

# **Go Where the People Are**

Analyzing Social Media and Methods for Delivering Faith-Based Messages

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## Abstract

The church has been in a state of chronic decline since the mid-sixties. However, during this same period expressions of faith have not decreased. Today, more than ninety percent believe in God and over fifty percent pray daily. However, church attendance has declined to only twenty percent attending church on a regular basis.

In our research interview with “Pastor Jimmie”, a United Methodist ordained Elder, he stated “The church is stuck in the fifties and sixties.” In other words, the church is not moving to “where the people are.” Our research gave us two reasons, the logistics of the contemporary family and the church is no longer as relatable.

At the same time the church considers the secular world’s way unacceptable, which has further created alienation with their main constituents, those who work in the secular world or the marketplace.

Jesus’ life as Tekton or as a carpenter provides valuable clues for the church, on how to move forward using “secular” methods and to be “where the people are.” Jesus’ use of parables became a critical means to His relaying the message of God and there is a strong comparison to today’s social media. As such, by exploring Jesus’ secular life and the parables in conjunction

with today's Social media, our research provides the church with both a process and framework on how to "go where the people are."

To help create this roadmap for the church, a ten-week study using Social Media was conducted as an example of the value of "secular" means in delivering faith based messages and to improve relevancy. The vast majority of Americans use social media and spend up to two hours a day interacting. Its "where the people are."

Over a ten-week period, three hundred individual posts were made on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Ten thousand followers were created and over fifty thousand forms of engagement occurred.

What we learned was when we approached people through their lens, faith messages were accepted. Which didn't mean changing the message of the Gospels, but changing the delivery. We simply went where the people were.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

There it was in all its magnificence, on the final day of the designated research period for this project, November 12, the answer I was looking for about how to deliver faith-based messages to the American marketplace using the secular<sup>1</sup> tool called social media. A simple post on LinkedIn that was fewer than two hundred words, with the title “Five Reasons We Know Jesus Was Pro-Business.” Its visual quality and content were far inferior to the hundreds of other faith-based messages that I had distributed over four popular social media sites during the ten weeks of my research project. The post was viewed by one thousand people, far exceeding the previous high of close to five hundred. In fact, its reach was five to ten times that of the other messages. What it did was provide a lens for what had appeared to be a largely cynical group for most of the research period, a lens through which they could see Jesus. It provided the final clue as to how to find God in social media.

A simple message written in frustration, accompanied by numerous private conversations with God. A simple message of no particular excellence, accompanied by no especially captivating images. In its humble simplicity it had found its way to the road these viewers were traveling, viewers searching for God in their lives who happened to be using the secular phenomenon called social media. People who, statistics will tell us as part of this study, want to know God but have turned away from the church to receive faith-based messages in other ways that will help them on this life journey.

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<sup>1</sup> Secular defined as activity that occurs outside a religious institution or church. This distinction is being made to show those activities predominately performed outside the “traditional” walls of religious institutions. This distinction is being made to create a contrast between activities of the church and those normally associated with world outside of the church.

This simple message was the final clue as to how to find the compelling force of God on social media. We just had to deliver a message that, rather than tell this group what we had to say about this force, would convey it to them in a way they could relate to.

In Kendra Dean's book *OMG: A Youth Ministry Handbook*, she says, "Jesus is already at work in the young people we love (And to be sure in those we don't)—'Christ is on the loose,' as Biblical scholar Don Juel put it."<sup>2</sup> While this quote relates to our youth, it can be expanded to the larger population. Jesus is already where we are going in our various ministries; we just have to find out where we can most help. In each of the four social media sites we studied, we found Jesus/God. But instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, we had to learn to connect Jesus with the constituents of the site in ways that paralleled how the site worked. For instance, Facebook is a community site that shares its views personally and requires a personal connection. Twitter is a site that requires less community and more global messaging. Instagram requires the creative use of imagination. LinkedIn users want to know how God is present in their careers. God/Jesus is already there in all of these sites; we just have to find out how to help users access that force.

These are people who, as we will see through the research done for this thesis, feel disenfranchised by the church or find the church unreliable. But these people still experience the compelling force of God and want to know more. In some cases, they feel that the church doesn't like them. One CEO, Harlan Kent, expressed this best by saying, "The church thinks we are soulless creatures."<sup>3</sup> Some other people are put off by the acrimony and scandals of the church, such as child abuse within the Catholic Church or the United Methodist Church's disputes over

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<sup>2</sup> Kendra Dean, *OMG: A Youth Ministry Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 61.

<sup>3</sup> From a conversation with Harlan Kent, former CEO of Yankee Candle and Alex and Ani, 12/1/2017

same sex marriage. But our research tells us that most people, including those in the business world, still want God in their lives.

There were many other successes and there were many dead ends on this journey of using business methods and techniques to discover where God/Jesus was on social media. As well as, what the best methods of delivering faith-based messages, through text and images, were, in the secular world of social media.

The goal of this research was to first establish a theological justification for using secular methods, cemented around Jesus as *tekton* (“artisan”) and his use of parables. My theological research will demonstrate that Jesus himself used secular means and methods to spread the good news throughout ancient Judea, that Jesus created an identifiable and relatable image as he walked in human form in the early part of the first century of the common era. My research will show that in establishing his relatable identity, in many of the Parables, and even in his own work life, he connected with people through the secular, a lens through which people would more readily accept his message.

The second goal is to show that social media is a viable tool for delivering faith based messages and has become an important communication vehicle in the twenty-first century, where billions of users exist and billions of messages are shared every day. For this research, I used the most popular and frequently used sites: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Combined, they have more than three billion users, many of whom spend more than an hour a day on these sites.

The research was conducted using secular statistical techniques commonly used in the business world. A research-oriented attitude was adopted, as opposed to a results-oriented attitude. This allowed for a focus on exploring all methods to find out what worked and didn't

work in achieving results. This distinction is important in that many techniques and methods were used to determine what sites and what individuals respond the best to the various methods, rather than just follow our preconceived ideas.

Additionally, it was determined that a model had to be built that was of sufficient size to provide statistical accuracy and adequately to allow future readers to calibrate their own efforts to the efforts of this model. A critical goal in establishing statistical reliability was the acquisition of ten thousand followers/connections over the four sites. The number actually achieved was 11,551. This number proved large enough to provide valuable insight and contained the size necessary that allowed for statistical accuracy.

The methods chosen to develop followers were not designed simply to obtain followers, but to determine what methods worked best in obtaining “authentic followers.” These methods ranged from blind canvassing to direct one-on-one mutual engagement, to answer the question of what method works best for a faith-based organization and where the people of God responded best.

As such, after developing the content for the sites, the first phase was mostly about follower development. This period lasted for four weeks and was followed by phase 2, which was a combination of developing followers and increasing engagement. This combined activity lasted for three and a half weeks. The final phase was pure engagement with followers.

Important to this was the use of another business technique called “time studies.” Each of the various techniques used had a time associated with the activity. In other words, how long does it take to acquire one hundred followers on Facebook, or how long does it take to interact with fifty people on Instagram?



“Change management,” another business practice commonly used by successful commercial enterprises, was critical to the development and management of the model. In other words, when something didn’t work, a change to a method or technique had to occur or the discovery of best practices would be limited. This practice of experimenting with change was a critical technique in the study.

