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**Extending God's Kingdom on Earth**

“This Good News of the kingdom will be proclaimed to the whole world as a witness to all the nations” (Matthew 24:14)

- Advancing the Kingdom of God: A Four Part Series by Carlos Mantica
- Jesus' Teaching on the Kingdom
- Extending the Kingdom: The Parable of the Apartment Building
- Missionary Hearts – Evangelistic Feet: Quotes from Spirit-filled Evangelists
- Tear the Roof Off for Them! by John Hughes
- Authentic Evangelism, and Portrait of the Christian Ambassador, by Jim Berlucchi
- Ambassador for Christ, by Brandt Haglund
- The Youth Bridge – Critical Transition Stages, by Michael Shaughnessy
- The Three Greatest Needs of the Christian Church, by Bob Tedesco
- Spiritual Gifts, by Steve Clark, and Yielding to the Holy Spirit, by Don Schwager
- The Gift of Prophecy – The Prophet's Role, by Bruce Yocum
- Fixed Point, by Rob Clarke
- Mary Magdalene: The First Witness to the Risen Christ, by Jeanne Kun
- Eternity Series > | Intro | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | artwork by Jamie Treadwell
- Loch Tarff - Scotland, The Wind, and The Trout, recent poems by Sean O'Neill
- Thy Kingdom Come > | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Quotes from early fathers
- Resources for Daily Scripture Reading and Meditation, by the Servants of the Word

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I would like to address a topic that is rarely dealt with nowadays. The topic is the Kingdom of God. It’s strange that the Kingdom is not a common subject, because Jesus Christ spoke about almost nothing else. Everything the Lord Jesus said was in some way related to the Kingdom.

What he announces is the arrival of the Kingdom. What he offers his followers is the Kingdom. His parables intend to explain what the Kingdom is like. A large part of his teaching is focused on how to enter the Kingdom and who is fit for it. The beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount are like the Constitution of the Kingdom. What we are to seek above everything else is the Kingdom of God and his justice. What Jesus hands over to Peter is the keys to the Kingdom. What he will deliver to his Father when his work has been accomplished is the Kingdom.

However, it is not just what he says but what he does that is in the line of the Kingdom. The miracles he performs and his works of power in the Spirit are intended to show that the Kingdom has arrived and that he is himself the King who was to come. These are the signs of the Kingdom and the credentials of the King.

When John the Baptist, already in prison, sends two of his followers to ask Jesus whether he is the one everybody was waiting for or whether they ought to wait for someone else, the Lord does not reply with words but with works. Scripture says that at that very moment he healed many people of their sicknesses and suffering and of evil spirits, and gave the sight to many blind men. Then he responded,
“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. Tell him that the blind can see, the lame can walk, and lepers are cleansed. If I cast out demons through the Spirit of God, this means that the Kingdom of God has already come to you.”

Matthew sums up Christ’s activity by saying that “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity” (Matthew 9:35). The works of power are, thus, signs that go together with the announcement of the Kingdom, and a proof of its arrival.

“Lost the Thread”
We Christians have kept the teachings of Jesus as we would keep pearls, but without stringing them together in a necklace. That’s why we have so often “lost the thread.” We have preserved his teachings as if someone were to keep the parts of a disassembled car in a lot of boxes. All the pieces are there, but the car isn’t. Or at least we can’t see it clearly. The doctrine of the Lord also loses clarity when we only see the content of one box or another. We are lacking the chassis that kept them all together. And this chassis is the Gospel of the Kingdom.

John the Baptist preached in the wilderness, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:2). The coming of the kingdom is supposed to provoke something in us, a preparation and a response. Christ proclaims that the kingdom is already among us and can find us unprepared or leave us indifferent. That’s because we don’t even know what the Kingdom is, what is that which we must seek and ask for, and expect above any other thing.

Many words change their meaning as time goes by. It is very important for us to understand the words of Jesus the way people understood them when they listened to him in his day.

Meaning of the word “kingdom”
This thing that was called the Kingdom of God – what was its meaning for the Jews? What kind of relationship was there between the awaited Messiah and this Kingdom of God which the prophets had announced? Why is its coming
proclaimed as good news? What would your response be if I were to tell you, “Brothers and sisters, I’ve got big news for you: The Kingdom of God has come!”

Some translations further complicated the understanding of the Kingdom. As Jews would not dare pronounce even the word “God”, some of the evangelists wrote “Kingdom of Heaven” instead of “Kingdom of God”. That’s why, in our day, there are so many people who are waiting to die so they can go to the Kingdom of Heaven, instead of living so the Kingdom of God comes.

The word “kingdom” means very little for us today, because we don’t even have kings in this world of ours. For most of us, a kingdom is a place, the country or territory governed by a king. But if we conceive of the Kingdom of God as a place, we get confused.

There are many cases of kingdoms in history which did not occupy a single country or place. One case is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and the British empire. Another is the kingdom of Charles I of Spain and V of Germany, whose realm was so large and so scattered out that, in the famous expression of some historians, the sun never set on it. It was present in many places, yet it was a single kingdom, and a single king was obeyed in it. The Kingdom of God is also scattered out and embraces people from all nations.

Instead of “kingdom”, Jesus would perhaps speak today of “regime”. Because this refers to the domain, the time and manner in which someone reigns. When we talk about “the Somoza regime” we are not thinking of Nicaragua as a country, or of the territory we hold, but rather of the time when Somoza used to rule and of the manner in which his government was expressed.

Reign of God

The Kingdom of God, the REIGN of God, is God himself breaking into human history in order to reign on the earth, just as he is already reigning in heaven.

When we say, “Thy Kingdom come,” what we are expressing is our deep desire for our God to reign in an actual, true way within us and over the whole world, our desire for his will to be done on earth as it is already being done in heaven.

Our Father, may you be blessed! Reign within us, take the helm of our lives through your Holy Spirit. Make it possible for your will to be fulfilled on earth, just as it is already being fulfilled in heaven. Remember your covenant, and care for our daily needs as you care for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field which do not sow or spin, yet you clothe and feed them. Forgive our trespasses, just as we have already forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Do not put us to the test, because we are frail and small. Rather, deliver us from the power of the evil one.
Because yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. So be it!

**The Our Father**

This is the meaning of the Our Father, and a description of what the Kingdom is supposed to be: the domain and the time when men, already reconciled to God and to the brothers and sisters, and free from the evil one, once again receive everything from God, and live in order to praise and bless him.

We want his Kingdom to come, so that, as his will is being done on earth as in heaven, the earth will become Paradise once again. In fact, God’s purpose is to make a new heaven out of the earth:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” (Revelation 21:1-5)

We are under God’s rule, under God’s regime, in the age and the domain where our God reigns. And yet, we are still supposed to choose what rule we want to live under, what kingdom we want to be citizens of. Because, just as there is a Kingdom of God, there is also a kingdom of darkness, whose king is also among us. Jesus himself called him “the Prince of this world.”

The Lord explains and warns us that the wheat and the weeds will live together in the field up to the time of the harvest. At that time the weeds will be cut and thrown into the fire, but for now God lets them live even if they are harmful, lest on cutting it the wheat be cut too (Mt. 13:36-43). At this time the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness co-exist in the same territory, but not for too long.

**Does God reign in your life?**

You will say, “This I don’t understand. Isn’t it the case that God reigns from eternity and in absolute way over all that exists?” Let me reply with a simple question, Does God reign in your life? Do you do his will at all times? Can he decide about you as he wills? If your answer is No, then this means he is not reigning over you. And therefore he does not reign over all things that exist.

Even if that is the most important part, because if he does not reign over men and women he does not reign over the world, I’m going to take the question one step further – Do you believe that the world as we see it around us is God’s will, that he wanted or wants it to be as it is? Do you believe that famine, war, lies, cruelty, torture, robbery, oppression, drug-addiction, prostitution, the abortion of millions of innocent babies, the daily violation of the totality of his laws, is a sign that God is reigning over the world, and that what God wants is done in the world?

God has the power to destroy the whole of mankind with a mere word of his, and he already did this once in the time of Noah. Hundreds of times, whole nations were judged because the multitude of their transgressions filled up the measure of God's wrath. But his wrath did not bring about the Kingdom, because his Kingdom is life not death, creation not destruction, conversion not imposition.

The stars, galaxies without number, obey his laws. The whole of creation proclaims his greatness. The microcosm is...
subject to his laws. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without his consent, says the gospel. And even the hairs in our head are counted. But man continues to rebel against God, and under Satan he has built a whole world in rebellion against God. And God does not fully reign in that world. There is no contradiction in this.

The United States, too, can destroy us just by pressing a button, but it does not reign over us. It can place a fleet of aircraft carriers in front of our coast, it can make all of us bald with some secret weapon; but it will only reign over us if we hand over our hearts or submit to its laws.

A king reigns where he is known, where his law is obeyed, where his will is fulfilled and his name is glorified. That is why God is not reigning yet over all things that exist. On the contrary, after the fall of Adam, it was Satan that began reigning on the world, with a law written within us which is the law of sin. No one would question the fact that the law we usually abide by is the law of our flesh, imposed by Satan, and institutionalized in the world as collective sin.

**God's kingship with Israel**

Given this predicament of man, God chooses a people who will be for some time the Kingdom of God on earth. This is the people of Israel. To this people God dictates a law, he makes a covenant with them, and he himself dwells with them. As long as they remain faithful to his covenant, the power of God keeps and protects them, and they receive all things from God.

Under God’s kingship, Israel is victor over all peoples and is taken to the promised land, a land that flows with milk and honey, the new Paradise. Their greatest glory and power is reached in the times of David and his son Solomon. But Israel goes away from her God. She even worships other gods, and the judgment of Yahweh comes over them. Once again they are submitted to slavery under other kings. The birth of Jesus finds them subject to the Roman Empire.

The people were waiting for the Messiah whom the prophets had announced, the Messiah who was to come to set his people free and to restore them to their old glory. He would reign over all nations, for ages without end. This is what the angel announces to Mary: “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord shall give him the throne of David his father; he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and his reign shall have no end” (Luke 1:32).

Isaiah, Micah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah and all the great prophets had announced his coming, and the oppressed people were impatiently waiting for his coming. The Kingdom of God was supposed to be above all God’s lordship and dominion over his people, obedience to his law and his will, while all the rest would be mere additions to his kingdom and covenant. But, as always, the people reversed the order of priorities. In the hearts of the Jewish people, the Kingdom of God meant above all political dominion and power over their enemies – the additions to the kingdom, without the search for the kingdom of God and his justice. The Kingdom would now be the result of a great leader, anointed by God (this is what the word “Christ” means), who would have military dominion over the whole world for Israel. As you can see, the idea is old: in order for heaven to come to earth and for the earth to become Paradise regained, it is necessary to destroy, to kill, to impose silence, to dominate, and to overcome.

**Coming of the Messiah**

When the long-awaited Messiah finally did come John the Evangelist states in his Gospel prologue:

> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us… The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not (John 1:14, 9-11).
They received him not, because his plan did not fit theirs, and because he would not follow the agenda they wanted to impose on him. Some of them wanted to make him a king when he fed the crowd, and he hid away. Others asked him to have fire come down from heaven over those who rejected him, and he rebuked them. And then he began talking about turning the other cheek, and about loving your enemies, and about giving your cloak also if you are asked for your coat.

He said that whoever would be the greatest among them ought to become their servant, and not be like earthly kings. He commanded people to forgive seventy times seven, and to love their enemies, and a whole lot of other stupid things that, as everyone knows well, will not lead a people to its liberation. He called them blessed who were meek, who were merciful, and who sought peace. But they didn’t want peace – they wanted victory over their enemies.

Thus, “he came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:11-12) – of that God who makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

From the very beginning of his public life, Jesus is tempted by Satan to political messianism. Matthew records this in chapter 4:

“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me’” (vv. 8-9).

The funny thing is that Christ does not challenge Satan’s ability to offer him the kingdoms of the world, because in fact they belonged to him. Jesus simply answers,

“‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve’” (v. 10).

Luke comments that the devil left him until an opportune time. Undoubtedly, Jesus was tempted many times to political messianism. There was nothing wrong in wanting to deliver his people from the imperialistic yoke, but certainly not at the price of making a pact with Satan, or apart from the Kingdom of God, or of its justice which is supposed to be an addition to it.

Christ knew that only the Kingdom of God within man is able to overcome the kingdom of darkness in the world. He knew that what enslaves man and leads him once and again to his own destruction does not lie in the external structures of power, but in the sin that is within him. And he knew that only God’s power, reigning in the heart of man, is able to overcome sin.

If political liberation were enough, we would be forced to conclude that Jesus was a perfect idiot. He died needlessly, just because he wanted to. And his Father was even more stupid. Jesus could have been delivered by the angels at the last minute, as he himself tells Pilate; but his death was absolutely necessary. His blood was to be the ransom price for the human race. The devil could not understand this, because the devil is unable to understand love. If he had understood it, he would never have allowed the crucifixion of Christ.
The Kingdom of God

Part 1: What is the Kingdom of God?
Part 2: Jesus' Teaching on the Kingdom of God
Part 3: Extending the Kingdom - Parable of the Apartment Building
Part 4: Tools for Building the Kingdom: Word, Witness, and Community

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The Lord Jesus explained to Nicodemus that one had to be born again in order to enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:1-15). There will be no Kingdom of God without new people – new people who have God’s law written in their hearts by the Spirit, with his power inside them to fulfill the Law.

As long as this does not take place, all paradises built through weapons will become a hell again. That’s because they have not first evicted the FORMER KING – the evil one who was a murderer from the beginning, the accuser, the father of lies, the enemy, the one who is also called Beelzebul or Beelzebub, a name which means “lord of the flies” or, according to a different rendering, “lord of dung”. Demons are now ridiculous clowns in my Lord’s glorious parade. They are now obliged to obey the smallest of us who are the citizens of the Kingdom.

The word of the Lord has come true, that even the smallest in the Kingdom was greater than John the Baptist, of whom Jesus himself said that he was the greatest among those born of women. That’s how the devil sees us too, and our new worth is the reason for his rage. In fact, in Christ Jesus we are all now sitting at the right hand of the Father.
Parable of the mustard seed
Surely you will say, “Then I don’t understand. If all of this is so, why then do things go on as before?” The Lord explains:

The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. (Matthew 13:31-32)

Do you understand, my brothers and sisters? The Lord says that these things are revealed to the humble and understood by them, but not by the wise and prudent of this world (Matthew 11:25).

The Kingdom of God is here, but it has not yet reached the fullness of its growth. The seed has been scattered, but the parable of the sower says that, even though the seed is good, it doesn’t always bear fruit.

There are some, in fact, who are too shallow, and the seed cannot take root in them. The Lord compares them to ground that lacks depth. And he says that the seed sprang up immediately, but when the sun came out it was scorched, and withered away because it had no root. These are the people, says the Lord, who hear the word and welcome it with joy, but who lack roots, who do not internalize what they have heard until it has become a deep conviction and a firm decision, and therefore, when tribulation or persecution comes, they succumb immediately.

Others are too hard-hearted, and the word is lost like seed that has fallen among the rocks.

Other seed fell among the thorns, that is, in a hostile or corrupted environment that choked the little plant that was beginning to grow. The Lord says these are the people who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the enticement of riches choke the word, which remains fruitless.

Other seed is taken away by the birds. The Lord says these are the people who hear the word of the Kingdom and do not understand it, so the evil one comes and steals what has been planted in their hearts. Some of these evil birds are birds that soar up on high. Other people just lose the word because they are fond of doing business with the birds (Matthew 13:3-9).
Parable of the Dragnet
But the Kingdom of God also resembles a dragnet which is cast and which gathers all kinds of fish. When it is full they take it out to the shore, they sit down, and the good fish are gathered in baskets and the bad ones are thrown away (Matthew 13:47-49). For there will be a time of judgment, and the evildoers will be thrown “into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear” (Matthew 13:42-43).

Parable of the Leaven
Now you will say, “All of this sounds beautiful, but – what does it all have to do with us? What are we supposed to do?” The Lord replies,

    The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened. (Matthew 13:33)

Such is our mission, brothers and sisters: to make the whole dough leaven through our word, through our witness, through our way of life as a people.

Kingdom of God within us
The Kingdom of God is within us by the Spirit, like leaven that is gradually transforming us according to God’s plan. We, in turn, need to be inserted into the world, like yeast, in order to transform it into what God wants it to be.
God needs citizens of the Kingdom who will be instruments of the Kingdom, with the word and the power of God. The way the Kingdom of God comes to us is through the Holy Spirit, who is God’s dominion and power. To invoke the Spirit of the Lord upon us is to surrender to him the reins of our lives; it is to ascribe him his right place in the center of our hearts. Thus we will no longer be our own masters. God doesn’t come to us to do our errands. God comes to us in order to reign in us. And if he reigns in us we are then part of his Kingdom, and a sign of his Kingdom, and instruments for the extension of the Kingdom.

**God’s people – beginning of the kingdom**

But God also wants us as a people to be the beginning of God’s Kingdom on earth. In case you don’t know, that’s the way the world-wide council of Catholic bishops defined the Church at Vatican Council II (1962-65). The Church is the beginning of God’s Kingdom on earth, the new Israel, the concrete domain where God is known, praised and obeyed. It also defined itself as a sacrament of the Kingdom, that is, as a visible sign and instrument of the Kingdom, in order to show it forth and to expand it. Its mission is to extend the Kingdom of God on earth.

It was us who decided to change Christianity into an intimate, exclusive relationship between God and me. We lost the notion of being a people, the concept of people, of nation. God had to begin playing the fool, by being the King of a single citizen: ME, the “lonely Christian” who is the very denial of the commandment of love.

But that’s not what the apostles understood. When Peter explains to new Christians what they are, what he says is:

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

**Christians living in community**

That’s why, from the very day of Pentecost, Christians began living in community. They were one family, children of the same Father, a people that was different from all others. They had a distinct way of life, that would be for all others what the whole world will be one day.

The concept of a nation is very deeply rooted in the minds of the Jewish people. For generations they dwelt in the midst of other nations, sometimes as slaves (Egypt and Babylon), sometimes as freemen, but they never ceased to regard themselves above all as the Jewish nation, as the people of God.

They had their own culture, they preserved their own language, they obeyed their own laws, they followed only their own leaders, and it was forbidden to them to worship or serve other gods. Even those who managed to enslave them had to accept governing them through their own authorities, and to respect certain precepts of their law, for thousands preferred to die rather than betray such precepts.

Their first identity was that of Jews, and their first allegiance was to their own people. Something similar happens today with the Basque in Spain and the Miskito in Nicaragua. They recognize themselves as a nation living within another nation. Thus they will identify more with the French Basque or with the Honduran Miskito than with the rest of the Spanish or of the Nicaraguans.

Our Church is our Israel, and it is also a nation. Its people has been gathered from all nations. As Paul says, now there is no Jew or Greek, no slave or freeman. We are all citizens of the same Kingdom. Like the Jewish people, the
Church dwells in dispersion among all nations, but it has its own law, its own authorities, its own way of life, and acknowledges no king but God. It is immersed in the whole world, precisely in order to leaven all of it like yeast in the dough, so that someday the whole world will be a single fold with a single Shepherd.

Go to > Part 3: Extending the Kingdom - Parable of the Apartment Building

The Kingdom of God

Part 1: What is the Kingdom of God?
Part 2: Jesus' Teaching on the Kingdom of God
Part 3: Extending the Kingdom - Parable of the Apartment Building
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Carlos Mantica is a founder of The City of God community (La Cuidad de Dios) in Managua, Nicaragua, and a founding leader of the Sword of the Spirit. He served as president of the Sword of the Spirit between 1991 and 1995.

top illustration: Jesus preaching in the Temple, by James Tissot

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The Kingdom of God series

Part 3: Extending the Kingdom of God

Parable of the Apartment Building

by Carlos Mantica

Following on the previous two chapters which explain the Kingdom of God (Part 1 and 2), we know that the Lord Jesus does not just simply choose disciples so they can wait around to go to heaven some day. The Lord chooses disciples for his own in order to carry out his mission in the world.

