

**Habits for the Journey with Jesus**  
**A Confession of Practice**

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*Habits for the Journey with Jesus:  
A Confession of Practice*

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English-speaking readers who prefer not to use one or both of these Bible versions (or who insist on not using one or both) are welcome to check this pamphlet against their preferred standard English versions of the Bible. We also invite those interested to check this pamphlet against the source-language Scripture texts using the standard, scholarly Biblical-language reference tools for English speakers.

The writers of this pamphlet are deeply indebted to Professor Mark A. Noll of the history department at Wheaton College, author of the book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1994, Eerdmans), for his personal example and for his phrases, “patterns of thinking” and “habits of mind,” in *Scandal*, in the paragraph divided between pages 141 and 142. This pamphlet’s title, and its section titles, “Habits of Thought,” “Habits of Ministry” and “Habits of Church,” were inspired by those phrases.

Professor Noll uses his “habits” phrases in that paragraph to label the problems that he is addressing, and he uses other terms and phrases to label his positive goals, for clarity. Conversely, we use our “habits” phrases in this pamphlet to label our positive goals, and we use other terms and phrases to label the problems we are addressing, for clarity.

## Introduction

The writers of this pamphlet hope to “spur” our Evangelical Christian brothers and sisters “on to love and good deeds.”<sup>1</sup> Some will feel “provoked.”<sup>2</sup> We do not wish to provoke people unnecessarily. For this pamphlet, we have chosen not to try to define the word “Christian,” but rather, we offer our loose definition of “Evangelical.”

An “Evangelical” is a Christian who emphasizes at least the following:

- \* salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not by works;<sup>3</sup> and the enjoyment of a direct, personal relationship with Jesus.
- \* good works resulting from salvation.<sup>4</sup>
- \* “the priesthood of all believers,”<sup>5</sup> believing that an organized church is necessary but cannot claim authority to control Christians’ access to God;
- \* the need to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ actively to outsiders, not merely to pass it on to the next generation of one’s kin or ethnic group;<sup>6</sup>
- \* the Gospel as being simple enough to be available to the non-learned as well as to the learned, believing that evangelism and discipleship are the responsibility of every Evangelical. These can involve many roles, activities and relationships both personally and corporately (in the sense of, “as a group”); and
- \* acceptance of the Bible, defined by the traditional Protestant canon list of 66 books, as the only authoritative Scripture for Christians; as an authority higher than both tradition and church leadership in matters of faith and practice; as the written

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:24 (NIV).

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 10:24 (the NRSV uses “provoke” where the NIV uses “spur on”).

<sup>3</sup> John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:21-26, 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 19:1-10; Ephesians 2:10; James 1:22 - 2:26.

<sup>5</sup> a well-known phrase from the 16th-century Protestant reformer Martin Luther, who probably based it on 1 Peter 2:9-10.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 12:3; 1 Kings 8:43; 2 Kings 19:14-19; Psalm 22:27; Psalm 67; Psalm 98; Isaiah 11:1-10; Isaiah 37:14-20; Isaiah 42:1-9; Isaiah 49:6; Isaiah 52:7-10; Micah 5:2-5a; Habakkuk 2:14; Matthew 24:14; Matthew 26:13; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 13:10; Luke 2:30-32; Luke 24:44-49; John 10:16; Acts 1:1-8; Acts 2:1-11; Acts 10:1 - 11:18; Romans 1:5,16; Galatians 3:28-29; Colossians 1:23; Revelation 7:9-12.

Word of God and not merely the best ancient collection of human words to contain some words of God; and as the object of required, ongoing personal and corporate study and application.

The writers of this pamphlet are Evangelicals who believe that the emphases of Evangelicalism are an important witness to the rest of the world's body of Christians and to the world at large. However, we also believe that many tendencies of Evangelicals in these times are hurting this witness. *Habits for the Journey with Jesus* is an attempt to outline better alternatives to those tendencies.

## Habits of Thought

We believe that a Christian in these times whose heart and mind are the most available for God to use . . .

- 1) cultivates an attention span for listening, thinking and discussion; does not allow education level and/or brain condition unfavorable to this discipline to thoroughly overwhelm its application; rather, works around or past these obstacles to cultivate this discipline.<sup>7</sup>
- 2) believes that the details in speech and deeds are the proof or disproof of love.
- 3) does not dismiss an argument or an idea simply out of a distaste for its source.
- 4) refuses to compartmentalize thinking, Bible study, prayer, discussion, worship, self-examination, service to others, evangelism, meditation, action and play away from each other or into restricted occasions, locations, social settings or persons.
- 5) uses seriousness and fun as nutritious parts of a healthy “diet” of stimulation, not using either one to squelch the other.
- 6) welcomes thinking as gainful labor, healthy exercise or joyful diversion, rather than hating it as occasionally necessary drudgery.
- 7) does not keep a vital connection with God at bay by treating God merely as a concept or by merely pursuing an emotional high from God in worship.

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<sup>7</sup> The writers of this pamphlet chose the verb “cultivate” to call for patience with this process, especially for people who find it truly difficult. We rejoice at any commitment to grow in this, and here we criticize only the stubborn refusal to grow in this.

- 8) pursues a vital connection with God  
by continually wrapping one's life around the truths  
that God continually seeks to introduce into one's heart,  
even when they are stark and painful realities;  
meets God in humble, discerning commitment  
during the ongoing grind of mundane life,  
as God continues weaving these truths  
into one's emotional, mental and physical practice,  
so that, as a result of one's partnership with God,  
these same truths become sources  
of clarity and comfort.
- 9) recognizes that sensory stimulation for too much of one's waking day is a hindrance to examining one's motives; and that this ongoing examination of one's motives is necessary for clear and honest dealing.
- 10) enjoys entertainment by others and cultivates the ability to entertain others and self creatively.
- 11) is not annoyed by details, exceptions and nuances.
- 12) does not use generalities as absolutes when they are only generalities; does not try to prevent this abuse by overwhelming them with their exceptions in order to reduce them to nothing; rather, strives to employ generalities in problem solving and movement toward goals with an appropriate degree of both firmness and flexibility.
- 13) is neither afraid to affirm Biblical truth claims nor afraid to question whether the appropriate truth claims are being used to achieve a particular goal or address a particular problem.
- 14) makes every effort not to squeeze, bend, stretch or chop reality to fit an ideology, a political agenda or an epistemological theory.
- 15) does not avoid the work of problem solving, saying, "That's just how things are;" rather, embraces this work, saying, "That's how things are here and now."
- 16) does not move hastily into action; rather, performs due diligence to analyze "how and why things are here and now" before moving conclusively to "how things could be better."

- 17) does not limit one's efforts to mere analysis, but moves forward towards a course of action.
- 18) does not skip Biblically necessary relational, logical, factual or personal-discipleship steps while moving forward, but rather performs humble due diligence with each step.
- 19) neither thinks instead of making things happen, nor acts merely to feel busy and effective.
- 20) strives to speak frankly and act honestly; makes every effort to avoid passive-aggressive behavior.
- 21) does not use the saying, "Don't join a perfect church; if you did, you'd spoil it," as an excuse for lukewarm living<sup>8</sup> or as a way to suppress valid concerns about a church.
- 22) does not believe, "Every idea that is of the world is evil;" believes that many ideas and belief systems, and even religions, contain truths which can be useful for certain things;<sup>9</sup> believes that it is only their elements that contradict the Bible that must be rejected by Christians.<sup>10</sup>
- 23) does not assume that "normal" means "right," whether in the world or in the church.
- 24) uses discernment to take thoughts, stories, trends, fashions, attitudes, styles, fads, art works, art genres, political passions, unacknowledged motives, topics where "we just don't go," postures, unspoken agreements, "in-group" forms of coded speech, assumptions, gestures, eye and face signals, passive aggression, long jumps to conclusions, tones of voice and unexamined beliefs all captive to obey Christ.<sup>11</sup>
- 25) understands that the "secret of the kingdom of God"<sup>12</sup> is having a heart and

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<sup>8</sup> Revelation 3:14-22.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31; Romans 1:19-20.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 3; Romans 1:21-22. See also C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: 1943, 1945, 1952, Macmillan Publishing Company), paperback edition, page 43.

<sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

<sup>12</sup> Mark 4:11 (NRSV and NIV).

mind engaged in fruitful seeking after the truths that God weaves into confusing circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

26) believes that wisdom and discernment have three interwoven disciplines:

a) applying one's mind to weigh evidence and evaluate matters according to Biblical standards;

b) applying one's heart to face the discomfort of uncomfortable facts;

c) applying one's heart and mind to seek the Holy Spirit's power for strength and guidance. This strength and guidance are to assist us in these disciplines, not to relieve us of them.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mark 4:10-12. Jesus explained the parable to his disciples because they had asked him to; the crowd had not asked him to.

<sup>14</sup> Translators for the standard English versions of the New Testament have used the English word "discern" and its derived forms for various Greek words in various New Testament contexts. "Discern" is not a one-to-one translation. The NRSV of 1 Corinthians 12:10 lists one spiritual gift as, "the discernment of spirits," and the NIV of that same phrase says, "distinguishing between spirits," which in any translation is one supernaturally-enhanced skill and not discernment in general. Also, the epistle 1 John does not discuss "spiritual gifts," yet its verse 4:1 tells all Christians to test spirits.



## Habits of Ministry

We believe that a Christian in these times who is the most available to be used by God in the lives of others . . .

27) practices the preceding habits of thought during ministry, understanding that ministry to a person is found in uncovering the ongoing work of Jesus within the details and issues specific to that person and within the relationship these details have to the times.

28) does not relegate thoughtful ministry mostly to the titled or highly-trained “professionals” or “experts.”

29) seeks to operate in the “Need Zone”<sup>15</sup> with a person.

The *Need Zone*: the “place” in Christian community where a need is properly identified and successfully met, and where the resolution is celebrated.

*Diagnosis*: the process by which a need is properly identified by humble listening, the Holy Spirit’s guidance and disciplined thinking.<sup>16</sup>

*Prescription*: moving forward from the diagnosis in love with truth, direction and the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Incarnation*: the process by which the seeming distance of God is made close by addressing needs through person-to-person Diagnosis and Prescription.

*Flippancy*: a failure to minister in the Need Zone by failing to appreciate a need’s actual harshness.

*Pity*: a failure to minister in the Need Zone by labeling a harsh circumstance as “bad,” thereby failing to believe in God’s ability and willingness to redeem it.

*Platitude*: a piece of advice that does not come from Diagnosis. Those who utter platitudes presume the authority of God to address needs without committing

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<sup>15</sup> “The Need Zone” was written by Gregory S. Wertime before *Habits for the Journey with Jesus* was written, and is included here by his permission.

<sup>16</sup> Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Art Form*, expanded edition (Louisville, KY: 2001, Westminster John Knox Press), pages 39-52, “UGH! Analyzing the Discrepancy.”

to be Incarnational.

30) recognizes that flippancy, pity and platitudes are different ways one can assume a false sense of mastery over another person's confusing circumstance; that using any of these in an attempt to minister is a symptom of "being in over one's head."

31) recognizes that if the person attempting to minister feels in over his or her head, simply listening is good ministry; that it is OK to be honest about one's limitations in understanding how God is weaving truths and blessings into the confusing circumstance of another; that being honest in this, and praying with the person for God to reveal the mystery, is far better than uttering platitudes.

32) recognizes that while many helpful experts may exist to address the need, referring someone to an expert is not a ministry act to be done hastily.

33) recognizes that the method that God used to meet one's own past need may not be the same method that God uses to meet someone else's similar need.

34) recognizes that what is easy to comprehend and perform for one may not be easy for another.

35) recognizes that it is only God's leading which can replace a heart of stone with a heart of flesh;<sup>17</sup> that genuine ministry sometimes, at God's sovereign and mysterious discretion, results in the fruit of "aha!" conviction and release in the other person.<sup>18</sup>

36) recognizes that saying, "Just get over it," treats people as mechanisms that can be fixed according to speedy procedures and not as beings who often need God's long-suffering and mysterious leading.

37) recognizes that if the one attempting to minister encounters anxiety and resistance in the other, it is frequently the responsibility of the one attempting to minister "to go back to the drawing board."

38) Recognizes that lessons learned at the drawing board are also important

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<sup>17</sup> Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26 (both NIV and NRSV for both verses).

<sup>18</sup> Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Art Form*, expanded edition (Louisville, KY: 2001, Westminster John Knox Press), pages 53-73, "AHA! Disclosing the Clue to Resolution."

spiritual fruit. Though unglamorous at the time, they are often the results of our ministry efforts from which God derives the most joy and we the most benefit.<sup>19</sup>

39) recognizes not only that failure to minister is a sin, but also that failure to go back to the drawing board when necessary is a sin; further recognizes that ministry that never encounters any resistance may be a sign of a subtler form of sin, namely, the sin of chronically staying in a comfort zone and blunting the truth.

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 10:17-24; Luke 13:22-30; John 15:1-17, especially verse 11; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

## **Habits of Church**

We believe that a 21st-century church that is the most available for God to use . . .

40) understands that “the priesthood of all believers” is made complete in the practice of all Christians being personally engaged in these habits of thought and ministry.

41) recognizes that these habits are not “pie in the sky” idealism, but are practical and practicable habits, even in the grind of making ends meet.

42) patiently, creatively and insistently teaches these habits of thought and ministry to all members, remembering that these habits are not natural and that the risen Jesus is the only human expert in them.

43) holds these habits of thought and ministry as the responsibility of every member, in such a way that confronts impulses which would undermine that responsibility.

44) believes that the structure of the church exists for this purpose. A good church encourages members to accept church leaders for their structural function to nurture these habits. Therefore, this leadership must not be internalized by members as a substitute for individual thinking and initiative in ministry.

45) believes that these goals should override the impulses to appease the powerful political special interests in a church which are in bondage to money, tradition and/or the culture in wider society.

46) confronts church leaders whose methods and rhetoric are not nurturing these habits of thought and ministry in members; recognizes that titled leaders and informally influential members are all church leaders and are all accountable to this standard.

## **“But, that seems like a lot of work!”**

The answer to this objection to the list of habits in this pamphlet requires a discussion of work. The writers are not promoting or leaving any opening for the heresy of “justification by works.” We are reminding our fellow Evangelicals that the abundant life Jesus proclaimed in John 10:10 happens when Christians exercise faith in Jesus by applying the redemption which they have accepted (a redemption which all humans need but can never earn or make possible themselves<sup>20</sup>) to their ongoing, daily lives.<sup>21</sup>

God works. Creating humankind in his image, he gave humans the ability to work. He also gave humankind good work to do before the Fall.<sup>22</sup> The Fall tainted human work,<sup>23</sup> but God did not abandon human work to that tainted state any more than God abandoned humankind to sin. Redemption through Jesus includes the reconciliation of all things to God<sup>24</sup> and the gathering up of all things to God,<sup>25</sup> including human work.<sup>26</sup> During God’s work of planning and carrying out redemption through Jesus, God also prepared good works for Jesus’ redeemed disciples to do in daily life after their redemption.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, these works which God has prepared are a necessary part of the journey with Jesus, and are fully possible only for people who have accepted the redemption that Jesus paid for in full by his blood. The writers of this pamphlet call the performance of these necessary good works, “active participation in spiritual growth.” Actively participating in one’s spiritual growth and in the spiritual growth of others is the essence of these good works. We believe that this pamphlet’s list of habits confronts tendencies that are inhibiting active participation in spiritual growth among Evangelicals in these times.

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<sup>20</sup> Luke 15:17-32; Romans 3:9-31; Romans 5:6-21; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-9; Galatians 2:16-21; Titus 3:4-7.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 5:14-16; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:9-14; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; 2 Timothy 2:21; 2 Tim. 3:17; Titus 2:7,14; Titus 3:1,14.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 1:26-31; Genesis 2:15-16.

<sup>23</sup> Genesis 3:16-19.

<sup>24</sup> Colossians 1:9-20.

<sup>25</sup> Ephesians 1:3-10,20-23.

<sup>26</sup> Colossians 1:10-11; Titus 2:14.

<sup>27</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10, especially verse 10; see also Matthew 5:16; 2 Corinthians 9:8; 2 Timothy 2:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:17; Titus 2:14; Titus 3:1-8,14.

