ability to fill all the requests. He

in 1949 that the Navigators were receiving urgent requests from twenty-two countries around the globe.¹²⁴ In May 1949, Trotman listed several of the requests from ministries all over the world, and he said the following: “What shall we do to meet these requests? To provide materials and methods is not the answer. They are simply tools. It’s the workman that counts. We are happy to announce that definite action is now being taken to get men and women ready for the work that is to be done abroad.”¹²⁵ Trotman then discussed plans to collaborate with the Northwestern Schools under the leadership of their president, Billy Graham, to aid in preparing men and women for Christian service. Trotman did not realize at that time that his organization was about to become more deeply connected with Billy Graham than he could ever have imagined.

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

“Daws, I am not able to sleep nights for thinking of what happens to the converts after a crusade is over,” he said.¹²⁶ Graham uttered these frantic words in 1951. He was issuing his third of three immediately successive attempts to engage Trotman in developing a program for follow-up with those who had received Christ during his mass evangelistic crusades. Graham had seen thousands of people give their lives to Jesus Christ as each session of his evangelistic crusades concluded, but he had no idea what happened to his new converts after he left town and moved on to the next crusade. He was beside himself, and he needed to implement a program that would effectively engage new believers in the Christian life. “Who else?” Graham asked Trotman. “Who else is

said, “. . . I’d be frightened, but GOD loved the world, started 12 apparently poorly prepared disciples out and told them the world was their parish. It can be done—by His grace it shall be done . . .” Lorne Sanny, *The Navigators News Letter* no. 35 (May 1948): 2.

¹²⁴Skinner, *With Integrity of Heart and Skill of Hand*, 34.

¹²⁵Dawson Trotman, *The Navigators Log* (May 1949): 2-3.

¹²⁶Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 26.

majoring in this?”¹²⁷ Trotman was majoring in it.

Trotman knew that mass evangelistic efforts, even including those of his friend Billy Graham, suffered from lack of follow-up. He had himself been vocally critical of such movements for that very reason.¹²⁸ He also knew that the principles God had given to him were effective in bringing spiritual babes to maturity in Christ and turning them into laborers in the harvest. Foster records that “Daws *was* acutely aware that evangelistic campaigns were weak in follow-up. In fact, the whole church was. He also sensed that this Macedonian call to ‘Come over and help us’ was not just from Billy Graham, but from God.”¹²⁹ He could not decline. He was as busy as he had ever been, but he knew God was calling him into this work in a substantial way. He decided to spend a week at Graham’s Fort Worth Crusade that ran from February 24 through March 25, 1951,¹³⁰ and this experience led Trotman to the inevitable conclusion that he must give himself and his Navigators to this vitally important work. A special edition of the Navigators Log devoted to Navigator work in the Graham Crusades reports that “[Trotman] knew it would mean more than printed materials—it would mean weeks and months of labor invested by himself and others trained in the principles of helping new Christians grow.”¹³¹ He broke the news gently to his leadership team on the back porch of his home, saying, “We’ve got more than we can handle, and the [Navigator] work is growing fast, but I know this: we’ve got to help Billy Graham. After being at the Fort

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Foster, *The Navigator*, 126.

¹²⁹Ibid., 130.

¹³⁰Billy Graham Center Archives, “Select Chronology Listing of Events in the Life of Billy Graham and the History of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, up until Rev. Graham’s Retirement in 2005, with a few later significant events,” accessed June 13, 2014, <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/bgeachro/bgeachron02.htm>.

¹³¹The Navigators, “How It Began,” *Navigators Log: Graham Crusades Edition* (October 1957).

Worth campaign, I have no choice but to go all out to work with Billy. And that means every one of us will have to dig in and ask God to enable us to produce twice as much.”¹³² He meant what he said.

Trotman threw himself into developing the follow-up procedure for the upcoming crusade in Shreveport, Louisiana in April, 1951. He took along as many assistants from the Navigators as he needed, and devoted his time to meeting with pastors, training laypersons, and developing materials for following up new converts.¹³³ At the end of that year, Trotman reflected on his experiences with Graham in a letter to his “beloved co-laborers;” he wrote:

It is impossible to describe the joy it has been to work with the Billy Graham team, truly a band of men whose hearts GOD has touched. The Navigators have been entrusted with the direction of the personal work and follow-up phases of these campaigns. The last campaign (in Greensboro, N.C.) seemed almost to outshine all the others for opportunities and results. Imagine having the privilege and responsibility of channeling the 6,443 who made decisions into places of usefulness in the churches of that lovely, aristocratic North Carolinian city. The local committee was so pleased with the work done that they kept Bill Michel and Edyth Sedgley to handle the follow-up office for several months. At one time during the campaign we saw Bill directing as many as 30 volunteer helpers in just the follow-up office and still unable to do all that needed to be done. This made us wonder what has been happening down through the decades when there hasn’t even been a follow-up chairman or committee in connection with most of the major evangelistic efforts.¹³⁴

Trotman believed so much in what God was doing through his work with Graham that he devoted half of his time to the efforts, and he later donated his beloved Lorne Sanny—

¹³²Skinner, *Daws*, 322. The minutes of a Navigator Directors Conference held in San Francisco, California in February 22-24, 1951 record Trotman’s reasoning behind throwing his weight behind the BGEA work. He listed seven reasons, the first of which was that “the converts are definitely entitled to help, and we are in a position to give some help even though it is on a mass basis.” The rest of the reasons were understandably based on how the Navigator work would profit from the experience, but the primary factor was that those who gave their lives to Christ needed the help. Dawson Trotman, “Report on Directors Conference in San Francisco,” March 29, 1951 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 5-6.

¹³³The Navigators, “How It Began.”

¹³⁴Dawson Trotman, “Beloved Co-Laborers” letter, December 22, 1951 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

then Vice President of the Navigators—to the Graham team six months out of each year.¹³⁵ Sanny eventually shouldered the majority of the load for follow-up and even came to be considered part of the Graham team.¹³⁶ Trotman and Sanny combined to train more than thirty thousand counselors for Graham crusades between 1951 and 1956, and at least forty thousand more received training via tape-recorded messages during the London crusade in 1954.¹³⁷

Trotman’s influence on the Graham team and the tens of thousands of counselors and tens of thousands of new converts was staggering. Tom Phillips recalls that the mantra handed down to him from Graham was “Disciples, Not Decisions.” He recalls, “that [slogan] came down from the Navigator training into BGEA, and we [did] everything accordingly. The books we put together, the Christian Life and Witness course, the witnessing tool, the follow-up . . . everything we did was to put people into the church to be discipled by the church.”¹³⁸ Graham biographer John Pollock noted in 1966 that “[Trotman’s] concern for the individual perfectly matched Graham’s concern for the mass. Their coming together in 1951 may have been one of those little-known, unrecognized but decisive moments in the growth of the Christian church.”¹³⁹ Trotman knew that when he heard Graham echoing his long-held sentiment that bringing individuals to a point of decision represented five percent of the work while following

¹³⁵The Navigators, “How It Began,” Skinner, *With Integrity of Heart and Skillful Hand*, 35-36.

¹³⁶Billy Graham, *Just As I Am*. Sanny is pictured as part of “The Team, 1953” on a photo page between pages 166-67 of this work.

¹³⁷The Navigators, “How It Began.”

¹³⁸Tom Phillips, telephone interview with author, May 2, 2014.

¹³⁹John Pollock, *Crusades: 20 Years with Billy Graham* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publishing, 1966), 116, quoted in Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 42. William McLoughlin records that “Graham claimed to have improved upon Billy Sunday’s revival methods by means of a more complete ‘follow-up’ technique conducted by a specialist who belonged to an association called The Navigators.” William G. McLoughlin, Jr., *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1959), 514.

them up represented ninety-five percent, he had made a substantial impact in the entire ministry of the BGEA.¹⁴⁰ He said, “It is amazing to see how the *Lord* took us, so keen and bent on individual contact, and threw us into the largest mass effort in the States today and caused it to fit perfectly.”¹⁴¹ That “perfect fit” working relationship between Trotman and Graham, undoubtedly organized by Almighty God, has impacted millions since it began and left in its wake a vast army of trained disciple-makers all over the world.

Reflecting on Trotman’s Great Commission Ministry

When Dawson Trotman surrendered his life to the Lord Jesus Christ in 1926, he knew that he was called to carry the message of the gospel to the world. He knew that he wanted to get “down to business” for God, and he did so quickly. His ministry of evangelism grew from a willingness to share his faith with his co-workers in a lumberyard to developing would-be evangelists out of boys and young men. He devoted himself to teaching others the fundamentals of actively following Christ, and he sought to turn “mere believers” into “laborers in the harvest” by modeling for them and challenging them to engage in regular spiritual disciplines. He embraced Christ’s call to be a “fisher of men” and to train other fishermen, and he found great success in his efforts. Then he met a hitchhiker, and his ministry was never the same.

Trotman found that he did not agree with the prevailing theological interpretations of the Great Commission. Some theologians had focused their

¹⁴⁰Dawson Trotman, “Beloved Co-Laborers” letter, October 19, 1951 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 4. In his *Multiplying Disciples*, Waylon Moore attributes the quotation, “Decision is five percent; following up the decision is the ninety-five percent,” to Billy Graham. Apparently Graham made the concept a part of his repertoire to the degree that others thought it was original to him. Trotman, who had been dead a quarter century when Moore’s book was published, would have been very pleased. Waylon B. Moore, *Multiplying Disciples: The New Testament Method for Church Growth* (Tampa: Missions Unlimited, 1981), 41.

¹⁴¹Trotman, “Beloved Co-Laborers” letter, October 19, 1951, 4.

interpretation of Matthew 28:18-20 on “going” and therefore emphasized the evangelistic and missiological implications of the Great Commission. Others introduced a bifurcation of the Great Commission by separating its mandate into two separate but equally important tasks: evangelism and discipleship. Trotman rejected both of these interpretations and argued for a more holistic understanding of the text. According to Felts, “[Trotman] suggested there were not two separate tasks, evangelism and discipling, but one great overarching mandate incorporating both tasks, that of making disciples. He . . . vigorously asserted that neither should be neglected, but rather both kept in balance.”¹⁴² Because he believed making disciples was the central thrust of the Great Commission, he consistently encouraged Christians to be about *both* evangelism and discipleship, and he maintained that Christians were required to be obedient in both arenas.

To Trotman, discipleship had two components: a personal commitment and a methodology.¹⁴³ Many of his contemporaries were focusing on the personal commitment required by discipleship—what Hunsicker calls “an individualistic concept of ‘total surrender’”¹⁴⁴—and were therefore emphasizing its inward focus. Trotman, however, concentrated on a more outward focus—that is, a methodology whereby new believers would become mature in Christ. According to Hunsicker, “[Trotman] saw disciples as ‘converts followed-up’ and argued that new believers needed to be ‘discipled into a life of prayer and Scripture study’ by more mature Christians.”¹⁴⁵ Consistent with his view, Trotman gave his life to developing methods whereby new Christians could be nurtured to maturity in Christ via the one-on-one, intentional care provided by a more mature

¹⁴²Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 110.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁴Hunsicker, “The Rise of the Parachurch Movement,” 168.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*

believer. He became known as the “Apostle of Follow-Up,” and his impact was staggering—even if his name faded relatively quickly from the annals of popular evangelical history. Nearly anyone who has been “discipled” using the methods that Trotman championed in the nearly six decades since his passing owes some degree of gratitude to what God accomplished through this man.

Trotman’s Ministry Vision: The Big Dipper

Trotman preached his final message on June 14, 1956, just four days before his death. In his message—a repeated sermon he had delivered many times since 1948—he discussed a final illustrative tool that would summarize his vision for the Navigators’ ministry. While in Paris, France, atop the George V Hotel during a time of prayer in 1948, Trotman asked the Lord if there were anything he was missing with the Navigator ministry. He prayerfully wondered if they were doing anything that was displeasing to the Lord. He then asked, “What are we doing that brings you pleasure?”¹⁴⁶ God’s response seemed to come as Trotman set his gaze upon the Big Dipper constellation. The Big Dipper is made up of seven individual stars—four that form the dipper and three that form its handle. In its design, Trotman saw the individual parts of the Navigator ministry that together formed what he believed to be a biblically based, God-honoring ministry. None of the elements were necessarily new to Trotman or to the Navigators, but by using the Big Dipper as the illustration by which he identified and ordered them, he ensured that his hearers would stand a much better chance of remembering the overall vision.

The First Star: The Wheel

Trotman identified the most fundamental star in the Big Dipper—the star that connects the dipper to the handle and thereby ensures the functionality of the entire

¹⁴⁶Dawson Trotman, “The Big Dipper,” transcript of message given on June 14, 1956, Discipleship Library, accessed June 13, 2014, http://www.discipleshiplibrary.com/dawson_trotman.php, 2.

structure—as the Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life. Thankfully, he had developed an illustration to help Christians remember what it meant to live such a life: the Wheel. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Wheel represented the sum of what Trotman believed the Christian life should be. He saw Christ at the center of life, providing the base from which all other animation happens. Every aspect of the Christian life relied upon Christ as the center and depended upon him as the axis. The goal of the Christian life was for the Christian to live out his faith before men, so that they might see his good works and therefore glorify the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). The means by which Christ was kept at the center and influenced the Christian life were the spiritual disciplines of prayer, the Word, obedience, and witnessing.¹⁴⁷ Taken together, all of these elements were essential to living the Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life, and leading Christians to live such a life was the central focus of the entire Navigator ministry.

The Second Star: The Word Hand

Having identified the most important star, Trotman continued by denoting the next star—the one found below the fulcrum point. He said, “We in the Navigators stress the Bible quite a bit. The five ways of getting a grip on the Scriptures are pictured in the Hand.”¹⁴⁸ Recall again from Chapter 3 that the Word Hand was the illustration devised by Trotman whereby he delineated what he believed to be the four methods of Scripture intake and the one method of Scripture assimilation. The four methods of intake, represented by the four fingers on top of the Bible and listed in order of increasing usefulness in the believer’s life, were hearing the Word, reading the Word, studying the Word, and memorizing the Word. Believers could ingest the Word of God through these

¹⁴⁷Recall that the present version of the Wheel used by the Navigators today calls the outer rim “The Obedient Christian in Action” and has the Word, prayer, witnessing, and fellowship as the spokes. The Navigators, “The Wheel,” The Navigators Tools, accessed May 22, 2014, <http://www.navigators.org/Tools/Discipleship%20Resources/Tools/The%20Wheel>.

¹⁴⁸Trotman, “The Big Dipper,” 3.

methods, but to gain a firm grasp on the Bible, a fifth activity was needed: Scripture meditation. Meditation, represented by the thumb, allowed the believer to take what he had received from God through the Word and appropriate it in his life so that it made some sort of measurable difference. Trotman said, “The first two stars are the backbone of our work: the balanced Christian life revolving around the Lord Jesus Christ, and the importance of the Word of God. Without these, there is no production for God.”¹⁴⁹

The Third Star: Evangelism

The next star Trotman identified was the one that provided the cutting edge to the Big Dipper—the star that forms what Trotman called “the blade with which you dig.”¹⁵⁰ Trotman believed that the mechanism by which the Navigators invaded the world’s lostness was evangelism, and he emphasized its importance in the ministry by saying, “Without evangelism you haven’t got anything. It is the cutting edge.”¹⁵¹

Trotman believed firmly that “no man ever followed Jesus who didn’t become a fisher of men”¹⁵² Furthermore, he asserted, “If you’re not fishing, you’re not following. You have to win one before you can win five, and five before you can win five hundred. The world is before you. How big is your faith?”¹⁵³ He urged all believers—including new believers—to engage immediately in sharing their faith. He said, “The gospel must get out. [God] needs you to tell this wonderful news to others who have not heard. To you who have been bought with a price He says, ‘Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 4.

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 26.

¹⁵³Ibid.

He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy' (Psalm 107:2)."¹⁵⁴ Although he had developed a deep sense of the importance of follow-up, he never faltered in his insistence that Christians must share their faith in obedience to Christ's command.

The Fourth Star: Follow-Up

After talking about the Big Dipper's cutting edge, Trotman said, "You reach out with a shovel and scoop up, but what do you need on that shovel to make a real dipper? We want a backside to hold in the contents. You need something to conserve that which you have picked up. This the fourth star . . . Follow-Up."¹⁵⁵ The illustration was coming together nicely. After Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, Word-saturated Christians reached into the world via evangelism and made an extraction, they needed a mechanism by which their payload would not fall away. Follow-up was that mechanism. Trotman had brought the attention of the evangelical world back to the importance of follow-up, and he kept it ever before them. He believed firmly that "successful follow-up . . . both in the New Testament and out of it . . . is done by someone, not by something."¹⁵⁶ In the booklet he developed for the Christ for America Campaign entitled *Follow-Up: Conserving the Fruits of Evangelism*, he made his case to his readers by saying the following:

Revival may be under way in your community, the evangelistic program may be all you could have expected and more, yet it may lose momentum, wither and die without effective follow-up. You have been busy enlarging the place of your tent (Isaiah 54:2) and lengthening your cords; now it is time to strengthen the stakes, lest your labor be in vain. You have cultivated and prepared the soil through prayer, watered it through personal visitation and publicity, sown the seed of the gospel and have seen tender shoots of new life break through into the light of day. The wonder of new-found joy and faith in Christ will doubtless find expression voluntarily to

¹⁵⁴Trotman, *Going on with Christ: IR Pack* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, year unlisted), 18-19.

¹⁵⁵Trotman, "The Big Dipper," 4.

¹⁵⁶Dawson Trotman, *Follow-Up: Conserving the Fruits of Evangelism* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1952), 11.

those around, and the new convert becomes ‘exhibit A’ for the gospel. To this fresh new zeal must be added knowledge, as they reach people with the reality and newness of their testimony that no one else may be in a position to reach.¹⁵⁷

Trotman argued that lack of follow-up could cause revival to stall and evangelistic success to be diminished by the immediate damage of new Christian life. He emphasized that Satan would be at work immediately in the life of a new believer, and consequently, God’s people must be at work immediately as well.¹⁵⁸ Follow-up was the key—humanly speaking—to enduring evangelistic success and gospel propagation.

The Fifth Star: Pacesetting

Trotman summarized the scoop portion of the Big Dipper by saying, “The Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life: we’re always fighting to get folks into a strong devotional life, always trying to get people into the Word of God, always fighting to get them to take care of the ones they win. Well, now, what else do we really believe is basic? What else is there that we are willing to give our lives for?”¹⁵⁹ The answer came quickly: pacesetting. Pacesetting would be the first star of the handle for the Big Dipper. Trotman had long been an advocate of leading by example. He repeatedly admonished his Navigators that “a man can expect no greater results in the lives of other men than the pace set by his own faithfulness.”¹⁶⁰ After citing Philippians 4:9 wherein Paul wrote, “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do,” Trotman told his followers that pacesetting would be “the living embodiment of your message.”¹⁶¹ He saw the pattern illustrated abundantly in Scripture—particularly by

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁵⁸Trotman, “The Big Dipper,” 5.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Trotman, “Contact Instructions,” 11.

¹⁶¹Dawson Trotman, “Pace Setting,” notes for message given on July 29, 1947 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

those Old Testament figures listed in Hebrews 11 and in the interaction of Jesus and his disciples—and he modeled and insisted upon the practice in those he led. He asked his hearers, “Would you rather have for a teacher a person who only knew a little of the Bible but it was a part of his life, and he lived it, or a man who knew the Bible from Genesis to Revelation who wasn’t living it?”¹⁶² He then went on to quote Edgar Guest, saying “I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day; I’d rather you would walk with me than merely tell the way.”¹⁶³ He believed strongly in pacesetting, sought to embody his message faithfully, and demanded the same from his Navigators.

The Sixth Star: Other Works

The next star proceeding outward on the handle was Other Works.¹⁶⁴ Trotman had gained some degree of recognition because of his contributions to other evangelical ministries, and his investment in those ministries was no accident; in fact, he sought to cultivate that aspect of Navigator ministry. Much mention has already been made of the vast number of ministries into which Trotman poured himself and his resources, but the magnitude of his impact in so doing dictates that this aspect of his ministry be emphasized again. Foster recalls that “through his friendship with church leaders, Dawson Trotman made a great contribution to the Body of Christ. Denominational leaders, heads of para-church groups and missionary societies, evangelists, pastors, and teachers could be counted among his close friends. He did not try to make Navigators

¹⁶²Trotman, “The Big Dipper,” 5.

¹⁶³Ibid. Trotman did hedge his assertion to some degree by saying, “It isn’t that everything you hear me say you may see me do, but there will be just enough that you do see . . . that you can tell whether we are sterling silver or just silver-plated.” Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁴Some discrepancy exists regarding the identity of the sixth and seventh stars. An undated notebook page in Trotman’s handwriting lists World Vision as the sixth star and Other Works as the seventh. The majority of the primary sources, however, indicate the order herein presented.

out of them, but sought instead to serve them in any way he could.”¹⁶⁵ In 1947, Trotman wrote in the Navigators News Letter that “it is our hearts’ purpose to familiarize ourselves with those CHRISTian works which honor the LORD and which have the seal and approval of His blessing, not only to learn of their program and to stand by in prayer, but to serve them in other ways as well.”¹⁶⁶

Examples abound of Trotman’s investment in Other Works. He helped Bill Bright develop and launch Campus Crusade for Christ—even giving him the initial encouragement to hold Bible studies on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles.¹⁶⁷ Alongside his service on the Board of Directors for Wycliffe, he constantly admonished his Navigators that “it cost Tyndale his life to translate the Bible into your language; what is it costing you to give the Bible to others in their language?”¹⁶⁸ Because many Navigator conferences were scheduled at the same time as Inter-Varsity conferences, Trotman made the decision to reschedule the Navigator conferences because he felt “it is [the Navigators’] responsibility to do everything possible to avoid having [the conferences] either on the same week or within a week or so on either side.”¹⁶⁹ In explaining the Big Dipper, Trotman recalled the time when he came to the realization that he needed to be about larger kingdom work: “There emerged in my heart and mind that

¹⁶⁵Robert Foster, “Pulling Together: How can we help others in their ministries rather than merely building up our own?” *Discipleship Journal* (July/August 1985), accessed May 4, 2010, <http://www.navpress.com/magazines/archives/article.aspx?id=14075>.

¹⁶⁶Dawson Trotman, Navigators News Letter No. 35 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1.

¹⁶⁷Addie Rosenbaum, “Dear Gang” Letter, November 21, 1951 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs); Skinner, *With Integrity of Heart and Skillful Hand*, 37.

¹⁶⁸Dawson Trotman, V-Mail, December 3, 1943 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹⁶⁹Trotman, “Dear Gang” Letter, May 12, 1953 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

night the thought that The Navigators must not work just for The Navigators, nor try to build the Navigator organization, but must work for the church—not just *a* church, but *the* church . . . all churches.”¹⁷⁰ This type of heavy investment was not typical of those in ministry, but Trotman’s willingness to lay his own agenda aside in favor of supporting kingdom work made a significant impact in many twentieth century evangelical ministries.

The Seventh Star: World Vision

The last star—the one farthest from the dipper—had to be World Vision. Trotman had developed a vision for the world in the Palos Verdes hills with Walt Stanton nearly two decades before this night on the hotel rooftop, and his desire to see all tribes, tongues, and nations had only grown since that time. Not only had he prayed over a map of the world, but now he had prayed over physical locations all around the world. Moreover, he now saw firsthand the world’s desperate need for the gospel, and he was more passionate than ever about reaching the ends of the earth for Christ. Trotman referenced Jesus’ last words to his disciples on earth in Acts 1:8—“ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”—and asked his audience, “Have you ever caught the idea that you are going to have a world vision?”¹⁷¹ He continued, “God wants every one of us to have more than a casual interest in every nation of the world to be concerned about what impact we can have.”¹⁷² Trotman had caught a worldwide vision, and it compelled him to invest everything he had in an effort to seek gospel transformation in lives both near and far.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰Trotman, “Big Dipper,” 7.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 10.

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Trotman understood that his ministry had to reach near and far. He was so profoundly

Summary of The Big Dipper

In these seven stars, arranged by the hand of God into the form of a dipper in the night sky, Trotman saw his vision for ministry. It was, to him, a sustainable and replicable model for carrying out the calling of Almighty God in his life and in the life of the ministry he founded. Trotman was a pragmatist, and before presenting this ministry paradigm to an audience at Mission Springs in the Santa Cruz mountains of California, he prefaced his remarks by saying, “Emotion is no substitute for action; action is no substitute for production.”¹⁷⁴ The Christian life was to be a life of action stemming from a vital connection to Jesus Christ. Trotman sought to obey James’ admonition to “be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22), and he urged others to do the same. He was a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, kingdom-minded man who did whatever he could to bring others along with him, and to a remarkable degree, his ministry strategy worked.¹⁷⁵

Trotman’s Concept of Spiritual Reproduction

Dawson Trotman’s words at Mission Springs, California in 1955, as recorded by Beverly Knutsen above, omit a small but important clause in what became something of a slogan for Trotman in his later years. LeRoy Eims records Trotman’s adage in full: “. . . emotion is no substitute for action, action is no substitute for production, and

impacted by a chapter expounding upon Acts 1:8 in Samuel M. Zwemer’s *Into All the World* that he sought and received permission from Zwemer to publish the chapter in booklet form for his Navigators. He prefaced the work by saying, “Because of the terrific challenge to my own heart and soul, I asked Dr. Zwemer for permission to reprint it and place it in the hands of our Navigators and perhaps other interested persons.” Samuel M. Zwemer, “Beginning at Jerusalem” (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, undated), 2.

¹⁷⁴Beverly Knutsen, Conference Notes, Navigators Conference in Mission Springs, April 23, 1955, 1.