For this purpose:

1. Christ inaugurates the Kingdom of God on earth, with his death and resurrection defeats the devil, sin and death, and is constituted by the Father as the LORD of heaven and earth. But this is just the first phase of his work. At present, not everything is under his authority and lordship (even we are not), and God’s full plan is for all things to have Christ as their head one day. St. Paul says in Ephesians 1:9-10:

   [God] has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

2. For the accomplishment of this mission, the Lord uses a strategy—he chooses a people, which is his Church. Since this mission is far above man’s ability, God then sends his own Spirit, God’s omnipotence and wisdom. It is the same Spirit who on the day of creation was moving over the waters; the same Spirit who begot Jesus in Mary’s womb; the same Spirit who made Jesus rise from the dead; the same Spirit who on the day of Pentecost came to empower the Church for the fulfillment of Christ’s mission in the world.
Such is the second phase of God’s plan: giving us his Spirit in order to have a Church with power.

3. The third stage of his plan will take place when Jesus Christ returns in glory and majesty. It is he who will one day make a universal reality out of the things which each one of us is called to gradually accomplish in himself or herself and in the people around us. He will make all things new and will then be all in all. And he shall reign forever and ever, Amen!

**Dying or living for the Kingdom of Heaven?**
Nowadays, many people are waiting to die in order to go one day to the Kingdom of Heaven, instead of living for the Kingdom of Heaven to come to us.

To which of these two groups do you belong, brother or sister? It really is all up to you. The Lord’s mission is quite clear. That’s what he chose us for; it is for that, and only for that, that he calls us and enables us. It is for that that he incorporates us into the Church through Baptism.

We have no space or time left for more theology. This chapter is designed for those who want to make the fulfillment of this MISSION a reality.

What I’m going to deal with here is concrete things we are supposed to do, and practical suggestions about how to do them. Again, I would like to stress that the important thing is not being able to say, “How nice all this is!”, but to say, “This is true!” And, which is more important, to say, “Yes, this is for me!”

And since I am sure that you have chosen to move over to live in the Kingdom of God, forsaking forever the kingdom of Satan and thus becoming Christ’s helpers for the fulfillment of his mission, what I want to talk to you about is

- how to take the good news of salvation to others
- how to lead men and women to Jesus, their Savior
- how to take men and women to this piece of the Kingdom which is the Church
- how to help make this Church truly become the beginning of the Kingdom of God on earth, a place where all men can get a glimpse of what the world will look like when Christ is its only and true Lord.
**The Parable of the Apartment Building**

We will understand God’s strategy better through a parable I wrote some time ago. It goes like this:

The Kingdom of God is like a residential development that a certain Lord built once. Right at the center of the development he built a beautiful apartment building. When he was done, the Lord saw what he had made, and he found it was good.

He then filled it with tenants, and drew out a set of bylaws, so that all of them could live there in peace and harmony. But after some time he saw that the tenants had changed his work into a ruin, a true hell. None of the facilities seemed to work well.

Many apartments had no light, because disobedience to the bylaws resulted in having the power source cut. The administrators had reserved the use of the elevators for themselves, so they were the only ones who could go up to the higher places. The residents did not know each other, and those in the lower floors hated the ones in the higher floors, and vice-versa. The whole building seemed to be about to crumble down.

So the Lord planned to do something about this, and said to himself, ‘I’m going to start all over again. In the same development I will build a new building, high on the top of the hill so everybody can see it. I will dwell in this building myself, and I will set my Son in charge of its administration, and my Advocate in charge of maintenance, so this new stage will be a model for all those who live in the first one.’

And this Lord so loved his tenants, that he sent his Son to build the second building on the hill at a very high cost. For this purpose he used the same blueprints he had used for the former building, and when the second one was finished it was no different from the preceding one, except that the Lord himself dwelt in it, and it was under the management of his Son and under the maintenance of his Advocate.

He then invited some of the old tenants to move for free to the new facilities, so they could tell the others what all this was like. They moved with everything they had, leaving behind only those old things that would not match their new house.

The new tenants did not lose their contact with the tenants of the old building or leave the neighborhood. Whenever they came to visit their old friends, they would help them both to repair the old building and to protest and fight the abuses of the old management. But they were aware that their true mission was not that, but was rather to announce what the Father and the Son had done, and to witness to what the Advocate was doing in the new building and invite them to move over to it. “What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you will live in condominium with us.” They also understood that it was just a matter of time, because the old building was going to be unavoidably demolished. And the Lord would add each day to the new building those who would be saved.

So much for the parable.

**God's solution for the world**

Given the situation of the world, God does not choose to destroy it as he did in the times of Noah. He is not satisfied with admonishing people, as he had done through the prophets, nor does he send his Son to repair it, but to build a
new Israel, planted in the midst of the nations and built on a hill.

The solution God offers the world is only one, and it is called the Church. In God’s strategy, this Church will act as a sacrament of salvation. It will be a sample, a sign, a model of what the world can be if God dwells in it and if Christ is its head. But also, even now, it will be the instrument for accomplishing his work of salvation in this world.

That’s why the Church calls the laity to the restoration of the temporal order, to insertion in the old building, in order to make it more just, more human and more bearable, but without forgetting that our true mission is the extension of GOD’S KINGDOM, and not the improvement of men’s kingdoms.

We are supposed to bear witness to what it means to live in the Kingdom, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ; and, as a group, to be the beginning of that Kingdom and the sample of what the whole development will look like one day, when the world as a whole will have Jesus Christ as its Head and Lord.

Go to > Part 4: Three Tools for Mission: Word, Witness, and Community

This article is adapted from the book, From Egghead to Birdhood (hatch or rot as a Christian), (c) copyright 2001 Carlos Mantica.

Carlos Mantica is a founder of The City of God community (La Cuidad de Dios) in Managua, Nicaragua, and a founding leader of the Sword of the Spirit. He served as president of the Sword of the Spirit between 1991 and 1995.
As we have seen in the previous chapter (Part 3), The Parable of the Apartment Building contains several practical ideas which we may not have grasped at first sight.

1. The first is that those who moved to the new building had to announce to the others the good news that they no longer needed to live or be as before, because the gates of the new building, the gates to the place where our God reigns, are open to them. Christ opened them with his blood!

2. The second thing they need to do is bear witness to how they now live, and to the fact that their new way of life is
better than the former one. That is to say, they are not there by force or because they are good people, but because they are no fools.

3. The third thing is inviting people to COME AND SEE, for them to live in condominium with us.

**Three tools for mission**

We have, thus, three tools to carry out our part of the mission: the word, the witness, and the community of brothers and sisters.

**Word**

The first tool we have is, then, the WORD.

Some people don’t know how to talk to people, so maybe they think that what they are supposed to do is go to some retreat and give a talk. Others of us would want to talk to the whole world about Christ, but we don’t always do it the best way so we scare people. That’s why the best method is to take a look at what Christ himself did, as he is our best teacher in everything.

There’s a tremendous passage in the Gospel where Christ gives us a lesson on how to talk to people. It’s the account of Christ and the Samaritan woman, in John 4:1-42.

> Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again to Galilee. He had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. (vv. 1-9)

Here we have several wonderful lessons given by the Lord. Let’s imagine the scene. The Lord is tired after walking several hours through the desert. It’s noon, the sun is scorching, and all of them are starving. That’s why the disciples have gone into town for food. But the Lord does not let go the opportunity.

Let’s look well: the Lord has not made a special trip in order to talk to the Samaritan woman. It’s a coincidental encounter, but the Lord is always ready to announce the Kingdom. First lesson: We need to be apostles 24 hours a day, and take advantage of the normal circumstances of life, and even of a coincidence, to talk to people about Christ.

**Second lesson:** We must take the initiative, instead of waiting to be asked.

**Third lesson:** The Lord excludes no one from his love. Jews and Samaritans were enemies to death, to the point that this woman is perplexed to see that he addresses her. It’s got to be the same with us.

A Christian is not supposed to have enemies, and if he does, he is supposed to love them, no matter what their ideology, their convictions, their flag or their social status. The Lord expects us not to exclude anyone from the good news.
Another lesson, a very important one: The Lord does not just approach the Samaritan woman to say without preamble, “Madam, I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me.” In that case he would have been regarded as a madman.

The Lord begins by establishing a common concern. The woman has come to draw water, and the Lord talks about... about what? About water! And to the farmer he speaks about the seed in the field, and to the housewife about the lost coin, and to the fishermen about nets and fish, and to many of you he would talk about baseball or boxing or football. That is, he starts the conversation with something the other person is concerned about.

Let’s go ahead.

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?” Jesus said to her: “Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here do draw.” (vv. 10-15)

Here we can see another lesson from the Lord. After establishing a friendship or a relationship, he talks to her about something he has and she lacks. He talks about something that is better for her, something that would make her very happy. He’s not deceiving her. It’s something he sincerely desires for her.
The same with us—we Christians have something the world needs and does not have. We have someone who is the light and the salvation of the world, someone they don’t even know or have heard about.

But we also have something better, which they don’t have. The life we are now living is something we would sincerely desire for them: our peace, our joy, the love we relate to each other with, our mutual loyalty, our strength in difficulties, the way we help each other, our confidence even before death itself, and so on.

Let us continue reading.

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.” The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.” (vv. 16-19)

We have here a very important lesson that we often neglect. The Lord confronts her with her sin, but does not condemn her. He doesn’t say, “You old adulteress! You’ve already got five men in your record, and you’re now with your sixth! You’re on your way to hell!”

Just as we can’t call right what is wrong, we must be like the Lord who hates sin but loves the sinner. We can confront a person with his faults and sins, but only to tell him that the Lord wants to erase those sins forever, and that we ourselves love and accept this person, because one day we were like him and the Lord was pleased to have mercy on us.

When we confront someone with his life, we can have the same experience the Lord had. Look at what the Samaritan woman says:

“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is come when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” (vv. 20-21, 23a)

What has happened here? The same thing that happens to us so often: when the Samaritan woman realizes she is being confronted with her disorderly life, she shifts to a different subject. She changes topics, she leaves the area of her personal life and starts to talk about theology. It’s unfailing!

You are trying to have someone to face, perhaps for the first time in his life, the fact that he’s headed to disaster and cannot go on like that. So he says, “Boy, I really think this retreat is not for me because I don’t believe in Adam’s apple.” Or, “The truth is that all priests are a lot of thieves.” Or else, “Come on, explain to me this thing about Jonah and the whale.”

And, of course, your response has to be, “Stop mentioning other people, leave Jonah with his whale and the priests with their problems, and face up the facts of your own life right now!” This is what the Lord does; he brings her back to the personal level.

The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.” (vv. 25-26)
Our evangelism needs to lead to that point—to a personal encounter with Christ, an encounter with the Savior who is coming. We often spend years talking about doctrine, but we do not follow a doctrine—we follow a person, the living and risen Christ, the son of Mary, the Savior of the world. It is him that we need. It is Christ we are supposed to give them. See what happens when a person meets Christ:

So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” They went out of the city and were coming to him... Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. (vv. 28-30, 39-41)

A person who has had an actual encounter with Christ will find it almost impossible not to talk about him. I hope you have encountered him. When one encounters Christ, his life will no longer be the same. And this takes us to the second instrument we had referred to earlier.

**Witness - Testimony**

We announce the GOOD NEWS with the WORD and with TESTIMONY.

Brothers and sisters, a witness is not super-human. A witness is simply someone who can bear witness to something that is true because he knows it for sure.

I have come here to bear witness that God is LOVE. That my Lord is faithful. I have not come to tell you that I am good, but that my Lord is good. I have not come to tell you what I am able to do, but that in him who strengthens me I am able to do everything. I have not come to boast about holiness, but to boast that my God and my friend is the Holy of Holies. Just like the Samaritan woman, I have come to tell you that I now know that all of this is true, not because somebody told me so, but because I have verified it myself.

We often have no chance to talk to people, but our works can talk instead of us.

I’m sure that some of you are here today, not because you needed or wanted a retreat, but because you needed to have something you saw in the life of a friend or relative and came to look for that.

I suppose you are clear by now that it is not that we have SOMETHING special, but that we have SOMEONE very
special, and it is he who makes everything else possible.

Bishop Helder Câmara from Brazil used to say that we ought to take care of our own lives, because that may be the only Gospel our brothers can read. I believe that a Christian is someone who, while always wanting and striving to live according to the Gospel, humbly recognizes that his life will always be far below the truth he preaches.

It is said that, in the middle of a battle, Alexander the Great found a soldier who was escaping in withdrawal, and asked him, “What is your name?” “Alexander,” replied the soldier. “Alexander, and you flee?” the emperor said; “Either you change your attitude or you change your name!”

We can have falls and failures just as anyone else. What we cannot do is live exactly as before, and boast about the name of Christians. We either change our name or change our attitude.

You will ask which is more important, the word or the testimony. That’s like asking which is more important, the right leg or the left leg. Whichever you lack, you’re lame, you’re worth nothing.

Because if you lack the word, they will think you are a good person, but they will never know who is your rock and your source of power. You will be admired, perhaps, or respected as an honorable citizen, but not as an apostle of Christ. But if you lack the testimony, they will hardly accept what you say, and they will not encounter their Savior.

Community

The third element we had mentioned is community.

So I end by telling you that life in the new apartment building is far better than life in the world. Because I have known both, and I would exchange my whole past life for a single minute of the new one.

I just want to tell you that I don’t only live a new life, but I live in a new world. It’s a completely different world, where people are different, and where the way we relate is different, and where our children are different, and our wives are different.

It’s a world where the other person is not my rival or my enemy unless the opposite is demonstrated, but my brother and my support. A world where people walk in the light, with purity in their eyes and sincerity in their hearts. Where a person’s problems are everyone’s problems, and a person’s joys are everyone’s joys. We now wonder how we were ever able to live otherwise.

And this is another instrument of the Lord—the community of brothers and sisters who show the old tenants a different alternative of human fellowship, based on the Lord’s love and power.

I only have one more thing to tell you. For the Samaritan woman, her encounter with the Christ was not the end of everything, but the beginning of a new life. Many of the things we will do are the simple, everyday things, but everything we do will have a new meaning.

We are involved today in an incredible enterprise, we are part of the people to whom the salvation of the world has been entrusted. With our actions and omissions we can advance or hinder the second coming of the Lord.

In this people, in this mission, we all have a position to occupy, and every position is important. We must find ours, because the position you are supposed to hold cannot be held by anybody else in your stead.
In the Lord’s eyes, each of us is unique and irreplaceable. That’s why he dreamed of you from eternity, he waited for your arrival with anticipation, and he is now waiting your coming to the house of the Father for you to work with him in building that world which will one day have Christ as its only LORD. To him be glory, honor and praise, now and forever. Amen!

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**The Kingdom of God**

Part 1: What is the Kingdom of God?
Part 2: Jesus’ Teaching on the Kingdom of God
Part 3: Extending the Kingdom - Parable of the Apartment Building
Part 4: Tools for Building the Kingdom: Word, Witness, and Community

This article is adapted from the book, *From Egghead to Birdhood (hatch or rot as a Christian).* (c) copyright 2001 Carlos Mantica.

Carlos Mantica is a founder of The City of God community (La Cuidad de Dios) in Managua, Nicaragua, and a founding leader of the Sword of the Spirit. He served as president of the Sword of the Spirit between 1991 and 1995.
Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!”

- Pope Francis

I have had the privilege of preaching the gospel on every continent in most of the countries of the world. And I have found that when I present the simple message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, with authority, quoting from the very Word of God—he takes that message and drives it supernaturally into the human heart.

- Billy Graham

“Go forth and set the world on fire”

– Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the missionary Society of Jesus
The spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions. The nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we become.

- Henry Martyn

There is not a better evangelist in the world than the Holy Spirit.

- D.L. Moody

I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship, and the whole world for my mission field.

- John Wesley

God, I pray Thee, light these sticks of my life and may I burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you, Lord Jesus.

- Jim Elliot (1948)

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

- Jim Elliot (1949)

Expect great things from God. Attempt great thing for God.

- William Carey

Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can

- John Wesley

“Whoever wishes to be a soldier for God under the standard of the cross and to serve the Lord alone… bear in mind that he is part of a community founded principally for the advancement of souls in the Christian life and doctrine and for the propagation of the faith by the ministry of the word, by spiritual exercises, by works of charity, and expressly by the instruction in Christianity of children and the uneducated.”

– from a document written in 1539 to explain the mission of the Society of Jesus, by Ignatius of Loyola, 1539

We should not ask, “What is wrong with the world?” for that diagnosis has already been given. Rather, we should ask, “What has happened to the salt and light?”

- John R. W. Stott

Many, many people hereabouts are not becoming Christians for one reason only: there is nobody to make them
Christians. Again and again I have thought of going round the universities of Europe, especially Paris, and everywhere crying out like a madman, riveting the attention of those with more learning than charity: “What a tragedy: how many souls are being shut out of heaven and falling into hell, thanks to you! I wish they would work as hard at this as they do at their books, and so settle their account with God for their learning and the talents entrusted to them. This thought would certainly stir most of them to meditate on spiritual realities, to listen actively to what God is saying to them. They would forget their own desires, their human affairs, and give themselves over entirely to God’s will and his choice. They would cry out with all their heart: Lord, I am here! What do you want me to do? Send me anywhere you like - even to India.”

– from a letter written in 1542 by Francis Xavier in India to Ignatius Loyola

Many of our brothers and sisters are ‘baptized, but insufficiently evangelized.’ In a number of cases, nations once rich in faith and in vocations are losing their identity under the influence of a secularized culture. The need for a new evangelization… must be valiantly reaffirmed, in the certainty that God’s word is effective.

- Benedict XVI

The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

- Jesus (Matthew 9:37).

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

- Jesus (Mark 16:15-18)

“This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

- Jesus (Luke 24:46-49)

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

- Jesus (Acts 1:8)

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.”

- Jesus (Matthew 24:14)
I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

- Paul (Romans 1:14-16)

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

- Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 5:14-20)

Save others, snatching them out of the fire.

- Jude

Here am I. Send me.

- Isaiah

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I found myself inspired by this story recently.

“And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

– Mark 2:2-5

A few things struck me in thinking about these four men and their idea:

It was crazy
Who thinks to take off the roof? How rude! Surely a good-hearted, responsible citizen would see the impossibility of getting the paralytic inside, and decide to wait outside, hoping that on his way out Jesus would notice them.

**It was urgent**
Couldn’t they have waited twenty minutes for Jesus to finish his sermon? These men had a serious sense of urgency about them.

**It was bold**
They were willing to barge in, to interrupt the Son of God as he was speaking, and to literally put this man's need in the forefront of what was going on.

**It was selfless**
These four men didn’t have anything to gain in doing this. On the contrary, odds are they’d be the ones to pick up the tab for the roof damages.

**It was full of faith**
One has to be absolutely certain that Jesus is able (and willing) to heal before doing something like tearing a roof off. It seems these men had an acute understanding of who Jesus is, and faith that he would be willing to heal this man.

What about us: how far are we willing to go for the people who need to be brought to Jesus?

- Are we willing to get two or three other brothers or sisters together to carry them?
- Are we open to the seemingly harebrained ideas that the Lord would give us?
- Will we “storm heaven” for them, boldly and selflessly putting their needs before the Lord?
- Do we understand the urgency? Or do we passively wait?

Christ stopped at nothing to bring us to him – are we willing to tear the roof off for our neighbor?

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Is the job of evangelism completed once an individual has made a commitment to Jesus Christ? Not if we take seriously the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ came among men preaching the kingdom of God. Now this phrase “the kingdom of God” sounds strange to modern ears. Nevertheless, we should understand what Jesus meant by this kingdom. When the people of Galilee begged him to stay with them, he replied by saying, “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:43). Later, Luke records that “he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). There are literally scores of references to this kingdom cited throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Just what is this kingdom? On earth it is that human society which has come under the reign of Jesus Christ. The kingdom then, is a society of believers under the reign of God awaiting its full establishment at Christ’s return. This redeemed society is distinct from the kingdom of this world, the other human society where Jesus is not acknowledged as Lord.