## The Work of Untangling

The writers of this pamphlet are convinced that untangling confusing circumstances to find and join Jesus' ongoing work within is the essence of active participation in spiritual growth. The habits of thought, ministry and church outlined in this pamphlet are an attempt to outline the mental and practical substance of this untangling process. As we Christians enter into this work, Jesus is available and willing to reveal truths to us through confusing circumstances, truths that we would never otherwise have confronted. While these truths are timeless and changeless, they are recombined and re-contextualized within each new circumstance in a way that requires a fresh look and, sometimes, a fresh vocabulary.

Having worked with Jesus to interpret a circumstance, we discover new aspects of ourselves, our times, our society and the environments that we find ourselves in. We are then able to face our fears and identify our temptations without clinging to a false sense of mastery.<sup>28</sup>

It is this sense of the "new" that Jesus spoke about when he told the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist that one cannot put new wine into old wineskins.<sup>29</sup> Some interpreters have taken this to be "time-specific," that Jesus was the wineskin the Pharisees were rejecting at that time due to their tradition. Some have taken this to be "time-transcendent," that our lives of faith would frequently have to adapt to newness that God brings. The writers of this pamphlet think that both are true, with special consideration for the latter.

Proverbs 25:2 (NIV) says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings." You might reply, "That's great for kings, but what about me, and what does that have to do with wineskins?" We are called to live as adopted sons and daughters of God<sup>30</sup> and as fellow priests among believers.<sup>31</sup> Untangling the mysteries of our confusing circumstances to find the ongoing work of God within them is the work of those who rise to these labels.

One way that many of us Evangelicals fail to rise to these labels is by misusing a work ethic that prizes and expects efficiency. Efficiency has many excellent material uses. However, like any other good thing, it can be used to replace God, becoming an idol and hindering spiritual growth. In misusing

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<sup>28</sup> Rev. Mark Brewer, in sermons to Bel Air Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in Los Angeles, California between 2002 and 2005, has frequently been repeating the saying, "Confidence is the feeling you have until you know what's really going on."

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:21-22; Luke 5:36-39.

<sup>30</sup> Romans 8:14-17,23; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 3:23 - 4:7; Ephesians. 1:5; Hebrews 12:3-11.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Peter 2:9-10.

efficiency, we often try to apply “five quick steps” to achieve a ministry goal or solve a confusing circumstance. When the expected solution does not come quickly, or when the next circumstance hits us before we can catch our breath, we often feel disappointed and angry. In these situations, when we do not examine these hard feelings and the expectations that cause them, we take the next step further into sin: blaming and shaming ourselves and others.

The writers of this pamphlet are outlining a different approach which recognizes confusing circumstances as the opportunities for spiritual growth that they are. It is by continually entering the effort of untangling these mysteries of confusing circumstances that we are continually remade as new wineskins for God’s Spirit to work in. Doing this, we can go, as the apostle Paul wrote, “from glory to glory,”<sup>32</sup> neither being stuck in tradition nor simply drifting from trend to trend.

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<sup>32</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18 (King James Version, public domain. The NIV and NRSV translators did better jobs on this phrase in this verse, but the writers of this pamphlet used the KJV here for its familiarity.)

## Teachings and Habits of Jesus and the Apostles

This section is a look at habits of thought, ministry and church that are recorded specifically from the life of Jesus; from the sayings and writings of the apostles John, Paul and Peter; and from the Epistle to the Hebrews.

This section includes habits Jesus practiced in the context of performing extravagant miracles. While reading these, a person might feel intimidated by the miracles and think, “He’s the Son of God! I could never do that.” While we Christians must not stop asking in wholehearted belief for God to perform extravagant miracles, which God is able and willing to perform today,<sup>33</sup> we must also enter the less-glamorous good work that God gives us. This less-glamorous work is what we usually find in the vast majority of our lives. It is not only within the means Jesus has given to us, it is also our calling as disciples.<sup>34</sup> In this work, we experience our efforts meeting Jesus’ power and willingness to transform hearts and minds, and we experience the quieter, more intimate miracles that are the substance of spiritual growth. Here, we grow into the reality that Jesus is not only “the author-pioneer and perfecter of our faith”<sup>35</sup> as belief, he is also the author-pioneer and perfecter of our faith as practice.<sup>36</sup>

In this section, all direct quotations of words, phrases, clauses and sentences from Scripture are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted. The lines, “Habits in this pamphlet,” show which numbered habits are derived from the given passage(s) of Scripture.

### **“With all your mind:”<sup>37</sup>**

*Scriptures:* Matthew 22:24-30; Mark 12:28-34; and Luke 10:25-28.

*Habits in this pamphlet:* all.

*Comment:* All three Gospel passages quote from Deuteronomy 6:5 and part of Leviticus 19:18, adding the phrase, “with all your mind,” to Deuteronomy 6:5. All three passages are parts of accounts of disputes between institutional religious

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<sup>33</sup> The writers of this pamphlet reject the belief that God no longer performs certain types of miracles.

<sup>34</sup> John 14:12 - 15:11; 2 Peter 1:2-15.

<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 12:2 (NIV) says, “author and perfecter;” the NRSV here says, “pioneer and perfecter;” the Greek word in question can be translated into English as either “author” or “pioneer.”

<sup>36</sup> Observe, for example, that all of chapters 12 and 13 of Hebrews discusses both belief and practice together.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27.



authorities<sup>38</sup> and Jesus, yet no one in the texts seemed to dispute this addition. Jesus made the addition in Matthew and Mark, the institutional authority in Mark approved the addition by rephrasing it, “with all the understanding,”<sup>39</sup> the institutional authority made the addition in Luke, and Jesus approved the addition in Luke.

These three Gospel passages, and the Deuteronomy and Leviticus passages on which they are based, are the beginning of any Christian teaching about habits of thought.

**“Wise as serpents and innocent as doves:”<sup>40</sup>**: Matthew 9:35 - 11:1.

*Habits in this pamphlet:* all.

*Comment:* In the middle of this account of Jesus’ commissioning and instructing the twelve apostles for a mission, he said, “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (verse 10:16). Among those they would meet on their mission, the disciples needed to be able to discern who was actually a person of peace and who would pretend to be a person of peace in order to trap the disciples for the authorities to apprehend them.

The writers interpret Jesus’ command to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” as a state of heart and mind that the disciples were required to maintain henceforth -- for their specific commission in the passage and for the Great Commission that would follow. As a time-transcendent command for all followers of Jesus, being “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” requires the discernment of both one’s heart and mind to reckon with the knowledge of good and evil on an ongoing basis. Specifically, this requires continually applying one’s heart in faith in Jesus to be the engine for one’s mind to disentangle good and evil from one another, thereby training the heart to be pure and the mind to be sharp. Upon using this discernment, a disciple of Jesus is equipped to avoid evil and untruth in the many ways that they are often present in a corrupt idea wrapped together in goodness and truth. A disciple practicing discernment is also equipped to rescue and clarify goodness and truth from within any evil and untruth. In this way, disciples past, present and future are equipped to deal with “wolves” both as corrupt ideas and as the corrupt people who promote them, since dealing with one requires dealing with the other.

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<sup>38</sup> Throughout the Teachings and Habits of Jesus and the Apostles section, the writers use the terms “religious institutional authority,” “religious authority,” “religious leaders,” etc...

Although it is probably obvious to most readers, we want to make sure that the full content of Matthew, Mark and Luke is applied to the here and now and not merely limited to the time, place and culture of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

<sup>39</sup> Mark 12:33.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 10:16.

In Matthew 24-25, Mark 13:3-37 and Luke 21:7-23, Jesus spoke of the apocalypse and warned his disciples not to lead astray by false prophets. Throughout situations of uncertainty, danger and calmness, Jesus urged that his followers have continuing vigilance and readiness against being lead into fear, false confidence and dissipation. These are commandments to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” for every one of Jesus followers from the day he spoke it until judgement day.

In Matthew 10:19-20 and in similar passages (Mark 13:11 and Luke 21:12-15), Jesus told his disciples not to plan their self-defense speeches for persecution trials in courts. Jesus instructed them to let the Holy Spirit use their mouths in these situations.