A production mindset was used in the development of the faith messages sent out to these sites. More than three hundred individual posts or images were distributed through these sites during the ten-week test period. Each individual blog post took three hours to write, including editing and posting. Each image and its accompanying message took one hour to develop. Many times the images had to be photographed, which added an additional hour to the effort. To keep this coordinated, a production schedule was set up to create the required content.

While a business mindset and techniques were used to conduct this experimentation, prayer, theological reflection, and a sense of mutual connectedness were always part of every decision. While the goal was to avoid proclaiming doctrine or insisting on a specific theological viewpoint, the messages still had theology embedded in them. Otherwise there would be no support for the messages and it would be unrealistic to assume no embedded theology existed.

The embedded theology anchor points were threefold. The first was that all humankind was made in the image of God or *Imago Dei*, from Genesis 1:27–28. Our statements made no assertions beyond this statement that “all humankind was made in the image of God, man and woman,” meaning that every race, every age, every gender, and every orientation has value, because of its creation in the image of God. We did this to avoid limiting the population we tried to reach to only those people like us, but also to ensure that the process was respectful of *Imago Dei*.

The second anchor point was based on God's love for humankind through Jesus and God's desire to have a relationship with humankind. Revelations 3:20 is the expression of this thought, where it says, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." This is a message of connectedness with God/Jesus that is built around a journey of faith and not one of "believe or be doomed."

The third anchor point was Jesus's answer to the question of which is the greatest commandment, to which he replied, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:35–40) This is a reflection of both where we should place our faith and trust, and also a purpose for our lives that extends beyond our selves.

With these embedded theologies the content was created. To reach out into the hearts of those in both the business world and on social media and connect them to a faith life that has long been underserved. To provide theology that helps them to see the value in pursuing a life of faith.

With these perspectives and values we ventured into the world of social media armed with messages of hope, faith, and love. We couldn't control where this venture would lead us. Our only input was what we said and what we tried. Surprising turns and discovery existed each day on this venture, even on the last day, with the magnificent results of a post containing inferior graphics and text. But Jesus had been there, ahead of us. We only needed to help by delivering a message on the path that the viewer was already taking.

## Chapter 2 Theological Perspective

Almost 90 percent of Americans believe in God.<sup>1</sup> Further, more than 50 percent pray daily.<sup>2</sup> These findings were part of a Pew Research study published in 2015. In this study we can find that most people believe in God and a majority of Americans pray every day. When we look at those that are “religiously affiliated,” we see these numbers dramatically increase, to 97 percent who believe in God and 67 percent who pray daily.<sup>3</sup> These are remarkable statistics that point to an overwhelming desire to be connected to a metaphysical being that is outside what is seen in the world.

However, the source of most of this connection in the past has been the institutional church. While many studies say that 40 percent of all Americans report being regular churchgoers, according to the Hartford Institute for Religion research the reality is that only 20 percent actually attend a church on a regular basis,<sup>4</sup> To verify this claim the institute correlated actual total attendance numbers with average attendance (180 attenders) per church,<sup>5</sup> Essentially they confirmed what many sociologists had suspected, that many of those surveyed had over-reported their actual attendance.<sup>6</sup> More people, then, pray daily than attend church, by an amount that is more than double!

These statistics point to a disturbing reality for the church: more people have faith lives outside the church than in the church. As part of this research project, I interviewed an elder of

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<sup>1</sup> *U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious*, Pew Research, [www.Pewforum.org](http://www.Pewforum.org), November 3, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious*, Pew Research, [www.Pewforum.org](http://www.Pewforum.org), November 3, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> *Fast Facts about American Religion*, Hartford Institute for Religion Research, [http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast\\_facts.html](http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

the United Methodist Church in Oriental, North Carolina, James T. Weaver, to get his thoughts on this result. Mr. Weaver, or as his congregation calls him, Pastor Jimmy, had an interesting observation. He stated, “The Church is stuck in the fifties and has made limited movements to connect with the changes in society.” Further, he said, “It is hard to get the Church and the existing congregants to change.”<sup>7</sup> His observation indicates the lack of a “ministry of presence.” The church isn’t always where the people are.

As we proceed further, we have to answer the questions of “So what does this mean?” and “How can a stronger ‘ministry of presence’ by the church help?” The answer to the first question is that the results of the surveys noted above, give us clues as to why the mainline denominations are in a state of chronic crisis in church attendance and involvement. During the period from 2007 to 2014, regular church attendance in the mainline denominations declined by 9 percent.<sup>8</sup> When we look further back, to the period from 1990 to 2004, we also see this trend, where church attendance dropped 15 percent.<sup>9</sup> Both these surveys show that on an annual basis there was a 1 to 2 percent drop in attendance, a chronic crisis. At the same time, religiosity or commitment by Americans to their faith, has not shown a parallel decrease. As stated before, most Americans believe in God (90 percent), which has changed little over the years. Daily prayer or an individual’s connection with God/Christ actually increased among those affiliated with the major denominations, by 6 percent, in the seven-year period from 2007 to 2014.<sup>10</sup> And there was a rise of 14 percent in spiritual peace and a sense of well-being in this same group.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with James T. Weaver, Pastor of the UMC of Oriental, October 15, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> *U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious*, Pew Research, [www.Pewforum.org](http://www.Pewforum.org), November 3, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Shattuck, Kelly, and Steven, *Startling Facts: An Up Close Look at Church Attendance in America*, <http://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/139575-7-startling-facts-an-up-close-look-at-church-attendance-in-america.html/2>, December 29, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> *U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious*, Pew Research, [www.Pewforum.org](http://www.Pewforum.org), November 3, 2015

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

This indicates that more people are conducting their religious practices outside of the church.

This disconnect between the increase in religious observances by the individual and the chronic decline in church attendance is the “so what.” Many people are “cutting the cord” with the institutional church, but not with their practices of faith. In the business world, these statistics in a well-run enterprise would illicit change. In other words, the business would go to where the customer now resided.

There is a belief by those who work every day that organized religion is difficult and unwelcoming<sup>12</sup> and also a belief that the church is rule-bound with doctrine it does not always live up to.<sup>13</sup> Not to mention that the logistics of going to church often conflict with daily life in the modern era.<sup>14</sup>

To understand the first belief we should know that there are 160 million Americans who engaged in business or work in the United States.<sup>15</sup> And many of them feel rejected or disconnected from the church. During the research period of this project, as I was canvassing for followers on LinkedIn, I received the following message: “Please do not contact me again, organized religion is a very disruptive influence.” Interestingly, nowhere on my LinkedIn profile is there a direct connection with being a pastor or religious official. In the introduction here I noted Harlan Kent’s comment of the church seeing businesspeople as “soulless creatures.” Even on my own advisory board, made up of mostly former or current businesspeople, there exists this sense of isolation on the Church’s part. All attempts to have a pastor serve as an advisor on my

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<sup>12</sup> Emma Green, “It’s Hard to Go to Church,” *Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/religious-participation-survey/496940/>, August 23, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Market Laboratory, *Barron’s* (New York: Dow Jones & Company), November 6, 2017. Pg. M36.

board were met with polite no's or silence, in spite of numerous attempts to get an answer. A stark statistic is that more than half of the potential people who could attend church are in the business world or work, and feel rebuffed.