Jesus’ intention in evangelism is not simply to redeem individuals (though this is crucial) but to incorporate
them, into a transformed community. It is within the body of Christ that believers are brought to maturity and fruitfulness. Together, their lives give witness to the world that Jesus is Lord, extending his influence to bring others into that new life. “He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13). Peter highlights this fact also: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

God wants to win others to himself through his kingdom and into his kingdom. This is the basis upon which to understand our personal involvement in evangelism: A widely accepted misunderstanding of the gospel undercuts God’s full intention with evangelism. One might refer to it as the abbreviated gospel. The inadequacy of this notion of the nature of the good news naturally leads to an understanding of evangelism that is highly individualized and short-sighted. It often limits the focus of personal witnessing to helping others make a verbal acceptance of Christ without emphasizing the ongoing need for commitment and relationship with other Christians. The fruit borne can be dramatic, but it is often woefully short-lived. Consider the following examples of this kind of approach:

- According to Gallup poll surveys conducted in the United States between 1976-2005 an average of 39 percent of adult Americans claim to have been born again. This is a startling statistic, indeed, when one considers the obvious realities of modern life. Statistics of divorce rates, sexual promiscuity, and widespread cheating in business and industry, fly in the face of the claim on the part of one out of every three adult Americans to have been born again. Where are these millions of Christians? Where is the evidence of their redemptive influence upon our post-Christian culture? Might they have died prematurely, withered on the vine?

- A man’s dormitory in a nominal Christian university is visited one evening by a touring evangelistic troupe. Upon presenting the gospel message, the leader asks for commitment from the students, to be indicated by the raising of hands. Virtually all of the 200 students in attendance make this commitment to Christ. Publicized as one of its most notable evangelistic successes, the evangelistic group makes little or no effort to follow-up on these decisions. Satisfied that arm-lifting indicates conversion, the group is unaware that no observable change occurs in the lives of the students. Premarital sex and drunkenness continue to thrive in that particular dormitory.

- A nationally renowned entertainer claims conversion to Christ. After recording a hit song about the experience, he resumes his former blatantly decadent lifestyle.

- A professional athlete who is avowedly and publicly born-again divorces his wife, remarries, and divorces again.

One can think of countless examples of this kind of evangelism and its distorted Christian ideology. I remember leading a young man to Christ about ten years ago. As he prayed aloud his commitment, I thought, “Thank God, he crossed over.” Because I had a stunted understanding of the gospel, I did not industriously help him to establish a prayer life, join a church, or improve his marriage. Six months later he admitted sadly, “You know, I asked God into my life and had a great momentary experience. But now I look back and see that my life is the same as before. I haven’t changed at all.”

Paul says:
“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me” (Colossians 1:28-29).

Authentic evangelism is not completed when the message of salvation is verbally proclaimed. Neither has it fully succeeded when people respond with faith and commitment. These are crucial elements but more is needed to establish new believers in a productive and enduring Christian way of life.

I would suggest that we understand authentic evangelism as the process by which we, as members of a redeemed community, help others to establish, re-establish, or significantly deepen a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The process of evangelism is not complete, however, until the individual is helped to take the crucial steps which promote and insure ongoing growth in the Christian life. This would include connection with some kind of vital, committed Christian fellowship.

We can see, then, that our goal in evangelism is not simply to help others make decisions for Christ or accept Christ as Lord although this is of absolute importance. Rather it is to help them also to establish a basic Christian lifestyle that will be fruitful in years to come. We want to produce “fruit that will abide” – the kind of fruit that Jesus desires his disciples bear and that proves that they are his disciples. Like the great evangelist and apostle Paul, our vision for evangelism should be the full, uncondensed version: “Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all energy which he mightily inspires within me” (Colossians 1:28-29).

Paul toiled endlessly not just to verbally declare the gospel, but also for the full integration of that gospel into the lives of his converts. In other words, he was not satisfied with only a personal decision for Christ. His aim was that the full life of Christ be worked out in each individual.

This approach has many implications for our personal involvement in evangelism. First, it extends our responsibility and concern beyond mere verbal proclamation aimed to provide a quick decision.

Second, it implies that we, as Christ’s witnesses, can most effectively reach others if we are rooted in Christ
and in solid Christian relationships. The more we evangelize out of the context of strong Christian relationships, the more effective we are in reaching others. Not only do we have more resources to rely on, but our own lives will witness to the joy of redeemed relationships. We can genuinely say to others, “Come and see.”

Third, an accurate understanding of the full gospel message greatly increases our field of harvest. We are not only now considering these people who are avowedly non-Christian. Rather, our outreach includes the many thousands who perhaps profess Christ and yet are not solidly rooted or growing in Christ. Our harvest could accurately include many of those born-again adults who have failed to grow to Christian maturity. Evangelism then, can feasibly include anything from helping someone commit or recommit their life to Christ to introducing an isolated and weak Christian to a thriving Christian environment.

Our commission as Christians is thus both extensive and challenging. As members of the body of Christ, we are trying to bring others into the full life that Jesus alone can give. Within this supportive Christian environment, we can apply the principles of personal evangelism that will truly contribute to changing the world.

See > Part 6: Portrait of the Christian Ambassador

[This article is adapted from the book, Person to Person: How to be effective in evangelism, © 1984 by Jim Berlucchi, and published by Servants Books, Ann Arbor.]

Person to Person: How to Be Effective in Evangelism
by Jim Berlucchi

> Part 1: True “No Limit” Message
> Part 2: Everyday Evangelism
> Part 3: Be Open - Be Natural
> Part 4: Building Bridges
> Part 5: Authentic Evangelism
> Part 6: Portrait of the Christian Ambassador

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A Portrait of the Christian Ambassador

by Jim Berlucchi

Three qualities are essential for the Christian ambassador. When all is said and done, our success will largely be determined by our faith, our love for God, and our love for men and women.

**Faith**

The work of *evangelism depends primarily upon the action of God*. God is the One Creator and sustains the world. God himself who intervened in human history to save all men through the one man, Jesus Christ. He now lives in us through the Holy Spirit, whose power enables us to love and serve him. We enter into these realities through faith. Faith is the key for us. Faith in God and reliance upon his promises and power are essential for divine approval. We concur with the writer of Hebrews when he boldly declares that “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6a).

In our evangelistic endeavors, we, too, recognize with the psalmist that “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Ps 127:1). “Unless the Lord,” is the constant instinctive refrain of our hearts as we realize the immensity of our Christian commission, the meagerness of our abilities, and the immeasurable greatness of him who sends us forth. With the psalmist we can say, “Some boast of chariots, and some of horses but we boast in the name of
the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7). In this battle we do not trust in our bow, nor can our sword save us for “In God we have boasted continually” (Psalm 44:8a).

As we serve the Lord in evangelism, we labor by faith in him. Though we gain insight and expertise through experience, our ultimate trust is founded in the work of his own hand with the people we are serving. One of the foremost principles for fruitful evangelism is to pay first concern to what God seems to be initiating in someone’s life and then to cooperate with that lead. Such action is founded primarily in faith.

It is by faith that we decide to reach out to others. It is by faith that we are open about our Christian lives, that we invite friends and neighbors to share our lives, that we pray for them and take concern for them. By faith, too, we share the gospel with them, realizing that God’s word will change lives. Paul rejoiced that his disciples in the city of Thessalonica first responded to his words because they recognized God’s voice. “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Again, Paul emphasizes that God gave the growth in Corinth, even though Paul planted and Apollos watered. “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

Exercising faith for those around us can be challenging, particularly in light of some of the painfully obvious obstacles that prevent their spiritual progress. However, one of Satan’s primary strategies to make us ineffective is to discourage and dishearten us. He will bring to our mind all the things that seemingly cannot be overcome. If we focus solely on the obstacles, our confidence will plummet. Here is precisely where faith begins. By its very nature faith focuses not on what is seen, but on what is invisible. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:16). As we work with and pray for those who haven’t fully responded to God’s call, we should view them with the imagination of faith. We should visualize them in our minds’ eye precisely as God would have them be, not as they currently appear to be.

Trusting in God and knowing that our labor is not in vain releases God’s power and enables his servants to work in his peace.
Love of God

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (Deuteronomy 6:9).

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment” (Matthew 22:35-38).

Loving God wholly is the ultimate Christian ideal. It is why we were made. Our love for and pursuit of God will fuel our desire to see all people know and follow him.

It is no coincidence that the great evangelists through the ages have always demonstrated a sincere and loving devotion to God himself. This supreme love for Jesus Christ was the foundation for their evangelistic success. Likewise, we must root our evangelism within the context of our decision to love God above everything.

Anyone who would introduce Christ to another must first know Christ well himself. Anyone who would teach another to love Christ must love Christ first himself. The better one knows and loves his master, the more eager and competent he will be to show others the way.

As we direct every dimension of our lives toward loving and serving Jesus, we will, in fact, be increasingly eager to see his will done on earth. We will view those around us with God’s eternal perspective, rather than with our own limited view. As we deepen our contact with the living God, we will bring his wisdom, charity, and courage to bear in our daily situations. The more we love him, the more we will bear his image and likeness, his interests and strengths, his perception and concern. We will see others with his eyes and respond to them with his mercy.

To love the Lord with all our hearts is not a romantic aspiration that provokes primarily an emotional response. It is a decisive commitment to a commandment which should mobilize all our energies and resources. The response is practical, as we seek to surrender our time, money, desires, and relationships to the will and good pleasure of our Maker. To fulfill the commandment requires our allegiance to the person who stands behind it and dependence on his grace to see it realized.

As we love God in prayer, in the reading of his word, and in service, we will grow in the fruit of the Spirit. A fruit tree with deep roots, that is regularly pruned and nourished, bears the most attractive fruit. Likewise, just as we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we should “live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith” (Colossians 2:7). The fruit of the Spirit amply demonstrated in the life of a believer serves as an almost irresistible attraction to others. People want to be around and to be like one who embodies love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23). Such a person will draw others to Christ. We can demonstrate these qualities of character only to the degree that we are united to Christ.

Loving Others

The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet” and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself!” (Romans 13:9).
For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:14).

If you really fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well (James 2:8).

The third quality of the Christian ambassador is love for others. The dwelling of God is with man. Human beings are the focus of God’s intense love and concern. God so loved us that he became like us in all things except sin. If the life of Christ shows us anything, it most dramatically and refutably proves God’s love for men.

This second commandment sums up in seven words our obligation to others. This short phrase reflects remarkable psychological insight in directing us to love others as we love ourselves. All of us, by instinct, are concerned for our own need. Consider for a moment how thoroughly aware of our own needs we are. When we feel fatigue, hunger, or pain we eagerly seek relief. We are indignant when cheated, manipulated, violated, or rejected by others. We go to great ends to make life work well for ourselves and to fulfill our aspirations and desires. The orientation to love ourselves comes quite naturally.

If we take but a fraction of this self-love and direct it toward the needs of others, we move in the direction commanded by the Lord. He wants us to become increasingly aware of the needs of others and to demonstrate a readiness to serve them. The Son of Man himself came not to serve, but to be served, and to offer his life for the ransom of many (Mark 10:45). Our charge is to carry the burdens of our neighbors and to view their needs with genuine concern.

Jesus cited the Good Samaritan as an ideal example of a person who, in his act of service to another human being, fulfilled the second commandment.

Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So, too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

(Luke 10:30-37)

A brief analysis of the parable can alert us to loving others in our daily situations:

The Samaritan “as he traveled, came to where the man was.” The Samaritan was carrying out his own business when he came upon the man in distress. Likewise, we need not look around for all the needy people we can
find in order to fulfill the commandment. *The Lord will provide sufficient opportunities in the course of our routine daily life.*

The parable says, “and when he saw him.” The Samaritan perceived the man’s awful condition. May we too perceive the miserable condition of our fellow men and women. May we have eyes to see those around us who are ravaged by Satan, lying in sin, at the mercy of their circumstances. The first step in loving others as ourselves is simply to see them as they truly are.

The Samaritan “took pity on him.” His immediate response was pity. He wasn’t repulsed by the bleeding body, as perhaps the Levite had been. He wasn’t indifferent as perhaps the priest was. He responded with compassion. As we see the truly pathetic state of many around us, our response should be the same. It is this attitude which will give birth to appropriate action.

The Samaritan “went to him.” He took initiative. Unlike the priest and Levite who sidestepped the problem, the Samaritan faced it squarely. His pity translated into action and involvement. Likewise, we are called to respond to people and reach out toward them. We should take initiative rather than shrinking back in fear or timidity.

He “bandaged his wounds, pouring out oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.” What a beautiful description of personal service rendered at the cost of personal inconvenience, possessions, and time! With his own hands, cloth, wine, and oil the Samaritan helped the victim. The scripture says that the Samaritan loaded his own donkey with the bruised body. He further cared for him at an inn. Surely our love for others will normally carry a personal price tag.

“The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’” The Samaritan continued to serve at his personal expense and he had enough concern to follow up by insuring for the man’s proper care until his full recovery. He showed a readiness to serve beyond the immediate need. His commitment to the man was genuine and deep, not merely functional. It proceeded from a heart that reflected the intention of God.

As Christian witnesses, we, too, must have a genuine interest in the welfare of others. This compassion and readiness to serve people is essential for effective evangelism. Watchman Nee, a twentieth-century Chinese teacher and martyr, underscored this principle in an address on evangelism and love for men:

If you try to preach the gospel to the unsaved, but have never been touched by the words “God created man,” so that you approach men as your fellows; if you have never had more than a casual interest in men; then you are unfit to preach Christ as “a ransom for many.” It needs to dawn on us that God created man in His likeness and set His love on man because man was exceedingly precious to Him. Unless man becomes the object of our affection we cannot possibly become a servant of men . . .

Brothers and sisters, in the light of God’s passionate concern for man, can you still regard your fellows with indifference? We shall be worthless in His service unless our hearts are enlarged and our horizon is widened. We need to see the value God has set on man; we need to see the place of man in God’s eternal purpose; we need to see the meaning of Christ’s redemptive work. Without that, it is vain to imagine that you and I can ever have a share in the great work of God. How can anyone be used to save souls who does not love souls? If only this fundamental trouble
of our lack of love for men can be solved, our many other difficulties in relation to men will vanish. We think some people are too ignorant and we think others are too hard, but these problems will cease to exist when our basic problem of lack of love for men has been dealt with. When we cease to stand on a pedestal and learn to take our place as men among fellow-men, then we shall no longer disdain any. 1

As we grow in these attributes – faith, love of God, and love of neighbor, we will be increasingly useful to the Lord of the harvest. Methods amount to nothing without the Spirit and character of God as the foundation and power of our outreach. That comes with prayer and fellowship with the Spirit. May God grant us all the grace to be formed in his nature so that we may bear lasting fruit for him.


[This article is adapted from the book, Person to Person: How to be effective in evangelism, © 1984 by Jim Berlucchi, and published by Servants Books, Ann Arbor.]
Ambassador for Christ

I heard the Lord say, "I want you to be an ambassador for My Kingdom.

Brandt Haglund is an SPO Mission Leader, serving with Saint Paul's Outreach (SPO) since 2011. Here is a brief summary of his personal testimony and how he got involved with SPO.

My name is Brandt Haglund and I'm a work in progress. When I went to university my two aims were: I wanted to be successful and I wanted to have a lot of fun doing it. My goal was to be an ambassador to a foreign country. But I soon found myself immersed in the college party culture. Everybody on a college campus wants to be happy, but actually there is not a lot of happiness there. There's a lot of pain, a lot of hurt, and brokenness. From the outside it looked like I had everything really going for me. I was getting good grades, I had this great internship. On the outside I had a lot of friends - a ton of friends on facebook. But on the inside I felt like I didn't have friends. On the inside I was empty.

I met a guy who seemed like a pretty cool guy. He invited me to come to a party to hang out with a bunch of his friends. Little did I know, this wasn't your typical college party. It was a group of men and women from St. Paul's Outreach (SPO) hanging out together. It was one of the first times in my life where I encountered a group of Christians who were actually acting like what their faith talks about. After this encounter I came to the point where I cried out, "God, hey you, listen up. God, if there is a God, what do you want me to do, because I've tried doing this my way - it doesn't seem to be working. So I'm going to give you one chance! So, don't mess up."

One of my roomates was trying to encourage me to go on an SPO Fan into Flame retreat. He said that retreat would change my life and would provide a framework where I actually would have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. I realized that if God is real - if God exists - I would be able to align my life with the will of God.

God really began to change me from that point on...

When it was time to graduate, I thought it would ultimately be great to be an ambassador in a foreign country - I would have loved to have some sort of job like that. But instead of me saying, "God, this is what I want to do, you bless it." I really tried to say, "Here's my life, Lord. How can I serve you. What can I do for your kingdom How can I help build your kingdom here on earth?"

And I really sensed the Lord saying, "I want you to be an ambassador." And then I started thinking, "Yeah, that's what I want to be too. I want to be an ambassador. What do you want me to do with my life?" But then at the end, I heard the Lord say, "I want you to be an ambassador for My Kingdom. I figured that one of the best places I could be an ambassador for Christ was on one of the university
Jesus says, "There is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend." SPO doesn't even ask that you die. SPO asked if I would give two years of my life to be a missionary. I figured that's a pretty good deal right there.

I am grateful to God and to SPO for helping me to become the man I am today. Not only have I grown in my relationship with Jesus Christ and love for my Church, but as a missionary I have the best job in the world.
Critical Transition Stages for Moving Youth

Forward in Faith and Discipleship

by Michael Shaughnessy

The above diagram illustrates some key realities for working with youth. It is entitled The Youth Bridge because passing from age 12 to age 26 is like crossing a river filled with piranha and alligators. Many parents raise their children in the faith only to see them eaten alive by post-modern youth culture. Having the right youth bridge is more likely to produce a happy outcome than swimming the river.

A good bridge has all the right parts.

- Christian youth workers who pay attention to each individual, not just the program.
- High-impact events that provide the opportunity for conversion to Jesus Christ.
- Ongoing programs that help youth to grow into adult disciples.
- Good transitions from one program to the next. (Many young people are lost in transition, especially from high school to university.)
- Peers to support each other in their faith.
- Christian parents who encourage their children to become saints, missionaries, and martyrs.

A good bridge is essential during this period of life to complement the decreasing influence of the parents and rising independence of the youth. These two dynamics create a danger zone right at that transitional age! Teens are less directly controlled by their parents’ beliefs, but have not yet attained an adult faith. It is when they are most susceptible to the deception of the world.

Young children believe what they are told. They believe in Santa Claus, if the Santa Claus myth is passed on. They learn spelling and math, and, if they are brought up in a believing family, they believe what they are told about Christianity.
In early adolescence they begin to examine whether the beliefs they have been taught are true. As this occurs the direct influence of the parents decreases. This is normal and good. If your eleven year old asks you, “Can I stay up until 10:30 and watch an R-rated movie,” you would answer, “No, you are too young and that’s too late!” If your 26-year-old asks the same question, you would say: “Why are you asking me? You’re an adult, make up you own mind!”

Every child must cross the age bridge to become an adult. If that bridge is built right it helps our youth become strong in the faith.

Good youth work involves understanding the danger zone and building a bridge that spans the entire river.

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Battling Giants in the Land

Israel wandered in the desert for forty years because they feared “the giants in the land.” They believed “an evil report” about the sons of Anak and saw themselves as mere grasshoppers. The problem was not the existence of giants. It was the nonexistence of fight.

“It’s not the size of the dog in the fight, it’s the size of the fight in the dog.” - Mark Twain

Michael Shaughnessy is an elder in The Servants of the Word and the Director of Kairos in North America. Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school, university and post university aged people.
A number of years ago, a friend and co-worker came to me and said, “I need to talk to you about some serious questions that I have about the Catholic Church.” Al had been listening to a televangelist who had been systematically criticizing the various denominations, and apparently it was the Catholics’ turn. Al is a free-church assistant pastor with a number of Catholic friends. I was able to adequately address his concerns, and at the end of our discussion, I said, “Al, this was fun, but you have somehow missed the main issues!” He said, “Well, what are they?” My response was, “I’ll never tell!”