The writers interpret this Scripture to be a time-transcendent promise that the Holy Spirit will assist a follower of Jesus in improvising a speech in those moments that is custom-tailored to address his/her persecutors. Improvisation in any endeavor, such as jazz improvisation, requires that one is relaxed enough to be ‘surrendered to the moment’. However, good improvisation in any discipline also requires that one’s mind be well trained in the underlying structures involved in that discipline and be experienced in developing creative ideas based on those structures. This is as true for the teachings of Jesus as it is for jazz.

Furthermore, this commandment in Matthew 10:19-20 is for one type of situation wherein Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would take over their mouths via their submission. This is not a promise that the Holy Spirit will always relieve a follower of Jesus from the task of thinking. It is important to note that the general command to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” came just before the command to let the Holy Spirit do the thinking and talking in one type of situation.

**Some examples of Jesus’ being wise as a serpent::** Matthew 21:23-27, Mark 11:27-33 and Luke 20:1-8.

*Habits in this pamphlet:* 4, 5, 20, 24, 43-46.

*Comment:* In this dispute about Jesus’ authority and John’s baptism, Jesus put the institutional authorities in a position where speech by them would have revealed their true thoughts to the crowd. The authorities chose silence.

*Scriptures:* Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26.

*Habits in this pamphlet:* 4, 5, 13, 14, 20, 24, 43-46.

*Comment:* In the question about paying taxes or monetary tribute to the emperor, Jesus’ famous answer amazed the authorities. He exposed their political trap and dismantled it in public.

*Scriptures:* Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-37; Luke 20:27-40.

*Habits in this pamphlet:* 4, 5, 12-14, 20, 24, 43-46.

*Comment:* In the question about marriage and life after the resurrection, Jesus exposed the silliness of the question and told the questioners in public how poorly they were using the Scriptures.

**The parable of the sower:** Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15.

*Habits in this pamphlet:* 1-11, 14-21, 25-28, 42-46.

*Comment:* At least two points apply to good habits:

First, Jesus said that only “good soil” produces “fruit.” In real farming and gardening, good soil requires repeated work by humans so that it does not become packed down, eroded away or choked with weeds. We can infer that the same is true of human character; hearts and minds require constant “tilling and weeding,” and Jesus does not exempt anyone from the need to do this on an ongoing basis to maintain “good soil.”

Second, Jesus said he was explaining this parable to his disciples because they had asked him to explain it. The crowd had not asked him to. People who do not persistently ask Jesus questions do not receive the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

**Proof of love: person-specific, creative, hardworking, formula-free detail by Jesus.**

*Summary of habits in this pamphlet for this section:* 1-6, 10-39.

*Scriptures:* Matthew 8:1-14; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16.

*Comment:* When Jesus healed a leper in Galilee, Jesus affirmed the words of the leper’s plea when responding. Jesus also returned the man to society by telling him to go get certification of restored health from the authorities.

*Scriptures:* Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10.

*Comment:* When Jesus heard the plea from centurion in Capernaum to heal a slave, Jesus publicly commended the faith of this officer of the occupying army of the oppressive foreign government. Jesus then healed the slave in the manner the centurion suggested, by speaking from a distance.

*Scripture:* Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39.

*Comment:* In Gerasa, after Jesus cast the legion of demons out of the man who had been living among the tombs, the people from the area saw the man, “clothed and in his right mind,” with Jesus. Again, Jesus did more than solve the man’s

most obvious problem. Jesus got the man dressed, gave him dignity, returned him to his own people in front of many of their witnesses, and gave him a mission to tell his own people what the Lord had done for him.

*Scriptures:* Mark 5:35-43; Luke 8:49-56.

*Comment:* When Jesus brought the dead daughter of a local institutional leader back to life, her parents were amazed and astounded. Recognizing that her parents were too shocked to know what to do, he directed them to give her something to eat right away.

*Scriptures:* Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:33-46; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15.

*Comment:* When Jesus fed the crowd that included five thousand men, he handled many practical, organizational details as well as performing the miracle.

*Scriptures:* Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17.

*Comment:* Jesus made time to lay his hands on children and bless them during a busy day, rebuking his disciples who were keeping them and their parents away.<sup>41</sup>

*Scriptures:* Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-25.

*Comment:* Jesus showed that he knew, understood and loved the heart of the rich young ruler by going directly to the weak spot: the man's trust in his wealth and willpower over any active trust in God.

*Scriptures:* Luke 17:11-19.

*Comment:* By telling the ten lepers to go show themselves to the priests for certification of freedom from leprosy, and then healing them from a distance after they turned to go, Jesus both healed them and returned them to society. When only one returned, a Samaritan, to thank him, Jesus also accepted his thanks and commended his gratitude and faith.

**Proof of love: Jesus affirming the hardworking love and faith of people he interacted with.**

*Summary of habits in this pamphlet for this section:* 1-6, 10-43.

*Scriptures:* Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26.

*Comment:* The people who brought the paralytic to Jesus, breaking through the roof of the house according to Mark and Luke, showed great love for their friend and great faith in Jesus' willingness and ability to heal him. This was hardworking

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<sup>41</sup> Note how Jesus rebuked the misuse of efficiency.

ministry in loving detail even before Jesus became directly involved.

The texts do not say how far the paralytic had been brought. The friends' effort on faith and the paralytic's trust in them were enough to impress Jesus, however; "when he/Jesus saw their faith" is in all three texts, before Jesus opened his mouth to speak. After Jesus told him to get up and pick up his stretcher, Jesus told him to go home, obviously on his own two legs; he went away (Mark), going home (Matthew and Luke), praising God as he went (Luke).

*Scriptures:* Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8.

*Comment:* The gospels record scenes where different women anointed Jesus with perfume. He accepted these anointings as extravagant displays of honor and as detailed, loving actions appropriate for the time-specific reality of his proclaiming the Gospel (Luke) or preparing to suffer as the Messiah/Christ (Matthew, Mark and John). When men who were present at these scenes rebuked the women for being wasteful, immodest and/or disruptive, Jesus rebuked those men.<sup>42</sup>

*Scriptures:* Matthew 9:20; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48.

*Comment:* When Jesus healed the chronically hemorrhaging woman, the Matthew text says that Jesus told her, "Take heart daughter; your faith has made you well," and then says that she was immediately healed. In saying, "Take heart," Jesus directly addressed her fears and told her that her courage was moving in the right direction and to continue in that direction. The fears Jesus specifically addressed were that her disease would be exposed to all, and that she had stolen power from Jesus. In saying, "daughter," he addressed her fear of being shamed and outcast for her disease by publicly affirming her as a member of his family. In saying, "your faith has made you well," he gave her credit for her healing, affirming her heart and the boldness of her action. In doing these things, Jesus did more than let his power heal her body; he also sought her out, forming a relationship, and he spoke to her, healing and strengthening her emotionally.

We hear Jesus doing two more things in the Mark and Luke versions: he sought her out publicly rather than let her sneak away, and he blessed her publicly. This exposure was frightening at first. She fell to her knees in front of him, trembling, and testified in full to him and to the crowd about what had just happened. However, the exposure made his blessing and commendation glorious.

Mark and Luke record another blessing: "Go in peace." The Aramaic word *šēlam* and Hebrew word *šalôm*, usually translated *eirēnē* in Greek and "peace" in English, have a wider range of meaning than *eirēnē* or "peace;" they mean, "being

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<sup>42</sup> Note how Jesus rebuked the misuse of efficiency.

whole, prosperity, peace or welfare.”<sup>43</sup> Jesus was not adding a platitude onto the end of his speech. Rather, he was stretching the crowd’s understanding and acceptance of his authority. By saying, “Go in peace,” he decreed to the whole town<sup>44</sup> that this woman was once again a full member of society, completely healed and not to be shunned for any memory of her past condition.

Mark records one last blessing to this woman, “and be healed from your disease,” as a public assurance that her healing was permanent.

**Jesus’ demand for honesty::** Matthew 7:1-5, Matthew 18:15-20; Luke 7:37-42, Luke 17:3.

*Habits in this pamphlet:* 1-4, 6-9, 11-20, 22-27, 29-46.