During this period of research, I was asked to establish a church in my community. I assembled a group from my community to be the guiding group of what this church would look like. The group was mostly made up of current or former business people. One member of this group, Cynthia Campbell, stated, "I don't want what we are doing to be a 'canned church'."<sup>16</sup> Another comment, stating the dissatisfaction with the institutional church.

The second issue, regarding the doctrine and practice of the institutional church, is one that is best described as expressed in ambivalence and skepticism. In a Gallup poll we see this is both the least important reason why people attend church and the number one reason why they don't. The poll also showed that the lowest ranking reason for attendance was loyalty to the tradition of the subject's denomination, and the highest ranking reason for non-attendance was not agreeing with what organized religion preached.<sup>17</sup> By their very nature of being institutional the mainline denominations are removed from being a ministry of presence. Coupled with the recent scandals of Catholic child abuse and the public doctrinal fights such as the current UMC debate on same sex marriage, this sense of the church's distance from real life has led some to believe that the church doesn't practice what it preaches. Finally, hidden in a Pew Research report, it was discovered that not all churches are in decline. Attendance in religiously unaffiliated churches grew more than 40 percent from 2007 to 2014, further pointing to the disconnect being specifically with the "institutional church."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> From Cynthia Campbell interview, church planning member, January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Frank Newport, "Just Why Do Americans Attend Church?," [www.Gallup.com](http://www.Gallup.com), April 6, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> *U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious*, Pew Research, [www.Pewforum.org](http://www.Pewforum.org), November 3, 2015.

Another issue about the church and the ministry of presence, in the modern era involves logistics. In an article in the *Atlantic*, Emma Green points this out by stating, “People who report going to worship services less frequently now than they used to, overwhelmingly say the logistics of getting there are the biggest obstacle.”<sup>19</sup> Green points out, based on research she has studied, that there are three reasons that are part of the logistics issue: “crazy work schedules,” daily life creating a higher priority, and finally, the fact that the church isn’t the center of social or cultural life as it was fifty or sixty years ago.<sup>20</sup>

This issue identifies an area where business could help the church with a ministry of presence. Recently, in a class I was taking, filled with pastors, there was a universal complaint about people who use logistics as a reason for not coming to church. The one statement heard from the pastors that was most revealing was “How can God be less important than a youth soccer game?” I knew that as it related to the individual absent from church, this wasn’t a silent statement that God wasn’t important, but a statement that the church wasn’t important. A businessperson would respond to the same problem with “How do we make church a higher priority than a youth soccer game?” As opposed to complaining about people’s priorities. Without customers, a business will fail. So most well-run businesses don’t blame their customers, they search for them and make them feel wanted wherever they find them. Much as in the famous business book about change management, *Who Moved My Cheese?*, in which two of the characters, named Hem and Haw, ask why their cheese is dwindling, while Hurry and Scurry simply seek to find more cheese.

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<sup>19</sup> Emma Green, “It’s Hard to Go to Church,” *Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/religious-participation-survey/496940/>, August 23, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

If the religiously affiliated churches continue to decline at a rate of close to 2 percent a year, the math suggests that within a decade they will lose another 20 percent of their membership, and if expenses even just stay flat the very survival of the church will be threatened. This decades-long decline has become a chronic crisis of the major denominations and soon will become an acute crisis.

From a business perspective waiting for a theological answer is not the solution or as Jesus said, “No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.” (Mark 2:22) The institutional church has to make itself into a new wineskin to accept the inevitability of change; it must focus on becoming more of a ministry of presence than a ministry of insistence. Go where the people are.

During our research, we found that hidden expressions of faith are widely expressed on social media. Statements and proclamations abound about people seeing God and Jesus. In the research, we found requests for prayer due to illness and life circumstances, we found the lonely looking for relevance, we found people expressing the joys of their faith. We found that people can be touched powerfully through words and images on social media. These websites can be places of evangelism through education and caring. Like the phone and television set of an earlier time, they are the places where people can most likely be found in the twenty-first century. They are, potentially, where the cheese was moved.

### **Using Jesus’s Life to Justify Secular/Business Methods**

Jesus was a prime example of a change agent that we would find in the commercial world, and through his life significant change was made. Interestingly, Jesus didn’t use the



“religious elite” to affect theological change. He used ways, and spoke in a language, that the common person could understand. He walked among the people. In between his childhood and his earthly mission, he was a craftsperson or part of the commercial world. In Mark 6:3 it is stated, “Is not this the carpenter . . .,” a statement made by people from Jesus’s hometown of Nazareth. Jesus himself used the secular world to create the “new” church, not through doing the same things that had been done in the past, but by attaching himself to existing culture and where the people actually were in their lives.

After his baptism and the forty-day trial in the wilderness, Jesus began his earthly mission to spread the good news. To help, Jesus recruited twelve ordinary people. Their occupations are not fully disclosed in the Bible, but the ones that are identified are members of the first-century marketplace. For instance, Matthew is identified as a tax collector. In Matthew 9:9, Jesus meets Matthew at his tax booth and says to him “follow me,” which he does. In Matthew 4:18–19, we see a similar call to the fisherman, Andrew and Peter to follow Jesus, where Jesus says, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Likewise, later in chapter four, both James and John are called away from their father’s fishing business to walk with Jesus.

None of the others have their specific occupations identified, but none are identified as clergy. In fact, late in the Gospel of John, Jesus appoints Peter, a fisherman, as the founder of the new church. In John 21:17 Jesus says; “Feed my sheep.” When we combine this statement with Jesus’s statement of purpose for Peter in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus says to Peter, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” In both statements we see that a secular employee, a fisherman, was designated to build the new place of worship.

Certainly we can use a metaphorical interpretation to assume that “the fisherman” was a gatherer of humankind and not necessarily a symbol of secularism. However, for a person who is looking at this through a lens other than the academic or religious, these people become identifiable in their own context and not as symbolism.

Jesus in fully human form was a carpenter. As noted in the statements made by his hometown residents in Mark 6:3. Paul Furfey refers to the Greek word called *tekton* as the original source of the English translation for carpenter.<sup>21</sup> In his article “Christ as *Tekton*,” he sheds “some light on the hidden life of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> The “hidden life” Furfey refers to is between Jesus’s last appearance in the Gospels, as a youth, and his baptism, before he starts his earthly mission. It was during this period that Jesus became an identifiable secular businessperson in the first-century marketplace.