That is the subject of this article...not just for Catholics, but for the Christian churches in general. It is the case that the Christian churches drift in and out of the need for reform and renewal and even restoration. Even the first century church, which gets so many positive reviews, drifted in and out of trouble.

- **Ephesus:** “You do not love me now as you did at first.” Revelation 2:3 (Today’s English Version)
- **Smyrna:** “You are rich!” Revelation 2:9b (Today’s English Version)
- **Pergamum:** “There are a few things that I have against you.” Revelation 2:14 (Today’s English Version)
- **Thyatira:** “But this is what I have against you.” Revelation 2:20 (Today’s English Version)
- **Sardis:** “I know that you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead!” Revelation 3:1 (Today’s English Version)
- **Philadelphia:** “Because you have kept my command to endure...I love you.” Revelation. 3:10a, 9b (Today’s English Version)
- **Laodicea:** “But because you are lukewarm...You are poor, naked, and blind.” Revelation. 3:16-17c (Today’s English Version)

So, five of the seven churches mentioned needed something between renewal and restoration.

**What is needed?**

A group of 40-50 active Christians met to discuss and brainstorm the needs of the church in an attempt to identify the three greatest needs, and the range of input was remarkable. The activity itself assumes that one cares enough to
even ask the question! It also assumes that humans might be able to discern the mind and heart of God well enough to identify the right needs. Furthermore, if you look over the Lord’s complaints in Revelation, you’ll see a list with some variety, some personalized or localized shortcomings.

The short list generated in this article is intended to be general in its observation and application. It relies heavily on scripture, as well as quotes from Baptist and Catholic Church leaders.

1. Born Again

“I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” John 3:3 (New International Version)

Billy Graham has repeated this verse thousands of times to individuals, and to crowds of thousands and tens of thousands. It is the basis of the evangelical movement; it has been the theme of countless crusades, retreats, rallies, revivals, days of renewal, Bible studies, etc.

Pope Benedict XVI describes this as “when the person is struck and opened by Christ…” 1 Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko says, “…there is always a personal encounter with Christ.” He also says, “The greatest challenge facing the church (is) evangelization.” 2 Bishop Cordes laments, “(many) have been sacramentalized but not evangelized.” Andre Fossard exclaims, “God exists and I have experienced him!” 3

So, many Baptist, Catholic and other Christian leaders would agree that the number one need of the Christian church is the encounter with Christ; to be struck and opened, to be born anew; and born again to a new life in Christ: evangelism.

2. Discipleship/Formation

While many Christian leaders would agree on the number one need of the church, perhaps fewer would agree on my choice for number two: discipleship and formation. It is worth noting that the Billy Graham organization takes great care to ensure that new converts will be cared for locally before he agrees to do a crusade.

In speaking of the movements and new communities, Benedict XVI said, “It is their task to bring the message of Christ to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) and to make disciples of all men.” (Matthew 28:19). Bishop Rylko has said, “The first and greatest priority is, therefore, Christian formation.” 3 Bishop Rylko further quotes John Paul II as...
equating the making of disciples with two priorities: a “solid and deep formation” and a “strong testimony.” These are two areas in which the new ecclesial movements and new communities are producing stupendous fruits for the life of the church. These two groups have become true laboratories of faith and authentic schools of Christian life, holiness, and mission for thousands of Christians in every part of the World.”

3. An Environment of Discipleship

Evangelism and discipleship need an environment that teaches disciples “to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19). This is raising the issue of how people change and grow. We need teaching and instruction, and we also need training in which a more experienced brother helps us to apply a principle in practice (teaching them to observe: knowing and doing).

In addition to the one-on-one training and help, we need to be immersed in an environment that models and supports the Christian life. In this environment we witness the joy and the reality of the Christian life and we “absorb” it. The body of Christ is pastoral by its nature and is a part of the pastoral care that we receive.

Finally, the environment of discipleship is also supportive to the lives of the disciplers. Those who teach and give pastoral care will also need support and encouragement. Too many Christian ministries focus on a single, gifted person who may be in danger of collapsing under the stress, or “burning out.” In the Sword of the Spirit, our approach is more corporate and more environmental.

Covenant Love

Evangelism (conversion), discipleship (formation), and an environment of discipleship (community), are given here as the three greatest needs of the church. In my mind, a fourth is important: covenant (or covenant love). All great projects, achievements or civilizations are marked by serious commitment to the cause. Covenant characteristics are also noteworthy in Judeo-Christian history. In fact, before covenant was expressed in law and legal documents (deeds, etc.), it existed in the nature of God. Before there were an Old Covenant and a New Covenant, and before there was a covenant with Noah…there was a covenantal God! It is his nature to be loyal, faithful, reliable, consistent and true to his word. Commitment, it seems, does not scare him at all. He relishes it; he invites it; he models it; he initiates it.
Yet covenant, and covenant love are not frequent topics in Christian books and sermons. Why is that? Nothing is more repulsive to the flesh than being “locked in” or “decided.” We would always like to be doing what we “feel like” doing. Certain lawyers make a living by getting us out of clear agreements and commitments that we have made. The best phone plans are the ones where “no commitment is necessary.” After a while, we mistakenly attempt serious things (family life, starting a business, building the kingdom of God) with a “no commitment” attitude and those things are doomed to fail.

Covenant and covenant love are the glue that holds the discipleship environment together. The love of God is a constant. In desiring to be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect (Matthew 5:48), we intend to model his nature, and model his love to our brothers and sisters. We are “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5) and covenant love is the mortar that allows us to be built into a city on a hill (Matthew 5:14).

**Word**

God is a “man of His word.” He is faithful, his word is everlasting. His word, and his approach to it, defines the divine. His word is so essential, so crucial, so defining that he named his son the “Word of God.”

- “The Word was God.” John 1:1
- “And the Word became flesh.” John 1:14
- “The name by which he is called is the Word of God.” Revelation 19:13
- “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.” 1 John 5:7

**Summary**

In the Sword of the Spirit, we say we are a “community of disciples on mission.” In this short descriptive phrase, we can see those first three elements. The fact that our communities have lasted over forty years is at least an initial sign that the covenant love of God and the love of the brethren are in place.

This entire chapter is based on the assumption that the reader has some concern or questions about the needs of the church. Those who think everything is just fine will not be stirred by this discussion, while others may have a different list. When I first heard of the Baptism in the Spirit in 1970, I remember thinking, “I knew there was supposed to be more than what we were experiencing!” Something in me was expecting more. The scripture readings on Sundays always pointed to the hope of something more. There is more, much more, and we in the Sword of the Spirit are just scratching the surface of what the Lord has for us.

“There is an urgent need for a strong testimony and Christian formation. What great need there is of living Christian communities! This is where the ecclesial movements and new communities appear. They are the answer which has been raised up by the power of the Holy Spirit to the dramatic challenge at the end of the millennium. You are this providential answer.”

- Pope John Paul II

**Notes**

1. There are denominational differences about the “born again” experience versus the salvation reality which some say takes place
at baptism, others at accepting Christ. There are sacramental and experiential differ-ences and emphases.

3. *On Ecclesial Movements and New Communities* (resource M), Cardinal Rylko, Zenit Weekly News Analysis, April 1, 2006; section 3, para. 6
4. Ibid, section 1, para. 1
5. Ibid, section 3, para. 7
“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed.” With these words, St. Paul begins Chapter 12 of his first letter to the Corinthians. He wants them to have information about spiritual gifts. He wants the Corinthians to understand what spiritual gifts are and how they should function in the life of the Church. He is concerned because he knows that spiritual gifts can be a great source of strength to the Church, as well as an occasion of trouble.

It is hard to know what St. Paul would write to the Church today. He did not want to have the Corinthians uninformed, but few Catholics today know much about what he wanted the Corinthians to know. Few understand what spiritual gifts are or their place in the life of the Church. Now that there is a renewal in the use of spiritual gifts among Catholics and many are experiencing prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, and the rest, it has become even more important to understand the place of these “manifestations of the Spirit” in the life of the Church.

By and large, we Catholics have a less difficult time with spiritual gifts than most Protestants have. Many Protestants do not believe that miracles happened after the death of the last apostle. Yet Catholics expect to have them occur in every century and every land. Our lives have been filled with stories of the supernatural works of the saints and the miracles that occur at the shrines. We have not forgotten that God heals directly, that he speaks through prophecies, that extraordinary events accompany his work.

The Catholic Church has also preserved in its teaching the importance of spiritual gifts. Thomas Aquinas, in the Summa Theologiae (in the section on “Graces Freely Given”) taught that Christians need spiritual gifts, because
Christian revelation contains truths above the power of man to know. Consequently, a Christian needs special gifts from God to know Christian truth and preach it, and he needs to have his preaching accompanied by signs so that others will believe.

Even in our own time, the Church at the Vatican Council taught Christians that they should expect spiritual gifts. In the *Decree on the Lay Apostolate* (section 3) the Council Fathers say:

“For the exercise of this apostolate (of evangelism) the Holy Spirit who sanctifies the people of God through the ministry and the sacraments, gives to the faithful special gifts as well (cf. I Corinthians 12:7), ‘allotting to everyone according as he will’ (I Corinthians 12:11). Thus may the individual according to the gifts that each has received, administer it to one another and become ‘good stewards of the manifold grace of God’ (I Cor 4:10) and build up the whole body in charity (cf. Ephesians 4:16). From the reception of these charisms or gifts, including those which are less dramatic, there arises for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of mankind and for the upbuilding of the Church.”

Something similar is stated in the *Constitution on the Church* (section 12). The fact that the Council fathers emphasize what are called the less dramatic gifts, indicates that they also expect the more dramatic gifts, the kind Paul talks about in I Corinthians 12.

Moreover we know from the Bible that we should expect these gifts. At the end of the gospel of Mark, the risen Christ says to the Apostles:

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

Or St. Paul says in I Corinthians 13:

“Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues they will cease; as for knowledge it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect, and our prophecy is imperfect, but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.”

“The coming of the perfect” must mean the second coming. It is certainly not referring to anything that has happened yet (which orthodox Christian has yet suggested that the perfect has come and we see face to face?). Until Christ comes we can expect the spiritual gifts.

As Catholics, we should expect to see spiritual gifts in the life of the Church. And it should not surprise us to know that they are becoming as frequent as they were in New Testament times. We know that if the Church is to be renewed and if the world can ever be led to Christ, there is going to be needed a special work of the Holy Spirit. It was this realization that guided Pope John when he prayed for the Vatican Council, “Renew your wonders this day as by a new Pentecost.”

**What Are the Spiritual Gifts?**

St. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapters 12–14 about spiritual gifts, and if we want to understand
more fully what spiritual gifts are and how they should be used we can study these chapters. These chapters are his special instructions about spiritual gifts to the Church at Corinth, a Church he had founded. He begins the whole section by talking about the spiritual gifts he has in mind: the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits, various kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues.

At this point we Catholics sometimes get confused. We know something about spiritual gifts, but we were taught in the catechism class that there are only seven of them: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, piety, fortitude, and fear of the Lord. To understand what Paul is talking about we need to understand that there are different types of spiritual gifts. The seven gifts are gifts that come along with the Spirit for the strengthening of each individual Christian. The nine gifts that St. Paul is talking about are sometimes called charismatic gifts, and are a different type of gift. As we consider what they are we will see how they differ from the seven gifts.

One way in which St. Paul describes the nine gifts that he is talking about is as “manifestations” of the spirit. In other words, when we see a spiritual gift operating, we realize that the Spirit is at work. A spiritual gift makes us aware of his presence. When, for instance, we see someone healed miraculously, or when we hear a prophecy, we know that the Spirit is present and at work. When someone is present at a manifestation of the Spirit it is hard to even think that God is dead.

Spiritual gifts also make us aware of God’s power. They manifest his ability to change the world. A man recently said that he was praying the rosary, and he was wondering whether Mary’s prayers had any special effect. He began to doubt whether praying the rosary would do any good, whether it was worth the effort. And then he suddenly began to think of Lourdes and of the extraordinary cures at Lourdes. “Then,” he said, “it seemed stupid to wonder about the power of Mary’s intercession.” This man’s reaction shows the kind of effect a real spiritual gift can have. It has an even greater effect when we are actually present. If we see a deaf boy healed, or if we are given a prophecy and see it fulfilled, we are reassured in an even deeper way that God’s power is great enough to do all things. That is why St. Paul speaks of Christians as having “tasted the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:5).

The spiritual gifts, then, are manifestations of God’s presence and power. That is why it would be a mistake to say that the gift of healing is what doctors have or the gift of tongues is the ability to speak a foreign language (that you learned in school) or the gift of interpretation is what Berlitz translators have. All these things may in a certain sense be gifts of God, but they are not the kind of spiritual gifts that Paul is talking about. If I were to try to tell a non-Christian doctor that his medical skill was a spiritual gift and a manifestation of the Spirit and that therefore he should become a Christian, he would reply that he could not see that it had anything to do with the Spirit. He learned it in school. Moreover, if that was a manifestation of the Spirit, it was an excellent proof that you could have all the spiritual gifts there are without any faith in Christ at all. Christian belief, according to his view, would be of no value in obtaining gifts of the Spirit.

It is clear what St. Paul meant when he talked about gifts of healing, for instance. He himself healed people instantaneously, not by using healing, medically, but by a simple command (Acts 14:8). And it was a manifestation for the people that the power of God was present. And it is clear that when he talks about the gift of tongues, he is not speaking about a foreign language that he understands, but he is talking about speaking in a language he does not understand (I Corinthians 14:14).

As he begins to talk about the spiritual gifts, St. Paul gives us a list of the kind of gifts that he has in mind. There are other lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament (Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Peter 4:10-11 and they are not the same as the list in I Corinthians 12:4-11, so it is probable that St. Paul was not trying to give a complete list of all the spiritual gifts. But he does give us enough examples of spiritual gifts that we can understand what he is talking
Teaching Gifts

The first two gifts which St. Paul mentions are teaching gifts: the utterance of wisdom (sometimes translated: “the word of wisdom.”) and the utterance of knowledge (sometimes translated: “the word of knowledge”). They are special inspirations by which God works through one person to give understanding to another person or to a group of people. A person who is given an utterance of wisdom or an utterance of knowledge can then give a lesson (an instruction or an explanation) in the Christian assembly (I Corinthians 14:26) or perhaps a special word of advice or instruction to a particular person. The New Testament in great part, especially the epistles, is made up of utterances of wisdom and knowledge, inspired teaching.

The utterance of wisdom probably refers to something different from the utterance of knowledge. The utterance of wisdom is concerned with the best way to live. It is an expression of God’s guidance in how to live as a Christian. When Christ spoke to the rich young man and advised him to sell his possessions and follow him (Mark 10:20), he was giving him a word of wisdom. Or when Peter spoke in the Council of Jerusalem and said that the Gentiles should not have to follow the full Mosaic Law, he was given an utterance of wisdom by God. Or much of what St. Paul said in I Corinthians 12–14 would be examples of the utterance of wisdom, practical spiritual teaching. The utterance of knowledge on the other hand, is more what we would call doctrinal teaching. It is the Spirit inspiring someone to speak an understanding of a truth of the mystery of Christ. Christ’s teaching about the relationship between the Father and the Son in Luke 10:22 would be an example of the utterance of knowledge as would the first chapter of Ephesians where Paul teaches the Ephesians about God’s plan.

St. Paul, when he is speaking about the utterance of knowledge almost certainly does not mean a special knowledge of facts that a person could not have known otherwise. I have been present and seen a person filled with the Spirit tell another person something about his past that he could not have known or tell us what is happening in a room that he was not present in. These things happen often, but they are not what St. Paul is referring to by “the utterance of knowledge.” When such a thing happened in the New Testament, people considered it an indication that a person was a prophet (John 4:16-19, Luke 7:39), but they did not consider it “knowledge,” a word which in the New Testament is used to describe knowledge of God and the mysteries of God.

The utterance of wisdom and knowledge are spiritual gifts that work through the understanding. The Spirit inspires a person to understand a truth, to understand things the way God understands them and then to speak about them. There is a difference between natural understanding, acquired by study, and inspired understanding. Inspired understanding feeds the spirit in a way that natural understanding cannot, because it is a manifestation of the presence of the Spirit in a person. It makes a deep change in people, giving them an increase of spiritual life.

I remember once being present when a Christian teacher spoke about the love of God. Even while he spoke, I had a sense of the presence of God and was praying while I was listening to his words. When he finished, there was a change in the whole room. People had come to life, and there was a new sense of the presence of the Spirit. Even though what he had to say was not naturally very impressive, everyone knew that God spoke through him.

Another time I was present while a mature Christian was speaking to a young man who had just received the baptism of the Spirit. He was explaining how to live the Christian life, and I could see by the expression on the young man’s face that his life was being changed by those words. Moreover, the older man did not know the younger man as well as I did, and I am sure that he could not have known how appropriate what he was saying was for that particular man. The Spirit, however, was working through his mind to instruct a new Christian. When I asked him later how he let these gifts operate, he said that when he felt the presence of the Spirit trying to use him, he yielded his mind to
The Spirit and he “saw” what to say and how to say it. He said that very often in such a situation, he would learn as much as the person he was speaking to, and that he often found himself knowing things that he had never studied or thought through.

Sign Gifts

The next three gifts which St. Paul mentions could be called sign gifts: faith, gifts of healing, and the working of miracles. They are gifts which manifest the power of God in the world in a particularly striking way. They call attention to God’s reality, and so they bring people to a knowledge of God. The words of Christ at the end of the gospel of Mark tell us that this is God’s way of confirming the truth of the message (as Aquinas pointed out, such confirmation is important if men are to be able to accept the truth of something that is beyond human reason):

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons. They will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover... And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it.”

I was present at a Kathryn Kuhlman “evangelistic” service in Los Angeles one summer, and there I saw the power of the spiritual gifts to bring men to Christ. The message at the service was simple, without a great deal of power to it. But much of the meeting was devoted to prayer for God to heal people. Early in the service a couple of men spoke who had been healed the time before. One had been healed of crippling arthritis (as he put it, “I couldn’t even weed my garden, it was so bad”). Another man had been cured of terminal cancer and had his doctor with x-rays taken a week apart to show the authenticity of the cure. Neither of the men was a Christian when he was cured. In the course of that service about 35 people came forward and said that they were cured of a variety of things. A young boy had been deaf in one ear and was supposed to be operated on that week to have his eardrum sealed up, and now he could hear; a couple of people were cured of arthritis; a woman whom I had seen before her cure, on crutches and in a large brace, was able to move around and walk normally for the first time since an automobile accident nine years before. At the end of the service, when the woman who was leading it asked how many men wanted to become Christians, about 150 men filled the front of the auditorium to commit their lives to Christ, and there were probably even more women who could not find a place.

We have seen such things happen for many years. The shrine at Lourdes is the source of accounts of people who have turned to Christ, because they have seen the power of God operate in extraordinary ways. The lives of the saints like Francis and Anthony and Vincent Ferrer contain stories of miracles which converted whole towns. When men see the power of God do something extraordinary, they do wonder, and they do turn to God. When they can see him at work in the world in a way that goes beyond what human beings by themselves can do, they recognize the need to confront him.

The sign gifts, then, are the working of the Spirit in power through certain Christians, so that men might know the truth of the Christian message. The first of these, the gift of faith, is not the same as the faith by which all Christians believe and turn to Christ. That is given to all Christians, not just to “another.” That kind of faith is what makes men Christians. This kind of faith is a special spiritual gift.

The charismatic gift of faith seems to be a special gift of prayer. It is a gift of praying with a God-given confidence, and it produces extraordinary results. The person who prays with faith knows through the work of the Spirit in him that what he asks for will be given. It is the kind of faith which Christ was speaking about when he said in the gospel
of Mark (Mark 11:23), “Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.”

The gift of faith is what the prophet Elijah had when he confronted the prophets of Baal. He challenged them to a contest. Whoever’s God would send down fire from heaven to consume a burnt offering would be the God of Israel. The prophets of Baal went through every rite they could to get Baal to burn the offering, with no results at all. Elijah, on the other hand, first drenched the offering with water so that there would be no doubt about the power of the Lord, and then he simply prayed, knowing God would answer. And he did. Such faith is God-given. No matter how a man would try to work himself into such faith he could not do it.

