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They Will Know We Are Christians by our Scars: The Preacher's Body in Pauline Missiology

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Introduction

In his 1877 Yale Lectures, Episcopal minister Phillips Brooks described preaching as "the bringing of truth through personality" (1899, 5). These words have become something of a dictum in homiletics ever since (see Johnson 2009, 173). According to Brooks, "The truth must come really through the person, not merely over his [*sic*] lips, not merely into his understanding and out through his pen. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being. It must come genuinely through him" (1899, 9). He could have added that the truth must also come through the person's body; not character, affections, intellectual and moral being alone, but the preacher's physical self as well. After all, the body is the means through which human beings experience the world (see Merleau-Ponty 2012).

The act of preaching cannot be separated from the body of the preacher. Whenever a person preaches, it's their body that speaks. Lips, yes. Along with the entire physique. Her whole body communicates. Verbal proclamation is, therefore, inseparable from the preacher's physicality. While a sermon may be a literary artifact, preaching is an embodied act: the preacher's body serving as the medium for the gospel message (though this does not reduce preaching to a speech-act; see Rottman 2008).

Recognizing this reality, many homiletics texts make some reference to the preacher's body. Yet, in most of these instances, the concern is limited to the preacher's

attire or their body language—matters related to posture, gesture, voice.[1] While the role of the body in preaching has garnered more interest in the last two decades, these

welcome developments (largely in the sphere of preaching-as-performance; see Childers 1998; Farley 2008) have yet to investigate the place of the preacher's physical scars suffered as a result of bearing faithful witness to Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, this gap is unsurprising given the authorial contexts from which these homiletics works emerge (read: privileged). On the other hand, the absence is odd given the significance of the body in the New Testament, generally, and in the Pauline corpus, specifically. To wit: Christians worship the Word made flesh (John 1:14; Rom 1:3; 8:3; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:7; Col 1:22; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:13; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7), and central to the faith are three embodied events: Jesus' incarnation (from embryo to birth), His crucifixion, and His resurrection.

The Apostle Paul also makes frequent mention of his own body, describing everything from his circumcision (Rom 2:28–29; 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22; Gal 2:15; Phil 4:3–5) to his manual labor (Rom 16:22; 1 Cor 2:1–5; 4:12; 9:3–18; 16:21; 2 Cor 10:10–11; 11:6; Gal 6:11; 1 Thess 2:9; 4:11; Phlm 19). Multiple times he refers to his body and the impact it has on his preaching (Gal 4:12–20; 2 Cor 12:7). He also catalogs the various (physical) hardships he endures on account of his ministry, chiefly in his Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor 4:9–13; 2 Cor 4:8–10; 6:3–10; 11:23–33; 12:10; cf. Rom 8:35; Phil 1:12–26; 2:17; 4:12) (see Fitzgerald 1984).

Among the items Paul lists in the *Peristasenkatalog* are incidents of physical violence he has had to endure; violence that has left permanent marks (cf. Gal 6:17; Acts 14:19; 16:19–24). What's the significance of these physical scars for his gospel proclamation? What function did his reference to them serve in his letters? What relationship exists for Paul, if any, between his bodily sufferings as an apostle and those of Christians in general?

[1] Broadus devotes four chapters to matters pertaining to delivery (1870/1979:263–307), including one focused exclusively on the body (290–299). While he covers facial expressions, posture, and gesture, he does not say a word about other corporeal matters. Two other more recent examples will suffice. Robinson gives an entire chapter to this in *Biblical Preaching* (2001:202–220). Subsections in this chapter have the following headings: "Grooming and Dress," "Movement and Gestures," "Eye Contact," "Vocal Delivery," "Rehearsal," and "Feedback." Chapell (1994) leaves this material for an appendix titled "Delivery, Dress, and Style." One noteworthy example that moves beyond these basic matters of delivery is McCullough (2018).

In seeking answers to these important questions, this essay will briefly examine four of the hardship catalogs in Paul's Corinthian correspondence, along with a fifth relevant text, before suggesting contemporary consequences arising out of the exegetical conclusions.

1 Corinthians 4:9–13

> 9 For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to humans. 10 We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are sensible people in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are honored, but we are dishonored. 11 To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are naked and beaten and homeless, 12 and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; 13 when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day. (NRSVue)[2]

Paul's first[3] letter to the Corinthian church—a church he planted (3:6)—is written to bring unity and order to a fractured community. Throughout the letter, he is careful to set every aspect of the church's identity and behavior in light of the cross and the crucified Christ.

Following an epistolary introduction (1:1–10), the apostle moves immediately to discussing dissensions between the Corinthian believers, including rival preacher-centered factions (1:10–4:21). After articulating his own homiletic (2:1–3:4), he corrects false ideas about the role of preachers (3:5–17) and reproaches the church for misunderstanding the wisdom of the world with that of God (3:18–23). In light of the preceding material, Paul instructs the church on how preachers like him and Apollos ought to be regarded (4:1–21).

This last section is of special interest for our study. In particular, Paul writes of being "beaten" as a result of his missionary activity. While *kolaphizō* may be metaphoric here (as it likely is in 2 Cor 12:7), there's no textual reason for understanding it other than literally: Paul experienced physical assault in the course of his ministry.

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[2] All Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible Updated Edition.

[3] Canonically, speaking; cf. 1 Cor 5:9. Some identify this lost letter with1 2 Cor 6:14–7:1.

His purpose in detailing this and other hardships he has had to endure is not to shame the Corinthians but to "admonish" (*nouthetōn*) them as a father would a child (4:15). In light of this spiritual relationship, Paul urges the church to "imitate" (*mimētēs*) him. While he sends Timothy to them to give a fuller explication of what this imitation consists of (4:17), surely it includes following the example of enduring suffering for the sake of gospel proclamation (cf. Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6-7; 2:14). As Joseph Fitzmyer notes, "He wants his 'children' to . . . follow his way of living out the gospel, which is a humble way of life with much suffering" (2008, 223; cf. 1 Thess 1:6–7; 2:14; Phil 3:17).

Such conduct is consistent with the way in which Paul initially proclaimed the *mystērion* of God to the Corinthians: not with eloquent rhetoric as the Sophists familiar to them spoke but in (physical, bodily) weakness (2:1–4; cf. 2 Cor 10:10). If his own testimony is to be believed, Paul was not a professional orator and, in fact, shunned the prevailing techniques and methods of persuasive speech, relying instead on the power of God (2:5). For him, the one who preaches "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:2) is not only someone who eschews the speech patterns of the world but whose very body testifies via its weakness, to the crucified one.

This is simply logical for Paul whose entire life and ministry is one of calling others to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor 11:1; cf. Gal 4:12–20) (see Ellington 2004). If Christ suffered bodily and died in proclaiming good news, it follows naturally that those who preach him will experience something of what he endured.

2 Corinthians 4:8–10

> [8] We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, [9] persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, [10] always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

Paul's second canonical letter to the Corinthians is written for their edification (12:19).[4] Throughout the letter, Paul makes so many references to his afflictions that

[4] Lots of ink has been spilled debating the unity of the epistle. Regardless of whether the Apostle Paul wrote the entirety of it as it currently stands or later redactors stitched together two or more letters into its current canonical form, the overall argument of this paper is not largely affected; see Long (2004).

even a cursory reading of the epistle reveals how pivotal the theme of apostolic suffering is to his argument. He writes in anticipation of a future return to Corinth (13:1), though he has had to change his immediate plans.

After some introductory words of greeting, doxology, and thanksgiving (1:1–11),[5] he explains why a planned visit has been postponed (1:12–2:13), before delving into a lengthy digression and description of his apostolic ministry (2:14–7:4). After setting his work in the context of the new covenant (2:17–3:18), he moves to an extended reflection on the place of suffering in his ministry (4:7–5:10).

Within this section, Paul gives the first of his four *peristasis* catalogs in the letter. He likens believers' physical bodies to jars of clay (4:7; see Oropeza 2018, 421–423), then lists a variety of trials he has had to endure for the sake of proclaiming Christ—afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down—each trial balanced by a divine antithesis (4:8–9). Especially pertinent is that rather than discrediting his apostleship, Paul presents these sufferings in order to prove his apostolic legitimacy.

With respect to the body, these afflictions surely include bodily harm suffered in service of his ministry. For instance, *kataballomenoi,* the fourth of the trials, "was a technical term in wrestling ('thrown down'), in boxing ('knock down'), and in battle ('strike down')" (Harris 2005, 344). In other words, the persecution Paul encountered most certainly involved physical violence.

The totality of his sufferings was not limited to a particular space and time but in some sense, *pantote* (cf. *dei* at 4:11). Paul and his colleagues are "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies" (4:10). Murray Harris helpfully summarizes: "First, the resurrection life of Jesus is evident at precisely the same time as there is a 'carrying around' of his dying. Indeed, the very purpose of the believer's identification with Jesus in his sufferings is to provide an opportunity for the display of Jesus' risen life. Second, one and the same physical body is the place where the sufferings of Jesus are repeated and where His risen power is manifested" (2005, 347).

[5] As early as his introduction, Paul makes clear that suffering is going to be a prominent theme in the letter, as he gives thanks to God for comfort amid his afflictions.

2 Corinthians 6:3–10

> 3 We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be
> found with our ministry, 4 but as servants of God we have commended
> ourselves in every way: in great endurance, afflictions, hardships,
> calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights,
> hunger; 6 in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit,
> genuine love, 7 truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons
> of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8 in honor and
> dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors and
> yet are true, 9 as unknown and yet are well known, as dying and look—we
> are alive, as punished and yet not killed, 10 as sorrowful yet always
> rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet
> possessing everything.

Paul continues describing his role in 2 Cor 5:11–7:4. After articulating a vision of ministry based not on appearances but rooted in the love of Christ (5:11–15), he summarizes the gospel story, highlighting the implications for reconciliation with God (5:16–21). From there, he proceeds to make a defense of his ministry, addressing those who question his qualifications (6:1–10; cf. 1:15–19; 4:4). Here, we find the second *peristasis* catalog in the letter, as Paul juxtaposes the trials he has endured with the virtues evident in his life to demonstrate that he is a genuine follower of Jesus.

Paul is at pains to ensure "that no fault may be found with [his] ministry" (6:1). He has sought to live in such a way that would be a credit to the God he serves (6:2), and to prove his legitimacy, he marshals his physical sufferings as evidence. The reason he has endured "hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger" (6:4–5) is because he has staked his entire life on the resurrection of Jesus. It is for this reason that he can say, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19). He has endured affliction as a servant of the crucified and risen Jesus, and what scars he has suffered are but a "slight momentary affliction" (2 Cor 4:17).

What is more, his service has been for the sake of those whom he believes need to be reconciled to God. "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord," he writes, "we try to persuade others" (5:11). Paul sees himself and his missionary colleagues as

"ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through [them]" (5:20). In other words, his bodily suffering has served a missional purpose and continues to do so.[6]

2 Corinthians 11:23–33

> [23] Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. [24] Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; [26] on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; [27] in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. [28] And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. [29] Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant? [30] If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. [31] The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie. [32] In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, [33] but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands.

The tone of 2 Corinthians changes in chapter 10, which has led some to theorize that the last four chapters of the epistle were originally part of one or more no-longer-extant letters (see Thrall 1994, 3–49). The joy and affection that marked the first nine chapters seems to have abruptly given way to bitterness,[7] as Paul spends a significant portion of chapters 10 through 13 detailing the suffering life as normative for followers of Jesus—in contrast to the life of exaltation and glory taught and modeled by the so-called super-apostles (11:1–15).

[6] Harris (2005) lays out three possible groups to whom Paul is making his appeal: a) unbelievers; b) Corinthians believers; and c) any evangelistic audience (447–449). While he prefers option c, regardless of which group is in view, what is clear is that Paul experiences suffering because of his missionary endeavors.

[7] Hence the view of some that these latter chapters represent a portion of the pain letter Paul alludes to in 2 Cor 2:4.

He points to himself and his sufferings as an example of what faithful witness to Jesus looks like in 11:23–33, the third of the letter's *peristasis* catalogs. This is his "boasting" and the evidence of his Lord's commendation of him (10:17–18; cf. his opponents' boasting in 10:12–13). Christ's power is made perfect in weakness (12:1–10), as the story of the crucified Christ is lived out in the sufferings of His followers.

In his catalog of hardships, Paul lists imprisonments, floggings, being lashed and beaten with rods and stoned and shipwrecked, living in constant danger from a variety of threats, in addition to dealing with hunger, exposure, and psychological pressure because of his concern for the welfare of the churches (11:23–33). Paul offers this list as proof that he is a "better" servant of Christ than those who oppose him. He details his sufferings to convince those who may have been led astray, whose affections for Christ have waned (11:3; cf. 6:11–13).

Harris notes the seeming strangeness of this strategy: "What must have surprised the Corinthians was that Paul seeks to establish his superiority in Christ's service by tabulating his adversities rather than by appealing to his success in founding congregations in strategically important centers around the Aegean, or by referring to the number of converts won, or by citing miracles performed. Rather, appeal is made to evidence of his shame and dishonor" (Harris 2005, 798). On the surface, this is an unexpected strategy, yet it is entirely consistent with the apostle's approach in his letters to remind his recipients of the cruciform life.

That Paul lists things the Corinthians disdained suggests that he was not trying to gain goodwill from his hearers (contra Peterson 1998, 118). What his catalog of sufferings does is further forge his identification with Christ "who was crucified in weakness" (13:4). Jennifer Glancy (2004) imagines Paul showing the Corinthians his scars, reminding them that Christ had suffered likewise.[8] And, as convincingly argued by Kar Yong Lim, Paul's scars not only "tell the story of his weakness; but, more importantly, they tell the story of Jesus" (2009, 179). It is not Paul's words alone that herald good news; the gospel is literally written on his flesh, embodied in his mutilations (cf. Gal 6:17).

[8] She asks, "Did Paul, when present in a community, use his body to persuade, to exhort, or to inspire? If Paul expects the Galatians to understand his [*stigmata*] to be marks on his back, they are likely to have seen those marks, and, with or without his guidance, to have read the story of his punishments inscribed there. Perhaps when Paul stood in the midst of a congregation, he bared his back and offered and interpretation of the history of its markings, reminding his dubious audience that whips had similarly lacerated Jesus' flesh" (103).

2 Corinthians 2:14–17

> [14] But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. [15] For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing: [16] to the one group a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is qualified for these things? [17] For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many, but as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God, we are speaking in Christ before God.

While not a catalog of his hardships, a fifth passage from Paul's Corinthian correspondence is worth considering before attempting to summarize the role of bodily suffering in his apostolic ministry. As Paul begins describing this ministry in 2 Corinthians, he employs two metaphors. The first is the triumphal procession (2:14), a likely an allusion to a familiar event for his Hellenistic audience, whereby a conquering general returned home, victorious in war, leading his captives behind him. What is more difficult to discern is how Paul sees himself fitting into this image (along with how his readers would have understood it). Is he among the triumphant or the captive? While various suggestions have been proposed (see Schnabel 2008, 137–139), Scott Hafemann's (1986) influential work concludes that Paul is likening himself to a slave being led to death, and I have not encountered a more persuasive alternative.

The second metaphor Paul uses is that of a fragrance (2:14b–16), and while it, too, may draw from Hellenistic imagery, it is more likely that he is referencing the cultic sacrificial system (see Kurek-Chomycz 2010). *Osmē* and *eōdia* occur together elsewhere in the Pauline corpus (Phil 4:18; Eph 5:2; cf. Gen 8:21 LXX), both times, clearly with that sense. The words are also found together in the New Testament in John 12:3 to describe the aroma of the perfume used by Mary of Bethany to anoint Jesus (par. Mark 14:3 where the alabaster jar must be broken open in order to be used). As Lim aptly concludes, "Paul establishes himself as God's servant in manifesting the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ, and the manner of this manifestation is through his cruciformed life of suffering" (2009, 96).

Just as a cultic sacrifice only gives a fragrant aroma when it is burned, so for Paul, those who "proclaim the good news of Christ" (2:12) only spread the fragrance of knowing God when they offer their bodies to God as a living sacrifice.

