

EVANGELISM AND THE MARGINS: LIVING JESUS' TRANSFORMATIONAL
NARRATIVE OF LOVE AND OUTREACH

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of
Drew University in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Ministry

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Madison, New Jersey
November 2017

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ABSTRACT

EVANGELISM AND THE MARGINS: LIVING JESUS' TRANSFORMATIONAL NARRATIVE OF LOVE AND OUTREACH

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This project examines the interplay between marginalization and evangelism. The concept and perceptions around both topics are complex. Evangelism as presented in the socio-historical context of the bible and modern society is not one dimensional. There are many blurred lines when attempting to understand evangelism from a biblical and modern perspective. For those who are marginalized, it is extremely relevant and worthy of examination because of the demeaning and painful effect it has on those who have lived on the fringes. Marginalization is life changing and radically changes the ways in which those marginalized interact with others, conceive the world, and develop their own self-perceptions. In any sphere, marginalization is humiliating, but it has a particularly jarring effect when experienced in the context of the church that is supposed to exemplify edification and liberation.

The connection between evangelism and marginalization might not seem obvious at first glance, but an examination of Jesus' ministry reveals he often performed some of the most impactful evangelism in the margins. It is within the periphery of community,

church, and society that we witnessed some of the greatest forms of ministry by someone who himself was relegated to the margins.

I partnered with Grant Chapel AME Church to examine the effects marginalization had upon evangelism and to explore ways the church could address its negative effects. Grant Chapel AME Church members shared their views surrounding marginalization and evangelism through two focus groups, an online survey and a five-week bible study. As a community of faith, we analyzed the stories of Jesus in the gospels, specifically stories where he experienced marginalization. We then compared the practice of evangelism in the biblical context with its practice in the current socio-historical context. The project results demonstrated the need to reimagine the approach to evangelism today and the extensive work needed to provide a clear understanding of evangelism within the community of faith, in connection to Jesus' example provided in the Gospels. It was also instructive for revealing the impressions we leave on others when we interact with members within and outside of our faith community.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to first thank God for allowing me to complete this work. I would also like to express my sincerest gratitude and appreciation to everyone at Grant Chapel Church who walked with me throughout this journey. As Pastor Byrd often said, “We’re getting our Doctorate!” Thank you for all the focus groups you attended, the surveys you completed, and the bible studies you participated in. I could never have completed this work if not for your love and support. A special thanks to my Advisory Committee who provided lots of feedback along the way and helped shape the project. Thank you, Reverend Vernon Byrd Jr. and Reverend Dr. Melinda Contreras-Byrd, for your leadership as the Pastor and Co-Pastor of Grant Chapel AME Church. I appreciated all the prayers, support, and suggestions you provided along the way. I am especially grateful for the enthusiasm and passion you displayed around the topic. Your passion often served as fuel for my work. You both are true models of love and kindness. Thank you to Reverend Dr. Sheila Gipson who prophetically spoke into my life one Sunday morning while announcing me as the preacher for the hour. You told me it was time to get my Doctorate and called me Dr. before I caught the vision. If not for that moment, I’m not sure when I would have begun this journey. Thank you also to Reverend Dr. Buster Soaries who helped me conceive the idea for my project and provided the initial support for me to begin. A special thanks to my mother and father in ministry, the Reverend Dr. Floyd and Reverend Dr. Elaine Flake. Through your leadership, love, support, and example, my ministry was birthed at the Greater Allen Cathedral. You were the first people to show me what ministry was all about. You have never stopped

supporting me through the journey. Thank you for your continued mentorship and for remaining as my spiritual parents and covering. In addition, thanks for helping me get started with this doctorate program, being a sounding board as needed, and providing me with a platform to begin to test out some of my concepts. Thank you to my advisors, Dr. Leonard Sweet, Dr. Terry Todd and Dr. Gary Simpson for your help and guidance throughout this program. Finally, I want to thank my family. A special thanks to my parents, Paul and Aviole, for always supporting my efforts and dreams. You have always been the most encouraging parents a person could ask for. Mom and Pop, this is especially for you! A special thanks to my brother, Paul and sister, Vivianne, who understood why I had to miss so many of our sibling bonding time to write. Last but certainly not least, my two boys, Jayson and Christian. Thank you for sharing me with countless hours of academic work for the last three years. You are the best children a mother could ask for, and the greatest gift God could have ever given me. With that, to God be the glory. AMEN!

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

—Matthew 18:12-14

Living in a society which is willing to discard people, it is difficult to fathom a God who rejoices when ordinary people are saved. The idea that Jesus Christ would be willing to leave his heavenly home with all its glory to seek out one lost soul in a broken world does not make sense to the average mind. Why would the son of God leave a place of honor at the right hand of the Father to find a lost homeless woman and celebrate when she is found? Why would God value the life of a Hollywood superstar as much as the life of a prostitute and celebrate alike when the prostitute or Hollywood star is born again? How can God demonstrate the same willingness to die for both a Prime Minister and a murderer? We serve a God who baffles our minds with radical love and outreach to all who are hungry for a meal, thirsty for a drink, and in dire need of a friend.

Jesus specialized in hanging out with people in the margins and making them whole again. Jesus unequivocally demonstrated the importance of leaving the crowd of ninety-nine and finding the one lost person- no matter where they reside. It was

inconsequential if people were from the proverbial “wrong side of the tracks.” Jesus accepted them, ushered in healing, taught a new way of life through faith in Him, and demonstrated love even when others did the opposite. Maybe Jesus loved those on the margins because that is where he landed when he arrived on earth. Judith E.B. Roberts states,

Jesus lived in the margins. He was friends with the invisible of society, the despised and the oppressed. He, too, was rejected, excluded and considered to be an outsider by those with power. As disciples, we are called to be in mission with the lonely, the oppressed, the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, the angry and those suffering in mind, body and spirit.¹

Marginalization can be a difficult concept to address because it deals with power structures which are often fluid. A person can enjoy a position of power and influence in their home but instantly lose that sense of supremacy when they enter another setting. As such, sometimes marginalization can feel like too big of a topic to address, define, or even tackle. However, if you have ever been made to feel marginalized, it does not feel like a monumental task. Rather, it feels very personal and very painful. Being on the other end of marginalization can forever change your life, the way you interact with others, think about the world, and even look at yourself. Feeling marginalized at work, school, or in everyday life can feel unbearable. Nevertheless, when marginalization occurs within the church community, it can be even more devastating because it can catch you off guard.

The first time you are demeaned, rejected, or become a target of exclusion within a Christian faith community (for whatever reason) it can make you question your faith

¹ Judith E. B. Roberts, “Discipleship with the Marginalized at the Centre,” *International Review of Mission* 103, no. 399 (November 2014): 189.

and impact your ability or desire to bring others into the church community. For many of us, witnessing the debilitating pain caused in these moments can forever change our lives, our relationships, our mission, and our ministry. Witnessing marginalization within the faith community can be the catalyst for an extended research project as in my case. As such, I partnered with Grant Chapel AME Church to examine and address the interplay between marginalization and evangelism.

The initial connection between evangelism and marginalization might not seem as obvious at first glance. However, when we examine Jesus' ministry, we often see he performed some of the greatest demonstrations of evangelism in the margins. It was in the margins he met a woman at a well and offered her living water and friendship.² It was during dinner with a despised tax collector that Jesus introduced salvation to an entire household; and it was under the veil of night that Jesus taught a curious politician a lesson about being born again. Within the periphery of community, church, and society we witness some of the greatest forms of ministry by Jesus who was relegated to the margins. Following in the footsteps of Jesus, we in the community of faith must begin to examine how we are bringing the good news to people especially those who are often cast aside to the margins.

Through my work with Grant Chapel AME Church we examined the age-old question, "What would Jesus do?" as we explored who currently and historically have been relegated to the margins by the same people who should be welcoming them as a brother or sister in faith. As a congregation, we asked the question, "What could we learn from the crumbs Jesus left behind for us to follow, specifically in terms of how he

² Leonard Sweet, *AquaChurch 2.0: Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 1999), 37.

was often found hanging with people on the fringes of society?” What lessons did Jesus teach us about evangelism to those often rejected by others and how we could to bring forth the good news through love on the peripheries? We also delved into how we define evangelism and compared our understanding to examples seen in the Gospels. Finally, we asked the question, “Why was Jesus often found at the periphery of society, sharing the good news with those often rejected by those in the center of wealth, politics, and influence?” Asking a church to engage in conversations around marginalization and evangelism was both ambitious and difficult. As I quickly learned, many people carried strong opinions on both topics mired in deep unresolved hurt, often inflicted upon them by their very own communities of faith. My research approach, therefore, was to center the conversations on the examples of how Jesus himself evangelized in the margins.

When engaging in a dialogue with renowned theologian, Dr. Leonard Sweet, I asked him to share his thoughts about how Jesus evangelized to people. He shared a profound statement with me which I carried into my project and subsequently became an anchor in my ministry. He said, “Jesus never healed anyone the same way...he tailored each healing to each person. Jesus never reached out to anyone the same way...he customized each evangel to each person. There is no one right way to evangelize...only a multiplicity of right ways as long as they are missional, (go into all the world), relational (make disciples of Jesus) and incarnational (in all cultures).

With that, a beautiful journey began as together the members of Grant Chapel AME Church and I examined the multiplicity of ways Jesus brought forth salvation through a ministry of love and outreach.

Project Scope

The scope of this project was limited to the adult faith community of Grant Chapel AME Church. Participants were those attending a five-week bible study session from February 2017 through March 2017, and members from the faith community who volunteered to be part of the focus groups and online surveys.

Methodology

The project consisted of a five-week teaching series for Grant Chapel AME Church exploring how practices of marginalization can inhibit evangelism. Content development was influenced by data gathered from a church survey and two focus groups, where congregants had an opportunity to share their experiences and understanding of marginalization and evangelism. Following the five-week bible study, participants were asked to complete a post series survey to assess the impact of the teachings on their understanding of key terms and intended behaviors.

The bible study series was designed to be discussion based, allowing personal narratives to surface and participants to engage one another. Throughout the series, we compared current events from a cultural and theological perspective, to situations Jesus dealt with in the Gospels.

At the close of the project, I attempted to observe if discernable transformation occurred in terms of participants' understanding and desire to lean into Jesus' way of approaching people from all walks of life, and introducing them to the Gospel in a loving and approachable manner. Could we learn to be intentional in our rhetoric and become a church focused on ensuring no one feels marginalized when they engage with us?

Key Terms:

Evangelism: the spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness.

In the *International Review of Mission*, evangelism can be defined as follows,

Evangelism in the way of Christ is an invitation to experience and proclaim the festive message of the resurrection and of the salvation of the whole creation in Jesus. It is witnessing to God's reconciling, restoring, and healing activity in history. It is a call to a new life; a life of service and humility, repentance and prayer, a life of following the example of Christ, from here and now until the end of time. . . . Every church and local congregation is called to announce the great message of hope, and should become a healing, reconciling community in full *koinonia* with the universal church. It does this through proclamation and witness according to the scriptures, confession of faith in worship and in *diakonia*, all the glory of the triune God.³

The journal as with many other sources links evangelism and discipleship stating, "The commandment to make disciples of all nations makes world evangelism fundamental to the missions of the church."⁴

The technical definition of a *disciple* is one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another (Christ). Throughout my studies, I have witnessed a blurred line between discipleship and evangelism and demonstrate this in my project.

Marginalized: to put or keep (someone) in a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group.

Unconscious Bias: a bias we are unaware of, which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain, making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences. Also known as implicit social cognition,

³ World Council of Churches, "Evangelism: Witnessing to Our Hope in Christ," *International Review of Mission* 101, no. 1 (April 2012), 80, accessed September 16, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2012.00089.x>.

⁴ Ibid.

implicit **bias** refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an **unconscious** manner.

Chapter 2

GRANT CHAPEL AME CHURCH HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Grant Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church located in Trenton, NJ was founded in 1929. Over the last eighty-eight years, Grant Chapel has grown from a thirteen-member church where services were once held in a private home, into a thriving church with approximately 160 members. Within the last fifteen years, 45% of the membership growth has occurred.¹ The present sanctuary dubbed, “Miracle on Mercer Street” by current pastor, Vernon Byrd Jr. is the fifth home of the church and is based in the heart of the Mill Hills District, a quant historic neighborhood in the New Jersey state capital.

The church’s growth has been steady over the years with 75% of the members joining within the last fifteen to thirty years. The current population is a tight knit group consisting of a number of families with long standing membership and some newcomers who joined after visiting.

¹ Anita Rawls, “2015 Membership Survey Results for Grant Chapel African American Episcopal Church,” (report for church, April 10, 2016), 4.

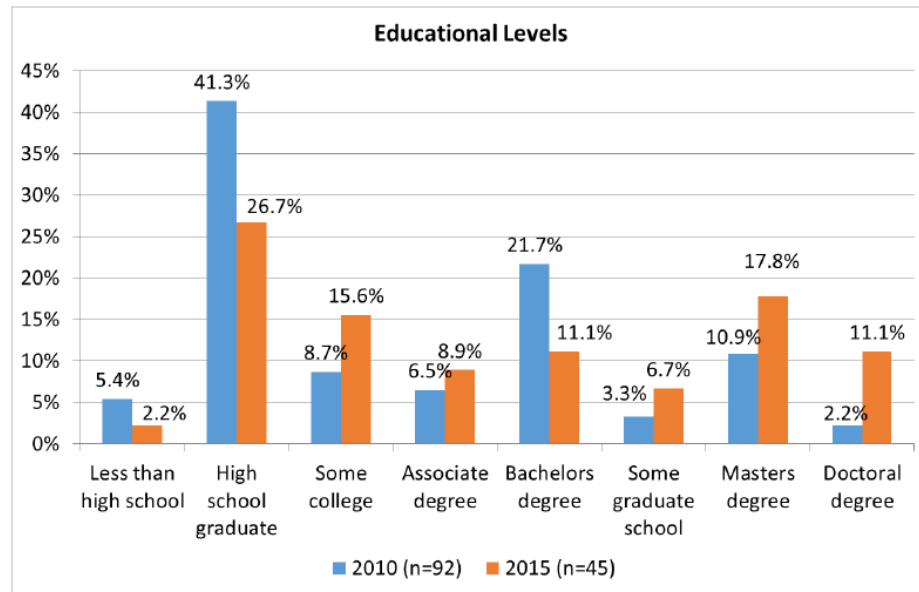


Figure 1. Educational Levels of Grant Chapel AME Church Members

Source: Anita Rawls, “2015 Membership Survey Results for Grant Chapel African American Episcopal Church,” (report for church, April 10, 2016), 4

Although Grant Chapel is an African Methodist Episcopal church, the congregants at weekly services are ethnically and racially diverse. This creates a weekly space where people of diverse backgrounds—who might not associate with one another under ordinary circumstances—can come together as one and demonstrate love and hospitality. Even though the majority of those taking advantage of the programs and services are African American, a significant number of attendees are Latino, White, and Jew. According to a 2015 membership survey, 56% of members earned a postsecondary degree and 42.3% of members earned a high school diploma as noted in figure 1.¹

¹ Ibid., 7.

Members have careers spanning a broad spectrum of industries. In 2015, the most predominant areas of interests for members of Grant included culinary arts, event planning, personal development, and tax preparation.²

The other group which members over indexed in were retirees. Today there is a focus by Pastor Vernon Byrd on growing the young adult population (ages 18-40) as he believes this group will be the platform for the next wave of growth within the church. Pastor Byrd's vision is to see another church growth spurt similar to the one experienced a few years ago. He believes this can be achieved through a church-wide focus on evangelism and an internal focus on creating a welcoming atmosphere which will attract people who are looking for an inviting space to worship, learn and grow in faith. Both his teaching and preaching is reflective of his vision and centered on sharing God's transforming power. This focus is putting love into action.

Also, there is an intentional focus on social justice in the church embraced by all members. They have consistently joined together to stand hand-in-hand with their brothers and sisters in the surrounding community of different races, creeds, and religious affiliations for justice. The co-Pastor, Melinda Contreras-Byrd, has been an active agent alongside of her husband, Pastor Vernon Byrd, to lead members in marches and participate in rallies nationwide fighting for the civil rights of others. These include the incarcerated, women's rights, voting rights, and the rights of other minority groups experiencing injustice.

Grant's focus on social justice issues is very consistent with the rich history of the AME church, founded in 1816 by African Americans who wanted the right to freely worship. As history records it, white officials at St. George's Methodist Episcopal

² Ibid., 10.

Church grew uncomfortable with and resistant to the increased numbers of African Americans worshiping with them. One Sunday morning, as Absalom Jones and other members of the church were on their knees praying, the white officials tried to forcefully remove them from the altar. Mr. Jones responded, “Wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more.” When they concluded their prayers the black members of the church left and never returned again. Thus, began the movement to organize a separate church welcome to blacks that fulfilled their need for opportunities of self-expression and fuller involvement in the service of worship of God and in society as a whole.³

The desire to resist being pushed to the sidelines served as the catalyst in starting the AME church and has remained a central theme in the denomination even today. Every year as the leaders gather for annual conference, we are reminded of our history and responsibility to fight for those who may feel disenfranchised. The Council of Bishops regularly take on issues and encourage church engagement in matters of marginalization across various political, racial, and socioeconomic categories.

The leadership and members of Grant Chapel AME Church proudly follow in the footsteps of their rich heritage as a church founded on the principles of social justice. You can consistently hear echoes of this desire for justice for all in the teaching, preaching, and programming focus of the church. Given Grant’s history and vibrant worshipping community, it was a perfect location for a project centered on exploring the lessons Jesus left behind about evangelism and marginalization in the Gospels. The primary reason was

³ Andrew White, *Know Your Church Manual: The African Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: AMEC Publishing House, 1965), 5.

because the people and Pastor were both open to this conversation and had a desire to create a space which was welcoming to all.

About Trenton, NJ

Trenton, New Jersey is an urban community and the New Jersey state capital. It has experienced an economic decline and increase in crime rates over the last decade due to the economic downturn; consequently, there are natural concerns for safety within the church community. Some members have expressed concern about engaging in a street ministry especially after sunset. The increased crime rate and safety issues in the surrounding area have served as an impediment to participating in some traditional evangelistic opportunities. According to the 2010 census, the population of Trenton is 84,913.⁴ Single family homes comprise 60% of the housing sector with two out of five people owning their own home.

Trenton is currently trying to re-invent itself as a place suitable to live, work, and shop. Mayor, Eric Jackson—who replaced the previous mayor jailed for corruption—has set up a plan to revitalize the city based on four pillars: decrease in crime, improvements to public schools, an increase in economic development, and growth of the arts and culture.⁵

⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census. “Quick Facts Trenton City, New Jersey.” <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/3474000,00> (accessed March 26, 2016).

⁵ “Living Trenton: The Downtown Capitol District Master Plan,” City of Trenton, May 2008, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.trentonnj.org/cit-e-access/webpage.cfm?TID=55&TPID=9125>.

Table 1. Trenton, New Jersey Demographics and Educational Attainment

City Demographics & Facts	Educational Attainment
Population: 85,104	37% High School
Total Households: 28,608	5% Associates
Average Household size: 2.8	7% BA
Median Age: 33.4	14% Less than 9 th grade

Source: Data from “Living Trenton: The Downtown Capitol District Master Plan,” City of Trenton, May 2008, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.trentonnj.org/cit-e-access/webpage.cfm?TID=55&TPID=9125>.

The city of Trenton has a younger population than the country with larger households, lower levels of educational attainment, and a higher unemployment rate. The racial distribution is 50.8% black, 26.3% white, 4.3% mixed races, and 17.4% are other. Trenton has more than double the Hispanic population of the country, growing at a remarkable rate of 56.7% from 2000-2010. By 2018, it is estimated that 40% of the Trenton population will be Hispanic or Latino.⁶ The migration of the Hispanic population in Trenton serves another ministry growth opportunity for Grant Chapel AME Church. The church currently does not have any specific evangelistic programing aimed at attracting new members from the growing Hispanic population in Trenton.

The median household income is \$34,458, more than half of the county income of \$72,000. The state government is the largest employer with 57.3% of the jobs. Private sector jobs are decreasing, currently at 33.5%. Wage increases continue to lag in Trenton. During the initial focus group and subsequent bible study, some participants shared that the location of Grant Chapel church in West Trenton carried a negative connotation within the city. I was informed that West Trenton was often considered the less affluent

⁶ “Trenton Citywide Economic Market Study: Prepared for the City of Trenton Office of Housing and Economic Development, Fall 2014, preparers, Larisa Ortiz Associates, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.trentonnj.org/documents/TrentonCityWideMarketStudy.pdf>.

part of the city and in the eyes of some carried a negative stigma. Some members shared how they often feel others from surrounding communities look down upon them based on their location. So, we entered the conversation with a group of people who already identified with the sentiment of being marginalized by others and some members of surrounding churches. This helped create a greater sensitivity to the concepts of marginalization at the inception of the project.

