

WITNESS

JOINING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS AND
SHARING YOUR FAITH IN THE 21ST
CENTURY



WITNESS

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PART I: WELCOME AND WHY



WELCOME TO *WITNESS*

WE'RE GLAD YOU'RE HERE, AND WE ARE EXCITED TO WALK WITH YOU IN THE NEXT STEP OF YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY.

OUR GOAL IN THIS WORKBOOK IS TO PROVIDE EVERY CHRISTIAN WITH TEACHINGS, STORIES, AND TOOLS TO HELP THEM INITIATE AND SUSTAIN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE, WITNESSING TO THE LOVE AND GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST TO EVERYONE WITH WHOM THEY INTERACT.

LISTEN: WE GET IT. WE KNOW THIS CAN BE AN INTIMIDATING PART OF A LIFE OF FAITH. CREATING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS CAN BE MESSY, CHALLENGING, AND AWKWARD, ESPECIALLY IN OUR INCREASINGLY POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD. YET WE ALSO KNOW THAT WE HAVE AN EXAMPLE IN CHRIST WHO TOOK ON THE MESSY, CHALLENGING, AND OFTEN AWKWARD TASK OF REDEEMING **US** (ROMANS 5:8). JESUS WENT TO THE CROSS SO THAT WE MIGHT HAVE FULL, FREE LIFE IN HIM, THE BEGINNING OF THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS (ROMANS 8:23). BEING A CHRISTIAN MEANS BEING WILLING TO DO THE SAME, TO DENY OURSELVES FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD (MATTHEW 16:24).

SO JOIN US FOR A FOUR WEEK JOURNEY, SPENDING TIME LEARNING ABOUT **THE WORLD** WE LIVE IN, THE FULL MESSAGE OF **THE GOSPEL**, AND THE WAYS WE CAN SERVE AS **THE WITNESS** TO THAT LIFE-CHANGING MESSAGE.

INTRODUCTION: WHY WITNESS?

IN THE BIBLE, THE GREEK WORD THAT WE TRANSLATE TO ENGLISH AS "WITNESS" IS THE WORD "MARTUS." THE WORD ORIGINALLY REFERRED TO SOMEONE WHO HAD SEEN SOMETHING INCREDIBLE AND SHARED THEIR TESTIMONY ABOUT THAT EVENT. THIS IS WHY THE EARLY CHRISTIANS WERE CALLED WITNESSES: THEY WERE PEOPLE WHO SHARED ABOUT THE EVENTS THAT THEY HAD ENCOUNTERED. SOMETIMES THIS OCCURRED IN COURTROOMS, AND OTHER TIMES THIS EVEN MEANT DYING BECAUSE OF THE NEWS THEY SHARED, WHICH IS WHY WE HAVE SHIFTED OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORD "MARTUS" FROM "WITNESS" TO "MARTYR" IN ENGLISH OVER TIME. IN ITS ORIGINAL SENSE, A WITNESS WAS SIMPLY SOMEONE WHO HAD REPORTED WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

IMAGINE...

NOW IMAGINE: YOU HAVE BEEN CHAINED TO THE BACK OF A CAVE FOR YOUR ENTIRE LIFE. YOU'VE ONLY EVER SEEN THE BACK WALL OF THE CAVE, AND SOMETIMES YOU CAN SEE SHADOWS MOVING ACROSS IT. YOU'VE TRIED TO FREE YOURSELF FROM THE CHAINS, BUT YOU ARE NEVER ABLE TO; THEY ARE TOO STRONG. YOU CAN TURN YOUR HEAD ENOUGH TO SEE THAT THERE ARE DOZENS OF OTHER PEOPLE IN THE SAME PREDICAMENT AS YOU.

THEN, ONE DAY, A MAN ARRIVES, STEPPING BETWEEN YOU AND THE WALL. HE IS THE FIRST FREE PERSON YOU HAVE EVER SEEN. HE ISN'T A SHADOW, HE IS SOLID. HE HAS A LIGHT WITH HIM, ILLUMINATING THE WHOLE PLACE SIMPLY WITH HIS PRESENCE. SUDDENLY, WITH JUST A WORD, HE BREAKS YOUR CHAINS AND OFFERS YOU A WAY OUT OF THE CAVE: SIMPLY FOLLOW HIM. AFTER YEARS OF STRUGGLE, YOU HAVE BEEN SET FREE.

IF YOU EXPERIENCED THIS SORT OF FREEDOM, THIS LIFE-ALTERING AND CHAIN-BREAKING REALIZATION, IT WOULD SEEM NATURAL TO WANT TO SHARE IT, RIGHT? YOU'D WANT TO *WITNESS* TO WHAT YOU HAD EXPERIENCED. AFTER ALL, THERE ARE SO MANY OTHER PEOPLE STILL STUCK IN THE DARK, STILL HELD DOWN BY THE CHAINS.

WITNESSING TO THE GOSPEL FOLLOWS THIS SAME STORY. WE HAVE BEEN LIBERATED FROM ALL THE THINGS THAT CHAIN US, AND SO WE WANT TO SEE OTHERS EXPERIENCE THE VERY SAME FREEDOM.

WHY ME?

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF REASONS WE ARE A LITTLE UNCOMFORTABLE WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS OR WITNESSING TO JESUS CHRIST IN OUR WORLD. SO LETS CONFRONT THOSE FEARS. WE HAVE COMPILED OF A LIST OF A FEW COMMON DIFFICULTIES THAT MANY CHRISTIANS HAVE WHEN WITNESSING TO JESUS CHRIST; WE HOPE THAT IN EXPLORING THESE YOU WILL ACTUALLY FEEL THE FREEDOM TO BECOME A WITNESS TO WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN YOUR LIFE.

DIFFICULTY 1: I NEED TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS IN ORDER TO WITNESS TO JESUS

WHEN ATTEMPTING TO PROMPT A SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION, OR EVEN WITNESS TO A FRIEND ABOUT WHO JESUS IS, WE CAN OFTEN FEEL LIKE IT IS OUR JOB (AS A TRUE CHRISTIAN) TO ENSURE THAT NO QUESTION OR RESPONSE GOES UNANSWERED. SINCE WE DON'T FEEL LIKE WE HAVE ALL OF THE ANSWERS TO COMPLICATED AND DIFFICULT QUESTIONS, WE AVOID SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS ENTIRELY. IT MAKES SENSE; WE WANT TO BE CONVINCING AND WELL-READ IN ORDER TO TRULY WITNESS TO OTHERS IN OUR CONTEXTS. HOWEVER, THERE IS AN IMPORTANT REALITY TO KEEP IN

MIND: NONE OF US HAVE ALL OF THE ANSWERS. YOU DON'T HAVE TO KNOW ASTROPHYSICS, GREEK, THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT EMPIRES, OR THE DETAILS OF PHILOSOPHY TO TALK TO PEOPLE ABOUT WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN YOUR LIFE. THIS IS EXACTLY THE CENTRAL POINT OF THE GOSPEL - THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER, THAT HE IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE (JOHN 14). IF THIS IS TRUE, THEN NONE OF US ARE EXPECTED TO KNOW IT ALL. OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHERS ARE SIMPLY TESTIMONIES, OR WITNESSES, TO WHAT JESUS HAS DONE IN OUR LIVES. WE DO NOT ARRIVE IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS AS EXPERTS WHO HAVE SOLVED EVERY QUESTION ABOUT LIFE AND THE UNIVERSE, SO WE SHOULDN'T PRETEND TO BE. INSTEAD, IT IS IMPORTANT SIMPLY TO EXPRESS WHAT JESUS HAS DONE IN OUR LIVES, AND HOW WE HAVE SEEN HIM (AND CONTINUE TO SEE HIM) TRANSFORM US. IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER TO A FRIEND'S QUESTION, THAT IS OKAY! ACKNOWLEDGE IT AND THEN OFFER TO EXPLORE THE QUESTION IN MORE DEPTH TOGETHER.

DIFFICULTY 2: I WILL BE VIEWED NEGATIVELY IF I WITNESS TO MY FAITH OR EXPRESS MY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES BECAUSE I AM A CHRISTIAN (IT WILL COST ME)

THIS OBJECTION IS HIGHLY RELATABLE - IN FACT, IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PROBLEM FOR CHRISTIANS. IN OTHER TIMES THERE WERE LIONS OR POVERTY THAT CAME WITH PUBLICLY CLAIMING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. IN OUR TIME THE PERSECUTION IS MORE POLITE. WITH ALL OF THE FAILURE OF THE CHURCH THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY, MANY PEOPLE IN OUR CULTURE BELIEVE THAT CHRISTIANS ARE MOSTLY HYPOCRITES AND CON-ARTISTS. THEREFORE, IN WITNESSING TO OUR FAITH WE ARE ASSOCIATING WITH THE CHURCH AND LUMPING OURSELVES IN WITH THE MISTAKES AND NEGATIVE

PRESS OF THE CHURCH'S CHECKERED PAST AND PRESENT. WHILE THIS MAY PARTIALLY BE TRUE, THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE TO THIS OBJECTION: IF MANY PEOPLE ALREADY THINK CHRISTIANS ARE CORRUPT OR UNDESERVING OF CONSIDERATION, WHO IS GOING TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS? WE NEED CHRISTIANS WHO ARE GOOD FRIENDS, WHO LOVE PEOPLE WELL, WHO LISTEN EARNESTLY, WHO ARE NOT MANIPULATIVE. WITNESSING TO OUR NEIGHBORS, COWORKERS, AND FRIENDS IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT INVITING THEM INTO A TRANSFORMATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS (THOUGH THIS IS A MAJOR PURPOSE). IT IS ALSO ABOUT EXEMPLIFYING CHRISTIANITY IN A WAY THAT IS WELCOMING, KIND, AND GRACIOUS. IN THIS WAY, WE RE-DEFINE CHRISTIANITY AS GOOD NEWS. IF WE LIVE WELL IN THE NAME OF JESUS AND PEOPLE DON'T LIKE US IT IS STILL WORTH DOING (1 PETER 3:13-17)

DIFFICULTY 3: I'M NOT SURE IF JESUS HAS REALLY CHANGED MY LIFE

THIS OBJECTION PERHAPS RUNS THE DEEPEST, AS IT HAS TO DO WITH OUR HEARTS, NOT JUST OUR MINDS. FOR MANY OF US, FAITH IN JESUS ITSELF IS DIFFICULT ENOUGH: I MEAN, HOW CAN I REALLY KNOW IF THIS WHOLE CHRISTIANITY THING IS ACTUALLY REAL IN THE FIRST PLACE? DO I REALLY BELIEVE IN THIS STUFF? THIS IS AN EXCELLENT QUESTION TO ASK OF OURSELVES, ONE THAT IS ESSENTIAL TO A CONSISTENT LIFE OF FAITH; WE WANT TO BE PEOPLE WHO "EXAMINE OURSELVES" (2 CORINTHIANS 13:5), REGULARLY REFLECTING ON WHO JESUS IS AND WHY HE MATTERS TO US. AS WE DO THIS, WE WANT TO REFLECT ON IMPORTANT QUESTIONS, "DO I BELIEVE THAT JESUS SAVED ME FROM SOMETHING? DOES FOLLOWING JESUS MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE?" IF THE ANSWER IS YES, WE ARE ALREADY ON TO SOMETHING: WE ARE RECOGNIZING THAT A LIFE DEVOTED TO JESUS HAS CHANGED US AT A FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL, THAT FOLLOWING HIM HAS BROUGHT US FROM DEATH TO LIFE. ONCE WE REALIZE THIS, THEN WE CAN

START TO CONSIDER HOW TO WITNESS TO OTHERS AND INVITE THEM INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS. IT IS PRECISELY IN KNOWING WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR ME THAT I CAN BEGIN TO INVITE OTHERS TO ENTRUST THEMSELVES TO HIM. CONSIDERING THIS OBJECTION MORE CAREFULLY CAN ACTUALLY BRING YOU DEEPER INTO YOUR FAITH.