The Function of Paul's Bodily Suffering

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions from Paul's self-references to his bodily suffering. Paul understands his physical afflictions as a natural consequence of his apostolic ministry (cf. Phil 1:29). They do not catch him by surprise, nor does he expect otherwise. In fact, the physical hardships he has endured result inevitably from identification with Christ, who suffered bodily, himself.

How, then, could it be different for those who proclaim him? Can any believer identify with Jesus without suffering physically (cf. 2 Cor 12:10; see Schnabel 2008, 133)? The one who follows the crucified Messiah will bear the marks of suffering consistent with *koinōnia* in his blood and body (1 Cor 10:16). For Paul, union with Christ "means that we must follow Christ's own road to glory. . . . [T]he daily anxieties, tensions, and persecutions [in Rom 8:17] . . . are the lot of those who follow the one who was 'reckoned with the transgressors' (Luke 22:37). . . . Participation in Christ's glory can come only through participation in his suffering" (Moo 1996, 505–506).

It is for this reason that Paul can admonish the church to imitate him in his service (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1). Bodily suffering is not simply something he must experience as an apostle. It is the inevitable path for all who would imitate him as he imitates Jesus (cf. 2 Tim 3:12). Bodily suffering is normative for the preacher.[9] Imitation is not along one axis only, in one dimension of life, alone. Paul is not simply charging the church to do verbal proclamation as he does it, for instance, but to follow the whole of Jesus' earthly example, including His physical suffering (cf. 1 Pet 2:21). Given Paul's cross-centered homiletic, it is imperative for him that the entirety of the preacher's life, including the preacher's body, be cruciform. This is the logical conclusion for anyone proclaiming a

[9] Commenting on Phil 3:10, O'Brien writes, "As Paul participates in Christ's sufferings, the tribulations through which every Christian must pass, so he desires to understand and experience the life-giving power of God, that power which he manifested in raising Christ from the dead, and which he now displays in the new life the Christian receives from the risen Christ and shares with him" (1991, 400). Later, explaining the meaning of *pathema*, he says, "At Rom. 8:18 and 2 Cor. 1:5-7 Paul uses the word to designate the afflictions in which all Christians participate as part of the sufferings of Christ… . All Christians participate in these sufferings; through them they enter to kingdom of God (Acts 14:22; cf. 1 Thes. 3:3, 7). Suffering with Christ is a necessary prerequisite to being glorified with him (Rom. 8:17)…. Such afflictions may include physical sufferings such as imprisonment, floggings, beatings, hardships, and privations of different kinds (2 Cor. 11:23-28) as well as mental anguish (2 Cor. 1:4-11, esp. v. 8; 11:28)…. Paul is not suggesting that he is actively seeking martyrdom. For him it was an honour to share in Christ's sufferings, to enter into a deeper and closer personal relationship with his Lord, and thus to become more like him each day. He also knew that to share in Christ's sufferings was evidence that he was truly one of the Messiah's people, destined for salvation and future glory (Phil. 1:29; Rom. 8:17)" (405-406).

crucified Messiah. Preachers do not carry "in the body the death of Christ" (2 Cor 4:10) only in a spiritual sense but (also) a physical one.

So, Paul can point to those hardships he has faced in the course of his ministry as proof of his apostolic legitimacy. They validate his claims, adding credibility to his verbal proclamation as they give evidence that he has truly been crucified with Christ and died to the world (Gal 2:20; 6:14).[10] Though culturally, his scars may be seen by the Romans as indicators of dishonor, so was Jesus' death on a cross. Shame or not, the body is the place where Jesus—both his suffering and his resurrection power—is manifested (2 Cor 4:10), and bodily suffering is not only inevitable for Paul, who serves Jesus in a hostile world, such affliction serves an apologetic function. The marks of his beatings display the sufferings of Christ, who was executed in weakness (2 Cor 13:4). Paul's body literally tells the story of the gospel. In this sense, his scars are persuasive in themselves; they serve a missional purpose (cf. Phil 2:17; 1 Thess 2:1–7, 17–20).[11]

Scars do not simply tell a story;[12] they carry the fragrance of knowing Christ. Just as an alabaster jar carrying perfume needed to be broken in order to spread the aroma of the nard, so too does Paul's body, along with the bodies of all who seek to imitate Paul in his imitation of Christ, need "breaking." Paul understands his physical sufferings as normative for all who would follow his example.

Contemporary Considerations

We turn our attention now to considering some of the implications of our study for contemporary Christian witness. Paul reminds his readers that the body communicates every bit as much as words do. That said, he does not evince any of the typical concerns for the preacher's body that are raised by homileticians. He offers no instructions about

[10] Harris notes, "The link between suffering with Christ and dying with Christ in explicit in Phil. 3:10: participation in Christ's sufferings … is indistinguishable from conformity to his death…. To suffer for and with Christ is to die with Christ. For the Christian suffering is not a sign of divine disappointment but an opportunity for divine engagement" (2005, 349).

[11] Stettler (2000) suggests the possibility that Paul believed his ministry would lead to Christ's parousia. She argues that he saw his sufferings and the sufferings of the church as filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions; that is, they helped fill an affliction quota that must be met before Christ returns; cf. Bauckham 1975.

[12] Martyn, commenting on Galatians 6:17, says, "Considering his physique to be a major form of communication, alongside the words of his letter [to the church in Galatia], Paul points literally to his own body. He can do this because his body tells the story of the forward march of the gospel, just as do his words" (1997, 568).

what clothes to wear or how to stand or where to put one's hands. He certainly does not say anything about voice projection, nor are his writings about the preacher's body simply matters having to do with a speaker's perceived trustworthiness or what ancient rhetoricians like Aristotle classified as ethos.

At one level, this is obvious. It is no secret that preaching is more than elocution and delivery. It is impossible to separate the preacher's message from their body. A preacher who regularly indulges in fast food yet waxes on about self-control has little credibility. The harmful optics of someone proclaiming the crucified Christ while clad in a three-thousand-dollar blazer and thousand-dollar shoes, for instance, does not need belaboring.[13] Not only is the call to imitate Paul in his bodily suffering normative for preachers, all Christians are called to a life of suffering. As missiologist Scott Sunquist says in a note on Mark 8:27–35, "Jesus' identity [is linked] with his suffering and glory, and links his followers' calling to cross-bearing. Bearing a cross is an image of self-denial and even death. It is a call to extreme obedience" (2013, 213).

In 21st century North America, should a preacher bear scars and other physical sufferings obtained in the service of Christ, these would serve to make the messenger more credible, helping to grant them a hearing. This is especially valuable at a time when many professing Christians have brought ill-repute to the name of Jesus, with some using their bodies in ways contrary to Paul's example. Bearing marks of affliction on one's body does more than enhance or adorn the gospel message. Without them, the message may simply be tuned out. No amount of eloquence and oratorical skill can substitute for embodied cruciformity.

Writing over one hundred years ago, the British preacher G. Campbell Morgan said, "[T]he man [sic] who preaches the Cross must be a crucified man. You may preach the Cross and it is nothing but a Roman gibbet unless you preach it from yourself. It is the crucified man that can preach the Cross. Said Thomas 'Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails . . . I will not believe.' Dr. Parker of London said that what Thomas said of Christ, the world is saying about the Church. And the world is saying to every preacher: Unless I see in your hands the print of the nails I will not believe" (1904, 59). His words of admonition are as relevant as they have ever been. Simply put, how can a

[13] See the @PreachersNSneakers Instagram account for examples.

preacher without any scars preach a crucified Messiah? The great missionary Amy Carmichael (1999) expressed this poetically.

> Hast thou no scar?
> No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
> I hear thee sung as mighty in the land;
> I hear them hail thy bright, ascendant star.
> Hast thou no scar?
>
> Hast thou no wound?
> Yet I was wounded by the archers; spent,
> Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent
> By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned.
> Hast thou no wound?
>
> No wound? No scar?
> Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
> And piercèd are the feet that follow Me.
> But thine are whole; can he have followed far
> Who hast no wound or scar?

While the marks of suffering that covered Paul's body would not have been seen as emblems of honor in his day, today, the health, wealth, and upward mobility of many preachers is what threatens to undermine the gospel, and in fact, physical afflictions may bridge some cultural barriers.[14]

The preacher's wounded body also serves a more direct missional function; scars are proclamatory in and of themselves. (The social media post I saw as I was finishing this paper is not true for the apostle Paul. According to this post: "There is no way to preach the gospel with your life. You can affirm the gospel with your life but you cannot preach the gospel with your life. You can only preach the gospel by opening up your mouth &

[14] This certainly may not be the case in all cultures. Some parts of the world reflect the prevailing view in Paul's time "that a deity's approval meant earthly blessing, and inasmuch as the driving motive for much of the participation in the Greco-Roman civic cults was the desire for health, wealth, and status, Paul's suffering posed an immense cultural barrier to his gospel" (Hafemann 2000, 171).

speaking forth the Word of God." Yet Paul is able to point to his scarred body and say otherwise.[15]) Michael Gorman says Paul "wanted the communities he addressed not merely to *believe* the gospel but to *become* the gospel, and in so doing to participate in the very life and mission of God" (2015, 2). (Thus, Gorman can call Pauline theology a theology of theosis.) As preachers grow in conformity to Christ, they no do not simply tell good news with their lips, and they do more than embody it in their flesh; they become the gospel.

These conclusions raise several questions for contemporary preachers. For instance, if the body is essential for proclamation, what of gospel ministry in digital spaces, where content is disembodied from the messenger? If bodily suffering is normative in Paul's writings for those who preach Christ crucified, what of preachers who do not bear the marks of such afflictions? Paul's context is one of persecution; do scars look different for those who serve in nations that do not show up on Open Doors' World Watch List, in contexts where freedom of religion is a right defended by the state? These questions and others are beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important that they are asked.

[15] As I write this, anti-Asian racism is on the rise around the world. Recently, Lee Wong, an Asian-American army veteran and elected official in Ohio, removed his shirt during a town hall meeting to show his scars as proof of his patriotism (see https://www.npr.org/2021/03/27/981976788/asian-american-local-leader-shows-army-scars-is-this-patriot-enough).

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The Body Tells the Tale: Communicating the Gospel through the Reconciled Local Church

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Introduction

I was among a line of people streaming off a bus. We all filed by a weathered homeless man tucked into a small alcove. He appeared very uncomfortable. His hair was greasy. His face leathery. His eyes stared down. He looked tired. And, he had no legs. His body told a tale.

We have all seen it. From the homeless to a family member who experienced a great trauma or addiction. Unwittingly, we read people based on what the body tells. From the homeless to the obese to the chiseled athlete, we do this, and we do it with ourselves when we look in the mirror.[1]

The body can attract or repulse. Whether we engage the person is shaped by the tale the body tells. We are more likely to want to engage with the healthy rather than what seems unhealthy. And yet, this too is imperfect and tenuous. I did stop and talk to the legless, homeless man and the conversation revealed a man of sorrow but also an inviting tenderness, even joyfulness. Conversely, the physically fit body may attract, but what if that drive to fitness is no less rooted in trauma than the addict? What if

[1] Charlie Sorrel in "How the Invention of the Mirror Changed Everything" (www.fastcompany.com) notes a shift in human social and self-understanding with the arrival of the silvered glass mirror among the rich and royalty in the 15th century. He quotes Ian Mortimer's *Millennium: From Religion to Revolution: How Civilization Has Changed Over a Thousand Years*: "The very act of a person seeing himself in a mirror or being represented in a portrait as the center of attention encouraged him to think of himself in a different way. He began to see himself as unique. Previously the parameters of individual identity had been limited to an individual's interaction with the people around him and the religious insights he had over the course of his life. Thus individuality as we understand it today did not exist: people only understood their identity in relation to groups—their household, their manor, their town or parish—and in relation to God."

beauty is only skin-deep? Might the homeless man be communicating greater authenticity than the gym-goer? The body tells the tale, but we are more than what others see.

In *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, medical doctor Bessel Van Der Kolk researches the impact of post-traumatic stress on the whole human being: "We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present" (2014, 21). The imprint of the past on our mind, brain, and bodies has telling consequences. The body will keep score and tell the tale.

Healing requires a work of wholeness. As van der Kolk's learning reveals, healing requires a whole and communal response. He summarizes, "People who feel safe and meaningfully connected with others have little reason to squander their lives doing drugs or staring numbly at television; they don't feel compelled to stuff themselves with carbohydrates or assault their fellow human beings." (2014, 353). So, we note that while our whole beings keep a score and the body tells a tale, wholeness requires community.

If, however, the body tells the tale—whether authentically or inauthentically—then what is necessary for true community that brings wholeness? What if we were attracted to the wrong story or a false story?

Let us consider the attachment theory of psychologist Gordon Neufeld: "…attachment is the pursuit of proximity, of closeness and connection: physically, behaviorally, emotionally, and psychologically. As in the material world, it is invisible and yet fundamental to our existence…. When we ignore its inexorable laws, we court trouble." (2004, 17). Neufeld calls for attachment awareness because multiple forces—social, relational and economic—have eroded natural attachments creating "…an unprecedented cultural breakdown for which our instincts cannot adequately compensate." (2004, 31).

The tale being told by so many, and by the wider social reality, is a great challenge for the healing community. Van der Kolk says we need to overcome the traumas our bodies keep score of (2014). So, in the end, our bodies are telling a tale and crying out

for an integral wholeness while we increasingly find ourselves formed by a cultural reality that disempowers the attractive attachment that is crucial to make us whole.

These insights on the impact of meaningful community and attachment leads us to the consideration of this paper: If the Church is the expression and presence of the body of Christ, have we considered deeply enough what tale the local Christian fellowship, as Christ's body, communicates? In what follows we will explore these questions in hopes of a better communication of the gospel in the current social reality through an exploration of the local fellowship as the body of Christ telling the tale. This is crucial for healthy attachment to God is. Christians must confess that the increasing unattachment of people from God in secular society is intricately connected to the tale the church has told, less in the message we have proclaimed from pulpits but from lack of embodiment of the Good News we proclaim.

Miroslav Volf writes, "Misconceptions of the Christian faith mirror the widespread misbehavior of Christians; and the misbehavior of Christians is associated with the misconstruals of their own faith…" (2011, 52). It will be attentiveness to the embodiment of the gospel of God's kingdom that Christians must attend to now. The "hermeneutic of suspicion" that Lesslie Newbigin says dominates the secular mind and society as it looks at the tale the church is telling must be countered with an embodied hermeneutic: "…the only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it" (1989, 227).

This embodied hermeneutic of the gospel will be small and localized, requiring discipline and patience, a rejection of the grandiose, and lived in view of neighbors, co-workers, and schoolmates. It will require a body of people who live as Cyprian said of the third-century, pre-Christendom church, "…we do not speak great things but we live them" (Kreider 2016, 13). The church must tend to wholeness and authenticity as the body of Christ to tell the tale of the good news and make attachment to God attractive.

This community has at its heart the remembering and rehearsing of his words and deeds, and the sacraments given by Christ through which it is enabled both to engraft new members into its life and to renew this life again and again through the body broken and the lifeblood poured out. It exists in him and for him. He is the center of its

life. Its character is given to it, when it is true to its nature, not by the characters of its member but by his character (Newbigin 1989, 227).

In what follows, we will look particularly at Jesus' words and deeds to see how the gospel of the kingdom was communicated through his body that told the tale and how *his* body—the church—is to be the avenue by which people in a culture of eroded attachments find wholeness and hope.

The Body Tells the Tale: Jesus' Body in Word and Deed

The mystery and hope of the gospel of the kingdom is tied up in the promise of Immanuel, God with us (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23). God came not disembodied but in human flesh: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).[2] The Apostle Paul connects this divine embodiment to the very nature of the church: "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col 1:18–20).

The mystical, spiritual understanding of the church as the body of Christ in the world is rooted in what God accomplished in Christ's physical body. God the Son was reconciling all things through his *very real* body (John 20:27). The early church always pointed to Jesus' *very real* resurrected body and to the church as the very real body of Christ, filled with the Spirit of God, after the ascension. In summary, Jesus Christ was God in bodily form and the church is the body of Christ embodied in fulfillment and in continuance of God's mission to extend his reign and presence to the ends of the earth.

So, how did Jesus reveal God in bodily form? And how did this form his disciples to be his body that keeps telling the tale? To answer, we will look at three dimensions of the bodily life of Jesus: embodying embrace; active faithful presence; and localized transformation.