¹⁷⁵I commend to you the work done by Robert Walter Felts in evaluating Trotman’s discipleship principles for use in missions organizations today and the work currently being done by Kenneth Albert in examining Trotman’s discipleship methods in light of New Testament principles.

production is no substitute for reproduction.”¹⁷⁶ Following the quotation, Eims summarized the aim of Trotman’s Great Commission ministry, saying “his focus was on producing reproducers.”¹⁷⁷ Trotman became fully committed to the ministry paradigm he saw prescribed in 2 Timothy 2:2, and he sought to instill the same vision in all of his spiritual progeny. Not only did he want those who heard his teaching to grow to maturity in Christ, but he wanted them to replicate the process in others. The Big Dipper was Trotman’s overall vision for his ministry, but his concept of spiritual reproduction was the key for the entire plan.

In what was to become his *magnum opus*, Trotman explained masterfully the difference between single-generation ministry and ministry that continued to reproduce itself *ad infinitum* until Christ’s return:

[In 2 Timothy 2:2], Paul is instructing Timothy to refresh his recollections and perhaps cogitate anew upon those things which he has heard of Paul among many witnesses; Timothy is then to commit or intrust [*sic*] those things to a certain kind of men who should be able to teach others also. It is to be especially noted that Timothy’s ministry to these men was to go one step further—A STEP OF INCALCULABLE IMPORTANCE—than we are accustomed to think. His first job, of course, was to commit to faithful men; but he was by no means to stop there; he was to proceed immediately with the ALL-IMPORTANT additional step of teaching these faithful men how to teach others also. Timothy was to be more than a teacher; he was to be a teacher of teachers. As a teacher, he was to teach faithful men; but as a teacher of teachers, he was to teach the same faithful men to teach others to teach others. In merely teaching men, Timothy would have been propagating; in teaching men to teach others, he would have been producing producers; but in teaching men to teach others to teach others, he would have been producing reproducers. We believe it would be difficult to estimate the importance of having a clear distinction in our own minds of the difference between merely teaching others, and teaching others to teach others to teach others. We do believe, however, that it is necessary to make this distinction in order to get the full import of the verse. And, still further, we believe that upon having the distinction clear in our minds may depend the difference between fruit—more fruit—and much fruit in our personal ministries.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶LeRoy Eims with Randy Eims, *Laboring in the Harvest* (1985; repr. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2011), 88.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 30-31.

To Trotman, this understanding was essential to carrying out Great Commission ministry. Christians must not only seek to produce those who could reach others, but they must also seek to instill in those they reached the ability to teach others to train others. In short, Christians should produce reproducers.

In Trotman’s mind, the fundamental design of humanity’s propagation held the secret to effective Great Commission ministry. In the beginning, after the Lord God had created everything else, he created man and woman in his own image. After blessing them, he said to them, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). The first man and the first woman were to fill the earth via a God-designed and God-ordained system of reproduction. They were to reproduce themselves, and in so doing, they were to fill the earth and subdue it. As time passed and the progeny of Adam and Eve grew, they also reproduced themselves, and the process continued in such a way that the earth is now filled with more than seven billion people.¹⁷⁹ The exponential population growth that began with the first man and the first woman has so filled the earth that some people have begun to worry about the earth’s being overcrowded and nearing the inability to sustain such vast numbers of people.¹⁸⁰

Trotman believed that all healthy, mature Christians were to reproduce themselves. In the natural realm, a couple would fail to reproduce only if something were wrong, and Trotman believed the same to be true in the spiritual realm. Specifically, Trotman saw three reasons why couples would not physically reproduce,

¹⁷⁹United States Census Bureau, “U.S. and World Population Clock,” accessed June 16, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/popclock/>.

¹⁸⁰Albert Mohler addresses this issue as it was raised in a 2009 article in USA Today, saying that “for well over a century, many prophets of doom have predicted world overpopulation would lead to ecological disaster, famine, poverty and other woes.” Mohler then asserts that such prognostications are unfounded, but the fact remains that the exponential proliferation of human beings instituted by God at creation and carried on by human beings throughout the centuries has resulted in an astounding increase over time—enough so that some secular theorists are worried. Albert Mohler, “The Real Population Threat,” AlbertMohler.com, accessed June 16, 2014, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/03/25/the-real-population-threat/>.

and he saw three corresponding reasons why people would not spiritually reproduce. First, he recognized that if a couple were not united they could not procreate; in the same way, if a believer is not united to Christ, he will not propagate. Second, disease or physical impairment could hinder physical reproduction; likewise, spiritual disease—sin—would lead to hindered spiritual reproduction. Third, just as physical immaturity precluded procreation, so also spiritual immaturity inhibited spiritual reproduction.¹⁸¹ Trotman believed that something was radically wrong with any believer who had not brought others to Christ, asserting that “every person who is born into God’s family is to multiply.”¹⁸²

What set Trotman apart from others who sounded the clarion call for spiritual multiplication was his continuation of the metaphor. Parents who bring a child into the world do not stop nurturing the child after he is born; rather, they care for the child intensively for the next eighteen to twenty years in order to protect him and prepare him to enter society as a fruitful citizen. In the same way, spiritual parents must protect and prepare their children for the life to which they are called in Christ. He notes the following:

In the physical realm, God provides parents for each baby. Giving birth to the child is only the beginning of carrying out the parental responsibility. A baby without proper attention and protection against disease may become a sickly child. The responsibility of the parent is to protect, feed, provide for, guide and train the child. The child must be nurtured to maturity and completely equipped to do and be all that he should as a citizen of his community. The character of the citizen will be the result of the faithfulness of the parent in carrying out his responsibility.

In the spiritual realm, has God anything less wonderful for these who are born new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17)? For them all the world is new. They have before them a grand new life with all its potentialities for blessing and profit and use. They can either fall into a nominal Christian existence and be of little help, or an actual hindrance to the cause of Christ, or they can move victoriously into a life of fruitfulness and glory to the Lord. Is it not the responsibility of the spiritual

¹⁸¹Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 12.

¹⁸²*Ibid.*, 13.

parent, through whom the life was brought into existence, to provide for growth and training of these babes in Christ?¹⁸³

Trotman believed fully that those who led others to the Lord—that is, those who became spiritual parents—had “the God-given responsibility of caring for the infant” in Christ.¹⁸⁴

According to Trotman’s metaphor, what was required for new believers was a strict regimen of spiritual pediatrics. Just as newborn infants require a significant amount of undistracted attention from their parents, newborn Christians require a significant amount of devotion from their spiritual parents.¹⁸⁵ The program Trotman advocated was rigorous:

The main contact comes once a week or not less than every two weeks. It takes that much time to give them a good solid background—to get a few verses of Scripture in their hearts so that they can begin a new stand on many of the problems in life. They have to be shown how to take time to steady down into a regular devotional life with the Lord so that God can speak to them and so that they, in turn, can fully unload their hearts before Him.¹⁸⁶

Trotman strengthened his point with a reminder from the discipling ministry of Jesus: “You’ll remember that Christ gave his men three years It sometimes takes two or three years before a babe in Christ is solid enough so that he can be given responsibility. We believe this thing works but we have to give it time.”¹⁸⁷ Felts questions Trotman’s insistence that new believers undergo a sort of incubation period before they can be useful in Christian service,¹⁸⁸ but Trotman was simply asserting his fundamental belief

¹⁸³Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 5.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸⁵Skinner records the following oft-repeated pattern in Trotman’s public discourse: “‘Don’t bring spiritual babes to birth and leave them to die for lack of nourishment,’ he exhorted his audiences. Giving them a Bible was not enough. They must be fed. ‘Don’t just set the baby in the pantry with a can opener. Mix his formula and heat it to the right temperature; then hold the bottle for him.’ The hit-and-run evangelism he and others had practiced for years, resulting only in the ‘survival of the fittest,’ he now condemned as dead wrong.” Skinner, *Daws*, 70.

¹⁸⁶Foster, *The Navigator*, 125.

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸Felts, “A Critical Analysis,” 75.

that Christians should not lead others to Christ unless they were equipped, prepared, and willing to serve as spiritual parents to the new Christians entrusted to their care.¹⁸⁹

The work to which Trotman believed God had called believers was not easy. It was diligent, time-consuming, soul-searching work. He believed that new babes in Christ needed to be contacted quickly and often in their early days with Christ. Continuing the analogy between a newborn baby and a newly reborn Christian, Trotman noted that care for a newborn could not wait until it was convenient for the mother, the physician, or some other caregiver; it had to begin immediately, regardless of what else was going on at the time of the child's birth. In the same way, he argued, Christian caregivers could not allow their newborn brothers and sisters to languish until a convenient time. He argued that, since Satan wasted no time in approaching and seeking to influence new believers, neither should Christians.¹⁹⁰ In addition to that initial contact, Trotman prescribed that new believers needed personal interaction with a more established Christian at least once a week so that the new believer might learn to be faithful and to begin the journey of producing reproducers.¹⁹¹ Once a week was a minimum, however, as Trotman continually reminded his audiences of the "With Him" principle of disciple-making illustrated in Scripture.¹⁹² To become like Christ, the disciples had to be with him. While they were with him, they were able to witness firsthand what it meant to be like him.

In reflecting on the earthly ministry of Jesus, Trotman noted that Jesus did not

¹⁸⁹Jim Downing recalls that Trotman often exhorted his hearers by saying, "You have no right to lead someone to Christ unless you are going to follow them up," and "You have no right to leave your orphan on someone else's doorstep." Trotman was a consistently passionate advocate of the notion that those who lead others to Christ must serve as their mentors as they learn to walk in Christ. Downing, *Living Legacy*, 25.

¹⁹⁰Trotman, "The Big Dipper," 4.

¹⁹¹Trotman, "Contact Instructions," 1.

¹⁹²Foster, *The Navigator*, 152.

need three years to establish his identity as Messiah; rather, he said, “the time element was needed for the preparation of those into whose hands was to be committed the delivering of the message which was to free an enslaved world, and anything short of this length of time and preparation would not have fitted them for the complete task.”¹⁹³ He saw the same pattern revealed in Paul’s ministry to Timothy and others, and he found the paradigm to be prescriptive. Recalling Paul’s words to the Philippian Christians in Philippians 4:19—“those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do”—Trotman emphasized the importance of spending time with people in ministry:

Why didn’t Paul say ‘things which you have heard, do.’ There is more than that. Paul had spent time with the Philippians. It was the VERY ESSENCE OF HIS MINISTRY—TIME WITH HIS MEN. Time with Titus; time with Philemon; time with Timothy; time with Silas; time with Barnabus; time with Sopater and Aristarchus. These were men not who met him once a week or twice a week or three times a week in a meeting, but men with whom he journeyed—men whom he took with him on his journeys; and though he was mobile and couldn’t stay in a spot, he had put himself in the position to have ample time to train them.¹⁹⁴

To Trotman, the essence of ministry was time: time with the Lord, and time with people. He lived his life with a passion for more of God and a desire to do more for God, and he sought to inculcate in his men the same desire. He wanted them to be able to see the Christian life portrayed well before them so that they could do the same in the life of another who could do the same in the life of another. He believed that he was in the business of building men, and he found that business to be always needed, often difficult, and eternally rewarding.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most beneficial evaluative tool for assessing the impact of Great Commission ministries is observing their influence in the lives of those whom they reach

¹⁹³Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 31.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 58.

for Christ. The programs developed and implemented by Dawson Trotman had a profound impact on the lives of thousands of people whose own influence reached around the world. One of the most poignant examples of lives transformed by God through the discipleship measures implemented by Dawson Trotman occurred on the morning of December 7, 1941. LaVerne Tift recalls the events as follows:

Some 30 men of the Armed Forces were up and about from their varied sleeping places at the Navigators Home in upper Kalihi Valley. They had enjoyed a night of singing and sharing, followed by a strong challenge from the Word of God delivered by Gunnersmate Jim Downing of the USS *West Virginia*. This was the Lord's Day and the men were making ready to fulfill their opportunities to minister with the Gospel Team, or in any other way the Lord could use them.

Harold DeGroff, Director of the home, was out in the back yard when a shell exploded some distance from him. "Wow, those fellows are sure getting careless in their target practice," he mused as he set out for the house at a good speed. One of the men turned on the radio to find out what was causing all the noise. Harold didn't get a word in because of the dramatic statement that sent a chill through the room. "Pearl Harbor is under attack! This is not a drill, I repeat, this is not a drill! All service men return to your ship or station!" The time was 0810.

Herb Goeldner had left the [Navigator] home some time before, to teach a Sunday Bible class on his ship in Pearl Harbor. When he arrived at the main gate, all was in confusion. The first wave of Japanese planes were already devastating the ships and airfields. Herb wheeled the car around and headed back for the home to pick up the other fellows. The men were waiting, and the goodbyes were sobering, but there was encouragement in the exchange of memory verses of God's faithfulness. Once back to the Navy base, these men didn't stand and watch or hide behind some shelter. Their stories are an inspiration of courage and fortitude, strengthened by their commitment to Jesus Christ, which made them ready to live and ready to die.¹⁹⁵

Many of the men to whom Tift refers trusted Christ because of the work of the Navigators. They were actively seeking to grow in Christ by engaging in the faith-developing activities that were offered at the Navigator Home Trotman established in Hawaii. They were growing closer to Christ and preparing themselves to be used on board their ships to see other men trust Christ and grow in relationship with him. They were ready to live and lead others to Christ, and they were ready to die fulfilling their calling. They were men of valor, established in love by the truth of God's Word that was

¹⁹⁵Tift, *Valiant in Fight*, 3-4.

hidden in their hearts. They were Trotman's men. They were disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the final analysis, Dawson Trotman was a pioneer in the field of Great Commission ministry. As one who was ahead of his time in the discipline, Trotman encouraged both himself and many others to follow the Lord Jesus Christ actively via intensive disciple-making methods. To Trotman, discipleship was about followers of Christ investing in other Christians in very personal, relational, and—although the term was far from yet being coined—missional ways. Trotman was ignited by his love for the Lord Jesus Christ and his passion to see the gospel propagated throughout the world until the Great Commission was fulfilled by disciples being made from every tribe, tongue, and nation across the globe. He was not content with the status quo; rather, he pushed himself and others to be radical followers of Christ who were fully committed to the Lord in every aspect of life. As a result, Trotman ignited a ministry that, after more than eighty years of existence, continues to impact lives all over the world. He helped countless multitudes—one-by-one according to the principle of 2 Timothy 2:2—to grow up in Christ and lead others who could lead others in doing the same.

CHAPTER 5

THE INFLUENCE OF TROTMAN'S PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ON HIS GREAT COMMISSION MINISTRY

This dissertation has thus far sought to illustrate that Dawson Trotman was a man of intense devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ as evidenced and cultivated by his strict and faithful regimen of personal spiritual disciplines. Further, this dissertation has sought to show that Trotman was an innovator in the field of disciple-making ministry in the twentieth century and that his contributions, although largely unattributed to him, have shaped the landscape of evangelical Great Commission ministry in profound and expansive ways. This chapter will serve to bridge the gap between Trotman's program of personal spiritual disciplines and his Great Commission ministry. Specifically, this chapter will show how Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines provided the foundation, motivation, and urgency for his disciple-making ministry, and it will show that Trotman felt that his personal spiritual disciplines also provided for the effectiveness of his Great Commission ministries. Additionally, it will illustrate that he sought to inculcate in his disciples the same notion that fulfilling the call of the Great Commission required a deep relationship with Jesus Christ that was nurtured by a strong devotional life.

The Man God Uses

Trotman was a man of the Word. He loved the Scriptures, searched the Scriptures, prayed through the Scriptures, and wanted to align his life to the greatest degree possible with the holy revelation of God in Scripture. He did not worship the Bible itself, but because he saw Jesus Christ revealed in Scripture, he devoted himself to

studying its pages.¹ He believed the best work done in shaping the life of a Christian was done with the Bible, a pencil, a notebook, and perhaps a concordance in hand, and he built his life and ministry around this notion.² During his time in the Word of God, Trotman saw that God’s work in the world he created was done most often through men.³ Without question, the Bible is filled with stories of God miraculously intervening in the course of human history and performing incomparable acts that illustrate his glory and power, but the overwhelming norm throughout the Bible’s pages is that God uses men—ordinary men—to accomplish his extraordinary purposes. Trotman found this principle to be not only descriptive but also normative, and he sought to be a man God could use to build other men God could use. Trotman believed the purpose of ministry was to build the man in Christ so that the man could replicate the process in others. Further, his ministry indicated that God’s man could be built only through communion with God via personal spiritual disciplines. This conclusion, developed from his study of the

¹Robert Foster recalls that Trotman had little patience for those who expressed disdain for the Bible while simultaneously expressing devotion to Christ. Foster records, “Dawson worshiped the Christ of the Bible, not the printed pages of the book itself. He had little time for those who preached sermons on the moral teachings and life of Christ but were soft and uncertain about whether the Bible is the Word of God. To say, ‘I love Jesus, but have my doubts about the Bible,’ was inconsistent as far as he was concerned.” Robert Foster, *The Navigator* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), 71.

²Jim Downing recalls a discussion he had with Trotman about the baptism in the Holy Spirit as some sort of second blessing after following Christ. After giving his life to Christ, Trotman had been told by his charismatic mother that he needed to be baptized in the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues. Not knowing if he agreed with that idea, Trotman went into the hills for a few days with his Bible and a concordance, and after studying the matter, reached his own conclusion. Downing asked Trotman what he had concluded. Trotman replied, “You have the same Bible as I do. Find out for yourself.” Jim Downing, *Living Legacy: Reflections on Dawson Trotman and Lorne Sanny* (Colorado Springs: DawsonMedia, 2007), 16.

³I recognize that the biblical record contains many important references to women whom God used mightily to accomplish his purposes. Trotman makes mention of women of faith like Sarah, Ruth, Esther, and Mary Slessor in his “Faithful Men” manuscript. For the most part, however, Trotman uses the term “men” when he is discussing God’s work through human beings, and for continuity’s sake, I will maintain the same practice. This practice should not be construed to mean that either Trotman or I devalue women or God’s work through women to impact the world with the gospel. Dawson Trotman, “Faithful Men” (unpublished manuscript, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2-4.

Scriptures and his observation of church history, shaped the man he was and the men he sought to fashion.

God's Man in Scripture

Trotman built his entire Great Commission ministry around the instruction the Apostle Paul gave Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2—that is, “the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Paul instructed Timothy to find faithful men in whom he could invest time and training to propagate the gospel message throughout the world. In Trotman’s eyes, this teaching was no different from what God had done throughout the entire Bible. He said, “. . . the story of the Bible (though it is the textbook on redemption, thru which the scarlet thread of the blood of CHRIST is traced) is in one sense the story of what GOD [did] thru men.”⁴ The grand narrative of Scripture opens with God creating the world and all that is in it, and then it moves immediately to God’s interaction with the human beings he created from the dust of the ground. Trotman asserts:

In the story of a man, Adam, and his fall, three . . . chapters are taken to bring us up to the place where GOD begins to work with his man for the redemption of the human race. The generations of Adam are listed, and then immediately GOD begins to show what he can do thru the man Noah in Chapters six thru 11. From that point on, the remaining 49 [*sic*] chapters of the Book of Genesis are devoted to demonstrating what GOD did thru a man, Abraham, and his son, Isaac, and Isaac’s son, Jacob, and one of Jacob’s sons, Joseph.⁵

He then stated what was to be the thesis of his defining work in “Faithful Men:” “It should here be noted that it is through these chosen, yielded, and obedient men that HE is accomplishing HIS redemptive work, and we see why HE places such an importance on key and faithful men.”⁶

⁴Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 1.

⁵Ibid. I recognize that Genesis is composed of fifty chapters, not sixty as Trotman’s statement seems to indicate. Please note that original spelling and grammar have been retained in quotations from Trotman’s personal journal and unpublished manuscripts.

⁶Ibid.

From that point on, Trotman spent the next several pages chronicling how God used men and women who were chosen, yielded, and obedient to him to perform great and wondrous tasks throughout biblical history. Having mentioned the grand human characters of Genesis, he continued through the Pentateuch to recall the story of God’s work through Moses to redeem the people he had chosen for himself. He wrote of the mighty works done through Moses’ successor, Joshua, as he led the people of God into the promised land. He discussed the roles played by the Judges as they brought the people of God back to God’s statutes, and he spoke of how God used Ruth as an example of what he can do through a yielded woman. He listed the wondrous deeds God did through Samuel, Nathan, David, Elijah, and Elisha as recorded in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, and then he discussed God’s work through Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Job. He saw in the Psalms and Proverbs the wisdom of God expressed through God’s men, and he saw in the prophets “books being actually named after the men whom GOD could use to accomplish HIS purpose.”⁷

Trotman did not stop at the end of the Old Testament. He said, “Is this true only in the Old Testament which ends with the man, MALACHI? Turn the page to Matthew, a man [and] a faithful follower. LUKE, the obedient servant. JOHN, the disciple who lived so close to JESUS—all portraying the man, CHRIST JESUS.”⁸ Trotman asserted next that “. . . the New Testament [is] particularly an account of what GOD did thru the man, CHRIST JESUS, and the men HE chose to give the message of the Gospel to the rest of the world.”⁹ After discussing the work God accomplished through John the Baptist and the disciples who became apostles, Trotman said, “While most of the rest of the books of the New Testament are not necessarily the account of

⁷Ibid., 3.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

what HE did thru a man, they are the product of what he was able to give thru a man who was willing to pay the price, for most of the epistles, both to the Church and to chosen men, were given thru Paul.”¹⁰ What Trotman saw revealed throughout the entirety of the biblical revelation—perhaps not including God’s creative work in the first two chapters of Genesis—was God working through men and women whom he could use to accomplish his purposes.

Trotman also acknowledged that times existed during which God was unable to find anyone on the face of the earth through whom he could work. He records:

And down thru the ages we feel that the cry of GOD is for men that HE could use. Some of the most tragic verses of all the Bible are simply the account of GOD’s looking and failure to be able to find a man of the hour for the need of the hour. ‘And there is none that calleth upon THY Name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee . . .’ (Isa. 64:7). ‘And HE saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor’ (Isa. 59:16). ‘And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before ME for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none’ (Ezek. 22:30). GOD’s quest for men that HE could trust and men that HE could use is beautifully portrayed in the statement ‘. . . I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after MINE own heart, which shall fulfil all MY will’ (Acts 13:22). It has been the thing for which HE has sought from the beginning.¹¹

Trotman read about these great heroes of the faith—those who called upon the name of the Lord and stirred themselves to action for his sake—and in studying their lives, he began to understand God’s methodology for carrying out his redemptive plan.

God’s Men in Church History

The methodology Trotman discovered in Scripture was not abandoned after the Apostle John recorded the Revelation on the Island of Patmos—at least not in Trotman’s view. He saw the same pattern repeated throughout the annals of church history:

Church history today is not what GOD did thru a denomination. It is the result, in most cases, of what he did thru the man [Martin] Luther, the man [John] Calvin, the man [John] Wesley, the man [D. L.] Moody. Modern missions are not the result of mass movements, but of what HE could do thru men such as [David]

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 4.

Livingstone, [Robert] Morrison, [William] Carey, [Hudson] Taylor, Mary Slessor, and [Adoniram] Judson.¹²

Trotman had been deeply influenced by the assertion made by E. M. Bounds in his *Power through Prayer* that “men are God’s method. The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.”¹³ He had seen this principle displayed in the lives of his heroes in the faith: Hudson Taylor and D. L. Moody. He asked, “Is GOD going to change HIS plan in reaching the World today? Will it be the radio, the printing press, the airplane which will do the job? These will all play their part, but the need of the hour is for men”¹⁴ Trotman’s study had led him to believe that ministry was about finding God’s man for the hour at hand and preparing him in every possible way to be used by God.¹⁵

Moreover, Trotman’s observation of the world around him led him to the realization that God likely needed more than one man to accomplish his task contemporarily. He asserted his position as follows:

The lateness of the hour, [and] the tremendous size of the task, calls for men, holy men of GOD, strong, rugged soldiers of the Cross with an eye single to HIS glory, men that will hazard their lives for the Name of the LORD JESUS, men who will bring their bodies into subjection, men of prayer, intercessors, men who, like Paul, could say, ‘Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith’ (I Thess. 3:10), men who will not only preach the word in season, and out of season, but will, as Paul did, stick with those they preach to three months, six months, a year and a half, two years, three years, men who will go back over the hazardous journies [*sic*] and follow up their converts as he did whether by foot or sailing vessels, thru storms, with or without companions.¹⁶

By the time Trotman had given his life to Christ and was emerging into Christian

¹²Ibid.

¹³E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 2.

¹⁴Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 4.

¹⁵“Remember, God is looking for a man” was a point of emphasis for Trotman. Dawson Trotman, notes for a message given on July 17, unlisted year (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹⁶Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 5.

ministry, some felt Christianity had taken on a more feminine connotation.¹⁷ Trotman hated this perception. He saw in his scriptural and historical predecessors a deep courage and willingness to face any circumstances to declare the gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world, and as a result, he purposely emphasized the lengths to which God's men must be willing to go to carry out their commission.

“Common Denominators for Spiritual Effectiveness”

At this juncture in his discourse, Trotman recognized that everything he had written to this point begged a critical question: “What do we mean by men of GOD, holy men, bondservants, real soldiers, obedient sons?”¹⁸ He answered:

We mean men who are the embodiment of the message they carry; men who have a knowledge of the Word of GOD, and who lay hold of the promises of GOD, who are obedient to the will of GOD, and who then carry the message of GOD; men of whom it may be said, as was said of Haggai, that they are ‘the LORD’s messenger in the LORD’s message’ (Haggai 1:13).¹⁹

In defining what type of men God would use, Trotman meant men of a valiant and vibrant faith that “was the means by which they were able to attain and maintain the characteristics which made them effective.”²⁰ Following the pattern of Hebrews 11, Trotman asserted that such a deep degree of faith was the central factor in determining usefulness in the kingdom of God. He finished his discussion of the essential characteristics for spiritual effectiveness by calling attention to Ezra, who had “prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10). Trotman observed that this one verse illustrated clearly how

¹⁷Betty Lee Skinner records that Trotman “intentionally cultivated the rugged, he-man image to counter the idea that Christianity was suitable only for women and children.” Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: A Man Who Trusted God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1974), 12.