To support this view, Furfey describes what kind of craftsperson Jesus was by saying, “It seems to be rather commonly assumed that the work of our Lord and St. Joseph was of the crudest and simplest sort. This assumption is entirely gratuitous—and not very flattering.”<sup>23</sup> Furfey goes on to explain that due to the relatively small size of Nazareth, the work of Jesus and potentially his father would have varied from simple to complex.<sup>24</sup> Likely theirs was the only woodshop in Nazareth and thus responsible for the mending and construction of farm tools, roof beams, and pieces for local places of worship.<sup>25</sup> While this assumption comes from Furfey, he also quotes Justin, saying, “St. Justin (*Dial.* 88, 8) says that our Lord made ‘plows and yokes.’ It

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Furfey. “Christ as *Tekton*,” *Catholic Biblical Journal Quarterly* 17 (April 2, 1955): 204

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 208

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

is just possible that this statement preserves an oral tradition; if so, it would be a very valuable one, as St. Justin was born in Palestine only a couple of generations after the death of Christ.”<sup>26</sup>

To further support this statement that Jesus was a *Tekton*, or carpenter, we can turn to other sources. For instance Craig Evans in the Cambridge Companion to Jesus, states, “*Tekton* should perhaps be translated to ‘woodworker’ or perhaps better to ‘builder.’<sup>27</sup> Evans later states, “Jesus’ statement that His ‘Yoke is easy’ (Matthew 11:30) may in fact allude to his trade.”<sup>28</sup>

In Thayer’s Greek to English Lexicon of The New Testament, we find a similar description of the word, *Tekton*. *Tekton* translated from Greek to English, contains three meanings. The first description is; ‘worker in wood, carpenter, joiner or builder.’ The second definition is; ‘any craftsman or workman.’ The third definition is; ‘planner, potter or author.’<sup>29</sup> While these definitions give a broader view than as a carpenter, we can at least assume Jesus as a worker in the 1<sup>st</sup> century marketplace. Perhaps Evans is right that Jesus was a carpenter, when we tie *tekton* Matthew 11:30.

Ken Campbell extends this meaning of *tekton* to one of a more general craftsman, perhaps to working with stone and metals as well. In his article “What Was Jesus’s Occupation?” Campbell states, “First, it is evident that the word does not mean ‘carpenter’ as that word is understood today. In the context of first-century Israel, the ‘τέκτων’ was a general craftsman who

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Craig A. Evans, editor Markus Bockmuehl, *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 14

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Joseph A. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Coded with Strong’s Concordance Numbers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson’s Publishers, 1996), Strong code 5045.

worked with stone, wood, and sometimes metal in large and small building projects.”<sup>30</sup> Campbell as well confirms that Jesus worked during this “hidden life.”<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, Gideon Goosen in his article “Jesus the Blue Collar Worker,” also asserts that evidence exists that Jesus worked among the people. Goosen states, “Australians can thus identify with Jesus of Nazareth who worked with his hands for possibly twenty or more years, Jesus the blue collar worker. A Jesus who did the ordinary things associated with earning a living to the extent that his townsfolk were surprised when he returned as a famous miracle worker and unbelievably questioned: Is this not the son of the carpenter?”<sup>32</sup> Goosen also confirms in his article that while Jesus worked, we couldn’t consider him part of the middle class, as there was no middle class in Judea during the first century.<sup>33</sup>

While other articles exist that provide both a historical and biblical backdrop, these three cement a basis to look at Jesus as a shop owner, craftsman, and part of the commercial economy of the first-century marketplace in Judea. Whether Jesus performed this act of working in the commercial world simply to learn the language of that world or to become an identifiable figure is a deeper matter of Christology. But whether we view Jesus from a high Christology or a low Christology, it is clear that in Jesus’s “hidden life” exist the roots of the language used in his mission to spread the good news. He used secular and business language, and its means.

Interestingly, in all three of these articles there are references to the impact this time in

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<sup>30</sup> Ken M. Campbell, “What Was Jesus’ Occupation?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 3 (September 2005): 512.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Gideon Goosen, “Jesus the Blue Collar Worker,” *Colloquium* 30, no. 2 (November 1998): 166.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*: 155

Jesus's life had on one of his main message vehicles, the Parables. The Parables themselves provide valuable clues as to the medium and the way in which Jesus delivered the words of the Gospel. For instance, Furfey believes there is a parallel between Jesus's craft and the Parables, as he states in "Christ as *Tekton*," "The Parables of Christ were couched in the simple language of the common man, but they are great literature. Is it unreasonable to suppose that his woodworking was somewhat parallel in quality, that it was simple and unornamented, but beautiful in its severe functionalism?"<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, Campbell includes this same reference in his article by stating, "The most notable thing about the public speech of Jesus is generally considered to be his use of parables, and the most remarkable feature of his parabolic teaching is his observation of everyday life in Palestine."<sup>35</sup> Again we see this extension of Jesus's "hidden life" into the Parables. Campbell extends the reflection by stating, "Rather, Jesus' employment of stories and metaphors was based on (a) his intimate knowledge of the Scriptures; and (b) his own hard-won experience growing up on a terraced farm in Nazareth, participating in the cyclical life of the village, going to work every day, attending the synagogue, and interacting with his family, clan, neighbors, and strangers."<sup>36</sup> Campbell's suggestion is that Jesus "walked among the people," during this "hidden life" of his life.

Campbell later explains that this piece of the Parables is often missed in scholastic research because the focus has been placed on literary critique of the Parables and not on the

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<sup>34</sup> Paul Furfey, "Christ as *Tekton*," *Catholic Biblical Journal Quarterly* 17 (April 2, 1955): 210.

<sup>35</sup> Ken M. Campbell, "What Was Jesus' Occupation?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 3 (September 2005): 512

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*: 513.

source of the material that they contain.<sup>37</sup> The importance for this argument is not only the simplicity of the literature contained in the Parables, but the origin of the information in them, culled from everyday life in a world where Jesus worked.

Goosen states, “In contrast to this the historical Jesus says he has come to give us life and to give us life to the full. Everything Jesus did and said seems to have this life-affirming thought behind it.”<sup>38</sup> Jesus knew, either through his own work life or as God, that humankind needs to pay its bills and that to do that humankind needs to work in the commercial world. So Jesus started where humankind “has to be.” A ministry of presence. The by-product of this experience was the Parables.

What is the universal message and purpose of the Parables? Thomas Rauch, in his book *Who Is Jesus?*, explains this as follows: “They challenge our customary way of seeing our world, draw us out of our complacency, force us to ask questions, to rethink our values.”<sup>39</sup> They create imaginative thoughts from hearing or reading them. They aren’t long texts that require extensive time to be set aside to absorb and analyze them. They become visual by connecting our daily lives with short bursts of insight. Not that dissimilar to the world of social media where condensed and powerful thoughts that inspire us to think are also contained. Parables were the medium of the first century, and social media is quickly becoming the medium of the early part of the twenty-first century. They are the places where people are, and where they receive their information.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Gideon Goosen, “Jesus the Blue Collar Worker,” *Colloquium* 30, no. 2 (November 1998): 155.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Rausch, *Who Is Jesus?: An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 83.

It may be easy to say, *Well people should continue reading extensive text to get insightful thoughts*. But the reality is that this approach won't reach most people. Consider the first-century literacy rate. In his book *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, Bart D. Ehrman puts literacy at 3 percent for the population that Jesus encountered in the first century.<sup>40</sup> The ability to read was not available to the average worker or commercial enterprise owner. The Parables became a way for Jesus to orally express the messages of faith in a colorful and easy to remember manner. Social media contains similar messages and like the Parables contain faith based messages that help people with their relationship with God.