[2] All Scripture quotes from *Holy Bible, New International Version,* 2011.

Jesus Transformed through Embodying Embrace

Jesus began forming his spiritual —the church—through invitation and hospitality. "Come, follow me…" (Mark 1:17; Matt 4:19) are his first words to those who would become his disciples. This invitation was with rabbinic purpose. It was an invitation to a way of life that would be revealed through word and deed and then carried forward by his apprentices as they journeyed with God and others. In Jesus' interaction with his disciples and in his interaction with others as his disciples watched, Jesus modeled an "embodying embrace." He was the God who saw (like Hagar discovered of God in Genesis 16:13) and who welcomed others into his most authentic reality. This hospitality and embrace surprised, challenged, and transformed. His welcome was laser-focused on forming a community that embodied the transforming presence of the kingdom. His declaration of the timely nearness of the kingdom of God was a call to embody a new reality (Mark 1:15).

Enveloped into closeness, the disciples witnessed the cost of embodying the Jubilee vision of Yahweh. The popular awe of his declaration of Isaiah's words at the synagogue in Nazareth turned to outright hostility when the words were moved toward their intended application (Luke 4:16–30). From the outset the disciples were invited into the applied hospitality of God's will that made room for the oppressed and found evidence of living faith embodied in the despised foreigner—like the Sidonian widow and Naaman and the Syrian officer. Invitation into the kingdom vision was to find the hospitality of God embodied in unexpected and unsettling ways. The body of Jesus touched undesirables (Mark 1:41) and entered homes the "righteous" and "unrighteous" would not or could not let their bodies go (Luke 7:36–39; 19:1–10).

The invitation of Jesus to the first disciples brought them into conflict with the holy presence and perplexity of God. They witnessed and eventually came to embody this radical hospitality as well (consider Ananias' welcome of Paul in Acts 9 or Peter's entering of Cornelius' home in Acts 10). In invitation, Jesus was attaching human beings to God himself. In hospitality, Jesus was embodying the very nature of God and inviting human beings into that same nature with the intention that God's reign may be seen and attached to through them.

Forming this kind of body required bringing opposites together. Jesus invited twelve into radical hospitality. The calling of the twelve names sets of brothers, a tax collector, a political zealot, and an eventual traitor (Luke 6:12–17). The group would become a body of invitation and hospitality by being with Jesus and working through the practical successes and disappointments of life together (Matt 20:20–28). Jesus embodied the will of God and the reign of God, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes community, "in the thick of foes" (1954, 17). The twelve were learning by the embodied embrace of Jesus to have their illusions shattered so a new reality could emerge. Bonhoeffer again sheds light on the impact of this, "Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it" (1954, 27). This is what the disciples were invited to discover, so that they might carry this invitation and transformative hospitality forward.

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield writes, "…Christian hospitality and the community that develops from it is, I believe, the ground zero of our life in Christ: it is how our faith is visible and serviceable, powerful and potent. Hospitality from the home, in the neighbourhood, and through the membership of the local congregation has the potential to transform us" (2015, 147). Transformation into the likeness of Christ is the point of the body telling the tale. Jesus intended that the nature of the inviting and hospitable God may become the nature of the disciples who would become the body of Christ in the world. Invitation and hospitality are gospel communication only to the extent that God in bodily form becomes the transformed and transforming body life of the Christ-centered community.

To summarize, the local body of Christ that tells the tale of the gospel of the kingdom will embody the invitation and hospitality of Jesus lived on earth. Such invitation and hospitality only tell the tale when they result in transformation of broken lives into wholeness and attachment to the Father in heaven. Thus, to live is to continue the life of Jesus with his first followers. To continue this embodying embrace is to become attractive to the world in the same way Greeks came and asked Philip, "Sir…we would like to see Jesus" (John 12:21).

Jesus was an Active Faithful Presence

God in human flesh did not sit still. When pressure came for Him to settle and have the crowds come to Him, He chose differently. "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come" (Mark 1:38). He had his regular routes and roosts (like Capernaum and Bethany), but the body of Jesus was active as the body was created to be. Each gospel follows the Son of God as an actively faithful presence in many places and among many peoples. It was His followers He would commend to a Spirit-filled ministry to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), but His activity laid the logical foundation in the disciples for the Spirit's eventual dispersing of the Good News.

David Fitch writes, "Faithful presence names the reality that God is present in the world and that he uses a people faithful to his presence to make himself concrete and real amid the word's struggles and pain. When the church is this faithful presence, God's Kingdom become visible, and the world is invited to join" (2016, 10). This faithful presence that the local church is called to embody is not sedentary. The active way of Jesus has always formed the way of Christians. When active, moving, faithful presence has been abandoned the church risks unfaithfulness to the essence of the words and deeds of Jesus. The active movement of the church is a sign of the activity of the Holy Spirit and is the expected nature of the believing community. The body of Christ simply goes. The church is a body in motion.

This active incarnation was the practice of the disciples and the early church. In His resurrected body, Jesus commanded His disciples, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations…" (Matt 28:19). The emphasis is on making disciples, an attaching of them to their Trinitarian home, but that requires an active body life, not sedentary spirituality. The other gospel writers all point to this way of the body telling the tale. Mark's Gospel states, "Go into all the world…" (Mark 16:15). The good news in the Gospel of Luke will be proclaimed to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). John's Gospel has Jesus sending the small body of disciples in the same way He was sent (John 20:21). It is the Holy Spirit that will of course animate all this action of the body of Christ—just as it had for Jesus in the flesh—but that is the point: the Spirit is the breath of God animating for activity.

The first disciples were attached to a non-sedentary Jesus. They saw Him cross seas (even walk on them), traverse turbulent territory like Samaria, enter places of theological debate, dance at weddings and wander big cities. The four Gospels reveal God on the move and so they too became a body telling the tale in this way when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. Human transformation into the likeness of God and attachment to God demanded this movement. Everywhere Jesus took His disciples was aimed at transforming them into the body of Christ and bringing God's revelation to unlikely places. The fruit of this is seen in Paul's desire to get to Rome (Acts 19:21) and Spain (Rom 15:24) and in the unavoidable non-sedentary nature of the body of Christ that is still on the move.

The church body loses its effectiveness, health, and ability to tell the tale when it stops moving. A retreat into buildings and a "come to us" sedentary programmatic structure is not what Jesus modeled. The church is "…not…a community of completed disciples who are simply adding to their ranks, but (are) 'a people on the way,' a people who are still being molded into mature disciples themselves" (Tizon 2018, 148). When we are on the move like Jesus, we commit to our own ongoing transformation and bring faithful presence to a world prone to retreat, selfishness, think-alike and look-alike grouping, or self-promoting agenda, and even violence. Being on the move Jesus' way requires discernment and the leading of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:8; 8:1–5; 16:6–10).

A body on the move must employ all the body's gifts and abilities—spiritual and natural—to tell the tale of the gospel of the kingdom. A sedentary church tends toward teaching (symbolically locked in place by pulpit) at the center of telling the tale. Conversely, a people on the way must be holistic in the way the human body is. An active local church will see the need for every gift and skill engaged in the movement. Construction skills, making meals, health care, mowing lawns, running an ethical business, tilling the soil, starting socially active organizations, and using the arts (even Jesus doodled in the dirt [John 8:6]) , or coaching sports will be honored by a sent body of Christ on the move. The disciples remained fishers in practice and Paul never abandoned his tent-making craft. A people on the way use their whole bodies and harness the whole body to tell the tale.

To summarize, the body of Christ that tells the tale will be active and on the move. Only in going locally and globally and being present in places we have not yet been can

we be a people on the way. This faithful presence that gets up and goes along the way transforms disciples into better fitness as the body of Christ. We need to be on the move for the sake of others and for our own health.

Jesus Was Locally Transforming

Jesus' embodying embrace and active faithful presence was purposeful and aimed at localized transformation. Elias Chacour tells the story of his professor calling students to a life of active faithful presence:

> "If there is a problem somewhere," he said with his dry chuckle, "this is what happens. Three people will try to do something concrete to settle the issue. Ten people will give a lecture analyzing what the three are doing. One hundred people will commend or condemn the ten for their lecture. One thousand people will argue about the problem. And one person—only one—will involve himself so deeply in the true solution that he is too busy to listen to any of it. Now," he asked gently, his penetrating eyes meeting each of ours in turn, "which person are you?" (Chacour 2013, 134).

Jesus was the "one person." Jesus' word and deed, his entire being, were the true solution to the localized problems that beset people and kept them from attaching to the Father.

When the twelve were disputing who was the greatest, Jesus says, "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). The localized problem of communal competition is solved, not with a lecture or a book, but by pointing to His own person—to what He did with His body among them. Jesus consistently brought localized transformation wherever His faithful presence went, beginning with His closest followers and then extending through them to the world where they were present.

The gospels repeatedly reveal Jesus' bringing about localized transformation that seem to follow a pattern: Jesus initiates and enters with His whole being into relationship with a person (or group), that person or group experiences the true

solution only His person can provide, and the overflow of that encounter brings localized transformation to the personal and social life of a place resulting in the multiplied embodiment of God's kingdom.

Let us look at three examples in the gospels to illustrate this. First, Jesus' active faithful presence with the demon-possessed man of the Garasene (Mark 5:1–20). The account includes all the elements noted: Jesus embodies embrace and active, faithful presence by taking his disciples into Gentile territory and engages the fearful man among the tombs (Mark 5:3–5). Jesus' full person becomes the man's true solution, and this leads to localized transformation. The demonized person is set free, and the wider community is impacted. The encounter with power is not solely for the man's sake. In fact, Jesus prevents him from leaving with the twelve. Instead of abandoning the local, the restored man is to be the body of wholeness there: "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19). His body will tell the tale.

A second story in the gospels is Jesus' interaction with the woman of Sychar (John 4:1–42). Jesus embodies active embrace and active faithful presence by leading His disciples into hated Samaria and engaging a woman in conversation. This leads to her personal encounter with God in the flesh (John 4:26–29) and this spills over into a wider localized transformation resulting in Jesus and His team staying two more days (John 4:40). In fact, Jesus' bodily life—even thirst—becomes a key moment in shaping His followers to see the world differently and engage it like He had just done. "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). In other words, Jesus exhorted them to engage their full selves in His work. The bodies of those with us tell a tale, and our whole selves must have a story to tell that brings transformation even to our enemies, so that they can embody the kingdom, too.

A third localized transformation account comes at the cross. Jesus embodies embrace in various interactions through the passion narratives. In the chaos of the darkened garden, Jesus initiates and embodies embrace with Malchus, the servant of the high priest (John 18:10–11; Luke 22:49–51). He embraces His mother and John, uniting them as family (John 19:26–27). He embraces the criminal (Luke 23:42–43). Jesus models in word and deed an active faithful presence as he moves toward the cross, all with localized transformation in mind. The interaction with His mother and John, the

criminal, and even Pilate reveal a very localized transformation within a grander, cosmic transformation. The cosmic transformation won at the cross and the resurrection is, as John depicts it, ultimately expressed locally with Peter's reinstatement after his grievous denials. This localized transformation rooted in Peter's experience of the wholeness of Jesus' resurrected body overflows into Peter's passionate ministry to the body of Christ in new, active, and unexpected places:

> Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God" (1 Pet 4:1–2).

Peter is encouraging the local believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia to be the body of Christ, just as Jesus was God in the body. They were to represent Christ where Jesus never visited in the flesh. These new Christians were the body telling the tale and bringing overflowing local transformation in word and deed—even if they suffered like their Lord. Being a body that tells the tale, they were helping previously unreached peoples attach to the Father through their experience of God in the flesh evidenced in the local body of Jesus' Spirit-filled disciples. In short, the New Testament reveals that the body telling the tale is the only way the will of God advances.

Conclusion

Miroslav Volf writes, "We live in an age of great conflicts and petty hopes" (2011, 99). The local church, the body of Christ, is a new creation, a radical community, that is the continuance of the one body of Christ. This union is through the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul writes, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor 12:13). The breath of God gives life to the church and reconciles and unites unlikely people, sometimes those who were enemies or strangers, into one body so that the words and deeds of Jesus have expression everywhere. This Spirit-filled body shaped by the embodying embrace and active faithful presence of Jesus will bring a locally transformative solution—the presence of Jesus—for the great conflicts and petty hopes

besetting the realities people are living today. Tus, the body, reconciled and Spirit-filled, will tell a tale. Johannes Reimer writes, "A church which does not follow its missionary call and does not embody the gospel has lost its nature and represents a religious club rather than the people of God" (2017, 60).

In the end, the local church is to be in function the body of Christ bringing an overflow of localized transformation through the same embodying embrace and active faithful presence God the Son lived in human flesh. The local church is now the "one person" involved deeply in the true solution—which is Jesus Christ, God with us.

The body of Christ needs to communicate the good news with a wholeness of being. A reconciled way of relating with one another, society, and even enemies, is to be evident when people interact with believers. This body-life should be measured by one metric: by whether the local church body reflects the person of Jesus. This body active in the community needs to be healthy, intentional, and must awaken a desire for those outside the body of Christ to become attached to the Father so that "…we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph 4:15–16).

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Understanding Arts as Language

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Introduction

The evangelical church is often understood as a people of "the book." Scripture is the key foundation of the evangelical identity. However, the Bible has had a longstanding companion volume in the hymn book. Generations past demonstrated an intuitive sense of aesthetics as a key component of expressing and learning the practices of Christian faith. Yet there has always been an uncomfortable tension between these two books in the life and experience of the church. The arts tend to be employed as subservient to either utilitarian or decorative purposes.

Contemporary evangelical understandings of religious art tend to rely heavily on modern philosophical concepts of aesthetics. Ancient history is not able to supply the church with a robust theology of taste. A systematic theory of aesthetics was not developed until the Enlightenment (Brown 2000, 5). In fact, art was never really understood or perceived as art while under the direction and guidance of the church. The church was involved in producing and distributing aesthetic work, whether that be music, painting, architecture, or sculpture, but really had no systemized theology of art. Art theory did not truly emerge until the modernist era when the value of aesthetics began to be examined outside the auspices of the church (Brown 2000, 60).

With modern aesthetic theory, philosophers and artists started to distance themselves from traditional views in which art was employed as a servant of either institution or ideology and began to see art as free and unrestricted from such masters. Art was instead understood as worthy of contemplation, and this contemplation was of the work itself, without any necessity for carrying a specific content or message. Hence arose the idea that art could be produced for its own sake. The church today has

inherited this philosophical premise and has continually struggled with two polarities that color most discussions in the church today regarding art. Of course, wherever there are polarities, there is the possibility of tension.

As an artist myself, I have struggled through these two ideas and at times feel caught between the two factious sides. On the one hand, my devotion to the gospel narrative aligns with missiological intention to use whatever methods are at my disposal to ensure the gracious offer of salvation is announced. But in this I see the conflict when artistic values are compromised and at times even abused, being somehow less than what God intended. My artistic sensibilities see the value and beauty in art that is free from such concrete constraints and can revel and play with the material provided in the gracious playground of God's creation. Yet, this sensibility tends to leave art in the realm of merely decorative, and hence sidelined in offering anything of value to the church in regard to meaning.

Andy Crouch represents this kind of pull, arguing that utilitarian approaches to art ignore the broader implications and possibilities and that religion itself is by nature more than modern ideas of the useful (2010, 38–39). He sees art as challenging the narrative that reduces everything to what is most efficient in essence (2010, 42). In turn, he sees in aesthetics the practice of play as a means to rediscover God's giving and gracious nature. Yet, the church continues to struggle with whether aesthetics is intended for utility or beauty.

Basing the church's understanding of aesthetics on this conflict unfortunately misses the mark and ultimately diminishes arts' full range of effectiveness to bear and transmit meaning. The power of art to connect is based on the nature of communication. Communication is what builds connection and thus community and culture. I would like to argue that the issue is not one of pragmatics but rather an issue of language. What is at issue here is a loss in the contemporary evangelical church of understanding the arts as a unique and diverse complex of language.

This article will present an understanding of arts as language capable of communicating meaning as well as give some direction in recovering our aesthetic sensibilities, particularly through the role of the local artist. Just as everyone is on some level a theologian, everyone is aesthetic, and thus an artist. The Evangelical Church will

need aesthetic skills in communicating with the diversity of cultures, subcultures, languages, and dialects increasingly presented in a postmodern world.