¹⁸Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 5. The title of this section is the same Trotman used in his manuscript, so it is therefore enclosed in quotation marks.

¹⁹Ibid., 6.

²⁰Ibid.

Ezra was able to impact his generation for God: “First, he prepared his heart. He must have been a praying man. Second, he sought the law of the LORD. He must have been a man of the Word. Third, he intended to do the known will of GOD. He must have been obedient. And fourth, he was to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. He must have been a strong witness for GOD.”²¹ Ezra was a man of the Word and prayer, and he was a man of obedience and witness. As a result, he maintained a centered relationship with God, and he was able to live the life of faith with great fruitfulness. Ezra was a living embodiment of The Wheel.²²

Dawson Trotman’s Great Commission ministry found its foundation, motivation, urgency, and effectiveness in his personal spiritual disciplines. One of his most enduring legacies was that he was a man of discipline.²³ He was saved by grace, but he strove with great diligence to “work out [his] own salvation with fear and trembling” as he recognized that it was God who was working in him “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). He sought closeness with God, because he loved his Lord. He sought communion with God, because he knew that he required it to be of any value in the kingdom of God. As a result of his closeness and communion with God, he embraced fully his conscription from God and yearned to be used effectively in God’s kingdom for God’s glory. The Wheel was more than a handy illustration for him—it was the story of his life. He wanted to be, like Ezra and so many other great heroes of the faith, a man of the Word, prayer, obedience, and witness. He wanted his life centered in Christ, and he wanted the world to be able to see his good

²¹Ibid., 7.

²²Skinner records that “Dawson believed that The Wheel, which in final form showed Christ as the hub with four equal spokes connecting the Christian with his source of life and power, was a graphic model of the kind of disciples God wanted. If it was truly God-given, it would stand the test of time.” Skinner, *Daws*, 46. Jim Downing asserts that “the Wheel illustration may well be Dawson’s most lasting legacy.” Downing, *Living Legacy*, 8. Since the Wheel remains the foundational illustration of the Christian life used by the Navigators today, I find it safe to conclude that it has stood the test of time.

²³Skinner, *Daws*, 385.

works and glorify his Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). He wanted to be “that man” Moody described who was wholly devoted to God, and he wanted to help turn every follower of Christ into “that” kind of man.²⁴ To him, these characteristics were the common denominators of spiritual effectiveness, and he strove to embody them and instill them in others.

Foundation

Dawson Trotman recognized that the Christian’s relationship with God was developed by the time he spent with God. Spending time with God meant two key factors were necessary, and he made these two faith practices the vertical spokes of the Wheel. First, God’s man must be in the Word. God’s man must receive the Word via hearing it, reading it, studying it, and memorizing it, and he must appropriate the Word by meditating on it.²⁵ Second, God’s man must be a man of prayer. He must tap into the riches of God’s power by boldly approaching the throne of grace and there receiving what he needed for life and ministry. Trotman wrote, “We begin to know the mind of God as we carefully read the pages of the Book which He has given us; and we enter into His purpose and plans, as revealed in the Book, when we reach Him through prayer.”²⁶ God’s man could be God’s man only so far as he invested in his relationship with God, and the Word and prayer were to Trotman the foundational elements of cultivating that relationship.

God’s Man is a Man of the Word

Robert Foster writes that “to understand Dawson Trotman, one has to know that he had a consuming desire to be a man of the Bible and to help others become men

²⁴Skinner, *Daws*, 131.

²⁵Recall the discussion of the Word Hand in chap. 3.

²⁶Dawson Trotman and Theodore Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, vol. 2 (Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible Correspondence School, 1964), 11.

and women of the Bible.”²⁷ Trotman had come to Christ via Scripture memory, and he had grown in Christ by Scripture memory. He recalled that his new birth was evidenced in his own heart by the fact that his life was being transformed by the Word of God hidden in his heart. He remembered, “. . . a distinct change had taken place. I could no longer enjoy the dirty stories or taking the Lord’s Name in vain. I used to think it was fun to use bad language when I lost my temper, but that grew distasteful to me. When I cried to God for help, the Holy Spirit brought one of the 20 [memorized] verses to my mind.”²⁸ He believed that the Word of God was foundational to the Christian life and that it provided strength, courage, cleansing, and a bolstered faith.²⁹ He asserted, “It is through the Word that we know the blessing and wealth of the CHRISTian life made possible through the coming of the SAVIOUR, and it is these great truths that we seek to make known to the uttermost parts of the world”³⁰ He believed that a strong foundation in the Word was an essential characteristic of the man God could use, asserting that “the big task is the evangelization of the world in this generation The job is going to be done. God is going to use men to do it. Therefore the men have to be trained . . . like the disciples were trained, in the Word. They’re going to be taught principles and they’re going to be put into practice.”³¹ He maintained the Great

²⁷Foster, *The Navigator*, 61.

²⁸Dawson Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1975), 15. Sanny recalls that “the verses he had learned on Christian growth began to help him as the Holy Spirit brought them to mind. When he swore or lost his temper his heart condemned him, and he humbly claimed the promise of I John 1:9, ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins . . .’ asking his new Lord to forgive him.” Lorne Sanny, *Dawson Trotman: The Pathfinder* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1958), 5-6.

²⁹Dawson Trotman, “The Word” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

³⁰Dawson Trotman, “Beloved Co-Laborers” letter, December 22, 1951 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

³¹The Navigators, “Dawson’s Vision” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 4.

Commission could be fulfilled if Christ’s followers would be people of the Word, trained in the principles of faith revealed by God in the Holy Bible.

Powerless apart from Scripture. Beginning in 1933 and continuing in earnest through 1945, Trotman’s ministry was focused on men who were actively serving in the military. As a result, Trotman had little patience for those who were not willing to “get down to business” for their Lord. These men were at war—both physically and spiritually—and they had to be fully equipped and prepared to do battle. No room existed for laziness in any sense. In the Fall 1942 edition of the Navigators Log, Jim Downing echoed Trotman’s sentiment as he explained to the Navigators that the nature of their providential assignment precluded any notion that they might approach the Christian faith in a lackadaisical manner:

In a more suitable atmosphere where a CHRISTian has more encouragement than opposition, he may drift along without the strength derived from planned Bible study and pass for a CHRISTian, but not in the service. Where one sleeps, eats, and works twenty-four hours each day among those who seek occasion to reproach the CHRISTian testimony, there has been no manifestation of spiritual strength necessary for maintaining a genuine testimony apart from the definite, faithful, and intelligent practice of reading, studying, and memorizing the Word of GOD. The Navigators CHRISTian Service Men who are of spiritual stature have learned that apart from consistently spending time in the Word, their CHRISTian lives will dwindle into uselessness.³²

Too much was at stake for Navigators to neglect the Word of God. This connection to Scripture was vital. Trotman told the Wycliffe Bible Translators in 1955 that, after reflecting on his own ministry, he discovered that any ministry effectiveness depended on the Bible. “Listen!” he said. “I’ve geared myself back from follow-up, through evangelism, back to your ministry of getting the Bible. We couldn’t do anything without the Bible!”³³ Everything about the Christian life and the Christian ministry depended on

³²The Navigators, *The Navigators Log* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1942), 11.

³³Ethel Wallis, *Lengthened Cords: How Dawson Trotman—Founder of the Navigators—Also Helped Extend the World-Wide Outreach of the Wycliffe Bible Translators* (Glendale, CA: Wycliffe Bible Translators, 1958), 112.

Scripture, so the man of God must be intimately connected to it.

By insisting that the Navigator men had to eschew spiritual laziness, Trotman developed a breed of Christian that was characterized by a strict sense of discipline.³⁴ The men maintained a posture of preparedness for spiritual battle by devoting themselves to time in the Word of God, and they became known for their seriousness in approaching spiritual matters.³⁵ What Trotman was not espousing by admonishing his men to be highly disciplined, however, was any idea that they were to be some special breed of “super-Christians.” He was simply seeking to make his men into what he believed the Bible said should be true of anyone who would follow Christ as Lord. The April 1959 edition of the *NavLog* included a posthumously published article from Trotman in which he made his position clear:

All over the world, men and women are reaching their neighbors for Christ. They are not ‘Super-Christians,’ but simply those who have believed the Gospel, learned how to feed themselves on the Word of God, and been encouraged to pass it on to someone else. Some of us have gotten no further than ‘Jerusalem’ with our witness (Acts 1:8). Some have not even witnessed at home. May God help us feed our own soul daily with the Word, live it before others as we speak it with the authority of God’s messengers . . . and then train our ‘babes’ in Christ to follow Him!³⁶

In Trotman’s eyes, being a Christian meant believing the Word, ingesting the Word, and carrying the Word to others. This calling was not reserved for the spiritually elite but was rather meant for all persons in Christ.

Trotman believed that the secret to world evangelization was to get as many people as possible into the Bible. Skinner recalls that this desire was his primary message: “His goal, by whatever means, was to get every Christian around the world

³⁴“Dawson Trotman & His Navigators,” *The King’s Business* (August 1956): 12.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Dawson Trotman, “Super-Christians,” *NavLog*, no. 76 (April 1959), quoted in Ken Albert, Susan Fletcher, and Doug Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2011), 191. Foster recalls that Trotman would often adjure his audiences to “get into the Word, allow the Word to get into you, and get going and concentrate on getting the Word out to others.” Foster, *The Navigator*, 90.

into the Book. At home he exhorted the Glen [Eyrie] staff to believe God's promise of His sovereignty in their lives and obey His command to give thanks in everything."³⁷ Trotman felt that God's promises as revealed in Scripture were paramount to achieving God's purposes in the world, so every aspect of life and ministry had to be tied to the Word. He believed the Word was essential in molding God's man and certainly in any ministry done in God's name.³⁸ Throughout the course of his Christian life, he required of himself a whole-hearted devotion to spending time in the Bible, and he sought to lead others in doing the same.³⁹ He demanded such an allegiance of those in whom he invested time. After speaking to a group of servicemen in Germany in 1952, a soldier approached Trotman to ask for a personal meeting. Trotman would be glad to spend hours in one-on-one meetings with men whom he considered to be "down to business" for the Lord, but he was unwilling to waste time on those whom he felt were uncommitted. Skinner records the interaction: "'I've got to see you,' a GI said after a servicemen's meeting 'Are you in the Book?' Daws asked. 'No.' 'Did you ever spend an hour with Bob Hopkins here?' 'Yes.' 'Did he tell you to get into the Book?' 'Yes.' Then the verdict: 'You don't need to see me. You need to start crawling.'"⁴⁰ He had no time to spend with those who were not dedicated.

Trotman had a passion for reaching the world for Christ, and he believed that the task could be completed in his generation. In fact, he insisted that God's call to every generation was to carry out the Great Commission.⁴¹ He believed God was big enough to accomplish the task, and he believed that God had provided enough resources for it to be

³⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 369.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 51.

³⁹Foster, *The Navigator*, 75.

⁴⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 332.

⁴¹Foster, *The Navigator*, 190.

done.⁴² He further observed, however, that the job was not being done. Foster records how Trotman diagnosed the problem:

The key obstacle to carrying out this commission, Daws pointed out, was failure to believe in God's promises—which could be traced to a weak or lacking devotional life. 'Crossing an ocean doesn't make a missionary. If you haven't won the battle of the quiet time here at home, you won't have any more time or discipline to get it built in overseas. If you haven't won victory over temptation . . . won a soul to Christ . . . or trained yourself to study the Scriptures here in the good old U.S.A., there's no reason to believe it's going to happen, like a miracle, four thousand miles away.'⁴³

Trotman did not mince words. Those Christians who were serious about reaching the world for Christ—about making disciples of all nations both at home and abroad—must first have been committed to the Word of God. They must have been willing to hear it, to read it, and to study it. It had to become part of who they were. Claiming the promises of God in Scripture was essential, but it was impossible to do if one did not know the promises of God due to lack of time in the Word. The task was too great and too important for God's man to be devotionally lazy.

Hidden power. Trotman's own experience spurred in him a strong belief in the power of Scripture memorization, and he admonished every Christian with whom he spoke to commit God's Word to memory. The concept was not new. Scripture itself is replete with God's instruction that believers should hide his Word in their hearts,⁴⁴ and Trotman championed the practice whenever he could. He often shared a message entitled "Values of Scripture Memory" in which he related nine aspects of the Christian life that were strengthened by the practice. He taught that memorized Scripture was of particular value in the Christian's own spiritual formation. Trotman insisted that memorizing the

⁴²Dawson Trotman, *The Need of the Hour* (1975; repr. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 15, 21.

⁴³Foster, *The Navigator*, 190-91.

⁴⁴Recall from chap. 3 Trotman's scriptural rationale for Scripture memorization based upon verses like Deut 6:4-6 and 11:18; Prov 6:20-21, 7:1-3, and 22:18; and Ps 119:9 and 11.

Bible enabled the Christian to achieve victory over sin and grow in obedience, to embrace a more complete understanding of the Bible's storyline and to experience enhanced Bible study, and to hear in one's own heart and mind the very words of God.⁴⁵ These points—five of his nine—were directed to forming the man of God. His remaining four points centered around the value of memorized Scripture in Great Commission ministry. Trotman insisted, based upon passages of Scripture like Proverbs 22:17-21,⁴⁶ 1 Peter 3:15,⁴⁷ and Jeremiah 23:28-29,⁴⁸ that memorized Scripture was the “best preparation for soul-winning.”⁴⁹ He believed that it added value to preaching and teaching and that it provided courage and clear thinking during spiritual conversations. Further, he believed that the practice stirred the confidence of the hearers, giving them the assurance that the sharer was speaking the very words of Almighty God and thereby leading them to grant the speaker “entrance into [their] hearts.”⁵⁰ He insisted that memorizing Scripture was like loading arrows into the quiver of the believer's heart such that he was prepared at any moment to use his ammunition in spiritual discourse.⁵¹

⁴⁵Dawson Trotman, “Values of Scripture Memory,” transcript of message given at a Navigators Seminar, July 11-12, year unlisted (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

⁴⁶“Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?” (Prov 22:17-21).

⁴⁷“... be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet 3:15).

⁴⁸“The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath a word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer 23:28-29).

⁴⁹Trotman, “Values of Scripture Memory.”

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Dawson Trotman, “Values of Scripture Memory: Seminar at 536 South Hope,” July 12, 1949, unpublished transcript, 9-10, quoted in James Douglas Hankins, “Following Up: Dawson Trotman, the Navigators, and the Origins of Disciple Making in American Evangelicalism, 1926-1956” (Ph.D. diss.,

The idea that memorized Scripture provided the necessary ammunition for Great Commission ministry was central to Trotman. He saw the practice verified in Scripture itself, as noted in his reflection on Psalm 1:2 in an undated AlphOmega Bible study: “Vs. 2 especially challenges me to meditate in the Word day and night, literally to have it on the tables of my heart that I can meditate and thus produce fruit for my GOD.”⁵² One of the earlier entries in his personal journal records his admonition to himself that he must engage in personal spiritual disciplines to prepare himself for Christian service, and everything began with Scripture memorization: “Definite memory of Scripture—definite reading of Scripture—Builds the prayer life, which growing makes the working vital Christian, and indeed fruitful. Think!!!”⁵³ Many years later, he was still trumpeting the same cause of Scripture memorization with those whom he sought to equip. He records, “Meet some thirty kids at 6:30 p.m. Challenge them with the need to get down to business in the Word, especially memory. . . . Point out to the kids that if they are going to have a real revival in this city it is going to start with deeper things than a Saturday Night Jubilee.”⁵⁴ In meeting with so many Christian workers from all over the world, he felt like he had empirical evidence that memorizing Scripture made a significant difference in ministry. He recorded a meeting with Bill Blackstone, a missionary to China, who related that he had failed to see a real impact in China until he began to memorize Scripture. Trotman recorded, “Bill tells me, now that he is starting the second memory set, that this has been a blessing in his life and that he realized now what has been the matter with his spiritual life, even in China—lack of the Word. He

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, July 2011), 145.

⁵²Dawson Trotman, AlphOmega Bible Study on Ps 1, undated (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), “Application.”

⁵³Dawson Trotman, personal journal, November 15, 1929.

⁵⁴Ibid., December 9, 1944.

wants to print [the memory set] up Four or five missionary societies that have asked for the memory work.”⁵⁵

Trotman’s insistence on the power of memorized Scripture in Great Commission ministry was based on the Bible’s admonition, his personal experience, and what he observed in others. He had received Christ by way of memorized Scripture, and he found that his early Christian life and influence were profoundly impacted by the verses he had written upon his heart. He reflected, “God’s Word in my heart was so effective in helping me to lead my fellow-workers to Christ, and in starting them growing in the Christian life, that I began to do what I could to help others hide the Word in *their* hearts.”⁵⁶ Trotman recounted that he had instilled the practice of Scripture memorization in many different groups—including his Sunday school class, the Navigators, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association counselors—and the results were the same in every case: “. . . individual memory of Scripture has proved to be most valuable to counsellor [*sic*] and convert alike.”⁵⁷ He shared testimonies of people whose lives had been transformed by memorizing Scripture: a woman who led her seventy-three-year-old mother to Christ using memorized Scripture; a counselor who had been a Christian for many years who was renewed in his faith by the practice; and several church leaders who experienced an improved vigor for ministry as a result of Scripture memorization.⁵⁸ Trotman was thrilled that many people were “finding that memorization of Scripture is

⁵⁵Ibid., February 2, 1947.

⁵⁶Dawson Trotman, “Hidden Power,” *Vision and Venture* (September 1954): 8.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., 8-9. Skinner records that David Morken, Hubert Mitchell’s brother-in-law, was deeply impacted by Trotman’s admonition that he should memorize Scripture in preparation for ministry. She recalls, “Morken found it worked. In addition to review, he used Dawson’s suggestion for meditation, finding the Word thus digested became part of his life and virtually unforgettable. His wife Helen felt that memorizing Scripture had deepened his ministry and given his preaching new authority.” Skinner, *Daws*, 242.

not merely an activity for the Sunday school but something that God desires of every Christian.”⁵⁹

Robert Foster recalls that “Daws really had only one string on his guitar, and he would pluck it often and loud: ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly’ (Colossians 3:16).”⁶⁰ For the word to dwell richly in a Christian, it had to be stored in his mind. It had to be written on the tables of his heart. Trotman said, “Carrying within the very recesses of your heart and mind the living Word of God gives the Holy Spirit, at any moment of any one of the 24 hours of the day, an opportunity to transmit the Word from the Captain of your salvation to fit your own need or the need of anyone to whom you are privileged to minister!”⁶¹ Trotman concluded his most famous and enduring sermon, *Born to Reproduce*, with the following admonition to his hearers:

Every one of us, no matter what age we are, should get busy memorizing Scripture. In one Sunday school class, a woman seventy-two years of age and another who was seventy-eight finished The Navigators Topical Memory System. They then had something to give.

Load your heart with this precious Seed. You will find that God will direct you to those whom you can lead to Christ. There are many hearts ready for the gospel now.⁶²

Trotman was a staunch advocate of Scripture memory, because he was a staunch advocate of Great Commission ministry. He felt that the two disciplines were indispensably related to one another.

Profound return on investment. God’s man had to be a man of the Word—a man who ingested the Bible via hearing, reading, studying, and memorizing it, and who digested it by meditating on it day and night. In recounting Trotman’s legacy, Skinner

⁵⁹Trotman, “Hidden Power,” 9.

⁶⁰Foster, *The Navigator*, 61.

⁶¹Dawson Trotman, “How to Memorize Scripture,” quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 221.

⁶²Dawson Trotman, *Born to Reproduce* (1975; repr. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 36.

began her list of fifteen superlatives with the foundation of the Word. She said, “[He epitomized] an awesome respect for the promises of God and the power of the Word, seeing it not as a treasure held on deposit but as a limitless fortune to spend for the benefit of many.”⁶³ Trotman believed that if he lived in the Word continually—a feat possible only via Scripture memorization—he would “be one of God’s blessed men . . . [and would] always be nourished within and thus be healthy outwardly before the world.”⁶⁴ He lived that dedication, and he passed it on to others. In an undated Bible Study on John 14, he reflected on part of the twenty-sixth verse in which Jesus said, “[The Holy Spirit] shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you” by recording the following:

So oft when I am memorizing Scripture and writing it on the tables of my heart and know that those passages are the Word of God, this promise comes to my mind that HE will bring the things to my remembrance. The very fact of memorizing Scripture gives HIM opportunity to bring it back again. This HE does so often and especially in my life or the life of another. HE never fails to fulfill this one of HIS exceeding great promises.⁶⁵

Dawson Trotman’s Great Commission ministry was founded on the Word of God written on his heart to make him more like Christ and to ready him for service in the Lord’s ministry. God’s Word was to Trotman “a limitless fortune to spend for the benefit of many,”⁶⁶ and he dedicated his life to spending as much of it as he could to benefit as many people as possible.

God’s Man is a Man of Prayer

Trotman’s incredible reliance on the power of God expressed itself through his prayer life. Just as much as he was a man of the Word, he was a man of prayer. The

⁶³Skinner, *Daws*, 386.

⁶⁴Trotman, *AlphaOmega Bible Study on Ps 1*, “Practical.”

⁶⁵Dawson Trotman, *S.T.S. Bible Study on John 14* (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

⁶⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 386.

Word instructed him that he had received through Christ the ability to “come boldly unto the throne of grace” that he might “find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16), and the course of human history illustrated to him that anyone who would be useful in God’s service must rely upon God’s limitless strength. He wrote, “I had been taught from the beginning that one characteristic common to all men GOD had ever used down thru the ages was an effective prayer life.”⁶⁷ Trotman had seen deep prayer lives exhibited in the scriptural witness—most profoundly in the life of the Lord Jesus himself—and he had read of the deep prayer lives of his heroes in the faith. God had worked powerfully through men like E. M. Bounds, Hudson Taylor, D. L. Moody, and so many others, and Trotman had come to recognize that their usefulness resulted from their prayers. Men used mightily by God appeared to be men who relied profoundly upon God through prayer, and Trotman reflected, “This means, of course, only one thing: I must give myself to prayer.”⁶⁸ He did, and as was his pattern, he sought to bring others along with him.

Individual prayer life. Trotman’s insistence upon the power and necessity of prayer began in his own life. He believed that Scripture was clear regarding the source of a believer’s strength, and he relied heavily on it.⁶⁹ He further believed that his suitability for service to God depended upon his prayer life. After a Junior Prospectors Meeting in April 1931, Trotman recorded his desire to be able to pray in a manner that rendered him useful to God: “Oh the conflicts of my soul as I try to pray! Shall I let God use me? I must learn to pray, to wrestle by the hour for souls. Oh Jehovah—catch me, hold me,

⁶⁷Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 8.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹In an undated AlphaOmega study on Rom 8:18-30, Trotman recorded, “. . . the Spirit strengthens the believer, praying through them, while CHRIST intercedes for them.” He recognized he was strengthened through prayer, and he devoted himself to the practice. Dawson Trotman, AlphaOmega Bible Study, Rom 8:18-30, undated (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), “Panoramic Paragraph.”

strengthen me. I need Thee every moment.”⁷⁰ A little more than two years later, he recorded again his feelings about his own prayer life as it pertained to his usefulness in service to God:

Have a truly blessed time alone with the LORD. Early this morning. Again have I had the matter of prayer brought definitely to my attention as being vitally connected with accomplishing much business for God. I set my face again to pursue and persevere in habits of much time with Him. Truly our most difficult work, as refreshing and wonderful as it is—PRAYER.⁷¹

Trotman believed that his prayer life, more than anything else, indicated the depth and breadth of his spiritual life, and he boldly asserted that “what you are praying for is what you are living for.”⁷² If he was going to live to make an impact in the kingdom of God, he had better be praying accordingly.

Skinner notes the seriousness of Trotman’s devotion to prayer and makes the case that the driving force behind his intense discipline was not, as some might have averred, a sense of legalistic duty; rather, she says, his passionate prayer life was fueled by a desire to be useful to God:

Dawson’s compelling drive to spend time in prayer might have appeared legalistic, but his journal from that period reveals his motives: the joy he found in spending time with his Lord . . . and his deep conviction that God worked only in response to prayer. He fervently wished to be a usable instrument in ‘the Lord’s work—that wonderful work of winning souls.’ With this goal in mind, prayer was power, not a ritual; he would discipline himself to pray, whether the inclination was there or not.⁷³

Skinner further records that Trotman would later attribute his entire ministry to his prayer life, saying that “he had little doubt that his disciplined practice of prayer during the first five years of his Christian life laid the foundation for all his subsequent ministry.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰Trotman, personal journal, April 7, 1931.

⁷¹Ibid., June 23, 1933.

⁷²Foster, *The Navigator*, 196.

⁷³Skinner, *Daws*, 51.

⁷⁴Ibid., 53.

Trotman did not make this claim boastfully but rather from the humble realization that he was utterly reliant upon God.