The gifts of healing are different from the power of prayer for healing which is part of the ordinary life of the Christian community. Christians pray for one another for a variety of things and see results. In our community, we have seen people cured of migraine headaches which they have had for years, of colds and flu, of epileptic seizures. Not every prayer has been answered, but we have seen more than can be explained just by accident. Moreover, the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has always been a normal part of the life of the Church, and since the recent outpouring of the Spirit, I know of at least one person who was given up as hopeless, who improved right after receiving the sacrament and is well today. Most priests can tell stories of the differences the sacrament has made. These things are part of the normal life of the Christian community.

There are, however, people who seem to have a special gift of healing. When they pray for healing, results happen, and they happen with greater frequency and with more extraordinary effects than happen with other people. The Spirit works through them to produce “works of power,” to produce “things for people to be astonished at,” to produce miracles. These people have a special spiritual gift, probably because God wishes to use them to bring others to know Christ.

Revelational Gifts

The next four gifts are gifts which could be called revelational gifts: prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits (sometimes called discernment of spirits), various kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. These are gifts by which God makes known something about the present situation to his people.

Discernment of spirits has been called the protection of the Christian community. This is the gift which allows a man to “distinguish between spirits,” to tell whether an evil spirit is at work in a person or a situation or whether it is the Holy Spirit or whether it is just a man’s own spirit. This is probably the work of the Spirit by which Peter “saw” that Simon was “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity” when he tried to buy the power to confer the Spirit (Acts 8:23), or by which Paul could “see” that the Holy Spirit had given the cripple the faith to be made well (Acts 14:9).

Discernment of spirits is a kind of vision or a sense. One person described to me how the gift of discernment worked with him by saying that he often could almost see the presence of the Holy Spirit in power like a glow. I asked him what he could discern in some people that he did not know but whom I did know. Like Paul he “peered intently” and then gave me a description of those people that I knew to be accurate and which was beyond the power of even extraordinary psychological sensitivity. Another man once told me how in talking to a girl, he was aware that what was holding her back in turning to Christ was the influence (not possession) of an evil spirit. As he put it, he could just sense that that was what the cause was, without knowing her. His discernment was proven true by the marked change in her attitude toward Christ after he prayed with her for deliverance from the influence of the evil spirit (and she did not realize that he had prayed for her that way, because he prayed in a foreign language). In other words, discernment is a spiritual revelation of the operation of different types of spirits in a person or situation, a means by
which God makes Christians aware of what is happening.

Prophecy is a gift by which God speaks through a person a message to an individual or to the whole Christian community. It is God making use of someone to tell men what he thinks about the present situation or what his intention is for the future, or what he thinks they should know or be mindful of right now. Prophecy is not necessarily for prediction of the future (although this frequently happens). Paul describes some of the uses of prophecy by saying in I Corinthians 14:3, “He who prophesies, speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” It is God speaking now to his people, words which are intended to reveal his present attitude.

In the Catholic Church today, people use the term prophecy in many different senses. In the Council documents in many places, it is used to describe any speaking of Christ’s message to the world. When the word is used in this sense, teaching is a type of prophecy. When a bishop or priest teaches, for instance, he is exercising a prophetic role. Another popular use of the term is that of prophecy as reading the signs of the times or judging the present situation. There are many today who would consider themselves to be exercising a prophetic role because they condemn many current situations in the name of what Christ has revealed.

The term prophecy can be used in many ways, but when Paul is using the term prophecy, he is probably using it in a way that would not allow a person to call teaching or judging the present situation prophecy. He is probably referring to the type of speaking that occurred when one of the prophets at Antioch stated that Paul and Barnabas were to be set aside for apostolic work (Acts 13:2) or when Agabus foretold that there would be a great famine (Acts 11:28) or when Agabus predicted how Paul would be taken prisoner (Acts 21:1). These prophecies were given as messages from God. They are given in the words of God (the speaker speaks in the first person). That they are more than just human speech is indicated by the accuracy of the predictions and by the fact that the prophet gives directions from God, something that would be sheer presumption if God himself were not speaking. It is clear that not all prophecies are like this. The book of Acts only reports some of the more extraordinary prophecies, but these are enough to indicate that when the New Testament speaks of prophecy, it uses the word in a special sense to indicate direct messages from God.

Speaking a prophecy is more than a person just saying something that happens to be on his mind as a message from God. The prophet receives a special “anointing,” an urging to speak. He realizes that he has a message from God, although often he does not know what it is until he actually yields to God and begins to speak. To the degree he yields to God, to that degree his message will be pure. A prophetic message is different from a teaching. A man gives a teaching with his understanding. He sees the truth of what he is saying. A prophet may not understand what he is saying, and he can never “see” that this is God’s message right now. He has received a revelation, a message from God.

Prophecy can be very effective in building up the Christian community. It is clear from I Corinthians 14 that prophecy was very common in the early Church. The Church at Corinth apparently had so many messages that there had to be a certain order in giving them (I Corinthians 14:29-32). When a prophecy is given at a gathering of Christians, it has a powerful effect in drawing them to God and deepening their sense of the presence of God. Prophecies are also an effective way of God’s directing his people. In the last year in our work on campus, God predicted through prophecy that we would have a major change in our situation (leaving one position and moving to another), that he would begin soon to bring many people to the prayer meetings at Ann Arbor and throughout Michigan, that he would give us a period of trials, and that he would end that period of trials and again bring many people and a deeper life in the Spirit. Each time, the prophecies turned out to be literally true, and the guidance given in the prophecies about how to confront these coming situations turned out to be a great help.
Speaking in tongues can be two different things. First of all, it can be a gift of prayer for an individual (I Corinthians 14:14). This is the more common gift of tongues, but I will not go into it here. Speaking in tongues can also be a gift for the community when the Spirit urges someone to speak out loud in tongues for the community. In this case, the speaking in tongues should have an interpretation, so that the whole community can understand what is happening. The experience of giving interpretations is similar to the experience of prophecy. The interpreter, like the speaker in tongues, does not understand the tongues (I Corinthians 14:2, 14). In other words, the gift of interpretation is not a gift of translation. It is an urging to speak words which are given.

Speaking in tongues just means speaking in languages. As is clear from Acts and I Corinthians 12–14, it was common for the Spirit to give Christians other languages to speak in which they did not understand. And it is still common today. I was talking to a man about a year and a half ago who told me of an experience that he had had a couple of years back. He went with a choir to a church to give a performance, and many of the choir members had received the baptism of the Spirit. During the concert, at a moment of silence, one of the choir members spoke in tongues and then another one gave the interpretation. The rest of the choir was embarrassed because they were afraid that the audience would not understand. But it turned out that the right afterwards, the pastor of the church turned to the choir director and asked her if she knew the men. When she replied that she did, he asked her if they knew Hebrew. When she replied that they did not he told her that he knew Hebrew and that the first man had given a message in perfect high Hebrew and that the second man had given an almost literal translation of the message. It was enough, to convince the pastor of the validity of the gift of tongues.

The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

There are more workings of the Spirit than those Paul enumerates in I Corinthians 12:4-11. But these are enough to give us an idea of what spiritual gifts can be. In a community in which spiritual gifts operate, Christians are much more vividly aware of the presence and power of God.

Paul says in I Corinthians 12:7: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Another translation might be that to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for usefulness. Spiritual gifts have a very pragmatic purpose. They are given to build up the community. This is the difference between the seven gifts and the nine charismatic gifts. The seven gifts are given with the Spirit for the building up of the individual, of his relationship with God. The charismatic gifts are given so that the individual can do something for the community.

One term which Paul uses to describe the gifts is “service” (I Corinthians 12:5). Looked at from this perspective the gifts are a service for the community. In fact, the term “gift” is somewhat misleading. The gifts are not gifts to the individual Christian. They are gifts through the individual Christian to the community. For the individual Christian they are a service, a service he can perform for the community. When he makes himself available to God to be used, he performs a service for the community.

It is no accident that the idea of the “body of Christ” is found in the New Testament at its earliest date in passages that are concerned mainly with charismatic gifts (I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12). The idea very likely first came to Paul or some early Christian when he was trying to explain how the spiritual gifts operated in a Christian community, a local Church. “All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (Romans 12:4). In other words, in the Church, different Christians are the channels for different gifts. One prophesies, another heals, another speaks in tongues. And yet all these things are the work of the Spirit, and they all work together for the building up of the community. It is much like the different members of the body. The foot, the hand, the eye, all have different functions, and yet they all make one body and they all work together to build up the one body.
It is clear that in I Corinthians 12-14 Paul is trying to teach the Corinthians how to use the spiritual gifts with love, in harmony, without envy or jealousy or conflict. No one is to envy the other, or to disdain the other, but they are to be as conscious of their dependence on one another as the different members of one body. But in making this point, Paul brings out in a vivid way an important truth about the charismatic gifts — that they are for the upbuilding of the community. They are not primarily for an individual’s benefit, but they are for the benefit of the whole Christian community. They are the way an individual can perform a service to the community — by putting himself at God’s disposal to be used in one of his “workings.”

The charismatic gifts, then, are intended to equip a Christian for service in the community. They are intended to equip him with the power of God so that he can work in the community with God-given ability to strengthen the community. That is why Paul ends the chapter with the paragraph on apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. These are the various services Christians can perform in the community. These are stable positions within a community. But in order for a person to truly perform one of these functions in the power of God, he has to have the spiritual gifts which equip him to do what these positions call for. In other words, any Christian community needs a certain number of functions to be performed, and God offers spiritual power, spiritual equipment through the spiritual gifts, for those functions to be performed. Moreover, the whole purpose of the giving of spiritual gifts is so that an individual Christian might be ready to perform a service, to carry out a function within the community.

One way of summarizing the spiritual gifts is to say that the spiritual gifts are like tools or resources. They are the equipment of God for the work he has given Christians to do in the world. Christians need the power of God to do the work of God, because the work of God is something beyond human ability. The spiritual gifts are the empowering of Christians to do God’s work — to teach, to speak his message, to perform signs of his presence. They are the Holy Spirit working through men to renew the face of the earth.

The Spiritual Gifts and Holiness

Strange as it may seem, before becoming acquainted with the new movement of the Spirit in the Church, it never occurred to me that I Cor. 13 came between I Corinthians 12 and I Corinthians 14. It sounds obvious when you say it that way, but I had never thought of it. I was not used to reading First Corinthians 13 in context. I, like most Catholics, knew chapter 13 as the great hymn to love. But I did not realize that Paul wrote that chapter to explain to the Corinthians how to use the spiritual gifts. I did not realize that the whole point of the chapter was to say that spiritual gifts are to be used in a loving way to build up the community.

First Corinthians 13 contains much wisdom that is important for the proper understanding of spiritual gifts. It is also frequently misunderstood because it is not read in context. Paul begins by saying, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” In this opening section Paul is not playing down spiritual gifts at all. He is not even saying that spiritual gifts are valueless if I do not have love (a healing by God’s power is after all a healing by God’s power). Rather he is saying that I am nothing if I do not love. He is making a simple point in a forceful way; namely, that there is a difference between charismatic power and holiness, and that holiness is the measure of a person, not charismatic power.

The same point is made in a passage in the seventh chapter of Matthew. “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many
‘And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’” This is a passage that came home to me with a new force after acquaintance with the new work of the Spirit, because I found that I could take it quite literally. And what Christ is saying is sobering. He is not saying that they did not really prophesy or cast out demons or do miracles in his name. Rather, he is saying that that is not what makes a man a genuine disciple of his (someone he “knows”). What makes a man a genuine disciple of his is doing his father’s will, holiness.

It is not uncommon for people to say, when they see Paul’s exhortation in I Corinthians 12:31 to “earnestly desire the higher gifts,” that the gift that they want is love. But to say that or to describe love as the “greatest gift of all” is either to miss the point or to obscure what Paul is saying. In this section Paul does not consider love one of the spiritual gifts. Rather, he calls it “a way.” And in Galatians 5:22 he describes it as a fruit of the Spirit along with “joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Love, in other words, is not one of the spiritual gifts, one of the tools to build up the life of the Christian community. It is the very life of the Christian community itself. It is the way in which Christians must walk. It is what they must aim at.

To say that Paul does not describe love as a gift is not to say that there is no sense in which love is a gift. It is the effect of the Holy Spirit living in us. Paul conveys that idea by using the term “fruit of the Spirit” (something that grows in a person’s life from living the life of the Spirit). But it is to say that love is not a gift in the same sense that prophecy or healing is. A person can prophesy or heal just by allowing the Spirit to work through him. But he loves by growing in holiness, by surrendering his heart and will to God, by growing into maturity of Christian character.

There is a relationship between holiness and the spiritual gifts. The spiritual gifts are not a sign of holiness. They are not a merit badge for spiritual achievement. Rather they are equipment for working to build up the Christian community in holiness. They are often given to beginners so that growth is possible for themselves and for the community that they are a part of. Perhaps the more extraordinary workings of the Spirit are only entrusted to those who are more mature in Christian character, but the whole of First Corinthians 12–14 is instructions for the use of spiritual gifts for Christians who need much more growth in love.

**Seeking Spiritual Gifts**

Paul says at the beginning of I Corinthians 14, “Make love your aim and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” This is the second time he urges the Corinthians to “earnestly desire” the spiritual gifts. He has an attitude which is much different from many modern Christians who are often reluctant to have spiritual gifts. Paul goes so far as to command the Corinthians to seek spiritual gifts.

Paul’s attitude toward seeking spiritual gifts makes a great deal of sense if we understand what they are for. If they really are God’s equipment for the building up of the Church, they are really valuable to have. In these days in which the Church seems to be losing ground in the world and in which so much of the life of the Church seems to be weakening and losing vitality, God’s power is needed desperately. It would not make sense for a carpenter to forego a hammer and try to use his fist or for a writer to forego a pen or a typewriter. They know they need them for effectiveness in their work. And we need the spiritual gifts, because we need the fullness of God’s working among us, the fullness of the power he will put at our disposal.

The scripture does not say a great deal about how a person can obtain spiritual gifts. But the advice to seek the gifts is actually excellent advice on how to obtain them. Perhaps the biggest obstacle to our having them is not being open to them, not wanting them. There are, I think, a couple of reasons why this is so. One of them is fear of God. Many people do not want the spiritual gifts, because that brings God too close for comfort. It is one thing to think of God in heaven or as the creator. It is even safe to think of his providence, for that means that everything is God working
and there is no need to confront God directly apart from dealing with things. And it is safe to think of him as speaking in the scriptures, because we can read those when we want to and absorb them as we want to. But when God starts healing my next door neighbor and speaking to me in prophecy, that is a more frightening thing. That means that I have to confront him more immediately than ever before, and it might become obvious that I have not surrendered fully to him.

Another reason for not wanting spiritual gifts is the desire to do things ourselves. Being used for a spiritual gift involves yielding to God and letting him work through you. There is a certain self-denial involved. There is a surrendering of control and a devaluing of my natural abilities. It seems like a less glorious thing to let God work through me to convert the world than to actually go out and convert the world myself. To be the instrument of a working of God is a humbling thing, and we often have an inner resistance to being humbled.

Another clue which Paul gives to obtaining spiritual gifts is in Galatians 3:5, where Paul asks the Galatians the question, “Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” And he apparently is referring to a common experience of the Galatians, because he is using the experience of seeing miracles through faith as a proof that it is not law which justifies a man.

Faith, then, is a means to obtaining the spiritual gifts, perhaps *the* means. Faith means that we know, first of all, that these things are possible, because we realize that Christ promised them to us. And then it means asking for them with expectancy, being willing to count on them happening. Peter would never have walked on the water if he had not had enough faith to actually step out upon it. And he stopped walking on the water when he started looking at the wind and the waves and started being afraid that it would not happen any longer.

God has a great deal in store for us, a great deal that we really need. But we need to be fully open to him. We need to be ready for everything he is willing to do, in fact earnestly desiring him to do more and more among us, for him to increase and for us to decrease. And we need to have faith, faith that his promises are still good. Then we will begin to see the spiritual gifts appearing among us and in our own lives.

**Why Now?**

Catholics do not find it difficult to believe that God does give prophecies and miracles, discernment of spirits and healing. But they do not expect to see them around commonly. Padre Pio in Italy or at the shrine of Lourdes maybe, but not my next door neighbor, especially not my next door neighbor with the raspy voice and the irritating habit of slamming the garage door. A prophet should have a certain prophetic look, and a miracle worker should certainly have some kind of glow.

It must be admitted that there is something new about the new movement of the Spirit compared to what we Catholics have been accustomed to. It is new not because of the spiritual gifts, but because the spiritual gifts seem to be given much more commonly, and to ordinary people — not only to monks and nuns, but workers and housewives, lawyers and students. They are being given now, in fact, much the same way as they were given to the Christians in New Testament times. Why now?

The fathers of the Church noticed in the fourth century that there seemed to be a difference between their Church and the Church of the Acts of the Apostles in the frequency of spiritual gifts. John Chrysostom in his homilies on First Corinthians put it this way:

“Yes, the Church was then a heaven. The Holy Spirit reigned as its master, and inspired directly each
of its ministers. Today, we have been left with nothing more than the symbols and signs of these gifts. In fact, in our own present day also, we speak in turn, two or three, and when one becomes silent, the other begins. But this is only the vestige and memorial of what used to happen.”

The reasons they gave for the departing of the spiritual gifts in their age are also clues to why they are returning in our age.

The first reason for the lack of spiritual gifts is given by St. Cyril of Jerusalem in his discussion of First Corinthians, Chapter 14:

“When we shall have the proper dispositions of faith, hope, and charity in regard to God and our brethren…we shall receive an abundance of the charisms of God.”

Cyril is saying that the disappearance of the spiritual gifts is our fault. We lack the right disposition to God which makes them possible. And this is probably one reason why the spiritual gifts are becoming more common. With more and more people receiving the baptism of the Spirit, they are receiving a renewal in the life of the Spirit of the kind that makes it possible for God to work through them in the way he did for the early Christians.

The second reason for the lack of spiritual gifts is given by St. John Chrysostom in his commentary on the Acts (chapter 2):

“In the beginning the faith had to be spread throughout the world. Since it was new and weak, like a young tree, it needed special care from the farmer to enable its expansion and growth. So God granted the miraculous gifts, but these are no longer necessary.”

Chrysostom is saying that the reason for the disappearance of the spiritual gifts is God’s fault. He gave them to get things started, and now that the Church is established, he is taking them away. And this is also probably a reason why the spiritual gifts are returning. It is obvious that we are in an age of crisis for the Church. Unbelief is increasing in the world. There is a loss of faith within the Church. Christians everywhere are becoming uneasy, wondering where God is. The Church needs the spiritual gifts now as much as it did in the first centuries to meet the challenge of our unbelieving, technological society.

The last word has to be: it is a mystery. But as in every Christian mystery, there is a human aspect and a divine aspect. If we wish to see God at work in the way he acted in the early Church, we have to go deeper into the life of the Spirit. If we do not, the absence of God’s gifts in the world is our fault. But it is also true that God is not tied down by us, and right now, almost despite us, he is renewing his Church with spiritual power to meet the challenge of this age.

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Gifts of the Kingdom for Power Evangelism and Service

“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” - Acts 2:4

Yielding to the Gifts of the Spirit

and removing blocks that hold us back from exercising them

a discussion guide for small groups

by Don Schwager

“Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy”

– 1 Corinthians 14:1

The power of God’s kingdom

The gifts of the Spirit enable people to experience the presence and power of God in their personal lives. They are supernatural manifestations of God’s kingdom here and now. When Jesus began his mission he announced the coming of God’s kingdom:

“The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent, and believe the Gospel (Good News)” (Mark 1:15).

The Lord Jesus demonstrated the power of God’s kingdom through the signs and wonders he performed – his numerous healings, miracles, exorcisms, and prophetic words of knowledge as he revealed the hearts and intentions of the people he met. All of these supernatural signs and wonders had one aim – to open the hearts of people to an experiential encounter with God and his personal love and compassion for them.