Understanding Aesthetics as Language

Common wisdom holds that music is the "universal language." This broad concept attempts to emphasize the power and appeal of music in drawing humanity together in some form of harmony. Yet, in practice, we see that music just as often divides. I grew up in rural Western Canada and the heartbeat of our community soundtrack was country and western music. Yet, the sounds being broadcast into my life through mass media communication were very different. On television, I watched rock music videos and heard distorted guitars on the radio. This was a sound that was much more interesting and attractive to me. I would express my discontinuity with my community in terms of taste: I did not like country and western music. But truly the genre of my community did not adequately communicate or represent the world I was experiencing.

Since communication is more than simply the transmission of information, it is a means of connection between human being. However, at times I felt quite out of touch with my community. This was even an issue in my church, as I grew up observing the transition from traditional forms of musical worship to more contemporary musical styles. Tensions could be very high as different factions of our small church argued about the purpose and place of music within the church. There was not any difficulty with the presence of music in worship—that was a given. But the precise expression of music in our small rural church did not bring unity.

These experiences led me to understand that music is not a universal language but rather a universal phenomenon across cultures. All cultures have some form of musical expression. Yet, just as I cannot understand the spoken language of a people group unless I take the time to live in their community and learn, I need to approach music in the same way. Just as there is a wide diversity in spoken languages, there is also a variety of languages and dialects within musical languages. Different parts of our world have explored quite diverse facets and techniques in the use of sound to communicate. Even within our own North American context we recognize many dialects or genres of music, each with its own internal logic that communicates and connects with a unique people group.

As I went on to formal musical instruction, my ability to speak a wider variety of musical languages increased. In formal classical music training, I learned the importance of form and the unique sound of western instrumentation, such as the piano and orchestral techniques. I learned a wider and extended palette of harmonic color in studying jazz. Currently, I am studying electronic music. I am coming to this style of music as a non-native and am discovering how technology influences composition. Joe Horness identifies an unfortunate misunderstanding that has created a culture of conflict around musical styles in the evangelical church. Identity and traditional values were perceived to be under fire while, he argues, the fundamental issue was the change of language (2004, 103).

Worship scholars are increasingly talking about how worship is ultimately a kind of language, one that the church practices with great diversity in many places. Lang observes that just as there are many languages in the world, there are also many languages used in the worship of the church and many different liturgical forms. Every church will have localized ritual language unique to a specific people group, their situation, and geography (Lang 1997, xi). Don Williams asserts that the church is naïve to think that one musical language will someday be discovered that can universally reach across to all people (2004, 85). The underlying assumption is that when the church gathers, there is a strong aesthetic component in how the congregation encounters one another and God.

Worship is so much more than words and texts. Hugh Graham argues that the physical components of language, sound, voice tone, and quality of enunciation are intrinsically connected to the content of meaning being communicated (2003, 37). Graham sees text and performance as inextricably connected. Communication occurs in essentially artistic ways as the speaker makes choices regarding pacing, dynamics, and other creative devices, shaping interpretation. To say the word “whisper” in a hushed tone of voice is a more faithful realization of the text than simply reading the word without expression. One could choose to shout the same word, and we would feel the disconnect as the language conflicts with the aesthetic realization.

One of the characteristics of language we take for granted is its conversational quality. While we write words in fixed forms, edit and codify our thoughts in permanent works in everyday use, language is the medium in which we improvise conversations.

Improvised conversation utilizes complex social systems of knowledge to communicate in a variety of situations with a variety of people. Part of maturity is gaining proficiency in the ability to both write words and communicate effectively in real time interactions with others.

The arts are a living language and in the same way, we see aesthetic work both in fixed and improvisatory forms. Part of the baggage of modern aesthetic theory is the focus on artistic genius and the pursuit of art as elevated or even quasi-divine, with the artists themselves being seen in these terms. In this way, art is most valued as a fixed work and is even afforded considerable protection in perpetuity—consider the care and security at galleries and museums. Yet, we see that even young children are quick to sing a song or paint a picture. They make no pretensions to posterity and are simply communicating what is on their hearts.

Benson considers that artists do not really create, they are simply improvising, using the material of creation and reordering them in a fashion that expresses and communicates with others (2013, 17). Artwork as an improvised journey and essential experience of life means that artists are participants in community, living in an open response to their world (2013, 35). Artistic improvisation reinforces the linguistic character of aesthetic communication. Art as language even helps us move past the objectifying of artistic works that occurs with the commodifying and sale of art. In this way, art has been removed from the community and given into the hands of a privileged few. As a result, our local communities are impoverished, and we have weakened aesthetic sensibilities since we no longer have models or references in speaking our own local dialects.

Scott Aniol observes that the evangelical commitment to inspiration must extend not only to the content but also the forms (2015, 150). For Aniol, truth is communicated beyond the paradigms of modernity's commitment to objective correspondence. The Scriptures themselves demonstrate an essential aesthetic quality that is not simply a decoration but an essential part of presenting the Bible's truth (2015, 151). Essentially, he is stating the obvious in that the Bible contains a wide variety of genres, and great portions of the Scriptures represent the story of God in largely aesthetic forms. The Bible is full of narrative storytelling and poetry. Biblical writers use evocative language that appeals to the senses, and we have references to music and even see the worship of

Israel, centering on the temple and tabernacle with lots of detailed attention to aesthetic considerations. In this way, the Bible itself is a telling argument that the life of faith is an artistic experience.

Aniol argues that biblical truth is best understood as uniting communication of truth in both propositional and aesthetic forms of language (2015, 153). The combination of proposition and art is necessary since, as human beings, we are not simply thought nor are we simply body; we encompass both realities. Commitment to communication in this way addresses both the reformation of our minds through doctrine and our imaginations. If we do not understand the importance of art as language, we are missing out on an essential biblical component of gospel communication, and we end up with a weak container for truth and thus a weak or even truncated gospel (2015, 156–157).

Art Has Meaning

Understanding aesthetics as language and artistic forms of communication as essential can make those who are highly committed to propositional forms of biblical truth nervous. Evangelicalism is a movement that grew out of modernity and even now is learning how to renew itself and grow into the culture and paradigm of history we are now facing. I want to be very clear that understanding art as language does not compromise a commitment to the truth and the authority of scripture. I am on the conservative side of the evangelical church and understand these concerns. When we hear the words “arts” and “aesthetics,” we can easily bring in the baggage of modernity that sees the damage of arts in our culture, having elevated the subjective and placed autonomous authority in the individual will of the artist. We need to address the issue of meaning. If artists speak a complex of many languages or dialects, we need to grapple with how they function and how we can know and understand their communication.

First of all, modernity has given us an overconfidence in the codified representations of life in printed form. One of the first exercises for musicians learning their craft in traditional classical methodology is learning to read music notation. Music notation is in many ways one of the biggest hurdles in a young musician’s development. Very few seem to realize that we are teaching students to read a unique language and that students enter lessons with varying degrees of native fluency.

Having grown up in the church and having music at home, I remember struggling with reading proficiency at an early age. This struggle may have even stunted my musical development. As a young musician, I had what we call a good "ear"—that is, I could aurally understand more complex music than I could read on the page. My piano teacher would strategize ways to force me to develop my reading ability and frustrate my free attempts to explore music I could internally conceptualize. Of course, this represents sound pedagogy as teachers challenge students in areas of weakness, but there are other methods of teaching music that emphasize aurality and worry less about the printed representation of notes on staves.

Charlotte Kroeker, in conversation with Mary K. Oyer, observes that the paper and written forms of music are by no means an actual representation of music or the sounds that a person actually hears when a work is ultimately performed (Kroeker 2005, 177). The performance is the actualized and definitive reality of music that the ink and paper can only represent. Notation is an aid, but the ability to communicate only really happens when music comes off the page (2005, 177). This is one of the key misunderstandings of students as they begin to learn an instrument. The instrument is traditionally how one learns to access the world of music through physical discipline and technique. Yet in reality, the teacher is employing the discipline of an instrument to bring students up to speed on the aesthetic competencies of musical language.

Teaching music is much more complex than simply teaching an instrument, and the students who excel at an instrument are the ones who perceive the language of music best. That is why certain people can pick up and play multiple instruments. They understand music, and the instrument is not a barrier to the musical meaning they are already proficient in expressing. This is one of the difficulties adults have in learning music. There is the desire to play an instrument but a lack of understanding of the commitments required in the greater work of immersing themselves in a language. Children often learn language by immersion, while adults need more pedagogical direction and support.

Hughes takes us further on this journey. He suggests that meaning begins internally with thoughts and ideas that may be initially ineffable. Meaning inevitability emerges as inexpressible ideas are purposefully reordered and rendered, language being the vehicle by which we pass on what we are trying to convey (2003, 104–105). Hughes also

wonders if any particular part of a human being is more likely to understand meaning than another and sees bodily reactions to even a simple joke as a demonstration that meaning extends beyond intellectual process 2003, 110). Jensen notes that aesthetic activity brings out meaning in the physical world, confronting us with ideas of which our consciousness tends to be unaware (2004, 18). We reveal ourselves and our community in a way that can be understood, observed, touched, and interacted with through art. In this way we have tools to understand ourselves, and our ideas have concrete anchors on which they can be reshaped and formed.

For example, healthy ideological debates work best when the opposing views hear each other and can transcend their differences and synthesize new ways of knowing and acting, using words as the vehicle for meaning. Aesthetic communication has a similar logic in that form, sound, color, movement, and substance can all be utilized to awaken and confront our views of ourselves and the world. Where words can be used to compartmentalize and rationalize, the arts have the ability to keep us accountable to truth as they address the whole being.

We all have been in situations where we say one thing, but our body language betrays us by communicating what is at odds with our words. Aesthetics operates as meaning in this context, and we have to grapple with the fact that understanding transcends words and is found in the way the words are communicated. This is the language and logic of aesthetics, and it is vital for building bridges of meaning between people.

The tendency of modernity to specialize and separate has benefits, but in postmodernity we are seeing the desire for a more holistic approach to language and meaning whereby ideas are carried along by a communication that is wholly aesthetic, comprising both word and art. Oyer reflects on our tendency to see music as the illuminator of text but suggests that the opposite may be at work: through the text, the words illuminate the sounds and give the music a viable voice (Kroeker, 165). The division between words and images is not really distinct, as both are languages utilized to bring ideas into the world (Jensen, 18).

The overconfidence in the precision of words as the fortress of meaning in modernity is a significant blind spot that can carry over into the church. Written

language is quite simply not as precise in conveying meaning as we wish. Arguments on finer theological details and extended semantic discussions demonstrate the infinite imprecision we struggle with in the use of words. If words were so capable, we would not need so many commentaries. We are constantly adding books to the libraries of our seminaries. The words we offer on behalf of the Scriptures often outweigh the original text by a large margin.

Bennet Reimer was an American music educator who gave some helpful direction on how to understand the ability of art to convey meaning. He points out that conventional languages tend to operate as symbols in series (1970, 64). In this way, we grasp meaning as the information is released in a linear fashion over time. More information is unveiled with each passing word. That is how you read this article. You can only pull the concepts from the words as you walk through from beginning to end. That is the discipline of reading and listening to text.

Reimer argues that art languages take symbols from the page into an actualized presentational form in which meaning is accessible in concurrent rather than linear ways, and that these artistic forms are the most natural means of human expression (1970, 64). For Reimer, "insight" is the most important aspect of arts languages in that they embody meaning, instead of simply defining or designating in the way we typically understand word-based meanings (1970, 65). For him, the arts are completely objective in the same way as word-language in that the aesthetic logic can be known, evaluated, and learned (1970, 69).

As an example, let us look at the theological concept of incarnational living. Christian disciples do not simply comprehend beliefs but embody them in the world. The pursuit of Christ is an ongoing actualization of the words of scripture taking hold of our lives. The journey is not complete unless we act in concrete ways. The words are empty and even hypocritical without the action. Art functions in the same way, taking ideas and making them concrete in the world. The work is objective because we are able to interact with a physically substantive item, whether a sculpture, painting, or another form. In some ways, artistic expression is the most objective of forms, enabling interaction with both the idea and the expression of the idea.

Saliers gives us the example of church liturgy. In worship, the church acts with words (2005, 17). Words are never left alone in abstraction but are wedded with the aesthetic languages of gesture, movement, and procession. Prior to modernity, the church did not feel the need to separate word and art. Meaning was carried along by a holistic unity of aesthetic communication. All of the church was artistic. Timothy Pierce challenges the church to be both aesthetically skilled and theologically rich and warns that there is a danger in "compartmentalizing" the various actions and acts of worship (2008, 239).

The affective nature of the arts should be held in unity with the rational aspects of understanding. Preaching and music should both be held to this logic. The historical worship patterns of the church undergird the marriage of word and art as well. Word and table are the two essential actions of historical Christian worship. Biblical theology sets up the church to practice faith in both rational and affective ways. As the evangelical church, we would do well to see more of our activity in artistic terms.

Rediscovering the Amateur and Local Artists

Frank Gaebelein addresses his own personal aesthetic development and looks to the environment provided for him in his home. He tells of how both his father and brother were quite dedicated amateur musicians. Their music was a constant soundtrack that Gaebelein heard as a child. They would play classical music or arrangements of symphonies and other great works. From these experiences, Gaebelein is convinced that the development of good musical taste in the home is important and that unskilled performances of great music is beneficial, maybe even preferred to exposing young musical students to professionals (1985, 170).

Gaebelein's experience seems somewhat counterintuitive, because we tend to celebrate and highly prize the exceptional. Even our common aesthetic education tends to aim at the transcendent examples. To become an artist, our references are the great artists—the Rembrandts, Michelangelos, and Picassos. As musicians, we draw on our rich heritage of classical repertoire—Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. Through technology, would-be artists today have immediate access to examples of history's very best work. Yet, something is lost when only the great masters are our models. Our

aspirations can become deceptive, and we can become consumed with what is ultimately elusive and develop expectations that are ultimately unbalanced or even unhealthy. When the goal is to become, or at least compete, on the transcendent aesthetic level, a widening gulf occurs between the elite and the rest of society at large.

The church must always be careful and cautious of elitism. The temptation to see greatness in worldly terms is in constant conflict with the gospel message, and the Scriptures bear witness that the revelation of God's glory comes through weakness. There is a simplicity and confounding of human wisdom inherent in the gospel that will constantly challenge the Babel ambitions of human accomplishment. In the church, the most educated seminary professor must realize that they do not add anything better or more significant to the body than the uneducated farmer. What elitism causes is separation and division. This should not be the relational logic of the church.

Language is meant to be more than the transmission of information. The true objective of communication is interpersonal connection. The aesthetic greats are elevated and adored, but they are at a distance from us. God is not to be objectified in this way, especially in worship. The congregation does not consist of bystanders observing greatness. No, the church congregation is to participate in the glory of God, as they engage in real communion with him.

I became aware of this unintentional elitism in the simple matter of prayer in my congregation. The invitation was given to one of my worship team members to pray in the service, and he was quite uncomfortable with the idea. This went beyond the simple hesitation to public speaking. He was quite articulate in his reasons. His objection was based on the comparison of himself to the pastoral staff. He felt that his prayer would simply not be qualitatively as good and thus was not beneficial or even appropriate for the church. He was giving essentially aesthetic reasons for non-participation.

As I explored his objection with him and others in my church, I was quite surprised at the distance that had developed between the spiritual practices of the congregation and what they were observing on Sunday mornings in corporate worship. Our commitments to artistic excellence had produced a congregation of bystanders observing the polished work of the trained. This even extended to their home life, where many fathers did not have confidence in praying with their children because the models

at church were at too great a distance from what they were able to practice. As a church staff, we had to nuance our aesthetic aspirations in worship, in order to give place to the congregation that was slowly being shut out of the prayers of the church.

Gaebelein's understanding of the role of the amateur certainly harmonizes with my experience, especially as I understand music as an artistic language. The home is the first place of learning many practical skills that are employed in the adult world. We learn the basics of morality and social engagement, as well as basic life skills such as personal care and language. Our formative years are an example of immersive learning. Learning language by being immersed in the environment is the best way to become a confident communicator. Children primarily learn language in this way, picking up words, slowly establishing a vocabulary, and developing conversational skills in bits and pieces. Children do not learn spoken languages through formal instruction. Language learning begins with small bits and pieces that over time are cobbled together such that an individual is able to make connections with others in the world.