WE UNDERSTAND THESE OBJECTIONS - WE'VE HAD THEM TOO. THAT IS WHY THEY ARE INCLUDED HERE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WORKBOOK; WE WANT TO MAKE SURE WE ARE ADDRESSING THEM AND WALKING THROUGH THEM TOGETHER. STRUGGLING WITH THEM IS EXPECTED, BUT DON'T LET FEAR STOP YOU FROM SEEING GOD CHANGE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE YOU CARE FOR. NOW THAT WE HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THESE DIFFICULTIES, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT JESUS ACTUALLY TELLS US ABOUT WITNESSING TO OTHERS.

JESUS CALLED US TO THIS WORK

AFTER DYING ON THE CROSS AND CONQUERING DEATH IN HIS RESURRECTION, JESUS COMMANDS HIS FOLLOWERS:

"ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME. THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND SURELY I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE." - MATTHEW 28:18-20

THIS IS A COMMAND WE HAVE HEARD OFTEN IN THE CHURCH, AND IT LIES AT THE CENTER OF OUR EFFORTS TO WITNESS IN OUR CULTURE. THERE ARE A FEW IMPORTANT POINTS TO IDENTIFY IN JESUS' WORDS:

1. WE ARE CALLED TO "MAKE DISCIPLES"

NOTICE THAT JESUS DOESN'T SAY, "GO AND GET PEOPLE TO SAY A SPECIAL

PRAYER," OR "GO AND CONVINCE OTHER PEOPLE THAT WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS RIGHT." THOUGH THOSE THINGS MAY NOT NECESSARILY BE BAD, THE CALL OF JESUS IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT: IT IS A CALL TO "MAKE DISCIPLES." IN THE CULTURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, A DISCIPLE WAS SOMEONE WHO SERVED AS AN "APPRENTICE," OR "PUPIL," TO A "MASTER." THEY SPENT TONS OF TIME LEARNING AND PRACTICING ALL THAT THE MASTER DID, BECOMING MORE AND MORE LIKE HIM ALONG THE WAY. MAKING DISCIPLES, THEN, INVOLVES INVITING PEOPLE INTO A LONG-TERM FOLLOWING OF JESUS, LEARNING FROM AND SUBMITTING TO HIM IN EVERY AREA OF OUR LIVES. NOW, IT'S IMPORTANT TO KEEP IN MIND: THIS DISCIPLESHIP JOURNEY ISN'T PERFECT (ALL WE NEED TO DO IS LOOK AT JESUS' OWN DISCIPLES TO KNOW THIS IS TRUE!). IT INVOLVES RELATIONAL COMMITMENT, AUTHENTIC QUESTIONS, AND REAL VULNERABILITY. THIS IS THE HEART OF WITNESSING IN OUR WORLD TODAY: WE INVITE PEOPLE TO FOLLOW JESUS WITH US, ON OUR OWN JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP. WE DON'T NEED TO FEEL PRESSURE TO CREATE A "COME TO JESUS" MOMENT IN EVERY SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION, NOR DO WE HAVE TO BE EXPERTS! WE ARE SIMPLY INVITING PEOPLE TO FOLLOW JESUS RIGHT ALONGSIDE US.

2. WE ARE CALLED TO "ALL NATIONS"

OFTEN TIMES WE THINK OF THIS COMMAND ON A "GLOBAL" SCALE. WE IMAGINE PAGAN PLACES WITH FOREIGN GODS HOSTILE TO THE GOSPEL. SO WE SEND OUT MISSIONARIES TO THE FARTHEST REACHES OF THE WORLD IN ORDER TO WITNESS. WE THINK OF THEM AS BRAVE ENOUGH TO PAY THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS WITH THEIR WHOLE LIVES. WHILE THIS IS CERTAINLY TRUE (AND ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY), SOMETIMES WE FORGET THAT "ALL NATIONS" INCLUDES **OUR** NATION. JESUS ISN'T JUST TALKING ABOUT FAR OFF PLACES - HE IS TALKING ABOUT OUR OWN NEIGHBORHOODS

AND COMMUNITIES. IN OTHER WORDS, MISSIONARIES AREN'T SOME SPECIFIC, DESIGNATED POSITION BY JESUS: ALL DISCIPLES ARE MISSIONARIES, REGARDLESS OF THEIR LOCATION, AND THEY ARE CALLED TO MAKE OTHER DISCIPLES WHEREVER THEY ARE. THIS MEANS THAT YOUR OWN NEIGHBORHOOD, WORKPLACE, AND SCHOOL ARE ALL PLACES WHERE SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS AND WITNESSING CAN ACTUALLY HAPPEN. YOU DON'T NEED TO TRAVEL ACROSS THE WORLD TO WITNESS - TRY TRAVELING ACROSS THE STREET FIRST.

3. THIS ALL STARTS AND ENDS WITH JESUS

DID YOU NOTICE WHAT STATEMENTS FRAME THE COMMAND TO MAKE DISCIPLES IN THIS PASSAGE? JESUS SAYS THAT "ALL AUTHORITY ON HEAVEN AND ON EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME" AND THAT HE IS "WITH YOU ALWAYS." WITNESSING TO THE GOSPEL AND MAKING DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS STARTS AND ENDS WITH JESUS; OUR EFFORT SIMPLY PARTNERS IN GOD'S WORK. THIS GIVES US SOME IMPORTANT REMINDERS:

- WHEN WE WITNESS, WE JOIN GOD IN WHAT HE IS ALREADY DOING
- WHEN WE WITNESS, IT IS GOD'S JOB TO CHANGE LIVES
- WHEN WE WITNESS, WE ARE ALREADY SECURE IN WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

IN WITNESSING TO WHAT JESUS HAS DONE IN OUR LIVES, WE ARE PARTICIPATING IN THE NEW LIFE HE IS BRINGING TO THE WORLD. THERE IS NO HIGHER CALLING THAN BEING A PART OF THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS.

WE DO THIS TOGETHER

SO MAYBE YOU HAVE A FEW DIFFICULTIES. MAYBE THIS TASK IS A LITTLE CHALLENGING FOR YOU RIGHT NOW. IT IS CRUCIAL TO REMEMBER, BEFORE WE EVEN BEGIN, THAT JESUS GIVES THE COMMAND TO ALL HIS DISCIPLES AS A GROUP. WITNESSING IS NOT JUST A WORK THAT WE ARE FORCED TO DO ON OUR OWN - IT IS SOMETHING WE GET TO DO TOGETHER IN RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER, LEARNING AND GROWING AS WE DO.

THAT'S WHY WE'VE DESIGNED THIS WORKBOOK. WE HOPE THAT THIS WILL HELP EQUIP EACH COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS AS WE CREATE SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHERS AND WITNESS TOGETHER TO WHAT JESUS HAS DONE AND WILL DO IN AND THROUGH THEIR LIVES.

THIS FOUR WEEK JOURNEY WILL INCLUDE:

- PRAYER TOGETHER IN EVERY GATHERING, AND AN EMPHASIS ON PRAYER THROUGHOUT THE SERIES
- DATA ON OUR CURRENT WESTERN CONTEXT AND ON THE BEST PRACTICES FOR WITNESSING IN THE 21ST CENTURY
- VIDEO LESSONS AND STORIES FROM THOSE WITH EXPERIENCE WITNESSING ABOUT THEIR FAITH
- PRACTICAL TIPS AND TOOLS FOR CREATING MEANINGFUL SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS AND WITNESSING TO JESUS IN THE LIFE OF EACH MEMBER

EMBARK WITH US ON THIS JOURNEY, AND FIND OUT WHAT GOD CAN DO THROUGH YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP!

TASKS FOR INTRODUCTION:

1. IDENTIFY WHICH DIFFICULTIES MAKE CREATING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS AND WITNESSING TO OTHERS ABOUT JESUS CHALLENGING IN YOUR OWN LIFE. MAYBE IT IS ONE WE LISTED, OR MAYBE FOR YOU IT IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT. WRITE IT DOWN- WHAT SCARES YOU THE MOST?
2. SPEND TIME PRAYING THIS WEEK FOR GOD TO MAKE YOU BRAVE IN THE FREEDOM TO WHICH HE HAS CALLED YOU.
3. IDENTIFY A MINIMUM OF TWO PEOPLE THIS WEEK THAT YOU COULD PRAY FOR TO COME TO KNOW JESUS. WHO DO YOU KNOW THAT NEEDS JESUS? START PRAYING FOR THEM EVERY DAY.

NOTES

[illegible]

PART II: THE WORLD



PART II: THE WORLD

"THE PASTOR AND THE FAITHFUL SHOULD NOT DECEIVE THEMSELVES INTO THINKING THAT THEY ARE A RELIGIOUS SOCIETY...THEY LIVE IN THE WORLD. WE STILL NEED - ACCORDING TO MY OLD FORMULATION - THE BIBLE AND THE NEWSPAPER" - KARL BARTH, INTERVIEW - 1966

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, THE GOSPEL MESSAGE HAS ALWAYS ARRIVED TO PEOPLE EMBEDDED IN CULTURE. GOD SPOKE THROUGH OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS IN THEIR LANGUAGE AND THROUGH THEM TO THEIR CULTURES AND EMPIRES. JESUS ARRIVED ON EARTH AT A SPECIFIC TIME IN HUMAN HISTORY, SPOKE SEVERAL LANGUAGES, WAS JEWISH, AND LIVED IN THE TIME OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE. ALL OF THESE FACTORS PLAYED A ROLE IN HOW HE SPOKE AND HOW HIS AUDIENCE UNDERSTOOD HIM AND HIS MESSAGE. SIMILARLY, WITNESSING TO CHRIST'S GOSPEL MESSAGE SINCE HIS LIFETIME HAS ALSO ALWAYS TAKEN PLACE IN SPECIFIC CULTURAL LOCATIONS. FROM THE EVANGELISM OF GAULS AND VISIGOTHS, TO THE GREAT AWAKENINGS OF THE 18TH/19TH CENTURIES, TO THE EXPANSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH ACROSS AFRICA, ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA, THE GOSPEL HAS TAKEN ROOT IN RADICALLY DIFFERENT CULTURES WHO HAVE RADICALLY DIFFERENT ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT HOW THE WORLD WORKS.

WE EVEN SEE GLIMPSES OF THIS SORT OF CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT IN SCRIPTURE ITSELF: PAUL INTENTIONALLY INCORPORATES ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY WHEN PREACHING THE GOSPEL IN ATHENS SO THAT HIS AUDIENCE MIGHT BEST UNDERSTAND HIM (ACTS 17:16-33), AND HE SHOWS A WILLINGNESS TO SPEAK TO ANY CULTURE IN A WAY THEY MIGHT UNDERSTAND FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL (1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23).