Jesus speaks to a skeptical Jew

We can see examples in the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ prophetic words of knowledge for individuals that he
chose to reveal himself to in a direct and personal encounter. When Jesus first met Nathaniel, a skeptical Jew who questioned whether the Messiah could come from Nazareth, Jesus spoke a personal word of revelation that only Nathaniel could recognize as a true sign that Jesus was indeed the one true Messiah sent from God. When Jesus said, “I saw you under the fig tree,” Nathaniel answered, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel." (John 1:48-49).

Encounter with a Samaritan woman
When Jesus met a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, he spoke a personal word of revelation to her. That word opened her heart to recognize that he was indeed the Messiah and Savior who came not only for the Jews but for her personally - a broken and shunned woman in need of healing and reconciliation. Jesus offered her a new life of peace and joy in the power of the Holy Spirit. Her conversion brought many Samaritans from her town to meet Jesus and accept him as their Savior as well.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in [Jesus] because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.” (John 4:39-42)

A life-changing word for a cheating tax collector
Jesus spoke one word to Zacchaeus, a despised tax collector who had spent his life in greed and luxury by cheating people. Jesus' word, "Hurry, come down, I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5), brought a dramatic change of heart to Zacchaeus as he heeded the command of the Savior who was now offering him new life and freedom from his burden of guilt and sin. Ephrem of Syria, an early Christian bible scholar, probes the thoughts and response of Zacchaeus to Jesus' gracious invitation and offer of salvation:

Zacchaeus was praying in his heart as follows, “Happy the one who is worthy that this just man should enter into his dwelling.” The Lord said to him, “Hurry, come down, Zacchaeus.” Seeing he knew his thoughts, he said, “Just as he knows this, he knows also all that I have done.” He therefore said, “All that I have unjustly received, I give back fourfold.” (Exposition of the Gospel of Luke)

You will do even greater works
Jesus told his disciples that they would do the same works – the prophetic signs and wonders which he had done – and even greater works!

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:12-14).

While Jesus was physically present to his disciples in Galilee and Jerusalem, he was subject to the physical limitations of time, space, and circumstances. Now as the Risen Savior who is glorified and seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, the Lord Jesus makes his presence and power known through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit who dwells in the hearts and lives of disciples throughout the world.

That is why Jesus continues to commission his followers throughout every age to “make disciples of all nations”(John 17:18, Matthew 28:19). The end of Mark's Gospel recounts Jesus' great commission and
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promise to confirm the proclamation of his word with signs and wonders:

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation... And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen. (Mark 16:15,17-20)

Age of skepticism and unbelief
We live in an age of skepticism and unbelief that rejects the supernatural and reduces the notion of God to mere myth and delusion. This post-enlightenment thinking is also fueled by the "ruler of this age" whom Scriptures calls Satan, the "father of lies," and the "deceiver" who blinds people from the truth and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus has not left us powerless against the spirit of this age. He has heard the prayers of many for a new Pentecost and spring-tide of renewal for the Christian church. We are witnessing today a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the work of evangelism and mission.

The Lord Jesus wants to give all of his disciples spiritual gifts of power and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to make the work of evangelism more effective and fruitful in the face of increasing opposition, persecution, apathy, and indifference. Without his gifts and direction, what can we hope to accomplish by our own strength? Nothing. "What is impossible with man is possible with God." That is why we need the spiritual gifts and power of God more than ever before.

Courageous witness and bold testimony
The Lord Jesus wants to give us courage and boldness to be his word - a living and active word that speaks through the witness and example of our lives, as well as the testimony of our personal encounter with the Risen Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus promises to be with us as we speak and share our testimony with others. And the Lord will guide us to those he wants us to share the good news with. He promises to anoint us and give us the words to speak as we yield to the Holy Spirit.

Every Christian believer is called to be an evangelist and missionary for the kingdom of God. No one can exempt themselves from this call.

Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!” - Pope Francis

We can follow the example of past disciples and evangelists, such as Philip in the Acts of the Apostles who was led by the Spirit to speak to the people of Samaria and to the Ethiopian eunuch on the road to Gaza, as
well as the example of evangelists throughout the ages, such as Francis of Assisi, who was "on fire with the love of God" and love for the many souls he wished to save through proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Example of "power evangelism" in the Acts of the Apostles

In Acts of the Apostles, chapter 8, verses 26-39, we see a remarkable account of the evangelist Philip receiving two words from the Lord. The first word tells him to follow the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza. And the second word is to go up and join the chariot which he sees in front of him. Philip obeys the leading of the Holy Spirit and begins to speak with the Ethiopian official in his chariot. The Ethiopian has been reading a passage from scripture and Philip offers to explain the meaning of the passage to him. Philip then explains the good news of Jesus Christ and the Ethiopian asks to be baptized so he can become a disciple of Jesus.

**Spirit-filled / charismatic gifts for everyone**

The Lord Jesus wants all of his followers to be spiritually strong and well equipped for the work of evangelism and mission. That is why the charismatic gifts of the Spirit are essential. We don't serve in our own strength but in God's strength. That is why the charismatic gifts are for everyone – whether young or old, male or female, trained or untrained. Another New Testament word for charismatic gift is spiritual gift – given by the Holy Spirit to empower each of us to do the works which Jesus did. There is no discrimination in the distribution and use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are freely given, freely received, and freely exercised by all who are receptive and willing to yield to and cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

**Blocks to exercising spiritual gifts**

Paul the Apostle tells us that we must “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts.” What might hold us back or block the spiritual gifts from working effectively in and through us? Pride, ignorance, fear, doubt, and unbelief are key blocks.

**Unbelief and scepticism** make us resistant to the supernatural gifts and working of the Holy Spirit. Jesus
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on different occasions rebuked his disciples for their “lack of faith and hardness of heart” (Mark 16:14, Mark 8:17, Matthew 13:15). Like the hardening of the arteries which block the flow of blood and oxygen, “hardening of the heart” can block the flow of supernatural power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit within us if we allow unbelief and scepticism to take hold of our mind and heart.

Pride says, “I will choose the gifts I feel comfortable with, the gifts that will make me stand out and be admired by others.” “And, besides, I don’t want to look foolish and try something I might not like or succeed at.”

Ignorance says, “I don’t know how to use spiritual gifts or how to yield to the Holy Spirit?” “I better wait until I am one hundred percent sure I know what I am doing if I start asking for spiritual gifts”

Doubt says, “I’m not worthy. I’m not the right person, or the best person, or the qualified person to exercise spiritual gifts.” “I don’t have enough faith to expect that the Holy Spirit will give me real anointing and spiritual power to exercise charismatic gifts.”

Fear says, “I will fail or make a mistake, or sink out of fright like Peter did when he started to walk on water towards Jesus.”

Antidote: “Make love your aim”
The best antidote is love – the kind of love that sets us free to surrender fully to God and to do whatever he tells us to do for his glory and his kingdom. God’s love has been “poured into our hearts through the Spirit which has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). His love sets us free – to love and serve others not only with our natural strengths and abilities, but with the charisms and spiritual power which comes from the Holy Spirit who works in and through each one of us.

Spiritual word gifts for everyone
There are a great diversity of spiritual gifts given for the work of building up the body of Christ and for mission. Paul the Apostle urges us to "desire the spiritual gifts - especially the prophetic gifts for speaking under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I believe that the charismatic word gifts are available for everyone who is willing to yield to the Holy Spirit and be led by the Spirit. The charismatic word gifts include: the gift of tongues and interpretation, prophecy, and prophetic words of knowledge and leadings of the Spirit that direct and empower us in bringing the good news of God’s love, mercy, and salvation to others.

Gift of tongues: A charismatic gift of prayer and praise inspired by the Holy Spirit who enables us to pray in another language we have not learned and do not naturally understand. Paul describes two types of languages we can experience: “tongues of men and of angels” (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Gift of interpretation of tongues: A gift that enables us and others to understand the message that God wants to reveal when we pray or speak out words in tongues – these words are often a prayer or word of encouragement or exhortation. I believe that we can expect God to reveal the message he wants us to receive as we pray in tongues alone or with others and when we are inspired to speak out a prophetic word in tongues. If we listen with expectant faith, the Lord will enable us to understand the message he wishes to convey through the gift of tongues. The interpretation of tongues can come to our mind as a sense from the Lord of something he wants to say or pray through us - such as a word of praise and adoration, or a word of exhortation to turn to the Lord or repent, or a word of encouragement. The interpretation often comes as a gentle soft voice or word that we may not even consciously sense as a revelation of God at the moment. When
we pray in tongues we often sense the presence of God and a sense of what he is impressing on us at that particular moment.

**Gift of prophecy:** Inspired words of prophetic revelation directed to individuals or group of people. Most prophecy are inspired words of revelation that encourage, build up, and direct people to turn to God in worship, praise, repentance, and seeking after God for his help and direction.

**Gift of prophetic words of knowledge for evangelism and ministry:** Word gifts of knowledge are inspired leadings of the Spirit directed to an individual or group of people to whom God wants to reveal his presence, power, and word at a particular moment. (See example of Philip in Acts 8:26-40)

**Yielding to the Holy Spirit**
If we desire to receive the gifts of the Spirit, then we must learn to yield to the Spirit. Jesus instructed his disciples:

> And I tell you, **Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!**” (Luke 11:9–13)

The first step to yielding to the Holy Spirit is **asking with expectant faith.** What do we ask for? We ask with expectant faith for a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives - for a full release of the gifts and power of the Spirit within us. We ask for the Holy Spirit to give us the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation of tongues. We ask for the Holy Spirit to give us the gift of prophecy so we can speak his word to others as he leads us to speak to them. We ask for prophetic direction in being led by the Spirit to speak with certain individuals the Spirit wants us to speak with. And we ask for the Spirit to give us the words and message he wishes us to speak to others - especially in evangelising and sharing our testimony with others.

**Yielding to the gift of tongues**
Paul the Apostle writes, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues" (1 Corinthians 14:4). Learning how to yield to the gift of tongues is very beneficial for us. It is first and foremost a gift of prayer - a prayer that allows the Holy Spirit to pray in and through us. Paul writes,

> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26–27)

The Acts of the Apostles explains how the first disciples of Jesus received the gift of tongues on Pentecost:

> “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4).

Notice in this passage from Acts that "**all** were filled, not some." Each of the 120 disciples did something – they each spoke out in a language they did not previously know. As they began to speak out the Holy Spirit
formed their speech into a new tongue or language they did not know. When we pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give us the gift of tongues it is important that we first stop speaking out in our own language. We then speak out whatever sounds, syllables, and words the Holy Spirit begins to give us. As we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, the new words in another language will flow from our lips as we allow the Spirit to speak through and within us for the glory of God.

**Learning to exercise spiritual gifts**

Speaking out and praying in tongues is a cooperative work of the Holy Spirit and the individual who yields to the gift of the Spirit by speaking out with the new tongue the Spirit gives. Learning how to yield to the gift of tongues is an excellent way for learning how to yield to the other charismatic gifts of the Spirit. We ask with expectant faith. We yield ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We step out in faith by acting and speaking out as the Spirit leads us.

Do you want to grow in yielding to the Holy Spirit and to the gifts the Spirit wishes to give you? Pray with other Christians who have experience and wisdom in exercising the gifts of the Spirit. Learn from those who are wise in discerning the spiritual gifts and who have experience in helping others grow in using the gifts of the Spirit. The Life in the Spirit Seminars is an excellent and proven way to learn how to yield to the Holy Spirit and gifts of the Spirit.


### Questions for discussion and prayer in small groups:

1. Do I recognize the spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit wants me to exercise?
2. Are there any instances or ways in which I resist the promptings, inspirations, and gifts of the Spirit?
3. How can I better yield and cooperate with the work of the Spirit in and through me?
4. Am I willing to step out, take risks, in learning how to grow in exercising the gifts of the Spirit?
5. What obstacles might be holding me back from desiring and exercising the gifts?

Pray over one another for discernment of the spiritual gifts and for a greater release of the gifts.

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**See related articles:**

> [Spiritual Gifts](http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/april2014p14.htm) by Steve Clark
>
> [Prophecy](http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/april2014p14.htm) by Bruce Yocum
>
> [Clues for Evangelism](http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/april2014p14.htm) by Joe Difato
Exercising the Prophetic Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Church Today

The Gift of Prophecy: The Prophet's Role

by Bruce Yocum

One day not too long ago I was speaking with a missionary who had just had the opportunity to help someone who was dying to turn back to the Lord. He had planned to go visit that person on a particular day, but when the day came he was not feeling well. He struggled with the decision to go or not go. Finally, he decided that it would be best to keep the appointment. When he arrived, he found the man he had come to see in mortal agony, nearly dead. During the short time they had together he was able to help the man decide to repent and return to the Lord. Shortly after, the man died.

The missionary was left musing, "What if I had not gone?" That is an unanswerable question, because God does not show us "what would have happened." But he does give us responsibility, genuine responsibility, in his work. Therein lies a great mystery. The Book of Wisdom contains a passage which has always amazed me: "O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy word, and by thy wisdom hast formed man, to have
That it was the wisdom of God to have men and women rule over the creation astonishes me. I would have said it was foolishness! But it is true. God has given us a very definite and a very active role in his work, and with it, a great responsibility.

In all that follows I will assume what some people seem to think shocking: that genuine prophecy is both a divine and a human activity. In fact, genuine prophecy is, in a very real sense, as much a human activity as it is a divine activity. Any person who is given genuine prophetic revelation can decide not to prophesy. They are under no compulsion to prophesy. Furthermore, any person who receives a genuine prophetic message can add something to the message, something of their own. Even more, someone who has received a genuine prophetic message can decide how to communicate that message.

Yet, if the prophetic message is genuine, it is also true to say that it is a word from the Lord; that God is speaking to us through that message. Any true prophecy is a word from the Lord spoken in the words of a human being. Therefore, anyone who prophesies has to take responsibility for how they prophesy. Some would like to "supernaturalize" prophecy to such an extent that they themselves no longer have responsibility for the prophetic message. But the Lord does not give us that option. If he wanted to speak directly, and not through the agency of a human being, he could do so. But when God speaks through prophecy, he speaks through a human being, with human capacities and weaknesses.

MORE THAN A MESSENGER

The designation of prophets as "messengers" of God has been developed in order to highlight two central aspects of the prophet’s mission: the objective and divine nature of the message which the prophet brings, and the divine authorization to proclaim the message to God’s people. But to restrict the vision of the prophet to the elements introduced in the designation as "messenger" does an injustice to the very active and diversified task which God sets for the one who prophesies. The prophets clearly saw themselves as God’s "messengers" (Isaiah 44:26; Haggia 1:13; Malachi 3:1). They also considered themselves "servants of God" (Isaiah 20:3; Amos 3:7; Jeremiah 7:25; 24:4, etc.), "guardians" of Israel (Isaiah 62:6), and "watchmen" (Amos 3:4; Isaiah 56:10; Jeremiah 6:17; Ezekiel 3:17).

The prophets were, in their own eyes, entrusted with a mission demanding much more than passive receptivity to inspirations that might overtake them. In the Old Testament, once a man knew that he had been called to be a
prophet, he devoted himself wholeheartedly and very actively to his task. "We may indeed quite properly speak of the prophetic 'office,' consisting on the one hand of binding commitments, and on the other of liberties and powers." The prophets used every occasion and circumstance to proclaim the message they had received from God. For the sake of their missions Hosea married a prostitute and Jeremiah refrained from marriage entirely (Hosea 1:2; Jeremiah 16:2). Amos left his home and his occupation to fulfill his call (Amos 7:12ff.).

In the New Testament the pattern continued. While many Christians prophesied from time to time, or even regularly for periods of time, some of them were specially equipped to fulfill the role of the prophet. "According to Acts (2:16ff.) St. Peter interpreted the miracle of Pentecost as evidence that the whole church was a prophetic community, animated by the Holy Spirit. God had fulfilled Joel’s oracle, 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.' But from the New Testament as a whole it is clear that certain individuals were specially called to exercise the prophetic ministry" (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:6-10, 28-29).

Not all of those who prophesy are prophets Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 that all can prophesy (v 31), but he also asks, "Are all prophets?" and the answer is "no." Paul speaks both of "spirituals" and of "gifts of the spirit" and the two are not the same. A "spiritual" is a manifestation - a breaking forth - of the power of the Holy Spirit in prophecy (or in healing, working a miracle, etc). A "gift of the Holy Spirit" is the equipment which fits an individual to take his or her particular role among God’s people. In other words, Paul says that many can prophesy by a "working of the Holy Spirit," but that only some have the "gift" to be a prophet. (See Appendix Two.)

An Old Testament prophet knew that when the Israelites needed to hear God’s word, he could quite appropriately go before the Lord and ask for it. That was his place, his role as a prophet. He knew furthermore that his task in delivering God’s word was not completed when he first proclaimed the "message" God had given him. He preached it when the occasion provided the opportunity. Jeremiah committed his prophecy to writing at God’s command so that it could be presented to the king (Jeremiah 36). Ezekiel was quite clearly told by God that his task included not merely the reception and subsequent pronouncement of a word, but also active and ongoing vigilance in speaking that word when occasion demanded it (Ezekiel 3).

THE PROPHET'S ROLE

A true Christian prophet has a role demanding the same vigilance and the same sustained exercise of responsibility. His role can be described under five headings: to receive and proclaim the word; to actively seek out God’s will and God’s word; to "stir up" his gift; to "watch over" the word given and see it acted upon and fulfilled; and to intercede before God on behalf of the church.

Receiving and proclaiming the "word"

A more apt description of this responsibility would perhaps be "obeying the promptings of the Spirit." A crucial part of the prophetic ministry is immediate and obedient response to the urging of the Holy Spirit, whether that be a prompting to speak a message, perform a prophetic action, or even to refrain from speaking for a time. The Lord said to Ezekiel "Whenever you hear a word from me, warn them in my name" (Ezekiel 3:17). When the Lord told Jeremiah to go visit the house of the potter, Jeremiah went (Jeremiah 18). When the Lord told Isaiah that King Hezekiah would recover from an illness, Isaiah immediately went to the king with that message, even though he had prophesied only moments before that the king would not recover (2 Kings 20). When Agabus heard the Spirit telling him to bind the hands of Paul and prophesy, he did so at once (Acts 21:11).
Of what use is a servant who will not do the master’s will? What good is a messenger who does not proclaim the message he or she is given? Paul would most certainly have been to blame had he not responded to the dream calling him to Macedonia (Acts 16:9). The same blame should fall to the prophet who hears a word from the Lord and fails to speak it.

**Actively seeking out God’s will and God’s word**

The prophet bears a responsibility to place himself or herself continually in the presence of God, seeking to hear the word of the Lord and asking the Lord for guidance and direction, for encouragement or rebuke. When the Christian community needs guidance, it can rightly look to its prophets for a word from the Lord. When the community gathers to worship, it can rightly look to its prophets for inspired prayer or song, or words of improvement, encouragement, or consolation (1 Corinthians 14:3).

I have witnessed occasions when God has granted a prophetic word in response to people who sought it and occasions when he has not. I have already described a meeting in which God, through prophecy, gave a very practical solution for difficulties (see pages 49-50). Before that meeting, we were not particularly confident that God would speak to us directly on what were, after all, simple practical matters. Yet we received important prophetic revelation when we asked for it.

It is entirely appropriate for prophets to seek God for his word on any and every occasion. Perhaps God will speak, perhaps he will not. But it is the duty of the messenger to be in his presence, ready and eager to convey any word he may give.

"Stirring up" the prophetic gift

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that "prophets can always control their prophetic spirits," or as another translation puts it, "The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32). Paul means primarily that prophets can refrain from prophesying when that is appropriate. But I believe that there is also a positive aspect to the control which prophets can exercise over their gift.

When God assigns someone a responsibility in the Christian community, he also provides that person with the necessary gifts. God will not indicate that he has given an individual a mission of evangelism unless he also has given that person the gift to evangelize. And because the individual can count upon God’s power in the assigned service, he or she can take initiative in that service. For instance, a woman who knows that God has called her to an evangelistic service can place herself in situations where she will have to evangelize. It would be appropriate for her, as it was for Paul in Athens and Corinth, to assemble people for the express purpose of preaching the good news to them. She could then expect that God would supply the spiritual power necessary to open people’s hearts to the
gospel.