This is the way music is learned in the home. As a child I often listened to my father sing and play piano just after I went to bed. He is by no means an accomplished musician, but those notes and melodies, his stylistic choices, and even his joy in making sound, left a strong impression on me. Even as I went on to more formal musical education and experienced more sophisticated aesthetic culture, I still hear those sounds in my head. I owe a debt to the many church musicians, singers, and piano players that were by no means celebrated artists. Their contributions are largely anonymous and forgotten. Yet, in their music, I was tutored in the gospel. Christ is glorified in these simple aesthetic contributions.

Aesthetics is one of the key languages of prayer in the church, and the church, with all its various expressions of worship, should be an immersive artistic experience. The Reformers understood this and were wise to supply the soundtrack to shape the life of their congregations. When they set about to provide the congregation with this soundtrack of new songs, they did not go to the great artists. Their art was locally sourced. Religious singing in the German vernacular was quite common prior to the Reformation. The source and setting were simply that of the home.

Luther's contribution was to take musical works that were already useful and familiar to the people and adapt or revise them, making them suitable for liturgical use (Leaver, 2017, 65–69). In fact, Luther had a vast amount of rich material to work with and adapt since every aspect of life, including religious experience, was in some way a part of the people's common song (2017, 81). Four of the preachers from Wittenberg were also significant hymn writers. Preachers from the German strand of the Reformation tended to have a functional knowledge of music (2017, 137).

The Wesley brothers are also an example of seeing value in more humble and localized expressions of music. Erik Routley, in his observations of the Wesleys' musical output, observes that they were not looking for great composers for the purposes of high art. They used local musicians. They were in some sense professionals (they made a living through their musical trade), but their intentions were local (1984, 34). The Wesleys themselves were self-aware of this divide between high and low forms of aesthetic expressions in the church. Their aesthetic methodology began the argument over whether music in the church was "good" or "bad" based on an elevated sense of aesthetics (Routley 1964, 196). This was the beginning of a growing conflict in the church over the aesthetic suitability of worship forms based essentially on personal taste.

Hymnologist Eric Routley is helpful. In his observations on the Wesleys, he notes that for professional musicians, music is not a mystical mystery. Music is simply music (Routley 1984, 34). I tell my students that writing a song is much like writing an essay in that you start with a blank page and you fill it. Artistic ambition does not set the agenda. I simply write notes and rhythms and see where the music takes me, much like a writer simply needs to start writing. I do not worry about whether there is enough musical material or ideas in the cosmos. As a musician I have learned to trust the endless variety of music. God has graciously empowered the world with endless life and activity, and this is true in my own little aesthetic world. Creativity stops when I lack faith in God's provision or turn aside from my work to consider what others may think.

Paralysis occurs when I take these aesthetic fears to unhealthy extremes. Humanity wants to enshrine human accomplishment, and our aesthetic ambitions are one way in which we do this. Museums, art galleries, and concert halls are indicative of this human need to care for and preserve our highest aesthetic ambitions. Yet, God is an eternal source of creative energy that continues to flow through humanity. We do not need to worry about absence or lack. Local artistic expressions continue to persist and demonstrate that God has placed aesthetics into the heart of every human being for the purpose of that local community. There is no need to enshrine those artists or their work. They are for the people, as surely as the people are for God. Let God enjoy his creation's praise for his own joy and glory—it is for him. We do not need to keep it for ourselves.

Conclusion

Recently I had the opportunity to watch Terrence Malick's film "A Hidden Life." Malick tells the story of an Austrian farmer who refuses to swear allegiance to Adolf Hitler, despite the pressure of his community and the hardships faced by his family. The way in which the story is told is significant. The film unfolds with a succession of scenes that appeal to the senses, rich in imagery and sound. We are immersed in a wholly aesthetic experience. To be honest, not a lot happens in the movie. This is not a movie of action. The plot does not drive the movie. There are not even a lot of words. In fact, minutes seem to stretch by without dialogue, and there are very few words overall. Malick tells the story in such a way that we understand the facts but are also brought into the feelings of the characters. Viewers are left with a very strong emotional attachment to people struggling with a rather difficult and serious situation. Malick's film is a very good example of how the arts communicate a deep sense of meaning.

Work needs to continue regarding the subject of the arts and the church. Evangelicals have not spent a lot of time thinking about how the arts have influenced and shaped our tradition. Truly, there are very few writers and thinkers in the evangelical church today who have taken up the call to think about the issue. To learn about the arts and aesthetics, evangelicals have to go to the historical church, other

contemporary expressions of the church, and secular theories of aesthetics; very little has been written within our own tradition. What has been written in our tradition reflects our experience in music, with very little awareness of how other mediums and genres of art are relevant to ministry.

We have tended to adorn our sanctuaries with words and music but see little need for art, sculpture, and architecture. I am a demonstration of this, as most of my examples and understanding come from my experience as a church musician. I have an affinity for other artistic languages but am in no way a speaker. We need to provide more opportunities to bring artists into the worship of the church in substantive ways. Without models, we simply have no ability to pass on the language, and the same discontinuity I experienced in my home church will continue as congregants encounter a faith that cannot speak meaningfully into their lives. Local churches should invest time and energy in arts education and training, redirecting the program toward liturgical purposes and allowing the language of the local community to find expression.

As we move forward, I pray that the church will see the arts as a gospel issue. We are immersed in a world that God has made. Creation pours forth speech and cannot help but concretely embody the glory of God. We are made of the same material and should utilize all the languages at our disposal to the same proclamation work. We are to know and live the gospel to the praise of our Creator, so that others might know Christ and be brought into the eternal fold of God.

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Opportunities for Workplace Ministry in Canada

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Introduction

A couple of years ago, some people started a faith community at their office tower in downtown Calgary. When they asked for permission, they were told that company emails and meeting rooms were for company business only. This did not deter them. As there were many empty floors in the office building, they met weekly for prayer and fellowship in a meeting room on an empty floor. Six months later, I met with the faith community leader, who invited me to their Easter celebration. On the Wednesday before Easter, they brought a keyboard and microphones to the 17th floor board room of their office building. Over forty people from diverse Christian backgrounds and ethnicities attended. Various employees led in worship, shared Scripture, and led in prayer as together we celebrated Easter. One of the managers attending the Easter celebration commented to me that he noticed a difference in the atmosphere of his floor since this faith community started meeting and praying.

The following January, the leader of this faith community helped start a new faith community in another office tower. Together, the two faith groups planned an Easter celebration using a larger shared meeting venue in a different building with the same format. Over a hundred people attended.

If you had told me thirty years ago when I first moved to Calgary that one day, I would join an Easter celebration in the board room of an office tower in Calgary, I would have rolled my eyes in disbelief. Although thirty years ago Christians were much more open about their faith in the workplace, even then I would have anticipated the comment: "These meeting rooms are not to be used for religious services."

From my experience working in the oil and gas sector, the railroads, the local church, and the faith and work movement, "the way forward for people of faith to bring their whole selves, including their faith, into the workplace is opaque and resources to support them are scant" (Ewest 2018, 2).

The Research Study

This got me interested in researching what is happening in the faith-at-work movement in Canada and in analyzing the efficacy of the movement. This qualitative, exploratory study identified fourteen Canadian national workplace faith ministries. I sought to understand their target demographic, ministry model, and why individuals chose to participate in these ministries. I conducted phone interviews with each of the ministry leaders ranging from 30–90 minutes. Each interview was transcribed. However, this study does not include local church based, independent marketplace ministries and chaplains.

Several respondents indicated there are at least two other classes of workplace ministry occurring on a fee-for-service basis. These include leadership coaching and leadership development by Christian practitioners.

Target Demographic by Organization Size

Approximately twenty percent of the Canadian workforce works in the public sector (Statistics Canada, 2019). This study identified four national ministries in Canada focused on the public sector. These include the Christian Medical Dental Society (CMDS), Fellowship of Christian Firefighters, Public Service Christian Fellowship, and the Royal Canadian Chaplain Service. For the purposes of this research, only the Christian Medical Dental Society was interviewed. Data on the other three ministries were taken from their websites.

This study identified ten national workplace faith ministries in Canada focused on the private sector. These ministries interact with about 3,000 to 5,000 people. This represents less than 0.05 percent of the Canadian workforce in the private sector. The target demographic of these private sector ministries falls into three primary

categories; namely: (1) professions such as technology, legal, trucking, and trades; (2) frontline employees through Bible studies or chaplaincy programs; and (3) senior leadership of organizations, although others are welcome to participate.

Ministry Participation

The respondents identified two major categories of Christians in the Marketplace. These two categories are the dual backpack Christians and the single backpack Christians.

Dual Backpack Christians

Dual Backpack Christians are Christians who pick up their church backpack as they leave their home and head off to church. Some of these are Christians who are thoroughly committed to their local church. Then on Monday morning when they head off to work, they pick up their workplace backpack as they leave the house. For these people, faith and work are two solitudes that are not integrated. As one person said to me, "From Monday to Friday I do my work, and on Sunday I do my spiritual service by teaching Sunday School" (author interview 2019). Tim Keller, in his book Every Good Endeavor, suggests that this dualism leads "some to think that if their work is to please Christ, it must be done overtly in his name" (2016, 196).

Single Backpack Christians

Single Backpack Christians are Christians who take the same backpack to church and to work. Their desire is to live a holistic life. All aspects of their life, including "their work is informed, formed, transformed or malformed by their faith" (Ewest 2018, 3). Some Christians within this category find nourishment and refreshment for their soul and equipping for their role in the workplace through their local church. One respondent suggested that this was a very small percentage of Christians (author interview 2019). Some single backpack Christians choose to participate in workplace faith communities. Some Christians do not find what they are looking for in their local church or in a workplace faith community.

One benefit single backpack Christians find in a workplace faith community is that their colleagues understand their language and subculture. One respondent said, "If an [outsider] is present [in their faith community], then a different protocol is required. They simply want to fly under the radar and have a small faith community of guys who can share everything" (author interview 2019). Another respondent indicated that "meeting within a workplace area is a shortcut as you are surrounded by people who understand the question and you can get straight to 'how do we respond?' You don't need to expend emotional energy helping people understand the question, or having people shocked by the situation" (author interview 2019).

The Changing Nature of Work

A respondent from CMDS indicated that the medical field has always been hard work, but now there are two significant new stressors in their world. Work has become demoralized and demoralized; and work has shifted from a covenant relationship to a contract.

The Demoralization of Work

Today, the medical profession has become demoralized and de-moralized, because decisions are now made based on what can be done and what is available, not on what is morally appropriate. This demoralization of medicine has robbed the profession of the real satisfaction of medicine for millennia, which was practicing a God-honoring vocation that endued the profession with energy and grace. Similarly, "for many teachers, their work is a vocation or calling, one replete with notions of moral and ethical commitments to their practice and the students with whom they work" (Santoro 2011,4). Yet, many teachers today are evaluated on effectiveness and quality, eliminating the moral dimension of the practice (Santoro 2011, 19).

From the dawn of scientific management principles to the rise of the white-collar factory (Godin 2010, 18), many jobs have been reduced to repetitively performing a task with little or no direct connection to an end-product or service. When a person finds that they can answer in the affirmative to the questions "Is this work worthwhile?" and "Am I engaging in good work?," they are reaping the moral rewards of their work. The challenge for the church today is to help people answer these questions in the affirmative in environments that no longer value the moral rewards of work.

From Covenant to Contract

Forty years ago, medicine was a covenant between physician and patient, and this was satisfying. Today, medicine has shifted to a contractual interaction with a patient who is not as meaningful. For example, 40 years ago, a family doctor would deal with all the ailments of a patient. Today, a patient seeks out the most convenient drop-in clinic or the best specialist to deal with each unique ailment. I have observed the same trend in the workplace. Forty years ago, most companies would invest in a long-term relationship with their employees and remain loyal to their suppliers. Today, companies form contractual relationships with the lowest cost outsourcer or supplier to meet a short-term business need.

When a person primarily experiences contractual relationships with their employer and in other aspects of their life, it is easy for this mindset to permeate the way they perceive the church and Christianity. When Christianity is viewed through a contractual lens or paradigm, people tend to analyze the value Christianity brings to their career or to the meaningfulness of their work instead of experiencing a covenantal intimate relationship with God.

Communicating the concept of covenant is an opportunity and a challenge for the local church. It is an opportunity to invite people who have only experienced contractual interactions into a covenantal relationship with God and God's family. The challenge facing the church is to share the gospel in a way that people see the gospel not as an invitation to enter into a contract with God. Recently at a Bible study, we were discussing Jeremiah 31:33 ("this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel …"), and one participant commented, "Oh, that is just like a contract." Is Christianity perceived as a contract instead of a covenantal relationship part of what causes people to have a backpack for Sunday and another backpack for the workplace?

Ministry Models

Historical Model of Event-Driven Evangelism

One respondent described how thirty years ago an event-driven model of evangelism was quite successful in the workplace (author interview 2019). He described how

ministries would host an event over breakfast or lunch during the week, with a Christian speaker who would share a testimony and proclaim an evangelistic message and wrap-up with an altar call. Christians in the workplace would invite their non-Christian coworkers to these events, and several people would make a commitment to Christ. These individuals would then be directed to a local church for discipleship.

The respondent reported that this model is not working well today. He indicated that today the message would so turn off non-Christian folks that it would fracture their relationship with the Christian that brought them. For each person that would accept Christ at an event, five to ten Christians would stop participating in these events (author interview 2019).

Current Models of Workplace Ministry in Canada

From my observations and research, the current approach of the various ministries in Canada could be categorized into six distinct models. These models are as follows: (1) soul restoration; (2) chaplaincy; (3) personal, professional and spiritual development; (4) mentorship; (5) hands-on missional participation; and (6) advocacy.

Soul Restoration Ministries. Soul restoration ministries employ small groups engaged in Bible study and prayer. This kind of ministry is found in the public sector (20 percent of the workforce) and in one local ministry in Calgary focused on frontline employees in organizations with over 500 employees (6.3 percent of the workforce). Two national ministries follow a similar model for small business owners. This does not include leaders passionate about faith at work who start a prayer time or Bible study in their organization without any awareness or connection to a larger workplace ministry network.

Leaders of ministries that focus on soul restoration recognize that we all have a God-shaped hole in our lives that is often abused and scarred in the workplace. They understand that the stresses of the workplace combined with the stress of family life cause emotional wounds. They believe in God's ability to bring substantial healing to all aspects of life, including life in the workplace (Schaeffer 1971).

To address these emotional and spiritual wounds and needs, these ministries focus on Bible Study and prayer. In a faith community, they explore how the Bible relates to

the emotional, ethical and spiritual challenges of life in the workplace. These ministries believe in the power of prayer to impact the workplace. However, one observer noted that "the prayers tended to be for health and career related concerns rather than interceding for the city or marketplace" (author interview 2019).

Faith communities typically attract believers who only have a single backpack that they wear to church and work or are in the process of combining the contents of the two backpacks into a single one. Although these groups are open to non-Christians, the participation of the latter has not been observed.

One Christian participant described her participation in a workplace Bible Study this way:

> Attending the Bible Study quickly became the highlight of my work week as I was introduced to an amazing group of Christians who were committed to be a light to their colleagues in the workplace. The fellowship was refreshing to my spirit and since I worked in a company where I knew of less than a handful of Christians, I was encouraged by the time in the Word and the shared prayer. Having the Bible Study group reminded me that I was not alone in desiring to be a witness at work (author interview 2019).

Participants in these faith communities have their faith stretched as they discuss and apply Scripture to situations in their workplace with Christians from different denominational traditions. The leaders of these faith communities bring back to their local congregation stronger leadership skills and increased faith from their experiences. The leaders of these faith communities would see their faith community as having a positive impact on their workplace by equipping the saints to revitalize their sphere of influence within the workplace.

An implicit expectation within this model is that the Christians who participate in these faith communities would courageously demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in their jobs. The assumption is that the way they approach their work and their demeanor would lead to spiritual conversations with their colleagues.