THEREFORE, FOR THOSE OF US WHO WISH TO CREATE SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS AND WITNESS TO WHAT JESUS HAS DONE IN OUR LIVES, IT IS CRITICAL THAT WE UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE CULTURE AROUND US. AS KARL BARTH MENTIONS ABOVE, WE MUST READ BOTH OUR BIBLES AND OUR NEWSPAPERS TO WITNESS IN A WAY THAT PEOPLE WILL ACTUALLY HEAR AND UNDERSTAND IN THEIR OWN CULTURE AND TIME. LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT OUR PRESENT CULTURE.

LESS RELIGIOUS, BUT MORE SPIRITUAL

IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE 21ST CENTURY INITIAL INDICATIONS MIGHT SEEM TO BE THAT PEOPLE ARE LESS OPEN TO THE GOSPEL THAN EVER BEFORE. PER 2019 PEW RESEARCH, MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE LEAVING CHURCHES IN RECENT YEARS. HOWEVER, A DEEPER CULTURAL EXAMINATION REVEALS THAT WHILE PEOPLE MAY BE LEAVING ORGANIZED RELIGION, THEY REMAIN INTERESTED IN SPIRITUALITY.

IN 2018 A STATISTICAL ORGANIZATION CALLED THE BARNA GROUP RELEASED SOME IMPORTANT DATA ON RECENT RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL DEMOGRAPHICS, INDICATING SPECIFIC TRENDS OF THOSE WHO:

- DON'T ATTEND A CHURCH (CALLED "LAPSED CHRISTIANS")
- ARE AFFILIATED WITH A DIFFERENT RELIGION
- WOULD CATEGORIZE THEMSELVES AS ATHEISTIC OR AGNOSTIC

THEIR FINDINGS WERE EYE-OPENING: OF THOSE POPULATIONS, NEARLY TWO-THIRDS CALLED THEMSELVES "SPIRITUAL," INCLUDING NEARLY HALF OF REPORTED ATHEISTS/AGNOSTICS. THE IMPLICATION HERE IS THAT PEOPLE ARE STILL LONGING FOR (AND SEEKING) SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES. THE STUDY GOES ON TO LIST VARIOUS ACTIVITIES WHICH PEOPLE CONSIDER

SPIRITUAL, INCLUDING BIKING, GARDENING, READING, SPORTS, WATCHING MOVIES, LISTENING TO MUSIC, AND MORE. WHAT WE LEARN RIGHT AWAY ABOUT OUR CULTURE, THEN, IS THAT SPIRITUALITY IS NOT SOMETHING FOREIGN. IN FACT ALMOST EVERYTHING IS SEEN AS A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE. PEOPLE ARE ALREADY PURSUING THESE EXPERIENCES, WHICH MEANS THEY ARE LIKELY OPEN TO SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS. THOUGH PEOPLE MAY NOT CONSIDER THEMSELVES RELIGIOUS, THEY REMAIN OPEN TO SPIRITUALITY ON THE WHOLE. AS CHRISTIANS, THIS SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISING: PEOPLE ARE SENSING THE GOD WHO MADE ALL THINGS THROUGH HIS CREATION (ISIAH 40:26-28; ACTS 14:17).

HOW DO WE GET INVOLVED?

IF SPIRITUAL PURSUITS AND CONVERSATIONS ARE ALREADY HAPPENING IN OUR CULTURE, OUR QUESTION IS SIMPLE: HOW DO WE JOIN IN THEM AS WITNESSES?

BARNA ASKED THOSE OUTSIDE THE FAITH WHAT SORT OF EXPERIENCES THEY HAD WITH CHRISTIANS AND EVANGELISM, AND WHETHER THEY HAD LEFT THOSE EXPERIENCES ENCOURAGED OR DISCOURAGED. THE RESULTS INDICATED OVERWHELMINGLY THAT THOSE POLLED WERE **ENCOURAGED** AND SAID THAT THEY HAD POSITIVE EXPERIENCES IN CASUAL ONE-ON ONE CONVERSATIONS, OR CASUAL GROUP CONVERSATIONS. THE SAME PEOPLE REPORTED THAT THEY ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO VIEW INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS AS HOSPITABLE, KIND, OR WELCOMING, THAN CHRISTIANITY IN GENERAL. SO WHAT IS THE DATA TELLING US? TWO MAIN THINGS:

1. THAT PEOPLE IN OUR CULTURE ARE WILLING, EVEN **WANTING** SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION. THIS SHOULD ENCOURAGE THOSE OF US WHO STRUGGLE WITH DIFFICULTY 2 FROM THE INTRODUCTION.
2. THAT INDIVIDUAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE BEST WAY FOR CHRISTIANS

TO WITNESS TO WHAT JESUS HAS DONE IN THEIR LIVES

UNDERSTANDING THESE TWO TAKEAWAYS, WE FIND THAT CREATING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS AND WITNESSING TO THE LOVE AND GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST IN OUR 21ST CENTURY WORLD MEANS NURTURING THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE IMMEDIATELY IN FRONT OF EACH OF US. PRE-PACKAGED SPEECHES OR TRACTS ARE FAR LESS EFFECTIVE AT REACHING NONBELIEVERS THAN SIMPLY BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHRISTIANS WHO LISTEN WELL AND CARE DEEPLY. BETTER YET: YOU CAN BUILD A RELATIONSHIP DOING SOMETHING YOU PROBABLY ALREADY LIKE TO DO, LIKE BEING OUTDOORS OR READING GOOD BOOKS. IT STARTS AND ENDS WITH THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT: LOVE. SCRIPTURE POINTS US TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS IN OUR WITNESS TO THE WORLD:

"BY THIS EVERYONE WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER." -JESUS IN JOHN 13:35

"BELOVED, SINCE GOD LOVED US SO MUCH, WE ALSO OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN GOD; IF WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER, GOD LIVES IN US, AND HIS LOVE IS PERFECTED IN US." -1 JOHN 4:11-12

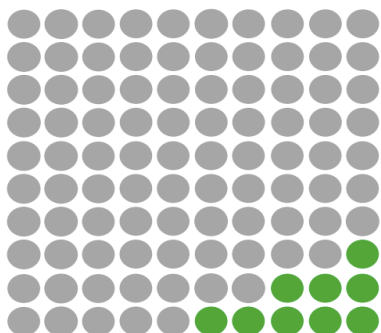
ACTIONS > IDEAS

CHRISTIANS OFTEN EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF "IDEAS" WHEN IT COMES TO WITNESSING. THE THOUGHT PROCESS GOES LIKE THIS: IF WE CAN JUST COMMUNICATE OUR IDEAS CLEARLY ENOUGH, AND WIN THE ARGUMENT, THEN PEOPLE WILL COME TO RECOGNIZE CHRISTIAN IDEAS AS TRUE AND BEGIN TO FOLLOW CHRIST. THERE ARE PLENTY OF PEOPLE ON YOUTUBE WHO CALL THIS "APOLOGETICS." YET WHAT IS EMPHASIZED REPEATEDLY BY

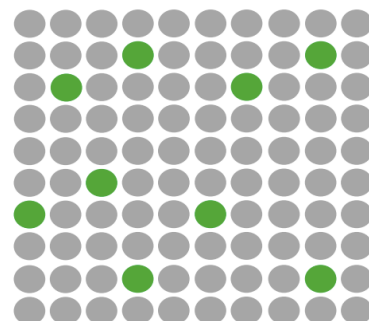
SCRIPTURE, NOT TO MENTION CULTURAL SURVEYS, IS THAT OUR ACTIONS MATTER FAR MORE THAN OUR IDEAS. THE WAYS IN WHICH WE LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS HAVE A FAR GREATER IMPACT THAN MOST ARGUMENTS. THIS ISN'T TO SAY IDEAS ARE UNIMPORTANT; THEY AFFECT OUR ACTIONS, BUT IF KNOWING JESUS CHANGES YOUR LIFE IT WILL BE VISIBLE TO OTHERS (JAMES 2:14-17). THINK ABOUT IT IN YOUR OWN LIFE: HOW DID YOU COME TO KNOW JESUS? THERE WAS PROBABLY SOMEONE WHO LOVED YOU AND INVESTED IN YOU. SO WHO AND WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE AND AREAS YOU CAN BE A WITNESS TO THE LOVE OF GOD? MAYBE IT'S BUILDING A FRIENDSHIP WITH YOUR BARISTA. MAYBE IT'S ASKING MORE ABOUT A COWORKER'S FAMILY OR PASSIONS. MAYBE IT'S OFFERING TO MOW YOUR NEIGHBOR'S LAWN OR MAKE THEM DINNER. NOTICE THAT EACH OF THESE REQUIRES A BIT OF EFFORT, BUT ALSO FITS IN TO THE AREAS WHERE YOU ALREADY SPEND MOST OF YOUR TIME.

THE REALITY IS THAT MOST OF OUR TIME AS THE 'CHURCH' IS SPENT SCATTERED, AWAY FROM EACH OTHER AND IN OUR SPECIFIC JOBS AND COMMUNITIES. IT IS IN THOSE PLACES, NOT ON SUNDAY MORNINGS WHEN WE HAVE THE GREATEST POTENTIAL TO WITNESS. THE IMAGES BELOW, BORROWED FROM THE *VERE INSTITUTE*, ILLUSTRATE THIS POINT CLEARLY:

Gathered Church



Scattered Church



THE GREEN DOTS (THE CHURCH) HAVE EXPONENTIALLY MORE CONTACT WITH GRAY DOTS (NON-BELIEVERS) WHEN THEY ARE SCATTERED RATHER THAN GATHERED (IN WORSHIP). FROM A STATISTICAL, PRACTICAL, AND--MOST IMPORTANTLY--BIBLICAL STANDPOINT, WE FIND THAT THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS PROVIDE A POWERFUL OPPORTUNITY WHEN IT COMES TO WITNESSING IN OUR MODERN WORLD. THE GATHERED CHURCH IS STILL CERTAINLY A NECESSITY, AS WE COMMEMORATE TOGETHER WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE AND ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER, BUT THE SCATTERED CHURCH IS ALSO AN ESSENTIAL PART OF WITNESSING TO OUR MODERN WORLD.

TO SUM UP: IT IS CLEAR THAT OUR WORLD IS LONGING FOR SPIRITUAL CONNECTION AND CONVERSATION, AND THAT MANY EVERYDAY THINGS ARE SEEN AS SPIRITUAL. SINCE WE ARE ALREADY INVOLVED IN THOSE THINGS EVERY DAY WE HAVE A PRIME OPPORTUNITY TO WITNESS TO THE LOVE AND GRACE OF JESUS THROUGH OUR DAY TO DAY INTERACTIONS.

"IF EVANGELISM ISN'T AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE OF NEIGHBOR, IT ISN'T CHRISTIAN EVANGELIZING. AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOR INCLUDES NOT ONLY WHAT I SAY TO THE NEIGHBOR BUT HOW I SAY THAT." - MIROSLAV VOLF

HOW?