This project was conducted at Grant Chapel AME Church from January 2017 through March 2017. The goal was to explore marginalization and its impact on evangelism by first allowing the members of Grant Chapel AME Church to share their views surrounding marginalization and evangelism through two focus groups and an online survey. During these focus groups, participants openly shared their personal narratives, views, concerns, perspectives, and lifelong experiences of how marginalization and evangelism impacted their lives. After conducting the initial research including a pre-bible study survey, I subsequently facilitated a five-week bible study series during which we explored how Jesus ministered to those in the margin, brought the Gospel to a wide-range of people, and how these biblical examples compared to our modern day understanding of what is required Christians today. At the close of the bible study, participants completed a post bible study survey to capture any changes in thoughts, perceptions, biblical understanding, and ultimately intended behaviors.

The project followed this timeline:

- ***October 2016:*** Identification and formation of the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC). Met with pastor to discuss potential LAC members and begin LAC outreach.
- ***November 2016:*** LAC meeting and outline of project idea. Received feedback on how to shape the project and potential activities.
- ***December 2016:*** LAC meeting to discuss the potential questions and how to set up focus group. Develop logistics and structure of focus group session.
- ***January 2017:*** LAC met to finalize focus groups and release of church survey. Facilitated two church focus groups to explore narratives surrounding views on marginalization and evangelism. Post session LAC meeting to discuss learnings from focus group. Conduct baseline survey surrounding views of marginalization and evangelism.
- ***February 2017:*** Began five-week bible series.
- ***March 2017:*** Completed five-week bible series.
- ***April 2017:*** Final LAC meeting to discuss project conclusion.

Pre-Bible Study Research Focus Group

On January 24, 2017, I conducted two ninety-minute focus groups to explore narratives of the church. These focus groups provided members of the congregation with an opportunity to share their narratives in a safe setting.

Pre-Bible Study Survey

Prior to launching the five-week bible study, I also conducted a twelve-question survey to provide additional members of the church an opportunity to share feedback on the topics of marginalization and evangelism. This also provided me with quantitative research data to support the qualitative data derived from the two focus groups. It also served as good baseline research results which were compared to the post bible study survey. My goal was to use the data to see which areas I saw the greatest changes in thoughts and perceptions.

Chapter 3

JESUS EVANGELIZING IN THE MARGINS: RE-IMAGINING EVANGELISM

Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.

—Luke 18:31-33

Jesus shared with his closest friends that he was about to be ridiculed, brutalized, and eventually murdered. He told them it was time to begin the journey to Jerusalem for the Passion. If we knew we were about to die, what would we do with the precious time left? Would we go to our best friend, Lazarus’ house to hang out one last time? Would we try to laugh one last laugh? Would we dance one last dance or drink one last drink? Would we ask our beloved Martha to cook our favorite meal one last time? If this decision was ours to make, any of those choices might suffice. This was not the case for Jesus.

When confronted with the reality that he was about to begin his final journey to Jerusalem to die, Jesus did decide to make an unexpected stop for dinner. He made a detour to meet with an enemy of the state who acquired his riches by being the ringleader of a band of thieves who took advantage of others. He decided to make a dinner date with a man who was despised by the widows he robbed, rejected by the community he abused, and hated by the religious leaders who deemed him a sinner. On his way to the cross, Jesus sought out a despised tax collector and called him by name. He didn’t call him a sinner or remind him of the laundry list of crimes he had committed against his

community. Instead, he lovingly insisted on staying at this despised tax collector's house after one encounter. What a discussion they must have had at the dinner table. We will never know the exact conversation, but we do know Zacchaeus was a changed man afterwards. Jesus declared, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."¹

While we try so hard to emulate Jesus, he was truly authentic in all situations. This was both the radicalness and the power of his ministry. When he called upon his disciples, he called the doctor, the fisherman, and the tax collector alike. Jesus viewed everyone as human with whom he was willing to share his own humanity to give them a substance which would cause them to hunger no more. Throughout the gospels, we see Jesus lovingly interacting with and sharing the gospel with people others often rejected. Jesus was willing to cross boundaries and break all the rules to go out of his way to meet a woman hiding out at a well after being shunned by her community and offer her some living water. Jesus was willing to engage the curious politician who came lurking in the shadows of the night and tell him he needed to be born again.

Jesus left us with a multitude of lessons on how we can similarly share the Gospel with others while simultaneously reminding us each evangel was unique to the need of the person. There were no margins which separated him from the people. After he was murdered and rose again, before heading back to heaven, he gave his followers their own mission to go out and spread the gospel throughout the four corners of the earth. Jesus commanded us to evangelize to make disciples to carry on the work he started.

In the article, "Millennials and the Great Commission," Jason Devries states:

¹ Lk19:9-10 (NRSV).

Evangelism is the act of proclaiming the good news of the gospel of Jesus. Discipleship, on the other hand, is the lifelong process of becoming like Jesus. When we read the Great Commission in Matthew, we see that Jesus never lays out a detailed plan for how to do it. It's assumed that the disciples know what Jesus is talking about. It's assumed they know what it means to be a disciple. Where would they have learned this? From Jesus. From watching him and living with him for three years. How can we learn this? From reading the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Discipleship assumes that evangelism has taken place.²

Richard Phillips shares a similar notion suggesting, if we want to learn how to evangelize to others, it would be wise to begin with the Gospels:

There is no better place to start than with the accounts of the ministry of Jesus Himself, for Jesus was an evangelist. The Bible says that Jesus went about among the people, 'proclaiming the gospel'. Just as Jesus is our primary model for faith, obedience, prayer, and good works, Jesus the Evangelist should be our model for the sharing of His gospel.³

If we want to experience the power of God in our gospel witness, we must follow biblical principles of evangelism; we must present the gospel in clear, scriptural terms; and we must follow Jesus' example in the practice of evangelizing actual people.⁴ Although I agree with this statement, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that evangelism as presented in the bible cannot fit in a singular box. In the bible, evangelism takes many forms, adding to its complexity. As you explore the pages of the bible, it becomes evident there is not one definition for evangelism. Depending on the context of the scripture and the reader's perspective, a variety of interpretations are possible.

In his paper, "Evangelism from the Margins" Peter Cruchley-Jones states, "The original meaning of the word evangelism, "gospel" is a technical term in Greek, meaning

² Jason DeVries, "Millennials and the Great Commission," *Banner*, April 22, 2016, accessed, August 17, 2017, <http://thebanner.org/departments/2016/04/millennials-and-the-great-commission>.

³ Richard Phillips, *Jesus the Evangelist: Learning to Share the Gospel from the Book of John* (Florida: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007), 2.

⁴ Phillips, *Jesus the Evangelist*, 4.

the announcement of a great military victory, or the rule of a new king or emperor.”⁵

Cruchley-Jones continues to paint evangelism in the light of a conquest stating,

Walter Bruggemann explores Old Testament paradigms of evangelism and argues that evangelism has these imperial echoes too as the proclamation of victory of Yahweh. In Isaiah 52:7 we hear the Old Testament gospel: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” The good news is that God has triumphed-salvation is accomplished, the empire is defeated, exiled people will return. The gospel is the news of God’s victory.⁶

Theologian and bible commentator Andrew Kirk also presents a more aggressive view of evangelism sometimes referred to as imperial evangelism which assumes we are “sent from the center to proclaim good news to the poor at the margins.”⁷ He defines it as “spreading the good news that in Jesus Christ, God is establishing a new order and calling people to renounce all alternatives and embrace this reality.”⁸ While some theologians enjoy citing scriptures which depict a militaristic spreading of the gospel, there are still some who view evangelism in a more gentle manner. John Howard Yoder argued for the essential vulnerability of the gospel as a genre of communication. He states, “In a biblical view of evangelism, evangelism is not the advertisement for a product to be sold, nor a license for forceful proselytization, but the proclamation of the victory of the vulnerable, suffering Servant of God.”⁹ Bryan Stone too tries to depict a

⁵ Peter Cruchley-Jones, “Evangelism from the Margins: Experiences of the Ironic in Evangelism in Cardiff, UK,” *International Review of Mission*, 105, no. 1 (July 2016): 33, accessed September 11, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/irom.12137>.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

gentler view of evangelism. Cruchley-Jones says, “Stone sets out self-consciously to construct a post imperial model of evangelism when Stone states, ‘The most evangelistic thing the church can do today is to be the church to be formed imaginatively of the Holy Spirit through core practices such as worship, forgiveness, hospitality, and economic sharing into a distinctive people in the world, a new social option, the body of Christ.’”¹⁰

Scripture does not have one neat way of looking at evangelism. Whether we look to Old Testament Scriptures like Gen 12:2-3 which served as a covenant with Abraham and the calling of God’s people as a corporate entity in all the earth to experience God’s blessings, or Psalm 96 where David sang a song witnessing that Israel’s identity was bound up with the calling to share the good news about the one and only living God with all the nations we can see evangelism at work in the scriptures. We can even turn towards the Gospels in the New Testament where we see numerous texts highlighting the responsibility of the faith community to spread the good news. In an article on evangelism the World Council of Church states, “In his ministry, Jesus steadily unfolded that it is specifically through his death on the cross and his resurrection that salvation was to be won. His last instruction was to disciple the nations, and it is for this reason that the Holy Spirit was sent to empower God’s people.”¹¹

What does evangelism mean? Rick Richardson, Director of the Masters in Evangelism Program at Wheaton College defines evangelism as, “telling the story of God’s ultimate victory over darkness, in our world and in our soul. Evangelism is inviting

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ World Council of Churches, “Evangelism,” 83.

people to take their part in that big story.”¹² It’s a definition that opens up the opportunities for anyone to evangelize with a willingness to go on a journey with another person. It truly allows us to re-imagine what evangelism can be using Jesus as our guide.

Charles Spurgeon adds a beautiful poetic thought to the definition of evangelism once saying, “evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread.” He romantically suggests a commonality and camaraderie between the evangelist and the evangelized, which in practice is lost in the zeal for empire building of aggressive churches.¹³ This zeal experienced by many has stained the sentiments Spurgeon tries to suggest in his definition of evangelism. Oftentimes, evangelism is not experienced as two equals trying to find sweet bread but instead one greater trying to force the lesser to eat his bread even before finding common grounds to share a meal together.

Like many subjects in the bible, there remains varied voices and interpretations on how to define and approach the matter. For many today, the word inspires a visceral reaction. According to Richardson, “Over the years, evangelism has gotten a bad name. It is sales, manipulation, TV preachers, big hair, pushing people to convert and going door to door. It elicits feelings similar to the intrusive practices of telemarketing.”¹⁴ Rebecca Manley Pippert, an expert in evangelism, agrees: “There was a part of me that secretly felt, evangelism was something you shouldn’t do to your dog let alone a friend...As an agnostic I was offended when I was treated as a person’s evangelistic project vs. a

¹² Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 25-26.

¹³ Cruchley-Jones, “Evangelism from the Margins,” 30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

person.”¹⁵ Therein lies a major problem with the concept of evangelism: It is often associated with people treating others as targets to convert instead of accepting them on their own terms, looking for ways to show love and grace.

Many have tried to come up with the perfect formula or prescription for evangelism which often left the recipient with a negative impression of the experience. Theologian Leonard Sweet explains this negativity: “When you leave an impression, you leave a dent. Too many Christians are leaving an impression of hate and dent of condemnation, not of love and salvation. Jesus did not come to condemn the world, he said, but to save the world.”¹⁶ Sweet offers a corrective to this called, “nudge evangelism,” which is, “impressing” upon everyone you meet, the goodness, truth, and beauty of Jesus. To nudge is to impress on people how special they are and how much Jesus loves them.”¹⁷ He then provides a series of interactive opportunities to readers and offers, “You will find in these interactives practical suggestions about how to make your nudge as simple as a smile, as profound as a prayer, as complex as a meal, as subtle as a story, as venturesome as a witness, as ambitious as an altar call.”¹⁸

Sweet reinforces an aspect of this Jesus left behind. There is no one right way to evangelize. Jesus treated people as individuals and approached each person and conversation differently. As Pippert asserts:

¹⁵ Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and Into The World: Evangelism as a Way of Life* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 16.

¹⁶ Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 2010), 3.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

In Jesus we have our model for how to relate to the world, and it is a model of openness and identification. Jesus was a remarkably open man. He didn't think it was unspiritual for him (fully realizing he was the Son of God) to share his physical needs. He didn't fear losing his testimony by revealing to his disciples the depths of his emotional stress in the Garden of Gethsemane.¹⁹

Through Jesus' life and ministry, we learn a myriad of very important lessons on evangelism. We should take notice of the people we are talking to. We should always honor and respect their humanity by exposing but not imposing our faith on them. In an article by the World Council of Christians we read,

As we look at the ministry and teaching of Jesus, we see that he is the source of the gospel-he is the good news. He is also the one to whom Christians should look as our model of evangelistic methodologies. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." (John 20:21) The self-employing of the servant who lived among the people, sharing in their hopes and suffering, giving his life on the cross for all humanity-this was Christ's way of proclaiming the good news, and as disciples we are summoned to follow the same way.²⁰

These lessons are important in the face of a declining number of United States citizens who are religiously affiliated, and a concomitant increase in the religiously unaffiliated. This is illustrated in a 2015 Pew Study:

A growing share of Americans are religiously unaffiliated, including some who self-identify as atheists or agnostics as well as many who describe their religion as "nothing in particular." Altogether, the religiously unaffiliated (also called the "nones") now account for 23% of the adult population, up from 16% in 2007.²¹

¹⁹ Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker*, 30.

²⁰ World Council of Churches, "Evangelism," 92.

²¹ "U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious," Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life, November 3, 2015, accessed, March 18, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.

In light of this decline, it should be an imperative for Christians to pick up the crumbs Jesus left for us to follow and spread the good news to all. This includes re-imagining evangelism by following the examples Jesus gave us while also finding and/or rekindling a passion for evangelism. According to Sweet, “The passion for evangelism is nothing other than a passion for reading the signs of what God is up to, connecting the God-dots, signing up, and then laying down our lives on God’s dotted line”²² A good place to begin might just be in the margins to which Jesus was relegated. After all, there is a God and world waiting.

²² Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing. 2009), 23.

Chapter 4

LEFT OUT BUT NOT FORGOTTEN, MAYBE: THE SIDELINES

It is a profound irony that the Son of God visited this planet and one of the chief complaints against him was that he was not religious enough.

—Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World*

In life and in death, Jesus taught. He taught us how to live, love, and laugh, even as those in power tried to relegate him to the sidelines. Throughout his ministry this man, who was both human and God at the same time, was judged and misjudged. He had labels hurled at him and was riddled with insults. He defied logic with his compassion. This God, who could have entered this world with riches, splendor, and a royal brigade, chose to humbly come to earth as an illegitimate son of a carpenter and teenage girl. He chose to walk among the people others rejected and show them love. The labels, “Samaritan,” “despised tax collector,” “leper,” “adulterer,” “unclean,” “poor,” “widow, or “sinner” did not matter to him. Unfortunately, they matter to the church today as we place them on others.

Rick McKinley asserts the following:

There’s no doubt society possesses enormous power to name us and tell us who we are. To say whether we’re good or bad. To pronounce us acceptable or rejected. To tell us if we’re legitimate or illegitimate. It’s so hard to go through

life and not care about or be influenced by what people say and think, and their judgment stays with us. The labels stick.¹

The labels stuck yesterday and they stick today. It hurts when society marginalizes us but it devastates when marginalization occurs within the community of faith. Jesus clearly rejected this as evidenced by whom he chose to engage with despite the criticism he often received for those choices.

The technical definition of marginalization is to put or keep someone in a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group.² Marginalization can occur because of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, social or economic status, ability, health, appearance, and even marital status. As I mentioned in my introduction, because marginalization is based on power structures, marginalization can shift depending on where we sit at a given time. In her research on marginalization, Carolyn Kagan discovered the following:

People who are marginalized have relatively little control over their lives and the resources available to them; they may become stigmatized and are often at the receiving end of negative public attitudes. Their opportunities to make social contributions may be limited and they may develop low self-confidence and self-esteem.³

In churches across the nation, we sometimes see some of the greatest forms of marginalization when people within congregations might not always feel welcomed. The marginalization can occur when a pastor during a sermon ostracizes people based on their

¹ Rick McKinley, *Jesus in the Margins: Finding God in the Places We Ignore* (New York: Multnomah Books, 2005), 56.

² Merriam-Webster, s.v. “marginalize,” accessed September 17, 2016, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/marginalize.

³ Carolyn Kagan et al., “Working with People Who are Marginalized by the Social System: Challenges for Community Psychological Work,” *Community Psychology*, accessed November 2, 2016, <http://www.compsy.org.uk/margibarc.pdf>.

appearance, uses inflammatory terms to describe certain people, or makes negative comments about other races to get a laugh. It can also occur when leaders and/or members of a congregation gossip about people's past and/or current challenges, are uninviting to people of other religions, relegate some to lesser seats, make select people feel as if they cannot participate in certain church activities because of their status, or separate people based on socioeconomic status, illnesses, or their criminal backgrounds. Many people have stated they simply do not go to church anymore because they feel unwelcomed or offended by how they were treated by the church community. This was not the example Jesus modeled in the Gospels. He actively taught and demonstrated outreach to those on the margins through a narrative of love and evangelized to those who others often treated as second class citizens.

Although in some cases the reasons people were marginalized in the first century vs. the 21st century might not be identical, the sentiments and impact of being rejected and excluded remains the same. During our conversations in the bible study at Grant, we spent a lot of time comparing instances in the Gospel where Jesus ministered to those on the margins and through the narratives of the participants in the bible study. Remarkably, we found more similarities than differences. For example, when talking about the woman at the well, a participant in the bible study shared how she believed there is not much difference between then and now. Like biblical times, the faith community will still ostracize and label a woman if they do not approve of her sexual history, the number of times she has been married, or the way she chooses to live in society. She continued stating, people with disabilities today often still feel excluded. A gentleman continued her thoughts stating, like Zacchaeus, people in certain professions can experience the

heavy hand of judgment from others. I can personally remember how a Pastor once said to me, "I know you corporate types." I was not sure what crime I was being convicted for with his comment but based on his tone I knew being an executive in Corporate America automatically put me in some type of negative category in his mind.

Many shared very painful stories about why it is sometimes easier in a faith community to wear a mask and hide your past vs. dealing with the judgement of the church. I recall one man sharing how the fact that he had a history in the streets often made people treat him differently. Although he did not carry the Samaritan name, he could identify with the feelings of being judged based on geographical affiliations.

Writer and cultural theorist, bell hooks, describes people living in the margins as being, "part of the whole, but outside the main body... We could enter the world but we could not live there."⁴ The marginalized are often defined as people with a social disadvantage at a given time or situation who are forced to live on the fringes of society. Unfortunately, marginalization occurs in the church community too, which is antithetical to everything Jesus Christ embodied. There are many who go to the House of God for help but walk out feeling injured because of the words, attitudes, rejection, actions, and inactions of those in power and within the congregation. This is not a new phenomenon and one Jesus vigorously fought against within his teachings and ministry.

Whether his stance against marginalization was demonstrated by setting up an intentional meeting at a well with a woman living outside of wedlock, stopping the persecution of a woman caught in an adultery, lifting a young child up as an example, or

⁴ bell hooks, "marginality as site of resistance," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (New York and Cambridge: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and The MIT Press, 1990), 341.

ministering to a widow, disabled person, or the broken-hearted; without hesitation, Jesus worked to extend a hand to those others rejected. With countless examples of Jesus boldly speaking about the importance of outreach through love, why has the church community fallen short in doing the same for those in need? Today, as during biblical times, some of the harshest criticism, judgment, and pain have been inflicted on others by those who share the same faith. Yet, this was not the divine example Jesus left for us in the Gospels to follow.

If we are going forth to evangelize, we have to first deal with our own biases and judgments which can stand in the way as we strive to be more like Jesus. The Pharisees and community of faith condemned Jesus for his ministry to those in the margins. They cast him as radical for demonstrating love over religion, showing compassion over judgment, and for being a friend to the sinners. McKinley makes a powerful point about this:

Jesus is a friend of sinners. He's there in the margins with the average Joe, with people whose lives are broken and tattered and sinful. People who have had horrible things happen to them and done horrible things back. Jesus is there accepting them and tolerating their behaviors. Why? Because he wants them to know that he loves them.⁵

Jesus' demonstration of love for others created an opening for ministry. Through this we learn when we create the space where people are open to engage in a gospel conversation, transformation can occur. However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that Jesus had a unique ability to offend people. In his book, *The Bad Habits of Jesus* Sweet states:

⁵ McKinley, *Jesus in the Margins*, 56.