Tor Vegge expands this thought about the audience of the Parables when he states, “The texts that the Formgeschichte worked with, Jesus logia, parables, discussions, teaching dialogs, anecdotes, and miracle stories, were in this research labelled as texts of the common people.” Further to this point concerning the simplicity of the Parables, Vegge quotes Paul Wendland as saying, “it is ‘oral traditions of the common people’ that are collected in the gospel of Mark.”<sup>41</sup> It is logical that if you want to deliver the “words of life” and the “truth,” then using vehicles such as the Parables is your best strategy. As opposed to forcing people to hear the message in an unfamiliar and uncomfortable place, why not use a medium that provides direct access to a population, which is understandable and available to them? Jesus, like any proficient change agent, would not have sought to “swim uphill,” but to rely on contemporary culture to deliver his message.

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<sup>40</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper Collins, Inc., Kindle edition, March 2012), 702–712.

<sup>41</sup> Tor Vegge, “The Literacy of Jesus, the Carpenter’s Son,” *Studia Theologica* (London: Routledge) 59 (2005): 29.

Attached as appendix item nine is a listing of all forty-five parables. In reviewing these Parables, we notice that thirty-five of them, when viewed using the discipline of historical context, are seen to either use commercial terms or be directly related to the marketplace. For instance, Parables such as the Lost Coin, Wise and Foolish Builders, the Shrewd Manager, the Coins, and Workers in the Vineyard. We can see from this analysis that Jesus did indeed connect his “hidden life” to the teachings of his earthly mission.

The combination of this early life of being engaged commercially and the use of a practical medium, the Parables, allowed Jesus to spread his message. Jesus did not use people of the traditional and religious elite to spread the word, but people of the commercial world. Jesus did not visit on a regular basis the existing religious buildings to deliver His messages, but instead used hillsides, boats, and homes. He used a language that people could hear and understand and avoided mention of things that were not accessible, referencing instead things that were connected to contemporary culture.

If Pastor Jimmy is right, the existing religiously affiliated churches need to move beyond their current medium of the fifties and sixties to that of the early twenty-first century, a place where social media can become a critical source of messages, thoughts, and imagination. While social media is not the only answer to fixing the chronic crisis in our churches, it is definitely a place where the people are, and is therefore potentially a place to start. It is an outlet to seek and not discount the value of. As we will see in the succeeding pages, it is a place where faith messages are distributed daily. A place of accessibility.

Social media doesn't necessarily replace the church, but can enhance it. It is a place where the disenfranchised go to seek God, a place that those hampered by the duties of life visit



to be close to God. God is there and people have found Him. As we will see as we proceed further with this analysis.

## **Chapter 3 Social Media and the Results**

The world of social media is a place where there exists a new way to communicate. It is a place that relies on condensed messages and visual imagery, where information is distributed and responded to. In this place we will see that faith messages exist and are vibrant. A place that is at first difficult to understand for those who have used social media, because of its non-intuitive nature, but when explained, becomes very intuitive. Similar to the Parables of Jesus, it rides the wave of where people are and it is a medium that speaks a simple language that is quickly understood by those who are there. We will find Jesus already there, residing in the hearts of the users of social media. In this world, our goal is to try and help Jesus with messages that are faith-based.

In researching this world, a number of parameters, methods, and terms have to be explained. One parameter that was established was to create a working model that was sufficient in size to provide statistical accuracy to prove its results. The overall size was determined to be ten thousand followers/connections. In other words, people who had accepted an invitation to follow, or asked to be followers of, our posts. Each individual site had to have at least one thousand followers. The sites were; Facebook (where we had 4,265 followers), Twitter (1,461

followers), Instagram (1,119 followers), and LinkedIn (4,240 connections/followers).<sup>1</sup> Each of these sites achieved an above average number of followers.

### **Statistical Analysis of Users by Site**

**Facebook** has more than 2 billion followers worldwide.<sup>2</sup> In the United States the number of users is 240 million.<sup>3</sup> The average number of followers per user is three hundred and thirty eight.<sup>4</sup>

**Twitter** has more than 330 million users.<sup>5</sup> In the United States there are more than 85 million users.<sup>6</sup> The average user has seven hundred and seven followers.<sup>7</sup>

**Instagram** has more than 700 million active users, which is almost triple the amount from last year.<sup>8</sup> In the United States there are more than 85 million users.<sup>9</sup> The average number of followers per user is between eight and nine hundred.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for a listing of these results.

<sup>2</sup> Number of Monthly Active Facebook Users Worldwide, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/>.

<sup>3</sup> Top 15 Countries Based on Facebook Users, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268136/top-15-countries-based-on-number-of-facebook-users/>.

<sup>4</sup> Aaron Smith, "New Facts About Facebook," [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/03/6-new-facts-about-facebook/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/03/6-new-facts-about-facebook/).

<sup>5</sup> Number of Monthly Active Twitter Users, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ryan MacCarty, Average Twitter Followers, <https://kickfactory.com/blog/average-twitter-followers-updated-2016/>.

<sup>8</sup> Number of Daily Active Instagram Users, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/657823/number-of-daily-active-instagram-users/>.

<sup>9</sup> Most Followers on Instagram, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/421169/most-followers-instagram/>.

<sup>10</sup> Mike Byne, "Instagram Statistics," <https://opticalcortex.com/instagram-statistics/>.

**LinkedIn** has more than 500 million users, when you assume a 17-million-user gain each quarter since the last public statistics report.<sup>11</sup> In the United States there are more than 130 million users.<sup>12</sup> The average LinkedIn user has between three hundred and five hundred followers/connections.<sup>13</sup>

## **Critical Measurement Methods for Social Media**

Before we can get into the model and how it worked, there are four critical characteristics and measurements that need to be discussed with social media. Understanding what they are and how they work is vital to understanding the model and how the various techniques used affected results.

**Followers:** Followers are those individuals who request to be connected and are accepted or those who are invited. It is critical to accumulate followers to build a base for “reach” and “engagement.” Depending on the methods used in acquiring followers, they can be highly engaged or weakly engaged. Our research showed that the more mutual the connection, the higher the engagement.

However, size also counts. Engagement is dependent on how the followers were obtained, but also on the social media site’s inherent volume of engagement activity. We varied our methods in follower acquisition to test how to obtain the most engaged followers.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Quarterly Number of LinkedIn Members, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/274050/quarterly-numbers-of-linkedin-members/>.

<sup>13</sup> What Is LinkedIn’s Average Number of Connections per User, <https://www.quora.com/What-is-Linkedins-average-number-of-connections-per-user>.

**Reach:** “Reach” refers simply to the number of people who saw a post, blog, or image. Reach of faith-based messages is affected by three factors: the number of followers, the site’s individual algorithm, and the use of hashtags. The algorithm employed by each site is critical in determining reach. Each social media has its own algorithm, and it is kept private by the various social media venues. More on this in the algorithm section. Followers also influence reach; the more you have the greater the reach. Use of hashtags expands your reach outside of your follower base, as they are posted in “conversations” created by other users.

**Algorithm:** This is the most unknown factor and has been kept private by all the sites. In our research we found few sources that could define how the algorithm works for each social media site. We determined from our research, that three factors related to algorithm improved our results. The first and most important was the quality of the post/image/thought that was posted. The second was our compliance with the various personalities of that particular site (more on this within the individual site analysis). The third, surprisingly, was how often we engaged with the given community. The more engagement the bigger the reach.