Chaplaincy. Chaplaincy ministries exist to "support business owners, management and employees as they face life's reality at work and home. They foster relational, emotional and spiritual growth and health as these individuals serve their companies, families and communities together" (Corporate Chaplains Canada n.d.).

Language is very important in Canada. The word "chaplain" is problematic and closes more doors than it opens. One respondent indicated that in Canada, when a chaplain approaches an organization that is not led by a Christian and enquires about offering Christian chaplaincy services, they are not welcomed. He indicated that Christian business owners are often hesitant to engage a chaplain as they wonder how it would affect non-Christian employees (author interview 2019).

As a result, marketplace chaplains have rebranded themselves as marketplace care in Canada and changed their service model to offering holistic proactive employee care so that there are no concerns about proselytizing. Marketplace care targets small to midsize organizations, with care teams putting in one or two hours per week at multiple companies. These care teams are also available on-call outside business hours.

Companies pay for the services of marketplace care, creating opportunities for Christians to serve in paid part-time positions, which currently have been difficult to fill. Although pastors can make good chaplains, this respondent's experience has been that if someone vets them and discovers that they are a pastor, they tend to be avoided like the plague.

Another respondent works for a ministry that provides chaplains for truck stops. Their organization has a unique relationship with the owners of a chain of truck stops that see the value of having a chapel and chaplain at each of their truck stops across Canada. Like his counterpart at marketplace care, he is unable to find enough individuals willing to serve as a chaplain at a truck stop (author interview 2019).

Personal, Professional, and Spiritual Development Ministries. Personal, professional, and spiritual development ministries focus on equipping individuals to impact their organization by living God's kingdom principles. They do this by providing seminars and small group meetings on topics like leadership skills or communication skills. These groups are confidential, authentic, and diverse. People participate in activities or faith communities hosted by these organizations to develop personally,

professionally, and spiritually. Respondents indicated that they relied on leadership material developed by their organization or well-known Christian leaders (e.g., John Maxwell).

Some ministries, like Leader Impact, design their faith communities so that they will be attractive to both Christian and non-Christian leaders who are interested in personal, professional and spiritual development. Other faith communities primarily appeal to Christians.

The implicit expectation of this kind of ministry is that Christian leaders who participate in these faith communities or events sponsored by these ministries would then transition into meaningful conversations about the Gospel over coffee with the non-Christians who attend.

Mentoring. According to research conducted by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, "young adults who want to grow in their understanding of and reliance on Christ are typically not interested in a list of tasks or disciplines. They need people to walk alongside them for the sake of faith development. This often takes place through small group interactions and mentorship" (Penner 2011, 53).

In this study, I discovered that Mentorlink is the only national ministry focused on mentoring. However, there is a huge opportunity in Canada for mentoring leaders in the church and in the workplace. According to the respondent, when mentoring is part of the DNA of Christian leaders, mentoring takes off with or without supporting structures. The respondent suggested that most structured mentoring programs fall apart because of the costs of maintaining a program, the challenges of retaining a leadership team for the program, and that people can get lost in the system (author interview 2019).

Hands-on Missional Participation. Some Christians are more fulfilled in using their hands and minds to serve God's kingdom on the local or foreign mission field. The engineering and medical professions have recognized this for many years and created opportunities for practitioners to serve on short-term or long-term mission trips.

An emerging field of missional participation is occurring in the technology sector. In Canada, FaithTech fosters communities where information technology professionals

can gather for a weekend and develop software or applications for Christian organizations. Similar faith communities are arising in the UK and the US. One participant indicated that being part of a group like this is more attractive than a workplace Bible study.

In some cases, people do not need a workplace faith community, but they have a desire to creatively embark on mission consistent with the way that God has gifted them. Often these people require some form of direction and an environment to participate in a mission. For example, I am currently working with an architect who is motivated about the opportunity to design a building for a new church concept. A hand-on missional worker uses their talents to teach job search skills at a center for homeless and recovering addicts. Another individual who has not been helped to find a way to use their gifts spends their time discussing relocating the support pillars of their church lobby.

Advocacy. Workplace ministries that focus on a specific sector (e.g., labor, law, medicine) see a vital part of their ministry as advocating for Christians in their profession, in addition to providing soul care and spiritual development opportunities. The Christian Medical and Dental Society (CMDS) is active in the Canadian legal issues around end-of-life care and abortion. This ministry attracts serious evangelicals and serious Catholics who are concerned with the direction that medicine is moving, are seeking to do a more effective job of exercising faith in the clinical environment, are looking to preserve the Christian ethos of medicine and dentistry in the academy, are concerned to preserve the Judaeo-Christian roots of medicine for the next generation of practitioners, or who want to equip the next generation to be ready for the world they are stepping into which is quite different from the world of thirty years ago.

A significant theme discussed in CMDS faith communities and one-on-one discipleship conversations are the ethical issues facing the medical profession. These include questions such as "what should a medical professional do when a patient requests medical assistance in dying (MAiD) within the rules specified by Canadian legislation?" One respondent indicated "that they have found that the evangelical church is not grounded well in a theology of suffering or a biblical understanding of stewardship of life and has not formulated a good response to a culture of death" (author interview 2019). Not having found satisfactory or sufficient answers in the

evangelical community, they have turned to the Catholic community, which has written extensively on the Moral Principle of Legitimate Cooperation with its recognition of the occasional necessity for "mediated cooperation with evil" in our daily lives (Rubio 2017 96).

Realities and Opportunities for Workplace Contexts in Canada

A local pastor shared with me that there are business practitioners in his congregation who would leave his church if the church could not find a way for them to use their gifts, or to see a connection between their gifts and their work. This challenge to the pastors and to faith and work communities can be addresses when we know the realities and opportunities for workplace contexts in Canada. This is what this section seeks to address.

Workplace Ministry for Self-Employed and Small Businesses

Approximately 15 percent of the workforce in Canada is self-employed. Another 23 percent works in establishments with one to nineteen employees (Statistics Canada 2016). This includes both private establishments and local establishments of national chains (e.g., banks, national food chains, national retailers). See Figure 1 for the percentage of workers according to the size of the establishment in Canada.

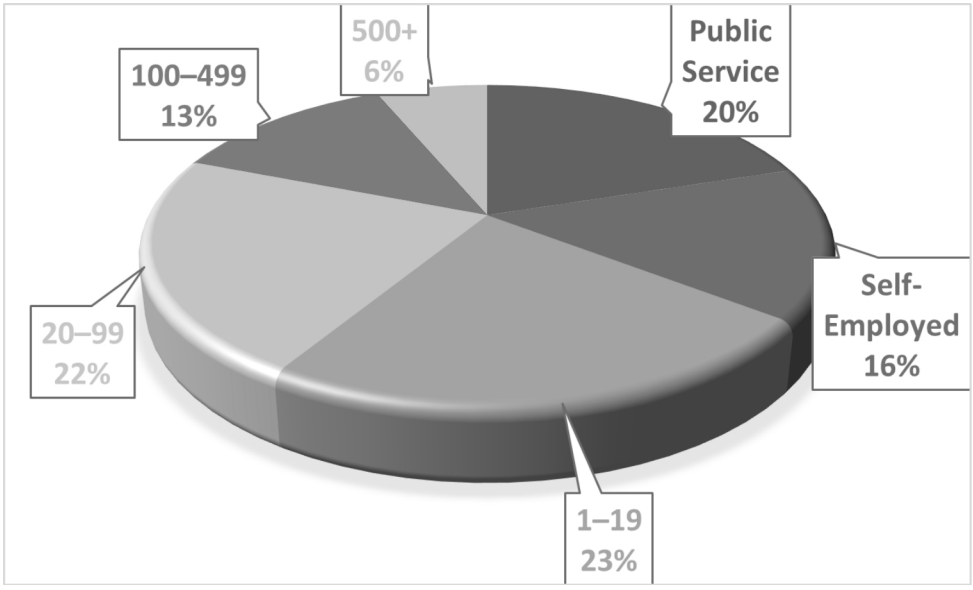

Figure 1 – Percentage of Workers by Establishment Size in Canada

Workplace ministries for the self-employed and small businesses rise and fall on their ability to recruit a local leader. Sometimes small business owners start entrepreneurial faith communities within their church. One of the primary drivers for small business owners to attend a local faith community is networking. The primary barrier for self-employed and small-business owners attending these faith communities was time and cost. Taking two hours (15–30 minutes travel each way plus 60 minutes for meeting) of non-revenue generating time to participate in a workplace ministry activity is challenging. One self-employed individual who was struggling to get his business off the ground commented that the $20 luncheon fee that one local organization charged was not within his budget (author interview 2019).

Opportunities for workplace ministry with self-employed and small-business owners are mentoring and providing connections to missional activities that require the employment of skill they already possess.

Workplace Ministry for Organizations of 20-99 Employees

Many of the leaders of organizations with twenty to ninety-nine employees (23 percent of the workforce) face the same challenges to participating in a workplace faith community as entrepreneurs and small-business owners. Some leaders or executives of these organizations may generate sufficient revenue to offset the financial commitment of participating in membership-based leadership ministries like Convene or Corpath. These leadership ministries compete against secular leadership communities (e.g., Mastermind, Tek), leadership coaches, and the pressures of the workplace. Employees from these organizations typically would have to travel to gather with other believers, which is a barrier to participation. One opportunity in this space is for the company to invest in a part-time chaplain or spiritual care person.

Workplace Ministry for Larger Organizations

For larger organizations, a gathering of executives and frontline employees in the same workplace faith community typically does not occur, because they deal with different workplace issues. However, some workplace ministries (e.g., LeaderImpact) have developed an effective model for workplace ministry with executives in these organizations. In some companies in the US (Google, Facebook, LinkedIn), workplace

faith communities are part of the offerings of company-sponsored or acknowledged activities under the banner of diversity or Employee Resource Groups (Tanenbaum 2014).

There are several challenges for faith communities for frontline employees gathering in larger organizations. First, they have to form a leadership team within the workplace that can gather individuals, lead discussions, and shepherd the faith community. Once a leadership team has been formed, the next hurdle is to identify who the Christians in the organization are and to invite them to join the workplace faith community. Another challenge is providing physical access behind locked doors to guests from adjacent companies.

Desire to participate in a workplace faith community does not always lead to participation. One respondent noted that "30-40-year-olds are not joiners—being a good parent means having kids in three or four activities each. They are so busy making sure their children are getting all these good things that they have not found a good time to connect with other Christians in their profession" (author interview 2019). This highlights the need to explore other patterns to connect with people who do not fit the model of meeting for a meal and Bible study.

In some cases, Christians are unable to participate in a workplace faith community because they are so busy keeping their head above water or have become quite stretched in their work and family activities that they do not have the capacity to participate in what for them appears to be just another religious activity.

On the other hand, one respondent commented that business leaders and doctors are attracted to workplace faith communities because "the church looks to them as leadership pillars which makes it hard for them to be vulnerable [in a church life group] and to say I'm not sure this workplace issue is black and white" (author interview 2019).

Opportunities for workplace ministry in large organizations include having Christian executives encourage their frontline employees to start a workplace faith community, mentoring of new hires, training gifted "shepherds" in the workplace on how to care for their colleagues, and leveraging the renewed interest in spirituality at the workplace.

Need to Connect in Workplace Ministry

Most workplace ministries in Canada make an assumption that individuals participating in these ministries have the gifts, capacity, and skills to engage in evangelistic conversations with their non-Christian coworkers. This may not be a valid assumption if non-Christians do not know which of their colleagues are Christians. A 2015 study from the UK discovered that only seven percent of people in the workplace know somebody in their establishment who is a Christian (Barna 2015, 18). In fact, a recurring theme in this study was that Christians in the marketplace cannot identify their Christian colleagues.

This lack of capacity to identify and relate with other Christian colleagues is also evident among faith and work communities. In this study, I discovered that there were at least thirty different faith and work communities in Calgary, most of whom were not aware of each other. Local pastors may have heard of some of the national ministries if somebody in their congregation participated or if they were financially supporting the ministry. Such realities indicate an opportunity to create a network or eco-system bringing together the various faith and work ministries.

Opportunities for Further Research

This research raises several questions that are important for us to understand with regards to the future of workplace ministry in Canada. Here is a list of thirteen questions:

1. What is a financially sustainable model to multiply workplace ministry? Specifically, is the banner of spirituality an open door for workplace ministry?
2. What is the role of leadership coaches and leadership development in workplace ministry?
3. Why do some individuals whose lives reflect an integration of faith and work not connect with workplace ministries?
4. What are creative and effective methods of offering workplace ministry for those who have the desire to participate but are unable to due to the nature of their work (e.g., entrepreneurs and those in the informal marketplace) or due to other commitments?

5. What is a simple evangelical theology that speaks to the challenges created by the demoralization of work (Santoro 2011, 1)?
6. What language does the church need to use as a result of the shift in work from being covenantal to contractual?
7. What is the language that needs to be used when discussing the gospel in the workplace?
8. What are the contemporary ethical challenges of navigating the workplace in a fallen world and what is a simple evangelical theology for these?
9. What percentage of non-Christians in Canada know a Christian in their workplace (ideally by establishment size)?
10. What is the effectiveness of the various workplace ministry models in terms of evangelism?
11. How do we connect the need for laborers within workplace ministries with people in the pews who are looking for ways to use their gifts and do not feel qualified to work in the nursery or serve coffee?
12. What is the impact of workplace faith communities in the local church?
13. What role will workplace faith communities have in the future of the church in Canada?

Conclusion

In 1992, some men who had been involved in the Faith and Work Movement in Ontario for over forty years published a book about their experiences and other articles on their perspectives of the "why" and "how-to" of faith at work (Milliken 1992). Twenty-seven years later, a handful of faithful individuals passionate about the gospel and the workplace continue to labor in the faith and work movement. Despite their best efforts, they still only touch the lives of less than 0.05 percent of the workforce. In 2001, Fortune Magazine concluded in an article that "we simply can't know whether today's ad hoc efforts to integrate faith and work will coalesce into something bigger and more powerful, with long-lasting effects, or whether they will fizzle" (Gunther 2001, 58).

To honor the legacy of these individuals passionate about the gospel and the workplace models of workplace ministry, we need to explore a new language and produce new materials that resonate with unique demographics of the workplace of the 21st century. These materials need to be accessible in the language of tradespeople, retail workers, entrepreneurs, and professionals. Such effort requires the workplace, the assembly, the agency and the academy to join together to dialogue and develop these new models and materials. Professionals with theological training and successful careers in the corporate world or as entrepreneurs are an underutilized resource. They can participate in or lead these dialogues, since they understand the unique cultures of the church and the workplace.

In his paper on workplace ministry prepared for the Lausanne 2010 Cape Town summit, Willy Kotiuga reminds us that the way forward is through "a renewed passion that can come only through prayer and the moving of God's Spirit" (Kotiuga 2010, 8). Zephaniah reminds us that our righteous Lord is within the city and within our workplaces (Zeph. 3:1-5). Through prayer and the moving of God's Spirit, we can frame in community the future of workplace ministry in Canada and be a witness to the workplace regarding the wonder of a covenantal relationship with God and the ability of God to substantially heal all aspects of work life.

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Do We Bible Translators (and Bible Translation Agencies) Know When We Have Succeeded?

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Introduction

Evaluation can be a sensitive topic. Although we agree that faithful stewardship and purposeful activities are important aims in mission work, there is a certain vulnerability in seeking clarity to the question of whether we have succeeded. Misunderstandings about the meaning of "success" can easily lead to frustrations and conflict, so it is crucial that teams, agency leaders, and other stakeholders share a common understanding of what the evaluation process is intended to measure. For the sake of fostering unity, there is value in stepping back from a ministry's perceived successes and shortcomings to take time to evaluate our understanding of evaluation itself.

Results-Based Management (RBM) is being adopted increasingly in response to the problem that "projects often accomplish the planned activities but fail in meeting the ultimate objectives of beneficial and lasting changes" (Marmor and Bartels 2018, 69). The RBM model has brought a healthy change of focus in strategic planning from *product outputs* to *impact*—what we most desire to see in the communities among whom we serve. While many celebrate that change in focus, others caution against the real dangers of measuring teams' success based on results they cannot directly surface. In light of the tension between these perspectives, this paper considers factors for appropriate evaluation, and it reflects on limitations of impact-focused evaluation, particularly in the context of Christian mission.