*Comment:* Jesus taught us to examine ourselves before we confront other people about sins they may be committing. He also taught us to confront people about their sins, and to forgive them when they repent.

*Scriptures:* Matthew 21:28-32. *Habits in this pamphlet:* 2, 4, 6-8, 16-18, 20, 21, 27, 43-46.

*Comment:* Jesus said that he rejects pious speech as a substitute for obedient repentance.

*Scriptures:* Matthew 23; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 11:37-52; Luke 20:45-47.

*Habits in this pamphlet:* 2, 4, 12-46.

*Comment:* Jesus roundly denounced the hypocritical actions, speech and thinking of corrupt religious authorities.

### **Living in the light::**

Matthew 5:14-16

Matthew 6:22-23

Luke 11:33-36

John 3:16-21

Corinthians 3:1 - 4:6 Corinthians

6:11 - 7:1

Ephesians 4:14 - 5:20

2 Timothy 3:1 - 4:8

Hebrews 3:7 - 4:16

1 Peter 2:1-12 1 John 1:1 - 2:17

1 John 3:11-24

1 John 4:15- - 5:12

Revelation 21:1 - 22:7

*Habits in this pamphlet:* all.

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<sup>43</sup> See the BDB and Holladay articles for these words in Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic.

<sup>44</sup> including the local institutional leader who, moments earlier, had begged him to save his daughter’s life, as recorded in Mark and Luke, or else to resurrect his daughter who had already died, as recorded in Matthew.

*Comment:* An obedient disciple of Jesus walks in the light of Jesus, letting this light shine into one's self, actions and words, while calling others to do the same. When one finds joy in this here on earth, one's heart is being prepared for heaven. Those in heaven will spend eternity enjoying the light of Jesus, which will replace the sun.

**The wisdom of God against the wisdom of the world:** 1 Corinthians 1:10 - 3:15.  
*Habits in this pamphlet* 1-4, 6-9, 11-46.

*Comment:* This passage is part of a rebuke to the church in Corinth for being divided over loyalties to human leaders and for following the wisdom of the world. He mocked worldly wisdom and its practitioners, yet the whole rebuke shows that Paul did not call for anyone to shut down his/her mind.

When Paul wrote of the "wisdom of the world," he was not writing about genuine knowledge that had been arrived at by non-Christian thinkers<sup>45</sup>. Rather, he was writing about the errors of judgement in those who are not informed in their spirits by the Spirit of God. He outlined in general terms the errors of judgement whereby the Greeks and the Jews had elevated corrupt ways of seeking truth in matters large and small. He denounced the Greeks for making an idol out of the verbal trappings of knowledge and wisdom without submitting to God as the source of wisdom. He denounced the Jews for demanding outward miracles while being hardened against receiving the intimate miracles whereby soft hearts interact spiritually with God.

Within the Jews' and Greeks' errors of judgement and within other forms of wisdom of the world, there is an essential error of the heart that underlies the intellectual errors of the mind. This essential error is the sinful pride of a flawed self-reliance wherein the self seeks to be strong where it is weak both before God and before others. Corrupted by sinful pride, worldly wisdom is merely the outward expression of an inward agenda to advance one's false sense of strength. This corrupt agenda of the heart, of prideful self-aggrandizement and self-protection, often exerts an unconscious pull on one's judgement.

When Paul wrote that he preached "Christ and him crucified...in meekness and fear...with a demonstration of the Spirit's power," he was describing the portal one must pass through in order for one to begin to shed this corrupting pride. It is through embracing the Gospel of Christ crucified and the Spirit's power that one begins to become conscious of one's true weakness before God. It is by fully

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<sup>45</sup> Paul recognized that certain aspects of non-Christian cultures could still reflect (even if in a refracted way) the truths of God. His sermon in Athens (Acts 17:16-34) is an example of this. Also, Paul's use of logical argumentation throughout his ministry shows that he benefited from sound ideas that had been developed by worldly philosophers.

owning and inheriting Christ's identity as "Christ crucified" in vulnerability that one is capable of inheriting the blessings of Christ risen and Christ alive and powerful. It was Paul's disposition of fear and trembling that made him capable of administering that power in ministry, not for his own aggrandizement, but for the blessing of others. It is this aspect of the Gospel, of reckoning with one's weakness through Christ as a portal to His glory, that makes the Gospel mutually exclusive (i.e., mutually "foolish") to the self-aggrandizement and self-protection that lies within the wisdom of the world.

It is through the removal of one's corrupting pride through Jesus that one's judgement begins to become uncorrupted and that one begins the path to true wisdom. When Paul wrote about the "wisdom among the mature," he was describing the wisdom gained by those who have developed in the faith of Christ crucified, Christ risen, and Christ alive and powerful along a difficult journey. These "mature" gain instruction being taught in their spirits by the Spirit of God, eschewing the flawed form of self-reliance<sup>46</sup> at the core of the "wisdom of the world." The "spiritual man" understands that he must continually resubmit to Jesus' specific direction in removing his corrupting pride so that his heart can be the instrument for making sound judgements.

As the Spirit of God reveals the thoughts of God to a spiritual man via his soft heart toward God, the spiritual man "makes judgements about all things." While the Spirit of God is teaching a spiritual person in the heart, it is the spiritual person who must actively receive that instruction and actively apply that instruction to the task of making decisions and interpreting information. Making sound judgements about "all things" is the fruit of those who daily shoulder this task, the task of making decisions and interpretations informed by God's Spirit, through the course of a lifetime. It is the soundness of those judgements and the consequences that follow throughout history that God will ultimately test in fire.

**Taking thoughts captive to obey Christ:** 2 Corinthians 10:1 - 12:21, especially 10:3-5.

*Habits in this pamphlet:* all, especially 9-39.

*Comment:* In 10:1-12:21, the apostle Paul defended his ministry and authority to a church where some factions opposed him. He also threatened to discipline the leaders who "commend themselves" if the other leaders in that church did not

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<sup>46</sup> As a believer gains maturity while being personally engaged in this process of discernment through and with God, he/she is less likely to idolize the fruits of that discernment process in another believer. It is for this error of judgement, of idolizing "celebrity teachers and Christian leaders, and of living out one's desire for power vicariously through a leader, that Paul rebuked the Corinthians. Avoiding the idolizing of leaders by being personally committed to the task of discernment is a form of "self-reliance" in the best sense of the term.



discipline them before his next visit.

In 10:3-5, Paul talked about intellectual activity in his ministry, as it applied to the task of disciplining against irresponsible thinking and behavior in churches. He counted himself and his companions in ministry<sup>47</sup> as free, obedient, disciplined, thinking and active agents, and not as inert tools. This view is clear in Paul's Greek and in English translation too:

*"Indeed, we live as human beings, . . . ."* The "we" were Paul and his companions in ministry. They lived as human beings (literally, "according to the flesh," in Greek). The Greek for "we live" must be translated as active, not as passive. Paul was not saying that he and his companions were mere corpses which the Holy Spirit animated, nor that they were like the Greek pagan oracle at Delphi,<sup>48</sup> nor that they were under what would today be called hypnotic suggestion. There are ways to express such ghastly notions in ancient Greek, but Paul did not use them or even hint in those directions.

*". . . but we do not wage war according to human standards;"* Paul said again here that he and his fellow human companions did this spiritual soldiering according to standards God had revealed.

*". . . for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds."* Not only were Paul and his companions doing the spiritual soldiering as humans, but they had also been entrusted with weapons. The weapons' power did not come from them, but from God. However, the weapons were not automatic; Paul and his companions wielded them by making moves and decisions from moment to moment. If Paul and his companions were to wield the weapons effectively, Paul and his companions had to have been free to observe and make moves and decisions as agents -- agents who have well-trained reflexes, disciplined habits and the choice to obey God in full awareness as God leads from moment to moment.

*"We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, . . . ."* Paul boldly said that he and his fellow human companions, with the proper attitude, equipment, training and direction, did the destroying. They destroyed arguments, but they did not destroy all arguments and bring thinking to a stop in churches. Rather, Paul clarified this spiritual and intellectual combat as an ongoing task. He used arguments throughout his missionary career, and many people in the churches he served disagreed with him freely and publicly during his lifetime and after his death. In this passage, Paul was

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<sup>47</sup> especially Timothy, who also served the Corinthian church from time to time, and whom Paul listed as the "assistant writer" of this epistle in verse 1:1.