Essentially, through the “algorithm” and its machine-based learning, the site determines how many of your posts/images/thoughts are distributed to your followers. If all content were distributed to all followers, everyone’s newsfeed would become too unwieldy. As such, the site’s algorithm controls what is disbursed to which individual users. In no case will 100 percent of one’s followers see each posting.

**Engagement:** This is simply the number of “likes,” “comments,” “shares,” or clicks” that are noted on each post. Higher engagement will create greater reach. Ultimately this is the highest form of acceptance of what is said or shown. Engagement is affected by the quality of the

content, the number of followers, and the algorithm generating reach. Each site has its own peculiarities that dictate what is above average engagement or below average. Understanding these differences by site helps indicate what works and what doesn't.

## **Glossary of Terms**

During our advisory group meeting there was a strong call to include a glossary of terms before delving into our model and how it worked. While the request might seem unusual, based on their own experience with the project the group felt that the succeeding content would be much harder to understand without starting with a glossary first. Essentially there are two reasons for this: First, many of the terms used by the sites are new and not particularly intuitive. Second, the reader could then understand that part of the research effort was first learning this new language. In other words, knowing the terms is starting at the beginning.

Because of the complexity of these terms the advisory group also strongly suggested restating the definition the first time each term was used as we go forward. The advisory group's strong feeling was based on their own learning curve on this subject. They received ten updates throughout the ten-week research period and had three group meetings. While not the dominant theme of the updates or the meetings, learning the language formed a significant portion of the meetings and the notes based on them. The live users of these four sites have a good understanding of these terms. As such, the advisory group believed that this is where we should start, not only to learn the language of the users, but to be on equal footing with the actual research subjects, the users.

## ***Follower Development Techniques and Methods Explanation***

**Blind Canvassing:** The process of asking for followers without considering mutual interest or mutual connection. For instance, each site will provide a listing of people you could invite a connection with or follow, by hitting the “Connect” key (LinkedIn), the “Add Friend” key (Facebook), or the “Follow” key (Twitter and Instagram). Based on what I found for each of these sites. This method was primarily used in the research period on LinkedIn and Facebook. The primary purpose of using this test method was to determine the level of engagement that would be received after acquisition and the level of acceptance. Engagement from followers acquired this way proved to be very weak. On average each of these requests would receive a 30 percent acceptance rate.<sup>14</sup>

**Mutual Connection Canvassing:** This process is similar to blind canvassing, but has the added requirement of only requesting a follower if at least ten other mutual connections exist. In general, the subsequent engagement and acceptance using this method were higher. Acceptance varied by site. LinkedIn was 40 percent, Facebook almost 50 percent, Instagram and Twitter in the 75 percent range.<sup>15</sup> While this method was used on all four sites, its heaviest use occurred on Facebook and LinkedIn.

**Mutual Interest and Connection Canvassing:** Similar to Mutual Connection Canvassing, with an added emphasis on interest. Interest was interpreted as a person who could easily be identified as someone with Christian values in his or her profile. While this process took longer in acquiring followers, it produced stronger engagement. This process was limited to

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<sup>14</sup> Calculation based on weekly log kept throughout research period.

<sup>15</sup> Calculation based on weekly log kept throughout research period.

Instagram and Twitter, where engagement ran significantly higher than on LinkedIn or Facebook.<sup>16</sup>

**Mutual Engagement Canvassing:** This technique was principally used on Twitter and Instagram. The process involved reading a non-follower's faith-based posts/images and doing three things if appropriate: liking, commenting on, and then following the individual. An important distinction was the avoidance of short comments and instead creating comments that spoke directly to the post, followed up with a statement of appreciation for the user sharing his or her thoughts. This added effort is untypical of comments made by other users. While it's a passive way to request followers, it produced well over an 80 percent follow rate and a more highly engaged follower.<sup>17</sup> This effort appears to be the one Jesus would have used. Based on Revelations 3:20, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." The main emphasis is on the word "with."

An important note should be made in follower development: avoiding following corporate sites and people who do not typically follow back is critical. On each site there are a number of users who use the site to sell a product. Their engagement and "follow backs" are very weak and will not produce an "authentic" follower base. Also, there exist a number of users who acquire followers but will not follow back. While principally limited to Instagram users, due to the restriction on how many people a user can follow, seventy-five hundred, these users use

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 1 report. Engagement was 60 percent on Twitter and more than 100 percent on Instagram in week 9 and 10.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 1 report. Engagement was 60 percent on Twitter and more than 100 percent on Instagram in week 9 and 10.



“grooming” techniques to acquire followers. For instance, they will follow a user, and when the user follows back, they will unfollow him or her. In this way they limit the number of people they follow, but increase their own followers. Some users have a strong presence and content, and as a result acquire a large number of followers. For instance, this occurs with famous actors and singers, politicians and athletes. While you can follow them, they will not become “authentic followers”.

### ***Engagement Techniques and Methods Explanation***

**Likes:** Each site has a key that can be hit called “Like.” When the “Like” button is tapped, it is recorded on the post. On all the sites this is true. However, the personality of each site dictates the value of the like. For instance, it is much harder to get a like on Twitter than on Instagram. The average like per follower on Twitter is one per every thousand follower.<sup>18</sup> The President, who has forty-three million followers, only averages two likes per one thousand followers.<sup>19</sup> Instagram averages five likes per one hundred followers.<sup>20</sup> Instagram produces the highest amount of likes per follower because the manual process of liking does not require any more than double clicking on the image. While the site does have a “Like” key, it is easier to simply double click the image.

**Comments:** Each site provides the opportunity to leave a comment. Generally, the comments are one word, like “amen.” The majority of the comments are limited in length, and fewer than 10 percent of all comments are one sentence long. Comments appear on average with

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<sup>18</sup> Based on a statistical sample worksheet by site developed during the research period.

<sup>19</sup> Based on President Trump’s Twitter account’s statistical analysis.

<sup>20</sup> Based on a statistical sample worksheet by site developed during the research period.

5 percent of likes. In our posts they never exceeded 10 percent, except for one controversial post, “The Five Reasons Jesus was Pro-Business,” which received almost as many comments as likes. On Facebook, there is also substantial amount of prayer requests. On average I encountered, and commented on, five to ten prayer requests, out of every fifty posts viewed on any given day during the research period. Generally, on all four sites comments are a higher expression of engagement than likes.

**Sharing:** Each site provides the opportunity to share a post that is read. Shares are rarer than likes and comments on all four sites except for Twitter. Twitter has a “Retweet” key, which is similar to the “Share” button that exists on Facebook and LinkedIn. In our survey of the users of Twitter, approximately 35 percent used the “Retweet” button exclusively to pass on information through their activity feed.<sup>21</sup> This is largely due to only having to hit the “Retweet” key, without being required to post a comment. On Twitter, this sharing activity exceeds that of comments.<sup>22</sup> Instagram is at the other end of the spectrum, and the process of sharing is a two-step process. The first is to save the post to your feed, and the second is to resend it with your own comment. Generally, on social media, added steps reduce activity. Instagram shares are substantially lower than shares on other sites, and there is no statistical calculation provided by the site. However, on our Instagram site, saves equaled 1 to 2 percent of likes.