SO IF WE KNOW THAT PEOPLE ARE LONGING FOR SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS IN OUR CULTURE, AND IN MANY WAYS ARE ALREADY HAVING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS, FOR CHRISTIANS THE QUESTION BECOMES SIMPLE: HOW DO WE ENGAGE IN THOSE CONVERSATIONS? TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION, WE PROVIDE A COUPLE PRACTICAL TIPS BELOW THAT CAN HELP:

1. **LISTEN** - WHEN YOU ARE GOING THROUGH YOUR USUAL, DAY TO DAY TASKS AND WORK, ACTUALLY TAKE THE TIME TO LISTEN TO THE CONVERSATIONS AND STORIES OF OTHERS. WHEN YOU DO THIS YOU WILL OFTEN FIND ALL SORTS OF SPIRITUAL CONNECTION POINTS: SONG LYRICS, FAMILY CHALLENGES, THE LOSS OF A RELATIONSHIP, A RECENT VACATION, AND SO FORTH. ALL OF THESE TOPICS CAN SERVE AS BRIDGES TO SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS, AS THEY INDICATE THE PLACES WHERE PEOPLE ARE EXPERIENCING WONDER, CREATIVITY, AND VARIOUS RELATIONAL DYNAMICS THAT ARE OFTEN CONNECTED TO THEIR SPIRITUALITY. LISTENING FOR THESE THINGS IN YOUR CONVERSATIONS WITH FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, AND COWORKERS CAN HELP YOU IN IDENTIFYING EASY CONNECTION POINTS WITH THEM.
2. **ASK GOOD QUESTIONS** - IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO FEEL A NEED TO COERCE OR COAX SOMEONE INTO A SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION; REMEMBER THEY ARE LIKELY ALREADY HAVING SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES AND CONVERSATIONS, SO YOU DON'T NEED TO REINVENT THE WHEEL. INSTEAD, SIMPLY LEARN THE ART OF ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS THAT GO DEEPER THAN THE DAY'S WEATHER. ASKING QUESTIONS LIKE, "WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE BANDS OR ARTISTS?" OR "HOW DID YOU MEET YOUR SIGNIFICANT OTHER?" CAN PROVIDE AMPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPIRITUAL TOPICS TO ARISE (THINGS LIKE WONDER, JOY, LOVE, BEAUTY, ETC.). THEN, AS YOU CONTINUE IN CONVERSATION WITH THEM, KEEP ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR STORY. "WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE YOUR CAREER?" OR "HOW DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO MARRY YOUR SPOUSE?" WILL OFTEN REVEAL SOMEONE'S DEEPEST PASSIONS, AND CAN THEREFORE LEAD YOU INTO REAL SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS. NEITHER OF THESE TIPS ARE PARTICULARLY NOTEWORTHY. IN FACT, AS YOU HAVE BEEN READING, YOU CAN PROBABLY THINK OF SPECIFIC INSTANCES IN

YOUR OWN LIFE WHERE YOU CAN PUT THESE INTO PRACTICE. SO WE WANT TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO JUST THAT - FOR THE TASKS IN PART I, WE WANT EACH OF YOU TO START PARTICIPATING IN AND INITIATING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS IN YOUR OWN LIVES.

TASKS FOR PART I:

1. KNOWING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE "SCATTERED CHURCH," TAKE SOME TIME TO THINK ABOUT WHERE YOU SPEND YOUR TIME DURING THE WEEK. THEN, CREATE A RELATIONSHIP "MAP" WHERE YOU SPEND YOUR TIME EACH DAY. LOOK FOR PLACES YOU GO TO OR ACTIVITIES YOU DO WHERE YOU INTERACT WITH NON-BELIEVERS AND TRY TO ADD THEIR NAMES TO THE MAP THIS WEEK. AIM TO GET THE NAMES OF AT LEAST FOUR NONBELIEVERS THAT YOU COME IN CONTACT WITH EACH WEEK. WE HAVE SOME EXAMPLES AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER IF YOU WANT TO SEE WHAT THIS SORT OF "MAP" COULD LOOK LIKE

2. CREATE AT LEAST TWO SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS THIS WEEK WITH PEOPLE FROM YOUR RELATIONSHIP MAP. YOUR GROUP WILL DEBRIEF THOSE CONVERSATIONS NEXT WEEK WHEN YOU MEET.

I. IMPORTANT NOTE: IN ORDER TO REMEMBER SPECIFIC POINTS OF YOUR SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS, WHEN YOU HAVE CONCLUDED THEM WRITE SOME QUICK NOTES ABOUT HOW THEY WENT. WHAT DID THE PERSON BRING UP? WHAT IS A MEMORABLE PART OF THEIR STORY? WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT THEM? WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF?

3. CONTINUE PRAYING FOR EVERY PERSON ON YOUR MAP. LEAVE THIS WORK IN GOD'S HANDS - ONLY THE LORD CAN CHANGE HEARTS.

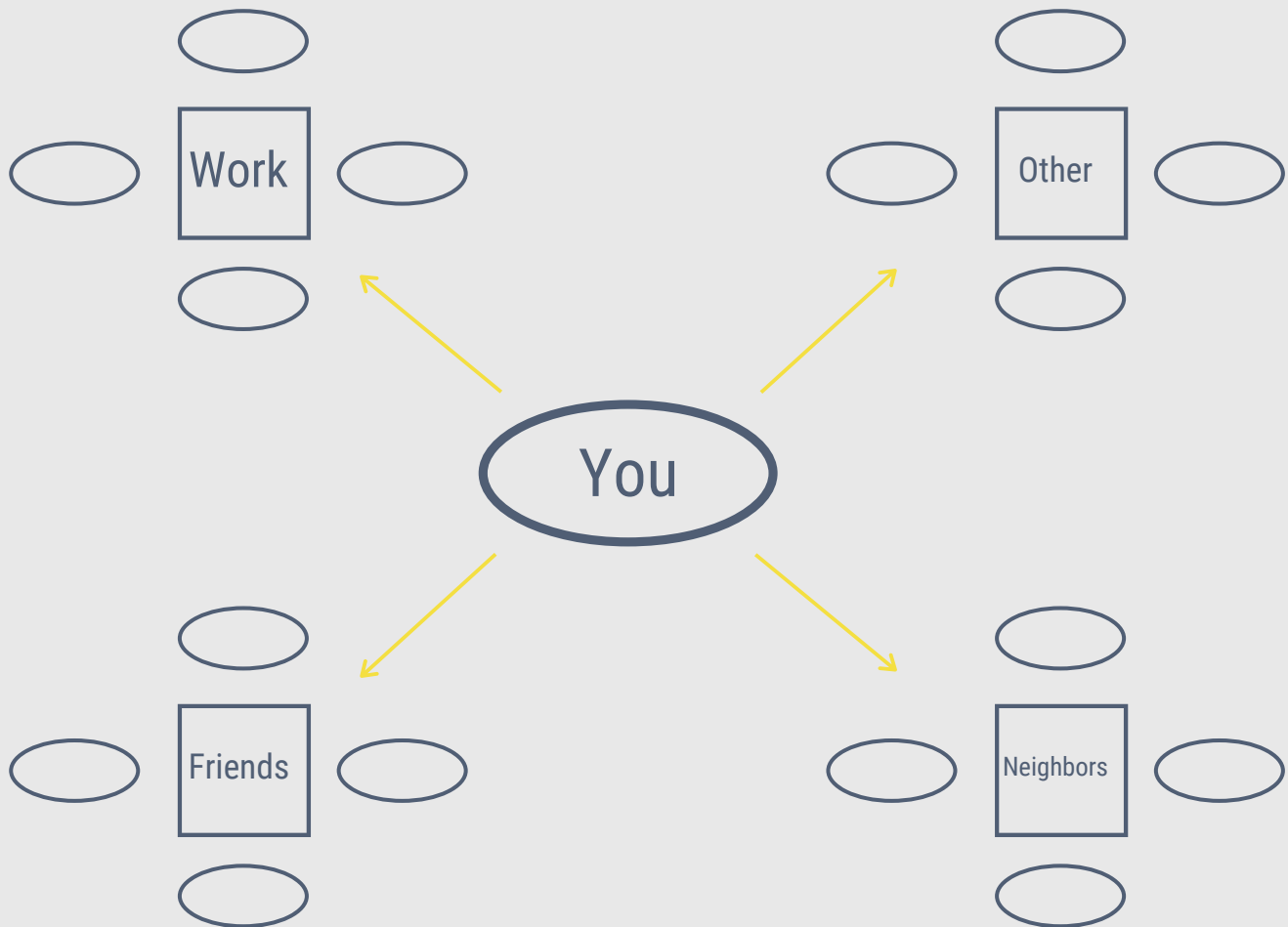
RELATIONSHIP MAP EXAMPLES FOR PART 1:

A NEIGHBOR MAP (BORROWING FROM *THE ART OF NEIGHBORING*) - MAKE A NINE-SQUARE GRID--LIKE A TIC-TAC-TOE BOARD--OF THE EIGHT HOUSES OR APARTMENTS CLOSEST TO YOU, WITH YOUR HOME IN THE MIDDLE. THEN, BEGIN FILLING THEM IN WITH THE NAMES OF YOUR NEIGHBORS, ALONG WITH OTHER DETAILS YOU MIGHT KNOW ABOUT THEM (I.E. WHERE THEY WORK, HOW MANY KIDS THEY HAVE, WHAT THEIR PASSIONS ARE, ETC.). CHOOSE A MINIMUM OF TWO OF THESE PEOPLE FROM YOUR MAP AND HAVE A SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION WITH THEM.



RELATIONSHIP MAP EXAMPLES FOR PART 1:

A FOUR-DIRECTIONS MAP - CREATE A MAP OF FOUR MAJOR AREAS OF YOUR LIFE (WORK, NEIGHBORS, FRIENDS, ETC.). THEN CHOOSE FOUR PEOPLE IN EACH OF THOSE AREAS AND WRITE THEM DOWN. FOCUS ON YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE PEOPLE, IN THOSE SPECIFIC AREAS WHERE YOU ARE ALREADY SPENDING YOUR TIME. SEE THE MAP BELOW FOR A SAMPLE TEMPLATE TO USE.





WITNESS TIP, PART I:

IT IS GOING TO FEEL AWKWARD AT FIRST, BUT DON'T FORCE ANYTHING! REMEMBER: PEOPLE ARE ALREADY INTERESTED IN SPIRITUALITY IN OUR CULTURE, AND ARE OPEN TO DISCUSSING IT. SIMPLY TRY TO BRIDGE THE GAP TO THEIR SPECIFIC INTERESTS AND GO FROM THERE. KEEP YOUR EARS AND EYES OPEN, SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS OR AVENUES INTO THEM ARE ALL AROUND YOU. HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLE SCENARIOS TO HELP YOU CONSIDER WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE FOR YOU:

SCENARIO 1: GOING ON A HIKE WITH A FRIEND - THIS CAN PROVIDE YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS THE BEAUTY OF THE NATURAL WORLD AND OPEN UP A SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION.

SCENARIO 2: DISCUSSING YOUR FAMILY - GROWING UP, MANY OF US INHERIT SOME OF OUR SPIRITUALITY FROM OUR PARENTS. LEARNING HOW PEOPLE WERE RAISED IS AN EASY WAY TO BUILD A BRIDGE TO SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS. WHAT IS THEIR SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND?

SCENARIO 3: TALKING ABOUT YOUR FAVORITE MUSICAL ARTISTS OR MOVIES - TALKING ABOUT ART TENDS TO OPEN PEOPLE UP TO INTERESTING CONVERSATION. INQUIRE ABOUT SOME OF YOUR FRIEND'S OR NEIGHBOR'S OR COWORKER'S FAVORITES AND CREATE A SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION THERE.

NOTES

This image shows a single page from a notebook or ledger. It features ten evenly spaced horizontal blue ruling lines across its entire width. The background of the paper is white. There are no margins, text, or other markings present on the page.