Trotman's insistence that a Christian's prayer life was vital for ministry often expressed itself in memorable ways. Foster records Jim Downing's recollection of a time when Trotman and Downing lodged together during a conference in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1953. Downing recalled how the two men rose early for their devotions, and Trotman turned his attention to Psalm 103. Not long after they began, Trotman turned to Downing and confessed, "Jim, I've got to confess this early in the morning that I have been awake for over half an hour and I haven't asked God for anything great yet."⁷⁵ Downing recalled that Trotman felt like he had wasted thirty precious minutes of his day. Foster further records Clyde Taylor's reminiscence of his missionary survey trip through South America with Trotman. Taylor recalled, "I was tremendously affected by his prayer life. At times on the trip, when we were just about ready for bed after a tiring and busy day, Daws would say, 'Clyde, I think a couple hours with the Lord is what I need right now,' and he would take off into the night."⁷⁶ Taylor said that Trotman would typically come back a few hours later with a renewed vigor for their ministry and the tasks that lay ahead of them. He marveled that Trotman "seemed to be able to function without sleep, but not without protracted times in prayer."⁷⁷ Trotman believed that anyone who would be effective in God's service must follow the same pattern. Skinner records an incident in which a student body leader asked Trotman for help in soul-winning. She writes, "The help he received was unexpected. 'How's your prayer life?' Dawson asked abruptly. It was not good. 'Get that straightened out and then we'll talk about winning souls,' was the terse prescription. But the student took it and did learn how to win people to Christ—

⁷⁵Foster, *The Navigator*, 37.

⁷⁶Ibid., 32.

⁷⁷Ibid.

by praying first.”⁷⁸ Skinner notes that one of the most lasting impressions Trotman made on people was brought about by his prayer life—the unmistakable “reality of his touch with God.”⁷⁹ Trotman’s legacy, as attributed by Skinner, was founded first in the Word and second in his intimate prayer time with the Lord. She said that he epitomized “a vigorous, sensitive love for Christ that jealously guarded His glory and sought much time with Him in solitary worship, a relationship which sustained his drive to carry out the Great Commission.”⁸⁰

Necessity of others’ prayers. Trotman understood the inherent difficulty of ministry, and he knew that in addition to relying on his own prayers, he needed also to rely on the prayers of others. He urged others to pray for him, and he urged his disciples to pray for others. Trotman recorded one meeting, for example, that was centered around such intercessory prayer in 1932. He wrote, “The team met at the home of Mrs. Wallace of Harbor City. The purpose of this meeting was to leave our prayer requests with her that she might bring us before the throne of grace and ‘hold up our arms’ in His service.”⁸¹ Trotman was referring to the Old Testament account of Israel’s battle with Amalek recorded in Exodus 17. As Israel fought, Moses stood atop a hill with the staff of God lifted up, and as long as Moses kept the staff lifted up, Israel prevailed. When Moses’ hand began to drop, however, Amalek prevailed. As a result, Moses’ associates—Aaron and Hur—stood on either side of him and held his arms up so that Israel could finally win the battle (Exodus 17:13). Trotman was herein making the point that, just as Moses required the support of others to carry out his duty in battle, so also did anyone seeking to carry out his assigned tasks in ministry. Trotman continued, “After

⁷⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 54.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 134.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 386.

⁸¹Trotman, personal journal, May 21, 1932.

supper, and quoting of Scripture, we had a season of prayer. Mrs. Wallace took the lists containing prayer requests, which each team member had prepared, and we know from the LORD's dealing with us up until now and from His promises that this will be the means of great and wonderful blessing to us."⁸²

In addition to coveting the prayers of others, Trotman instructed believers to pray for those in ministry all around the world. He believed that any Christian could be involved in worldwide ministry through their prayers on behalf of missionaries all around the globe. In his *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, he instructed new believers as follows:

Intercessory prayer is the believer's opportunity for an outreach that is worldwide. Intercession should embrace God's servants (II Thess. 3:1, 2), all who are in authority (I Tim. 2:2), and a lost world (I Tim. 2:1), which includes those who hate God's people and injure them (Matt. 5:44). This indicates that the Christian is a person who has God's burden for the world on his heart.

How often do you pray around the world, mentioning the names and needs of missionaries whom you know or have heard of in various countries? By such far-reaching prayer you may share in God's work wherever it is being carried on.⁸³

Trotman had prayed with a map of the world before him in 1931, and in the years that followed, he saw God answer his prayers in extraordinary ways. He knew the power of intercession, and he taught it to others. Lyman Coleman, who was disciplined by Trotman in the mid-1950s, notes that he still has his world map and still prays for his country today.⁸⁴ Trotman continually pushed his men to enlarge their vision and increase the

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 13. Note that 2 Thess 3:1-2 says, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith." 1 Tim 2:1-2 says, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Matt 5:44 records Jesus' words as he said, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

⁸⁴Lyman Coleman explained how he first met Trotman and developed a worldwide vision of prayer as a student at Baylor University in Fort Worth, Texas in 1951. Trotman came to speak at Baylor and then met with Coleman and some other students following his message: "[Trotman] met with us afterwards and said, 'Well now, we're going to start by your getting a prayer group at your dorm, and you

scope of their prayers. He once told a group of fellow laborers, “You’re not really asking things for the world. Your vision is limited. You need to *ask big*.”⁸⁵ The task of Great Commission ministry was big, but Trotman recognized that God was bigger. He therefore sought to match the scale of his prayers with the scope of God’s limitless power. If the world were going to be reached for Christ, it was going to require bold prayers of great faith in a boundless God.

Prayer for ministry. Speaking at Westmont College in 1951, Trotman recounted his protracted time of prayer with Walt Stanton.⁸⁶ He recalled that they met with the notion of claiming Jeremiah 33:3 and found that their vision grew as they persisted in seeking the Lord.⁸⁷ He said, “. . . we were really breathing hard when we started to pray that God would give us the privilege of leading young men to Christ from every state in the union It hadn’t come to [*sic*] clearly to mind what we wanted, but we were praying definitely one thing. And you know, I’m surely glad the Lord led us to

get some guys together, and you get the world atlas out there, and I’m going to help you start praying for the world.’ And so I got back to the freshman dorm. I got two other guys and we were a group of three, and we had two other things: we had the Bible, and we had a world atlas; and we used to take our atlas with us. Every time we met we’d open up the atlas and point at a country and say, ‘Let’s pray that God will give us a chance to go to that country with the gospel; or if we don’t go, raise up somebody else on this campus to do it.’ Well, you know, we didn’t know any better than just believe we can do it. And by the end of that freshman year, we had about a half a dozen guys meeting in the dorm. . . in the freshman dorm. And by the end of the second year, we probably were up to fifty.” At the time of this writing, the World Cup is being held in Brazil. Coleman recalled, “I see the soccer games in Brazil—that was the country I claimed for Christ.” Lyman Coleman, telephone interview with author, June 23, 2014.

⁸⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 317.

⁸⁶Some discrepancy exists as to whether this particular season of prayer lasted forty days or forty-two days, as primary source material claims both. In this instance, Trotman said that the meetings lasted forty days, whereas in *The Need of the Hour*, he said that the meetings lasted forty-two days. The lack of desired precision notwithstanding, the fact remains that the men met for a substantial protracted period during which they faithfully sought the Lord in prayer. Dawson Trotman, transcript of untitled message given at Westmont College Seminar, July 20, 1951, quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 139-40. See also Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 25.

⁸⁷“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not” (Jer 33:3).

pray that. [Because] God gave us men.”⁸⁸ God indeed gave them men—faithful men—that could eventually be found all around the globe. Trotman finished his reflection at the seminar by saying, “I didn’t realize that prayer is at the heart of this whole thing.”⁸⁹ The “whole thing” to which Trotman referred was the ministry to which God had called him. It was the life of faithful Great Commission service to which he had been appointed, and the heart of it all was prayer.

Trotman’s journal and correspondence are replete with references to prayer as essential to ministry. In 1932, while he was still ministering with the Minute Men, he recorded the instruction he gave his men: “The team met at [BIOLA] at 11:30. We considered our need of ‘praying without ceasing,’ and then committing into GOD’s hands whatever problem or decision should come up, trusting that He according to His many promises would take care of the rest, and that according to Phil. 4:6, 7 His peace would fill and keep our minds.”⁹⁰ Exactly two months later, he recorded another time of intense prayer with the Minute Men and reflected, “We thank GOD for teaching us that we can only go forward in the work as we go forward in pray[er] and we long for more such prayer meetings as this one.”⁹¹ Twenty years later, long after the Minute Men were disbanded and the Navigator work was worldwide, Trotman continued to urge his men to pray for ministry. In a “Dear Gang” letter dated October 23, 1952, he urged his Navigators to pray for direction regarding future ministry decisions: “We are asking that all of you who get this letter in time determine what time it will be in your area and spend

⁸⁸Trotman, transcript of message at Westmont College Seminar, quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 140.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁰Trotman, personal journal, February 22, 1932. Note that Phil 4:6-7 says, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

⁹¹*Ibid.*, April 22, 1932.

those two hours in definite prayer—the first hour alone, and the second hour with one or more others, claiming the promise of Matthew 18:19, 20.”⁹² He then listed seven points of specific prayer focuses to which he was calling his Navigators, and he ended his letter by quoting 2 Chronicles 7:15—“Now mine eyes shall be open, and Mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.” Trotman regularly distributed specific prayer lists for ministry to the Navigators, and the specific items for which he requested prayer often related specifically to accomplishing the ministry to which he believed God had called them—which was always related in some fashion to making disciples of Christ.⁹³

In Dawson Trotman’s eyes, prayer was vital for ministry. It mattered little if the right methods were used if they were not empowered by God through prayer. In reflecting on the Prayer Hand illustration Trotman developed, Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins correctly assesses Trotman’s feelings about prayer’s vital place in ministry:

Daws knew that prayer was the vital connection between believers and God. Witnessing without prayer leads only to human effort without the power to achieve supernatural results. Bible study without prayer produces only knowledge without wisdom to understand and apply it. Daily life without prayer creates only ineffective legalism and a life without peace, joy, or fellowship. According to Daws, new believers also need instruction and encouragement in prayer as a matter of first priority.⁹⁴

Trotman believed that regular, consistent prayer was vital in building the Christian life and ministry.⁹⁵ He had learned from E. M. Bounds that the greatest methods were useless

⁹²Dawson Trotman, “Dear Gang” letter, October 23, 1952 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1. Matt 18:19-20 records Jesus’ instruction and promise regarding prayer: “Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

⁹³Consider, for example, the list Trotman distributed to the Navigators on June 26, 1954, in which he listed nine prayer requests for the Navigator ministry at Glen Eyrie. First among his requests was “that the Lord Jesus Christ may not only be pre-eminent but very prominent in everything that is done.” Another request was “that the Lord will give the crew an all-around ministry in evangelism and follow-up among the conferees, local people, visitors, etc.” Dawson Trotman, “For Daily Prayer: Glen Eyrie, June 26, 1954” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

⁹⁴Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 26.

⁹⁵Trotman, *Follow Up*, 8-9.

in the hands of spiritually dry men, and he fought to ensure that he remained filled with the spiritual nourishment that could come only through close communion with God through prayer.

God's man had to be a man of prayer—a man who regularly and boldly approached the throne of grace for power to do ministry. He had to be a man who would pray with adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and petition.⁹⁶ As Trotman put it, men in God's service needed to be “holy men of GOD, strong, rugged soldiers of the Cross with an eye single to HIS glory . . . men of prayer, intercessors, men who, like Paul, could say ‘Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith’ (I Thess. 3:10)”⁹⁷ J. Robert Clinton claims that “the worldwide spread of the Navigators can be traced directly back to [Trotman's] prayer life.”⁹⁸ Robert Foster was deeply inspired by Trotman's prayer life, noting that “he focused on the living God and His willingness and power to fulfill His promises. Because of his faith, his life served as an example and challenge not only to his generation, but to all of us who follow.”⁹⁹ Dawson Trotman emphatically trumpeted the importance of prayer in Christian life and ministry, but his greatest sermon on the subject was the sermon he lived—a life lived in intimacy with God through prayer.

Foundation for Great Commission Ministry

Betty Lee Skinner, who spent many years working with Trotman, observed that “he wanted to live by faith, trusting God to supply his needs in answer to prayer. He was . . . convinced that a fruitful servant of God must be a man of much prayer and must

⁹⁶Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 13.

⁹⁷Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 5.

⁹⁸J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 41.

⁹⁹Foster, *The Navigator*, 38.

saturate his life with the Word—conditions he found great joy and difficulty in meeting.”¹⁰⁰ Trotman believed that every aspect of life and ministry centered on the depth of his relationship with God as cultivated by time in the Word and time in prayer, and he sought to build everything upon that solid foundation. He believed that a Christian who failed to find victory in his personal devotional life would fail to find victory in his Great Commission ministry, and he found empirical evidence for his belief in the lives of missionaries he interviewed.¹⁰¹ He asserted that God had little use for those Christians who could not devote one forty-eighth of their day (i.e., thirty minutes) to spending time with the Lord through the Word and prayer.¹⁰² He insisted that great men of God like Billy Graham, Bob Evans, and Hubert Mitchell join hands with him and covenant together that they would all devote their lives to the Word, prayer, and preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth.¹⁰³ He believed that if he invested in the depth of his life, God would take care of the breadth of his ministry.¹⁰⁴ Evidence indicates that he was right. He reflected, “We believe HIS blessing illustrates in a small way the truth we have been dealing with, that GOD uses yielded men who have come thru the Word of GOD and thru the life of prayer to carry out HIS orders up to the light which they possess.”¹⁰⁵ Dawson Trotman sought to get as close to God as he possibly could through personal spiritual disciplines, and God granted him a ministry that still reaches to the ends of the earth.

¹⁰⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 61.

¹⁰¹Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 17-18.

¹⁰²Foster, *The Navigator*, 30.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁰⁵Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 7.

Motivation

In developing the Wheel illustration, Trotman found that the Christian's vertical relationship with Christ that was cultivated through the Word and prayer had horizontal effects that touched the world around him.¹⁰⁶ He therefore included two horizontal spokes in his wheel: obedience and witnessing. He explained the difference between the vertical spokes and the horizontal spokes as follows:

The WORD and PRAYER represent INTAKE (usually unseen by the world); OBEDIENCE and WITNESS represent OUTLET, or the outward expression of the CHRISTian life in action which may be viewed by the world; OBEDIENCE is the silent expression of the CHRIST-life through CONDUCT, while WITNESS is the actual spoken testimony about the CHRIST-life. By one's OBEDIENCE (conduct) he may win a hearing for the WITNESS (spoken words).¹⁰⁷

If a Christian cultivated his relationship with Christ via the Word and prayer, the depth of that relationship would express itself in a life of ministry that touched the world around him. Further, his time with the Lord would compel him to bring others to Christ as well. Trotman reflected that his protracted time of prayer with Walt Stanton in the Palos Verdes Hills in 1931 came to an end, because "it seemed as though the LORD was saying, 'You have prayed; now go to work.'"¹⁰⁸ Then, speaking in broader terms, Trotman said, "Someone has said that prayer works; prayer is work; prayer leads to work. It appeared that way to us."¹⁰⁹ Trotman and Stanton's time in the Word and prayer led them to action—to lives of obedience unto God that would grant them a hearing for witness to the lost and dying world around them. Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines developed in him a passion to reach the world for Christ, and he found therein the motivation he needed to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

¹⁰⁶Foster, *The Navigator*, 51.

¹⁰⁷Dawson Trotman, "Contact Instructions" (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

¹⁰⁸Trotman, "Faithful Men," 9.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

God's Man is a Man of Obedience

Dick Hillis, whose life intersected with Trotman's at BIOLA as he returned from missionary service in China to teach there during World War Two, remembered Trotman as an exhorter who had little patience for disobedience in the life of a Christian. In 1942, Hillis was part of a prayer group organized by Trotman that included nine other men. In true Trotman fashion, the group met early in the morning and devoted themselves to sharing memorized Scripture and praying over a world map in order that the gospel might reach the ends of the earth. In recounting their time together, Hillis discussed Trotman's practice of urging the men to align their lives with God's Word, but he noted that the impetus behind Trotman's exhortation was genuine love:

During those times I realized the great pulsating force of Daws's heart was love, expressed in a desire that every one of God's children be conformed to the image of God's dear Son. If they weren't, and God told him to put his finger on that nonconformity, he would do it. This gave a deep love in my own heart for Daws. No one has ever personally hit me harder in relation to my spiritual life, and no one has loved me more.¹¹⁰

Trotman expected obedience from his men, and he expected obedience from himself. He told his Navigators, "Don't talk an inch beyond your experience. If you don't have it, don't preach it. If you're not practicing it in your own life, don't talk about it to others."¹¹¹ He believed those in Christian leadership should set the pace for their followers by obeying Christ, and he believed that obedience was required from anyone who would seek to follow Christ.

Being a doer of the Word. Trotman returned often to Edgar Guest's refrain that "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day."¹¹² He believed in the power of the

¹¹⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 243.

¹¹¹Foster, *The Navigator*, 148.

¹¹² Dawson Trotman, "The Big Dipper," transcript of message given on June 14, 1956, Discipleship Library, accessed June 13, 2014, http://www.discipleshiplibrary.com/dawson_trotman.php, 5.

transformed life in transforming other lives, and he sought to instill in his followers the biblical admonition that believers should be “doers of the Word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). In an AlphaOmega Bible Study on Romans 6, Trotman responded to the text by saying, “There is no doubt about the fact that the most convincing sermon is a transformed life, one dead to sin, freed from it, raised to newness of life, has all the power of demonstrating to an unbelieving world the absolute total change to be presenting this convincing argument, by GOD’s grace, I must show forth the fruits of a holy life.”¹¹³ The watching world should be able to tell the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian, and Trotman saw the distinction very plainly:

There are two kinds of men in the world, those living after the flesh and those living after the SPIRIT. Here is our opportunity to preach the Gospel by life. The world is bound to see the carnal lives all around them producing nothing but enmity, death and evil. Quickened by the SPIRIT, mortifying the deeds of the body, as a child of the King, I may live the life that will cause the worldling [*sic*] to stop, look and listen as it were and cause him to desire that which can only be had by coming to JESUS CHRIST.¹¹⁴

Trotman believed the preaching done by a transformed life would figuratively shout into the lost world and pique the interest of non-believers. He therefore focused intently on turning “hearers” into “doers” who would live the Christian life before others.¹¹⁵

Trotman often referred to the obedient Christian life as “victorious living,” and he insisted that the Christian had all the tools he needed to live in victorious obedience to Christ through the Word and prayer. He instructed new Christians that the keys to victorious living were found in their devotional lives: “Two weapons through which we can have victory lie ready at hand. One is prayer. The Saviour said, ‘Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation’ (Matt. 26:41). . . . The other weapon is the Word of

¹¹³Dawson Trotman, AlphaOmega Bible Study on Rom 6, undated (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarter Archives, Colorado Springs), “Practical Application.”

¹¹⁴Dawson Trotman, AlphaOmega Bible Study on Rom 8:1-17, April 15, 1944 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives), “Practical Application.”

¹¹⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 139-40.

God. Its truths should become a part of us as we spend time in it and the Holy Spirit reveals to us its meaning.”¹¹⁶ He maintained, however, that victory required more than simply knowing the Word; it demanded living the Word. He said, “It isn’t the number of verses you’ve learned that counts most, but what you are doing with the ones you have memorized. I believe God would rather have a man who knows 50 verses in his heart and is living them than a man who knows 1,000 verses in his head and doesn’t apply them to his life.”¹¹⁷ Foster records how a young Presbyterian minister responded to witnessing Trotman’s life. The minister recalled what impacted him most about Trotman:

I sensed in this man [Trotman] a heart to really know God and find out what God wanted him to do, and he had given his life to learn how to do it, and then was *doing* it. I hadn’t met any men like that. I believe Dawson looked on the Word of God as being real communication from God, and he bent himself to obey that Scripture. Hence there was a power in his use of Scripture which was born out of obedience.¹¹⁸

Ever the pacesetter, Trotman sought to follow Christ as closely as possible and thereby exhibit for others what the victorious Christian life looked like, and he accomplished his goal. People—Christians and non-Christians alike—were able to see Christ in him because of his obedience to the Lord.

J. Robert Clinton observes that the ministry of the Navigators and its far-reaching impact is an example of “the story of what God accomplishes with a life that is willing to trust and do.”¹¹⁹ Trotman trusted God’s Word, and he sought to live it out. As a result, God used him mightily in ministry. Trotman once asked a congregation to consider the thoughts of David as he penned Psalm 119:59-60, saying “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy

¹¹⁶Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 17.

¹¹⁷Trotman, “How to Memorize Scripture,” quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 220.

¹¹⁸Foster, *The Navigator*, 92.

¹¹⁹Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 40.

commandments.” Foster records Trotman’s response to this text:

Would you notice the *personal* action taken by David in this song? *I thought, I turned my feet, I made haste, I delayed not to keep.* Hundreds of times throughout the Scriptures, we are not only advised, but *commanded* to obey the words of God. This is the secret of the Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life. Stay away from diseases that you know will put you out of commission for God.¹²⁰

Trotman believed that the proper response to the Word of God and prayer was a life yielded to God in obedience. He called Christians to practice what they preached, noting that their actions would either enhance or negate the proclamation of their mouths.¹²¹

Downing summarized Trotman’s teaching by saying, “. . . men of the world are not looking for Words of Scripture but for lives which display that complete satisfaction unknown to those who do not know CHRIST. The men of stature among the CHRISTian Service Men are those who have learned to obey CHRIST . . . and refuse to trifle with sin which always oppresses our GOD-provided joy.”¹²²

Transferring joy from transformed living. Trotman found furthermore that the victorious Christian life lived in obedience to Christ was the best way to live. He asserted that those who lived according to the flesh lived “carnal lives . . . producing nothing but enmity, death, and evil.”¹²³ The Christian life was altogether different. The Lord Jesus asserted in John 10:10 that “the thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly,” and Trotman recognized that this verse—along with so many others in Scripture—was clear that life lived according to God’s Word and empowered by God’s Spirit is far better than life lived apart from Christ. He taught new Christians that

¹²⁰Foster, *The Navigator*, 56-57.

¹²¹Dawson Trotman, “The Life” sermon notes, undated (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

¹²²The Navigators, *The Navigators Log* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1942), 11.

¹²³Trotman, AlphaOmega Bible Study on Romans 8:1-17, “Practical Application.”

obedience to Christ is rewarding:

God promises ever so much more to the one who puts Him first. ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you’ (Matt. 6:33). The path that God has marked out for us to follow is for our greatest good: ‘As for God, his way is perfect’ (Ps. 18:30). And He never asks or expects too much. The instruction in Romans 12:1 to present ourselves completely to God is a ‘reasonable’ request, and we will find, on responding to it, that His will is good; it is acceptable; it is perfect—and it is abundantly rewarding. Even the special joy of more personal fellowship with Christ is in store for those who walk in obedience to His will (John 14:21; 15:10).¹²⁴

Trotman believed that God called him to live a life transformed by his intimate relationship with Christ, but he also noted that he could not live the victorious life apart from the continual intervention of God. He said, “I am sure to fail, but I am not left to myself. HE is quickening. GOD takes up at my point of failure and will produce a life acceptable to HIM. It’s the old story of GOD working in us ‘both to will and to do of HIS good pleasure’ in spite of our unutterable weakness.”¹²⁵ Godly living required grace upon grace, but such grace was given freely in Christ.¹²⁶

Because Trotman found such joy in living the transformed life, he wanted others to experience it as well. He wanted people all around the world to experience the wonder of knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and living a life free from slavery to

¹²⁴Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 20. Note that John 14:21 records Jesus’ words as he said, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” Likewise, John 15:10 records Christ’s words as follows: “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.”

¹²⁵Trotman, *AlphaOmega Bible Study on Rom 8:1-17*, “Application.”

¹²⁶In an article entitled “Sanctification,” Trotman delineated his position according to Scripture as follows: “While the believer is definitely trusting the sufficiency of the Spirit for his victory and fulfilling every condition, he will be divinely kept from sinning (Col. 5:16; Rom. 8:2; 6:14). This statement is not based upon any personal experience; it is based on the Word of God. The Christian never reaches a place where he cannot sin. There is a distinction to be observed between being able not to sin and not being able to sin. On the other hand, the Scriptures plainly teach that, in spite of the fallen nature, there is deliverance for the believer from the bond-servitude to sin through his union to Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom 8:1-10), and through the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit (Rom 8:2; Gal 5:16). This victory will be realized just so long as it is claimed by faith. Such is the divinely provided prevention from sinning.” Dawson Trotman, “Sanctification” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1.

sin and death. He found motivation for fulfilling the Great Commission in his own joy. In a letter to his “beloved co-laborers” in 1951, after recounting ministry advances all around the world, he paused to bring his readers’ attention to the Word of God:

We can’t take all the space just to tell what is going on because we want to include something from GOD’s wonderful Word. It is through the Word that we know the blessing and wealth of the CHRISTian life made possible through the coming of the SAVIOUR, and it is these great truths that we seek to make known to the uttermost parts of the world through the men and organizations we have mentioned. Just think what it will mean to some who have never heard His Name to discover that it means SAVIOUR! Think what a privilege it is to be His ambassador and to be able to tell them that He came to rescue the perishing, to deliver them from the chains of darkness and the prison house of sin, to give them ‘the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified.’ You know as well as we that this message has gone only partially to the uttermost parts. We believe every person in this generation can hear it if those who know Him are taught to grow in grace and in knowledge, and are brought to maturity and to live lives of fruitfulness and productivity. GOD is permitting us to see a faint ray of light which we believe is but the dawn of a new day of ministry, and that within a comparatively short time we can rejoice that His final command has been completely carried out.¹²⁷

In summary, Trotman maintained that time in the Word of God and prayer led the Christian to live a victorious, obedient life in Christ that was better than what the world could offer. As a result, the Christian’s joy ought to stir in him a desire to share this life-changing message with the lost and dying world so that they, too, might experience the joy of life in Christ.