The same basic truth applies to prophetic service. If God entrusts an individual with the task of serving the church as a prophet, that individual can count on God’s action when he or she attempts to serve prophetically. It is right, therefore, for a prophet to take initiative in prophecy. No one can prophesy unless the Holy Spirit is at work in oneself, but a prophet can "arouse" or "stir up" or "call into action" the gift that has been given. When Paul addresses Timothy, he urges him to "stir up" the gift he has been given (2 Timothy 1:6).

Spiritual gifts can be viewed as tools which God provides to help "build up the body of Christ" (see Ephesians 4:7-16). Those who are given these tools are entrusted with carrying out the corresponding tasks, just as a man who is a carpenter, for instance, is entrusted with the task for which his tools and his training suit him. The architect does not tell the carpenter every blow to strike with his hammer. Instead, the architect gives the carpenter blueprints and trusts him to make something according to those plans. This does not mean that a prophet can prophesy whatever and whenever he or she wishes. Prophecy will always depend upon the action of the Holy Spirit. But it does mean that a prophet can bring the power of the Holy Spirit into action. He or she can make the prophetic gift active when the occasion calls for it.

Prophets, in other words, can prophesy whenever it is appropriate, so long as they have a word from the Lord. Jeremiah did not have to wait passively for a moment of inspiration to strike him. He knew the Lord’s word for Israel, and he could bring the power of his prophetic gift into action simply by speaking that word. The importance of this ability to "prophesy" at the initiative and discretion of the prophet depends upon an understanding of the power of the prophetic word itself. Prophecy is more than simple communication of a message. It involves an action of the Holy Spirit, an unleashing of the power of the Holy Spirit. That spiritual power is a significant part of the prophet’s gift. Christians who know the Lord’s word for a particular time and place can repeat that word. But prophets can prophesy that word. They can declare it with full authority, and they can expect God to work through their declaration.

"Watching over" the prophetic word
The Lord told Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and the other prophets of Israel that their responsibility went beyond the first time they spoke the word he gave them; they were to continue speaking that word until Israel either responded to it or finally rejected it. So too, those given the role of the prophet in the church have to repeat and insist upon the word which they have been given until God’s people hear it and respond to it.

Praying for the church
I believe that an integral and important part of the prophet’s task is unceasing prayer for the Christian community. The prophets, because they knew what the mind of the Lord was, were in a position to pray more effectually than other members of the community. They had a clearer picture of what God was doing, and so they knew when prayer was most needed. They were also able to pray true "prophetic prayers," in which the Holy Spirit directed and guided their very manner and words. "Upon your wall, Jerusalem, I set watchmen. Day or night they must never be silent. You who keep Yahweh mindful must take no rest. Nor let him take rest till he has restored Jerusalem" (Isaiah 62:6, emphasis mine).

Prophets, then, are not people who simply leave themselves open to the possible inspiration of the Spirit. Rather, they are entrusted with a task demanding responsibility and vigilance on their part. They are to make themselves active in the role which God has assigned them.
IDENTIFYING A PROPHETIC GIFT

The Old Testament prophets knew they were prophets because they had experienced a definite and life-shaping encounter with God, an encounter in which God clearly gave them a prophetic assignment. That encounter made them prophets. The New Testament contains no accounts of prophetic "calls." Undoubtedly there were some such calls from God; we know at least that Paul began his ministry as an apostle in response to such a call (Acts 13:1ff.; Galatians 1:1ff.). And we know that Timothy learned from a prophetic message that a particular spiritual gift had been given to him (1 Timothy 4:14). It is reasonable to suppose that some Christian prophets do experience a direct "calling" to a prophetic service.

But whether a person receives a direct call or not, the burden for determining who is to function as a prophet within the Christian community falls to the community, not to the prophets (see chapter five). It is necessary therefore to know how a true prophet can be identified. There are two categories of qualifications for the exercise of a prophetic ministry: the personal life of the prophet, and the manifestation of the spiritual gift of prophecy.

The life of the prophet

No one can effectively serve God in a position of real responsibility unless his or her life is solid and stable, in both its Christian and its normal human aspects. A person afflicted with serious emotional or psychological problems cannot be trusted with a place of responsibility and authority within the community. God offers healing and strength to those who need it, but they should receive that healing before they are allowed to function in a prophetic service (or any other responsible service). Furthermore, any person not living a strong and consistent Christian life should not be allowed to function as a leader of God’s people.

We will from time to time encounter individuals who seem to manifest impressive spiritual gifts, and try to claim a place of service in the community on the basis of their powers. Frequently their spiritual powers are genuine. But it is not spiritual powers alone that determine positions of service in the body of Christ. Some time ago our community encountered a man who seemed to "prophesy" with real power. His prophetic gift was, I believe, genuine. However, this individual also manifested significant emotional immaturity in his personal life. As a consequence, the community could not fully trust this person’s exercise of prophetic gifts. Since he could not be unqualifiedly trusted, it was better that he refrain from prophesying until he had attained the requisite emotional stability.

Manifestation of spiritual gifts

Many individuals in the community will experience "manifestations" of prophecy, but the simple fact of prophesying does not indicate that an individual is a prophet. Before crediting someone with a significant gift of prophecy, we must see in him a more powerful, consistent, and complex manifestation of the prophetic spirit. There are four primary characteristics of an abiding prophetic gift.

First, an ongoing and consistent exercise of prophecy. Most people in the community prophesy only occasionally, or they may prophesy regularly for only a relatively short period of time (perhaps two or three years). Not uncommonly, people who have newly entered the community will prophesy regularly for a while. Only when an individual prophesies regularly over a period of four or five years or longer should we begin considering whether the gift is a significant indication of his place of service.

Second, a prophet should manifest a powerful and effective exercise of prophetic gifts. True prophecy can be manifested with more or less spiritual power. A significant prophecy has an impact on those who hear it; it is life-changing and life-producing. We should look for "results" from the exercise of an individual’s prophetic gifts. If one’s prophecy consistently changes people, moves the community forward in God’s purposeCthen we can safely assume that God has given one prophetic gifts in...
important measure.

Third, a prophet should have the ability to "stir up" the gift. Prophets can be counted upon to exercise their gifts when the community needs them. They are reliable; and they can be reliable because they have been sufficiently equipped by God to fulfill their role. At times prophets may even learn what will help them bring their gift into action. Elisha asked a minstrel to play for him when the king of Judah asked him to "get the word of the Lord" (2 Kings 3:9-20). Many prophets have experienced times when songs and hymns which glorify the Lord "bring on" the prophetic spirit. Christians have long recognized that their environment affects their ability to turn to the Lord. Oftentimes prayer or song can dispose us to receive the word of the Lord.

When an individual is able to consistently make his or her gift effective for the life of the community, that is an indication that God has entrusted that individual with the prophetic service in a significant measure.

Finally, an abiding prophetic gift usually includes a true gift of revelation which operates consistently. One clear mark of a true prophet is revelation. Through the prophets God reveals mysteries, brings to light his plan, and makes known things which have been hidden. At times prophetic revelation concerns specific private matters. God revealed King David’s sin to Nathan so that the prophet could confront David and bring him to repentance. At other times God uses prophets to reveal some major aspect of his plan for the world. For example, the revelation that the Gentiles could take part in salvation without following the Law of Moses came in part through the prophets of the early church (see Eph 2:4-6).

Not all revelation shows us something entirely new. But many of the mysteries of the Christian faith will be revealed in greater clarity and with a greater fullness by the prophets. Through the many prophecies I have heard describing God’s love, I have come to a much fuller and deeper understanding of that love. This is not simply the effect of repetition. Some of those prophecies opened my eyes to the mysteries of the eternal and unfailing love of God. God had already revealed that love to the world, but through the prophets he has revealed it to me.

The foregoing characteristics of personal life and spiritual gift can serve as a guide for recognizing the presence of the spiritual gift of prophecy. But they can serve as a guide only - not as an official "checklist." The gifts which Christ assigns to individuals differ. One apostle differs from another in both the degree and character of the gift received. Prophets will differ from one another in the same way. I know one man who seems to have a gift only for a kind of "inspirational" prophecy. Yet for some years now he has consistently manifested a powerful and productive inspirational gift. He is also able to "stir up" that gift. His prophetic gift is one of the greatest assets to community worship that I have ever witnessed. To a degree then, it is appropriate to refer to him as "a prophet." He does not receive revelation, but still he is in some sense a true prophet.

Paul tells us that each person should use the gift he or she has received according to the measure of the gift given (Rom 12:3). Not all prophets are called to prophetic service in the same way or to the same degree. But there is among them a true "family resemblance." In recognizing the likeness between members of the same family we are not surprised to notice individual differences as well: one may have blue eyes and another brown, and so forth. But there remains enough commonality among them all that we can discern their overall resemblance. Prophet may also differ from prophet in the way God uses him in his service.

RECOGNIZING PROPHETS IN THE COMMUNITY

A Christian community must be able to encourage and support those who have received prophetic gifts, and help
them to grow in their exercise of those gifts. Prophetic gifts are given, not for the person who exercises them, but for the community. It is the community’s responsibility to both foster and oversee the exercise of the gifts. Therefore it is important to pay attention to who prophesies, and how their individual gifts operate, so that we can help them to grow and benefit as much as possible from the working of God in them.

We should not be eager to identify people as "prophets." There is in some charismatic circles an eagerness to identify each person's "gift" and to speak about "my gift" or "so and so’s gift." The reality is far less simple. There are times when an individual exercises a particular gift in a striking and consistent manner, so that we are justified in saying that this person is, for example, "an evangelist" or "a prophet." But we should not be quick to determine that someone is a "prophet" and bestow a title on them.

We need to devote the same careful wisdom to the discernment of all gifts among the Christian people. We ought not to call someone a prophet before we know that God has called that person to an ongoing prophetic service. It is equally unwise to withhold from a real prophet the freedom to grow and develop in his or her assigned service.

The picture of the prophet which emerges from the pages of Scripture and the early church writings is impressive. Rather than mere mouthpieces who passively respond when God picks them up, the prophets are conscious agents of God, gifted by God to be envoys, watchmen, and bearers of royal authority.

Prophets, as other members of the body, are subject to the authority of the community. But in their place of service they exercise a true "charismatic" authority, proclaiming God’s word and leading the community in its response to God. In their service to the Lord, prophets are subject to the community. But in its service to God, the community is subject to the authority of the word which the prophet brings.

Notes:

1. Jeremiah’s declaration that he cannot “hold in” the prophetic word (Jer. 20:9) is not a literal statement of compulsion. Jeremiah was speaking of the conviction, zeal and indignation which took hold of him when he saw what was happening in Jerusalem.

This article is adapted from the book, *Prophecy: Exercising the Prophetic Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Church Today*, (c) copyright 1976, 1993 Bruce T. Yocum. Available from Tabor House.

Bruce Yocum is President of Christ the King Association and a member of the International Executive Council of The Sword of the Spirit.
A couple of years back, I crewed on a 120 ft Sailing Ship for ten days. We sailed from Waterford along the South Coast of Ireland, anchoring each evening wherever we could find a bit of shelter. It is a stunning piece of coast... absolutely gorgeous. We were accompanied by dolphins and we feasted on fresh mackerel.

Built over 50 years ago, the three masted ketch, had a lovely elegance. It moved well under sail. The ship would rise up and then plunge forward on the swell of the ocean. Accompanied of course by the creak in the ropes as the tensions shifted.

One afternoon the captain invited me to take the helm. Excited at the thought of steering the ship, I leapt up to take the wheel. Keeping the boat moving in a straight line turned out to be pretty tricky. Try as I might to anticipate the constant shift in direction – the wind and the waves kept knocking me off course. Looking astern anyone could see the ship was ploughing a very wiggly line...

Seeing my difficulty the captain encouraged me to take a landmark on the distant horizon and use that as a point of reference. It made all the difference. Just looking a few hundred yards ahead and trying to go straight I was all over the shop... but once I fixed on a landmark on the horizon I was able to keep the ship on course.

So much of life is like that... the short term stuff... the new car... difficulties at work... the foreign holiday... the upcoming exam... these things can pull us in all kinds of directions... The key is to have a clear long term goal. Some kind of overarching vision for life that helps us put all the short term stuff in perspective..
Lent is a time to reassess. It is a time to make space to look at the big picture. Lent is a good time to take a fix on our long term goals.

St. Paul was a pretty focused kind of guy. Reflecting on his long term goals he writes, I consider everything a loss – compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (Philippians 3:8). He had found a fixed point on the horizon to steer for...

To Know Jesus Christ... that was his goal.
The First Easter Testimony

"Noli Me Tangere" (Do Not Touch Me) by Titian, 1511-12

Mary Magdalene: Witness to the Risen Lord

by Jeanne Kun

Renaissance and Elizabethan Englanders called Mary Magdalene the “Mawdleyn,” a version of her name that gave rise to the modern word “maudlin,” which describes someone who weeps sentimentally. “Reformed prostitute” is the definition of “Magdalene” given by the Concise Oxford Dictionary. But do these images describe the true Magdalene of the gospels? Or has history falsely labeled – and thus badly maligned – this devoted follower of Jesus?

Most likely, the surname Magdalene indicates Mary’s hometown. In first-century Palestine, Magdala was one of the largest towns around the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists today identify it with the excavated ruins of Magdal, located not far from Tiberias, where the hills reach down to the lakeshore.

Plagued by evil spirits, Mary Magdalene was healed by Jesus (Luke 8:2). Consequently, some have concluded that she was emotionally unstable, a volatile personality – and wouldn’t it then follow? – of questionable virtue. Adding to this impression, several early biblical commentators identified her with the unnamed penitent who anointed the feet of Jesus (Luke 7:36-50). While there’s no evidence at all in the gospels that Mary and the repentant woman were the same person, Mary Magdalene nonetheless became the stereotype of a reformed
Living Bulwark

sinner. Actually, there’s no reason to think she had led an immoral life or been a prostitute. Rather, it’s much more probable that she suffered from epileptic seizures or a mental disorder. In other scenes described by Luke, Jesus’ casting out of evil spirits resulted in people being healed of epilepsy (9:38-42), the inability to speak (11:14), and curvature of the spine (13:10-13).

**Among the women who accompanied Jesus in his ministry**

Mary Magdalene was among the women who accompanied Jesus in his public ministry. Perhaps some of these women were relatives of Jesus. They may have been wealthy, supporting Jesus and his disciples with their resources. Some were young, and others were middle-aged and had sons who also followed this itinerant rabbi. But all these women had one thing in common: Their hearts had been deeply touched by Jesus, and as a result, their lives were changed.

Mary was probably among the crowd of followers who praised Jesus as he triumphantly entered Jerusalem. Did she, like many others in the holy city, expect him to deliver Israel from the Roman occupation? Less than a week later, Jesus was seized in Gethsemane, and his closest male disciples “deserted him and ran away” (Matthew 26:56). Perhaps they ran to find Mary Magdalene and the other women who followed Jesus to tell them of the master’s arrest.

We know from the gospels that there were women present at Golgotha: “There were many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him. Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee” (Matthew 27:55-56; see also Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:49). It is noteworthy that while many of the sons had fled, the mothers remained. John adds, “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene” (John 19:25).

Mary Magdalene and her companions watched as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus removed Jesus’ body from the cross and laid him in the tomb (Luke 23:50-56; see also Matthew 27:59-61 and Mark 15:46-47). After the sabbath, they returned to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body with spices (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1, 10). No thoughts of resurrection were in their minds. They hadn’t understood Jesus’ prophecies that he would be “raised on the third day” (Matthew 17:23; see also Mark 9:31). In their grief, these women simply sought to do one final service of love for him whom they had followed so faithfully, even to his grave.

**The first witness to the risen Christ**

Mary Magdalene is the only woman named in all four gospel accounts of the resurrection. However, in John’s Gospel, Mary is the first witness to the risen Christ, and her moving encounter with Jesus conveys the pure joy she must have felt as she recognized her master.

Mary came to the tomb early on the first day of the week, as soon as the sabbath had ended. Distressed at not finding Jesus’ body there as expected, she ran to tell Simon Peter that it had been removed (John 20:1-2). On her return to the empty tomb, two angels questioned why she was weeping. However, consumed by grief, she persisted in her assumption that the body had been taken away—perhaps stolen by grave robbers (20:11-13). When Jesus himself stood near her, Mary even mistook him for the caretaker of the garden where the tomb was located (20:14-15).

How is it that Mary – who knew the one who had freed her from her demonic affliction so well—failed to recognize her beloved Lord? Perhaps her tears blinded her. She may have been so overwhelmed by sorrow that she was deceived by her own expectations, with no room in her heart to comprehend any other possibility than that of finding his corpse. Or maybe Jesus’ resurrected body was so totally and gloriously transformed that he
was unrecognizable.

As if to probe Mary’s desire for him, Jesus asked, “Whom do you seek?” (John 20:15). Was she searching for the Lord or, with her limited understanding, for her preconceived image of him as she assumed him to be? When he said “Mary,” it was to his voice speaking her name that she finally responded with joyful recognition (20:16). The noted French writer Henri Daniel-Rops described this meeting vividly:

Then the unknown man spoke one word, “Mary,” and she looked at him, transfixed. . . . This one word sufficed to reawaken in the Magdalene the ardor and certainty of her faith. What Christian has not dreamed of hearing it, the word with which, from all eternity, God calls each one of us, but which the deaf do not hear. (Jesus and His Times)

With this single word, Jesus freed Mary again, this time from the hopelessness that had taken hold of her when she watched him die on the cross. The liturgical prayer known as the sequence, recited at Mass on Easter Monday, poetically imagines Mary’s early morning visit to the garden where Jesus was buried: “Tell us, Mary, what did you see on the way?” ‘I saw the tomb of the now living Christ. I saw the glory of Christ, now risen. Christ my hope has risen!”

When Mary heard her name, she turned and saw the Lord. In a surge of joy and relief she exclaimed, “Rabboni!” – an ecstatic pledge of her faith in Jesus and in his resurrection.

**Called to share in the resurrection life of Jesus**

Mary Magdalene, the first to see the risen and glorified Lord, is most remembered for her Easter testimony. Present among the Galilean followers, at the crucifixion, and at the empty tomb, she was an eyewitness to the ministry, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Perhaps she and the other women who shared the suffering at Golgotha and the joy of the resurrection supported one another in the coming years – and shared their memories with the believers who made up the early church. Some early writings state that Mary Magdalene later went to Ephesus with John and the mother of Jesus and was buried there.

In the Latin Church Mary Magdalene is known as *apostola apostolorum* or “female apostle to the male apostles.” When she proclaimed “I have seen the Lord!”, she was the first to convey the good news to the band of men who had been the closest to Jesus (John 20:18; see also Mark 16:9-10). Mary had accompanied Jesus from village to village, from Galilee to Jerusalem. With ardent love and perseverance, she had even followed him to Golgotha and the tomb. Her faith and constancy were rewarded on that first Easter morning, and she continued to follow Jesus as her risen and victorious Lord. Like Mary Magdalene, we too are called – each of us by name – to follow this same Lord and to share in his resurrection life.

[This article is from *My Lord and My God! A Scriptural Journey with the Followers of Jesus*, by Jeanne Kun. Copyright © 2004 by The Word Among Us Press. Used with permission.]
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> See other articles by Jeanne Kun
Six Themes of Eternity

Eternity is commonly defined as endless time, or the timeless state following death. However, this definition cloaks the power and vitality of the concept. It too easily places it in a box, awkwardly hidden away out of sight, out of mind. It's as though we've locked away a treasure, intimidated by its mystery.

Eternity is a 'bright' mystery, its fullness lies beyond our senses and rational capacity. Yet it is not closed to us, we have hints and insights into its nature. It is a powerful mystery as well, its significance breaking into our everyday existence as we open our inward eyes to see.

The concept of eternity invites us to see the big picture. Time is a dimension of creation, and eternity exists outside the limitations of time. One could say that the fullness of eternity exists, and is present to us, NOW. As I eat my cornflakes for breakfast, the heavens resound in praise.