PART III: THE GOSPEL



PART II: THE GOSPEL

"MANY PEOPLE TODAY ASSUME THAT CHRISTIANITY IS ONE OR MORE OF THESE THINGS – A RELIGION, A MORAL SYSTEM, A PHILOSOPHY. IN OTHER WORDS, THEY ASSUME THAT CHRISTIANITY IS ABOUT ADVICE. BUT IT WASN'T AND ISN'T. CHRISTIANITY IS, SIMPLY, GOOD NEWS. IT IS THE NEWS THAT SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED AS A RESULT OF WHICH THE WORLD IS A DIFFERENT PLACE." -N.T. WRIGHT, "SIMPLY GOOD NEWS: WHY THE GOSPEL IS NEWS AND WHAT MAKES IT GOOD."

FOR THOSE OF US WHO WISH TO WITNESS TO THE LOVE AND GRACE OF JESUS IN OUR WORLD TODAY, IT IS CRITICAL TO KNOW HOW TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, "WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?" WHILE IT MAY SEEM SIMPLISTIC, IT IS SURPRISING HOW OFTEN, THROUGHOUT CHRISTIAN HISTORY, THE CORE OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE HAS BECOME BURIED UNDERNEATH LAYERS OF RELIGIOUS MORALISM, PHILOSOPHICAL Musing, OR CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS. IN ORDER TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION, THEN, IT IS HELPFUL TO RETURN TO THE MEANING OF THE WORD ITSELF AS IT IS USED IN OUR NEW TESTAMENT.

GOSPEL = "GOOD NEWS"

THE WORD THAT WE TRANSLATE FROM THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT TO ENGLISH AS "GOSPEL" IS THE WORD *EUANGELION*. THE DEFINITION OF THIS WORD IS, LITERALLY, "GOOD NEWS," AND VARIOUS FORMS OF THE WORD ARE USED, IN TOTAL, AT LEAST 133 TIMES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ALONE (*EUANGELIZO* = PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS, *EUANGELISTES* = ONE WHO PROCLAIMS GOOD NEWS, ETC.). IN OTHER WORDS, THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIANITY IS NOT PRIMARILY A NEW MORAL CODE, OR A NEW PHILOSOPHICAL IDEA; INSTEAD, IT IS NEWS THAT SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED THAT HAS CHANGED THE COURSE OF THINGS.

THIS DISTINCTION IS CRUCIAL FOR US IF WE ARE GOING TO WITNESS IN OUR WORLD. THE GOSPEL IS NOT SOMETHING WE DO, BUT SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN DONE FOR US - IT IS NOT SOMETHING THAT HUMANITY CAN ACCOMPLISH, BUT INSTEAD SOMETHING JESUS ALREADY HAS ACCOMPLISHED. IN THIS WAY, CHRISTIANS AREN'T JUST PEOPLE WHO ACT DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE OF A MORAL CODE THAT HAS BEEN HANDED DOWN TO THEM IN THE BIBLE; THEY ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE INSTEAD RECEIVED THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS AND HAVE RESPONDED TO IT BY ENTRUSTING THEIR FAITH AND LIFE TO HIM.

"FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH, AND THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING; IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD— NOT THE RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST." - EPHESIANS 2:8-9

THIS FUNDAMENTAL DEFINITION OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE MAKES IT RADICALLY DIFFERENT THAN ANY OTHER RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY OR HUMAN PHILOSOPHY, FOR THE ONUS IS NOT LOCATED IN HUMAN EFFORT BUT RATHER IN THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS IN HIS LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION. WHEN WE WITNESS TO THIS GOSPEL, WE ARE NOT COERCING OTHERS INTO A NEW IDEOLOGY; WE ARE SIMPLY PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS THAT WE HAVE HEARD AND CHOSEN TO RECEIVE.

THE COMPREHENSIVE GOOD NEWS

SO NOW THE QUESTION BECOMES, "WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED?" IT IS IMPORTANT, IN ANSWERING THIS, TO ENSURE WE ARE EXAMINING THE WHOLE SCRIPTURAL NARRATIVE AND NOT SIMPLY FOCUSING ON ONE PARTICULAR ELEMENT OF THIS GOOD NEWS. OFTEN TIMES IN OUR MODERN WESTERN CONTEXT, OUT OF A DESIRE FOR SIMPLICITY, CHRISTIANS HAVE ACTUALLY REDUCED THE MESSAGE DOWN AND MISSED THE FAR-REACHING SCOPE OF THE GOSPEL ALTOGETHER.

THERE IS A TENDENCY, FOR INSTANCE, ONLY TO DISCUSS TWO PARTS OF THE MESSAGE:

1. THAT HUMANS ARE FATALLY BROKEN AND UNABLE TO REDEEM THEMSELVES
2. THAT JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION ALLOW HUMANS THE ABILITY TO BE FORGIVEN AND LIVE IN HEAVEN WITH GOD WHEN THEY DIE

TO BE CLEAR, THESE ARE IMPORTANT ASPECTS, AND NOT UNTRUE OF THE GOSPEL. HOWEVER, THEY ALSO MISS MAJOR POINTS OF THE SCRIPTURAL NARRATIVE, INCLUDING WHY HUMAN BEINGS WERE CREATED, WHAT THEY WERE MADE FOR, AND HOW THE GOSPEL WORKS TO RESTORE THOSE PURPOSES. CREATING AN OVERLY SIMPLISTIC MESSAGE THAT SPEAKS VERY LITTLE TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE WORLD TODAY IS ULTIMATELY ONE REASON WHY SO MANY PEOPLE DO NOT RESONATE WITH CHRISTIANITY: THEY SEE IT AS A FORM OF ESCAPISM RATHER THAN A LIFE-CHANGING REALITY. WHAT WE FIND IN SCRIPTURE IS A FAR MORE RICH AND COMPREHENSIVE GOSPEL PICTURE, ONE THAT ACTUALLY BEGINS TO TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO RECEIVE IT AND THE WORLD AROUND THEM IN POWERFUL WAYS. HERE ARE THE FOUR MAIN ASPECTS TO THE GOOD NEWS AS IT IS PRESENTED IN SCRIPTURE:

1. CREATION

THE BIBLE BEGINS WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE CREATION OF THE ENTIRE COSMOS BY GOD. PER THIS NARRATIVE, GOD IS THE ONE WHO INITIATES AND SUSTAINS THE UNIVERSE, THROUGH WHICH AND BY WHICH ALL THINGS CAME TO BE. THIS CREATION, IN GENESIS 1, IS DESCRIBED AS "GOOD" SIX TIMES (V. 4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25), AND HUMANITY - THE FINAL CREATIVE ACT OF GOD IN THE STORY - IS CALLED "VERY GOOD" (V. 31). IN THIS INITIAL CREATION, EVERYTHING WORKED TOGETHER IN HARMONY, AND THERE WERE NO DISRUPTIONS PROMPTING FRACTURE IN THE CREATED ORDER.

THE BIBLICAL TERM FOR THIS HARMONY IS *SHALOM*, WHICH WE OFTEN TRANSLATE INTO ENGLISH AS "PEACE" OR "WHOLENESS." ALL THINGS WORKED TOGETHER, AND EVERYTHING HAD A DISTINCT PURPOSE, INCLUDING HUMANITY. HUMANS WERE MADE SPECIALLY IN THE "IMAGE OF GOD" (V. 27), WHICH GAVE THEM INHERENT SPIRITUAL AND RELATIONAL NATURE LIKE GOD, PROVIDED THEM THEM AGENCY AND PERSONAL FREEDOM, AND WARRANTED A ROLE OF STEWARDSHIP OVER THE CREATED ORDER AS GOD'S REPRESENTATIVES. IN ESSENCE, HUMAN BEINGS WERE MADE TO PARTICIPATE ALONGSIDE GOD IN THE MAINTAINING OF THE *SHALOM* OF THE ORIGINAL COSMOS. THIS CREATION NARRATIVE IS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL, AS IT INDICATES IMPORTANT IDEAS ABOUT WHO GOD IS, WHAT THE UNIVERSE IS, AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN.

2. FALL

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF GENESIS GOES INTO MORE DETAIL REGARDING THE CREATION OF MEN AND WOMEN, EVEN LOCATING THEM IN A SPECIFIC GARDEN (WHICH WE REFER TO AS THE GARDEN OF EDEN) TO LIVE ALONGSIDE GOD IN FULFILLING THEIR PURPOSE. QUICKLY, THOUGH, THINGS GO AWRY, AS BOTH MAN AND WOMAN CHOOSE TO DISOBEY THE COMMAND OF GOD NOT TO EAT OF A PARTICULAR FRUIT IN THE GARDEN (3:6-7). THIS DISOBEDIENCE SERVES AS A DELIBERATE REJECTION OF GOD'S PURPOSES, AND IT HAS A RIPPLE EFFECT TO THE REST OF CREATION; THE HARMONY WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED BY GOD IN THE BEGINNING IS NOW DISRUPTED BY HUMANITY'S DISOBEDIENCE. THE RESULT FROM THIS POINT FORWARD IS A WORLD THAT IS BROKEN, OUT OF SYNC, AND IN DISARRAY. HUMAN HISTORY AND THE BIBLE PROCEED TO TELL THIS PART OF THE STORY, WHERE HUMANS WREAK HAVOC ON THEMSELVES, ONE ANOTHER, AND THE COSMOS. NO PART OF THE UNIVERSE IS UNTOUCHED BY THIS BROKENNESS AND REJECTION OF GOD'S PERFECT DESIGN. HUMANITY HAD NOW SKEWED THE

IMAGE OF GOD THEY WERE MADE IN; WHERE THEY HAD BEEN CREATED AS MIRRORS REFLECTING THE NATURE OF GOD IN THE WORLD, THEY NOW SHATTERED THOSE MIRRORS, ALIENATING THEMSELVES FROM RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. NOT ONLY SO, BUT THEY ALSO WERE FUNDAMENTALLY UNABLE TO RESTORE THEMSELVES, FOR THEY WERE NOT THE ORIGINAL CREATORS IN THE FIRST PLACE. THE STORY, AT THIS POINT, APPEARS DIRE.

3. REDEMPTION

IN SPITE OF HUMANITY'S CAUSING OF THIS BROKEN WORLD AND THEIR FUNDAMENTAL REJECTION OF THEIR PURPOSES, GOD IMMEDIATELY REVEALS A PLAN TO REDEEM THIS BROKEN HUMANITY AND COSMOS AND BRING THEM BACK INTO RELATIONSHIP AS IT ORIGINALLY EXISTED IN THE GARDEN. IN GENESIS 12, WE LEARN THAT GOD CALLS ONE MAN, ABRAM, TO A PARTICULAR RELATIONSHIP; THEN, THROUGH ABRAM, GOD RAISES UP A NATION OF PEOPLE, CALLED TO LIVE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (THE STORY OF THIS NATION CONSUMES MOST OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE BIBLE). FROM THIS NATION COMES A SAVIOR, OR MESSIAH, THROUGH WHICH ALL OF HUMANITY CAN BE REDEEMED AND COME BACK INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AS THEY ONCE WERE. THIS SAVIOR ARRIVED IN THE PERSON OF JESUS, WHO CAME INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD'S BROKENNESS AND BECAME BROKEN TO REDEEM IT. INDEED, WE LEARN FROM SCRIPTURE THAT "THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH" (ROMANS 6:23), THAT THE COST OF HUMAN REJECTION OF GOD IS ULTIMATELY DEATH AND DESTRUCTION FOR THEMSELVES AND FOR THE COSMOS. IN ORDER TO CHANGE THIS DEATH AND DESTRUCTION, SOMEONE NEEDED TO TAKE ON DEATH AND DEFEAT IT. ENTER JESUS: HE LIVED A REAL, HUMAN LIFE, BUT ALSO BROUGHT WITH HIM A POWERFUL ABILITY TO BRING LIFE IN THE MIDST OF DEATH AND DECAY. HE HEALED SICKNESS, PROVIDED FORGIVENESS, AND EVEN RAISED PEOPLE FROM THE DEAD WHILE HE LIVED. THEN, IN ORDER TO PAY THE WAGES OF

SIN AND BROKENNESS, JESUS DIED FOR EACH OF US, AND HIS MIRACULOUS RESURRECTION ULTIMATELY CONQUERED DEATH ENTIRELY. NOW, THROUGH NO EFFORT OF OUR OWN AND SOLELY THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD IN JESUS, HUMANITY CAN RECEIVE THE WORK OF CHRIST IN FAITH AND HAVE THEIR LIVES REDEEMED. JESUS HAS SET RIGHT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH HIS LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION.