<sup>48</sup> whose oracle messages were ecstatic utterances produced during trances. She did not remember her utterances, which had to be interpreted by specialists who worked at the oracle site.

talking about the ongoing practice of destroying strongholds and arguments that are both “homegrown” within the church and imported from the wider culture. These strongholds and arguments are obstacles raised up against the knowledge of God, or “against acquaintance with God,” as this Greek phrase here can also be translated into English.<sup>49</sup> In this passage, Paul’s specific target was irresponsible thinking and behavior among Christians in Corinth.

“. . . , *and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.*” Here, Paul clarified the ongoing discipline of examining every personal thought and corporate thought and testing them for their consistency with the Gospel. If found consistent with the Gospel, a thought must be taken captive into practice. If found inconsistent with the Gospel, it must be rejected personally and confronted corporately.

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<sup>49</sup> Paul used the Greek noun *gnōsis* here, a word best translated into English as “acquaintance” or “knowledge (in the sense of acquaintance),” not as “knowledge (in the sense of possessing lists of facts).” To explain the kind of acquaintance, he put God’s name in the genitive case (as required by Greek). The Greek genitive case, often translated “\_\_\_’s” or “*of* \_\_\_” in English, also represents several other nuances, explained in grammars of Greek for English speakers. Here, God is the object of the acquaintance exercised by humans (in response to God’s prior acquaintance with humans and action on humans’ behalf), so it must be said that Paul put God’s name in the *objective genitive* nuance. The English word, “acquaintance,” requires “with” when we name the object of the acquaintance. Hence the translation, “acquaintance with God.”

## Some More Objections and Answers

To this day, strongholds, obstacles and arguments against acquaintance with God have not stopped appearing among Christians. These will not stop appearing until Jesus returns, as he himself told his disciples.<sup>50</sup> This pamphlet is an effort by the writers to expose and confront what we believe are some strongholds, obstacles and arguments within Evangelicalism in these times. We observe that these are hurting many Evangelicals' acquaintance with God and hurting the acquaintance with God of many whom Evangelicals are trying to evangelize and/or minister to.

In this section, we, the writers, have identified some questions and objections that we anticipate to the habits of this pamphlet. We believe the following questions and objections represent some of these strongholds, obstacles and arguments.

### **“But, that seems like a lot of new rules to cramp my style.”**

This objection comes from a view of human nature, that one's untrammelled self is good and that limiting it in any way represses its goodness. In fact, there are good elements to our unique selves that God's Spirit wishes to nurture. However, there are also unsavory aspects of ourselves that God wishes to prune away. Therefore, this objection's view of human nature is both partly true and completely wrong.

This pamphlet's "Habits" are an earnest attempt to outline alternatives to unsavory tendencies that are prevalent among Evangelicals in these times.

### **“Why do I have to take so many things ‘captive’?”**

In habit 24, the writers of this pamphlet amplified the phrase, “every thought,” from 2 Corinthians 10:5, into many forms of expression. Most of these forms of expression represent interpersonal and often unspoken forms of group communication, based on conclusions and assumptions arrived at by group thinking. Group-thinking assumptions continually surround all of us and will subliminally and excessively influence our individual thoughts if we are not each continually and carefully examining them. Taking expressions of group communication “captive” is an essential first step for a Christian to begin to take captive the assumptions that lie within.

Furthermore, we the writers interpret that Jesus' warnings against following false prophets can also be amplified to include following false leaders of all stripes

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<sup>50</sup> Matthew 24 - 25; Mark 13:3-37; Luke 21:7-36.

and following corrupt movements and trends. Though the ideas contained within movements and trends offer answers to certain questions, these ideas are often not specifically articulated by a self-declared “prophet”. Often within movements, the ideas and the questions being answered are elusive and the leadership is diffuse and not obvious. The leadership of a movement includes any who follow the movement and influence others to do the same, whether that influence is intentional or not.

### **“But, I just go with my gut.”**

Assumptions one does not examine, one will by default absorb.<sup>51</sup> Intuition, or “gut feel,” is a good thing God gives us for use in discerning his will. However, like the rest of an untrammelled self, intuition requires pruning.

Left unpruned, our intuition absorbs assumptions by osmosis and does not examine them for truth, accuracy and bias. Examining assumptions requires the full use of our heart and mind and the courage to question these assumptions when they conflict with the facts presented to us. This requires a fact-and-emotion feedback loop that involves dealing with fear of the unknown. Without this, one will distort reality to avoid fear.

This deep-seated avoidance of fear is what keeps people from examining their assumptions and the motives that are wrapped up in them. Relying on intuition that has not been pruned of this tendency inhibits clear and honest dealing and causes one to assume a false sense of mastery.

### **“The Gospel is simple, isn’t it?”**

The Gospel is simple in essence, yet complex in execution. God did not drop it down as a handbook from heaven, but came down as the person of Jesus to live it on earth. Jesus lived the Gospel as an adult in public for three years, custom-tailoring each ministry act on each occasion for each person, group and crowd.

Therefore, it is hubris for a follower of Jesus to treat people in a habitually simple way. People are both simple and complex, and they require a gospel that meets them in this reality. It is in untangling confusing circumstances that we individual Christians are able to see how Jesus is custom-tailoring the Gospel for others and for ourselves here and now. This task is a strenuous and sometimes painful exercise of faith.

When we embrace this exercise of faith through the habits outlined in this

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<sup>51</sup> from a sermon by Jim Belcher to the Twentysomething Fellowship of Lake Avenue Church, Pasadena, California, in 1996.

pamphlet, our ministry enters into more intimate partnership with Jesus. In this intimate partnership with Jesus, we are able to invite others into the task of untangling confusing circumstances to find his ongoing work within them. When we Evangelicals are not practicing these habits, our approach to reality is simplistic, insular, and (today in the USA) over-politicized. Outsiders and seekers often complain that we are deaf and sometimes hostile to their needs and concerns. This offensiveness is not the Gospel's inherent offensiveness,<sup>52</sup> it is our own.<sup>53</sup>

As a result, many people are “dischurched,” not merely “unchurched.” Their unhappy experiences are valid, and their complaints and sincere, pointed questions contain truths that we Evangelicals have, largely, not dealt with. In these times, we are not effectively

- \* recognizing these needs and concerns,
- \* addressing these needs and concerns in a helpful way, and
- \* taking responsibility for this “deafness” throughout Evangelicalism.

We often respond to complaints from a dischurched person by

- \* using, “Don’t join a perfect church . . . ,” as a platitude,
- \* merely defending our personal experiences and walks with God, or
- \* merely defending the quality of the individual churches we belong to.

By responding in these ways, we fail to acknowledge the wound of the person. In doing this, we set ourselves up to fail at addressing that person’s needs properly and render ourselves unable to face the larger problem of why the wound was caused and not properly addressed to begin with. In these times, this recurring problem throughout Evangelicalism is dragging our name and, more importantly, the name of Jesus through the mud throughout society at large and often right under our own noses.

We need to hear and assimilate into our discipleship the truths that Jesus is bringing to our attention through these dischurched people. It is in practicing the habits in this pamphlet that we train our hearts and minds for this task. Upon doing this, we show the attractiveness of the person of Jesus to them far more than in all of our carefully crafted worship environments and all of our attempts at being nice. In doing this, we partner with Jesus to bring the Gospel into the complexity of life.

### **What about the gifts of discernment and words of knowledge?**

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<sup>52</sup> Matthew 5:10-12; Matthew 21:42-44; Luke 20:17-18; 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:6; 2 Corinthians 2:14-17; Galatians 5:11; 1 Peter 2:1-10.

<sup>53</sup> Romans 2:19-24.

These gifts are wonderful and edifying and are versions of the essential spiritual encounter with God that is the substance of all spiritual growth. These gifts alone, however, as with any other gift, are not enough gas to power the engine of ministry to one's self or others. The gift of discernment must also be accompanied by the act of discernment. Discernment begins at the precipice of a confusing circumstance where mind begins to clarify for the heart what the self does not know and the heart unveils the self's fear of the unknown. Discernment is the act of deliberately seeking this clarity of heart and mind in faith, examining this crisis within one's self before Jesus. In that place, Jesus is faithful to usher the heart and mind forward through the unknown in a way that is custom-tailored with the right combination of knowledge for the mind and/or peace for the heart.