**Clicks:** A measure of engagement recording the number of times the user literally clicks on a link, profile, or post. This is the lowest form of engagement and the hardest to track. It is only recorded on a subset of Facebook called Facebook Business and on LinkedIn.

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<sup>21</sup> Based on a study performed during the research period.

<sup>22</sup> Based on a study performed during the research period.

**Engagement Calculation for the Research Results:** To measure the success of each post, engagement was calculated by adding the four components together. For instance, if a post had one hundred likes, ten comments, one click, and one share, then the engagement was counted as one hundred and twelve. Doing this allowed for a better evaluation of the acceptance of the post. While there is some duplication, it better measures the “emotional” connection of the post. This calculation is an important part of learning what works. It helps discover those posts that inspire at a higher level. All comparisons to industry standards include this same calculation, allowing for a truer comparison of this project’s posts to the average by site. Comparing to the industry average provides a better calibration of results, as each social media site inherently has varying engagement standards.

### ***Content Description***

**Content/Posts:** For this project content fell into three categories: tweets, images, and blogs. In all cases, content was the primary driver of engagement. Regardless of what article is read on line on how to improve engagement, the key determinant is always stated as content. It needs to be directed and appropriate for each site. For instance, on Instagram, long texts without an image will not work to acquire engagement. Prior to initiating activity on any of the sites, building a content base first is a critical function that has to occur before engaging in the site’s community. In all cases in our study, ten pieces of content were made available prior to seeking engagement. While you can begin without content, the process of developing followers and engagement will be slowed if you do so. It is also important to note that content has to be carefully limited in distribution. Our research showed that limiting content to one post a day was preferred. In our studies of other users, we discovered that numerous posts lowered engagement

and potentially would result in those users being blocked. Twitter posts could be two to three a day.

**Blogs:** Thirty blog posts containing faith-based messages were distributed throughout the ten-week research period. They can all be seen by going to the [www.brucehartman.com](http://www.brucehartman.com) website. Appendixes 3 to 5 contain sample blog posts that were used. They were posted each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and were primarily distributed on the Facebook social and business pages and on LinkedIn. Links back to the blog website were provided through images of the blogs on Instagram and Twitter. In some cases, the complete post could be read by clicking on the post, which would take you directly to the website. In other cases, the post could be read in its entirety on the site. This was done to determine which was most effective in gaining readership. We discovered no advantage to either. Each post also included an image designed to portray the message of the post.

Blogs as a form of communication were the least effective in gaining reach or engagement. The posts worked best on LinkedIn, where the average of views was one to two hundred. The blog regarding Jesus being pro-business was viewed by more than one thousand followers. Engagement generally was in the three to ten range per blog post, but was consistent with industry averages.

**Images:** On average seven faith-based images were posted each week. In week nine and ten there were nine posts. In total eighty images were created. They can all be seen on Instagram, under [bruce.l.hartman](https://www.instagram.com/bruce.l.hartman). The images contained original photos and free photos from the internet. In general, a caption was either embedded on the photo or in the comment section. These were the most viewed and engaged with posts. For all the sites, their reach was higher than blog posts.

On LinkedIn some of the images had five to eight hundred views or 20 percent of the total followers. On Instagram their views reached upward of 50 percent of the followers. Both cases are well above industry standard. In the succeeding sections for each site these statistics will be discussed further.

**Comments/Tweets:** These comments/tweets were short; at the time only 140 characters were allowed on Twitter (that's since been increased to 280). The comments were faith-based and performed very well, averaging a reach of five hundred people or 40 percent of followers. They had an engagement of ten per one thousand followers, well above the Twitter average of one per thousand followers. Appendix 6 contains examples of high-performing tweets. Comments, which can also be posted on the other sites, were tested on Facebook and LinkedIn, but the results were similar to the blog results. Tweets and comments both worked best on Twitter.

**Mutual Engagement Comments:** This activity primarily occurred in the engagement period of the ten-week project, from week eight to week ten. It principally occurred on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. LinkedIn had been tested earlier and showed a poor response. Essentially these comments were made in response to posts found on the news feed from those we were following. On average, one hour a day was spent per site responding to these posts. For all sites fifty posts could be liked and commented on in an hour.<sup>23</sup> The comments were directly related to the post and contained at least a one sentence of insight and one of appreciation. On Facebook the engagement rate per day averaged 55-60 percent. Instagram could not be measured, as the site does not provide engagement statistics for individual comments, but our

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<sup>23</sup> Based on manual time studies conducted during week nine of the research period.

own statistics indicated a similar result to Facebook's. Twitter's comments were handled differently. While the comments were directly related to a tweet, they were global in nature, meaning that while still personally directed, the comments were written for a larger audience. This had the effect of allowing them to be liked or retweeted by more other readers. On twitter the engagement rate to these comments was slightly less than that of our original tweets. Again, this "with" activity was the most productive.

A caution on mutual engagement is that there are no shortcuts. While some sites make it easy to like posts/images, this activity is less impactful than adding comments or sharing. In general, engagement will not occur back with just a like. When you add a directed and thoughtful comment, the number rises to well over 50 percent on all sites. If the goal is to establish an authentic follower base, this is the preferred method. Affirming comments builds mutuality.

### ***Other Key Terms***

**Organic:** When the word "organic" is used in social media, it refers to internally developed activity that is not paid for. For instance, followers that are organic were acquired through non paid activities based on the methods described above. While you can pay for followers and engagement, it is highly undesirable. Our research with paid activities produced significantly different results than when we worked with organic activities. Engagement from paid followers is at best weak and at worst just spam. It should be noted that all the results in this research project were derived organically.

**Hashtag:** Hashtags are principally a means of community conversation. A hashtag is entered using the "#" sign. For instance, on Instagram, a hashtag #Jesus might contain thirty

million image posts from users. A hashtag allows a user to post an image, comment, or blog post outside their follower base. These are not typically back-and-forth exchanges, only inputs into a conversation. From this activity engagement and potential followers will occur outside of the existing follower base.

**Search Engine Optimization (SEO):** SEO is the process of website discovery. The primary source of discovery is through Google searches. For instance, if a person would like to find faith-based messages, he or she will type those words into the search bar. Google will then provide the various sites where those messages can be found. Google uses an algorithm that ranks the websites/content and lists them in the order of rank. The key determinant in the algorithm is frequency of previous visits. The fewer visits, the lower the rank and the fewer future visits. To improve visibility and thus visits, each website needs SEO. However, the process takes months to develop and as such had little impact on this research project.

**Profile/Profile Page:** During the initial setup of each site, information about the user is required. It can be as simple as a name or as extensive as a complete résumé. Setting up the profile information is an important part of social media site performance. Profiles should be filled out completely and show a clear description of the user's purpose, interest, and life goals. This is important in discovery by other users. Weak or poorly written profiles will limit the number of followers acquired and their engagement. In our research, reviewing profiles was important. When a poorly described profile was noted, no follower request was submitted. Poorly written profiles are also an indicator of spam or a potential hacker. On LinkedIn, for example, if work experience is not shown, a potential follower will be less interested or potentially be a hacker. On Facebook, this is significantly important. Each day we received

friend/follower requests. While they were exciting to receive, they had to be viewed carefully. During the research process, six out of seven friend requests, for example, were discovered to be spam or false accounts.