"FOR WHILE WE WERE STILL WEAK, AT THE RIGHT TIME CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY. INDEED, RARELY WILL ANYONE DIE FOR A RIGHTEOUS PERSON—THOUGH PERHAPS FOR A GOOD PERSON SOMEONE MIGHT ACTUALLY DARE TO DIE. BUT GOD PROVES HIS LOVE FOR US IN THAT WHILE WE STILL WERE SINNERS CHRIST DIED FOR US. MUCH MORE SURELY THEN, NOW THAT WE HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED BY HIS BLOOD, WILL WE BE SAVED THROUGH HIM FROM THE WRATH OF GOD. FOR IF WHILE WE WERE ENEMIES, WE WERE RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH THE DEATH OF HIS SON, MUCH MORE SURELY, HAVING BEEN RECONCILED, WILL WE BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE. BUT MORE THAN THAT, WE EVEN BOAST IN GOD THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THROUGH WHOM WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED RECONCILIATION." -ROMANS 5:6-11

4. RESTORATION

YET THERE REMAINS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THIS ULTIMATE PLAN OF GOD: THE REST OF CREATION. SINCE HUMANITY BROKE THE *SHALOM* OF THE ORIGINAL CREATED ORDER, THERE NEEDS TO BE A FULL RESTORATION IF WE ARE TO GET BACK TO HOW THINGS WERE IN THE BEGINNING. IN THIS SENSE, SCRIPTURE REVEALS THAT, THROUGH JESUS AND HIS WORK, HUMANITY'S REDEMPTION PROMPTS A RESTORATION THAT WILL RIPPLE THROUGH THE ENTIRE COSMOS. JUST AS THE ORIGINAL REJECTION RIPPLED THROUGH THE WORLD, SO THE REDEMPTION OF JESUS RESTORES THE WORLD (ROMANS 5:18-21). THIS MEANS THAT, IN ENTRUSTING THEIR LIVES TO JESUS, CHRISTIANS PARTICIPATE NOT ONLY IN THE REDEMPTION OF THEIR OWN

INDIVIDUAL LIVES, BUT IN THE RESTORATION OF THE UNIVERSE, HAPPENING BIT BY BIT NOW AND CULMINATING IN THE EVENTUAL "NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH" WHEN JESUS RETURNS (REVELATION 21). *SHALOM* SHALL BE RESTORED, AND IT WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE WORK OF JESUS.

HOW THIS GOSPEL WORKS IN ACTUAL LIVES

THIS FOURFOLD GOSPEL STORY SHOWS US THAT FOLLOWING JESUS IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT A PERSONAL TICKET TO HEAVEN: IT IS AN ALL-ENCOMPASSING, TRANSFORMATIVE WORK OF GOD THAT AFFECTS EVERY PART OF OUR LIVES AND WORLD. WHEN WE RECOGNIZE THIS IS TRUE, WE FIND THAT NO PART OF OUR OWN LIVES AND WORLD IS OUT OF THE REACH OF THIS LOVE AND GRACE. PERSONAL FREEDOM FROM VICES (ROMANS 6), RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS (2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21), ECOLOGICAL HEALING AND RESTORATION (REVELATION 4, 21), JUSTICE FOR THE POOR AND MARGINALIZED (MATTHEW 5, LUKE 16:19-31), AND THE TOPPLING OF OPPRESSIVE EMPIRES (REVELATION 18) ARE ALL INCLUDED IN THE RESTORATIVE POWER OF THE GOSPEL. WE LEARN, THEN, THAT THE WORK OF JESUS ACTUALLY PRODUCES TANGIBLE CHANGES IN HOW WE LIVE AND MOVE IN OUR PRESENT WORLD. BEING A DISCIPLE MEANS SUBMITTING THE ENTIRETY OF OUR LIVES TO THIS REDEMPTIVE AND RESTORATIVE WORK, ALLOWING IT TO TRANSFORM US INWARDLY AND TURN US OUTWARDLY TO THE WORLD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESTORATION.

NOW, IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER: THIS SORT OF DISCIPLESHIP COMMITMENT IS NOT OFTEN INSTANTANEOUS. INSTEAD, IT USUALLY TAKES PLACE OVER TIME, WITH PEOPLE BECOMING MORE AWARE OF THE AREAS IN

THEIR LIVES THAT THEY ARE BEING CALLED TO HAND OVER TO GOD. WHILE THERE MAY BE A MOMENT THEY CAN RECOLLECT WHERE THEY DECIDED TO GIVE THEIR LIFE TO JESUS, THE REVELATION OF WHAT THAT ACTUALLY ENTAILS HAPPENS PROGRESSIVELY THROUGH THE REST OF THEIR LIVES. CONSIDER, FOR INSTANCE, THE BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF PETER: WHILE HE CERTAINLY COMMITS HIMSELF TO FOLLOWING JESUS, HE IS REGULARLY LEARNING AREAS IN HIS LIFE WHERE HE IS STILL NEEDING TO SUBMIT HIMSELF (LUKE 22:54-62, ACTS 10, ETC.). HIS DISCIPLESHIP IS ONGOING, AND THIS REMAINS TRUE FOR US TODAY; MANY OF YOU READING THIS BOOK ARE PROBABLY STILL LEARNING THE WAYS YOU COULD BE FOLLOWING JESUS MORE CLOSELY, WAYS YOU COULD BE DISCIPLING HIM MORE FULLY.

THE SAME IS TRUE FOR THOSE WHO ARE JUST STARTING TO LEARN WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW JESUS; INDEED, OFTEN TIMES THERE ARE MANY STEPS ONE PROCEEDS THROUGH BEFORE THEY ACTUALLY COMMIT THEIR LIVES TO CHRIST. THIS HAS PROMPTED MANY PASTORS AND TEACHERS TO CREATE FRAMEWORKS TO HELP GUIDE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THOSE WE WITNESS TO. THERE ARE MANY MODELS THAT CAN PROVE HELPFUL, BUT WE WILL BORROW IN PARTICULAR FROM DOUG SCHAUPP'S 2008 BOOK, *I ONCE WAS LOST: WHAT POSTMODERN SKEPTICS TAUGHT US ABOUT THEIR PATH TO JESUS*. IN THE BOOK, SCHAUPP OUTLINES 5 "THRESHOLDS" TO BECOMING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS, AND HOW WE NEED TO LEARN TO IDENTIFY WHERE IN THESE THRESHOLDS PEOPLE LIKELY LIE IN ORDER TO BEST COMMUNICATE THE GOSPEL MESSAGE TO THEM. THESE ARE THE THRESHOLDS HE MENTIONS:



1. **TRUST**: AN INDIVIDUAL MUST BE ABLE TO TRUST JESUS, A CHRISTIAN, AND EVENTUALLY A COMMUNITY OF CHRISTIANS. THIS TRUST DOES NOT NECESSARY MEAN ACTUAL LIVED FAITH YET; IT SIMPLY MEANS THEY ARE ABLE TO HAVE A POSITIVE ASSOCIATION WITH A CHRISTIAN OR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
2. **CURIOSITY**: ONCE A TRUST WITH CHRISTIANS AND/OR A COMMUNITY IS BUILT, AN INDIVIDUAL WILL OFTEN ILLUSTRATE A SENSE OF CURIOSITY THAT CAUSES THEM TO ASK QUESTIONS AND DESIRE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT CHRIST, THE BIBLE, AND CHRISTIANITY. NOT YET OPEN TO FAITH, THEY ARE IN MORE OF AN 'INVESTIGATIVE' STAGE
3. **CHANGE**: THIS IS WHERE WE START TO SEE THE HEART BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS. AN INDIVIDUAL IS STARTING TO BECOME MORE OPEN TO SPIRITUAL CHANGE IN THEIR LIVES. THIS OPENNESS DOES NOT NECESSARILY ALWAYS WARRANT A CHANGE; IT SIMPLY SIGNIFIES A SHIFT IN POSTURE TOWARDS THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
4. **SEEKING**: AT THIS POINT, URGENCY INCREASES FOR THE INDIVIDUAL. NO LONGER ARE THEY SIMPLY PASSIVELY OPEN, BUT THEY ARE ACTIVELY SEEKING TO MAKE A SPIRITUAL CHANGE IN THEIR LIFE, ATTEMPTING TO TEST WHETHER JESUS IS THE ONE THEY WISH TO FOLLOW
5. **FOLLOWER**: FINALLY, THIS STAGE INDICATES THAT AN INDIVIDUAL IS NOW COMMITTED TO FOLLOWING JESUS IN THEIR DAY TO DAY LIVES. THEY HAVE MADE A CONSCIOUS CHANGE, AND ARE SUBMITTING MORE AND MORE OF THEMSELVES TO THE CALLING OF JESUS

WHILE THESE FIVE THRESHOLDS ARE NOT SCIENTIFIC PERSAY, THEY NEVERTHELESS PROVIDE SOME USEFUL LANGUAGE TO HELP US UNDERSTAND THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF PEOPLE IN OUR MODERN, AMERICAN CONTEXT. FROM HERE OUR QUESTION BECOMES: HOW DO WE BEST WITNESS TO PEOPLE IN EACH OF THESE PARTICULAR STAGES?

OUR JOB = WALK WITH PEOPLE

ALL OF THESE FRAMEWORKS AND PATTERNS ARE HELPFUL IN MANY WAYS, BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT GOD IS THE ONE WHO ACTUALLY HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE IN OUR WORLD. HE MAY USE US AND OUR BEST EFFORTS IN THE PROCESS, BUT WE MUST NEVER ASSUME THAT OUR STRUCTURES WILL BECOME FOOLPROOF OR PERFECT. THEREFORE, IT IS NOT OUR JOB TO SIMPLY MOVE PEOPLE THROUGH A MECHANICAL PROCESS; IT IS OUR JOB TO MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE AND WALK ALONGSIDE THEM AS GOD NEEDS US TO. THIS MEANS IDENTIFYING THE PARTICULAR NEEDS IN OUR SPECIFIC RELATIONSHIPS AND WORKING TO COMMUNICATE THE GOSPEL IN THE MIDST OF THOSE PARTICULAR NEEDS.

THANKFULLY, SCRIPTURE GIVES US EXAMPLES OF THE WAYS IN WHICH WE MIGHT WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL UNIQUELY FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL.