Loving Christ means obeying Christ. Jesus expressed very clearly in John 14:21 that loving him meant keeping his commandments: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” Jesus was elaborating on his brief but powerful statement recorded in John 14:15, wherein he plainly told his disciples, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” The same sentiment is expressed by the Apostle John in 1 John 3-6: “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep

¹²⁷Dawson Trotman, “Beloved Co-Laborer” letter, December 22, 1951 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.” Trotman believed that God expected faithfulness from his people, saying that “along with expression of his needs to God in prayer, and personal intake of God’s Word, there should be instilled in the Christian the necessity of living in practical application of that Word True fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ is made possible by faithfulness in carrying out His wishes.”¹²⁸ Obedience to God’s commands was not optional to God, so obedience to God’s commands was not optional to Trotman.

Trotman recalled that the last words of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, were directing his disciples to make disciples of all the nations. These words were not a suggestion from God; they were a command from God, and God’s commands were to be obeyed. Trotman said that Jesus left the disciples with a job to do, and he supplied them with the power and authority to do it. He said, “I believe with all my heart that the reason so many wonderful Christians don’t accomplish more in their lives is they don’t believe Jesus meant what He said.”¹²⁹ Trotman believed Jesus meant what he said. He finished making his point by paraphrasing the Great Commission: “The last thing [Jesus] said was, ‘All power is given unto Me. I’m giving you all your orders now. Go and teach all nations and see that every created being hears the Word.’”¹³⁰ If loving Jesus and being in Christ meant obeying his commands, then loving Jesus and being in Christ meant carrying out the Great Commission. Trotman’s chief “Timothy,” Lorne Sanny, emphasized this point in his *Marks of a Disciple*, saying, “Let’s go back to ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.’ . . . Have you ever considered the possibility that

¹²⁸Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 9.

¹²⁹Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 16.

¹³⁰Ibid.

obedience to the Word of Christ might mean leaving your business?”¹³¹ He continued by sharing the stories of several people who left all that they had to carry the gospel to the nations as local and international missionaries, and he concluded by saying that “. . . I’m speaking of obedience to the Word of Christ, wherever it may lead and when the going is tough. That’s a mark of a disciple.”¹³² Disciples of Christ love Christ and obey Christ’s commands, and the very last command he left before ascending to heaven was the Great Commission. To Trotman, obedience was not optional.

God’s Man is a Man of Witness

In his most famous and enduring sermon, Trotman emphasized the notion that “everyone should be born again.”¹³³ Such was his heart. He legitimately desired that all people come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he based his desire on Paul’s assertion about God’s heart in 1 Timothy 2:4.¹³⁴ Trotman said, “God never desired that man should merely live and die—be a walking corpse to be laid in the ground. The vast majority of people know that there is something beyond the grave, and so each one who is born into God’s family should seek others to be born again.”¹³⁵ He believed that Jesus’ ministry with the twelve was designed to show them how to win souls for Christ after his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, noting that “from the very beginning, He had said that He would make them fishers of men (Matt. 4:19). During His three years with them He showed them how, and now He was committing to

¹³¹Lorne C. Sanny, *Marks of a Disciple* (1975; repr. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 19.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 20.

¹³³Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 12.

¹³⁴“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:3-4).

¹³⁵Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 12.

them the unfinished task. It was His final command.”¹³⁶ He believed that Jesus’ disciples—both the twelve then and the billions thereafter—ought to join their Lord in desiring the salvation of all persons and obey their Lord in taking his message to the world. In the May 1949 edition of *The Navigators Log*, Trotman emphasized the scriptural call for all Christians to witness:

In the second Psalm GOD says to His Son the LORD JESUS, ‘Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession’ [Psalm 2:8]. At the Last Supper the LORD literally told the disciples whom He had ordained that His work was now being given to them. Later as He prayed in the garden He reiterated this truth—‘As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world’ (John 17:18). Then, just before the cloud received Him out of their sight, His last words on earth were, ‘. . . Ye shall be witnesses unto Me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth’ [Acts 1:8].¹³⁷

Trotman saw in Scripture that God’s man must be a man of witness, and he patterned his life and teaching accordingly.

Spurred by personal spiritual disciplines. Trotman believed that the culmination of spirituality was a life of Christian witness. Having explained the importance of the spiritual disciplines in his *Follow-Up* publication, he went on to express how the life of witness ought to be the natural outworking of a life lived in communion with Christ:

The one who is . . . in fellowship with Christ through the Word, through prayer, through obedience to His known will, will have an effective witness both by life and word to those around him. As he seeks to tell neighbors and friends of his new-found life in Christ, the Word will give him wisdom and give authority to his testimony. Prayer will give discretion and open the hearts of those who hear. An obedient, consistent life will give power to the spoken word.¹³⁸

He believed that witnessing provided the outlet to the spiritual life that extended the benefits gained in the prayer closet to a lost and dying world. He said, “Spiritual exercise

¹³⁶Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 43.

¹³⁷Dawson Trotman, *The Navigators Log* (May 1949): 1.

¹³⁸Trotman, *Follow-Up*, 9.

is a necessary outlet for the Christian life and witnessing is an important phase of this exercise. A Christian who does not witness is failing to share that which, if appropriated, would bring life to others.”¹³⁹ He illustrated his point by referencing the difference between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, saying, “The Jordan flows on into the former and out again; it is fresh and vibrant with life. The Jordan flows into the Dead Sea, but since the Dead Sea has no outlet, it is without any form of life.”¹⁴⁰ Witnessing, he maintained, flowed logically from a life that was spiritually fed by personal spiritual disciplines.

Trotman came to understand the power of spirituality in soulwinning relatively early on in his Christian life. A journal entry in September 1929—a mere three years after his conversion to Christianity—indicates that he already understood the necessity of personal spiritual disciplines in carrying out the Great Commission. He recorded that he had just returned from a Christian service during which a singing group known as the Longs had performed, and although he enjoyed their singing, he was less than impressed with their spiritual impact. He said, “Singers they are indeed and fine entertainers. However they lack that wonderful quality of deep spirituality that is essential in the winning of souls. By their ways and their words they show a shallowness that as a rule is the result of little fellowship with the Lord in prayer and deep understanding of His Word.”¹⁴¹ He believed that the life of witness had to flow from a deep-seated spirituality within, and he knew that such spirituality had to be cultivated. In an undated AlphaOmega Bible Study on the Holy Spirit, Trotman recorded his biblical understanding of soul-

¹³⁹Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 25.

¹⁴⁰Ibid. Downing echoed this point in the Fall 1942 edition of *The Navigators Log*, saying that “it has been well said that all inflow and no outlet has been the reason that the Dead Sea was so named. The same principle will have the same effect in the life of a CHRISTian who is not witnessing. This exercise has not only been found necessary to develop men of stature, but is the crowing joy of the CHRISTian life.” *The Navigators, The Navigators Log* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1942): 12.

¹⁴¹Trotman, personal journal, September 12, 1929.

winning:

Inasmuch as GOD promises that through my innermost being shall flow rivers of living water, I take it that if that flow is unhindered by sin or by grieving the Spirit or quenching Him, that people can drink from that flow which is the water of life, souls can be saved. By HIS Grace, I must let nothing arrest the continual flow of water to a thirsty and dying world.¹⁴²

Trotman desired to make himself—by the grace of God—a usable vessel through which God could bless the world. He worked toward his goal by diligence in his spiritual disciplines. Talent, like that possessed by the Longs, might be entertaining, but eternal work could be done only through a spiritual depth resulting from the Christian’s relationship with Christ.

Prepared by prayer. Trotman felt that witnessing began in the prayer closet. When teaching new Christians about sharing their faith, he said, “We first need to talk to God about men, then talk to men about God. Prayer is the means of preparing our hearts and the hearts of those to whom we will be witnessing.”¹⁴³ Roy Robertson, the Navigators’ first overseas missionary, asserts Trotman’s teaching by saying, “The quiet time is a practice of discipline that begins to prepare a disciple for spiritual reproduction.”¹⁴⁴ Prayer prepared the witness by preparing his heart for the encounter and by readying him to engage those he might not otherwise engage. Foster records the story of Trotman’s interaction with a man with whom he was not particularly excited to speak. Trotman had prayed and asked the Lord to give him someone with whom he could share his faith, and after praying, he got into his Model T Ford and headed out to find his subject. He approached a stop light, and as he brought his vehicle to a halt, he noticed a big, tough-looking man standing by the intersection trying to find a ride.

¹⁴²Dawson Trotman, *AlphaOmega Bible Study on The Holy Spirit*, year unlisted (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), “Practical.”

¹⁴³Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 44.

¹⁴⁴Roy Robertson, *The Timothy Principle: How to Disciple One-On-One* (Singapore: The Navigators Singapore, 1986), 24.

Trotman decided that the man looked too hardened to receive Christ, so he averted his eyes and hoped that the light would change quickly. It did not. Trotman felt like he sat there thirty minutes, and as he sat at that light, he received confirmation from the Lord that he needed to offer the man a ride. Thankfully, the man received Christ and began the journey of following Jesus in Trotman's car that night. Trotman had prayed for an opportunity, and even though the subject the Lord provided was not the most appealing to the five-foot, six-inch Trotman, the Lord nevertheless answered his prayer. Foster draws a strong principle from the story, saying that "praying for witnessing opportunities can lead to unexpected experiences."¹⁴⁵ Prayer motivated Trotman to head out in his Model T that night, opened him up to a witnessing experience he otherwise would have avoided, and prepared him to lead an unlikely character to the Lord that night. This pattern was typical in Trotman's life.

Equipped by the Word. In January 1945, Trotman visited his Navigators in Honolulu, Hawaii. While he was there, Navigator Ken Watters noticed a change in Trotman's focus. Skinner recounts, "Watters recalled that Daws's message in Honolulu five years before had been 'Feed My sheep;' now he was preaching 'Teach the sheep to eat.'"¹⁴⁶ He believed in the power of teaching Christians to ingest and digest the Word on their own, not only for their personal benefit, but also for the sake of the kingdom of God. He wrote, "You and I as Christian workers can play a vital part in this world programme [*sic*] by helping others around us to get into the Word for themselves. Then, as they grow spiritually they will be prepared for effective service."¹⁴⁷ Trotman believed that the Bible provided the witness' authority and gave him divine words that could be

¹⁴⁵Foster, *The Navigator*, 105.

¹⁴⁶Skinner, *Daws*, 262.

¹⁴⁷Dawson Trotman, "Follow-Up on the Mission Field," *Youth for Christ Quarterly Magazine* (April 1954): 12.

used by the Holy Spirit to bring others to Christ,¹⁴⁸ but Scripture also equipped the sharer to serve as a useable vessel for the message of the gospel. Skinner records that Trotman was particularly honored by hearing of young pastors and ministry leaders whose lives and ministries were deeply impacted by his teaching and example regarding the Word of God:

Not least of Dawson's rewards was the blessing received by young pastors like the Reverend Ken Smith of Pittsburgh. Attending early morning follow-up instruction meetings, Smith confessed Dawson's presentation of The Wheel and the how of devotional life spoke to his personal need. 'Something I had never heard before,' he said. 'It began to get through to me that ministry depended upon life. I hadn't seen this as a *principle*. I wanted an effective ministry and had prayed for three years the Lord would show me how to lead someone to Christ.'

'I knew Daws was giving the logical application of the inspiration of the Bible. We hold the Bible to be the only infallible rule of faith and life. Daws was the first to show me the two embraced as a principle. From then on my problem was not theological but applying what I knew. My devotional life began to have meaning. I began to see God do what he said He would do.'¹⁴⁹

Seemingly small victories like this one recollected by Reverend Ken Smith are the grand results for which Trotman sought. He was teaching men to follow Christ intimately by way of personal spiritual disciplines, and in so doing, he was equipping them to teach others to do the same. His reward was found in the formation of God's men, who could then commit the same truths and practices to faithful men who could teach others also. The successes they found in their own devotional lives gave them the motivation to redouble their efforts in reaching the world for Christ.

Motivation for Great Commission Ministry

Trotman asserted that the disciplined life focused on the Word of God and prayer led to a life that expressed love for God through obedience and witness. In other words, an intimate vertical relationship between God and man pushed men to seek to bring others into the same type of relationship with Almighty God. He summarized his

¹⁴⁸Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 45.

¹⁴⁹Skinner, *Daws*, 326.

position by saying, “. . . when all things are right between you and the Lord, regardless of how much or how little you may know intellectually from the standpoint of the world, you can be a spiritual parent. And that, incidentally, may even be when you are very young in the Lord.”¹⁵⁰ The drive to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth did not depend upon a vast knowledge of biblical and theological truth—however helpful those bases may have been. It depended on the Christian’s willingness to obey that which he read in Scripture. Trotman ended his *Foundation Studies in Christian Living* with a discussion of the outflow of the gospel through the yielded Christian:

This final lesson is second to none in importance, for it is through faithful witnesses that the Lord will reach men and women in every part of the world. To those who will accept this responsibility, God makes this promise: ‘They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever’ (Dan. 12:3). Let us *begin now* to use His mighty power (Acts 1:8) to carry out His last command!¹⁵¹

Trotman found in his strict regimen of personal spiritual disciplines the motivation to take the gospel to the ends of the earth—no matter the cost—and he brought others along with him in doing the same.

Urgency

Dawson Trotman was a motivator. He believed that the kingdom of God was too important for people to waste time in their spiritual lives. He became infamous among his collaborators for his oft-repeated slogans, and one of his favorite adages was “the greatest waste of time is the waste of time in getting started.”¹⁵² God’s men had work to do, and they needed to be about doing it. He saw in the Word of God an urgency to the mission to which he believed all Christians were called, and he invited others to experience that urgency along with him. In an article he wrote for the *Missionary*

¹⁵⁰Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 15.

¹⁵¹Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 45.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, 44.

Aviator Fellowship in 1945, he summarized his resolve that the world could be reached for Christ if Christians would get down to business for their Lord:

What [God] needs is believing hearts. Solid, all-out, down-to-business Christian men . . . trained to the highest standards in the world . . . offering their services to help do the job.

If God's people will believe His Word, accept the challenge of the world, and whole-heartedly give of themselves; if they will pray, if they will give, if they will go; the great task can be done. It can be done soon. If we trust the One 'who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will,' the One who has declared that the vast throngs from every corner of the world will join in offering praise, we shall actually see it happen. Let's believe God, let's dig in to prepare soul and heart and mind. Let's offer ourselves, let's avail ourselves of every means to finish the job.¹⁵³

Trotman believed that God's man urgently desired to fulfill the commission of Christ by taking the Good News of Jesus Christ to his Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). As a result of his intimate relationship with Christ cultivated by time in the Word and prayer, God's man understood the heart of God, understood the commission he had received from God, and yearned to carry out that commission as quickly and effectively as possible.

God's Man Understands the Heart of God

Perhaps the greatest compliment God could give any man was that which God gave to David in calling him "a man after his own heart" (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). Trotman recognized the profundity of this classification, and he wanted to know why such a distinction was given to David. He found his answer in the Psalms. Trotman wrote, "God said that David was a man after His own heart. In the Psalms David says 'I will worship toward Thy holy temple' (Psalm 138:2). In fact, he says 'I will' to God scores of times. That's what God is after, men and women who will respond to God with 'I will.'"¹⁵⁴ Trotman observed that David could be called a man after God's own heart, not because he was perfect, but because he was willing to bring his heart in line with

¹⁵³Dawson Trotman, "GO: Prepared . . . Equipped," *Missionary Aviation* (July-September 1945): unnumbered.

¹⁵⁴Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 18.

God’s heart by exerting his will accordingly. David sought the will of the Lord, and he sought to align himself with God’s will. He clearly did not do so perfectly—consider, for example, his episode with the wife of Uriah as recorded in 2 Samuel 11—but even in the aftermath of such a tremendous fall, his heart was inclined once again to the desire of the Lord.¹⁵⁵ Trotman saw in David an example of a man who understood the heart of God by learning the desire of God and being willing to submit himself to the divine will regardless of the cost.

Aligning with God’s desire. Trotman believed that “God our Savior . . . will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4).¹⁵⁶ He maintained that the scope of God’s desire was for persons from all around the world—from every tribe, tongue, and nation—to be saved. He said, “I believe [the need of the hour] is an army of soldiers, dedicated to Jesus Christ, who believes not only that He is God but that He can fulfill every promise He has ever made and that there isn’t anything too hard for Him. It’s the only way we can accomplish the thing that is on His heart—getting the gospel to every creature.”¹⁵⁷ He saw God instruct his servant to ask him for the heathen from the uttermost parts of the earth for his inheritance in Psalm 2:8, and he contemplated that “. . . here [God] challenges me to ask for one of the greatest things in all the world, the souls of heathen people.”¹⁵⁸ He spent much time carrying out the orders given in Psalm 2:8, and over time, God answered his prayers.

¹⁵⁵Consider Ps 51.

¹⁵⁶When read in a twenty-first century context, the translation of 1 Tim 2:3-4 in the Authorized Version makes this passage easily misinterpreted. Trotman did not understand this passage to mean that all persons would be saved, as the whole counsel of Scripture makes clear. This dissertation has already shown that Trotman believed in the exclusivity of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that he believed firmly in the necessity of repentance and faith for salvation. This passage is included as evidence backing Trotman’s assertion that the scope of God’s desire for persons to be saved includes every tribe, tongue, and nation.

¹⁵⁷Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 12.

¹⁵⁸Trotman, AlphaOmega Bible Study on Ps 2 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), “Personal Application.”

In a letter to Dick Hillis, Hubert Mitchell, and Dave Morken in 1948, Trotman reflected, “It thrills my heart to remember those early morning prayer meetings when all of us fellows prayed together and asked God to touch the whole world. Though spread apart by the diameter of the earth, we are working together with one heart for this thing that is upon the heart of our wonderful Lord.”¹⁵⁹ Foster reflected that Trotman maintained this vision—to carry the gospel to the world following the desires of God’s heart—right up until the day he died:

A well-known Southern Baptist pastor related this beautiful memory: “‘Daws, what do you have on your heart?’ I asked him the very morning that he died. His answer was simple and yet profound: ‘The world.’ I have never heard anyone else say that in answer to a question like that. I know he was right, and I know that was exactly what he had on his heart the day he went to be with the Lord.”¹⁶⁰

Foster then shared a veteran missionary’s recollection of a prayer time with Trotman.

The missionary remembered, “As Daws prayed, I’ll never forget some of the words: ‘Lord, I pray that you will put upon this young man the same thing that is on Your heart—*the world*.’ Most people he knew had one country upon their heart—but not the world.”¹⁶¹ Trotman believed that God wanted his men to take the gospel to the world, and as a result, he likewise wanted to take the gospel to the entire world.

Willing to sacrifice. Trotman believed that God’s man would be willing to do whatever it took to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth, and he left the same impression with others. Because of his ardent belief in the power of God’s Word, he urged Christians to do whatever it took to get the Bible translated into every language on earth by saying, “It cost [William] Tyndale his life to translate the Bible into *your* language. What is it costing you to give the Bible to others . . . in *their* language?”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹Skinner, *Daws*, 297.

¹⁶⁰Foster, *The Navigator*, 184-85.

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁶²The Navigators, Notebook Filing Cards (Special Collections, The Navigators International

The person who understood God’s heart for the nations was willing to lay down his own comfort, security, and life to carry out God’s desire. Trotman knew that gospel ministry was not easy work, and he admonished would-be ministers that “a knowledge of the Word of God, through diligent study and memorization of Scripture, is necessary to prepare those carrying the Gospel to ‘stand against the wiles of the devil’ [Ephesians 6:11] which, if anything, are stronger out in the enemy’s territory than here at home.”¹⁶³

Trotman understood further that aligning his own heart with God’s would require his allowing God to work within him in profound ways. In May 1944, Trotman engaged in an AlphaOmega Bible Study on Romans 9:1-18, and in that passage, the Apostle Paul reveals his profound love for the Jewish people, saying “. . . I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh . . .” (Romans 9:3). Having read that deeply profound passage, Trotman reflected,

If Paul could have such a God-given love for the souls of men that he would be willing to take their place in eternal condemnation, that they might have eternal life, then I am sure that there is something missing in my own heart’s love for the souls of men. Paul was a man of like passions as I am. It is not altogether out of the question that I should have such love. My desire and prayer to GOD is that I might have such a love.¹⁶⁴

Trotman knew that espousing the desire of God in his own life required the grace of God in bringing about such an end, and through his personal spiritual disciplines, he embraced that grace. God honored Trotman’s prayers, and the effects were evident to many people. John Dedrick, the fourth Navigator, reflected about his perception of Trotman by saying, “Christ was to be honored and glorified above anything else I thought of him as ‘a man after God’s own heart,’ and he stimulated me to want to be that kind of man.”¹⁶⁵

Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), “Explan.” tab.

¹⁶³Trotman, “Go: Prepared . . . Equipped,” unnumbered.

¹⁶⁴Dawson Trotman, AlphaOmega Bible Study on Rom 9:1-18, May 6, 1944 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), “Practical Application.”

¹⁶⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 131.

Willing to repent. Following the pattern of David as a man after God’s own heart, Trotman realized that even the best men stray at times from God’s will for their lives. What was required when such drifting occurred was that which David embodied after his own sinful excursion: repenting and returning to God. So many times in his life, Trotman confessed his struggle with maintaining the disciplines he believed made him ready for ministry, and so many times, he confessed real struggles in his life that required the Lord’s intervention. In a 1937 journal entry, he recorded, “For the past weeks God has been dealing with me. The more I see of my life the more I touch the hem of His garment, the more I realize that no good thing can happen until the Lord deals with me. I am aware of the fact that the Lord is working something in my heart that is more than ordinary. Oh that His Name might be glorified”¹⁶⁶ More than seven years later, he recorded another time in which he sought to lay himself bare before the Lord that he might be brought into alignment with God’s will:

Here’s a good place to make a notation of something that the LORD has been doing. Because of things in my life which have been unjudged and not met for a long enough period of time so that I had become rather calloused and not fighting and because messages that I have heard which probably should have been used of the LORD had not done their work, HE used another method . . . For a long time I have known Romans 2:4, ‘Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of GOD leadeth thee to repentance? I have seen how the LORD has spoken to my heart in a more gentle way and so, through the quiet discernment of one woman the LORD had sent to 536 [the Navigator home], things were brought to light that made me realize that I needed heart searching. This has been done and victory has been won and the LORD is filling my heart anew with HIS own love and many wonderful truths are coming back into focus. I believe Satan has been attempting to make a breach in the Navigators’ work by affecting my own heart and life but there is Isa. 59:19 and Jer. 31:11 and I John 4:4. One of GOD’s greatest gifts to the Navigators and to the crew is this girl.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶Trotman, personal journal, January 11, 1937.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., December 7, 1944. Isa 59:19 records the words of the prophet, saying “So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.” Jer 31:11 says, “For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.” 1 John 4:4 says, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”

Trotman saw immense value in this girl's admonition in his life, and he knew that he needed such rebuke to keep his heart in line with God's and thereby remain useful in ministry. Furthermore, he knew that any breach in his own heart would affect not only him but also his Navigators, and he could not allow Satan to gain a foothold in such vital ministry.

Understanding the weakness of his own flesh led Trotman to maintain diligence in his personal spiritual disciplines and, when he slipped out of their regular practice, he sought immediately to return to them. Skinner records that Trotman recognized at one point in the early 1930s that he had let busyness, ministry responsibilities, and his own flesh interfere with his time with the Lord via the Word and prayer, and he could see the effects in his life. He returned immediately to his strict pattern of personal spiritual disciplines, reviewing one hundred passages of memorized Scripture that very day.¹⁶⁸ He knew furthermore that if sin mastered his life, his usefulness in ministry would be diminished. He wrote in his journal in 1929 that he had "just arrived home from the hills where I confessed again the sin that has overwhelmed and confused me, has caused others to suffer and I daresay has been a great hindrance to the Lord's work (that wonderful work of winning souls). Anew He has assured me that I am forgiven."¹⁶⁹ In a Navigators newsletter in November 1946, Trotman passed a similar admonition on to his men:

Because all of us are so quick to forget the precious lessons that the LORD teaches us, and because it is so easy for the flesh to follow the lines of least resistance, let me call your attention to a familiar passage: ' . . . If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.' Now, if we are going to do His work in His way with His results, then we are going to have to follow and follow closely, but He will never ask us to do anything too hard, nor will He ever call us to a place where He Himself is not there to lead. 'And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them . . . [John 10:4].'¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 93.

¹⁶⁹Trotman, personal journal, August 21, 1929.

¹⁷⁰Dawson Trotman, Navigators News Letter no. 29, November 1946 (Special Collections, The

Trotman knew that Satan was strong and his flesh was weak—and he knew that the same was true of his Navigators and all believers—but he also knew that the Lord was stronger than both the devil and man’s sinful desires. He therefore cast himself wholly upon the Lord, and he called his co-laborers to do the same.

God’s Man Understands His Commission

In the article he wrote for *Christ’s Ambassador* in December 1944 anticipating the end of World War Two, Trotman reminded his readers of the Christian responsibility in the world. He said, “Oh, Christian, what is our obligation? It is to go all-out for the Lord Jesus by helping to deliver the peoples of the world from the clutches of the deadly enemy of souls (Isa. 61:1).”¹⁷¹ Trotman regularly reminded Christians about their obligation to carry out the Great Commission, perhaps because he realized that the world, the flesh, and Satan would seek to diminish the urgency of God’s call. He dealt with such a struggle in his own devotional life, noting once that “. . . GOD challenges me to ask and promises to give me the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. . . . the challenge is . . . ‘Am I willing to pay the price of possessing the land?’ Such demands that I leave behind me many things that I love, face enemies, endure hardship; am I willing? HE will take care of HIS end of the deal.”¹⁷² Trotman knew what following the Lord meant for his life and the life of any who would endeavor to carry out Christ’s commission, but he also knew that all Christians were commanded to make disciples of all nations. Ease or convenience of service was irrelevant, because God had given orders

Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

¹⁷¹Dawson Trotman, “America’s Responsibility in the Post-War World,” *Christ’s Ambassador* (December 1944): 11. Isa 61:1 says, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.”