Jesus offended people with multiple anger episodes: when he saw how people were treating children, when he saw how a tree was hoarding its resources for itself and not feeding a hungry world, and when he saw a sacred courtyard turned exchanged.⁶

No one can argue that Jesus did not have a unique ability to offend others. However, Jesus did not make fun of others, gossip about their past, call them ugly, or push them to the sidelines when all they wanted was a seat in the house. How can we? To effectively evangelize to all, we must learn to deal with our biases. There are those who might argue that during certain interactions Jesus spoke harsh words to others, and leverage it as justification to excuse how some in the community of faith speak to one another. However, I would argue Jesus was purposeful and careful with his words. He frequently made astounding statements and asked provocative questions to test people and prove their intentions. This was seen in his dialogue with the Canaanite woman where he declined her initial request stating, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs”. On the surface, it would appear Jesus was engaging in a session of name calling. However, if you study the text to its conclusion you realize he was testing the woman using a common metaphor of the time. The conversation ended with him granting her request and then using her as an example to all the Jews to lift up the Gentiles as an example of “great faith.” This was seen numerous times as Jesus engaged with people- asking them questions only to get to the heart of the issue, create a space for vulnerability and seizing the opportunity to teach lessons to those around him. When we are willing to enter into a dialogue with God, remove our masks, and present ourselves as vulnerable to God we open up the possibilities for healing, reconciliation and restoration.

⁶ Leonard Sweet, *The Bad Habits of Jesus: Showing Us the Way to Live Right in a World Gone Wrong* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers. 2016), 65.

Through this project, members of Grant Chapel AME Church and I were awakened by the examples of ministry Jesus left for us to follow throughout the gospels. We were also reminded of the admonishment of Peter in Acts 10:34, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.” In this powerful statement, Peter was reinforcing the message that God values all without regard for social standing, wealth, or physical strength. Considering this we asked some critical questions- who are we to relegate any man, woman, or child into the margins? Who are we to decide who is worthy of salvation or who should be condemned to hell? Who are we to decide who is deserving of kindness and grace and who should be forgotten or mistreated? As we studied the Gospels during the five-week Bible study sessions, we were constantly reminded by Jesus that we as a church community should love our neighbors and be a beacon of light within our society. As a body of believers, we asked the introspective question, What would happen if we decided to follow Jesus’ example and embrace our neighbors, our culture, and the world differently? Could this transform us?

The idea of a church community as a beacon of light to inform society is not a new concept. Preacher, theologian, and civil rights activist, Martin Luther King Jr. often spoke about the role and responsibilities of the community of faith in informing society. King wanted to see society transformed into what he often referred to as the “beloved community,” synonymous with the Kingdom of God. It is my belief this concept of the church community informing society was also evident throughout the bible through the voices of the prophets and judges in the Old Testament and the Apostles, Disciples and Jesus himself in the New Testament. So often we would see leaders like Moses, Deborah, Paul, and Peter (to name a few) trying to elevate the way people were living by

directing them towards God when the community wrestled with issues of conduct and life. And similarly, we see traces of teachings on how we ought to live with one another in Dr. King's work.

This beloved community would be a society of which men and woman would live as the children of God should live.⁷ King surmised that although the world seems to be in bad shape today, we must not lose faith in the power of God to achieve his purpose.⁸ King believed the church had a responsibility to help shape the community. Walter Fluker explained King's view of the church:

For King, the nature and goal of the church is Christocentric. It is the Body of Christ and the symbol of the beloved community in the world. The church is called upon to demonstrate community within its own fellowship and the world.⁹

Fluker further outlined King's view of the influence of the church on the world:

King's social vision of the church allowed him to see that institution as the moral custodian of society. For King, this means that the church as an institution, the *ekklesia* of Christ, has a prophetic role as a creative minority within society. Its mission is to give moral direction to society and to willingly suffer as an institution the penalty for nonconformity and noncooperation with social evils which destroy human personality and ultimately impede the actualization of human community.¹⁰

King links the ability to achieve a society reflective of the Kingdom back to Jesus.

His perspective was that the redemptive love of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, made it

⁷ Walter E. Fluker, *They Look for a City: A Comparative Analysis of the Ideal of Community in the Thought of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King Jr.* (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 1989), 111.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 158.

¹⁰ Ibid., 172.

possible to achieve community and the realization of the Kingdom within history.¹¹

King, like many theologians, felt the church body bore a responsibility to make a positive impact upon society and to refuse to turn a blind eye to the mistreatment and inequalities in society.

Miroslav Volf in his award winning book, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* indicts the church: “Our coziness with the surrounding culture has made us so blind to many of its evils that, instead of calling them into question, we offer our own versions of them in God’s name and with a good conscious.”¹² Yet Jesus, using salt as a metaphor in the book of Mark 9:50, teaches the community of believers how they are expected to relate to one another stating: “Salt *is* good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.” In Matthew 5:13, Jesus submits a stern warning to the community of believers who fall short of their calling: “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men” Richard H. Niebuhr suggests the very warning about being thrown out calls for the bitter cry of repentance and invites a turnabout.¹³ Volf asks very profound questions: “How should we live as Christian communities today faced with the ‘new tribalism’ that is fracturing our societies, separating peoples and cultural groups, and fomenting vicious conflicts? What

¹¹ Ibid., 175.

¹² Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 36.

¹³ Ibid., 37.

should be the relation of the churches to the cultures they inhabit?¹⁴ To this question he proposes creating proper relations in our cultures.

As we tackle the relationship between community and church, I must lean on Dietrich Bonhoeffer who points out that Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies and even died between two criminals. The cross becomes a central theme to community. Volf goes as far as suggesting the foundation of Christian community is the cross:

Christ unites different ‘bodies’ into one body, not simply in virtue of the singleness of his person (one leader-one people) or of his vision (one principle or law-one community), but above all through his suffering. It is profoundly significant that Jew and gentiles are made one body of God’s children without regard to ethnicity, nationality, gender, race, or class precisely in the ‘cross of Christ’.¹⁵

In both life and death, Jesus demonstrated to believers how to live, the importance of community, and the responsibilities of manifesting the Kingdom of God and “beloved community” on earth. Even in death, Jesus demonstrated how to evangelize to sinners and extend fellowship to those who would otherwise be cast off to the margins. Jesus took it a step further by continuing to boldly teach lessons on inclusion even as he was dying on the cross. In life and in death Jesus taught us how to lovingly evangelize to others and how we were expected to live within our communities. What does this mean for the act of exclusion which has permeated our society, community, and even churches?

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 47.

Volf doesn't mince words: "Exclusion is barbarity within civilization, evil among the good, crime against the other right within the walls of the self."¹⁶

The sentiments in this definition were echoed throughout my project by members of Grant Chapel AME Church. During one focus group a participant, after experiencing exclusion in another church, questioned the evils of exclusion and remarked, "Oppression in the church is normalized and so many people have to live like this all the time and you think, 'That's what God's about?'" Her narrative of concern highlighted her belief that marginalization in the church was antithetical to everything God stood for and represented. She also talked about the evils of just standing idly by and watching this behavior, and the impact exclusion could have on those forced to experience the heavy hand of marginalization.

Volf suggests most exclusionary practices would either not work at all or would work much less smoothly if it were not for the fact that they are supported by exclusionary language and cognition.¹⁷ One can believe the community of faith would benefit from not only guarding her actions but also her words and thoughts. Volf also suggests that the practice of exclusion and the language of exclusion go hand in hand with the whole array of emotional responses to the other, ranging from hatred to indifference. These exclusions both call forth emotional responses and are sustained by them.¹⁸ For me, the most alarming warning shared by Volf was how the havoc wreaked

¹⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹⁷ Ibid., 75.

¹⁸ Ibid., 77.

by indifference could be even greater than that brought by intentional hatred and oppression. Indifference can be more insidious than hate.¹⁹

What a strong rebuke for any of us in the faith community who is, or has been willing to sit idly by and watch others be marginalized. The consequences are far-reaching and more painful. It also serves as a call to repentance and a call to action. For some it might even serve as a call for forgiveness. This too is a journey which leads back to the cross where we see Jesus ultimately teaching the art of forgiveness and communion, as he intercedes for those who attempted to throw him away. An example we should not take lightly and explored through this project.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 5

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

When we pull back the curtain on his life, we discover that Jesus knows what it's like to be marginalized. He knows what it's like to have society shove you to the side of the page, to not really be accepted, and in the end, to be totally rejected. He can identify with life in the margins, because when God came down to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, the margins is where he landed. On purpose.

—Rick McKinley, *Jesus in the Margins*

As Jesus prepared to depart this world he admonished us as believers to carry on his legacy to all:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.¹

Sometimes through our own conscious or unconscious biases, we blatantly or subtly ostracize others relegating them to categories of sinner or saint, in or out, friend or foe, and welcomed or unwelcomed. It is through this categorization that we begin the process of marginalizing those in our midst, and deciding who is worthy to be welcomed. Through our attitudes and approaches we can also inadvertently create an atmosphere where visitors or those outside of the church might not feel so welcomed in the church. Sometimes we are not even aware we may be making people around us feel unwelcomed.

¹ Mt 28:19-20

In their book, *Blind Spot*, Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald, suggests that every day automatic preferences steer us toward less conscious decisions, but they are hard to explain because they remain impervious to the probes of conscious motivation.² As a result, we often bring our own unconscious bias into our interactions, leading us to treat negatively those people who are different. This was not the example of ministry Jesus demonstrated in the Gospels.

Jesus said, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”³ He taught us to stand up for the disenfranchised, the poor, the hungry, the tired, the lonely, the hurting, and the oppressed. The radicalness of the gospel message is that Jesus was in solidarity with the very least of humanity.⁴ Meaning, Jesus didn’t approach those on the fringe in a manner which made them feel inferior but instead he was willing to sit among the people and lift them up. In being in solidarity with those on the margins, Jesus was setting an example for us to follow in terms of outreach through love, evangelism, discipleship and ministry as a whole.

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out that Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies and even died between two criminals. With this thought in mind, he poignantly stated, “So, Christians, too, belong not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the midst of enemies.”⁵ If we believe these thoughts, can we justify not extending (to

² Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald, *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People* (New York: Bantam Books, 2016), 55.

³ Mt. 5:44

⁴ Miguel A De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* (New York: Orbis Books, 2015), 11.

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, vol. 5, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelley trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, Press 2004), 27.

all) an equal invitation into community with the saints and fellowship with the Lord?

Even while dying on the cross, Jesus extended the kingdom to a sinner. If that was the example Jesus left us, how could we not do the same in our everyday lives?

What if we dared to believe in a church where all people were made to feel equal not only in the eyes of God but also through the words and actions of the men and women who professed to be followers of Christ? What if we dared to once again boldly be our siblings' keepers by loving and serving each other without qualifications? If not us, who?

In Matthew 21:42, Jesus said, "Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures, the stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone. This is the Lords doing and it is marvelous to see." Jesus dedicated much of his time on earth ministering to the people at the periphery. One can argue he attempted to move the church to the margins among the people who have been marginalized by the centers of power. To understand this theological perspective, you must first define the center:

To be in the center means to have rights, freedom, respect, and individuality; whereas to be at the margins has meant exclusion from the systems of welfare that benefit the ones from the center. The person or group on the margins has only a meager share of what is important to those in the center and often clings to the bare edges of life with nothing beyond. However, living on the margins of life, as some of us do, can provide its own advantages. The person on the boundary of what is sanctioned as the "norm" is in a unique position to see what is out of view for the people in the centers. Marginalization can provide an opportunity for critical thinking and creative options.⁶

This article further identifies why those in the margins serve as a privileged partner to the Lord verses an image of those with little to no value within society. It states,

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah who embodied the Suffering Servant, opted for life that was in solidarity with the weak, the vulnerable, and the disempowered

⁶ World Council of Churches, "Missions from the Margins: Toward a Just World," *International Review of Mission* 101, no. 1 (April 2012): 158, accessed September 16, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2012.00092.x>.

as an expression of his resolve to resist powers that defied the will of God. Through his message and his sacrifice, he laid the foundation for God's kingdom. This foundation is featured by the emancipation of the marginalized. (Luke 6; Matt 20). It is through Christ's identification with the marginalized (Matt 25:31-46) that they have become the privileged workers with God.⁷

From the sidelines, a person can see things that those who confine themselves to the center can miss. From the edges, you are sensitized to the pain and suffering from exclusion and the love and forgiveness found in reconciliation. One can even argue from the margins the image of a triune God is best understood because that is where His divine power is often manifested- in the vulnerability of his children. In the article, *Missions from the Margin* the author states,

We find the image of God as portrayed in the texts of the prophet Isaiah most apt. This God is a Servant of servants who identifies with those who suffer unjustly. This God was revealed in the crucified Christ, who bears the marks of systematic oppression upon his own flesh. Today this God identifies with those who are cast in the fiery furnace of discrimination and social exclusion. Although the marginalized are too often disempowered, and some have been tragically consumed, we affirm by faith that this God, also manifested as Sophia (wisdom), accompanies those who struggle against the enemies of life until they ultimately prevail.⁸

In John 14:6, Jesus professed to be the way, the truth, and the life. Although society may actively promote a culture of exclusion, if we are to follow the biblical examples of Jesus we are admonished to follow him and bear witness against systems, norms, and practices that deny the well-being, love and acceptance of our fellow brothers and sisters.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN: FOCUS GROUP NARRATIVES

Oppression in the church is normalized and so many people have to live like this all the time and you think, ‘That’s what God’s about?’

—focus group participant

The focus groups provided participants with an opportunity to share their personal narratives. I was shocked at how different both groups were, while yet being very similar. One group became very emotional with several people tearing up as they shared extremely painful stories, while the second group was more matter of fact in their sharing. Through the conversations, we witnessed the raw emotions stirred up when people vocalized feelings buried deep within. The groups were extremely transparent and willing to be vulnerable by openly sharing their stories, their joys, their pains, their hurts, and the experiences which helped shape who they are today. There were moments where we laughed together and moments where we supported one another through the tears.

Although the goal was not to serve as group therapy, there was a therapeutic aspect of the sessions for some as they released old hurts, perceptions, and memories long held and buried deep within. At the close of both ninety-minute sessions, many commented that they “needed this.” Some even suggested we have regular sessions where they could share their stories and thoughts. I walked away with lingering

questions: Do we sometimes spend too much time doing the things *we believe* God wants us to do, that we actually miss doing the things that *God wants* us to do? Are we sometimes so focused on the mission that we miss the ministry? Do we see the people, or see past the people? Do we realize the impact of our words and actions? Those questions surfaced when I heard some stories dating back decades that revealed the damage well-meaning people inflicted on others.

The focus groups were diverse in nature mimicking the demographics of the church. They included members and non-members of Grant Chapel AME Church. Participants were young, old, newly saved, seasoned Christians, male, female, wealthy, financially struggling, healthy, and health challenged. Although very different in perspectives, they were all united by the fact that they had a story to share.

Focus Group 1, twelve participants

When the members of focus group were asked about what comes to mind when they heard the word evangelism, the usual concepts surfaced. Immediately people began to shout out, “preaching” and “teaching.” Then their answers became more nuanced. One respondent suggested “evangelism” was a role occupied by the pastor’s right-hand person. This person was to be an extension of the pastor, sent out to labor on his or her behalf. Another participant quickly began to debunk that notion of evangelism, providing a catalyst for a vigorous debate.

The room exploded in conversation as one participant shared that she viewed evangelism in a very unfavorable light based on recent scandals with evangelists in mega churches, and the role these evangelists played during the recent political discord in the 2016 presidential election which rocked the nation. She passionately shared, “Over the

past few years, there has been quite a bit of scandals involving evangelists or people who fell into the evangelist category affiliated with mega churches.” She continued to share how she believed these TV and large ministry leaders personally profited off the backs of others who were often a lot less affluent. Another participant chimed in suggesting social media adds to this negative view of leaders of churches who classify themselves as evangelists, stating the abuses seen in some large ministries feed into these negative perceptions: “Unfortunately, with the spotlight shining on examples of abuse, good well-meaning pastors are often lumped into the same negative view.”

In response, I asked, “When you hear the word evangelism, do you primarily think of pastors of mega churches trying to personally profit by spreading the word?”

A gentleman quickly jumped in saying, “Not necessarily.” He said when he thought of evangelism he also thought of people like himself who often tried to speak to young people to get them involved in the church.

Another person jumped in with a very different view. She said, “In light of the past presidential election, evangelism seems to be quite political. During this election cycle, if you turned on the TV and watched many of the news and cable networks, you would see people who called themselves evangelists getting air time and promising people like then Republican candidate, Donald Trump, they would deliver their congregations to him. I remember one person going as far as saying, ‘biblically a woman should not be a leader of a nation’ so I know there is a huge political affiliation with people who consider themselves evangelists.”

Another participant interjected to question the direction of the conversation stating, “Aren’t we all supposed to be evangelists? We’re Christians saved by grace and

we're supposed to share the gospel with the world. We may not be equipped to go to hospitals but we can talk to our family members, friends, or co-workers or those who might be unchurched. We might not have the title, but we all can minister. We shouldn't get wrapped up in titles."

To that comment another woman agreed explaining how we all should do our parts at some level. She said, "We're not supposed to preach or give a lesson from the bible, but I can share my experiences." Another person agreed saying that any of us can share our story and the word of God based on our experiences. That can help people a lot because someone standing in the pulpit can't answer questions while they're preaching, but we can during one-to-one interactions.

I asked the group what evangelistic activities looked like in their opinions. In response, one person said praying, speaking to someone, or sharing the good news. One of the younger participants immediately chimed in to share a slightly different view. She stated, "Unfortunately when you first asked about evangelism the first image I got in my mind were all of the people in my life who have stood in the street and told me I was going to hell. I feel like many times evangelism is seen as someone just trying to scare someone to Christ." Although in theory, this participant felt everyone should technically be an evangelist, she expressed reluctance because as she put it, "Not everyone has the people skills to do it because some people's approach does more harm than good, scaring people away from spirituality as a whole." This participant continued by sharing with the group that someone who evangelizes should be humble and open minded, but that is often not the case. People often come at others with a know-it-all arrogance communicating, "I'm here to save you and I'm going to scare you to Jesus."

The group reached a consensus that people who evangelize often approach it with a harsh fire and brimstone message which scares people. They agreed everyone who is a Christian cannot handle evangelism as we know it. It was stated, “They don’t all have a warm, personable, or spirit to evangelize. We need people who can listen to others versus beat people up.”

Their comments made me curious so I decided to do an instant poll to better understand how many people really thought evangelism had a negative connotation. I assumed the group might feel more comfortable providing a transparent response if I took them out of the picture. I asked them, “If you think of the people you know, do you think they have a scary or negative view of evangelism.” When I asked this question, eight of the twelve people in the focus group raised their hands in agreement. I thought it was interesting that 67% of the group thought people they knew would have a negative view of evangelism. This revealed how much work needs to be done to re-imagine the term.

This negative view of evangelism is consistent with what scholars of evangelism have found like Rich Richardson, who is the Director of Masters in Evangelism at Wheaton College. He asserted, “Over the years, evangelism has gotten a bad name.”¹ In his book *Reimagining Evangelism*, Richards lays an argument that some recent events have further damaged notions around evangelism. He stated:

Evangelism has always had image problems. But the image problems for evangelism have only gotten worse in recent years. Photos of religious people, true believers, running planes into buildings and suicide bombing innocent men, women, and children have only reinforced the pervasive conviction in our society that people who think they know the truth and that everybody else is wrong are not only misguided but positively dangerous.²

¹ Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, 15.

² Ibid.

Evangelism has indeed become a bad word to many, and it was no different with many people in this focus group. Another person furthered the conversation by stating, “I’ve never thought of people who are handing out tracks on the streets as evangelists. I thought of them as quacks.”

A gentleman immediately countered with, “You know we make fun of groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses but the reality is they’re doing a lot more than many of us in terms of spreading their beliefs.”

Another woman said, “I had a conversation with a Mormon, and they were earnest. It was a good conversation. As a Jew worshipping in an AME church, my perspectives might be a bit different but, I look at evangelism as our service, getting up and doing.”

When asked about who influenced their thoughts on evangelism, there was a wide range of ideas. Some said their parents who always took them to church. Others felt it was the church woman on the block with the long skirt who went throughout the neighborhood talking to them about the gospel. At this point, I felt it might be helpful for us to delineate between what the office of evangelism was over against the act of evangelism. Through the conversations, I observed a lack of understanding of the differences between someone who might be ordained as an evangelist within the church and someone who participated in the act of evangelism. We spent some time discussing the differences which helped bring additional clarity to our discussion. It is worth noting that some in the group initially viewed the office of evangelism and the act of evangelism as one in the same, suggesting you had to be clergy to evangelize. This blurring of lines

made some people think unless they went to school for evangelism, they were not allowed to participate in the activity.