Planning as Described in Scripture

We begin with the assumption that "evaluation" is not a stand-alone activity; rather, we engage in evaluation primarily for the benefits it provides in informing a larger planning and implementation process. Therefore, as we explore the biblical foundation for *evaluation,* let us look first to the way Scripture speaks to the larger theme of *planning*.

"God's Part" and "Our Part"

An initial observation is that God is a planning God. Throughout Scripture, we read about His divine purpose in redemption history, "the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11).[1] While we know that God is sovereign, the Scriptures testify to His planning activities for His creation, and the unmistakable truth that "he chooses to work through means to bring about his glory" (Terry and Payne 2013, 26).

God is all-powerful and sovereign to accomplish His purposes as He wills, and yet He involves *people* to join in carrying out those plans. The paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility is a mystery that underlies all discussion of planning, and its depths are certainly beyond the scope of this paper, but we know that God has commissioned His church as an instrument of His working in the world (Matt 28:19–20; Acts 1:8). Indeed, to walk in obedience to God is to allow Him to do *His* work through us, and we are called to steward well the gifts we have received to that end (1 Pet 4:7–11; 1 Cor 4:1–4; 1 Cor 12; Luke 19:11–27; Matt 25:14–30). Dayton and Fraser (1990) express well that "we should plan *in paradox*. … We plan as though the future is our responsibility while believing God is the one who makes it happen" (10).

Wisdom, Faith, and Humility in Planning

As image-bearers of our God-who-plans, we too are plan-makers. Proverbs promote the practical wisdom and prudence of planning: "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty" (Prov 21:5; see also 15:22; 24:27). Jesus clearly expects

[1] New International Version 2011 used for all Scripture references in this paper. See also Ps. 33:10–11; Isa. 25:1; Isa. 46:8–10; Jer. 29:11; Acts 2:23; Gal. 4:4–5; Eph. 3:8–11.

that wise people plan and count the cost of such plans (Luke 14:28–30). If we celebrate the wisdom of planning for economic pursuits, how much more should we walk in that wisdom for the furtherance of the kingdom of God! Wisdom is a high value throughout Scripture and one that Jesus lived out in perfection. As finite human beings in a world full of need, we must make choices in stewarding well our limited time, giftings, and resources, and prudence helps us make those decisions wisely.

Terry and Payne (2013) reassure that planning is "not an attempt to undermine God's will" but an opportunity to seek His will (226). We are not to make plans independent of God's direction but guided by the Holy Spirit. Dayton and Fraser (1990) further clarify that goals and plans are "statements of faith"; as we seek to understand God's will for the ongoing development of a community or ministry, we align ourselves in faith with that discerned future, acknowledging our responsibility to act according to our understanding. As our understanding changes and grows, we change our plans accordingly (11).

Indeed, we hold all our plans with an open hand, with the humility to allow the Holy Spirit to redirect our efforts and activities in ways we do not foresee. By maintaining this posture of flexibility, we acknowledge that the wisdom that we exercise in planning is as nothing before God's perfect wisdom, which accounts for countless variables that we will never see, and aspects of His character and purposes which are beyond our understanding (Isa 55:8–11). Although we are called to seek wisdom, we are warned against being wise in our own eyes (Prov 26:12). Though we make plans, "it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Prov 19:21).

Ultimately, we in our finitude do not know what the future will hold, and James justly warns against the presumption that boasts confidently about what is yet to be (James 4:13–16). Humility in planning entails a readiness to change course rather than a resoluteness to cling to a well-developed plan, as our understanding of God's purposes in a situation develops. In our planning, we acknowledge that our understanding is never complete.

Direction and Accountability

In Scripture, we see evidence for two general purposes for evaluation. The first purpose, as we have described, is to inform planning and to contribute to wise decision-making. This evaluation for *ministry direction*—including both redirection and continuing in what is working well—is based on the understanding that we are wise to learn from the past and present, and to apply that learning to our future endeavors. Such evaluation helps equip us with clarity to choose well our next steps forward and to be faithful stewards of all that is entrusted to us. This purpose for evaluation is valid not just at the ministry level but also at the personal level, as we are called to "examine [ourselves] to see whether [we] are in the faith" (2 Cor 13:5).

A second purpose for evaluation is *accountability*. Ultimately, we are accountable to God, and perfect evaluation is in His hands (Matt 10:24–26; 1 Cor 4:1–5). However, living and working with accountability to *others* celebrates God's design that we, as members of the one body of Christ, serve Him in community. It is an outworking of our call to "consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Heb 10:24). Such evaluation, against a Western preoccupation with individualism, recognizes our human proneness to error and sin. The biblical basis for this kind of evaluation is perhaps clearest in Paul's epistles, where he admonishes the believers in various churches toward unity and striving together as one body toward righteousness (Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12; Gal 6:1–2; Eph 4; Col 3:12–17; 2 Thess 3:6–15).

These two basic purposes for evaluation are not independent of one another. As we submit to evaluation for the immediate purpose of *accountability*, its greater purpose is to inform the *direction* of our lives or work. However, the immediate purpose of *accountability* most overtly acknowledges our interdependence, whereas the immediate purpose of *direction* most overtly acknowledges our need to seek wisdom in our walk. A second distinction between the two purposes is one of control. Evaluation for *accountability* requires that the evaluated have a high degree of control over the areas being evaluated, whereas evaluation for *direction* alone does not require the same level of control, and an assessment that redirection is needed does not necessarily assume any degree of failure or shortcoming on the part of those "responsible." Related to the matter of control is a third distinction: in evaluation for *direction*, the evaluator may often be the evaluated; whereas, in evaluation for *accountability*, the evaluator is outside of the evaluated.

The Development of Results-Based Management (RBM)

As our discussion turns now to the Results-Based Management (RBM) model, it is helpful to place this approach within the context of its development in Bible translation work.

A Shift in Focus

There is a strong tendency for organizations to measure success in terms of resources, activities, and outputs. A church-planting agency might point to an increase in the number of church-planting workers, a corresponding increase in church-planting activities, and an increase in the number of churches planted. These increases were considered indicators that the agency was successful. A Bible translation agency might point to the number of completed Scripture translations as an indicator of success; to provide access to Scripture was to faithfully discharge our duty to the communities among whom we served.

However, concerns with this approach developed as Bible translation teams grieved over apparently "successful" projects where printed Scripture remained unused, and communities remained untransformed by God's Word. Perhaps we needed to reevaluate our understanding of "success." In response to this need, the RBM model suggested that we place greater emphasis on *impact*—the transformation that we desire to see in the communities we serve *over* the narrower accessibility of materials to those communities. Thus, we began developing our corporate goals and measuring "success" according to the impact of Scripture on people's lives. This explicit attentiveness to impact required a redesign of our strategic plans with increased attentiveness to encouraging the community's use and engagement of Scripture, alongside Scripture translation and publication.

"Splash and Ripple"

An important strength of RBM in Christian ministry is that it overtly distinguishes and acknowledges diminishing levels of control as we move from what we do to how we see God at work in the community. In RBM, *inputs* are the resources (human and material) that teams invest in the work; *activities* are the things we do to help bring about the

impact that we aim for; *outputs* are the immediate results of those activities; *outcomes* are the longer-term results; and impact is the ultimate change in the community to which the activities contribute.

Cox (2007) provides the helpful illustration of a person holding a rock over a pond: "The person drops the rock into the pond creating a splash and then ripples. Inputs are the person and the rock; the output is the splash, and the ripples are the outcomes and impacts" (14). The RBM model highlights the cause-and-effect nature of our work in ministry, but it acknowledges that "ripples are harder to track [than splashes] because they cover a widening area, influence a larger number of people, and their outward movement takes time. Outside influences (other ripples in the pond) also complicate their outward progress" (23). We can plan for and carry out activities that we pray and hope would lead to the outputs, outcomes, and impact that we desire to see, but we cannot directly carry out impact.

Flexibility by Context

The traditional focus on activities and "products" meant that goals could be standardized to some extent across ministries. A challenge with this approach is that "without intending it, we can allow fixed goals to take precedence over the impact goal of transformed lives" (Brown et al. 2006, 4). With RBM, however, desired impact became acknowledged as an individualized preferred future, which was context-specific, and impact goals were developed in collaboration with the ministry's many stakeholders. Thus, RBM fosters deepened communication and team relationships for carrying out the work. Likewise, the flexibility of RBM to adapt strategic planning to a particular situation means that the model more readily allows for adaptivity to changing circumstances. Referring to RBM applied to the public sector, Mayne (2007) notes that "implementation ought to be seen as incremental, with explicit review sessions built in so that the experience to date can be reflected upon, the challenges reassessed and implementation approaches appropriately revised" (105). As a ministry grows and develops, stakeholders systematically seek to measure progress against the impact statement.[2]

[2] In a nutshell, the Program Plan begins with the current context, a clear and concise statement of a preferred future, and then proposes sets of activities and resources that will help move toward the preferred future. As the "current context" changes, the pathway from the present to the future is adjusted.

RBM Concerns and Objections

The development of RBM helped address a real problem by confronting the faulty assumption that busyness equals success in ministry. While this model has been adopted in many contexts, concerns with RBM have also arisen.

Practical Challenges

Secular literature provides ample discussion of technical concerns inherent to RBM, particularly in terms of developing measurable metrics for assessing a project's success in achieving its desired impact (Mayne 2007, 90). Unmeasurable goals impede determination as to whether or how well they are attained. Without such clarity and the ability to act on it, the usefulness of planning may even be called into question.

Mayne (2007) perceptively observes that measurement for the public and non-profit sectors is for "soft events" that simply cannot be measured with scientific precision, but he argues that it is still useful to gather information that provides clarity regarding the results of a project—and that is itself a kind of measurement (99–100). Such an understanding is certainly true in the context of Christian mission, as the heart-level transformation of communities by the Holy Spirit is far from measurable in the scientific sense.

Still, there are correlations, however imperfect, between measurable outcomes and heart change, and we can draw on those correlations to choose indicators that help us aim in the right direction. There are things that we as workers can do to encourage the communities we serve to engage with Scripture, and there are things that we do and fail to do that can get in the way of Scripture's impact. While life-changing transformation is ultimately the Holy Spirit's work, we retain a responsibility to work by God's enablement, and to work wisely and diligently. Evaluation helps provide meaningful feedback as to how we can become better stewards of all that God has entrusted to us.

Deeper Concerns

In addition to the practical challenges, still deeper concerns are tied to an emphasis on impact over activities: if we are held accountable for the impact of Scripture in the lives of individuals and communities, will not workers in difficult situations risk becoming

discouraged at the scarcity or lack of fruit (which may be out of their hands)? Will not pride be a looming temptation for workers who see much fruit in their communities? Might comparison with other ministries become a snare if we distill impact to measurable metrics? If supervisors, donors, or other stakeholders call us to account for impact in the communities among whom we serve, might we become frustrated by a weak correlation between our efforts and the impact we see? Perhaps many of these objections arise not from RBM itself, but from an inappropriate application of RBM. Perhaps clarity regarding the factors that make an evaluation appropriate or inappropriate in a given context can help shed light on these concerns.

Aligning Purpose and Focus

We are always evaluating. Even evaluating whether we should evaluate something is itself an evaluation and one that we, in our finitude, must make. The question, then, is not whether we evaluate but what we focus on in our evaluation. Impact-focused evaluation is good, helpful, and appropriate for guiding decisions about a ministry's direction, based on the outcomes of past activities and an awareness of up-to-date relevant conditions. But it becomes less helpful if it is used to hold workers—individually or as a team—accountable for their work; it becomes even less helpful, and even harmful if it is used to hold those same workers personally accountable for their own spiritual vitality or condition.

Figure 1 on the next page illustrates the appropriateness of evaluation based on the relationship between its "focus" and "purpose." The *focus of an evaluation* can be a worker's spiritual condition, a worker's activities, or the impact seen in a community. The *purpose of an evaluation* can be for the worker's personal accountability, for his or her work accountability, or for informing the ministry direction. The "blurriness" of the "line of appropriateness" in the chart illustrates the lack of clear independence between each pairing of adjacent categories, as who we are is not entirely separate from what we do, and what we do is not entirely separate from what God does in bringing about impact in a community. Still, the existence of a line nonetheless shows that the categories remain meaningful labels for understanding what makes evaluation appropriate or inappropriate.

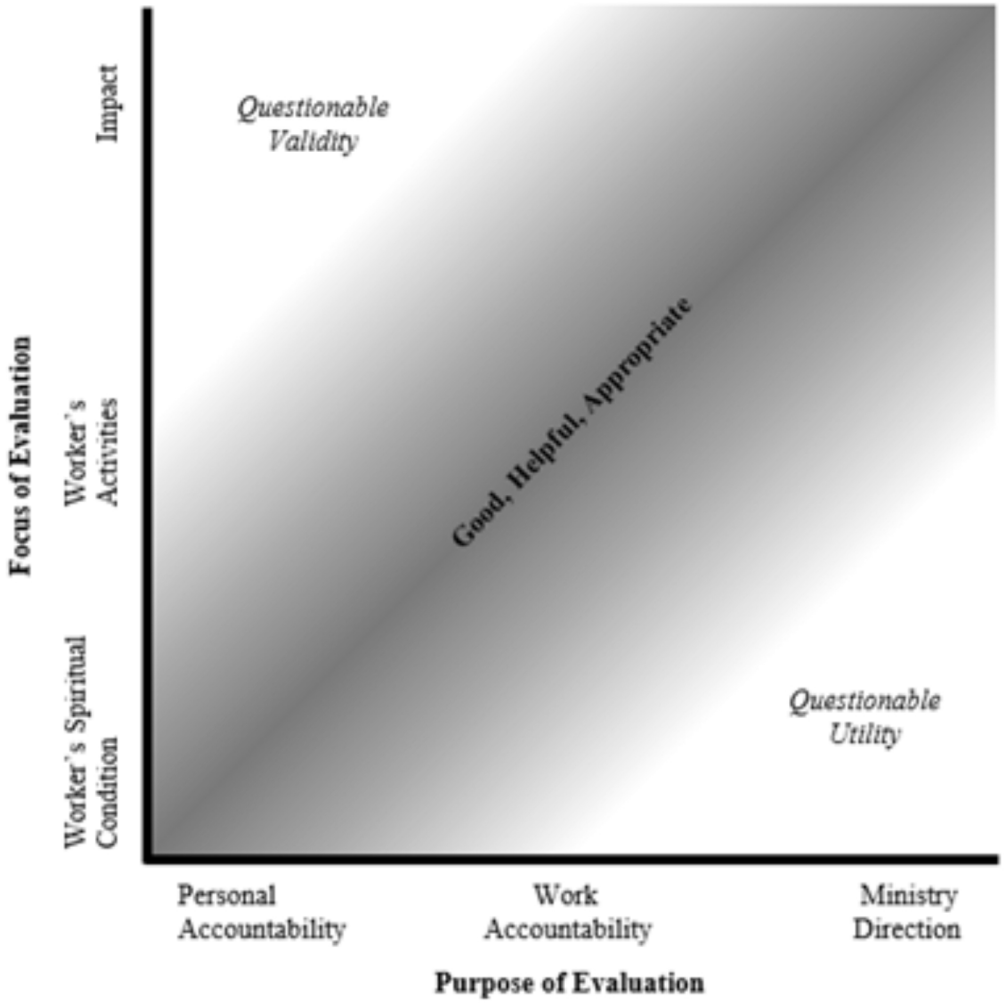

Figure 1: Appropriateness of Evaluation by Purpose and Focus

As seen above in the biblical basis for planning and evaluation, wisdom calls for making evaluative judgments about the state and progress of a ministry, in order to help us prayerfully plan our next steps toward encouraging and making space for the Spirit's transforming work in a community. The impact focus of RBM provides an ideal framework for this evaluation aim, because it encourages us to set our sights beyond current activities or simply busyness, and to more intentionally consider impactful growth in the community among whom we serve. The dark shading in the top-right portion of the chart represents this appropriate application of RBM to ministry direction.