CONSIDER THE DIFFERENT BIBLICAL "APPEALS" OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE:

1. **HEBREWS 2:14-18** | COME TO GOD OUT OF FEAR OF DEATH AND JUDGEMENT
2. **GALATIANS 3:10-12** | COME TO GOD TO BE RELEASED FROM SHAME
3. **1 CORINTHIANS 1:18** | COME TO GOD OUT OF APPRECIATION FOR TRUTH
4. **JOHN 4:10, 6:35** | COME TO GOD TO SATISFY ALL OF YOUR LONGINGS
5. **MATTHEW 9:27** | COME TO GOD FOR HELP WITH A PROBLEM
6. **1 JOHN 4** | COME TO GOD IN ORDER TO BE FULLY LOVED

NOTE HOW EACH OF THESE BIBLICAL APPEALS ULTIMATELY SPEAK TO DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE HUMAN CONDITION. SINCE THE GOSPEL IS FAR-REACHING IN ITS SCOPE, IT IS ALSO FAR-REACHING IN ITS APPEAL: IT CAN SPEAK TO US WHEREVER WE ARE CURRENTLY LOCATED. THIS IS THE MAIN

POINT OF JESUS COMING TO EARTH IN THE FIRST PLACE: TO MEET HUMANS WHERE THEY ARE, IN THE MIDST OF THEIR BROKENNESS, AND CALL THEM - IN THE WAY THEY NEED TO HEAR - TO NEW, FREE LIFE IN HIM. THIS IS WHAT THE GOSPEL DOES FOR EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US, AND THIS IS WHAT WE NEED TO EMULATE IN OUR OWN WITNESSING INTERACTIONS.

PART II TASKS:

1. TAKE SOME TIME THIS WEEK AND WRITE OUT YOUR OWN STORY.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

I. HOW DID YOU COME TO HEAR THE MESSAGE OF JESUS?

II. WHAT STEPS DID YOU FOLLOW OR EVENTS DID YOU EXPERIENCE WHEN CHOOSING TO COMMIT YOUR LIFE TO HIM?

III. WHAT GOSPEL "APPEALS" HAVE RESONATED WITH YOU IN THE PAST, AND RESONATE WITH YOU TODAY?

2. PUT TOGETHER A ONE-MINUTE AND A FIVE-MINUTE VERSION OF YOUR STORY, AND SHARE IT WITH A FRIEND, SPOUSE, OR FAMILY MEMBER.

THEN ASK THEM A COUPLE OF FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

I. WHAT DID THEY HEAR SPECIFICALLY IN YOUR STORY?

II. WHAT DID THEY WANT TO HEAR MORE ABOUT IN YOUR STORY?

III. WHAT QUESTIONS DO THEY STILL HAVE?

3. PUT SOME FINISHING TOUCHES ON YOUR STORY FOLLOWING THIS CONVERSATION

4. CONTINUE IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS WITH FRIENDS AND DETERMINE, AS BEST YOU CAN, WHICH "THRESHOLD" THEY ARE IN

I. WRITE THESE DOWN SO YOU CAN REMEMBER, AND EVEN TRACK THEIR PROGRESS AS YOU CONTINUE TO CONVERSE WITH THEM



WITNESS TIP, PART II:

IN YOUR CONTINUING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS, CONSIDER ASKING YOUR CONVERSATION PARTNERS A BIT MORE ABOUT THEIR STORIES (TO THE DEGREE IT FEELS COMFORTABLE AND NATURAL IN THE FLOW OF YOUR CONVERSATION). CONSIDER ASKING THEM MORE ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES AND HOW THOSE HAVE SHAPED THEIR VIEWS. WE AS HUMANS ARE SHAPED FAR MORE BY THE EXPERIENCES THAT HAVE HAPPENED TO US THAN WE ARE BY OUR REASON OR RATIONAL THINKING; INDEED, "INTUITIONS COME FIRST, STRATEGIC REASONING SECOND" (JONATHAN HAIDT, *THE RIGHTEOUS MIND*). IN THIS SENSE, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO UNDERSTAND THE STORIES OF THOSE WHOM WE CREATE SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS WITH AND WITNESS TO, FOR IT WILL ENABLE US TO BETTER GRASP WHAT SORT OF GOSPEL APPEALS MAKE THE MOST SENSE TO THEM.

NOTES

[illegible]

PART IV: THE WITNESS



PART III: THE WITNESS

"THE CHURCH EXISTS FOR NOTHING ELSE BUT TO DRAW MEN INTO CHRIST, TO MAKE THEM LITTLE CHRISTS. IF THEY ARE NOT DOING THAT, ALL THE CATHEDRALS, CLERGY, MISSIONS, SERMONS, EVEN THE BIBLE ITSELF, ARE SIMPLY A WASTE OF TIME. GOD BECAME MAN FOR NO OTHER PURPOSE." -C.S. LEWIS, "MERE CHRISTIANITY," P. 171

TO THIS POINT, WE'VE OUTLINED THE MANY CHALLENGES WE OFTEN FACE AS BELIEVERS WHEN DISCUSSING THE NATURE OF WITNESSING, AND EXAMINED ASPECTS OF THE COMMAND OF CHRIST TO WITNESS IN ORDER TO HELP PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR OUR WORK. FROM THERE, WE HAVE OVERVIEWED THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL MESSAGE, ENSURING THAT IT SPEAKS CLEARLY TO THE SPECIFIC CULTURE AND AUDIENCE OF OUR TIME. WE HAVE ALSO DISCUSSED THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL ITSELF, THE COMPREHENSIVE NATURE OF THIS NEWS, AND THE WAYS IN WHICH PEOPLE OFTEN HEAR AND RECEIVE THIS NEWS.

AT THIS POINT WE WANT TO ENSURE THAT WE CLOSE WITH A DISCUSSION ON THE ACTUAL PROCESS OF WITNESSING, AND HOW WE CAN DO IT PRACTICALLY AND EFFECTIVELY IN OUR OWN WORLD TODAY.

REAL, PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

SO OFTEN OUR DISCUSSION ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE CAN FEEL A BIT ETHEREAL, OR "UP IN THE AIR." WE CAN DISCUSS IMPORTANT TOPICS AT LENGTH, BUT THEN SOMETIMES MISS THEIR PRACTICAL APPLICATION. THEREFORE, WE HAVE DEVOTED THIS ENTIRE SECTION OF *WITNESS* TO

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES AND TOOLS WE HOPE YOU WILL FIND USEFUL IN YOUR OWN APPLICATION OF THIS IMPORTANT COMMAND FROM JESUS. THE REALITY IS THAT YOUR SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS AND WITNESS SHOULD TAKE THE FORM THAT MOST EXPRESSES YOUR OWN SPECIFIC CONTEXTS AND LOCALES; HOWEVER, THE ITEMS BELOW MAY FIT WELL WITH YOUR OWN SKILL SETS OR GIFTS, OR MAY SPARK CREATIVITY IN YOU TO PURSUE OTHER IDEAS IN YOUR OWN RELATIONSHIPS. HERE ARE A FEW PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF OUR *WITNESS* CURRICULUM:

1. **BE WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE:** WE CAN'T EXPECT SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS TO COME KNOCKING ON OUR DOOR - WE NEED TO BE AROUND THE PEOPLE WHOM WE WANT TO CONVERSE WITH. THIS ISN'T A NEW STRATEGY: LOOK AT THE MINISTRY OF JESUS AND YOU WILL FIND THAT HE WAS ALWAYS ON THE MOVE, ALWAYS SPENDING TIME IN THE PUBLIC SPACES WHERE OTHER PEOPLE SPENT TIME. FOR US, THIS MIGHT MEAN SPENDING MORE TIME IN OUR LOCAL COFFEE SHOP; IT MIGHT MEAN GOING TO THE CONCERTS OUR NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS GO TO; IT MIGHT MEAN BECOMING A REGULAR AT A NEARBY BAKERY OR DELI OR BARBER. SPEND TIME WHERE THE PEOPLE IN YOUR CULTURE SPEND THEIR TIME.
2. **BECOME KNOWN IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD:** FOR MANY OF US, WE LIVE WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE OF HUNDREDS, POTENTIALLY EVEN THOUSANDS, OF OTHER HUMANS. THOSE ARE ALL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS AND WITNESSING TO THE LOVE AND GRACE OF JESUS. START WALKING YOUR DOG MORE OFTEN. EAT DINNERS IN YOUR FRONT YARD OR DRIVEWAY AND GREET NEIGHBORS AS YOU SEE THEM. OFFER TO MOW YOUR NEIGHBOR'S LAWN WHILE YOU ARE MOWING YOURS. THROW THE BEST NEIGHBORHOOD PARTIES.
3. **TAKE NOTICE OF PEOPLE:** ONE OF THE MANY THINGS JESUS WAS GREAT

AT WAS NOTICING THE SORTS OF PEOPLE THAT EVERYONE ELSE IN HIS CULTURE OVERLOOKED (WOMEN, CHILDREN, THE BLIND OR LAME, ETC.). WHO IN YOUR DAY TO DAY LIFE IS REGULARLY "OVERLOOKED?" BARISTAS? GROCERY STORE CLERKS? JANITORS? HOTEL ATTENDANTS? BANK TELLERS? WAITERS? TAKE NOTICE OF THOSE PEOPLE! LEARN THEIR NAMES, ASK ABOUT THEIR STORIES IF POSSIBLE, AND CREATE REGULAR OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUR LIFE TO GREET THEM. GET TO KNOW THEM SO THEY CAN GET TO KNOW YOU. SPEND INTENTIONAL TIME CARING ABOUT PEOPLE THAT ARE MOSTLY INVISIBLE TO THE REST OF OUR CULTURE.

4. **CULTIVATE A SPIRIT OF CURIOSITY:** REMEMBER, SPIRITUALITY IS EXPRESSED IN THE ACTUAL LIVES OF REAL PEOPLE. IT'S NOT JUST FOUND IN A SET OF IDEAS, BUT IT IS LIVED OUT. SINCE THIS IS TRUE, THERE IS ENDLESS OPPORTUNITY TO FIND SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION IN SIMPLE AND EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS - SOMETIMES ALL IT TAKES IS A QUESTION TO SPARK IT. SO BE CURIOUS ABOUT THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU. ASKING QUESTIONS LIKE "HOW IS YOUR DAY?" OR "WHAT ARE YOU DOING THIS WEEKEND?" CAN CREATE EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS. IF YOU KNOW SOMEONE A LITTLE BIT BETTER, YOU COULD ASK A QUESTION LIKE, "WHAT IS YOUR SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND?" THIS IS A NON-THREATENING INQUIRY THAT AVOIDS A DEBATE AND SIMPLY ASKS SOMEONE TO TELL THEIR STORY, SOMETHING ALL OF US WANT TO DO.
5. **REMEMBER DETAILS AND FOLLOW UP:** DON'T JUST ASK QUESTIONS OF PEOPLE YOU SEE ON A REGULAR BASIS; FOLLOW UP ON THOSE QUESTIONS THE NEXT TIME YOU SEE THEM. "WHAT DID YOU DO ON YOUR VACATION?" OR "HOW WAS YOGA THIS LAST WEEKEND?" WILL START TO CREATE REAL RELATIONSHIPS, NOT FORCED ENCOUNTERS.
6. **REMAIN PECULIAR:** WHEN YOU ARE IN SPACES WITH NONBELIEVERS, IT SHOULD BE CLEAR THAT YOU DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY. MAYBE IT IS THE

WAY YOU ASK QUESTIONS. MAYBE IT IS THE AMOUNT YOU TIP OR AFFIRM SOMEONE. MAYBE IT IS HOW WELL YOU LISTEN TO SOMEONE ELSE, OR HOW YOU CHOOSE (OR DON'T CHOOSE) TO PARTICIPATE IN CERTAIN ACTIVITIES. OR MAYBE IT IS A SIMPLE PRESENCE OF PEACE THAT YOU MAINTAIN WHEREVER YOU ARE. IT SHOULD BECOME CLEAR TO EACH PERSON YOU INTERACT WITH THAT THERE IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT YOU.