After a lively conversation, due to time constraints we had to pivot to next topic of marginalization and thoughts around exclusion in the church community. This turned out to be a very personal and at times distressing conversation. One woman started the conversation by sharing she had an experience when she was younger where she walked into a church and everyone looked at her, giving her the impression that they were looking down on her because she wasn't dressed like them. She didn't have the big hats or ankle skirts. What challenged her to this day was the fact that in many circles what she was wearing would have been considered conservative and certainly appropriate church attire. The way they treated her made her feel out of place.

Another person shared how they visited a conservative church in another area and the people told her she was going to hell for wearing pants. The girls laughed aloud and pointed at her as if she was a spectacle for all to see because she was wearing pants. With a quiver in her voice, she shared how they ridiculed her and "made her feel marginalized in the church. It was awful," she said, "I know they did it to others. That type of attitude is just normalized. Oppression in the church is normalized and so many people have to live like this all the time and you think, 'That's what God's about?' It made me feel so sad."

As the moderator, I must admit, after this woman shared her experience, I had to pause for a minute. It took a lot of discipline and strength for me to maintain my focus because hearing this woman's story brought back personal memories. I, too, remembered experiences where I observed women feeling like some people cared more about what

they were wearing as opposed to their message or ministry. If their skirts were too short, they would be ostracized by supposedly well-meaning Deaconesses who would make them the subject of church meetings. Also, there were men of power and influence who stood behind the sacred pulpit making fun of people's appearance, missing the looks of brokenness of those young and old who carried untold hurts from being the subject of similar attacks at home, school, community and now, tragically, the church.

This young woman hit on something when she talked about oppression in the church being normalized and it was clear by the shift in the mood of the group, many of them had been hurt by their very own communities of faith at some point in their past. I inquired of this woman to explain what she meant by "oppression is normalized in the church."

She responded saying, "It makes me very angry when people don't speak up against the wrong things people say and excuse it saying, 'Oh, it's just [my] opinion and you know the church is like that anyway, so you know, whatever'...Opinions are the underlying cause of hate crimes and oppression and stuff like that." Her statements were both potent and powerful. She rightly accused everyone in the church of being guilty if they sit by and allow some from the pulpit to the pew to create an environment of oppression. Her comments had echoes of the conversation we entered with Volf in chapter four where he gave the church a strong rebuke surrounding the dangers of sitting in a place of indifference when we witness marginalization. From her experience, she too held everyone in the church responsible for the damage marginalization caused if they simply turned a blind eye to it as they observe it occurring.

Another person joined the conversation stating, “I’ve seen a “class thing” within churches today where people are treated differently based on where you live, marital status, appearance, or whether you have children. In a Baptist church, there was a couple who had children together but were not married. The man was a Deacon and the woman was a long-time member. They asked the woman to leave the church because she had children with this man out of wedlock but allowed the man to stay. How is that fair? How is that right?”

After a few more people shared examples of marginalization witnessed within church communities, we had to close the session. I asked for final comments and ended the session after one participant shared a profound thought. They said, “The danger of scaring people into Christ is when your faith is rooted in fear, you have the tendency to put others down because you want to feel big so you’re more secure in your own faith. You begin to think, ‘I’m going to heaven and you’re not.’ We have to be careful how we treat people. Overweight people, homeless people, people who are dressed a certain way, and people who haven’t had an opportunity to come to church might feel unwelcomed.” The participants were right. We have a lot of work to do as a Christian community.

Focus Group 2

“Sometimes the restrictions of the church protocols and stuff impacts how people feel.”

—Participant Focus Group 2

Focus group two had a different set of participants with a different tone. The conversation was more raw, personal, and at times, very emotional. Participants were extremely transparent about the hurt they experienced during interactions within the

church community throughout their lives. Some members shared very detailed and poignant personal experiences with evangelism and marginalization. Though some participants had very little understanding or experience with evangelism, others were well versed on the topic. Nevertheless, everyone certainly had experiences with marginalization which they openly shared. Participants in this group were extremely vulnerable. Even I, as the moderator, had to pause and reflect on some of the commentary as it caught me by surprise. It reminded me that sometimes pain does have an address and it can be on the most innocuous street corner, a church once visited, or even on a college campus.

We started off with a stunning admission by a young man who had presumably grown up in a Christian church. When I asked the group to define evangelism he simply stated, “I don’t know the meaning of evangelism.” Another male interjected by saying, “I don’t know what it means either. I’ve only heard of one person named evangelist and he is a minister.” I tried to probe further in the group to see if they could provide any details around their understanding of evangelism and what would be classified as evangelistic activities. One young man said, “Never heard of that.” An older gentleman jumped in to suggest evangelism was a title of an office within the church.

To that, an older gentleman countered with a monologue about what he thought of evangelism:

Evangelical people who I don’t particularly agree with because they’re right-winged Christians. They are the ones who marginalize everyone who is not like them. So therefore, I have a negative connotation when I think of them.” He continued to share that these right-wing evangelicals often made statements like, “Trump is our savior for our right-wing organization. The same groups making these statements are the same groups classifying themselves as evangelicals. I just don’t happen to agree with that right-wing stuff. Jesus wasn’t right-wing. So, if I’m going to follow Jesus he was more left-wing than anyone I know. I associate

the word evangelism with politics and because they call themselves evangelicals and are anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage, etc. etc. I don't like them. It's not that I'm for it all but I'm not anti-anything. I'm not going to condemn anyone. It's not my job to judge. I just don't like the evangelicals, you might be tolerant but they're just like the Pharisees. So therefore Jesus was against the Pharisees and so am I. I follow Jesus.

He then continued to say when he thought of the apostles as evangelists, he had a different connotation of the word as something positive.

This was a powerful depiction of the how evangelism can appear to have two faces. When he thought of the leaders of the church as evangelists, it was a positive thought. He remembered the manner in which Jesus and his disciples lifted people up by sharing the good news. However, looking at what he considered modern day evangelism, only negative thoughts popped into his head- thoughts of marginalization, judgment, and cruelty. This dichotomy aligns with concepts in Richards work, *Reimagining Evangelism* in which he introduced the idea of modernizing evangelism. The purpose was to create a shift in the way people approach evangelism:

The time has come to re-imagine how we picture and practice sharing the good news about Jesus. The time has come because the old pictures and practices aren't wearing well and aren't working well. People in our culture aren't responding. And people in the church aren't excited or engaged. Many believers are as uncomfortable with and turned off by evangelism as the irreligious are. The time has come because our culture is shifting. We are moving from modern, rationalistic, technique-oriented culture to a more imaginative, experiential, and story-oriented culture. Our memorized scripts and canned techniques may have helped an older generation reach out to the unchurched, but at this point in history, our techniques and scripts are more a hindrance than a help.³

This idea gave me hope that if the church was willing to step back and truly examine how we approached evangelism we could create a cultural shift in both the understanding of evangelism and our approach towards it. We can go back to

³ Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, 15.

conversations and connections Jesus made with people as He shared the good news verses a technique based script which has become a common approach towards evangelism. In his article “Evangelism as Discipleship” Roderick R. Hewitt also articulates the need for us to move away from the scripted based technique and approach modern day evangelism differently stating,

Too often, evangelism and discipleship are presented as programs that are designed like easy-fit custom furniture that can be assembled by dummies. I beg to differ, because my personal experiences and theological reflections seem to suggest that it is a messy affair fraught with challenges because there is no one-size-fits-all plan for evangelism and discipleship. At their core, evangelism and discipleship are about building genuine relationships with people who are seeking fullness of life that is mirrored in the life of Jesus.⁴

This to me, would lead us back to how Jesus himself approached each person differently with a genuine desire to connect before sharing the good news.

As we continued our dialogue on evangelism, another man jumped into the conversation saying his ideology of evangelism had evolved over the years. But he did agree that evangelicals tried to sway the minds of people like politicians. The conversation became even livelier with multiple people trying to enter the fray. One woman said:

I’ve been involved with evangelism and so on one hand you can see a positive but for the most part, when people talk about it, particularly white people, talk about evangelism, it makes me nervous. When you think back for black and brown people, evangelism was a way to send missionaries out who went into countries where people of color were and told them everything about their culture and themselves were wrong and that God said so. They used the scripture and their own self-serving interpretation of the bible in combination with teaching their

⁴ Roderick R. Hewitt, “Evangelism as Discipleship: Implications for Theological Education and Leadership Formation,” *International Review of Mission* 103, no. 2 (November 2014): 210, accessed September 18, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/irom.12057>.

culture to achieve their goals. You then had a lot of Africans who were left believing everything they knew about God was wrong. These missionaries took peoples land, people's culture and enslaved them for the most part. So it makes me very uncomfortable because the people who came into many of the foreign countries were white Christians and they came teaching their culture. They were not teaching Jesus. Yes, they did use the bible but they used it in such a way that it's not a good word. It was an enslaving word.

Another woman concurred with this statement, saying, "Entire groups of people and cultures were eradicated." She continued to share how she thought there were two meanings of evangelism:

There was one with the evangelicals who have tried to bring a false message with a double edge-we're bringing this but we're going to eliminate that-which is all you knew. She said, "And so that's negative. And then there are the evangelists in terms of like-the AME church. That is a person who is prayerful, confidential, and you can talk to them in times of trouble.

With that comment, I decided to do an instant poll to capture their overall sentiments as a group. Of the nine people in attendance, I asked them, similar to the first group, "When you think of friends or people around you, do you think they have a negative view of the word evangelism? Five of the nine people raised their hand in agreement. I continued to wonder to myself: If the word evangelism came with so many negative images of enslavement and politically motivated marginalization, will we ever be able to reclaim its original intent to spread the good news?

With that thought in mind, I asked the group to define what they would consider activities affiliated with evangelism. One woman shared her story. She said that when she was a young Christian, she was part of an evangelism community. They went to basketball games, downtown areas, or any place populated with a lot of people. They would set up shop and try to engage people to tell them, "they were sinners going to hell

and that they needed Jesus.” This statement was dressed up in a question, “If you died tonight, where would you spend eternity, heaven or hell?”

They were trained to do it by the Billy Graham crusades. “I was part of the Billy Graham crusades,” she said. She explained how these kinds of communities were on college campuses with the aim to tell people they were sinners going to hell, and they need to pray a specific prayer. The evangelist communities would pray the prayers with the people they engaged and then share with them that they were now bound for heaven. One lady asked the leader to identify the denomination. He said it was a non-denominational evangelical group affiliated with white churches. She said, “The group even went as far as to take us to black churches and tell us not to assume the members of the congregations were saved because they’re very emotional. Because they’re overly emotional about their faith they don’t get the gist of it. So you have to teach them the four spiritual laws. So we had little booklets outlining the four spiritual laws and we gave them out in the streets. We were told to bring our bibles to school and evangelize in the schools. These organizations still exist, you know. Look them up.”

A man interrupted to ask, “So they used a lot of scare tactics?” She continued saying, “Oh yes. I don’t want to give you the wrong impression. It wasn’t all about burning in hell. It was about God loves you and God has a plan for you but if you don’t get saved, you’re going to hell. We were even told to talk to pastors in these black churches too because some of them probably didn’t know Jesus.” Her story highlighted how the term evangelism in the US is largely branded by white evangelical organizations.

Another woman shared how as a child they used to have bible study on a neighbor’s porch. “She scared us,” she said, “She was holy and sanctified and we

weren't. She was trying to scare us into being good kids by telling us we were going to hell. My mom use to send us there anyway. It wasn't until I got older and got into church that I understood what she was trying to tell us, but as a youngster, she frightened us more than anything.

I asked the group whose job was it to evangelize? People began shouting out responses. One person said, "I once thought evangelists were only older woman in the church." They peppered me with the following responses:

"Evangelism is no one's job."

"Your own-self"

"No, everyone, if you have a heart."

"Every Christian is responsible."

"We may not all have the title but as Christians we should all be able to share the good news."

"I think preachers often get a lot of bad press. They're always talking about the cars they drive etc. etc. "

"I thought evangelists were always an appointed role out of respect for the person."

"The biggest problem is we put more emphasis on the title versus the word."

"These people use to scare me. I thought when they used to say we were going to hell it meant, next Tuesday."

In the end, the group came to a consensus that all members of the church should be spreading the good news of Jesus. Evangelism, technically, should be the responsibility of everyone, but not everyone is equipped to do it well. In some cases, people cause more harm than good. It was clear through this dialogue that the way in which some churches and parachurch organizations engaged in evangelistic activities have often led to experiences of marginalization and hurt within and outside of their

communities of faith. While evangelism is by no means the only cause of marginalization, the way many churches have done it has certainly led to marginalization.

After that closing comment, we moved onto our discussion on marginalization. I kicked it off by asking the group if they ever felt excluded, left out, or not part of the “in crowd” in the church?

One young man shouted out, “All the time!” He explained how he felt left out, but he added the qualifier that he was not the most active member of church. He said, “I feel like a lot church members don’t reach out as much as they should. And when certain activities come about—not everyone is involved—only certain members are involved. I pay attention. I just feel like people have distanced themselves. I once got into an accident and few people reached out to me.” He then suggested if that had occurred to a prominent member of the church it would have been different.” Another participant asked him why he thought he was left out? He responded by saying, “I’m considered a person in the world, meaning my activities are not the same as other church members. I might go to the club or ride a motorcycle.” A woman jumped in to encourage him saying, “You’re young. That’s what young people do.”

A participant interjected saying, “There are other examples of exclusion. People feeling ignored and walking out of church can be a problem.” For me, he said, “I was personally attracted to this particular church because when I first visited they were so welcoming to me and I was an anti-church person. But the greeting I received made such an impression on me.”

Another man said, “When I was at another church I had an experience which has always stuck with me. One day, I ran into an old friend on the street corner. I took him to

church with me but he was not dressed. So, he did not feel comfortable sitting in the front. But I had to sit in the front because I was an officer. So, he decided to sit in the back. When I turned around to check on him, I noticed he left. I ran into him again a few weeks later and he explained why he left. He felt extremely uncomfortable because people saw him sitting in the back and came up to him repeatedly asking him if they could help him, probably because he seemed out of place to them. He never came back again.”

I asked this gentleman if people continued to check on him because they were trying to be helpful. He responded saying the guy did not think so. He thought he was just out of place and they reinforced that feeling by the way they approached him. He continued saying, “When I heard about the situation, I asked a few people at the church about it. I still think about that situation now.” You could hear the pain in this man’s voice as he shared his story. He continued saying, “I was an officer in that last church and I had to sit in the front. I had to sit in a place where other people could not sit. I think about it to this day. I was sitting up front where he couldn’t sit and when I looked back he wasn’t there.”

I asked this participant why he thought the man may have felt uncomfortable. He said it could have been a number of things:

“Maybe the way he was dressed? Maybe where he could not sit? Maybe who could not sit with him? Maybe he was lonely. Maybe how the people approached him.”

Another woman chimed in saying, “Sometimes the restrictions of the church protocols and stuff impacts how people feel. At churches, everywhere you can’t sit in the front because it’s only for important people.”

That comment made me wonder if the seating arrangements in churches could be a form of marginalization. Although we may not intentionally mean to hurt or separate people, can our protocols go against some of the very same notions we teach? Should the leaders of the church always take the place of privilege over the visitors and those less powerful? At that moment, a scripture came to mind from James 2:1-5:

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

I wondered, "Are we showing favoritism in the church or simply trying to create certain structures to help better serve others? What would happen if we turned the current model upside down? What would happen if we allowed officers, stewards, deacons, deaconesses and missionaries to be among the people instead sitting in a place of honor? What if the guests—no matter who they are—were seated in places of honor instead?" After a brief discussion on the matter, a woman began sharing her story:

I've always felt excluded in churches because my family didn't go to church. What made it difficult was in most churches people are grouped up with their families or others. So you can imagine how it felt as a young person when I was in church by myself. I would have to find some place to sit and if there was a special event like a dinner or something, everyone sat with their groups and I was alone. So for those who come to church by themselves it can be difficult. If you're like me, a person who went to church because you wanted to know about God and no one says anything. It can be hard. I watch sometimes. We might be reciting something. We get up so routinely but guests can be lost. I remember the first time I went to an AME church. I didn't know what they were saying and no one was there to help me.

This woman's story highlighted how our regular routines can sometimes create exclusion. We sometimes take for granted that everyone knows the order of service or the liturgical practices- but sometimes they do not. Sometimes because we fail to provide a roadmap to the service, we make people feel like they do not belong and unintentionally promote exclusion within the church. Subtle things like ensuring guests can follow along in the service can make the biggest difference in creating a welcoming space within churches.

Another woman chimed in to say, "I have a reason I feel excluded. Being married to a minister, there are certain things I would like to be involved in, but they're reserved for the ministerial staff. But sometimes, I want to do some things because we all have gifts. I sometimes feel excluded with what I'm allowed to do as a lay person. I want to be able to do some big things too."

A participant said, "Before I joined my current church I had an experience where I wanted to have my child baptized. I wasn't a member at the church but I had family members who attended that particular church. They told me I couldn't have my child christened because I wasn't a member. So I had to go to another church which I didn't even like. However, they welcomed me." A man shared his story:

People should never be made to feel less than. A long time ago, I use to go to a church that had a ritual where during offering, tithers would come up first to hand in their tithes. A special prayer was then prayed for these givers. It was like, 'But all you regular folks, we're not praying for you.' I refused to participate in this ritual. When another member spoke up against it at a meeting, as an officer in that church, I backed him up. I was then asked by the pastor why I didn't tithe. I looked at him and said, who says I don't? He got a little tongue tied and I said, 'If you want to know why I don't participate in that little ritual you do, it's because that's not what my bible says.' Then I referenced a scripture about giving privately and he kinda took it personal. It was interesting because someone had said in a bible study at the church two weeks before that she wouldn't come to church if she didn't have money. I believe that conversation occurred for a reason

right before this leaders' meeting. I thought that ritual was so wrong and it had an impact on who would and would not come to church.

This session gave everyone so much to think about. We had to ask ourselves, do we spend enough time thinking about the impact of rituals in churches and their impact on making people feel included or excluded?

After this man concluded his story another woman shared how her niece attended another church and called about getting her child christened. Instead of focusing on the reason for the call she was chastised about not coming to church enough and tithing regularly. They told her she could not get God's favor on her mother's coat tails. The leadership in the church may not have known this woman was suffering from postpartum depression. She said, "The way they treated me hurt me and dented me so badly that I don't want to join a church anymore because they might rebuff me again like this church did." Her niece was doing the best she could and working as hard as she could to provide for her family. She did not expect to go to church for healing only to be further broken. What kind of dents are we leaving on people?

I recall a quote from Leonard Sweet which I mentioned in chapter four: "When you leave an impression, you leave a dent. Too many Christians are leaving an impression of hate and dent of condemnation, not of love and salvation. Jesus did not come to condemn the world, he said, but to save the world."⁵ Our interactions leave an impression on people. Some impressions become permeant dents reminding them of the love or hate, acceptance or rejection which they experience at the hands of their

⁵ Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 2010), 3.

communities of faith. We ought to be thoughtful and careful about what kind of dent we want to leave behind.

Another woman with tears in her eyes shared how she was wounded by the lack of response from her church when she was sick and suffering from the loss of a loved one. She said, “I’ve tried to be a good member. I’ve made contributions. I feel the church body could have done better in terms of embracing me when I wasn’t there. A phone call doesn’t cost anything but it makes a difference.”

There were many people who had a lifetime of love but also a lifetime of hurt based on experiences within the community of faith. This conversation highlighted the need for the faith community to be mindful of its structures, rituals, and treatment of members and non-members that may overtly or covertly marginalize. Jesus was the master of pulling people back in and restoring the dignity others tried to steal. He is the standard bearer for living and worshipping in the community of faith that we should test all our practices again.

Pre-Bible Study Results

In January 2017, I launched an online survey⁶ to capture qualitative data on church members’ thoughts around marginalization and evangelism. This allowed me to create another opportunity for people within the community to provide feedback if they were not able to join one of the focus groups. It also provided me with some baseline data I could use to compare results from the post bible study survey. The results proved to be consistent with some of the data ascertained from the two focus groups held at Grant Chapel AME Church in late January.

⁶ See Appendix C for the complete survey results.