¹⁷²Trotman, AlphaOmega Bible Study on Ps 2, “Practical Application.”

that were to be obeyed.¹⁷³

In Trotman's line of thinking, God's man had to understand his commission, and he had to understand that his commission was non-negotiable. The Great Commission was neither a suggestion nor merely a good strategy for church growth; it was a command. In a "Dear Gang" letter in July 1953, Trotman made his case clear:

As we search the Scriptures and carefully observe how God moved through the lives of His chosen men to carry out His objectives, we discover a constantly recurring principle. It is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 1:8, 'Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land.' Why should they possess what was already theirs, for the verse continues by saying, 'Which the Lord swore unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.' In the second chapter, verse 24, the Lord said unto them: 'I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle.' Twelve times in the first four chapters of Deuteronomy the Children of Israel were given their orders, 'Go get them' or 'Go get it' (Possess). We understand that 'all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen' [2 Corinthians 1:20], but somehow, before we can take possession of them we must besiege the enemy fortification with prayer, battle, and hard work. As David Livingstone put it, 'Nothing great is ever accomplished for God without patient, long, continued effort.' I find many passages of Scripture marked in my old study Bibles where quite apparently the Lord was directing my attention to things which He would someday do but these things have not been realized without a continued drive to possess the promised possessions. In a simple statement of Joshua we find the principle led further: 'Every place that the soul [*sic*] of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you.' The deed to the possession is not to be fully signed, sealed and handed over until the spiritual battles have been fought and won.¹⁷⁴

Just as God's orders were clear in the Old Testament, so were they clear in the New Testament. According to Trotman, God commanded the people to go in and possess the land twelve times in the first four chapters of Deuteronomy. The Great Commission appears five times in the New Testament.¹⁷⁵ Procrastinating was not an option. The

¹⁷³Skinner records an exchange between Trotman and Billy Graham while Graham was considering whether or not to assume the presidency of the Northwestern Schools in Minneapolis wherein Trotman tells Graham what he believes to be one of the greatest needs in theological education. Trotman said, "Billy, one of the *first* things a Bible school should do is teach the fundamentals of leading a man to Christ and following him up to the point where he could win a man and follow him up. And basic as that is, there's not a Bible school in America that has this in its curriculum." Skinner, *Daws*, 298.

¹⁷⁴Dawson Trotman, "Dear Gang" letter, July 16, 1953 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1.

¹⁷⁵The Great Commission appears in Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John

orders were given. The authority was given. The task was at hand. Although the world would not be conquered for Christ in a day, work needed to begin immediately.

God's Man Yearns to Carry Out His Commission

Trotman was captivated by his Lord. He knew that he had been bought with the price of Jesus' blood on the cross, and he knew that he had been resurrected unto eternal life along with Christ. His gratitude to his Savior was overwhelming. Once reflecting on John 14:6—"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"—Trotman wrote, "THE LORD JESUS CHRIST is my SAVIOUR. HE is the true Way to God. HE is the true and living WAY to God. What a wonderful way, and I'm not trying to find it. I'm on it. My heart is thrilled! I must take some others with me."¹⁷⁶ He had been given the greatest gift he could ever have received in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he urgently desired to pass that same gift on to others. Trotman was moved by the Lord Jesus' work in equipping others to carry out the Great Commission so much so that he desired to engage in the same work. He wrote, "One thing HE did was to prepare 11 men to live for Him and to die for HIM. It is my desire to be used of HIM to train men to live for HIM, and who will work with a willingness to lay down their lives for HIM. I know HE will grant this desire of my heart. HE is partially granting it now."¹⁷⁷ After a time of prayer on March 27, 1938, Trotman ruminated on God's calling, recording that he had learned much by spending time with the Lord in the park that day. He wrote, "Seems like the Lord is def [*sic*] leading me to 'Launch out' and dig into the great harvest field."¹⁷⁸ Trotman knew his

20:21; and Acts 1:8.

¹⁷⁶Dawson Trotman, S.T.S. Bible Study on John 14, undated (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), "Uplifts (cont.)."

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Trotman, personal journal, March 27, 1938.

orders and desired to obey God, but he also experienced a deep desire to bring others along with him on the pathway to eternal life.

Trotman was attracted to working with like-minded Christians who also sensed this urgency to accomplish great feats for God. Speaking at the Wycliffe Biennial Conference in Sulphur Springs, Arkansas in 1955, he bragged heartily about Wycliffe founder Cam Townsend's compatible heart: "You know, that's the thing that thrills me about Uncle Cam Townsend. I don't care how involved you get, how many problems there are—the world, the world, the world! . . . It thrills me, it encourages me, to see some men that believe that this little old speck in the universe can do business for Jesus Christ."¹⁷⁹ Having given the example of faith exhibited by their founder, Trotman then exhorted them all, saying, "Get a world vision and ask great. Ask greater and bigger than you are! Ask as big as the Lord!"¹⁸⁰

Urgency in Great Commission Ministry

Trotman believed the kind of Christian who believed God, trusted God, petitioned God, and followed God could not be stopped. He was convinced that Christians who were sold out to Christ would accomplish much:

The need of the hour is men who want what Jesus Christ wants and believes He wants to give them the power to do what He has asked. Nothing in the world can stop those men. Do you believe that? Do you want to be one of them? . . . Years ago when I was praying . . . I couldn't have comprehended what I'm seeing now. But that's the way He has promised it will be; so when you call, ask big!¹⁸¹

God's man understood that the heart of God was for the entire world, and he understood that God had conscripted him into service. He furthermore yearned to carry out his commission, bringing others along with him into heaven and impacting the world for Christ. As a result, God's man would stop at nothing in seeking to glorify the risen

¹⁷⁹Wallis, *Lengthened Cords*, 113.

¹⁸⁰Ibid.

¹⁸¹Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 26-27.

Christ by making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).

Effectiveness

In his “Faithful Men” manuscript, Trotman entitled his second section, “Common Denominators for Spiritual Effectiveness.”¹⁸² The title is bold. He mitigated it to some degree by including a parenthetical subtitle: “Or, the characteristics of some of the men GOD used.”¹⁸³ He began his section by recognizing the difficulty of expounding faithfully on such an audacious topic:

The question will be asked, what do we mean by men of GOD, holy men, bondservants, real soldiers, obedient sons. We mean men who are the embodiment of the message they carry; men who have a knowledge of the Word of GOD, and who lay hold of the promises of GOD, who are obedient to the will of GOD, and who then carry the message of GOD; men of whom it may be said, as was said of Haggai, that they are ‘the LORD’s messenger in the LORD’s message’ (Haggai 1:13).¹⁸⁴

To Trotman, spiritual effectiveness was not measured in numbers alone—although numbers were important. Numbers represented souls that were brought out of the dominion of darkness and into the dominion of light, so they mattered.¹⁸⁵ Beyond

¹⁸²Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 5.

¹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁸⁵Consider Trotman’s estimation of the state of world missions in his “Go: Prepared . . . Equipped” article in 1945: “The December, 1943, *National Geographic Magazine* informs us that the world contains 2,700 countries, nations or tribes, each having a different language. Through many of the great missionary agencies and Bible Societies we may now rejoice in the fact that all or a portion of the Word of God has been translated into the tongues of a thousand of these tribes. What about the others? Any clear-thinking Christian who is not blinded by his own unbelief, carelessness, or selfishness, must agree that something has to be done and be done quickly. Modern missions began in the latter part of the eighteenth century; here we are in the twentieth, and the job is only half finished. Will it take us another century and a half to complete it? ‘No, No, a thousand times, No!’ Trotman, “Go: Prepared . . . Equipped,” unnumbered. Whenever he reported God’s movement, he did so by listing concrete numbers. He reported 95,000 people being led to Christ in Formosa between 1951 and 1954. Dawson Trotman, “Follow-Up on the Mission Field,” 11. The Navigators reported that more than 30,000 counselors were trained for Billy Graham Crusades and an additional 40,000 received the same training via audio tape. The Navigators, *The*

numbers, however, Trotman measured spiritual effectiveness qualitatively in the lives of those who sought to carry out God's mission. He said, "Basically it was their faith and trust in GOD, but we see that faith was the means by which they were able to attain and maintain the characteristics which made them effective."¹⁸⁶ He listed several biblical examples: "Abraham, called the man of faith; Jacob a prince and intercessor with GOD; Joseph a man with purity of heart; Moses, willing to be separated from the riches of Egypt and suffer affliction with the people of GOD."¹⁸⁷ He then came to Ezra, who typified the common denominators for spiritual effectiveness as a man who "prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).

To Trotman, spiritual effectiveness found its foundation in faithfulness. Paul instructed Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 to find faithful men, and Trotman instructed his Navigators to find faithful men. He listed five standards that composed what he called the "basic minimum" for a Christian to be considered faithful:

1. There must be adequate provision in his life for hearing the Word of GOD. This includes the reading of good books by men of GOD.
2. The contact must have a daily reading program, and indicate on a check-up sheet the number of chapters of the Word read daily.
3. He must be pursuing some type of regular Bible study each week, and indicating on a check-up sheet the ground covered in Bible Study each week.
4. He must be memorizing three new Scripture verses per week, while carrying on a systematic review of all verses he has recorded on cards. He is to maintain a daily check on himself concerning the memory and review done for each day.
5. He is to maintain daily check-up on himself concerning whether he has gone over the specific prayer matters indicated on his prayer page for the day.¹⁸⁸

Put simply, a Christian proved his faithfulness in Trotman's eyes by dependably spending

Navigators Log: Graham Crusades Edition (October 1957): "How It Began." Clearly, numbers were worth noting and reporting.

¹⁸⁶Trotman, "Faithful Men," 6.

¹⁸⁷Ibid. A parenthetical note follows this passage, saying "more illustrations needed here." Recall that this manuscript was unfortunately never finished.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 48.

time in the Word and in prayer. To quantify these disciplines, he had the men record the specific disciplines they kept each day. If the men passed according to Trotman's standard, they were then to be counted worthy of further training in Great Commission ministry in a one-on-one setting.

Once a candidate was considered faithful, he was trained in how to produce reproducers. Trotman insisted that "as [the Contact] progresses in learning and demonstrating of personal faithfulness, hints are dropped along the way to the effect that the future result of faithfulness in his own life will be the reproduction of the same qualities and habits in another life."¹⁸⁹ Therein lay the secret to effective ministry—those who were faithful in their own lives were able to impart that faithfulness to others. Those who were not faithful in their own lives had nothing of eternal value to impart. He insisted that "Scripture makes it clear that by the Spirit of GOD and with the Word of GOD and the proper training, any child of GOD will be able to have at least some ministry in the life of at least one other person."¹⁹⁰ Trotman bemoaned the contemporary trend of leaving ministry up to those whom he described as "the scintillating, sparkling personalities in our work."¹⁹¹ He agreed that ministry would be relegated to a select group, but he added, "we have not said that it was to be those who were the most intelligent, those with the strongest personalities or the greatest gifts. We have said those were to be faithful men. And there is a world of difference. There is an eternity of difference."¹⁹² Trotman believed that effective ministry was done by faithful men who wielded well the Sword of the Spirit and who relied upon God's unlimited power through prayer to carry out the great task before them. He sought to be that kind of man, and he

¹⁸⁹Trotman, "Faithful Men," 48.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 56.

¹⁹¹Ibid., 60.

¹⁹²Ibid.

sought to build that kind of man for the Lord's service.

God's Man Wields Well the Sword of the Spirit

Trotman knew the power of the Word of God, and he believed unwaveringly in Scripture's usefulness as the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17). Foster records that "Dawson wanted the Bible to be so at home in his life that he could obey it anywhere and handle it as a master swordsman To Daws, the Word of God truly was a 'two-edged sword,' and was supposed to be used as a personal weapon under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He handled it both carefully and skillfully."¹⁹³ He built his ministry around it. In the early 1930s, Navy men did not have the best reputation, and their collective standing was apparently well-earned—at least around Trotman's stomping grounds. Skinner recalls that in six years around the San Pedro-Long Beach area in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he heard only one sailor share a weak testimony about faith in Christ. Reaching the Navy would be difficult, but Trotman knew it could be done—only with a much different approach. She records his thought process: "If the Navy were to be reached for Christ, Daws reasoned, it would certainly not happen through the empty witness of an old chief who did not even carry a Bible or quote a single verse of Scripture. It would be through . . . strong, rugged soldiers of the cross, schooled in prayer and skilled in using the Sword of the Spirit."¹⁹⁴ Trotman believed in the power of the Word, and he insisted that his men know how to wield well their Sword for the spiritual battles of life and Great Commission ministry. Foster remembers that "every facet of his

¹⁹³Foster, *The Navigator*, 61-62. To begin his chapter entitled "The Master Swordsman," Foster includes a passage from Oswald J. Smith that captures well Trotman's sentiment regarding the Word of God: "God's Word is your weapon. If you doubt its strength what power can you have in wielding it? It is your only source of information. When the Word of God becomes your meat and drink, your daily study and a very part of yourself, then, and not until then, will you be able to use it as He intends. Do you believe the text you proclaim is the living, inspired Word of God? And are you confident that it will never return void? God cannot use a man who doubts His Word." Foster, *The Navigator*, 60.

¹⁹⁴Skinner, *Daws*, 83-84.

life was permeated with the perfume of Scripture; the backbone of living the victorious Christian life was the Bible. His evangelism and follow-up of new converts was solidly based in Scripture, and his concept of multiplying laborers through personal ministry was the method the Apostle Paul had used.”¹⁹⁵ He saw the Word’s power in the life of Christ, in the salvation of sinners, and in the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.

Christ’s example. Trotman saw the usefulness of the Word of God epitomized in the life of Christ. When he was only twelve years old, Jesus was found in the temple with the elders, “both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). Studying this passage in 1944, Trotman reflected, “I am in the greatest business in all the world—my FATHER’s business. In this case, the LORD was going into the Word with men, searching the Scriptures, and HE called it HIS Father’s business.”¹⁹⁶ Trotman also found Jesus’ dealing with Satan during his temptation in Luke 4:1-13 to be prescriptive. He summarized the account by recording, “The Spirit of GOD leads CHRIST into the wilderness where HE received the 3-fold temptation of HIS arch-enemy, Satan Satan once uses Scripture, but wrongly. CHRIST successfully meets the devil in each case, but uses the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of GOD.”¹⁹⁷ If Jesus used the Word of God to instruct the religious elders and to defeat Satan in spiritual warfare, Trotman reasoned, then so should all who seek to follow Christ.

Power in disciple-making. Trotman further observed the power of the Word in witnessing encounters. His personal journal includes several examples of his

¹⁹⁵Foster, *The Navigator*, 76.

¹⁹⁶Dawson Trotman, AlphaOmega Bible Study on Luke 2:41-52; 3:21-22, September 23, 1944 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), “Godward Application.”

¹⁹⁷Dawson Trotman, AlphaOmega Bible Study on Luke 4:1-30, October 7, 1944 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), “Panoramic Paragraph.”

observation that the reason for his success in Great Commission ministry was the Word of God. On October 27, 1929, Trotman witnessed a woman come to Christ during a church testimony service where his Fishermen Four quartet sang. He recorded, “The Lord used the testimonies and Scripture quotations to convict a young lady. She stood up and accepted Christ The motto ‘Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last’ quoted along with I Timothy 6:7 seems according to her testimony to have had its effect in convicting her of her need.”¹⁹⁸ Less than two years later, Trotman recorded a victory in his Senior Prospectors Club, noting that the forty-five boys there that night made for a total of 141 different boys attending his clubs in a single week. He then wrote simply, “Reason: The Word.”¹⁹⁹ Fifteen years after that, Trotman recorded a witnessing opportunity with a Jewish lieutenant on his flight to Chicago for a meeting with the Chicagoland Youth for Christ. He said, “The Word worked with convicting power. One of the greatest opportunities for many, many months.”²⁰⁰ Throughout the course of his ministry, Trotman witnessed the power of the Word in witnessing. The Sword of the Spirit had been useful in his own life, in the lumberyard, around the naval base, and to the ends of the earth. Skinner reflects that Trotman had “a habit of applying the Word in practical terms to every facet of living, a practice given a third dimension by continual memory and review of hundreds of verses of Scripture.”²⁰¹ Trotman was convinced of Scripture’s usefulness, and he believed that anyone who would be useful in Great Commission ministry would be skilled in handling it.

¹⁹⁸Trotman, personal journal, October 27, 1929. First Tim 6:7 says, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out.”

¹⁹⁹Ibid., March 20, 1931.

²⁰⁰Ibid., February 2, 1946.

²⁰¹Skinner, *Daws*, 387.

God's Man Finds Power through Prayer

Trotman did not believe that prayer was inherently powerful; rather, he believed that God was inherently powerful, and prayer was the avenue by which the believer connected to that infinite source of perfect and effectual power.²⁰² He instructed new Christians that “our own strength is insufficient (II Cor. 3:5); but we have been invited to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help us in time of need (Heb. 4:16). As we come to God in prayer, through the all-powerful Name of Jesus Christ, He will meet our every need (John 14:13; Ps. 145: 18, 19).”²⁰³ Trotman was infinitely unsure of his own strength, but he had complete confidence in God's power. “What is the need of the hour?” he asked. “It is to believe that ‘Thy God reigneth’ (Isaiah 52:7) You don't need anything that He can't supply. Is it knowledge? Is it strength? God can do more through a weakling who is yielded and trusting than He can through a strong man who isn't.”²⁰⁴ Gospel ministry required men who possessed a faith that was strong enough that they could admit their weaknesses and lean wholly on God for whatever they needed—including fruit in disciple-making ministry.

Christ's example and admonition. Trotman again found the perfect example of this need for reliance upon divine power in the life and ministry of Christ. If the Lord Jesus Christ himself went into the mountains for an entire night of prayer before choosing

²⁰²Dawson Trotman, “On the Subject of Prayer,” *Timely News Tips: Full of Dynamite* 1, no. 6 (December 1940): 2.

²⁰³Trotman and Epp, *Foundation Studies in Christian Living*, 24. Note that 2 Cor 3:5 says, “not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” Heb 4:16 encourages believers to pray, saying, “Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” John 14:13 records Jesus words: “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” Ps 145:18-19 says, “The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.”

²⁰⁴Trotman, *The Need of the Hour*, 19.

his twelve disciples, surely normal men must do the same to be equipped for ministry.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, Christ commanded that his disciples lean fully on him for power. Trotman reflected on Jesus' discourse about his being the vine and his followers being the branches as recorded in John 15 by noting the following:

Doubtless the key to the abiding life is fully comprehended in a proper relation with JESUS CHRIST. HE said, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches.' The vine, with its roots reaching deep down into the soil, supplies all that the branches need. I have no need to look within and be dismayed or discouraged when I see how fruitless, how worthless I am of myself. I must keep my eyes on my LORD, the source of all my strength.²⁰⁶

Jesus said, "without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), and Trotman believed him. He believed that God had a work for him to do, and he said, "it is wonderful just to throw myself completely upon HIM, the All-Powerful One, and know that HE is able to finish whatever HE starts and to do it to the glory of God."²⁰⁷ He found assurance that Jesus' strength was available at all times and was able to do anything, especially including that which he was powerless to do.²⁰⁸

Power in disciple-making. Fairly early on in his Christian life—in fact only about four months after he had given his life to Christ—Trotman became convinced that effectiveness in Great Commission ministry was birthed in the prayer closet. He records on October 16, 1929 that "Young Harder comes to my room and spills the beans. His

²⁰⁵In reflecting on Luke 5:1-16, Trotman wrote, "The LORD went to the mountains for prayer all night and then chose His 12 disciples, and returned to the plains where many gathered for healing and for just a touch as power came out of Him." Dawson Trotman, *AlphaOmega Bible Study on Luke 5:1-16*, undated (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), "Panoramic Paragraph."

²⁰⁶Dawson Trotman, *AlphaOmega Bible Study on Rom 11:1-24*, May 27, 1944 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), "Personal Application."

²⁰⁷Dawson Trotman, *S.T.S. Bible Study on John 1*, undated (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), "Uplift."

²⁰⁸Dawson Trotman, *Letter to Jim Truxton*, October 13, 1945 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs). He ended the letter by quoting 1 Thess 5:24: "Faithful is HE that calleth you, Who also will do it."

prayer life (private) amounts to about 7 minutes a day. The reason *we* concluded (in the light of the Word and from the lives of men of the past who have been soul winners) for his spiritually dead and fruitless life. He left with convictions that will shape themselves into action²⁰⁹ This conviction that prayerlessness led to ineffectiveness in disciple-making was only strengthened with increased time and experience. In *Born to Reproduce*, Trotman recalls a time when he was charged with interviewing twenty-nine missionary candidates who were all graduates of some form of theological higher education. One of the first questions he asked each candidate was about the quality of his devotional life, and one of the follow-up questions was about the impact of the candidate's Great Commission ministry. He reported that only one of the twenty-nine candidates replied that he had any victory in his devotional life, and he further reported that the vast majority of prospective missionaries could not name a single human being who was living for the Lord as a result of their disciple-making ministry. He asked the candidates pointedly, "How do you expect that by crossing an ocean and speaking in a foreign language with people who are suspicious of you, whose way of life is unfamiliar, you will be able to do what you have not yet done here?"²¹⁰ He continued by extending the lesson to his hearers and to all Christians:

We traced back and found that never since they came to know the Savior had they had a period of victory in their devotional lives. That was one of the reasons for their sterility—lack of communion with Christ

These questions do not apply to missionaries and prospective missionaries only. They apply to all of God's people. Every one of his children ought to be a reproducer.²¹¹

Put simply, Trotman believed fervently that lack of communion with Christ via the Word and prayer led to lack of effectiveness in Great Commission ministry. By corollary, he maintained that strong communion with Christ via the Word and prayer led the

²⁰⁹Trotman, personal journal, October 16, 1929.

²¹⁰Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 19.

²¹¹*Ibid.*, 18-19.

Christian—at the very least—to a position of potential usefulness in disciple-making ministry.

Relying upon the prayers of others. Trotman further insisted that Christians required the prayers of others for effective ministry. In an inter-office memo to the Navigator staff on October 4, 1948, Trotman reminded his Navigators of their urgent responsibility to pray for God’s work to be done all around the world:

My heart was greatly impressed this morning by a statement from GOD’s Word, ‘Put me in remembrance: let us plead together’ (Isaiah 43:26). Just before this the LORD had said, ‘But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob.’ What an indictment! Beloved co-laborers, we must win ‘the battle’ of prayer. Our co-laborers need us, other CHRISTian workers need intercession, the world needs it, our LORD wants it and such verses as I am sure you are already familiar with (Isaiah 59:16 and 64:7) indicate what a great lack there is among the people of GOD on this score. Let us lay hold of this mighty weapon for the furtherance of the Gospel and for the carrying out of the will of GOD.²¹²

He further relied on his staff’s prayers for himself while he was out doing ministry.

Skinner recalls that after he returned home from a three-week trip in 1943, “during which he had felt upheld by prayer, that his ministry at a small church at home seemed fruitless.

The gang had quit praying! He lost no time in reminding them—and himself—that success in any undertaking for the Lord came ‘not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts’ [Zechariah 4:6].”²¹³ Trotman’s action here was no show; he believed exceedingly in the power of God as obtained through the prayers of his people, and he believed that any effectiveness he—or anyone else—might have in ministry depended solely upon the work of the Lord.

Effectiveness in Great Commission Ministry

Dawson Trotman believed that effectiveness in Great Commission ministry

²¹²Dawson Trotman, Navigators News Bulletin no. 49, October 4, 1948 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

²¹³Skinner, *Daws*, 238-39.

was founded in faithfulness, and he maintained that “Scripture makes it clear that by the Spirit of GOD and with the Word of GOD and the proper training, any child of GOD will be able to have at least some ministry in the life of at least one other person.”²¹⁴ Trotman did not relegate effective Great Commission ministry to what some might call super-Christians; he believed any follower of Christ who devoted himself to the Word of God and accessed the power of God through prayer could make an eternal impact in the life of at least one other human being. He believed that what the world needed was not a dozen Billy Grahams or countless foreign missionaries—although he did not diminish the importance of these servants. What the world needed was regular, run-of-the-mill Christians who would devote themselves to growing close to Christ via personal spiritual disciplines and then faithfully carry out the commission to which Christ had called them.²¹⁵ Because they knew their Bibles, they would be able to wield well the Sword of the Spirit, able always to give an answer for the hope they possessed. Because they knew their own weaknesses, they would rely solely upon the power of Almighty God, recognizing that any eternal work would be done by him. Trotman was no mathematician, but he deduced that if one devoted Christian made one disciple, and then the two of them went out six months later and each made one disciple, and the pattern was repeated every six months, the entire world could be reached in just under sixteen years.²¹⁶ That type of Great Commission impact—wrought in private conversations wherein faithful men taught others to teach others also—could be called effective ministry.

²¹⁴Ibid., 56.

²¹⁵ Trotman, “Discipleship,” quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 206; The Navigators, “Dawson’s Vision” (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

²¹⁶Trotman, “Discipleship,” quoted in Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words*, 206.

Conclusion

Dawson Trotman believed that the Bible was the inerrant record of God's interaction with the world he created through the people he created.²¹⁷ He believed that God placed a great deal of importance on the lives of the men and women he would use to accomplish his purposes, so he made sure that he, too, placed a great deal of importance on the lives of men and women God might use—starting with himself. He told his Navigators that their ministry would be only as strong as their devotional life, and he meant it.²¹⁸ He told his Navigators that if they wanted to bear fruit upward, they needed to “take root downward! That’s not easy,” he said. “It takes a little will, fight, leaning and the rest, but with the proper ingredients, by the grace of God, it can be done.”²¹⁹ He asserted to his hearers that “soul-winners are not soul-winners because of what they know, but because of the Person they know, how well they know Him, and how much they long for others to know Him.”²²⁰ Trotman’s prolific and enduring Great Commission ministry was based out of his intense regimen of personal spiritual disciplines such that his ministry received its foundation, motivation, urgency, and effectiveness from the moments he spent in the Word of God and prayer. He was able to be God’s man, because he submitted himself willingly and often to communion with God. He was able to train God’s men and women, because he believed that God wanted him—and all Christians—to carry out just such a ministry. He left no room for excuses:

Do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour? Are you yielded to Him?
Are you writing His Word on the tablet of your heart? Can you ‘give an answer to

²¹⁷Trotman, “Faithful Men,” 1.