However, RBM is not the only kind of appropriate evaluation that should take place in a ministry context. Toward the center and bottom-left portions of the chart, the dark shading there too represents helpful evaluations for the individual worker's work and personal accountability. In these instances, impact is not the best-aligned focus of evaluation. Rather, an evaluation of a worker's activities, over which the worker has greater control, provides a more solid basis for work accountability. Likewise, an evaluation of a worker's spiritual condition, in the context of a discipleship relationship, provides a well-aligned basis for that worker's personal growth accountability.

However, the lighter portions of the chart, particularly toward the bottom-right and top-left corners, represent the misalignment of an evaluation's focus to its purpose. While attentiveness to the worker's spiritual condition is good and necessary for personal accountability, the usefulness and sufficiency of that evaluation focus for making decisions about a ministry's direction is questionable. Similarly, attentiveness to impact is good and necessary for ministry direction, but the validity of assessing a person's spiritual vitality based on that impact is questionable at best, and potentially very harmful, as the following section of this paper will explore.

Significantly, there is less white space in the chart representing the inappropriate application of evaluation focused on a worker's activities than there is for the other two foci. Such an evaluation offers some validity for each of the three noted purposes of evaluation. That is not to say that a focus on worker activities is always the "best" option for evaluation—we have seen that that is not the case—but it does reflect an increased risk of misapplication inherent to the other two foci. An awareness of that increased risk (and recognizing a currently strong cultural tendency toward polarization) helps bring light to some of the controversy sparked by the development of RBM.

Dangers of RBM Misalignment

While an RBM-type impact focus is best suited for informing ministry direction, such a focus is not entirely misguided for the purpose of work accountability, especially when it acknowledges the decreasing levels of control from outputs to outcomes and from outcomes to impact, as is illustrated well with the "splash and ripple" idea. Where

expectations for a sort of "soft" accountability, which overtly accounts for the many variables that come between workers' efforts and the impact seen, are clearly communicated among a team, the RBM model can prove useful for providing some level of work accountability. However, where clarity regarding diminishing levels of control is lacking, a strong emphasis on impact distorts the reality that ministry workers cannot directly bring about the impact they aim for, and this misalignment—whether real or perceived—can become a stumbling block for workers.

Discouragement

If we view ourselves and our ministry teams as having control over and being responsible for impact, and we do not see the impact we desire and aim for, even with prudent planning and diligent prayer and work, we may be tempted toward discouragement. When we are faithful in the work we do and yet see little or no impact in our ministries, we find ourselves in the company of many others who have experienced similar "failure" in the eyes of their contemporaries. As Terry and Payne (2013) acknowledge, "there will be and must be men and women who will serve the Lord in 'hard-soil' contexts," where they may not see what looks like success in their ministries, but that does not mean they have been unfaithful (40). God's view of success is often very different from the success we aspire.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that the worker's responsibility in ministry is faithfulness, while God is the one who is responsible for results: "Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor" (1 Cor. 3:7–8). For those serving in the work of Bible translation, Hollenbach (1989) rightly cautions against the belief that "our work is not valuable if it does not result in an ongoing, broad utilization of our literacy materials and of the Scriptures we have translated" (1). His caution against equating success with impact remains timely to this day.

Comparison and Pride

On the other hand, when we view ourselves and our ministry teams as having control over and being responsible for impact, and we *do* see the impact we desire and aim for,

we may be tempted by pride. When measurements are used to determine our ministry effectiveness, their meaning often comes from comparison to other ministries. Otherwise, we would have little basis for determining which numbers are *reasonable*, *expected*, or *good*. That inherent comparison can pose a real danger to our motivations and faithfulness to God in our work.

To avoid overstating the matter, assessing impact—even numerically—can be a God-glorifying practice. When 3,000 people were added to the church in one day, Luke recorded it, and that testimony brings glory to God (Acts 2:41)! As Cruse (1999) points out, though, "Luke's purpose [in reporting impact in the early Church]…was not to underscore Pauline efficiency or Petrine effectiveness. His point was humbly and thankfully to illustrate the overwhelming power of the gospel in and through the lives of those who 'had been with Jesus'" (51–52). If we are to measure results for the purpose of determining our effectiveness, we must be attentive to our motivations, so that we are not caused to stumble in exalting self, rather than exalting God.

Impact and Control

Aside from matters of discouragement and pride, emphasizing impact as the primary measure of a ministry's effectiveness can become a source of frustration where workers perceive their responsibility in achieving such results. We can only contribute to impact; we cannot directly cause or control it. Mayne (2007), discussing the transition in focus from outputs to outcomes in the public sector, addresses this concern and notes that "it may not be clear just what accountability for outcomes can sensibly mean" (98). He goes on to suggest accountability "for having influenced the outcomes," which amounts to a sort of "soft" accountability that recognizes the many variables outside of a team's control (99–101).

Misunderstandings

An overarching challenge in aligning the purpose and focus of evaluation is the continued potential for misunderstandings among a ministry's varied stakeholders. Workers may have different expectations for evaluation than leaders do, and workers and leaders may in turn have different expectations for evaluation than donors do. Bloesch (1988) perceptively notes that "the two virtues of the technological society are

utility and efficiency. A demand for results governs both the secular and religious life of modern man" (148). A reality, then, is that we remain influenced by a cultural context that defines "success" in terms of "return on investment."

Cruse (1999) cautions that "this attitude puts significant and at times inappropriate pressure on the missionary to 'produce' in terms more suitable to a corporate venture than to a spiritual undertaking" (50–51). Terry and Payne (2013) likewise warn that "the capitalist mind-set that my worth and success are determined by the quota of widgets that I can produce by the end of any given day on the assembly line cannot be brought to where I serve. Just because we work hard today, there is no guarantee that we will have the desired quantifiable results by the end of the day (or month, for that matter)" (38).

Limitations of Evaluation

The RBM evaluation dangers described above pose the greatest risk where there is misalignment between the focus of an evaluation and its purpose. However, even when there is perfect "alignment," when expectations are clear and there are no misunderstandings among stakeholders, planning and evaluation still remain inherently limited in the hands of finite, error-prone, sinful human beings. While we can have some understanding of God's purposes in the world, that understanding is severely limited, so evaluation for any purpose and with any focus remains necessarily tentative, especially in the context of Christian ministry. This limitation and the following implications of it apply not only to RBM but to all human undertakings of planning and evaluation.

Faithfulness and Adversity

Whenever we attempt evaluation, our conclusions must be tempered by the examples of those in Scripture who were faithful to God but did not experience "success" as we conventionally understand it. From our limited, human perspective, it is easy to assume that "success," in terms of prosperity, is a sign of God's blessing, and that adversity is a sign of God's displeasure or, at least, of withholding His blessing. However, the book of

Job is emphatic that such assumptions are invalid. It illustrates clearly that there is no necessary correlation between our faithfulness to God and any visible, measurable outworking of it.

In Ecclesiastes, we read of "the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness" (Eccl 7:15). The psalmists, too, speak of "the prosperity of the wicked," and how it can be a stumbling block to the faithful (Pss 73; 78). Isaiah, even in his divine commissioning, was assured by God *in advance* that his message would fail in bringing Israel to repentance (Isa 6). The author of Hebrews tells of Old Testament individuals who were commended for their faith, yet "all these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth" (Heb 11:13).

Was John the Baptist effective in his ministry when he was beheaded? Were Paul and Barnabas successful in Pisidian Antioch, when they were driven out of the region? And if we were to attempt to measure the effectiveness of Jesus' ministry at the time of His crucifixion according to what we could see and measure—from a human perspective—what would our chosen metrics have shown? There is a sense in which measurable metrics and defined time frames for measuring results for the kingdom of God are faulty.

Time-Bound Goals and Eternity

Although we live within time and develop goals for stretches of time, we minister in light of eternity and within the purposes of a God who is not bound by time; we are to "judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God" (1 Cor 4:5). This caution, too, should temper every human attempt at evaluation. Although we rightly seek clarity by evaluating results for months and years, some successes simply will not be made known in this age. There may be situations where every measurable metric would cry, "Failure!" But who is to say that those metrics are not actually missing something that is a "success" in heaven's economy?

The Unpredictable Enabler

God declares through Isaiah, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:9). In any endeavor of evaluation, we must guard against projecting on God our assumptions of how He is at work in a situation. Cox et al. (2007), in their presentation of RBM, consider the "enablers" and "constraints" that provide the "context" of an undertaking (4). These varied factors influence a project in positive and negative ways, respectively. When we recognize that God is the key enabler of the projects we plan and evaluate, we must also recognize that He is not predictable—nor should we expect Him to be. As Jesus describes, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

When Jesus sent out the Twelve, and later when He sent out seventy-two disciples, He included instructions for them to "shake the dust off [their] feet" as a testimony against any place that would not welcome or listen to them (Matt 10:14–15; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5; 10:10–12). Paul and Barnabas later carried out this action of warning when they were driven out of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:44–52). In such situations, it was not "wrong" for the disciples to go to minister to those who would be resistant to their message. Rather, they were faithful, obedient in going as they were sent. These examples show that there may be a time when it is appropriate for us, too, to move on (evaluation may suggest a change of *direction*), but that does not at all suggest our failure (personal *accountability*) to carry out God's purposes. Like the disciples whom Jesus first sent out, we today are sent not only to those who will receive us but also to those who will reject us. God's ways are not our ways.

Proposals

Thus, we present four key proposals for appropriate evaluation, particularly in light of a widening embrace of RBM principles. In attempting evaluation, we must: (1) clarify the purpose of evaluation, including impact-focused RBM evaluation; (2) acknowledge

the need for various "levels" of evaluation with varying purposes and areas of focus; (3) practice humility in carrying out any kind of evaluation; and (4) carefully consider what we mean by "success," in light of the witness of Scripture.

Clarity of RBM Purpose

The focus of an evaluation should align well with its purpose. When an evaluation focuses on the impact of a ministry, its purpose should be to provide clarity toward determining the ministry's next steps. Where this alignment exists, RBM can provide valuable feedback toward moving forward wisely. However, a potentially harmful misalignment of RBM occurs when impact-focused evaluation is used for holding workers accountable for their work, and especially when it is used to discern or hold those workers accountable for their spiritual condition. It is important not only to maintain an appropriate alignment of focus and purpose but also to communicate clearly the purpose of evaluation, so that misunderstandings among stakeholders do not lead to frustrations and other unintended consequences.

Levels of Evaluation

"What gets evaluated gets done." Malphurs (1999) provides a helpful caution to leaders and organizations, "What we choose to evaluate sends a message to our people. It says this is important; whereas something else is not as important, because it isn't evaluated" (202). In light of this observation, the next key proposal is that we give attention to evaluating what is important. It is true, of course, that impact in mission is important, and a key benefit of RBM is that it causes us to give more attention to this aim than we may have in the past, emphasizing activities and products. However, in our focus on impact, we must not neglect other important aims, including the workers' spiritual condition and their diligent labor toward impact they may or may not see.

It is good to celebrate measurable milestone achievements in our ministries and the impact they represent (Brown et al. 2006, 5). However, we must be careful not to elevate those measures to the point of neglecting other important evidences of God's working. Cruse (1999) seeks balance, "No ministry 'totals' can be considered small and insignificant when accompanied by an ever-increasing knowledge of God displayed through our character in the context of genuinely righteous relationships" (53).

Humility in Evaluation

Glasser (1968) considers missionary planning "an impossible, even dangerous task, chiefly because no human strategy can ever suffice for a divine enterprise," and he rightly calls us to plan with "holy fear" (178).[3] This third proposal, humility in evaluation, is the overflow of recognizing our human limitations in any endeavor of planning and evaluation. We are bound by time; God is not. Our perspective is distorted by sin and prone to error; God's is not. We do not see the whole picture; God does. And so, as we seek *God's* wisdom and direction and *God's* assessment of our doing and being, we acknowledge that our evaluations and planning in this age must remain tentative and ready to change as God reveals His purposes more fully to us.

Reconceiving "Success"

When the seventy-two disciples whom Jesus had sent out returned to Him with joy at the "impact" they had seen in their ministry, Jesus spoke to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. *However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven"* (Luke 10:17–20; emphasis added). Jesus gently reminded His joyous followers that they were more than their ministry. We read in Matthew 7 of others who prophesy, cast out demons, and perform many miracles in Jesus' name. To these people, however, Jesus' response is severe: "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matt 7:21-23) These two passages show unmistakably that activities and even impact are not the ultimate measure of "success."

Even when we establish the "right" goals to help guide our activities wisely and to keep us accountable as part of the body of Christ, we can still have a wrong way of thinking about those goals, a way that can pose as a threat to our faithfulness to God by drawing us away from God's heart in the matter. Contrary to the conventional understanding of "success," achieving measurable goals in ministry may have little or no correlation to "success" in God's eyes.

[3] Quoted in Terry and Payne (2013, 34).

Cruse (1999) likewise refers to Peter's perspective on "effectiveness" as an encouragement to faithful workers who may have seen few visible results in their ministries:

> For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. *For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. (2 Pet 1:5-9; emphasis added)

Cruse concludes, "Godly character plus faithful perseverance always equals fruitfulness and a deeper experience of our Lord Jesus," even when results seem to be lacking (52).

We began this paper with an admission that evaluation can be a sensitive topic, but perhaps it need not be. When we reconceive "success" to be more than simply *what we do* or *the impact associated with those activities*, the sense of vulnerability we experience with the assessment of those areas is decreased. And when we recognize the proper, but limited, purposes of evaluation—whether for informing our direction or providing healthful accountability—we can better embrace it for the real benefits it provides.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the biblical basis for humble evaluation as a clarifying step in wise stewardship and as a manifestation of our interdependence as members of the one body of Christ. It has recognized the helpful shift in planning focus from outputs toward impact brought about by the RBM model, and it has noted RBM's strengths of acknowledging decreasing levels of control in moving toward impact and of adapting flexibly to various contexts. It has also identified objections to the RBM model and discussed the alignment of evaluation purpose and focus as a way to address some of

those concerns. Finally, the paper has acknowledged some limitations to all human planning and evaluation, and it has drawn out four key proposals for appropriately carrying out evaluation.

Planning is good. As Terry and Payne (2013) note, it is "part of the process that Jesus uses to build his church" (33). Although inappropriate evaluation can be unhelpful or even harmful, appropriate evaluation remains a good, helpful, and necessary part of life and ministry, one that helps us grow individually, as a team or ministry, as an organization, and as the body of Christ. Amid all the questions surrounding "success" and "effectiveness" in ministry, we ultimately seek to act faithfully and wisely with desired *impact* in mind but entrusting the outcomes of our *activities* to God, whatever they may be, for His glory.

> With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 1:11–12)

Appendix: One story of apparent failure

In the 1980s, my wife and I[4] joined with another couple to begin Scripture translation among a people group who had no real access to God's Word. There was one known follower of Christ (who was no longer living among her people) among this group of over 200,000 people. Our team had a shared God's kingdom dream that included faithful and clear Scripture translation, local people having growing literacy skills and a hunger to know and obey Scripture, families at peace with God and with one another, community leaders who are led by God, indigenous forms of worship, and that the people group would become secure in their place in the nation, confident in the richness of their language and culture, exercising dominion over God's creation around them. We had a vision of kingdom impact and outcomes in the lives of individuals, communities, and the people group as a whole.

After several years of ministry, seeing very little response among the people, we confided our disappointments to workers ministering among a neighboring people group who shared many of the characteristics of the people we were serving. This couple had been in ministry there for about ten years longer than we had. They told us of a time when they felt exactly as we did and were seriously considering giving up and going to serve with a people group who wanted God's Word and would commit people and resources to Scripture translation. But as they looked around at about a dozen people groups in that region, they recognized that thirty years before then, there were no local churches among those people groups, but Scripture translation had begun among each of the people groups, and in most of them, churches had emerged, and new believers had God's Word in their language to guide the formation and growth of churches. This couple chose to remain where God had placed them.

[4] Author name for this testimony can be provided upon request.

It is now about twenty-five years since that conversation with our co-workers serving the neighboring people group. Among that group, there are now perhaps 100 believers in several villages who are engaging with God's Word and with one another, serving as lights in their communities. There are no known local churches among the people group among whom we were serving. During the past twenty years, there have been several occasions where it looked like Christ was about to build His church among them, and we were hoping to see the kind of impact that we have been dreaming about since we began. We continue to pray and serve.

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