A total of twelve people responded to the survey. When asked what their first reaction to the word evangelism, the group was evenly divided between positive and negative reactions, each 50% of the group. When survey participants were asked how they defined evangelism they provided a wide range of responses:

- *Spreading God's word, good news, the Gospel, teaching the word of the Bible*
- *The Process of sharing God's love and grace*
- *Not just telling the good news. Actually, less telling and more doing. It's not only telling of healing, love, joy, comfort, and power of God but being those things to others when the opportunity presents itself. The good news isn't just verbal, it's an experience*
- *Someone you can confide with spiritual needs, besides your Pastor*
- *A missionary preacher of the Gospel of Christ*
- *Telling people about becoming a Christian, teaching Christian doctrine, and gaining converts*
- *My somewhat negative reaction is the way evangelism has been traditionally acted out is for Christians to be "holier than thou." "Our way is the only way." If however it is defined as living out the saving love of Jesus, I'm good with that.*

The consensus was that evangelism was about spreading the good news of the Gospel. Also, there seemed to be a notion that evangelism should be action-oriented, not only verbal, and should be done in a loving manner. People desired an evangelistic experience which was centered around love and building others up. This was similar to the concept Richards proposed when he suggested re-imagining our approach to evangelism and make it more around building connections and less around trying to convert people in a single conversation.

This desire to see a gentler form of outreach was consistent feedback when survey participants were asked what types of activities they thought should be included when describing evangelism:

- *Visiting the sick and shut in praying, teaching God's word on the street corners*
- *Encouraging people to make better choices in life or making them feel loved. It can be as simple as sending a card in the mail, visiting the sick, cooking a meal or giving small gifts. It depends on the party's love language.*
- *Community work, pastoral work, social justice advocacy, educational opportunities about the bible in its context and helping to bring deeper comprehension*
- *Being available for the people's needs*
- *Preaching, witnessing of God's grace and mercy, fervent prayer, and stewardship of one's time with service*
- *TV ministries, street ministries where you hand out materials*
- *Revivals (Old school evangelism)*

Survey results indicated people often felt evangelism more likely involved actions aimed at serving the needs of others. Some suggested it could include groups like revivals or TV ministries but most participants seemed to indicate they felt evangelism was often centered around one-to-one interactions.

When asked about personal accountability and comfort with participating in evangelistic activities the group was divided. Some people personally expressed a somewhat positive view while simultaneously expressing reluctance in participating in evangelism themselves. They also seemed to express that others might have a more negative view of evangelism than themselves. Perhaps they were the ones with the negative view but were reluctant to share it.

When asked how they personally felt about evangelism, 8 out of 12 participants expressed a somewhat or very positive view of participating in evangelism. When asked about others' view of evangelism, survey participants were not as positive. Of those surveyed, 55% felt others viewed the idea of evangelism as somewhat to very positive whereas 45% of participants viewed the idea of evangelism as neutral to very negative. One survey participant abstained from responding to this question.

When it came to engaging in evangelism in the next thirty days, participants responded across the board. Only 25% of respondents said they were extremely likely to participate in evangelism, 25% said they were very likely and the remaining 50% were somewhat likely to not at all likely to participate in evangelism in during that timeframe. When asked about whom they felt was responsible for participating in evangelism, 75% of the responders felt all members in a church should engage in evangelism. This demonstrated an apprehension to engage in evangelism activities even though people felt it was everyone's responsibility to participate in outreach. I later realized much of the discomfort came from the negative views people had around evangelism due to past experiences and many did not fully understand how they could participate in evangelism in a natural conversational manner.

The next questions were about marginalization within the church. When asked if participants had ever seen someone say or do something which would make another person feel unwelcome or not invited to participate in a church activity, 67% of respondents responded in the affirmative. When challenged to provide specifics examples responses included the following:

- *Visitors not being spoken to or acknowledged*
- *People being spoken to in an inappropriate manner or looked down upon based on how they were dressed or carried themselves*
- *Gossiping about people*
- *People being told they could not participate in certain activities like, baptism of children because they were not officially a member of the given church*
- *People being asked to leave although they were not disruptive because it appeared they were drinking*
- *Comments being made about someone's appearance*

In addition, 41% of responders admitted they may have made someone feel left out of church activities or may have been unwelcoming. When asked how likely they would be to reach out to someone within or outside of the church who was different from them—1 was “not likely” and 10, “very likely”—41% rated themselves as a 10, while only 17% rated themselves as 1. The rest of the participants’ responses were distributed throughout the scale.

When participants were asked to share in their own words why some people might not feel comfortable or welcomed in the church, they provided a wide range of answers:

- *People might not feel saved enough*
- *A newcomer might not feel comfortable if they do not know anyone and/or are not familiar with the order of service.*
- *People might also not feel comfortable if they have a negative interaction with someone*
- *When church communities do not create safe spaces for people to work through their pain, emotions, and thoughts it seeps into other things.*
- *A lot of churches refuse to progress and are misled about contents of the Bible and how we are to use it. We cannot preach about a God bigger than boundaries but limit God to a text that we do not explore fully in its context.*
- *Church is separated by clicks*
- *People may not physically or aesthetically look like me and therefore they are not approached in a friendly inviting manner.*
- *There are many ways- from the way someone is greeted when they walk in to a person being offended by what was preached that day*
- *A person might not have any friends or family attending the church.*
- *People could feel lost or bored with the liturgy*
- *People may feel they are too sinful to come to church.*
- *People might not feel understood, recognized, loved or respected*
- *Lack of diversity in the church*
- *People may feel church members are hypocritical*
- *Things like a person’s lifestyle: If they drink, have tattoos, are not well dressed, do not have any money to give, they do not have all of the liturgy memorized, they cannot read well, they’re in a wheelchair*
- *People do not speak to them in the church*

The final question was asked to provide a comparison of what responders believed Jesus taught through the Gospel before and after the survey. Responders were asked if they thought Jesus taught that believers should minister to people who might be considered sinners by the church community. Of those responding, 100%, felt Jesus either often or always required outreach. In reflecting on their responses, I wondered if everyone felt Jesus required outreach, why do so many people not feel a personal accountability to engage in outreach?

The survey results demonstrated the great amount of work needed to provide a clear understanding of evangelism within the community of faith in connection to Jesus' model provided in the Gospels. It was also instructive for revealing the impressions we leave on others when we interact with members within and outside of our faith community. One of the most powerful scriptures and indictments of how we treat one another comes from a story Jesus told in Matthew 25: 34-40:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

This survey makes one wonder, what would happen if we really leaned into the example of ministry and outreach to those on the margins which Jesus taught?

Post Bible Study Survey Results

The Post Bible Study survey was sent to participants online immediately following the fifth and final session in the series. It was used to compare thoughts and attitudes towards evangelism and marginalization following an in-depth bible study on the subject. I was curious to see if any of the negative thoughts on evangelism seen in both the focus groups and the initial online survey, would be upended or if they were too ingrained to change. I was pleased to see changes in perceptions about evangelism from negative to positive and a new willingness to engage in evangelism. This gave me hope for the entire faith community that their hurts and scars might be healed and we could actually re-imagine evangelism after launching dedicated teaching on the subject.

When asked about their first reaction to the word evangelism this group was a bit more optimistic with 67% of respondents having a positive or very positive reaction. When participants were asked how they would define evangelism, there were some similarities from the initial survey but less variances in the responses:

- *Sharing the word of God*
- *Preaching/teaching the Gospel and addressing the needs of others*
- *To influence the thinking or opinion of people that you come in contact with in daily situations*
- *Love of and benevolent service to others*
- *Teaching others that God loves them and how to live according to Jesus' example*
- *A publisher of glad tidings-a missionary preacher of the Gospel*
- *Showing and sharing the good news that we are loved by God*
- *Crossing boundaries to reach others with the guidance of the Holy Spirit*
- *Bringing forth the good news with love*
- *I think of evangelism as an invitation to do more mitzvot to be more aware of what I can do face to face and hand to hand. I see evangelism as action.*
- *I saw evangelism as somewhat negative given the blow hears on TV and radio. However, I misinterpreted evangelist vs. evangelism.*

The respondents were more inclined to look at evangelism as an action oriented word grounded in love. This was a sign that people really could change their views on the topic after training. When asked about what types of activities they linked to evangelism, the action theme continued:

- *Reaching out to people in and out of the church community--at work, social gatherings, shopping experiences, anywhere the opportunity presents itself.*
- *Sharing Gods word, personal testimony, serving others, addressing the needs of others*
- *Showing love and teaching certain truths from the Bible*
- *Help folks understand God's word by studying the Bible. You listen to people and try to meet them where they are in life*
- *Personal interactions with the entire world*
- *Praying, giving, testimonies, preaching, and teaching*
- *Actions and worlds of love. Affirmatively demonstrating to everyone especially those marginalized that God's love includes all of us. And it is okay to be yourself in doing so*
- *Any and everything*
- *Praying with people, teaching, the word, ministering to people in Jesus name*
- *Social Justice.*

When asked how they personally felt about evangelism, 92% of the responders felt somewhat positive or very positive with only 8% neutral. None of the participants reported viewing evangelism in a negative manner. When I think back to Richardson's insightful question, "Can the word evangelism be saved?" After these responses, I wanted to shout-yes! When asked how respondents thought others within the church viewed evangelism, respondents suggested 75% of others would view the idea of evangelism as somewhat or very positive and 25% would view evangelism as neutral.

Engagement accounted for the biggest change. Of those surveyed, 100% of the responders reported they would be somewhat likely to extremely likely to engage in evangelistic activities within the next thirty days. In addition, 100% of the responders felt

it the responsibility of all members in the church to engage in evangelism. When asked how likely they were to reach out to someone who was different from them using a scale of 1-10 with 1 as “not likely” and 10 as “very likely,” 58% of responders reported they were very likely to reach out to someone different from them. None of the respondents selected not likely.

When respondents were asked to consider Jesus’ teachings and expectations, 92% of responders reported they thought Jesus taught believers were expected to reach out to people who might be considered sinners by the church community.

The goal of the final question was to better understand some of the lessons on marginalization and evangelism participants took away from the bible study, and if there were any things they would do differently based on what they learned. The responses were very encouraging and demonstrated a new degree of understanding and sensitivity on the topics:

- *We all may have some type of bias without realizing it.*
- *Try to be more conscious of my thoughts and to be more active in spreading the word of the gospel.*
- *I have come to realize that sometimes you have to go over and above what seems to be obvious when it comes to people who are in need, or that is hurting. Everybody we encounter is in need of encouragement of some kind. We should try to find the best way to address the issues with sensitivity, love, and compassion.*
- *To think outside of the box about what it means to evangelize*
- *Who are we to judge?*
- *Be open to others, have a listening ear instead of looking at individual’s faults-instead look at their needs.*
- *I have been made aware of how marginalization is so pervasive, so evil, so subtle, for the sake of power*
- *To be more aware of my personal biases and prejudices and not to let them interfere with my service for the Lord*
- *To let go of my bias judgment towards people. I need to be more compassionate to people’s needs*
- *Anyone can be an Evangelist*

- *Evangelism is something everyone can do and it is something God expects me to do too.*
- *Even the most unlikely person can be marginalized by others-like someone who is rich. As a result of the bible study, I will make a commitment to reach out to people and be on God's agenda vs. my own. I will also not be prescriptive with my approach. I am excited now about something I didn't think was my gifting.*

The final comments and thoughts within the survey were exciting. I'm reminded of the saying, "How do you move a mountain? Bit-by-bit!" In reviewing the final remarks in the survey, it was clear many took the lessons on evangelism and marginalization to heart and challenged themselves to think, respond, act, and react as Jesus taught us through his life and ministry as revealed in the Gospels. By examining how Jesus interacted with people many participants clearly saw they could approach others in a similar manner. Participants shared how they could easily take the time to connect with others and have a normal conversation where they asked how they were doing and took the time to get to know something about them before telling this stranger what they needed to be saved. This type of dialogue felt more natural and made the participants begin to see evangelism as something they could practice. Also, in creating a space where people could share their personal narratives on marginalization, it allowed not only for healing but also the realization that we must be deliberate in our attempts to ensure our words, actions, and liturgy is inclusive to avoid intentionally or unintentionally marginalizing others. Some participants commented during the bible study discussion how they did not realize they actually participated in the practice of marginalization by simply ignoring the actions of others. They became committed to being more aware of marginalization and fighting against it.

All in all, the bible study and post survey results were very encouraging and allowed me to come to the conclusion that if we as a community of faith are mindful of how we interact with and treat others, we can re-imagine evangelism and begin to chip away at the very core of marginalization in our faith communities.

Chapter 7

PROJECT EVALUATION

In the book, *Know Your Story and Lead with It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership*, authors Richard Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones argue:

We understand ourselves in the form of a story, and we perceive events in the form of a narrative. Story is our access to reality. And any situation can be understood through more than one story, because no single account can tell everything that happened.¹

Our narratives are our preconceived notions about our world that are profoundly influenced by our family and cultural narratives.² This was a powerful concept to unpack and explore through this project, as I explored the participants' stories and saw the world through the narrative lenses of the Grant Chapel AME Church community through the focus groups, online surveys, and bible study sessions.

Through my research, I explored how some affiliated with Grant Chapel AME Church viewed evangelism, their narratives surrounding marginalization, and how unconscious bias can inhabit evangelism. My intent was to allow their stories to provide a broader understanding of the church and community context.

From an evaluation perspective, I followed the structure outlined by Carl Savage and Bill Presnell in their book, *Narrative Research in Ministry*. According to Savage and Presnell, there are two parts of evaluation to consider: observing change and discerning

¹ Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead With It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2009), 2.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

transformation.³ For observing change, I compared the state of Grant church prior to the project intervention and after the project. This was done by using the research data gathered from the focus groups and surveys and comparing the results to evaluate change in activities, habits, and narratives. The second more difficult part of the evaluation was discerning transformation defined by Savage and Presnell as, “a marked change, in structure, appearance, or character, usually for the better.”⁴ As transformation usually takes time and cannot be measured on an absolute scale, it is much harder to evaluate.

To observe change, I first needed to take an ecological approach of understanding Grant Chapel Church in relation to its larger context. The two contextual focus areas I considered were outlined in Chapter Four, “Grant Chapel A.M.E. Church History and Demographics.” Both areas provided a particular perspective which informed and influenced the cultural views of the church as a whole. As an AME church which was birthed out of an outcry of people who refused to continue to be marginalized, Grant is steeped in a tradition of social justice. Their desire to fight for the rights of others is inherent, and ingrained in the historical DNA of the church. These rights include those who may feel they have been left out. At the same time, I needed to recognize this was a community who knew all too well the sting of marginalization because many admitted and shared their first-hand experiences. Some articulated experiencing marginalization from their very own faith communities- a place they least expected to experience this sort of pain.

³ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Approach for Faith Communities* (Kentucky: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 123.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

When society tries to relegate people to the margins, it can be very distressing. In *Jesus in the Margins*, McKinley contends, “It’s so hard to go through life and not care about or be influenced by what people say and think, and their judgment stays with us. The labels stick.”⁵ The declarations society makes about people often become stereotypes that can feel permanent. To make matters worse, these stereotypes can have lasting consequences. For example, the existence of a stereotype associating a given group with violence and crime is grave and has important implications for the individual, the group, and the society.⁶ These stereotypes creep into music, TV, movies, play out on the nightly news and eventually in people’s daily lives.

In the other context- location, Grant Chapel is situated in the heart of Trenton, NJ, an urban community located in the state capital. It is a community that has experienced its share of socio-economic challenges and the ills associated with an urban community in a declining market. When growing up or spending significant time in one area, it has a way of becoming your cultural context, shaping your perspective, actions, and choices. Our community becomes our context and that context permeates the church. Our church can be messy because our communities can be messy, both a reflection of each other. When discussing the impact of community from a theological and cultural perspective, McKinley also asserts:

The picture of the church in the Bible is a messy one. Why? Because community is messy. The lies our culture wants us to buy into are not new. The church has struggled against them since its birth. The mess happens when people who are not like each other begin to do life together. We soon realize that community requires us to fall at Jesus’ feet and beg him for the love it takes to obey the “one another”

⁵ McKinley, *Jesus In the Margins*, 56.

⁶ Banaji and Greenwald, *Blind Spot*, 102.

commands. We find we often have to ask people to forgive us because we have not served and loved them the way Jesus wanted us to.⁷

I raise the concerns of the messiness of our communities and the impact of stereotyping because the unconscious biases have an impact on how we view ourselves and others. These biases can creep into the way we treat others in our faith communities. Even worse, the stereotypes society develops and ascribes to certain groups create automatic preferences in our minds which can significantly impact our behaviors and responses to others. Banaji and Greenwald discuss our brains' automaticity: "We implicitly know something or feel a certain way, and often these thoughts and feelings are reflected in our actions too. The difference being that we can't always explain these actions, and they are at times completely at odds with our conscious intentions."⁸ The constant barrage of print and digital media that cast certain races in a negative light creates associations in our minds, producing automatic responses which we cannot explain. They determine how we interact with these people, whether we are welcoming or rejecting, loving or cruel, talkative or silent, and welcoming or unwelcoming.

With this research on unconscious bias, I was better able to understand how the narratives of people worshipping in an urban church community grappling with higher rates of crime, poverty, and unemployment would be impacted. In addition, how the association with the AME church and its strong affiliation with social justice initiatives would also impact the narratives of the church community.

⁷ McKinley, *Jesus in the Margins*, 162.

⁸ Banaji and Greenwald, *Blind Spot*, 102.

The project surveys and focus groups uncovered a number of things about the church narrative. One of the most pronounced findings was related to the topic of evangelism. The pre-project intervention data revealed there was a high negative association with the word evangelism. It was fascinating to see the degree to which those affiliated with the church seemingly had a palpable and visceral reaction to the word. This intrigued me, and caused me to probe into the narratives of the participants to better understand their feelings. I wanted to understand, from a theological perspective, how God was showing up in these stories.

Savage and Presnell reflected on the importance of asking reflective questions upon hearing stories:

Critical pastoral/theological reflection begins with reflection on contemporary situations confronted in the storied realities of discipleship and ministry. Such reflections invite the pastoral theologian to raise questions about what God is doing in the situation, and how the faithful might join God's transformation action.⁹

The explorative questions asked during the focus groups and bible studies allowed the participants to weave their stories together and examine how God was working through their combined stories. As we examined the narratives we found a number of interesting intersections and were able to see a pattern of how media stories impacted their views on both evangelism and marginalization.

Self-proclaimed conservative evangelical Christians were very vocal about various political matters during a highly contentious election cycle, which the participants strongly felt fed into the notions of marginalization. Some believed it was offensive and

⁹ Savage and Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry*, 52.

against everything Jesus taught in the Bible for evangelicals to brag about “delivering their church” to a political candidate who openly maligned women, people of color, and other marginalized groups. Within this context, many who linked evangelism to evangelicals began developing strong negative associations with the word and concept. This harsh rhetoric in many cases fed into childhood memories participants had of people who called themselves evangelists, and would often try to scare people to Christ by damnation to hell if they did not “pray a certain prayer” at the time.

To help address this and create a space where people were more open to learn more about evangelism, I had to provide definitions and distinctions between the office of evangelism, televangelist (often white conservatives) who self-identify as evangelicals and the activity of evangelism which is a biblical mandate for all Christians. By differentiating between these terms, participants’ conversations became more focused on the act of evangelism and there was a positive shift in the conversations undergirded with a desire to learn how Jesus shared the good news, with who and how we could follow his examples today.

The research data also revealed many people had either witnessed or personally experienced marginalization in the church. In addition, the pre-project intervention research indicated that although the community felt Jesus required outreach to all, the community did not necessarily feel every church member was required or equipped to participate in evangelistic activities.

The post Bible study survey allowed me to compare and contrast thoughts and attitudes towards evangelism and marginalization following an in-depth Bible study on the subject. I was extremely curious to see if any of the negative thoughts on evangelism

articulated in both the focus groups and the initial online survey were too ingrained to create any shifts post intervention. I was pleasantly surprised to see positive movement with this group following the project intervention which gave me hope for the larger faith community who may have been stained by some past experiences but did not participate in this project.

When participants were asked about their first reaction to the word evangelism, this group was more optimistic post Bible study with 67% of respondents having a positive or very positive reaction to the word. This was up from the 50% in the pre-Bible study group who reported a positive or very positive reaction to the word.

One of the most significant changes from the pre-to-post project intervention survey was the response to the question of how survey responders personally felt about evangelism and their anticipated participation levels within the next thirty days. When asked how they personally felt about evangelism following the Bible study, 92% of the responders felt somewhat positive or very positive. In the previous study, 67% viewed evangelism in a positive light whereas 33% viewed it neutral to very negative. This was one of the first areas where there was a meaningful change in the reported data. This trend continued when I examined how responders thought others felt about evangelism and their personal intentions of engagement.