²¹⁸Dawson Trotman, “Knowing the Will of God,” transcript of message at a Navigator Conference, September 14, 1955, 7:30 p.m. meeting (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 1.

²¹⁹Addie Rosenbaum, “Dear Gang” letter, September 22, 1952 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

²²⁰Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 34.

every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear' [1 Peter 3:15]?

If not, what's your excuse? For there are no reasons, only excuses. And God has an answer for all the excuses of men, both Christians and non-Christians. Give yours to Him, will you? Tell Him He is big enough and the job is big enough and you are going to volunteer.²²¹

These words challenged his audiences in the early- to mid-twentieth century, and they challenged audiences who read the printed words in 1975 and thereafter. They continue to challenge Christians today, because the principles they advocate are scriptural and therefore timeless. God is still using men and women who know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, who are yielded to him, who are memorizing his Word, and who therefore are thoroughly equipped to carry his gospel effectively to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

²²¹Trotman, *Coming to Christ through Scripture Memory*, 20-21.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

When the most famous Christian preacher on the planet—the one from whom more people have heard the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ than from any other person in human history¹—says about another man that “he touched more lives than anybody I have ever known,” people ought to take notice.² Those were the words spoken by the renowned Reverend Billy Graham about his friend and mentor, Dawson Trotman, at Trotman’s private funeral service on June 27, 1956. Bob Cook related the content of Graham’s sermon in his *Youth for Christ* magazine by saying, “Trotman, [Graham] said, was a man who loved the Word of God, a man with a vision, a man of prayer, a man of discipline, a man of complete dedication, a man with a consuming passion for souls, a master of the soft rebuke, and a man who lived for eternity.”³ Trotman’s picture in the July 2, 1956 edition of *Time* magazine was captioned, “Evangelist Trotman: Always Holding Someone Up.” “So died Dawson Trotman,” the article said, “‘the Navigator,’ light and power of a movement that echoes the words of the Scriptures around the world.”⁴ The writer summarized Trotman’s ministry by saying, “Memorizing the Bible was the key to conversion, as Trotman saw it, so he handed out scores of Scriptures to

¹Billy Graham biographer David Aikman states, “Indeed, Graham has preached the gospel in person to more people than any other man or woman in history: 210 million people in 185 nations and territories around the globe by the end of his sixty-one-year active career in 2005.” David Aikman, *Billy Graham: His Life and Influence* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 4.

²The Navigators, *Great is thy Faithfulness* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1957), Graham letter.

³Bob Cook, “Inside YFC with Bob Cook,” *Youth for Christ Magazine*, August 1956, 2.

⁴“The Navigator,” *Time*, July 2, 1956, 58.

youth groups he organized. . . . He got up early to pray and read and stayed up late to talk to would-be converts, until a heart ailment several years ago forced him to slow down and take more than his customary five hours' sleep.”⁵

The pieces in *Time* and *Youth for Christ Magazine* captured the heartbeat of Dawson Trotman. He loved the Lord Jesus Christ with everything he had, and he was committed to knowing Christ and making him known. He was a man of the Word who spent hours listening to, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on Scripture. He was a man of prayer who would often forsake food or sleep to spend precious time with his Lord. He sought to obey Christ in every aspect of his life, following the admonition of James 1:22 to be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only. He understood the command of Christ to make disciples of all nations, and he sought to share with a lost and dying world the exceeding joy of having a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. He was intimately connected to Christ, and via his personal spiritual disciplines, he cultivated a deep relationship with Jesus. He therefore exhibited in many ways what it meant to live in the fullness and abundance of life given by Christ (John 10:10). He had given his life to Jesus; he had given his life to others; and he eventually gave his life for another. He was “always holding someone up,” even to the point of death.⁶

Summary of Argument

Several individuals have sought to capture the legacy of Dawson Trotman, beginning at his death in June 1956 and continuing throughout the course of the past fifty-eight years. Graham enumerated eight superlatives during Trotman's funeral service.⁷ Betty Skinner wrote, “He left no legacy except that held in trust in the lives of

⁵Ibid., 59.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Cook, “Inside YFC with Bob Cook,” 2; Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: A Man Who Trusted God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1974), 384-85.

men. His investment in countless men and women throughout the world would be the evidence of his influence on his times.”⁸ Skinner then listed fifteen traits she believed Trotman epitomized and passed on to the persons in whom he invested. One of those persons, Robert Foster, asserted that “what Orville and Wilbur Wright were to commercial flight, Dawson was to discipleship in the church. He had a basic vision. Although his applications were refined by others, he was a pioneer—one who makes things happen.”⁹ Another of those persons, Lorne Sanny, reflected on Trotman’s legacy as follows:

Dawson Trotman did not leave a life work completed with fruit that remains . . . nor did he leave spiritual methods to set in motion and continue by themselves. He left rather a life principle that will multiply many times a mere ‘life work.’ He left this principle embodied in men who have found in it their own fruitfulness and vision . . . the vision of multiplication person to person, with each person so reached becoming a soul winner and teacher of others, who will reach others.

As a pathfinder, Dawson Trotman’s contribution to the progress of the Church and world missions may best be known when [the] principle of spiritual multiplication has told its tale in every country of the world.¹⁰

Billie Hanks and William Shell observe that “of all men in this century he was most used of God to rediscover the biblical principles of discipleship and disciple-making and to restore them to the church of Jesus Christ.”¹¹ Three scholarly dissertations have been written—and one is currently in progress—that seek to give Trotman his rightful place in evangelical disciple-making and parachurch ministry during the twentieth century and beyond.

What is perhaps Trotman’s greatest legacy, however, is not necessarily the

⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 386.

⁹Robert Foster, *The Navigator* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), 2.

¹⁰Lorne Sanny, *Dawson Trotman: The Pathfinder* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 1958), 30-31.

¹¹Billie Hanks, Jr. and William A. Shell, eds., *Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 178.

obvious impact he made in the fields of evangelism, follow-up, disciple-making, or parachurch ministry. His greatest legacy is perhaps captured best in the ideas behind his methods—the concepts underlying his “Faithful Men” manuscript that never quite made it to the world stage in finished form: ministry is less about the method and more about the man, and the man God uses is built behind the veil of his private devotional life. These central truths drove everything about Dawson Trotman. Faithful men were the masterpiece for which he labored. The one person who was closest to Trotman—his wife of nearly twenty-four years—observed that “during Daws’ many hours alone with Him, God built into his life an unshakable faith ‘that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform’ [Romans 4:21].”¹² Having seen his life of faith from as close a perspective as another person possibly could, Lila remarked, “My own faith grew as I watched the Lord answer Dawson’s prayers.”¹³ Trotman believed that ingesting and digesting the Word of God built a life of prayer, and a life of prayer produced spiritual vitality, and spiritual vitality led to fruitful ministry.¹⁴ To him, the Christian life and Great Commission ministry never really got much more complicated than this paradigm.

This dissertation has argued that Dawson Trotman’s intensive regimen of personal spiritual disciplines including prayer, Scripture reading, and Scripture memorization provided the foundation, motivation, urgency, and effectiveness of his Great Commission ministry. For this case to be made, several important questions needed to be asked and answered. First, who was Dawson Trotman, and what was his understanding of Great Commission ministry? Contemporary evangelicalism has all but forgotten Trotman, and with the inevitable homegoing of the twentieth century’s evangelical giants, his name will become increasingly obscure. This dissertation has

¹²The Navigators, *Great is thy Faithfulness*, Lila Trotman letter.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Dawson Trotman, personal journal, November 15, 1929 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

sought to illustrate that Trotman mattered over a half century ago, and he continues to matter now. The contributions he made to twentieth century American evangelicalism ended neither with his death nor with the birth of a new century. The principles he advocated are timeless principles that are instructive for ministry. He understood Great Commission ministry to encompass both evangelism and discipleship, and he insisted that all Christians are called to make disciples of all nations. Trotman quite literally coined the verb, “to disciple,” and he redefined what evangelical Christians thought about discipleship.¹⁵ Every person who has “been disciplined” in the past seventy-five years owes some amount of gratitude to Trotman. Furthermore, he reintroduced evangelists to the vital need for follow-up and “spiritual pediatrics,” and he set the precedent for extensive follow-up ministry by designing the follow-up program that is still being used by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Trotman called Christians to reunite a falsely bifurcated Great Commission, and in so doing, he revolutionized disciple-making in the twentieth century.

Second, what key biblical and theological principles informed Trotman’s strict regimen of personal spiritual disciplines? Trotman’s faith was birthed through Scripture, and it was informed by Scripture. He believed in a big God, because the Bible revealed a big God. He was captivated by Jeremiah 33:3, in which God challenges his followers, saying, “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” He believed, according to Ephesians 3:20, that God was “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,” and he sought to live his life asking his big God to do big things. Trotman reminded Christians of the vital importance of writing the Word of God upon the tables of their hearts (Proverbs 7:3), and he developed a system for Scripture

¹⁵Robert Walter Felts, “A Critical Analysis of Dawson Trotman’s Methodology of Discipleship for Contemporary Mission Strategy Among North American Evangelical Mission Agencies” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 1989), 5.

memorization that is still in active publication nearly eighty years after its first issuance. He heard the Word, read the Word, studied the Word, memorized the Word, and meditated on the Word, and then he allowed the Word to drive him to boldly approach the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16) in prayer. He was a man of disciplined devotion to God, and he wanted that devotion to drive every part of his life and ministry.

Third, what was Trotman's vision for Great Commission ministry, and what theological concept drove his leadership of those whom God placed under his care? Trotman was convinced that God had called all Christians to be soul-winners, but his ministry paradigm shifted substantially after he met a hitchhiker whom he had previously led to Christ but who was showing no evidence of a transformed life. He became convinced that babes in Christ were in as much need for personal care as physical newborns, and he built his concept of spiritual reproduction around this notion. He believed that the world could be reached by one-on-one ministry following the principle set forth by the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2, and he gave his life to implementing this vision all around the world. He was a kingdom-minded man, and instead of seeking renown for the Navigators, he sought to magnify Jesus. He freely donated his men and women to any ministries he deemed worthy, and he poured himself out for Great Commission ministry. As his daughter-in-law observed, he was faithfully focused on reaching the world for Christ.¹⁶

Fourth, to what extent did Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines drive his Great Commission ministry? Trotman believed that the Christian life had a vertical dimension through which the believer communed with God, and this vertical dimension was composed of the Word of God and prayer. He believed that the vertical dimension of the Christian life fueled a horizontal ministry by which the believer lived a life of obedience and witness before a watching world. The strength of the horizontal

¹⁶Madeline Trotman, e-mail message to author, May 15, 2014.

dimension depended upon the depth of the vertical dimension such that any effectiveness in living the Christian life was fueled by close communion with Christ that was birthed via personal spiritual disciplines. He wanted to be “that man” Moody described whose commitment to God the world had never seen. He believed that the man of God was built in his prayer closet, and he believed that a Christian’s Great Commission ministry could be only as strong as his personal devotional life. Trotman found in Scripture and prayer the foundation, motivation, urgency, and effectiveness of his Great Commission ministry, and he taught others that same paradigm. He left in his wake a legacy of faithful service to God that continues to touch the world nearly six decades after his death.

Implications of Argument

The legacy of Trotman’s life and ministry continues on through generations of Navigators now numbering nearly five thousand around the world, but those ministers compose only part of his heritage. Trotman also left behind several principles of Christian life and ministry that are as applicable today as they were in 1933. These principles did not originate with Trotman—they originated with Almighty God—but Trotman brought them to the attention of evangelicals in the twentieth century, and evangelical Christians in the twenty-first century should find them to be salient reminders of timeless principles that are still useful today. Before final observations are made, however, a word of caution must be given. Like all redeemed sinners, Dawson Trotman was a saint only because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Robert Foster appropriately described Trotman as “an earthen vessel.”¹⁷ Any righteousness he had was that imputed to him by God who “made [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). Until June 18, 1956 in Schroon Lake, Trotman still struggled with the temptations imposed by the world, and the devil,

¹⁷Foster, *The Navigator*, 15.

and his own flesh (Eph 2:2-3). He wrestled with his own sinfulness, and his personal journal reveals that he wrestled with it honestly and diligently. He routinely exhibited a willingness to repent when he recognized his sin, and that readiness to admit his wrongdoing and seek reconciliation with those he hurt served him well in many cases.

A Word of Caution

On July 12, 1945, Navigator Oran Bell wrote a letter to Trotman in which he accused him of several sins including the misinterpretation of Scripture, feigned repentance, and hypocrisy. He finished his letter by saying, “You are the worst hypocrite I have known outside of the Bible. Do I have to write the evidence down again? You are hard on yourself [and] therefore hard on everyone around you. You are impatient with yourself, your wife and children—therefore with everyone around you. ‘Run with patience the race’ [Heb 12:1]. What a contrast!”¹⁸ This correspondence was one in a string of letters between Trotman and Bell—and eventually key Navigators around the world—in which Bell sought to make very clear that he believed Trotman was not qualified for ministry and was teaching heretical ideologies. Trotman had the support of the vast majority of his Navigators and colleagues in ministry, and he was eventually publicly absolved in an open letter to Bell signed by Charles E. Fuller, Louis T. Talbot, Irwin A. Moon, William G. Nyman, and Arthur Glasser in which they stated their support for Trotman:

In the light of the unscriptural and unchristian character of this accusation, and in the light of the true evidence in hand bearing on all the various accusations made, we rejoice that our confidence in Dawson Trotman is unshaken and most gladly commend both him and the work of the Navigators to the prayers and confidence of all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁹

This conflict, which happened at the same time as Dawson and Lila were discovering that

¹⁸Oran Bell, letter to Dawson Trotman, July 12, 1945 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs), 2.

¹⁹Old Fashioned Revival Hour, “Statement,” August 27, 1945 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

their son Chuckie would be an invalid for life, was the most difficult ministry experience of Trotman's life.

The accusations leveled by Bell and his associates were largely untrue, but Trotman felt their sting. He recorded in his journal on August 6, 1945 a time when Ken Watters confronted him about similar issues:

Instead of going into the matters we had expected to, Kenny made it clear that the LORD had laid it upon his heart to deal with me. He showed that he had not gone into many of the things that were on his heart when he dealt with me previously. Deals with me with the other three men present and it was a really crushing blow to hear all the things that had been on Kenny's heart. At first it was on my heart to answer some of the things Kenny brought up. There were some reasons, but the farther he went the more I realized that it would be impossible to make qualifications for anything without destroying the work that GOD was trying to do.

I spend the night alone in the upstairs of Chrisman's house. Never before have I ever spent such a night. I think that it was the closest to breaking my heart that it has ever been. I was in a straight betwixt two; trying to decide whether or not I should plead guilty to the charges and give opportunity for the matter to clear up or to have what I considered justice regarding many of the accusations that were made.²⁰

Trotman was not ignorant of his struggles, and he wrestled hard with God about them. He desired vindication, but he recognized that God's work in his soul would affect the entire Navigator organization. He therefore needed to be willing to receive the Lord's message, no matter how difficult it was to accept.

The problem with the accusations made by Bell, Watters, and others was that there was some truth to some of them. Trotman was hard on himself, and as a result, he was hard on those who were around him. Those whose writings have most elevated Trotman's name have also written honestly about his struggles. Betty Skinner admitted in the preface to her seminal work on Trotman that "a few who knew that Dawson Trotman was not perfect warned me not to canonize him in this book. The warning was

²⁰Trotman, personal journal, August 6, 1945. Recall that Watters later spoke glowingly about Trotman and quoted him extensively to the Wycliffe Bible Translators in marking Trotman's death. Ethel Wallis, *Lengthened Cords: How Dawson Trotman—Founder of the Navigators—Also Helped Extend the World-Wide Outreach of the Wycliffe Bible Translators* (Glendale, CA: Wycliffe Bible Translators, 1958), 127.

unnecessary for one who worked with him long enough to know that he had faults Both history and conscience have been looking over my shoulder to keep me honest.”²¹ Ken Albert, Susan Fletcher, and Doug Hankins admit that “Daws was very human, with feet of clay, and with some glaring personal weaknesses.”²² They summarize the list of Trotman’s shortcomings by saying, “His associates regularly noted that he could be demanding, overbearing, insensitive, driven, aggressive, and lacking in patience. He often insisted upon extremes of performance that even he could not always sustain.”²³ Research indicates that Albert, Fletcher, and Hankins are correct in their summation. Trotman’s personal struggles with sin were not without collateral damage, and collateral damage is still damage, regardless of intent. Specifically, Trotman’s perfectionism, micromanagement, discipleship by public humiliation, and harshness toward those closest to him are worth a brief admonitory discussion.

Perfectionism. Trotman was a perfectionist. He had high expectations of himself, and he had high expectations of those closest to him. Robert Foster attests to this classification by saying, “[Dawson] was a perfectionist, and could not stand to see imperfect work done by others.”²⁴ Skinner reminisced that he epitomized “fervent love, even though expressed on occasion in contradictory form if Daws was disappointed in one’s attitude or actions. His displeasure could be most severe with his family or closest associates, for whom his expectations were highest.”²⁵ Trotman felt that those who were employed in Christian service should exhibit a quality of life and work that befitted their

²¹Skinner, *Daws*, 13.

²²Ken Albert, Susan Fletcher, and Doug Hankins, *Dawson Trotman in His Own Words* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2011), 31.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Foster, *The Navigator*, 22.

²⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 387.

Lord. He recorded his frustration at what he perceived to be unacceptable behavior from Christians in his journal on October 15, 1939, writing that “four times today I am hindered by servants of the Lord being late.”²⁶ He knew the work to which the Lord had called him was important, and he had very little patience for those who did not act with due deference to that weightiness.

Long time co-laborer Jim Downing records an incident that depicts well Trotman’s perfectionism. Not long after the purchase of Glen Eyrie, an office worker had heard that there was an incinerator on the property in which he could conveniently dispose of papers by burning them. The property indeed had an incinerator, but it had fallen into disrepair after years of disuse. The fire ignited by the office worker started a grass fire on the property that could have reached some of the buildings, and after Trotman led the charge in getting the fire extinguished, he wanted answers as to how the fire started. Downing records the event as follows:

Once the fire was extinguished, Dawson gathered the tired, dirty, sweaty crew around the site. He had a low tolerance for stupidity, and the idea that an intelligent human being would burn papers in what was the equivalent of an open fire in gusty wind really agitated him. He lectured the crew as though each one were individually responsible. As he reflected on the carelessness that had caused the near tragedy, he almost exhausted his vocabulary. After several repetitions, the attention span of some of the weary firefighters began to wane.

Dawson responded, ‘You think I am a perfectionist. You’re right. I am. And furthermore, if I were not a perfectionist, there would not be a Navigator ministry today.’²⁷

Downing asserted that “Dawson epitomized the profile” of a perfectionist.²⁸ Trotman maintained exacting standards, and the inability of those around him to maintain those standards led many times to contentious moments and hurt feelings.

²⁶Trotman, personal journal, October 15, 1939.

²⁷Jim Downing, *Living Legacy: Reflections on Dawson Trotman and Lorne Sanny* (Colorado Springs: Dawson Media, 2007), 30-31.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 31.

Micromanagement. Stemming from his perfectionism, Trotman found delegation of authority to be nearly impossible. Foster said that “his inability to truly delegate responsibility became a thorn in his flesh.”²⁹ Trotman believed that he knew the best way to accomplish every objective—and every task involved in completing every objective—so he held tightly to the reins and rarely gave others the real authority to do what he needed them to do. Skinner records that he was reluctant to give up any of the work to which he felt the Lord had called him:

It seemed at every turn he saw work done or decisions made which showed need for correction or improvement. His compulsion was to see every job done right and to personally train the one doing it. Whether this stemmed from his perfectionism or his staff’s need for maturity, or both, it contributed to his refusal to quit—and to frequent shortness of patience with those nearest to him.³⁰

The degree to which Trotman micromanaged the Navigators was striking. He was the leader of an international ministry and spent incredible amounts of time investing in other works, but he nevertheless insisted that he be the one to choose the paint color for the Navigator office shelves and the type of paper and ink for every Navigator printing job.³¹

Serving as Trotman’s second-in-command was no easy task, and history reveals the providential hand of God in selecting Lorne Sanny for such a demanding role. To be clear, Sanny was Trotman’s chief “Timothy,” and the two men shared a father-son type of loving relationship until the day Trotman died. In the context of such a relationship, however, Sanny bore the responsibility of shouldering the greatest amount of Trotman’s larger-than-life vision and perfectionistic expectations. Occasionally, those who served in the Navigators would find Trotman’s leadership methods to be nearly dictatorial, and some even left the Navigators altogether as a result of personal wounds

²⁹Foster, *The Navigator*, 22.

³⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 362.

³¹*Ibid.*, 14, 328.

they felt they incurred from Trotman.³² Sanny often found himself with the unsavory responsibility of answering for Trotman and seeking to assuage the injuries of hurting Navigators. Skinner records, “[Trotman’s] deputy Sanny understood [his] ego-bruising tendency and had no problem with it, though he frequently administered first aid to the hurts of those who did.”³³ Sanny had shoulders that were broad enough to answer on Trotman’s behalf and mitigate the effects of Trotman’s perfectionism.

In addition to dealing with Trotman’s expectations of others, however, Sanny also had to deal with Trotman’s expectations of himself. In a biographical work she published about Sanny, Skinner recalls the situation a bit more bluntly:

At times Lorne found it difficult to follow Daws. Daws was impulsive, almost recklessly expansive, while Lorne is reflective, planning ahead in detail. As a visionary, Dawson started more things than his staff could ever finish. But they loyally tried. They loved him and knew he loved them. Lorne often became the buffer for others of the staff who chafed under the yoke of Dawson’s increasing demands.

At Hume Lake, California in 1948 Lorne complained to the Lord of his frustration with Dawson’s impossible perfectionism. Lorne would do nine things right and yet be reprovved for the tenth if it didn’t turn out so well. He felt unfairly treated and put upon. Instinctively turning to the Lord and His Word for comfort, Lorne settled it that day by the lake, ‘driving a stake’ to witness his resolve to follow Daws as God had called him to do, regardless of any misunderstanding or seeming unfairness. He knew that Dawson’s heart was to please God and obey His Word, as was his own. They were bonded by a father-son loyalty deeper than surface irritations or personality differences—and above all, the vision they shared of multiplying disciples to the ends of the earth. The enemy must not be allowed to sidetrack the vision by any means.³⁴

In a conversation just days before Trotman’s death, Trotman asked Sanny if he were ready to assume the mantle of Navigator leadership in the unlikely event of Trotman’s death. Sanny’s reply was simple: “Oh, the Lord would never make any mistakes like that.”³⁵ Sanny did assume the leadership of the Navigators just a few days later, and with

³²Skinner, *Daws*, 358-59.

³³*Ibid.*, 344.

³⁴Betty Lee Skinner, *With Integrity of Heart and Skillful Hand: Insights from the Life and Teaching of Lorne Sanny* (Singapore: The Navigators of Singapore, 1998), 35.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 45.

the full confidence of the entire team, led the ministry to grow a hundredfold over the course of the next three decades.³⁶ Sanny retired on June 18, 1986, exactly thirty years after he providentially assumed command of the Navigators.³⁷ He was neither the perfectionist nor the micromanager Trotman had been, and the ministry flourished under his leadership.

Discipleship by public humiliation. On March 3, 1945, Trotman met with Norm Crider to ask him about joining the Navigator work in Hawaii. Crider knew of Trotman's reputation for perfectionistic standards, and Trotman knew it. Trotman recorded the exchange:

Once all the business is on the table, I mention that I might not be as hard to work with as I used to be (just 'might'). He said, 'Thanks, Daws. I am not afraid of that although some have warned me that you would be a dictator.' I haven't any argument to that because my past hasn't been so good, but GOD certainly is teaching me that power in HIS work is not energized or realized through some of the pugilistic methods."³⁸

Trotman was not unaware of his "pugilistic" methods, and particularly in light of the Bell controversy of 1944 and 1945, he was trying to get better. He knew he had a problem, and he was seeking the Lord's help in solving it. He had recorded in December of the previous year that he was "admonished about the matter of fault finding in the presence of others with regard to the work of some of my co-laborers."³⁹ Throughout the course of his ministry, Trotman had made a practice of seeking to help Christians grow by publicly testing, admonishing, or reprimanding them, and the destruction was significant.

At Trotman's private funeral, Billy Graham seemed to have overstated just one

³⁶Downing, *Living Legacy*, 48.

³⁷Skinner, *With Integrity of Heart and Skillful Hand*, 7.

³⁸Trotman, personal journal, March 3, 1945.

³⁹Ibid., December 14, 1944.

aspect of Trotman's legacy, saying that he was "master of the soft rebuke."⁴⁰ The "soft" part of Graham's statement must have been embellished, as he had experienced Trotman's less-than-gentle public rebuke firsthand. When Graham was a student at Wheaton College, he was pastoring a small church to which he invited Trotman to come preach. Trotman's message centered around the importance of Scripture memorization, and he sought to emphasize his point by using the church's pastor as an illustration.