7. **CONNECT YOUR WORK WITH GOD'S WORK:** MOST OF US SPEND A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF OUR WAKING HOURS IN OUR WORKPLACES. OUR WORK PROVIDES US AMPLE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION AND WITNESS TO THE LOVE AND GRACE OF JESUS, AND IT IS IMPORTANT TO SPEND THOSE HOURS WITNESSING IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR WORK. LOVING GOD AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS CAN HAPPEN IN OUR WORKPLACES, AND WHEN WE PRIORITIZE THIS, PEOPLE WILL NOTICE.
8. **PRAY FOR OTHERS:** REMEMBER, GOD WISHES FOR EVERYONE TO COME TO KNOW HIM AND LIVE IN THRIVING RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM (2 PETER 3:9). WHEN WE PRAY FOR GOD TO PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES TO US, WE PARTICIPATE ALONGSIDE A DESIRE THAT ALREADY EXISTS IN GOD, AND GOD WILL PROVIDE US OPPORTUNITIES FOR THESE SORTS OF CONVERSATIONS WHEN WE ARE FAITHFUL TO PRAY AND LIVE IN THE KINGDOM.

THESE ARE JUST A FEW SPECIFIC EXAMPLES THAT WE CAN CONSIDER, BUT THE REALITY IS THAT EACH INDIVIDUAL IS PLACED IN A PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCE IN ORDER TO LIVE OUT THE GOSPEL AND SHARE IT WITH OTHERS IN THEIR UNIQUE WAY. PERHAPS YOU WOULD EDIT THIS LIST A BIT, OR CHANGE ITEMS OUT ALTOGETHER - THAT IS GREAT! USE THE GIFTS AND CONTEXT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU.

TASKS FOR PART III:

1. LOOK FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO WITNESS TO WHAT JESUS HAS DONE IN YOUR LIFE AND WHY JESUS IS IMPORTANT TO YOU.
 - A. FOCUS ON BUILDING A BRIDGE TO THOSE WHOM YOU HAVE ALREADY BEEN TALKING WITH OVER THE LAST FEW WEEKS.
 - B. TALK ABOUT SUBJECTS THAT YOU HAVE ALREADY SPENT TIME TALKING ABOUT WITH THEM
2. ONCE YOU HAVE HAD A CONVERSATION ABOUT JESUS, COMMIT YOURSELF TO PRAYING EVERY DAY
 - A. SET ALARMS ON YOUR PHONE TO REMIND YOURSELF THROUGHOUT THE DAY. PUT STICKY NOTES ON YOUR MIRROR OR LAPTOP. WRITE REMINDERS AND PLACE THEM ON YOUR NIGHTSTAND. SPEND REAL TIME THINKING ABOUT AND PRAYING FOR THE PEOPLE WHOM YOU WITNESS TO.

A FINAL CHALLENGE

ALRIGHT. WE'VE COME TO THE END OF OUR FOUR-WEEK JOURNEY INTO THE CALL AND WORK OF CREATING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS AND WITNESSING TO OUR NEIGHBORS ABOUT THE LOVE AND GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST. YET WE DON'T WANT FOR YOU TO SEE THE CONCLUSION OF THIS BOOK AS THE END: WE WANT YOU TO SEE THIS AS THE BEGINNING. OUR HOPE IS THAT THIS BOOK HASN'T PROVEN SIMPLY TO BE ANOTHER WORK TO ADD TO YOUR CHRISTIAN BOOKSHELF; OUR HOPE IS THAT THIS ACTUALLY ENCOURAGES YOU TO PARTNER TOGETHER WITH GOD IN WHAT HE IS DOING IN OUR WORLD. SO FROM THAT ENCOURAGEMENT, WE WANT TO ISSUE A CHALLENGE TO YOU: **THIS NEXT CALENDAR YEAR, PRAY EVERY DAY THAT GOD WILL USE YOU TO BRING ONE PERSON INTO A TRANSFORMATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST.** IF EVERY PERSON WHO READS THIS BOOK ACTUALLY COMMITS TO PRAYING LIKE THIS, AND GOD RESPONDS TO THOSE PRAYERS AS HE GRACIOUSLY DESIRES TO, THERE WOULD BE A RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF OUR NEIGHBORHOODS, CITIES, AND CULTURE. LET'S NOT JUST STOP AT LEARNING; LET'S SHARE ABOUT THIS LIFE IN CHRIST THAT HAS SO POWERFULLY TRANSFORMED EACH OF US. LET'S GO AND WITNESS.

NOTES

REFERENCES/RESOURCES

1. *DECLINE OF CHRISTIANITY CONTINUES AT RAPID PACE*. (2020, JUNE 09).

FROM PEW RESEARCH FORUM - THIS RESOURCE IS A HELPFUL ONE IN DETERMINING THE CURRENT STATE OF FAITH IN THE U.S. AND HOW IT HAS DECLINED IN RECENT YEARS

2. *REVIVING EVANGELISM: CURRENT REALITIES THAT DEMAND A NEW VISION*

FOR SHARING FAITH. (2018). CALIFORNIA, USA: BARNA GROUP. - THIS RESOURCE PROVIDES AN ABUNDANCE OF STATISTICS THAT TELL US MORE ABOUT THE RECEPTIVITY OF OUR CULTURE TO CHRISTIANITY, AND REMINDS US THAT--EVEN IF PEOPLE ARE NOT AS RELIGIOUS AS THEY ONCE WERE--THEY ARE STILL OPEN FOR SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

3. *THE VERE INSTITUTE* - THIS ORGANIZATION EXISTS TO EMPOWER CHURCH LEADERS TO CULTIVATE WHOLE LIFE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST FOR EVERYDAY KINGDOM IMPACT. THEY DO EXCELLENT WORK INTEGRATING ALL OF LIFE INTO THE RELIGIOUS LIVES OF CHRISTIANS. YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM AT VEREINSTITUTE.ORG.

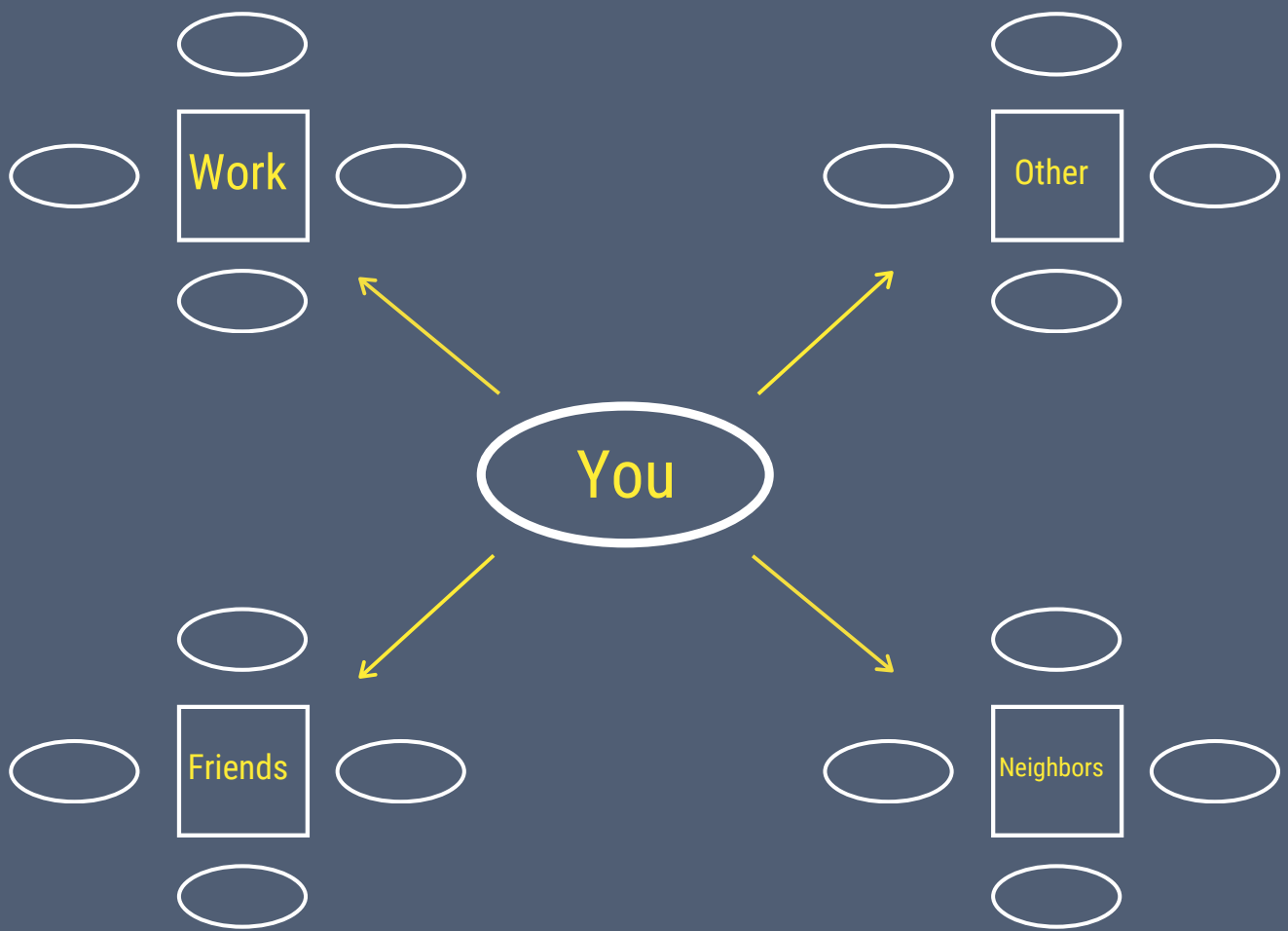
4. *THE ART OF NEIGHBORING: BUILDING GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS RIGHT OUTSIDE YOUR DOOR*. PATHAK, J., & RUNYON, D. (2016). GRAND RAPIDS, MI: BAKER BOOKS. - THIS IS AN IMMENSELY PRACTICAL BOOK FOCUSED ON EMPOWERING EVERYDAY CHRISTIANS TO LOVE THEIR NEIGHBOR WELL, AND PROVIDING THE HELPFUL TOOLS TO DO SO.

5. *SIMPLY GOOD NEWS: WHY THE GOSPEL IS NEWS AND WHAT MAKES IT GOOD*. WRIGHT, N. T. (2017). NEW YORK, NY: HARPERONE, AN IMPRINT OF HARPERCOLLINS. - N.T. WRIGHT IS ONE OF THE FOREMOST NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARS ALIVE TODAY, AND THIS ACCESSIBLE READ EXAMINES THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.

RELATIONSHIP MAP EXAMPLES:



BORROWED FROM *THE ART OF NEIGHBORING: BUILDING GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS RIGHT OUTSIDE YOUR DOOR*. PATHAK, J., & RUNYON, D. (2016). GRAND RAPIDS, MI: BAKER BOOKS





WITNESS