When asked how responders thought others within the church viewed evangelism, the response post-Bible study was also much more positive which may indicate when people have a more positive view of evangelism, they might project that view on others. Responders suggested 75% of others would view the idea of evangelism as somewhat or very positive whereas in the previous study only 55% of responders thought others would

view evangelism in a positive light. Within the pre-intervention focus group, 33% of participants felt others had a positive view of evangelism.

“Engagement in evangelism” accounted for the greatest change. Post project intervention, 100% of the participants reported they would be somewhat likely to extremely likely to engage in evangelistic activities within the next thirty days whereas in the first survey 33% of the responders stated they were not at all or not so likely to engage in evangelistic activities. Comments in the final survey by participants further indicated a change in perception. One participant stated they learned, “To be more aware of my personal biases and prejudices and not to let them interfere with my service for the Lord.” Another powerful comment reported in the survey was, “Evangelism is something everyone can do and it is something God expects me to do too.” It was amazing to see the change in the participants’ understanding of evangelism. More importantly, all participants came to the realization that they could evangelize in their own unique way with their own “giftings.” This demonstrated personal transformation as seen through the narratives of the participants.

The Grant Chapel community ended the Bible study with a newfound enthusiasm toward the topics and a realization of the impact of marginalization. More importantly, they developed a personal accountability towards both topics, and an ability to reimagine them in relation to Jesus’ ministry. For example, prior to the project intervention, some members of Grant only viewed marginalization through the lens of poverty or disability. Following the bible study some commented on “now seeing how someone who is rich, or a politician,” or someone with access to power could be marginalized.

The next category I analyzed through the data and narratives was transformation. The surveys were adequate to measure the change in attitudes, perceptions, and intentions within the church. However, the research data obtained could not measure church transformation, a harder concept to establish and to develop short term benchmarks that would indicate structural or cultural changes within the church. As a result, this project was one dimensional and unable to measure church transformation. I did observe anecdotal evidence of individual transformation through participant narratives and the comments from the survey.

Overall, the surveys have indicated change by project participants within Grant Chapel AME Church, but it cannot establish transformation in the larger church body because that is a process that occurs over time and represents a wider cultural shift within the entire church body. Many participants indicated a change in thought processes and intended behaviors, which has the potential to seep into the larger church body. The project design and execution did not account for findings within the larger context of Grant church. Transformation within the church context would require an ongoing focus on evangelism and marginalization, impacting the entire church body and requiring repeated stimulus. It would also require the development of consistent programs, a repeated and dedicated focus on the topics, volunteer opportunities, and ongoing training. In addition, long term transformation would require a sense of ownership by the entire church body and a desire for change to be internalized by the majority of church members. Although this is possible for a church mission and vision, it would take extensive time and was outside the scope of a short-term doctoral project.

I am hopeful for a continued focus on this topic within the church. The church body and leadership have expressed an interest and desire for a continued focus on the evangelism and marginalization. As a new staff member in the church, I too, am excited to continue the work and help create an inclusive environment where all feel welcomed in the church and members feel empowered to go forth and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Three months after my project ended, there was a leadership change in the church. The Pastor and Co-Pastor of Grant Chapel AME Church were re-assigned to a large congregation in Philadelphia, PA. With a change in leadership, the introduction of new programming and continued training to support a renewed focus on evangelism and outreach was put on pause as the new Pastor introduced his vision for the church. It is my hope that Grant Chapel AME Church does not lose the momentum and excitement around this topic and we will see long term change and transformation because of a continued focus on evangelism and marginalization.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION: LET THE CHURCH SAY AMEN!

You want to evangelize the world? Get fully committed to your culture. Re-inhabit your world. Get more involved in the lives of people you desire to help. If God so loved the world, why can't we? How can you be an incarnationist and not be a populist? How can you believe in incarnation and be an elitist? How can you not believe that God delights in mass culture as well as folk culture, that God enjoys pop music, that McDonalds's food and rap music and U2s 'With or Without You' are not on the menus and playlists of heaven? ¹

-Leonard Sweet

As the members of Grant Chapel AME Church tackled the intersection of marginalization, evangelism, and influence of culture, we considered and wrestled with the illuminating thought offered by Sweet in the quote above.

Here Sweet mirrors what Paul said in Acts 10:34 when he proclaimed God is not a respecter of persons, and in Matthew 18:12-14 when Jesus shared the example of being overjoyed after leaving the ninety-nine to find the one lost sheep. The message is simple: Everyone matters. God appreciates our diversity because it was his creation. For us to evangelize the world, we must begin with that notion and not succumb to an elitist

¹ Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 180.

attitude which separates communities based on whatever criteria is applied at any given moment. We cannot employ a theology of selective inclusion, outreach, and ministry.

God loves our varieties. As Richardson reminds us:

Jesus hung out with sinners, sick people, lepers, prostitutes, drunkards, blue-collar types. If you felt second class, like a failure, not a religious person, alienated by church and by spiritual-type people, then Jesus loved hanging out with you, and you loved hanging out with Jesus.²

If Jesus demonstrated a desire to build relationships with the many different people he met—who were often relegated to the margins—and a special individualized loving outreach, as followers of Jesus, shouldn't his followers do the same?

Unfortunately living in a society where interactions have now become more transactional than relational, something has gotten lost. McKinley contends, “The culture we live in is about our making it for our glory. The result of this is that people fail to engage in deep relationships. There are few places where they are really known not even in their own marriages and families”³ In many ways, it seems we have lost the art of connecting, which was in part what made Jesus’ message and ministry so powerful. Jesus would stop walking to ask a man to dine with him that very day and have a discussion which left an entire household changed. Jesus would sit by a well and ask a woman for a drink then engage in a discussion which would serve as an invitation for an entire community to come and have a chat with him. Jesus would stop teaching a lesson to teach another lesson when a man was dropped through a roof. He called a person by their name instead of identifying them by their sin while also taking the time to connect and invite them into fellowship with him. The beauty of these connections was the

² Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, 103.

³ McKinley, *Jesus In the Margins*, 155.

indiscriminate nature of the interactions and uniqueness to everyone. What a lesson to a body of believers!

During the Bible study sessions, we took the time to examine the ways Jesus deliberately connected with people and explored how we could do the same. This project allowed members of Grant Chapel AME Church to explore the multiplicity of ways Jesus ministered to those on the margins and lovingly shared the gospel with those others often rejected. We took powerful stories from the gospels and compared them to today's society and more importantly, explore where we fell into the narrative both individually and collectively. We were also able to make a link which many of us had not previously explored in terms of the intersection between marginalization and evangelism. It was a fascinating exploration which led us right to the feet of Christ to observe, witness, and learn.

As discussed in chapter seven, after the project intervention occurred, the congregation demonstrated changes in perceptions and actions:

- They had a new understanding about who within modern society is currently marginalized. They came to a consensus that marginalization isn't something that only occurs because of race or gender. People can be marginalized because of how they look, what part of town they are from, their profession, marital status or even past. Many participated admitted they never thought about how many people are excluded because of singular aspects of their lives.
- Congregants became sensitized to their tendency to marginalize people. Participants decided to be more conscious of things they said or did to others which could make them feel excluded and they vowed not to turn a blind eye

when they saw others getting marginalized. One person said, “I realized I was just as guilty as the person who was marginalizing someone by laughing at his stupid jokes.”

- They gained clarity about how to define evangelism.
- They accepted that it was their responsibility to evangelize as a community of faith and understood evangelism to be sacred act of sharing the gospel through love.

The evidence of these changes is in the survey results, personal narratives, and anecdotal evidence. This project did not allow for church transformation as this would require a long-term commitment to programing and the potential for structural changes in the church. I perceive an openness and desire by both the leadership and those who participated in the project to work towards changes which would in time bring forth a transformation within Grant Chapel. We could discern God’s work through the personal narratives and see changes already occurring.

Since the commencement of the project, the church leadership facilitated a series of educational opportunities to continue the dialogue on marginalization and evangelism. The Pastor taught on marginalization in a community with health disparities and has subsequently preached on God’s response to those society has marginalized. Also, the church has started a project where the congregation gives out bracelets inscribed with scriptural references as a non-threatening way to evangelize to those we encounter. This is our attempt to like Jesus, begin a conversation with another brother or sister and create an opportunity to share our stories.

I am also witnessing a renewed focus on inclusion in the church. During one of the focus groups, a member shared how difficult it was to follow the AME Church service when visiting an AME church for the first time. They did not understand the order of service, when to sit, stand or how to respond to the call to worship. To ensure visitors felt welcomed, the church has now placed copies of the liturgy in the pews. This was a very intentional attempt to ensure visitors felt welcomed and included. Grant Chapel remains committed to doing all it can to make worshippers feel cared for and considered. The project intervention played a significant role in this new sensitivity.

According to Sweet, one of Jesus' favorite metaphors in the gospel was human service and "water" or "living water." He said, "We can take the shape of whatever person or culture we are in without losing the essence of who we are. Like all water, we turn bad by staying in one place and not being in motion and mission."⁴ This project reinforces the notion that we should be true followers of Christ by sharing the gospel without judgment and with a spirit of love. In doing so, we become evangelists for Christ and defy the vileness of marginalization. Roderick Hewitt had it right:

People are looking to the God of life for fullness of life (John 10:10) that is best expressed in the life and work of Jesus. Therefore, evangelism cannot be separated from the wider agenda of the *oikoumene*.²² It must go far beyond the narrow agenda of converting non-believers or people of other faiths to the religion of Christianity and instead give priority attention to the holistic salvation of humanity and creation.⁵

⁴ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 183.

⁵ Hewitt, "Evangelism as Discipleship," 210.

We must regard those we are called to serve as individuals and not force feed them with a prescriptive conversation. We must look to connect with others. Sweet counsels about how to conceptualize evangelism for different generations:

Every generation needs a shape that fits its own hands, its own soul. Each generation, every person, needs a different handle from which to receive the living waters of Jesus. Our task is to pour the living water into anything anyone will pick up. By ‘anything’ I mean literally: anything. If I want to reach my twenty-second century children (they probably will live to see 2100) with the gospel of Jesus, I must be prepared to pour the living water into containers out of which I myself would never be caught dead drinking.⁶

It is a beautiful thought to think of us as a community of faith learning to love one another as Christ loved the church. It is a beautiful image to imagine wrapping arms of love around a neighbor instead of standing in judgment. According to Bonhoeffer, “Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others, we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.”⁷ This project explored the biblical and theological principles which we as a community of faith were taught through the ministry of Jesus including, forgiveness, non-judgment, inclusion, grace, and loving our neighbors. Through the stories of the woman at the well, and Zacchaeus, the paraplegic who was lowered through the roof, we are reminded that Jesus ministered to their point of need by connecting with them on a human level. He was willing to bend down and sit with someone in order to connect. If Jesus, the son of God could bend down to talk to someone, why can’t we? Just the notion of Jesus sitting

⁶ Sweet, *AquaChurch 2.0*, 37.

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone Book, 1959), 185.

with someone versus standing over them created a rich dialogue about how we approach others.

This project personally changed me and my ministry. It made me hypervigilant about my own evangelism, sensitive to how I treat others, and aware of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So often we use idle words not realizing how a word spoken hastily can humiliate, or how an unfriendly look can wound. If we are going to call ourselves leaders in our faith communities, we must first be followers of Christ. It also exhorted me to always speak up for others when I witness marginalization. The words of the woman from my focus group will dwell with me for the rest of my life: oppression in the church is normalized and so many people have to live like this all the time and you think, ‘That’s what God’s about?’ Like this young lady said, in our community of faith, we can allow oppression to be normalized but that is not what God is about.

APPENDIX A

Lay Advisory Committee Biographies

Rev. Vernon R. Byrd Jr.
Pastor

The Reverend Vernon R. Byrd Jr. is the son of the late Bishop Vernon R. Byrd, Sr. and retired Episcopal Supervisor Theora Byrd. He is a child of the parsonage and attended schools in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Bermuda. He received a BA degree in Economics and Sociology from Harvard University. He earned a Doctorate of Juris Prudence from the University of Pennsylvania School of Law. He received his Master of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary.

Professionally, Rev. Byrd has had an outstanding career as an attorney. He currently serves as Assistant General Counsel and Vice President of Legal Education and Training at Johnson & Johnson. Prior to that, he served as Senior Counsel for *The New York Times*. He is a member of the New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York Bar Associations. At the General Conference in July of 2012, the AME Church elected Rev. Byrd to serve as a member of the Judicial Council, the highest judicatory body of the church. On September 11, of 2014, Rev. Byrd successfully reached the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro, 19,341 feet, the highest freestanding mountain in the world.

From a young age, Rev. Byrd was active in virtually every area of the church. He was spiritually nurtured in the Sunday School and the YPD. As a young teenager, he began directing choirs and has led choirs at Morris Brown AME in Philadelphia and St Paul AME in Cambridge, MA. Rev. Byrd is a composer, singer and musician.

After much resistance, Vernon R. Byrd, Jr., finally answered the call to preach, and under the unction of the Holy Spirit, was ordained to serve the AME Church. His walk of ministry started out at Hemmingway Memorial AME Church in Maryland where he answered the call under the late Rev. Dr. William R. Porter. He serves as pastor of Grant Chapel AME Church in Trenton, New Jersey.

Rev. Byrd is a family man. He is married to the Reverend Dr. Melinda Contreras-Byrd, and they are blessed to be the proud parents of two daughters, Kamaria and Alexa.

Last but not least, Rev Byrd is simply a child of God who strives to live so that the world might see the love of Jesus in his witness.

Rev. Dr. Melinda Contreras-Byrd
Co-Pastor

The Reverend Dr. Melinda Contreras-Byrd is a New Jersey state licensed psychologist and owner of the Generations Center. The Center specializes in meeting the psychological and spiritual needs of all women, and both men and women of color. Dr. Contreras-Byrd's general areas of expertise involve issues of class, gender, ethnicity and faith; while her clinical areas of expertise are depression and anxiety.

She has worked as a school psychologist in urban and suburban districts. She has served as a clinical psychologist for juvenile offenders, homeless men, and adult substance abusers. Dr. Contreras-Byrd has directed programs for bilingual preschoolers and the intellectually gifted. She has been a professor of Psychology, Christian and Pastoral Counseling, and Black Studies. For six years, she served as the Special Services Advisor to the Office of the Dean of Students at Princeton University. In this capacity she developed, implemented, and supervised programming directed at meeting the social, cultural, academic and emotional needs of Asian, Black, Latino and Native American undergraduate students.

For the past six years, she served as a consultant psychologist and clinical supervisor for LifeTies Inc. of Trenton and Ewing, serving populations with backgrounds of abuse & neglect, and teens who were "medically fragile" or gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or trans-gendered.

Dr. Contreras-Byrd has appeared on local radio and television stations, and has served as lecturer, preacher, work-shop facilitator or key note speaker for numerous corporations, community, religious and educational organizations throughout the United States and Latin America. She is founder of "Solidaridad," a mental health/clergy wellness partnering initiative between pastors in the USA and the Dominican Republic.

She is a graduate of Rutgers University, The Graduate School of Applied & Professional Psychology, and the Princeton Theological Seminary. Her Seminary thesis involved the development of a spiritual approach to treating clinical depression in Christian women.

She presently serves as adjunct professor at the Doctor of Ministry Programs of Drew University and the New Brunswick Theological Seminary. She was recently awarded a grant from the Louisville Institute and conducted research into the factors that inform the self-care decisions of Black and Latino pastors in the United States.

She is a published writer and poet, an ordained Elder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and joins her husband, Rev. Vernon R. Byrd, Jr. in ministry at Grant Chapel AME Church in Trenton, New Jersey.

Rhonda Hunter
Member

I joined Grant Chapel AME Church in 1997 with my late husband Reverend Anthony Hunter Sr., to this union were born two sons Anthony Jr. and Elijah. As a member of Grant Chapel, I currently serve as the Vice-Chair of the Steward Board. I have served as the church's treasurer, a member of the Missionary Society, the Usher Board, and a Sunday School teacher over the past nineteen years.

I retired from the Department of Treasury in Trenton New Jersey as a Supervisor Accountant. Currently, I operate a tax business with over 50 clients. I am also enrolled in New Brunswick Theological Seminary pursuing a Master of Divinity degree. Daily I am reminded that "All things work together for good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Robert Johnson
Member

Robert Johnson is semi-retired after 27 years in corrections, another 8 years as Counselor at a treatment/rehabilitation center. Spending countless hours encouraging, and mentoring young men, with over 15 years coaching little league baseball, and PAL basketball. Operating on the premise of am I my brother's keeper? Yes, I am!

Timothy Johnson
Member

*Bio not available

Nanette Moore

Grant Chapel AME Church Community of Faith

Nannette is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where she earned a Bachelor of Science from the School of Public Health in Health Sciences. She is also a Certified Mediator for Negotiations and Conflict Resolution. She currently works at Johnson & Johnson as a Senior Manager of Leadership Development.

Maria Santiago
Member

Maria Magdalena Santiago has been a member of Grant Chapel AME Church since 1999. She serves as the Superintendent of Sunday School, a member of the Praise and Worship Team, Adult Praise Dancers, Missionary, and serves as a member of the Voices of Unity Choir.

Maria is currently employed by Merwick Care and Rehabilitation Center as the Human Resource Manager. She has over 9 years' experience in Human Resources. She received her Bachelor of Science in Bible with emphasis on Christian Leadership from Carin University in 2008. She is currently attending Carin University to complete her Masters Degree in Christian Counseling to be completed by June 2018. She is a current Member of the American Association of Christian Counselors.

She is the proud mother of a 15-year-old named Alayna. Maria is the eldest of 4 children. Maria is encouraged daily by Matthew 6:33, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness..."

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

Researcher:	Carla Calizaire, Drew University Doctorate of Ministry Candidate
Study Title:	EVANGELISM & THE MARGINS: LIVING JESUS' TRANSFORMATIONAL NARRATIVE OF LOVE & OUTREACH
Institution:	Drew University, Theological School

1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research.

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate and any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to take some time to think this over and ask questions now and at any other time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records.

2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

Any male or female at least 18 years old can participate.

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research study is to explore how practices of marginalization inhibit evangelism.

4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

This focus group will be conducted at Grant Chapel AME Church as a 90-minute group session.

5. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 90-minute focus group where we will discuss experiences surrounding topics like inclusion/exclusion within the church community, evangelism and other relevant topics. During the session, you will be asked a series of group interview questions where you will have an opportunity to share your thoughts/opinions. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering.

6. WHAT ARE MY BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope through your participation we can learn more about how marginalization in the church community can impact evangelism.

7. WHAT ARE MY RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the study.

8. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

9. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I wish regarding this evaluation. If I have any additional questions about the evaluation, I may call Carla Calizaire @ XXX-XXX-XXXX.

10. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

When signing this form I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.”

- **I agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information discussed by all participants and researchers during the focus group session.**

If you cannot agree to the above stipulation please see the researcher(s) as you may be ineligible to participate in this study.

Participant Signature: Print Name: Date:

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

Signature of Person Print Name: Date:
Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. When you hear the word evangelism what comes to mind? (Positive or negative impressions?)
2. Who influenced your impressions surrounding how you define evangelism and how we as Christians should evangelize to others?
3. Have you ever felt excluded, left out, or not welcomed in a church or church activity by groups of people/or a person and/or have you ever noticed anyone excluding others in church or maybe treating them different for any particular reason? How?
4. What did people say or do to make you feel excluded?97
5. Why do you think people may have excluded you or treated you differently? Did you think it was done on purpose?
6. How did it make you feel (in general and about yourself) when you thought people in church were excluding you or not treating you in a welcoming manner? Did it impact your desire to attend church?
7. Is there anyone or group of people who you think might not feel welcomed in the church? Who are they and why?
8. Do you think you ever excluded anyone? What made you exclude them? How do you know that you've never excluded them?

9. Who influenced your views on who should be included or excluded in church activities/services? (TV, News, Family, Denomination, other church members?)
10. Is there anything else you'd like to say about feeling included or excluded in church or your views on evangelism?