The big picture is a key to knowing a peace that transcends understanding. Things change, and they change unexpectedly. Our life is a constant journey into the unknown - the beautiful moments are fleeting, the good things pass away. The difficult times also come to an end and joy can be found in the darkest clouds. There is a thread of purpose that weaves throughout, nothing is wasted.

We cannot look directly into the face of eternity and see God. We are consumed by its brightness. Yet everything we see and know reflects a source of life beyond itself.

Faith is an awakening of perception. We see what we are attentive to, and the desires of our heart direct our inward eyes. We can see eternity in the eyes of a child, the laughter of a friend, and the tears of a loved one. The setting sun is a storybook of significance.

Our days are numbered, yet the ripples created by our life extend. Each interaction, conversation and act of contribution extends significance into eternity and adds our piece to the mosaic of life.
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I've noticed that I can't 'see' the sun directly at all. I even burnt out the lens on my little Canon camera filming the sunset. It's too bright. At best all I see is a bright round disk before I quickly turn away.

There are now many accounts of people who have been resuscitated or otherwise 'brought back from the dead' through medical intervention or unexplained 'miracle'. Invariably they describe an out of body experience of being drawn up into a very bright light.

The writer of the prophetic Biblical book 'Revelation' describes the face of the Lord as 'like the sun shining in all its brilliance'. John describes how he could not look at such a brilliance, 'I fell at his feet as though dead'.

Eternity is a mystery, a 'Bright' mystery. It contains a brilliance that we cannot comprehend directly. However, we can see its reflection. And in its reflection, we can begin to gather clues, colors, and its distinguishing characteristics.

The reflections of Eternity are in the world all around us. They are evident in the laughter of a child, the tears shed for a dying parent, the late night effort to start a stranger’s car in the deep of winter. The Christian faith is essentially about recognizing the reflection of Eternity that has been revealed in this world. Jesus Christ is described as being 'the image of the invisible God'.

I stand on the shore
my feet swallowed up in the agitation,
tumult and darkness of the moment

It’s the wave that shifts my gaze
pulled away into a deeper sea
through invitation, desire, or demand
I’m lifted to walk a miracle

A rocky bar hems me in
a wave marks my limit
I can’t return to shore, I’ve come too far
a promise carries power

I look again, the bar yields
the light breaking through its back
lock and chain fall away

My gaze rises into the distance
into the wide open space, a tranquil sea into
Jamie Treadwell is a life coach and a noted artist who works in pastels, watercolors and acrylics. He is a member of The Servants of the Word, an ecumenical lay missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord, and mission leader in the Sword of the Spirit. He is currently based in London, UK.
Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way

- Edward De Bono

For, don't you mark?
we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted — better to us,
Which is the same thing.
Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out

- Robert Browning
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Eternity Art Series by Jamie Treadwell

One could say that Eternity contains the ‘pearl of great price’. It’s mysterious, not easily grasped. It’s as though life is a dynamic quest we are drawn into. At our best our spirit stirs and courage rises to seek what is great and become worthy of it.

I wonder sometimes that the problem we face is not that we desire too many things, but rather that we don’t desire the things that really matter with a great enough intensity.

Pearl
20” x 39”
oil and acrylic

What’s more important, the sun or the moon?
The moon of course, it’s the moon that shines at night when it’s dark.
The sun shines during the day ... when it’s light anyway.

Just joking, but I wonder sometimes if we miss what’s really going on around us, and in us. What is the source of the hope within us, the love that stirs us, and the desires that fuel our passion?
The Golden Sea elevates our thoughts into the sheer wonder and beauty of existence.
In the moments before sunset, all goes quiet on the beach. Everybody stops and in silent attention watches the sun as it sinks down into the horizon.

In those few moments there is a silent reverence. There’s something about a sunset that touches deep within us. Perhaps it touches on the mystery of eternity, and how we make sense of all that is our past, and how we understand what lies ahead.

I sketched the pier at sunrise and sunset. I’ve studied the angle of the supports, splayed out like a haughty man taking a stance on principle: ‘I shall not be moved’. The two shelters stand as sentinels heralding the close of day.

The pier elevates the fisherman’s work, the dreamer’s thoughts, and fellowship’s conversation.

For those seeking a moment of solitude, it thrusts out deep into the horizon. The cares of the day released into the cascading torrent of Eternity’s color.

‘The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer’ (Brother Lawrence).

In this painting the Naples Pier, the sunset sky, and the sea are shown in unity of mark, color and tone. It’s all made of the same stuff. It all radiates the same light.

It’s the sun that is distinctive. The lines and marks seem to direct our attention into it. And then its energy reaches out and enlivens all the rest.
On a Sunday afternoon a crowd joined me on the beach to watch the setting sun while I began this painting. Dark clouds covered the sky. Disappointment threatened. But around the time of sunset the clouds began to break. Light poured through. Deep reds and oranges fired up the grey clouds. It was an exhilarating display.

The crowd gathered together that afternoon sensed a profound reminder of the significance of hope and the glory of the coming age. It’s the patient endurance of waiting that can be so difficult.

Transitions are often a response to where the wind is blowing, and not a simple straight-forward journey. The departure from the pier can be a time full of expectation as well as sadness.

The good things you can’t hold onto, the tough times pass. Each day brings an experience of unfinished business, words unsaid, even glimpses of genius that bring a smile. And the day passes. Somehow it all fits together, it just 'IS'.
Eternity Art Series by Jamie Treadwell

I’ve used one of the styles from the Eternity series - the bold vertical strokes - to refer to the connection between heaven and earth. Grace cascades down from heaven, our eyes and hearts drawn upwards. Gratitude recognizes that all we have is part of this eternal connection.

The colors and image represent a sunset, but also all the different times of day. Some bands are bright morning or rich daytime colors. Some are of the earth, some of the sky. There’s both light and darkness to give it strength and depth - life has both dynamics and they go hand in hand.

Fill each day with a litany of thanks, recognizing the gift in each circumstance.

What perspective is depicted here?

One viewpoint places you on the beach looking out across the sea and up into the sunset sky, another looking down from the heavens across the rough terrain of a desert, seeing an oasis of fresh water in the distance.

Perceiving from both perspectives helps us understand that we are not alone.

‘The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of man’ (Psalm 14).

Too often we miss what’s right in front of our nose. The reality is that we only notice what we’re attentive to.

Faith is an awakening of perception.
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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com
Sunk like a Norseman’s targe in the gray hills
whose green flanks fall like the folds of a skirt
in this narrow cusp of land, where brown dirt
bulges with life, this gentle loch distils
the raging of many rains into gold.
The riffled disc quavers as the sun dies
across her kind margins flashing the thighs
of the hills as the bolts of ling unfold.
If I marvel all day, summoning words
to fit the beauty of the cool water’s
rippled plane, is my time not as guileless
as a living prayer? If beauty still girds
God’s movement in time, then wonder is prayer’s
handmaid and will serve to sanctify and bless.
A selection of poems from *The snipe in winter*, by Sean O'Neill

> 1. Loch Tarff, Scotland
> 2. The wind
> 3. The trout

This poem is from *The snipe in winter*, a new collection of poems by Sean O'Neill. Available from Amazon.

Book available at [Amazon](http://www.amazon.com).

Sean O'Neill is originally from Glasgow, Scotland, and currently lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. He has published three books of poems and several novels.

See previous poems in past issues of *Living Bulwark*
A selection of poems from _The snipe in winter_, by Sean O'Neill

**The Wind**

poem by Sean O'Neill

The stony heart of the wind weighs against the door, probing its frail outlines, looking for a way past its fastness, unhooking the chimney and the tiles as though it sensed that conventional entry was futile. When each gust blows, all we can do is sit waiting to brave the long cold and submit to the chill, fearing the sky’s stern bugle. The lonely wind’s frostbitten music comes and we tremble with irrational fear; but when our time comes, it comes to us all from God’s hand not from nature’s dreaded drums or trumpets of tremendous doom. God’s mere whisper is louder than the air’s shrill call.
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e-mail: living.bulwark@yahoo.com
The trout

poem by Sean O'Neill

The peat bogs of Cavan, holding secrets
that for a thousand years preserved the skin
of the dead, waited for us to begin
our river walk, so dense with the spirits
of other anglers and their teeming catch.
I cast deep in a pit under some stone
where I’d seen a curved whorl like a hipbone
and the spray told me the fly was a match.
With my old tactic I pulled to the bank
where, at the last netbound heave, the line snapped
and the fish frisked away to thrive and live.
How many times we try but draw a blank,
finding we cannot alter or adapt
to win the prize that only God can give.

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email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com
The Privilege and Responsibility of Calling God Father

From a sermon by Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 AD)

For the Savior said, “When you pray, say, ‘Our Father.’” And another of the holy Evangelists adds, “who art in heaven.”…

He gives his own glory to us. He raises slaves to the dignity of freedom. He crowns the human condition with such honor as surpasses the power of nature. He brings to pass what was spoken of old by the voice of the psalmist: “I said, you are gods, and all of you children of the Most High.” (Psalm 82:6) He rescues us from the measure of slavery, giving us by his grace what we did not possess by nature, and permits us to call God “Father,” as being admitted to the rank of sons. We received this, together with all our other privileges, from him. One of these privileges is the dignity of freedom, a gift peculiarly befitting those who have been called to be sons.

He commands us, therefore, to take boldness and say in our prayers, “Our Father.” We, who are children of earth and slaves and subject by the law of nature to him who created us, call him who is in heaven “Father.” Most fittingly, he enables those who pray to understand this also. Since we call God “Father” and have been counted worthy of such a distinguished honor, we must lead holy and thoroughly blameless lives. We must behave as is pleasing to our Father and not think or say anything unworthy or unfit for the freedom that has been bestowed on us….

The Savior of all very wisely grants us to call God “Father,” that we, knowing well that we are sons of God, may behave in a manner worthy of him who has honored us. He will then receive the supplications that we offer in Christ.

[COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 71]
Our Father

If you want to know why we call our God Father, listen to Moses: "Is he not your Father who created you, who made you and established you?" (Deuteronomy 32:6)

Listen too to Isaiah: "O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." (Isaiah 64:8) Under prophetic inspiration Isaiah speaks plainly. God is our Father, not by nature, but by grace and by adoption. Paul too was a father: father of the Christians in Corinth. Not because he had begotten them according to the flesh, but because he had regenerated them according to the Spirit.

Christ when his body was fastened to the cross saw Mary, his mother according to the flesh, and John, the disciple most dear to him, and said to John: "Behold your mother." and to Mary: "Behold your son." Christ called Mary John's mother, not because she had begotten him, but because she loved him. (John 19:26-27) Joseph too was called father of Christ, not as procreator in a physical sense, but as his guardian: he was to nourish and protect him.

With greater reason God calls himself Father of human beings and wants to be called Father by us. What unspeakable generosity! He dwells in the heavens; we live on the earth. He has created the ages; we live in time. He holds the world in his hand; we are but grasshoppers on the face of the earth.
On the Lord's Prayer

From a sermon by Gregory of Nyssa, 4th century

Who Art in Heaven

These words I think have a very deep meaning. They remind us of the homeland we have abandoned, of the citizenship we have lost.

In the parable of the young man who left his father's house, went off the rails and was reduced to living with pigs, the Word of God shows us human wretchedness. That young man did not find his one-time happiness again until he had realized his moral degradation, had looked into his own heart and had pronounced the words of confession.

These words almost agree with the Lord's Prayer, because the prodigal son says: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.' (Luke 15:21) He would not confess himself to be a sinner against heaven if he were not convinced that the homeland he had left at the time of his going astray were not in actual fact heaven.

By this confession of his he makes himself worthy once again to stand in the presence of his father who runs towards him, embraces him, and kisses him.

The conclusion is this. To return to heaven there is only one route and that is to admit one's sinfulness and seek to avoid it. To make the decision to avoid it is already to be perfecting one's likeness to God.
On the Lord's Prayer

From a sermon by Origen, 3rd century

Hallowed be Thy Name

What is the meaning of the words `name' and `hallow'? 'Name' denotes the proper and exclusive nature of the being that carries it and indicates the general effect of its qualities. In human beings these qualities can change, and with them their names too. Abram came to be called Abraham, Simon became Peter, and Saul's name was changed to Paul. By contrast in the case of God who is immutable, who never changes, there is but one name, the `I am' that was given him in Exodus. (Exodus 3:14) We all endeavor to reflect on God to understand his nature, but they are few indeed that succeed in sensing his holiness.

Jesus' prayer teaches us that God is holy. It helps us to discover the holiness of the Being that creates, provides, judges, chooses and abounds in generosity, welcomes and rejects, rewards and punishes equally. This is what characterizes the quality that belongs to God, the quality that the Scriptures call by the name of God.

Therefore in the Scriptures we read: `You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain,' [Exod. 20:7] and again: `May my teaching drop as the rain my speech distill as the dew, as the gentle rain upon the tender grass, and as the showers upon the herb, for I will proclaim the name of the Lord.' (Deuteronomy 32:2)

Anyone who prays ought therefore to ask that the name of God may be hallowed, as is said also in the Psalms: `Let us exalt his name together.' (Psalm. 34:3) The Psalmist hopes that we may arrive, in harmony of spirit, at a true understanding of the nature of God.
On the Lord's Prayer

From a sermon by Origen, 3rd century

Thy Kingdom Come

'The kingdom of God is within us,' that is, on our lips and in our hearts. (Luke 17:21) Therefore anyone who prays that the kingdom of God may not delay its coming is praying that it may be consolidated, extended, and reach its fullness within him.

Our Lord in fact dwells in all holy people who recognize God as their king and obey his spiritual laws. The Father is present in the perfect soul and Christ reigns together with the Father, according to his own actual word 'If someone loves me ... we will come to him and make our home with him.' (John 14:23)

The kingdom will not reach its fullness in each of us until wisdom and the other virtues are perfected in us. Perfection is reached at the end of a journey, so we ought to be 'forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.' (Philippians 3:13)

In other words, on the one hand the believer is a tireless traveler and on the other hand the kingdom of God will reach its completion in us only when the words of the Apostle are fulfilled: 'When he has subjected all things, Christ will deliver up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all.' (cf.1 Corinthians15:24-28)

Let us subdue our members to produce the fruits of the Spirit. Then the Lord will walk with us as in a spiritual paradise. He alone will reign in us, together with Christ. And we shall already possess the benefits of the new birth and of the resurrection.

[Breviario Patristico © 1971 Piero Gribaudi Editore, Turin, Italy; translated by Paul Drake]
On the Lord's Prayer

From a sermon by Origen (185-254 AD)

Thy Will be Done on Earth as It is in Heaven

We who are praying are still on earth ourselves. And since we reckon that all the inhabitants of heaven fulfill the will of God in heaven, it comes naturally to us to ask that we too on earth should succeed in fulfilling the divine will. That will come about, logically, if we do nothing outside that will.

When we have perfectly accomplished it, although we are still remaining on earth we shall be like the heavenly beings and will bear equally with them the image of the heavenly Being. (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:49)

In the end we shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. Those who come to take our place on earth will ask that they too may become like us who are then in heaven.

In addition it is recorded that our Lord after his resurrection said to the eleven Apostles: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.' (Matthew 28:18)

Jesus claimed in short to have received authority on earth equal to that which he has in heaven. The things of heaven, at the beginning, have been illuminated by the Word. And at the end of time, thanks to the authority granted to the Son of God, the things of earth will be like those of heaven which is already perfect.

So then it is clear that Christ is calling his disciples to work faithfully with him by means of their prayers. That all earthly events may come to be transformed by the authority that Christ has received both in heaven and on earth, this ought to be our prayer.

[Breviario Patristico © 1971 Piero Gribaudi Editore, Turin, Italy; translated by Paul Drake]
On the Lord's Prayer

From a sermon by Gregory of Nyssa (330-395 AD)

Give Us this Day our Daily Bread

Bread represents life, and bread is easy to get. Moreover, nature herself gives us something to put on it to make it more tasty. The best thing to eat with bread is the peace of a good conscience. Then the bread is eaten with gusto, because it is being eaten in holiness of life.

But if you want to experience the taste of bread otherwise than in symbolic description, in the physical sense in fact, you have hunger to eat it with. Therefore, first of all, don't eat too much: you would lose your appetite for a long time. And then, let your dinner be preceded by sweat. 'In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread,' is the first commandment mentioned in the Scriptures. (Genesis 3:19)

The Lord's Prayer speaks of 'daily' bread. In saying that, let us remember that the life in which we ought to be interested is 'daily' life. We can, each of us, only call the present time our own. Why should we worry ourselves by thinking about the future?

Our Lord tells us to pray for today, and so he prevents us from tormenting ourselves about tomorrow. It is as if he were to say to us: 'He who gives you this day will also give you what you need for this day. He it is who makes the sun to rise. He it is who scatters the darkness of night and reveals to you the rays of the sun.'
On the Lord's Prayer

From the writings of Cassian, 4th century

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

The mercy of God is beyond description. While he is offering us a model prayer he is teaching us a way of life whereby we can be pleasing in his sight.

But that is not all. In this same prayer he gives us an easy method for attracting an indulgent and merciful judgment on our lives. He gives us the possibility of ourselves mitigating the sentence hanging over us and of compelling him to pardon us. What else could he do in the face of our generosity when we ask him to forgive us as we have forgiven our neighbor?

If we are faithful in this prayer, each of us will ask forgiveness for our own failings after we have forgiven the sins of those who have sinned against us. I mean those who have sinned against us, not only those who have sinned against our Master.

There is, in fact, in some of us a very bad habit. We treat our sins against God, however appalling, with gentle indulgence: but when by contrast it is a matter of sins against us ourselves, albeit very tiny ones, we exact reparation with ruthless severity.

Anyone who has not forgiven from the bottom of the heart the brother or sister who has done him wrong will only obtain from this prayer his own condemnation, rather than any mercy. It will be his own action that draws a much more severe judgment on himself, seeing that in effect by these words we are asking God to behave as we have behaved ourselves.
And lead us not into temptation

The request 'Lead us not into temptation' raises a difficult problem. If we pray God not to allow us to be tempted, what opportunity shall we have to give him proof of our steadfastness and fidelity? For it is written: 'Blessed is the one who endures temptation and overcomes it.' (cf. James 1:12)

Then what is the meaning of this phrase? It does not mean: do not allow us to come into temptation. It means: when we come into temptation, let us not be defeated by it. Job was tempted but he did not give way to the temptation. In fact, he did not accuse the divine Wisdom, he did not go down the road of blasphemy to which the Tempter wanted to attract him.

Abraham was tempted, and Joseph was tempted. But neither one nor the other yielded to the temptation, because neither of them said 'yes' to the Tempter. So praying the Lord's Prayer is like saying: 'Together with the temptation, give us also the strength to overcome it.' (1 Corinthians 10:13)
On the Lord's Prayer

by Cyprian of Carthage, 3rd century

**But Deliver Us from Evil**

The Lord's Prayer has an ending which neatly summarizes the different requests. We say actually at the end: 'But deliver us from evil,' understanding by such an expression everything that the Enemy can devise against us in this world.

One certain conviction we have: that God is a powerful support since he grants his help to anyone who asks for it.

Consequently, when we say: 'Deliver us from evil,' there is nothing else left for us to ask. Invoking the protection of God against evil means asking for everything we need.

This prayer secures us against any kind of machination of the devil and of the world. Who could be afraid of the world if he has God as his protector?

You see, brothers and sisters, how amazing the Lord's Prayer is. It is truly a compendium of all the requests we could possibly make.

Our Lord Jesus Christ who came for all people, for the wise as for the ignorant, without distinction of sex or age, reduces the precepts of salvation to the essential minimum. He wants even the simplest to be able to understand and remember them.

[Breviario Patristico © 1971 Piero Gribaudi Editore, Turin, Italy; translated by Paul Drake]
The Daily Scripture app is an aid for daily prayer and meditation on the Scriptures. It provides a short Scripture reading for each day of the year from one of the four Gospel texts, followed by a meditation, written by Don Schwager based on the Scripture passage, along with a prayer and a few verses from the Book of Psalms. It also has a daily reading selection from a Christian book.

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