As one moves forward from the unknown into the known along this mental and intellectual journey with Jesus, one is given the measure of discernment needed to act according to Jesus' specific direction. It is this mental, emotional and spiritual journey that avails a follower of Jesus of the ability to be nimble and precise in the act of ministry. Embarking on this mental, emotional and spiritual journey is the responsibility of each follower of Jesus whether or not he/she is blessed with the special spiritual gifts of discernment and/or words of knowledge.

### **What about my *intent* to love?**

The writers wrote Habit #2 and the Habits of Ministry that complement it to be jarring to our fellow Evangelicals. In some ways, many of us Evangelicals are not "result-oriented" enough. When we find that our attempts at ministry and evangelism are rejected and avoided, we too often shrug and say, "God's Word doesn't go forth and return empty."<sup>54</sup> While this Scripture contains profound truth, it is all too often code for saying, "God will cover for all of my ministry and evangelism mistakes, so I don't really have to bother to re-evaluate and figure out how to improve my relationship habits and communicate more effectively."

In other ways, many of us Evangelicals are result-oriented towards the wrong result. Having a large number of people showing up to a church or Bible study is a result that is not necessarily close to the heart of Jesus. High quality relationships in which people are participating in each others' lives in such a way that the Gospel is being custom-tailored for one another's specific confusing circumstances is much closer to the heart of Jesus, since it is the substance of his teachings and earthly practice.

It is common knowledge that good parenting involves continually custom-tailoring affection, reward and discipline to fit the specific, ever-evolving needs of

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<sup>54</sup>a brief paraphrase of Isaiah 55:10-11.

the child. A child will experience this high-quality parenting as love. A child will experience much less love if the parent significantly neglects some aspect or aspects of good parenting, no matter how much the parent intends to love the child or feels love toward the child.

We participate most fully in the custom-tailored parenting that God is doing in each of our lives when we embrace the emotional, mental and spiritual task of untangling confusing circumstances. In doing so our actions will result in the details of our speech and deeds being received as love by the person we are ministering to. Our actions will not simply be the result of our feelings of “love” in the moment, or of formulaic words and deeds, but rather of a life committed to the ongoing act of participating in God’s love in all of its complexity.

### **Are you questioning my honesty?**

We Evangelicals tend to value efficiency, pragmatic action, chapter-verse quotation of Scripture, simple trust in God, common sense and gratitude. These are, generally, good things that we have emphasized in order to avoid the pitfalls that can occur with ongoing examination and rigorous efforts to understand complex things. These pitfalls include

- \* having pride in one’s knowledge and using it to elevate oneself above others, and
- \* using intellectual gymnastics as a way to avoid dealing with one’s fears and other emotions.

In matters of faith, these pitfalls also include

- \* relying on a knowledge system to comprehend matters instead of relying on faith in God,
- \* devaluing the authority of Scripture,
- \* false piety, a version of pride in one’s knowledge, in which one idolizes pious words, and
- \* gnosticism, another version of pride in one’s knowledge, in which one has faith and pride in special, esoteric knowledge.

While attempting to avoid these intellectually-oriented pitfalls, we Evangelicals have also sought to avoid pitfalls associated with attempts to examine emotions. These include

- \* morbid fascination with one’s own angst,
- \* self-pity or “crying on the devil’s shoulder,”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> from a sermon by Rev. John Yates, Falls Church Episcopal Church, Falls Church, Virginia, in

- \* “navel gazing” and
- \* chronic ingratitude.

It is in recognizing these pitfalls and promoting values to counter them that we Evangelicals have defined the context for what is honest and authentic. The writers of this pamphlet believe that this context, though well intended, is too narrow and creates pitfalls of its own.

Discipleship with Jesus requires taking full responsibility for the internal reality of one’s heart and mind while, at that same time, reckoning with the external reality of coercive pressures. This requires seeking Jesus’ power and help in order for one to execute one’s responsibilities to orient one’s heart and mind to the fruits of God’s Spirit, and to deal with external pressures according to Jesus’ specific direction. For the writers, honesty in the context of these responsibilities is the unflinching examination and disciplined effort to understand these internal and external realities and how they relate to each other.

The emotional essence of all of the pitfalls that we Evangelicals try to avoid is the stagnation that occurs when one rejects the responsibility to examine his or her heart and mind before God with faith in God’s direction and becomes comfortable, not allowing God to pry him or her into necessary and uncomfortable acts of faith.

By outlining these habits of thought, ministry and church, the writers are attempting to clarify this: the ongoing examination and rigorous efforts to understand complex things in the context of honesty as defined above. In doing so, we aim to “rescue” thinking from the pitfalls and emotional stagnation it has often fallen into and recognize it as an important part of having authenticity in discipleship and ministry.

We Evangelicals fail to be honest and authentic in this way when we try to avoid the pitfalls of thinking without also seeking to employ the best of what thinking can be in the course of our discipleship. Flippancy, platitudes and passive-aggressiveness are some common forms of dishonesty and inauthenticity that we fall into when this happens.

We, the writers, believe that when Jesus spoke against false piety, which was prevalent among Pharisees 2,000 years ago, he was also speaking against the larger and deeper problem of dishonesty and inauthenticity, of which false piety is one form. We believe that the habits of this pamphlet, when practiced, address the forms of dishonesty and inauthenticity that are prevalent among Evangelicals in these times.

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the mid-1980’s.



## **“Aren’t you equating these ‘Habits’ with Scripture?”**

The Bible plainly addresses many issues in life, so we Evangelicals are right to give priority to Scripture. However, not every issue in life has a thorough analysis and prescription provided directly in a chapter and verse in Scripture. For an “indirectly covered” issue, Scripture offers us goals and guidelines, not a “playbook.”<sup>56</sup> It is our responsibility to partner with Jesus to create the playbook for the issue. Done properly, the playbook will be consistent with the goals and guidelines of Scripture.

Examples of playbooks include creeds, catechisms, written church constitutions, denomination statements on issues in society today, sermons, Sunday School lessons and all manner of Christian books and devotional materials. Of course, these must be carefully examined for their consistency with Scripture. If found consistent with Scripture, they must be digested into life lessons learned along our personal journeys with Jesus. These life lessons form a more intimate sort of playbook.

We Evangelicals benefit from playbooks developed before us as we develop new playbooks to address the specific needs of our lives and our generation. In turn, future generations will require new playbooks and updated versions of old ones.

Therefore, it is dishonest to criticize a valid playbook analysis of an issue as not being chapter-verse of Scripture. This selective appeal to Scripture is akin to looking at a sign that points to a city and then rejecting a map offered by someone to help you get there because the map is not part of the sign.

The ongoing effort to develop playbooks with Jesus is our personal and collective responsibility as we confront new issues and untangle new, confusing circumstances. This is part of what the apostle Paul called, “taking every thought captive to obey Christ,” and the apostle John called, “walking in the light.”

## **“But, you’re not being nice!”**

We are writing passionately and frankly. Being nice is generally a good thing. However, we can no longer be silent about forms of “niceness” which actually suppress the truth and hinder honesty. These toxic, passive-aggressive forms of “niceness” are too commonly practiced among Evangelicals today, and serve to undermine the habits we’ve outlined in this pamphlet.

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<sup>56</sup> from American football, the catalog of descriptions of plays used by a team, separate from and subject to the rule book.

## **“But, where’s the fun in any of this?”**

This objection comes from an idolatrous bondage to popular culture. The authors of this pamphlet are not against all popular culture, even commercial pop culture; we enjoy and spend money on parts of it ourselves, and we encourage our Christian (Evangelical and otherwise) brothers and sisters who work in “The Industry.” We are, however, alarmed that so many people today, including Evangelicals, are giving it too much power over their lives.

This idolatrous bondage manifests itself in three interconnected ways: ersatz personal expression through consumerism, conformity to trends, and constant sensory stimulation. This bondage is choking personal creativity in fun and relationships and choking opportunities that God seeks to use to unite truth and fun to create joy.