APPENDIX D

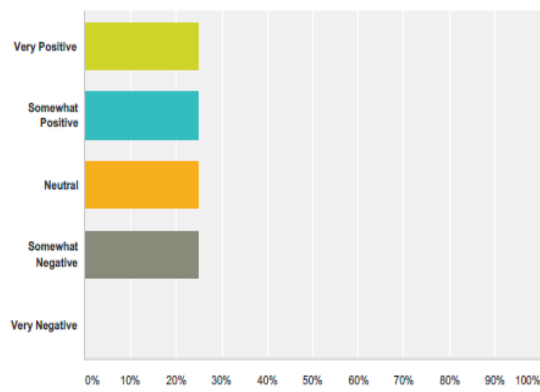
PRE-BIBLE STUDY SURVEY

Grant Chapel AME Church Jan 2017

SurveyMonkey

Q1 What is YOUR first reaction to the word evangelism?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Very Positive	25.00% 3
Somewhat Positive	25.00% 3
Neutral	25.00% 3
Somewhat Negative	25.00% 3
Very Negative	0.00% 0
Total	12

Grant Chapel AME Church Jan 2017

SurveyMonkey

Q2 How would you define evangelism?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0

#	Responses	Date
1	Spreading God's word	1/20/2017 3:23 PM
2	The process of sharing the message of God's love and grace.	1/13/2017 6:46 PM
3	Not just the telling of the good news. I would actually say less telling and more doing. It's not only telling of the healing, love, joy, comfort, and power of God, but being those things to others when the opportunity presents itself. The good news isn't just verbal, it's an experience.	1/10/2017 11:30 AM
4	Someone you can confide in with spiritual needs, beside your pastor	1/9/2017 3:18 PM
5	Evangelism is spreading the Good News of God's word.	1/9/2017 3:05 PM
6	Spreading the gospel	1/9/2017 2:02 PM
7	My "somewhat negative" reaction is that the way it has been traditionally acted out is for Christians to be "holier than thou." "Our way is the only way." If, however, it is defined as living out the saving love of Jesus, I'm good with it.	1/9/2017 1:47 PM
8	A missionary preacher of the Gospel of Christ.	1/9/2017 1:41 PM
9	Telling people about becoming a Christian	1/9/2017 12:47 PM
10	teaching the word of the Bible	1/9/2017 12:47 PM
11	Attempts to teach Christian doctrine and gain converts	1/9/2017 12:32 PM
12	A teacher of the gospel.	1/7/2017 8:28 PM

Grant Chapel AME Church Jan 2017

SurveyMonkey

Q2 How would you define evangelism?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0

#	Responses	Date
1	Spreading God's word	1/20/2017 3:23 PM
2	The process of sharing the message of God's love and grace.	1/13/2017 6:46 PM
3	Not just the telling of the good news. I would actually say less telling and more doing. It's not only telling of the healing, love, joy, comfort, and power of God, but being those things to others when the opportunity presents itself. The good news isn't just verbal, it's an experience.	1/10/2017 11:30 AM
4	Someone you can confide in with spiritual needs, beside your pastor	1/9/2017 3:18 PM
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8	A missionary preacher of the Gospel of Christ.	1/9/2017 1:41 PM
9	Telling people about becoming a Christian	1/9/2017 12:47 PM
10	teaching the word of the Bible	1/9/2017 12:47 PM
11	Attempts to teach Christian doctrine and gain converts	1/9/2017 12:32 PM
12	A teacher of the gospel.	1/7/2017 8:28 PM

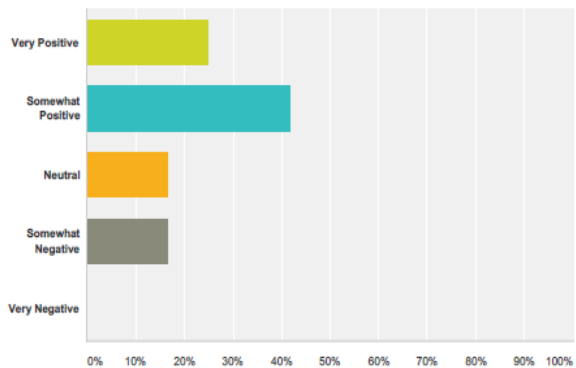
Q3 What types of activities do you think are included when describing evangelism?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 1

#	Responses	Date
1	Visiting sick and shut in praying, teaching God's word, street corner ministry.	1/20/2017 3:23 PM
2	Any activity that encourages someone to make better choices in life or makes them feel loved. It can be as simple as sending a card in the mail, visiting them when sick, cooking a meal, or giving a small gift. It really depends on the receiving party's preferred love language.	1/13/2017 6:46 PM
3	Community work, pastoral work, social justice advocacy, educational opportunities about the Bible in its context and helping to bring deeper comprehension.	1/10/2017 11:30 AM
4	Being available for the peoples needs	1/9/2017 3:18 PM
5	Witness of God's grace and mercy, fervent prayer, and stewardship of one's time with service.	1/9/2017 3:05 PM
6	preaching, witnessing	1/9/2017 2:02 PM
7	Feeding the hungry. Clothing the naked. Visiting the prisoner and the sick. Gong the extra mile for your neighbor	1/9/2017 1:47 PM
8	Broadcast the "glad tidings" of Jesus Christ through love and concern.	1/9/2017 1:41 PM
9	Street ministry Preaching TV preaching	1/9/2017 12:47 PM
10	Going out to the community and sharing the word of God	1/9/2017 12:47 PM
11	Revivals, preaching, Giving out salvation materials etc	1/9/2017 12:32 PM

Q4 How do YOU feel about personally participating in evangelism?

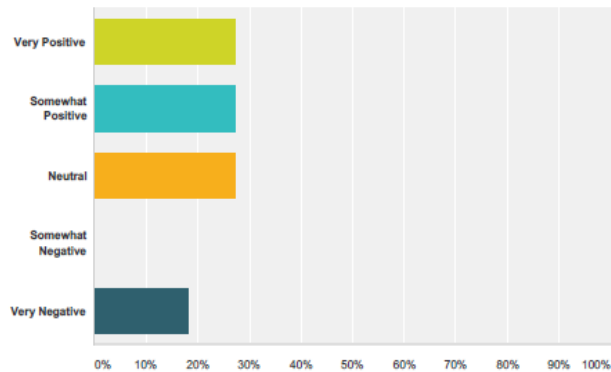
Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Very Positive	25.00%	3
Somewhat Positive	41.67%	5
Neutral	16.67%	2
Somewhat Negative	16.67%	2
Very Negative	0.00%	0
Total		12

Q5 How do you think OTHERS within the church view the idea of evangelism?

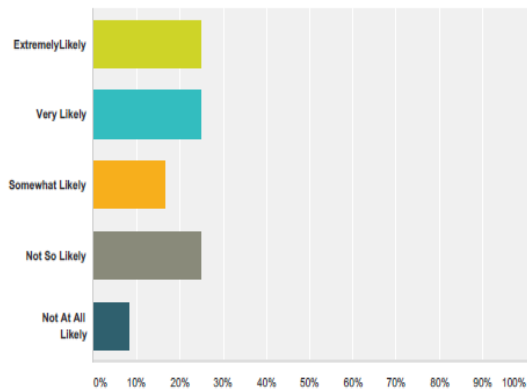
Answered: 11 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Very Positive	27.27%	3
Somewhat Positive	27.27%	3
Neutral	27.27%	3
Somewhat Negative	0.00%	0
Very Negative	18.18%	2
Total		11

Q6 How likely are you to participate in some form of evangelism within the next 30 days?

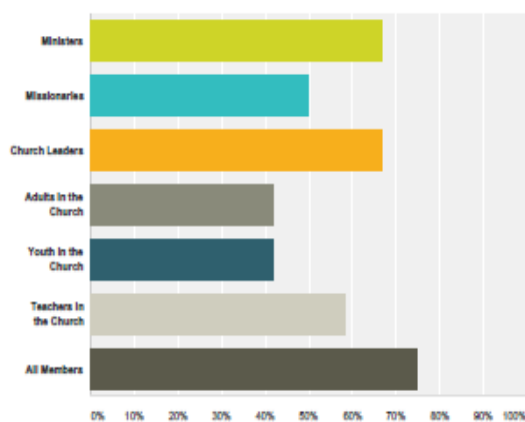
Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Extremely Likely	25.00% 3
Very Likely	25.00% 3
Somewhat Likely	16.67% 2
Not So Likely	25.00% 3
Not At All Likely	8.33% 1
Total	12

Q7 Whose primary responsibility do you think it is to participate in evangelistic activities? (Check all that apply)

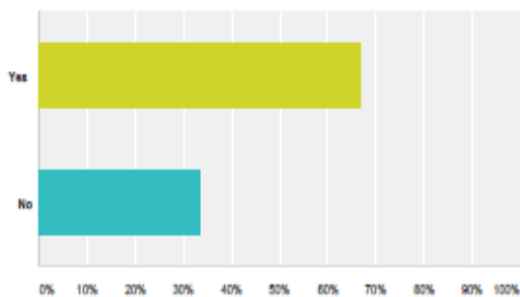
Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Ministers	66.67%	8
Missionaries	50.00%	6
Church Leaders	66.67%	8
Adults in the Church	41.67%	5
Youth in the Church	41.67%	5
Teachers in the Church	58.33%	7
All Members	75.00%	9
Total Respondents: 12		

Q8 Have you ever seen someone say or do something to make another person feel unwelcomed or not invited to participate in a church activity?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0

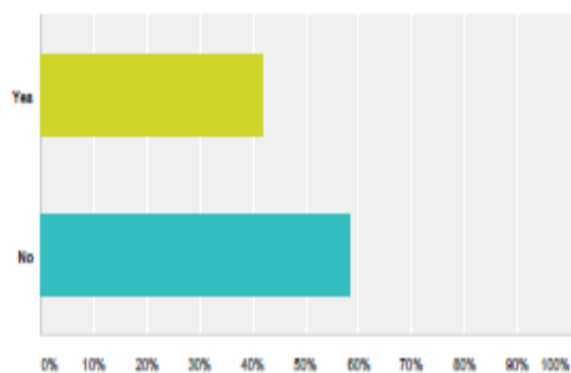


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	66.67%	8
No	33.33%	4
Total		12

#	If yes please share why you think they were not welcoming to the other person.	Date
1	Based on personal beliefs and experiences that were being projected on to someone else.	1/10/2017 11:30 AM
2	Certain visitors were not spoken to/acknowledged in a inviting manner.	1/9/2017 3:05 PM
3	the way they spoke to the person or looked down on them because of the way they were dressed or they act differently, which did not meet their expectations.	1/9/2017 2:02 PM
4	Gossip has been something that has caused some people (the subject of the gossip) to stop coming to church.	1/9/2017 1:47 PM
5	Person entered the door, was ignored, turned and left.	1/9/2017 1:41 PM
6	They were not an official member so they can't participate. Not moving over so they could sit	1/9/2017 12:47 PM
7	They asked them to leave although they had been worshipping quietly because they obviously had been drinking.	1/9/2017 12:32 PM
8	During a dance routine it was stated the size of dancers was not accepted.	1/7/2017 8:28 PM

Q9 Do you think you have ever made someone feel left out of church activities or unwelcomed in the church by something you said or did (even if by accident)?

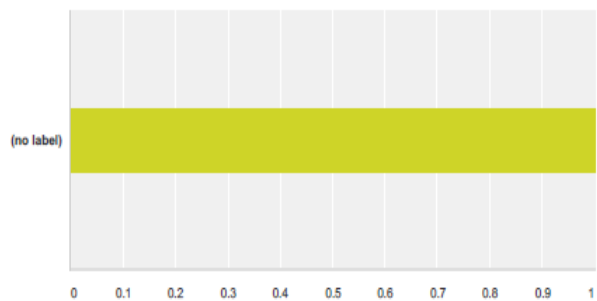
Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	41.67%	5
No	58.33%	7
Total		12

Q10 How likely is it that you will reach out to someone in or outside of the church who is different from you (different meaning-age group, race, gender, occupation, marital status etc) and try to have a conversation with them or invite them to join you at a church activity? (1 being not likely and 10 being very likely)

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	8.33%	8.33%	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	16.67%	41.67%	12	1.00
	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	5		

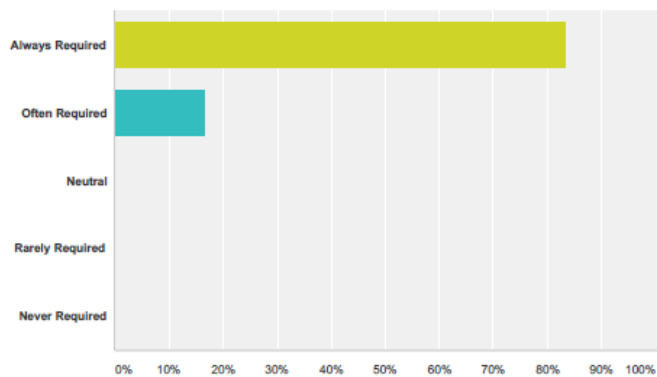
Q11 In your own words why do you think some people might not feel comfortable or welcomed at church?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0

#	Response	Date
1	They don't feel "saved" or "holy" enough.	1/20/2017 3:23 PM
2	People usually feel most comfortable around others with whom they have a positive relationship or shared experience. A newcomer might not feel comfortable if they don't know anyone and/or are not familiar with the order of service. People may also not feel comfortable if they have a negative interaction with someone.	1/13/2017 6:46 PM
3	We get distracted from the blessings of community. We're human so it's only natural that we are not always at our best, life takes a toll on us at times. However, when church communities don't create safe spaces for people to work through their pain, emotions and thoughts, it seeps into other things. And projects a temporary feeling or experience as the character of the church. A lot of churches also refuse to progress and are mislead about content of the Bible and how we are to use it. We can't preach about a God bigger than boundaries but limit him to a text that we don't explore fully in it's context. People experience God before stepping into a church, so they know of his truth and love, they need to church to learn and expand more. So if a church is limited in its experience and spiritual understanding of God, people will know and it will push them away. God is above doctrines and systems, and does not need them to reach us. I think we need to stop leaning on them so heavily and start leaning on him more to show us how and where we can expand our reach.	1/10/2017 11:30 AM
4	Church is separated with cliques	1/9/2017 3:18 PM
5	They may not physically or aesthetically look like me and therefore they are not approached in a friendly inviting manner.	1/9/2017 3:05 PM
6	In my opinion, there can be many reasons, something as small as the way they are greeted when they walked in the door to being offended by the word that was preached that day	1/9/2017 2:02 PM
7	A variety of reasons. They may not have friends or family that go to the church. They may feel lost or bored with some of the liturgy. They may feel like the pastor or members judge them. They may feel like they are too sinful to come. They may not feel understood, recognized, loved or respected.	1/9/2017 1:47 PM
8	Pointing fingers!	1/9/2017 1:41 PM
9	The church is not very diverse.	1/9/2017 12:47 PM
10	Because people feel that church members are hypocrites they don't preach what they teach themselves or they may be looked down upon how they are dressed and feel they are not accepted.	1/9/2017 12:47 PM
11	They drink. They have tattoos They are shabbily dressed. They are gay. They have no offering to put in. They are alone. They don't know the responses that we all have memorized. They cannot read well. They are in a wheelchair	1/9/2017 12:32 PM
12	Not being spoken to.	1/7/2017 8:28 PM

Q12 Do you think Jesus taught that believers were expected to provide outreach to people who might be considered sinners by the church community?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Always Required	83.33% 10
Often Required	16.67% 2
Neutral	0.00% 0
Rarely Required	0.00% 0
Never Required	0.00% 0
Total	12

APPENDIX E

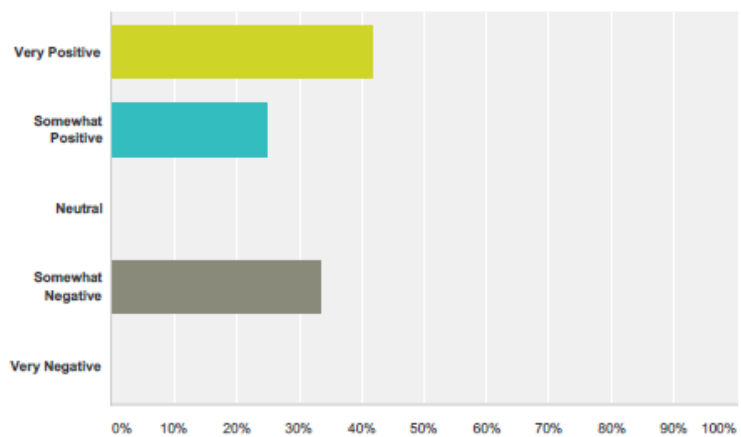
POST BIBLE STUDY SURVEY

Grant Chapel AME Church Evangelism & Marginalization March 2017

SurveyMonkey

Q1 What is YOUR first reaction to the word evangelism?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Very Positive	41.67%	5
Somewhat Positive	25.00%	3
Neutral	0.00%	0
Somewhat Negative	33.33%	4
Very Negative	0.00%	0
Total		12

Grant Chapel AME Church Evangelism & Marginalization March 2017

SurveyMonkey

Q2 How would you define evangelism?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0

#	Responses	Date
1	Somewhat negative given the blow hearts on TV and radio. However I misinterpreted evangelist vs evangelism. As a Jew, I think of evangelism as an invitation to do more mitvot, to be more aware of what I can do face to face and hand to hand. I see evangelism as action.	3/10/2017 11:43 PM
2	sharing the word of God	3/10/2017 8:09 PM
3	preaching/teaching the gospel	3/8/2017 8:05 AM
4	To influence the thinking or opinion of people that you come in contact with in daily situations.	3/4/2017 1:35 PM
5	Love of and benevolent service to others.	3/3/2017 7:09 PM
6	teaching others that God loves them, and how to live according to Jesus' example	3/3/2017 6:54 PM
7	someone who speaks the gospel.	3/3/2017 12:01 PM
8	A "publisher of glad tidings;" a missionary preacher of the Gospel.	3/2/2017 2:24 PM
9	Sharing the gospel of Jesus and addressing the needs of the lost.	3/2/2017 1:49 PM
10	Showing and sharing the good news that we are loved by God.	3/1/2017 11:12 PM
11	Crossing boundaries to reach others with the guidance of the holy spirit.	3/1/2017 10:20 PM
12	brining forth the good news to people with love.	3/1/2017 10:10 PM

Grant Chapel AME Church Evangelism & Marginalization March 2017

SurveyMonkey

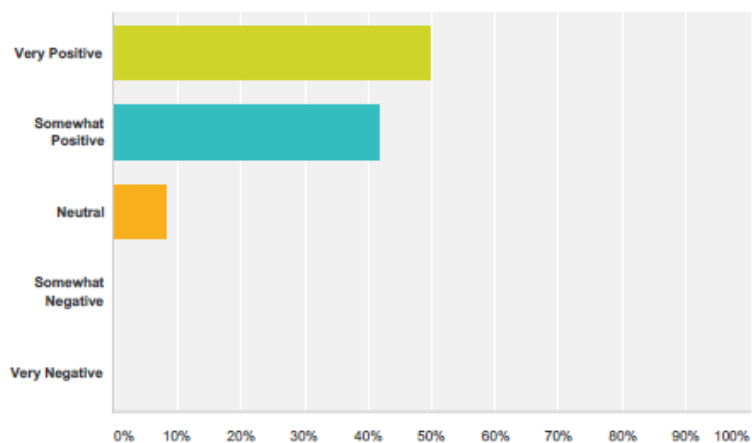
Q3 What types of activities do you think are included when describing evangelism?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 1

#	Responses	Date
1	Social justice. Do more mitzvot anonymously, draw women together (In an informal and temporal way) to make circumstances better for others. It can be just a small gesture or a spur of the moment act of kindness or executing a well conceived plan.	3/10/2017 11:43 PM
2	reaching out to people in and out of the church community	3/8/2017 8:05 AM
3	At work, social gatherings, shopping experiences, anywhere the opportunity presents itself.	3/4/2017 1:35 PM
4	Sharing God's word, personal testimony, serving others, addressing the needs of others.	3/3/2017 7:09 PM
5	showing love and teaching certain truths from the Bible	3/3/2017 6:54 PM
6	You help folks to understand God's word, by studying the Bible. You listen to people and try to meet them were they are in life.	3/3/2017 12:01 PM
7	Personal Interaction with the entire world/	3/2/2017 2:24 PM
8	Praying,giving testimonies,preaching &, teaching.	3/2/2017 1:49 PM
9	Actions and words of love. Affirmatively demonstrating to everyone, especially those marginalized, that God's love includes all of us. And It is ok to be yourself in doing so.	3/1/2017 11:12 PM
10	Any and everything!	3/1/2017 10:20 PM
11	Praying with people, teaching, the word, ministering to people in Jesus name.	3/1/2017 10:10 PM

Q4 How do YOU feel about personally participating in evangelism?