Skinner records the exchange:

[Trotman] compared the ill-prepared Christian to a grocery clerk who assures the customer an item is in stock but does not know where to find it. 'How long would that clerk survive? For instance, here's a preacher,' and quoting a verse of Scripture he wheeled to ask, 'Billy, where's that found?' Flustered, Billy could not say, and Dawson pressed further. 'If this is an important verse, you ought to know where it is.' Graham was embarrassed but recovered sufficiently to quote a verse for which Dawson could not supply the reference. The congregation enjoyed the volley, but the point was made.⁴¹

This incident was not isolated. In 1942, Trotman was preaching in another church when the church's pastor's wife had trouble keeping her children quiet during his sermon. Skinner recalls that "as the message grew long the pastor's young wife struggled to quiet two small children. 'Those your kids, Don?' Daws asked abruptly. They were. 'You better get them in hand.' 'Amen,' agreed the red-faced pastor. 'You better do something about that Amen too,' the guest speaker added."⁴²

Skinner said that Trotman used such a practice to shock his hearers into submission.⁴³ Others felt that his motivation was less honorable. Jim Downing recalled Trotman's practice of reading his congregation as he preached, looking for those who would not meet his eye in agreement and then zeroing in on them to make public examples of their lack of faithfulness. Downing conceded that Trotman's method

⁴⁰Cook, "Inside YFC with Bob Cook," 2; Skinner, *Daws*, 385.

⁴¹Skinner, *Daws*, 188-89.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 211-12.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 211.

resulted in many of his hearers receiving the motivation they needed to get down to business for the Lord, but he also noted that the practice evoked a less holy impulse in him. Downing refused to serve as such an illustration:

When I understood his strategy, it energized my mean streak. I would often sit in the meeting absolutely expressionless. When he zeroed in on me but got no response, he would call me by name and ask how I was doing in the area he was emphasizing. After a few such incidents, we had a talk. I knew the areas in which he was struggling. I told him that the next time he called on me by name in a meeting, I was going to respond by asking him how he was doing in the areas he struggled in. A truce followed.⁴⁴

Downing was not afraid to stand up to Trotman—a practice which cost him his role as “key man” on the U.S.S. *West Virginia* for a time⁴⁵—but Downing loved Trotman and continues to serve the Navigators even today as a centenarian.

Trotman’s strategy backfired another time when Trotman and Clyde Taylor, general director of the National Association of Evangelicals, were on a missionary survey trip together. The men arrived in their Brazilian hotel late at night and had only a few hours to sleep before they were awakened at 6:00 a.m. for the next day’s itinerary. They therefore prayed together briefly and went off to sleep. During Trotman’s message to a group of local missionaries the next morning, he asked Taylor publicly how much time he had spent in devotions that morning. Taylor, refusing to serve as an illustration, said, “Why, Dawson . . . that’s a foolish question for you to ask me, for you know we both spent the same amount of time with the Lord this morning.”⁴⁶ Trotman did not appreciate the retort, but Taylor’s point was made. Foster records that Trotman was tough on those closest to him. He observes, “He would praise his men from faraway platforms, but face-to-face he could be very severe about their shortcomings.”⁴⁷ Skinner, in noting that some

⁴⁴Downing, *Living Legacy*, 8.

⁴⁵Skinner, *Daws*, 118.

⁴⁶Foster, *The Navigator*, 20.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 21.

of the Navigators were hurt and alienated by Trotman, sought to rationalize his harshness to some degree in the following:

In the hearts of two or three . . . was a growing rebellion against Dawson's leadership as dictatorial, a trait he would have stoutly denied, pointing to his respect for each person's wishes and leading from the Lord wherever they differed from his own. But the intensity of the burden and conviction and the velocity of his impact on those around him doubtless alienated some and stepped on toes as in earlier years.⁴⁸

Trotman's noble intentions notwithstanding, the fact remains that his practice of discipleship by public humiliation is worth noting as an example of what not to do.

The closest ones. A danger sometimes associated with visionary leaders is that they can tend to run roughshod over the people who mean the most to them as they seek to reach the goals they have set for themselves and their organizations. Such was the case with Trotman. He loved his family with an incredibly deep love, but he believed that if he took care of God's business first, God would take care of his family.⁴⁹ Skinner observed that an evening at home with his family was rare enough for him to make a special notation in his journal, saying, "First time in a long time for evening home with the kids. Bunch of cute clumsy clowns."⁵⁰ Trotman's daughter-in-law, Madeline Trotman, spoke candidly about his relationship with his family. Madeline met Daws for the first time one week before he died, and she was discipled for many years by Lila. She married Dawson's son, Burke, many years later. Madeline loved Dawson and was captivated by his vision. She reflected, "Daws was so committed to these people to train them in seeing the Great Commission, to train them in seeking the importance of digesting the Word of God, and taking in the Word of God, and hiding it in their hearts

⁴⁸Skinner, *Daws*, 344.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 175 In my experience, many pastors and Christian leaders have held to this maxim over the course of many years, and the evidence illustrated in the lives of many of these men's children seems to indicate that, although God certainly cares for all people, God also has an intended purpose behind supplying parents for children. This maxim is misguided at best.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

. . . and dwelling upon it to live it out. He was so intent on his vision, and he was driven to see this happen in people’s lives.”⁵¹ She further reflected in later correspondence that “perhaps two words which describe him to me are: Faithfully Focused. He certainly knew what he was here for, on this earth, and I really love it that he was single-hearted for Jesus.”⁵² She loved her father-in-law, but she admitted that in the midst of his intense devotion to carrying out his calling, “. . . he did have a blind spot, and that was his own children.”⁵³

When Dawson and Lila got married, they committed their lives and their home—wherever it may be—to the Lord’s service. Isaiah 60:11 says, “Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought.” Next to this verse in his Bible, Trotman wrote, “Our home—always—God willing.”⁵⁴ The Trotman home was the Navigator home, and many people met and grew in Christ in their home. The problem was that the Trotman children were also trying to grow in that home, and if Dawson’s time was being begged by his children or his Navigators, he often chose the Navigators. Madeline Trotman reflects, “From the day my husband came home from the hospital as a baby, he lived in a home with eighteen or twenty-five or thirty trainees.”⁵⁵ She further reflects that “There was no communication [with the children]. There was not a ‘I want to know who you are,’ or ‘I want to know who God has made you to be, and I want to be your cheerleader, and be your fan club, and help you know the riches of my

⁵¹Madeline Trotman, telephone interview with author, May 15, 2014.

⁵²Madeline Trotman, e-mail message to author, May 15, 2014.

⁵³Madeline Trotman, telephone interview with author, May 15, 2014.

⁵⁴ David Buckelew Hunsicker, “The Rise of the Parachurch Movement in American Protestant Christianity During the 1930s and 1940s: A Detailed Study of the Beginnings of the Navigators, Young Life and Youth for Christ International,” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1998), 152-65; Foster, *The Navigator*, 9-10.

⁵⁵Madeline Trotman, telephone interview with author, May 15, 2014.

heavenly Father.”⁵⁶ The Navigators received that kind of attention, but the children often did not—at least not from their father. Their mother filled the gaps as best she could—so many people remember Lila as the glue that silently held the family together⁵⁷—but the children still suffered from their father’s absence and his sternness when present. Dawson bragged *ad nauseum* about his children to others,⁵⁸ but the children themselves did not always hear their accolades from their father’s lips.⁵⁹

Trotman’s family felt the pressure of his perfectionism, perhaps more severely than any other group of people. He loved his wife enduringly, but he also sought to disciple her strictly. She was part of his spiritual progeny, after all, and he refused to let those he led to Christ languish without one-on-one discipleship. Skinner reflected on their relationship, noting that Dawson’s deep romantic love for his wife did not diminish the high standard he felt she should meet:

He was remarkably realistic in detecting her spiritual need or shoring up a weak place in her relationship with the Lord. He once admonished her for saying ‘I wish’ this or that, since it signaled discontent with circumstances the Lord had allowed or sent. He later noted that ‘her life is much more of a testimony’ and that she was tackling a new schedule. ‘Lila has certainly been growing in her ability to fill the place of a wife and mother,’ he wrote, ‘and as the one to do the many things that need to be done in such a work as the Lord has called us to.’ On one occasion he reproved her for putting the Sunday paper ahead of her time with the Lord. He kept after her, too, about losing weight, perhaps with less understanding than if he had ever had the problem himself. He was embarrassed by her appearance when she was both overweight and pregnant; it did not occur to him that his intolerance should have embarrassed him far more.⁶⁰

In June 1984, Tim and Sharon Beougher hosted Lila Trotman in their home, and during

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Skinner, *Daws*, 178.

⁵⁸Ibid., 175-76. Downing records, “I knew that Dawson was very proud of his family. In his eyes, they were the brightest and most beautiful on earth. (Groups of unmarried servicemen sometimes got a little weary of his boasting about his family, although none doubted the truthfulness of his assertions.)” Downing, *Living Legacy*, 40.

⁵⁹Madeline Trotman, telephone interview with author, May 15, 2014.

⁶⁰Skinner, *Daws*, 177.

the course of the conversation, Tim asked Lila about Skinner’s comments regarding their relationship. She replied, “Betty didn’t need to write everything she did. Dawson was hard on me at times, but it was always in the context of love.”⁶¹ Lila loved her husband, and she admirably defended his chief motive of love. Nevertheless, what Skinner recorded is particularly helpful in admonishing Christian leaders—or merely Christian husbands—to remember the biblical call that, in loving their wives, they must “not be harsh with them” (Col 3:19 ESV) and in parenting, they must “not provoke [their] children, lest they become discouraged” (Col 3:21).

His greatest burden. Trotman was not an unrepentant man. If he was confronted with a personal deficiency in his life, he addressed it as quickly and severely as possible. Downing recalls a time when the local director of the Youth for Christ chapter in Honolulu declined an invitation to come spend time with Trotman while he was in town. Trotman, who served on the Board of Directors of Youth for Christ, wanted to know why the man declined. Downing answered, “I told him I had invited the YFC director and then I shared his response. ‘No thanks,’ the man had told me. ‘I spent a week with Dawson Trotman at Camp Bethel, and I got enough of him to last me the rest of my life.’”⁶² Trotman replied honestly to Downing: “Dawson then told me that the greatest burden he carried was the trail of wounded souls he had left around the world. ‘Some people think I have the gift of exhortation and enjoy exercising it,’ he said. ‘They are wrong. Exhorting others is very difficult for me. I only do it out of sheer obedience lest I ignore and grieve the Holy Spirit.’”⁶³ Trotman was correct in his assessment that he had left a trail of wounded souls around the globe—and some of them bore his last name.

⁶¹Timothy Beougher, e-mail message to author, July 15, 2014.

⁶²Downing, *Living Legacy*, 29.

⁶³Ibid.

Unrecognized chink in his armor. The common denominator in all of Trotman’s weaknesses mentioned thus far has been that he knew about them and made some effort to correct them. Skinner asserts that he had one weakness that he failed to diagnose, and she further asserts that this one unrecognized deficiency made a significant impact in the Navigator ministry. She writes, “Though he delighted in the spiritual growth and development of his men, he paradoxically but humanly enough reacted when one rose to challenge his own leadership. It was an unrecognized chink in his armor that plagued him and cost him in later years.”⁶⁴ Jim Downing confirmed this shortcoming as he finished the first half of his *Living Legacy* in which he chronicled his reflections on the leadership styles of Dawson Trotman and Lorne Sanny. Downing suggested that the providential hand of God was not too hard to distinguish in the events of June 18, 1956:

There seems to be a common profile among entrepreneurial types like Dawson Trotman. They are visionary, are unrealistic about finances, and find it difficult to delegate.

As Betty Skinner pointed out in *Daws*, Dawson was threatened by strong men close to him and held them at arm’s length.

Perhaps God was so determined that the Navigator ministry increase and multiply that He did not intervene in the natural events on Schroon Lake that day in 1956. He changed leadership according to His schedule. Soon the Navigators would learn the meaning of ‘team leadership’ as discovered and implemented by Lorne Sanny. Lorne knew how to exploit the strengths of strong men who were driven by the Navigator vision. Under his leadership, the Navigators would grow tenfold and then a hundredfold.⁶⁵

Downing published those words in 2007, just over half a century after Trotman’s death. All indications are that Downing did not write vindictively but rather observationally. He believed that God used the specific gifting of Dawson Trotman to launch the Navigators’ worldwide ministry, and he believed that God used the specific gifting of Lorne Sanny to take the Navigators to places Trotman could not have led them. Both men were needed in the grand scheme.

⁶⁴Skinner, *Daws*, 118.

⁶⁵Downing, *Living Legacy*, 48.

An earthen vessel. Dawson Trotman was considered perfect in Christ, but he was being sanctified until he died (Heb 10:14). As a result, he had some areas of weakness that are worth mentioning in reflecting on the implications of his personal spiritual disciplines as they impacted his Great Commission ministry. The greater part—by far—of Trotman’s legacy is positive and provides valuable instruction for ministry. The lesser part of Trotman’s legacy is negative, but it likewise provides valuable insight for ministry in most contexts. Trotman’s focus on building faithful men and women who could serve God’s kingdom in Great Commission ministry would have been augmented if he had spent more time investing in those who were part of his physical progeny as well. His daughter-in-law remembers her father-in-law as being “faithfully focused” on the great task of making disciples of all nations, but she concedes that he had a major blind-spot: his own family.⁶⁶

Christian husbands and leaders can learn just as much in this case about what not to do as they can learn from the enduring positive legacy Trotman left behind. He was a perfectionist, and he believed that tasks carried out for God ought to be carried out with the utmost excellence. He was not wrong in wanting Christian life and ministry done right, but he was at times wrong in the way he sought to micromanage that high degree of excellence. His practice of discipleship by public humiliation left a trail of wounded souls that included those whom he loved the most. Oran Bell—who was wrong about so much in Trotman’s life—was right about one assertion: Trotman was hard on himself and those around him.

Lessons Worth Remembering

Even in light of Trotman’s weaknesses, he provided many enduring lessons that are worth remembering and applying in contemporary ministry. Trotman did not

⁶⁶Madeline Trotman, e-mail message to author, May 15, 2014.

develop new concepts that had never been taught before, but he called evangelical attention back to some scriptural principles that are timeless and functional in any context. Trotman asserted that men, not methods, are the key to ministry, and he believed that the most useful men were those who cast themselves wholly upon the Lord for every need. He believed that the right methods in the hands of God's men could be used mightily by God to accomplish his purposes, and he devoted his life to building faithful servants who could carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Men are God's method. Throughout the course of biblical history, God used men and women to accomplish his divine purposes. Beginning with the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:28 that Adam and the woman were to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth,” God expected his people to serve his purposes in the world he created. The biblical narrative certainly includes instances in which God worked miraculously apart from any human contact to accomplish what he desired, but the vast majority of the scriptural witness is devoted to telling the story of how God worked through men and women to touch the world. Trotman asserted that the story of Scripture—second only to its nature as the revelation of Jesus Christ—was the story of how God worked through men and women like those recorded in the great Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. Trotman was reminded of this truth by E. M. Bounds, who argued that while the church was looking for better methods to accomplish God's purposes, God was looking for better men. Trotman devoted his life to crafting men—faithful men who followed Christ and could teach others to teach others *ad infinitum* until Christ's return—and those who have memorialized him in writing therefore say that he left his legacy, not in marble or manuscripts, but in men.

Men and women who were wholly devoted to God were God's method in the scriptural witness and throughout the course of church history, and they continue to be

God's method today. The twenty-first century church of the Lord Jesus Christ continues to search for the right methods, seeking in every way to make a countercultural gospel relevant in a godless culture. Revitalization will not come until the church returns its focus to crafting committed Christians who know Christ well and seek to make him known through every aspect of their lives. Dawson Trotman believed the world in which he lived could be reached by faithful men who devoted themselves to Christ, and the same remains true today. He believed that the world did not need a dozen Billy Grahams, and he was right. What the world needs is about two billion regular, run-of-the-mill, supernaturally faithful Christians who will seek to grow as close to Christ as possible and who will then seek to take his message to their particular Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.⁶⁷

God's men are divinely empowered. Trotman believed that the most usable man was the one who would continually and faithfully cast himself upon the Lord by way of personal spiritual disciplines. He believed that the message of the gospel carried authority when it was relayed using God's Words and not merely the evangelist's human words. He believed that the evangelist was powerless to make any kind of eternal impact if he were not divinely empowered by the Spirit of God through prayer to carry out his supernatural mission. If the Christian's supreme example—Jesus Christ himself—secluded himself for times of protracted prayer before making major ministry decisions, how much more did mere mortals need to cast themselves wholly upon Almighty God? God, Trotman believed, was much more interested in accomplishing his purposes than any human emissary, and God was infinitely powerful and capable of bringing about any end he desired. Trotman therefore found that those who made themselves most usable in

⁶⁷A survey by the Pew Forum in 2011 found that the global population of those who claim to be Christians is 2.18 billion people. Pew Research, "Global Christianity—A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population," accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

the hands of the Master were those who aligned themselves most closely with him through regular and intensive personal spiritual disciplines. God did not need super-Christians or those with stunning abilities in Trotman's day, and he does not need them today. Faithfulness to God and complete reliance upon him result in more enduring fruit than talent alone could ever produce.

God's men use God's methods. Trotman was not adverse to using methods—in fact, he devoted himself to seeking the best new method to accomplish just about any task. He simply believed that the methods were only as useful as the hands in which they were placed. The sharpest scalpel is useless in the hands of an untrained medical student, but the very same implement is life-saving in the hands of a master surgeon. Trotman believed in developing and using the best methods, but he insisted that the methods were only tools in the hands of God's men. If God's man were dry, lifeless, and dull, no method would bring about life. If God's man were saturated with the presence of the Holy Spirit and deeply in tune with Christ via personal spiritual disciplines, the right methods would be useful in bringing about results.

The church culture in the twenty-first century continues to try to find the right method to right the proverbial ship and breathe life into churches with declining membership rolls and decreased cultural impact. Religious experts publish plans and programs that, if properly implemented, ought to draw masses back into the church. Perhaps if the worship style is edgy enough, or the pastor is trendy enough, or the technology is advanced enough, or the church culture is relevant enough, perhaps the people will come. Examination of Scripture seems to reveal that none of the characteristics just listed will ever be enough to bring about eternal transformation in the lives of sinners who are separated from God. The one factor that Scripture seems to trumpet—faithfulness—rarely seems to be discussed in the latest church growth trends. Perhaps what the church needs today is what the church needed in Trotman's age: God's

men who are the embodiment of God's message carrying out God's calling on their lives. Perhaps then the methods being so loudly advocated will actually result in real change in the church and in the world.

God's men always return to God. Trotman was not perfect. He was a fallen man living in a fallen world. He spent the thirty years after his conversion becoming more like Christ, but he never got fully there until June 18, 1956. Trotman struggled with sin, and to a great degree, when he was confronted with it, he repented. He, like David, fled to the Lord. At times, like David, he took some convincing of his sin, but once he recognized it, he turned immediately to the Lord by prayer and the Word. He recorded so many times in his personal journal that he had been admonished regarding some particular weakness, and he seemed to deal with himself honestly before God. As others have noted, he indeed had his blind spots, but he made every effort to repent quickly and seek forgiveness from those he offended—even if he felt like he was justified in his offensive actions. He felt that the work of God was more important than his personal justification in what he deemed to be petty matters in the scope of eternity, so he often subjugated his own emotions in order to magnify the cause of Christ.

Scripture speaks often and profoundly about the power found in humility. "Pride goeth before destruction," the proverb asserts, "and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov 16:18). Jesus told the Apostle Paul after being thrice implored to remove the thorn in Paul's flesh, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). Trotman sought to portray a man's man image of Christianity, but even in his machismo, he freely admitted his utter inability to carry out the ministry to which God had called him. He therefore devoted himself to prayer and coveted the prayers of his precious co-laborers for every endeavor. He was a staunch exhorter and bordered on legalism in spiritual disciplines, but evidence indicates that he did so because he felt compelled so to do. Perhaps the greatest need of the contemporary church is to

recognize its weakness apart from Christ and to cast itself whole-heartedly upon the Lord. Perhaps the church needs to recognize that it was conceived in the humiliation of the cross and functions beneath a yet-to-be vindicated Lord. The day of the Lord is fast approaching, but it is not here yet. In the meantime, fulfilling the calling to which Christ has called the church can be done only as the church relies completely and fervently upon Christ.

Areas for Further Study

Since so little scholarly work has been done on Dawson Trotman, the prospects for further research on his life and ministry are many. Trotman was devoted to all of Scripture, but he was particularly fascinated with the book of Isaiah. After Trotman's death, Lorne Sanny told the Navigator staff that he wanted to look through Trotman's Bible for one particular reason: "I want to borrow his first Bible and spend some time alone with it and go through and look at the promises that God gave Daws in Isaiah. I don't think they ended yesterday."⁶⁸ Trotman loved the Book of Isaiah and returned to it often. He built his ministry around the promises God gave him through that particular prophet, and delineating those promises and then examining how God fulfilled them in Trotman's life could provide valuable insight into the Navigator ministry.

Another option for further study is Trotman's unpublished manuscript entitled *Faithful Men*. Although many parts of the manuscript have been discussed in this dissertation, much remains that could be analyzed for the benefit of the Navigators, contemporary evangelical parachurch ministries, and the church. Trotman intended in *Faithful Men* to set forth both his theology of disciple-making and the methodology it birthed, and he started what would have been a valuable resource to the church had it ever been finished. Further investigation could also be undertaken as to whether the

⁶⁸The Navigators, "Notes from Lorne's Meeting with the Glen Eyrie Staff, 4:30 p.m., June 19, 1956" (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

Navigators continued to follow the principles he set forth in “Faithful Men” or if the ideologies therein presented died with Trotman in 1956.

A final suggestion for further study is the program of follow-up started by Trotman in the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The program, although revised under the subsequent leadership of Lorne Sanny, Charlie Riggs, Tom Phillips, and Gary Cobb, is still based around the principles upon which Trotman built it in 1951. Each of the men who have directed the program has improved it to some degree and altered it for changing times, but the foundational elements remain the same. An investigation into the follow-up program itself, focusing on the principles upon which Trotman founded it and the manner in which each of these men have augmented it, would provide a fascinating look into the efforts of the most successful evangelistic association in history at making “disciples, not just decisions.”⁶⁹ In addition, this study would provide an avenue to investigate the discipleship relationships of these men who followed the pattern of 2 Timothy 2:2, each discipling the next in line, and it would thereby provide further validation for Trotman’s ministry methods.

Final Thoughts and Reflections

For thirty years, Dawson Trotman devoted his life to following Christ, and he invited and equipped others to do the same. He died as he had lived, “always holding someone up.”⁷⁰ Billy Graham said, “If we had sat down and planned the way that God might take Dawson home, we certainly could never have conceived of any more appropriate way than that he whose life was given to help others should be taken saving another.”⁷¹ Multitudes of Christians have come to Christ, grown up in Christ, and

⁶⁹Tom Phillips, telephone interview with author, May 2, 2014.

⁷⁰“The Navigator,” *Time*, July 2, 1956, 58.

⁷¹Lorne Sanny, “Dear Gang” letter, June 19, 1956 (Special Collections, The Navigators International Headquarters Archives, Colorado Springs).

brought others to Christ because of the ministry of Dawson Trotman. Burke Trotman reflected that his dad was “going to have tremendous rewards in heaven for all that he’s done” in reaching people for Christ.⁷² Those rewards will be the souls of those men and women who are there, in part, because Dawson Trotman believed God was serious about the commission he imparted to his followers. They will be the hearts in which Scripture was hidden, because Dawson Trotman taught them why and how they should do so. They will be the generations of people who never knew Dawson Trotman’s name or even the name of the Navigators, but they know the name of Jesus—and that is all that mattered to Trotman.

In the final analysis, the world is richer because Dawson Trotman lived. He was far from perfect, but he believed in a big God and taught others to believe in him, too. He championed the Word of God and prayer, and he taught others how to commune intimately with God through personal spiritual disciplines. He lived a life of Christian obedience and witness before a lost and dying world, and he inspired others to follow Christ actively in their lives as well. He carried the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ to his Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, and he equipped others to do the same. He was a faithful man of God to whom much had been given, and he lived his life with the joyful burden that because much had been given, much also was required. He leaned heavily upon his Lord so he might carry out the ministry to which he had been called, and God used him to bring about eternal change in the lives of many people.

⁷²Madeline Trotman, telephone interview with author, May 15, 2014.

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ABSTRACT

DAWSON TROTMAN'S PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES AS THE FOUNDATION FOR HIS GREAT COMMISSION MINISTRY

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This dissertation argues that Dawson Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines served as the foundation of his Great Commission ministry. Chapter 1 defines important terms and states the case for researching Dawson Trotman's views on the subject.

Chapter 2 presents a biographical sketch of Dawson Trotman's life, giving particular attention to his understanding of Great Commission ministry with emphasis on his understanding of the gospel and of the process of discipleship.

Chapter 3 explores Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines and the bases upon which he developed his understanding of such disciplines. Attention is given to the scriptural sources from which he derived his intensive regimen of regularly practiced personal spiritual disciplines and other sources that influenced his thinking in these disciplines. Furthermore, this chapter examines Trotman's core theological beliefs regarding his personal devotional time and the methods he employed in practicing them.

Chapter 4 chronicles Trotman's Great Commission ministry both in terms of its history and the vision Trotman proposed not long before his untimely death. This chapter concludes with an analysis of Trotman's understanding spiritual reproduction as the cornerstone of his Great Commission ministry and legacy.

Chapter 5 bridges the gap between Trotman's intense regimen of personal spiritual disciplines and his Great Commission ministry. Specifically, this chapter

illustrates how Trotman's personal spiritual disciplines provided the foundation, motivation, and urgency for his disciple-making ministry, and it shows that Trotman felt that his personal spiritual disciplines also provided for the effectiveness of his Great Commission ministry.

Chapter 6 summarizes the research, presents conclusions, and offers some insight as to how Trotman can and should inform contemporary Christians as they seek to obey Christ's Great Commission.

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