## **“Why aren’t you presenting all of this more gradually?”**

We, the writers, think that a soft, gradual approach is inappropriate for communicating the larger problem that holds this pamphlet together. This larger problem is urgent and is greater than the sum of its many parts. It is the aggregate of many persistent and under-examined tendencies among Evangelicals, resulting in an overly simplistic application of the Gospel. Ultimately, this gives power to movements in wider society which are contrary to the Gospel but, nonetheless, on some level, attempt to deal with life’s complexity.

As we Evangelicals are oversimplifying the Gospel, we are oversimplifying our approach to the wider society we are trying to reach with it. Instead of engaging with the questions contained within these non-Gospel movements, we are overly insular, overly politicized and often overly acquiescent toward them.

Political activism is an important and necessary part of our earthly citizenship. However, seeking confidence in human political majorities for cultural battle as a substitute for practicing the habits of this pamphlet individually and as churches puts confidence in the wrong source. It can make us feel effective in the moment, but it is not the task that Jesus calls us to or that Paul and John describe. This misplaced confidence “lets us off the hook” of the true task of developing our hearts and minds.

By steeling ourselves for cultural battle in this way and by “circling the wagons” in a defensive attempt to protect ourselves, we fail to discern the real problems in society that these non-Gospel movements are, on some level, trying to address. This discernment involves “spitting out the bones:”<sup>57</sup> carefully removing

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<sup>57</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Kent Hovind, Ph.D., a creationism advocate, who was using the

the aspects of these movements that are compatible with the Gospel from the aspects that are anti-Gospel, and understanding the relationship between the two. It involves recognizing the valid concerns, questions and critiques contained within these movements and working to arrive at Gospel-centered answers that sincerely and specifically address them (even if, in the process of thinking, we are compelled at times to say, “I don’t know.”). Upon failing to discern in this way, we fail to arrive at and implement viable, Gospel-centered alternatives to the anti-Gospel behaviors and ideas that society legitimizes as being answers to the valid questions and problems these movements are addressing.

We Evangelicals find true relevancy in our Christian practice when we use discernment as outlined above to take the movements of the times captive to obey Christ. We fall into ersatz relevancy when we gauge our relevancy not from the vantage point of the Gospel but from the vantage point of what society has legitimized. When and where we have fallen into ersatz relevancy, we have absorbed many anti-Gospel behaviors and ideas into our practice. This has occurred with behaviors and ideas that we have not scrutinized, and even with those that we have actively stood against.

We manifest this problem when we avoid difficult teachings and practices of Jesus, have topics where “we just don’t go,” and have personal behavior that is often little different from the behavior of the unchurched and dischurched around us. These are some symptoms of what has been called “Jesus Plus.”<sup>58</sup> Jesus Plus is a phenomenon that occurs whenever Christians (including Evangelicals) as individuals or as churches have tweaked, watered down and adjusted the Gospel to fit movements that they have acquiesced to rather than properly taken captive.

The writers of this pamphlet believe that insular defensiveness, over-politicized cultural warfare, ersatz relevance and Jesus Plus are interconnected parts of a problem that is threatening the long-term viability of Evangelicalism as a Christian movement. We the writers believe that, when practiced, the habits outlined in this pamphlet address this problem.

### **Aren’t you being negative and divisive?**

In presenting this pamphlet to the Evangelical community, we the writers are risking the accusations of negativity and divisiveness. We are willing to take this

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phrase in a completely different context (public-domain videotape of seminar, *100 Reasons Why Evolution is Stupid*, Compass International).

<sup>58</sup> Rev. Steven Marsh used the phrase and criticized the practice of “Jesus Plus” by laypeople frequently in sermons to the College Fellowship of Bel Air Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Los Angeles, California, in the late 1980’s and to that same congregation’s Koinonia Fellowship of young single adults in the early 1990’s.

risk. Evangelicalism has been instrumental in bringing many to Jesus. However, in its current practice, it is dividing at least as many from Jesus, including many whom we personally know and care about.

**“But, I feel overwhelmed by this pamphlet.”**

This pamphlet is a product of four years of intensive discussion and five months of intensive writing, with prayer support from several brothers and sisters in Christ. We, the writers, did not arrive at it quickly, and we do not expect people to absorb it quickly. As we say in the footnote to habit number one, we rejoice at any commitment to grow in these habits and we criticize only the stubborn refusal to grow.

## Sources and Suggestions for Further Reading:

Aland, Barbara; Aland, Kurt; Karavidopoulos, Johannes; Martini, Carlo M.; Metzger, Bruce M., editors, *The Greek New Testament*, fourth revised edition, second print (Stuttgart: 1994, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft). This one and the next one have exactly the same Greek wording on the main body of the page, but somewhat different punctuation and paragraphing. A slight revision to the fourth edition was released in 2002.

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Bailey, Kenneth, *Poet and Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*, (Grand Rapids, MI: 1976, 1980, 1983, Eerdmans). Professor Bailey, a New Testament scholar and uniquely experienced interpreter of traditional and modern Middle Eastern peasant cultures and oral traditions, is one of Steve's heroes. This book was not consulted for this pamphlet, but it has shaped much of Steve's understanding of the culture of Jesus' first audience and of Jesus' teaching and actions the Gospels. Steve has also been blessed to hear Professor Bailey speak in person during two different "Weekend in the Word" conferences at Bel Air Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles, California.

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editions; Arndt, William F.; Gingrich, F. Wilbur; Danker, Frederick W., English translators and revision editors, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, second edition, revised and augmented (Chicago: 1979, The University of Chicago Press). A third English edition is now available, known by the abbreviation “BDAG” since Danker directed this revision.

Blackaby, Henry T.; King, Claude V., *Experiencing God* (Nashville, TN: 1994, Broadman and Holman). This is the book from which Steve first learned as an adult to practice discerning the ongoing work of God in circumstances, with several friends from church in a small-group Bible study.

Borlase, Craig, *The Naked Christian* (Orlando, FL: 2005, Relevant Books). Steve found this book, by a British Evangelical, very encouraging. It addresses some of the same problems that are addressed in this pamphlet.

“BDB:” Brown, Francis; Driver, S. R.; Briggs, Charles A., editors, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Oxford: 1906, 1957, Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, seventh printing, 1980).

Holladay, William L., editor, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: 1988, E. J. Brill, 14th impression, 1998).

Burchett, David, *When Bad Christians Happen to Good People* (Colorado Springs, CO: 2002, Waterbrook Press). This book was not consulted for this pamphlet, but Steve found it encouraging during the writing process; at long last, here are a USA Evangelical author and a USA Evangelical publisher who dare *from within the community* to confront laypeople who harm the Evangelical witness to Jesus. Burchett works as a sports commentator on ESPN television.

Elliger, K.; Rudolph, W., managing editors; Rueger, H. P.; Schenker, A., revision editors, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, fifth corrected edition (Stuttgart: 1997, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft). This is the edition for the Hebrew Scriptures (the Torah, Prophets and Writings, in Hebrew with a few portions in Aramaic) used by Christian scholars and seminaries, based on the oldest available, complete manuscript (from a Jewish source). Because this edition’s text is encrusted with so many reference symbols to point to the margin notes by specialists for specialists, it is hard to read smoothly, even in large print. Jewish scholars have recently published non-specialist, smoother-reading editions of this same manuscript (two titles: *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* and *The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*).

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Lowry, Eugene L., *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Art Form*, expanded edition (Louisville, KY: 2000, Westminster John Knox Press). Greg Wertime heartily recommends this book as being useful far beyond writing sermons, especially the chapters, “UGH! Analyzing the Discrepancy” (pp. 39-52) and “AHA! Disclosing the Clue to Resolution” (pp. 53-73). These two chapters are unchanged from the first edition of 1980, although the page numbers may differ.

Noll, Mark, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1994, Eerdmans). Professor Noll (Wheaton College) is another one of Steve Blackwelder’s heroes. Steve first read this book in 2004 and was powerfully blessed by it. It gave him helpful categories for further developing his long-running discussions with Greg Wertime. Professor Noll’s gracious reply in the summer of 2004 to Steve’s fan letter gave Steve more motivation, so that eventually he and Greg started writing this pamphlet.