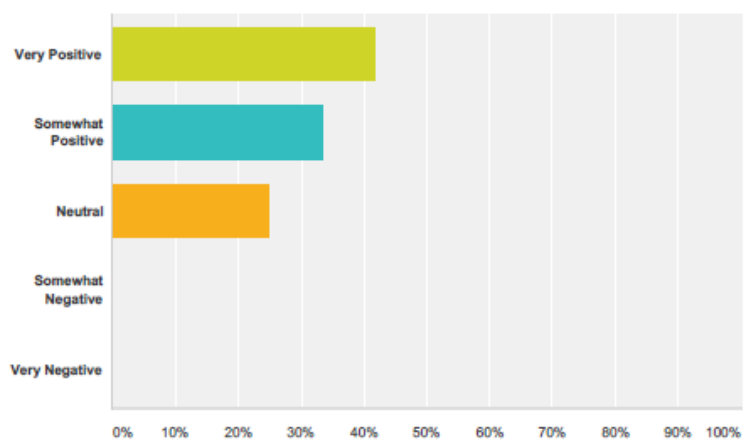
Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Very Positive	50.00%	6
Somewhat Positive	41.67%	5
Neutral	8.33%	1
Somewhat Negative	0.00%	0
Very Negative	0.00%	0
Total		12

Q5 How do you think OTHERS within the church view the idea of evangelism?

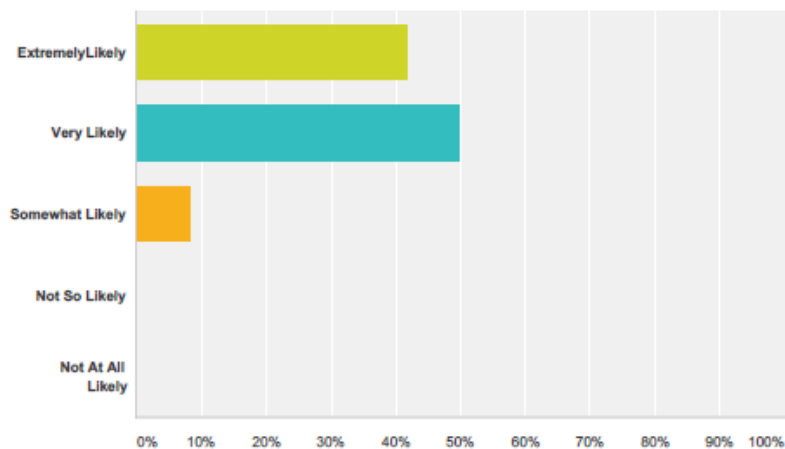
Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Very Positive	41.67%	5
Somewhat Positive	33.33%	4
Neutral	25.00%	3
Somewhat Negative	0.00%	0
Very Negative	0.00%	0
Total		12

Q6 How likely are you to participate in some form of evangelism within the next 30 days?

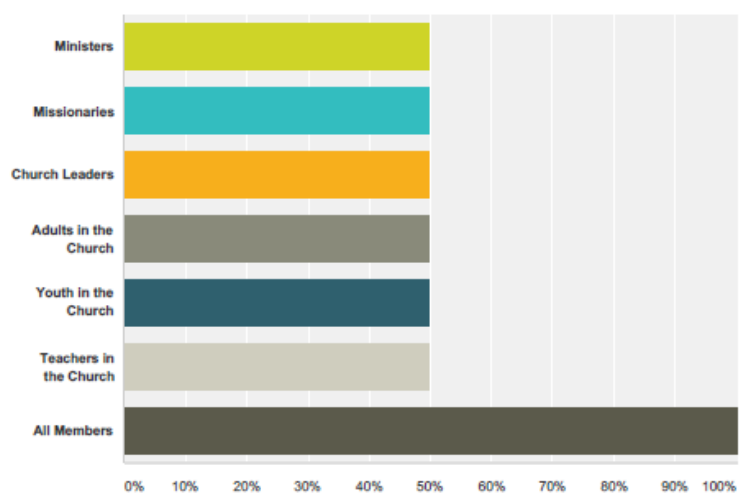
Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
ExtremelyLikely	41.67%	5
Very Likely	50.00%	6
Somewhat Likely	8.33%	1
Not So Likely	0.00%	0
Not At All Likely	0.00%	0
Total		12

Q7 Whose primary responsibility do you think it is to participate in evangelistic activities? (Check all that apply)

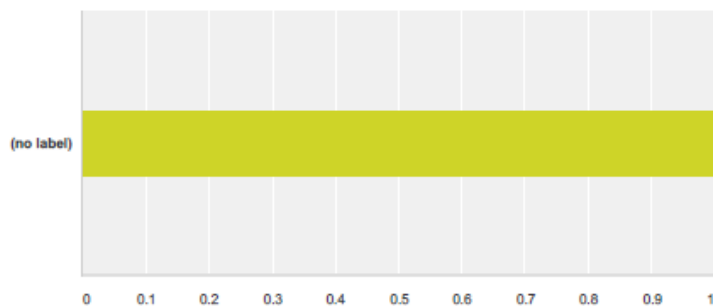
Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Ministers	50.00%	6
Missionaries	50.00%	6
Church Leaders	50.00%	6
Adults in the Church	50.00%	6
Youth in the Church	50.00%	6
Teachers in the Church	50.00%	6
All Members	100.00%	12
Total Respondents: 12		

Q8 How likely is it that you will reach out to someone in or outside of the church who is different from you (different meaning-age group, race, gender, occupation, marital status etc) and try to have a conversation with them or invite them to join you at a church activity? (1 being not likely and 10 being very likely)

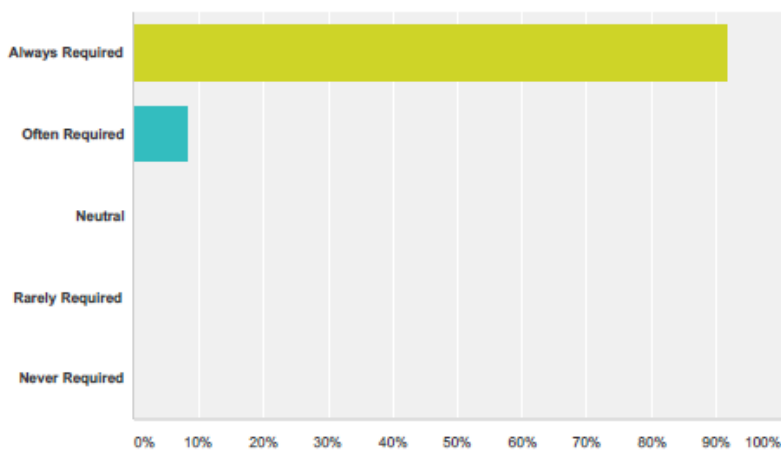
Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	0.00%	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	8.33%	58.33%	12	1.00
	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	7		

Q9 Do you think Jesus taught that believers were expected to provide outreach to people who might be considered sinners by the church community?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Always Required	91.67%	11
Often Required	8.33%	1
Neutral	0.00%	0
Rarely Required	0.00%	0
Never Required	0.00%	0
Total		12

Q10 What important lessons did you learn during the Evangelism & Marginalization bible study series? In addition, what will you do different as a result of what you learned?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 3

#	Responses	Date
1	I have been made aware of how marginalization is so pervasive, so evil, so subtle, for the sake of power and people away from proper sense, proper action. NPR has done a very good job trying to be neutral yet reporting All that is happening. We need to do more, not just for the name of evangelism. (Not a Jewish model value, parse.) but doing that which is in your spirit, talents, and gathering together to do good.	3/10/2017 11:43 PM
2	We all may have some type of bias without realizing it. Try to be more conscious of my thoughts and to be more active in spreading the word of the gospel.	3/8/2017 8:05 AM
3	I've come to realize that sometimes you have to go over and above what seems to be obvious when it comes to people who are in need, or that is hurting. Every body we encounter is in need of encouragement of some kind. We should try to find the best way to address the issues with sensitivity and love, and compassion.	3/4/2017 1:35 PM
4	To think outside the box about what it means to evangelize	3/3/2017 6:54 PM
5	Who are we to judge? Be open to others have a listening ear, instead of looking at a individual's faults you look at their needs.	3/3/2017 12:01 PM
6	To be more aware of my personal biases and prejudices and not to let them interfere with my service for the Lord.	3/2/2017 2:24 PM
7	To let go of my bias judgement towards people. I need to be more compassionate to people needs.	3/2/2017 1:49 PM
8	Anyone can be an Evangelist.	3/1/2017 10:20 PM
9	Evangelism is something everyone can do and it is something God expects me to do too. Also, even the most unlikely person can be marginalized by others-like someone who is rich. As a result of the bible study I will make a commitment to reach out to people and be on God's agenda vs. my own. I will also not be prescriptive with my approach. I'm excited now about something I didn't think was my gifting.	3/1/2017 10:10 PM

APPENDIX F

BIBLE STUDY OUTLINE

Five Week Teaching Plan: Discipleship from the Margins: Living Jesus' Transformational Narrative of Love and Outreach

Session 1 Introduction to Evangelism & Marginalization: Introduce the concept of

evangelism & marginalization. Compare and contrast key definitions:

Evangelicals, Evangelism, the office of evangelist, & marginalization.

Re-imagining Evangelisms: Exploring some concepts outlined by Rick

Richardson in his book, *Re-Imagining Evangelism* and looking at how we

can:

- Be on a Journey with the Holy Spirit as the Guide: We can serve as a travel guide helping people move towards their final destination. Listen to the whispers and nudging of God. Being on God's agenda vs. our agenda. Taking our time to bring the Gospel to Others.
- Demonstrate love for others: Evangelism is an opportunity for us to look beyond ourselves and extend loving outreach to others. Evangelism should not be beating people with a bible but showing love and respect in our interactions and listening to what they need vs. focusing on our own goals. Sharing our stories, ourselves, willing to be vulnerable and transparent. This is outreach through love.

- Crossing the Boundaries that Separate People: Evangelism is an opportunity to cross barriers which divide people. This is breaking barriers.
- Opportunity to Connect on a Human Level: We should work towards building a connection with others on a personal basis. (People vs. projects/targets)
- Share the Good News: Once you connect you can begin to share the good news and what God has done for us in our lives.
- Discuss what people perceive marginalization to be in the church context: Who are the marginalized? Explore how Jesus lived in the margins. Have any of us ever felt marginalized? Discuss marginalization in the context of today and biblical times. Introduce the concept Jesus taught in Matthew 25:34-40: “What you do to the least of them you do onto me,” and discuss what that might mean. Introduce concept of “the many ways Jesus ministered based on individual needs” with the first Gospel story-Nicodemus.

Provide the three Gospel scriptures we will focus on over the next few weeks:

Woman at the Well	John 4:1-42
Zacchaeus the Tax Collector	Luke 19: 1-10
Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man	Mark 2: 1-12

Session 2 Uncovering Unconscious Bias in Ministry and Who is on the Fringe: We will engage in an open discussion about how we develop unconscious biases which impacts who and how we are willing to minister to others. In

addition, we will begin exploring one of the three selected stories in the Gospels where Jesus demonstrated examples of ministry to those considered on the margin. (Woman at the Well). How we can see the following ways Jesus ministered to people by doing the following (and how we can too).

- On a Journey with the Holy Spirit as the Guide
- Demonstrate love for others
- Crossing the Boundaries that Separate People
- Opportunity to Connect on a Human Level
- Share the Good News

Session 3 *“When Six Men Say No”*: Continued exploring the story of the woman and the well and look at who this woman can represent in modern society. Discussion: Who do we define as the fringe today? Do any of us feel like we’re on the fringe and what is the impact? How did Jesus bring restoration to people on the fringe and how can we do the same thing today? What is the impact of that restoration on the woman at the well and the people in her community? How she became an evangelist in her own right bringing the people of the town to Jesus. What message was Jesus sharing with the church? Is there someplace which can represent today’s version of Samaria or a modern-day woman at the well which we have looked past or judged? If so, why?

Session 4 *“Is Trump the New Tax Man?” Evangel-what?:* Continue exploring how Jesus ministered to different people differently and how we can do the

same. Explore the story of Zacchaeus and how Jesus was on a mission to minister to him, making a pit stop on the way to the cross. Discuss how some are comfortable with salvation when the person being saved is poor, from the wrong side of the tracks, sick, etc. However how do we feel when Jesus offers the same salvation to the wealthy person who has gotten rich by taking advantage of those less fortunate? Why were the people in the community so angry about Jesus dining with this despised tax collector? Is anyone out of reach of God's salvation? Who is today's Zacchaeus? How does someone like Donald Trump compare with Zacchaeus? What does the final verse in the scripture mean? Does Jesus put a qualifier on who he came to save? Should we? Discuss the concept shared by Dr. Sweet: "Jesus never healed anyone the same way...he tailored each healing to each person. Jesus never reached out to anyone the same way...he customized each evangel to each person. There is no one right way to evangelize...only a multiplicity of right ways." Compare and Contrast the way Jesus ministered to Nicodemus, the Woman at the Well, and Zacchaeus. Should we follow Jesus' example and do the same? How can we?

Session 5 *"When Your Family Kicks You to the Curb"*: Review all of the stories and concepts we covered over the last four weeks. Reinforce the different lessons learned based on the stories each week. Close with the story of the paraplegic lowered through the roof. Discuss how Jesus healed him from the inside out and restored his family to him. Reinforce how Jesus

ministered to everyone in a very individual way as should we. Discuss how everyone will apply all of the concepts we learned throughout the five weeks moving forward. What will we do differently? What have we learned about ourselves and what God is calling us to do?

Post-Bible Study Survey

Upon completion of the five-week bible study series, I launched an online survey to identify what the participants had learned during the series. This survey provided additional quantitative research data I used to compare to the pre-bible study survey.

APPENDIX G

BIBLE STUDY HANDOUTS

Grant Chapel AME Church –February/March Bible Study:

EVANGELISM & THE MARGINS: LIVING JESUS’ TRANSFORMATIONAL NARRATIVE OF LOVE & OUTREACH

4 Week Lesson Plan:

- 1. Explore: How evangelism is defined?**
 - a. What does evangelism mean to us?
 - b. What are some of the common views surrounding evangelism?
 - c. How have these views developed?
 - d. How can we reimagine evangelism?
- 2. What is Marginalization and how does it show up in the church community?**
 - a. How do we define marginalization?
 - b. Discuss examples of people in biblical times and today who were marginalized?
 - c. What is our role in marginalization as both people who may marginalize others or people who may have been marginalized?
 - d. Was Jesus in the Margins?
 - e. How did Jesus minister in the margins?
- 3. Unconscious Bias: What role do our own biases play in marginalization?**
 - a. How can unconscious bias show up in ministry?
 - b. How do we develop some of our biases?
 - c. How can we address hidden bias?
- 4. In-depth Scriptural Study of Evangelism & the Margins**
 - a. Week 2: Title: “When six men say no...”
 - b. Week 3: Title: “Trump as the New Tax Man?”
 - c. Week 4: Title: “When your family kicks you to the curb...”

Week One: Evangelism & The Margins:

Part One: Evangelism

1. The term “evangelism” has different meanings to people for various reasons?
2. Let’s define the following terms?
 - Evangelist (as an Office)
 - Evangelical Christian
 - Evangelism
3. Did Jesus evangelize? (John 3: 1-21)

Reimagining Evangelism:

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

--1Peter 3:15

How Can We Reimagine Evangelism?

- **On a Journey with the Holy Spirit as the Guide:** We can serve as a Travel Guide helping people move towards their final destination. Listen to the whispers and nudging of God. (*Taking our time*)
 - **Demonstrate love for others:** Evangelism is an opportunity for us to look beyond ourselves and extend loving outreach to others. (*Outreach through love*)
 - **Crossing the Boundaries that Separates People:** Evangelism is an opportunity to cross barriers which divide people (Breaking barriers)
 - **Opportunity to Connect on a Human Level:** We should work towards building a connection with others on a personal basis. (People vs. projects/targets)
 - **Share the Good News:** Once you connect you can begin to share the good news.
4. How can we practice the examples Jesus demonstrated in the Gospels in our everyday lives?
 5. What barriers do we have to overcome?

Week One-Part Two: The Margins

Marginalization:

“When we pull back the curtain on his life, we discover that Jesus knows what it’s like to be marginalized. He knows what it’s like to have society shove you to the side of the page, to not really be accepted, and in the end, to be totally rejected. He can identify with life in the margins, because when God came down to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, the margins is where he landed. On purpose.”

-Rick McKinley. Jesus in the Margins: Finding God in The Places We Ignore

“What do you do with a man who is supposed to be the holiest man who has ever lived and yet goes around talking with prostitutes and hugging lepers? What do you do with a man who not only mingles with the most unsavory people but actually seems to enjoy them? The religious accused him of being a drunkard, a glutton and having tacky taste in friends. It is a profound irony that the Son of God visited this planet and one of the chief complaints against him was that he was not religious enough.”

— Rebecca Manley Pippert, Out of the Saltshaker & into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life

1. What do we know about Jesus’ life?

- Where was Jesus from? (John 1:46)
- What was his family story?
 - What does it mean to come from a small town?
 - Was he a boy with a label to all in town? illegitimate? Is his mama a “respectable woman”
- What socioeconomic class did he fall in?
- Why would Jesus come on earth in this form?

2. What do the margins represent today?

- Who is on the margins today?
- How is marginalization displayed?
- How do we know we are on the margins?
- Is marginalization permanent?
- Can you move in and out of the margins?

3. What does the bible say?

- What does God do: Matthew 5:1-11
- What should we be doing: Matthew 25:34-40

Week 2: Unconscious Bias & When Six Men Say No: The Woman at the Well --
John 4:1-42

Part One: Unconscious Bias:

Definition: Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner

Bias is taught:

- Throughout your lifetime
- By interactions
- Subtle Words
- What we see in the media
- What we learn in school

Examples of Media Influence:



The image contains two screenshots of news articles from the Associated Press (AP) reporting on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Both articles show people wading through chest-deep floodwaters. The top article, dated Tuesday, Aug. 30, 11:31 AM ET, shows a young man carrying a large black bag and a blue box through the water. The bottom article, dated 3:47 AM ET, shows two residents wading through the water, one carrying a backpack and the other carrying a bag. Both articles include a 'RECOMMEND THIS PHOTO' section with star ratings and a 'RELATED' section with a link to 'Hurricanes & Tropical Storms'.

Associated Press AP - Tue Aug 30, 11:31 AM ET

A young man walks through chest deep flood water after (footing) a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005. Flood waters continue to rise in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina did extensive damage when it

Email Photo Print Photo

RECOMMEND THIS PHOTO » Recommended Photos
Recommend It: Average (138 votes)
☆☆☆☆☆ ★★★★★

AFP 3:47 AM ET

Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area in New Orleans, Louisiana. (AFP/Getty Images/Chris Graythen)

Email Photo Print Photo

RECOMMEND THIS PHOTO » Recommended Photos
Recommend It: Average (211 votes)
☆☆☆☆☆ ★★★★★

RELATED

- Katrina's Effects, at a Glance AP - Tue Aug 30, 1:26 PM ET

Hurricanes & Tropical Storms

Bias is ingrained deep: Our views of others are influenced by:

- Stereotypes
- Membership in groups
- Social Class
- Media

Power of Expectation: a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future

- When you expect something, it is more likely to occur in your head.

Part Two: Woman at the Well: When Six Men Say No....Jesus Evangelizing in the Margins

How did Jesus Demonstrate the Following in the Scripture?

- **On a Journey with the Holy Spirit as the Guide:**
 - How did Jesus demonstrate ministering to this woman was his mission?
 - What/who represents modern day Samaria?
 - Why do we not go into the modern day Samaria's
- **Demonstrate love for others:**
 - How did Jesus show love for this woman?
 - What words/actions did he use?
- **Crossing the Boundaries that Separates People:**
 - Which boundaries did Jesus cross?
 - Which boundaries do we need to cross today?
- **Opportunity to Connect on a Human Level:**
 - How did Jesus connect on a human level with this woman?
 - How can we connect on a human level with modern Samaria
- **Share the Good News:**
 - What good news did Jesus share with this woman?
 - What was the result of him sharing the good news?
 - How did Jesus say Yes...when six men said no?

Week 4: Is Trump the New Tax Man? Luke 19:1-10

How did Jesus Demonstrate the Following in the Scripture?

Activity: Break out into three groups. Find and discuss (in the scripture) examples which demonstrated the following things occurred:

- **Jesus allowed the Holy Spirit to be his Guide:**
 - What verse shows that Jesus allowed the Holy Spirit to direct his path?
Why do you think this is the case?
- **Jesus demonstrated love for Zacchaeus**
 - How did Jesus demonstrate love for Zacchaeus?
 - What actions and words demonstrated his love?
- **Jesus Crossed Boundaries that Separates People:**
 - Which boundaries did Jesus cross in his interactions with Zacchaeus?
 - Which boundaries do we need to cross today?
 - Who can represent Zacchaeus in today's society?
- **Jesus Connected with Zacchaeus on a Human Level:**
 - What specifically did Jesus do to connect on a human level with Zacchaeus?
 - If you can into a modern-day Zacchaeus how could you connect with him or her on a human level
- **Jesus Shared the Good News with Zacchaeus:**
 - What makes you think Jesus shared the good news with Zacchaeus?
 - What was the result of him sharing the good news?

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