**Time Studies:** Part of the research process was to create time studies. The purpose is to help future readers understand how long each technique took. For instance, the process of mutual engagement, which involves directly communicating, by liking and commenting, with other users' posts resulted on average in being able to connect with approximately fifty people an hour. This was true for each site. This was determined by using a stopwatch and working on mutual engagement for one hour, then collecting the data for the number of people engaged with. This test occurred during week nine and ten, or three to four hours a day using each social media site. Another example was "mutual connection and interest canvassing" to create followers on Twitter, during which we found that three hundred follower requests could be sent out in one hour.

**News Feed:** Each site provides a daily feed of posts from users that you are following. The number of posts and which ones you see are dictated by the algorithm of the site. We were able to determine those users we engaged with would show up on future news feeds. To ensure a balanced news feed, we would like only one post from a specific user on any given day to ensure we didn't keep seeing the same person. Additionally, we strived to vary our mutual engagement activities by user during the week.

On all the sites there is a feature with which you can instruct the site that you want to see all posts from a particular user. While we did not use this feature, it can be valuable for smaller organizations, like a church, to ensure that all material is distributed. This does require a



communication to all followers to turn this switch on, but if that is successfully accomplished it will ensure that all posts are at least distributed to the follower base.

### **Individual Site Analysis**

During the advisory group meeting on November 15, the structure of this thesis was discussed and the advisory group was asked if the results should be presented week by week or by social media site. From their own point of view from following the project, they strongly recommended a site-by-site construction of the results. As such, what follows is just that.

The results will discuss:

- Follower development methods
- Content posted and cadence
- Engagement results and comparison to averages of other sites
- Methods of expanding reach technique
- Geographic applicability
- Results of testing paid advertising
- Time studies and results
- Where did we find God/Jesus on the site?

As we proceed with this review, an important distinction needs to be made, between having a “research orientation” and a “results orientation.” In our first advisory group meeting this was discussed extensively. Our conclusion was that the best value for this project was to evaluate all methods and techniques to discover what worked best or worst—thus avoiding a results orientation. The ultimate results could have been significantly improved for the three

main performance measurements—followers, reach, and engagement—if a results orientation had been used. While the results achieved in total were significantly higher than industry averages, the approach was a research orientation. The advisory group also stressed the importance of indexing to “authentic” followers or engagement, as the belief was that this would be more portable for future readers.

### **The Model Used for Research**

As we proceed further, we will get into a more detailed discussion of the model by site. As stated before the model in general was constructed to be of sufficient size to create statistical reliability, and each site was to have more than the industry average number of followers to further validate the results. The primary reason for these two goals was not to serve a result orientation, but to allow a faith-based organization to have sufficient information to construct its own operating model.

### **Individual Site Setup**

Prior to starting to use any of the sites on social media, the site should be set up properly. Starting without posted content will minimize reception and acceptance by other users. For each site at least ten pieces should be posted before trying to connect with other users. This will allow potential connections to understand the overall message and in turn accept or reject it. First-time visitors to a page will want to understand the overall message and goal of the page. Without content it will be hard to determine these factors and in turn acceptance will be slow. The profile information on all sites should be filled out completely.

### **Instagram Results**

## ***Key Statistics***

**Followers:** Beginning base equaled zero. After ten weeks we had 1,119 followers.<sup>24</sup>

**Engagement Rate for Weeks Nine and Ten:** 126 percent of the previous week's follower base.<sup>25</sup> 18 percent of followers by image.<sup>26</sup> Industry average for Instagram is 4.3 percent engagement of follower base.<sup>27</sup>

**Reach of Followers for Weeks Nine and Ten:** The average image post reached 43.7 percent of followers during the final two weeks, based off the previous week's follower base.<sup>28</sup>

**Follower Development Methods** consisted of primarily two methods: “mutual engagement canvassing” and “mutual interest and connection canvassing.” For this site a more targeted follower development method was used to determine effectiveness. In general, mutual engagement canvassing proved to be the most effective method. The process of being highly engaged with the images posted by others—liking, commenting, and following—produced the highest follower rate, of close to 75 percent.<sup>29</sup>

The process of mutual interest and connection canvassing was less effective. Tests were run on one hundred potential followers on a daily basis for four weeks. In general, 40 percent

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<sup>24</sup> See Appendix 1, under Instagram.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 1 for results.

<sup>26</sup> Per bruce.l.hartman Instagram page for all images posted during week ending 11/3/2017 and week ending 11/10/2017.

<sup>27</sup> Calculated by reviewing three hundred independent faith-based users over a three-week period.

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix 1 for results.

<sup>29</sup> Weekly log analysis.

“follow backs” occurred. In effect, we would follow users that had more than ten mutual connections and had a faith-based interest.

Initially, blind canvassing occurred, during the first two weeks, with low results. Overall, follower development was best achieved by mutual engagement canvassing. Part of the reason was a more targeted approach and that Instagram has a cap of 7,500 followers, which makes the act of following a more important decision than it is on other sites. While mutual engagement canvassing is the most effective way to develop authentic followers, it does require more effort than other follower development activities.

During the first two weeks, it was noticed that followers would drop each day after an initial gain. As part of the study all people who followed us, if appropriate, were followed back. However, many times they unfollowed in the next day or two. In reviewing the people who unfollowed, we found that they had far more people following them than they followed. Instagram limiting the number of people you can follow makes following a rarer commodity, which some feel has to be protected. It was not uncommon for us to be followed by someone with more than ten thousand followers but fewer than seventy-five users that they were following. In effect, they were grooming us to follow them back. After the second week, we did not follow back any followers where this condition existed.

Being careful with who was asked to follow was an important part of reach and engagement, as the more restrictive process of creating followers produced a more engaged community. This selectivity was one of the critical aspects of why the overall engagement on this site was four times higher than for the average Instagram user.

This selectivity also applied to who was followed. In general, people under the age of twenty-one or highly political were intentionally not followed. Each person that was followed first underwent a profile review to determine their suitability. In general, age is not noted in the profiles, so other criteria were used to determine age. If users declared themselves to be fathers, mothers, or owners of a business, or exhibited other predominantly adult indicators, then they were followed. People who included pointed political comments in their profile were also intentionally not included. This latter step was added to ensure that when people reviewed my profile they would not be able to determine or assume my political beliefs. The profile in general avoided strong political views and as such didn't lend itself to attracting people who could be viewed as polarizing.

In general, around 100 followers were added in the average week.<sup>30</sup> The highest week was week nine, with 258, and the lowest week was week two.<sup>31</sup> The principal reason for the large increase in week nine was a highly concentrated effort at the end of week eight and beginning of week nine in testing mutual interest and connection canvassing.”

**Content Development** in general required five to seven hours a week of effort. Each image would take, on average, one hour to develop and post. On each Thursday, the next week's “media plan” was developed for each site. The media plan had a common theme and cadence for the site. For Instagram, starting in week five the cadence was as follows:

- Sunday was “Song of the Week.” The songs were faith-based. A picture was created and the caption included the lyrics to the first stanza of the song.

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

- Monday, Wednesday, and Friday were derivatives of the blogs that were posted on the other sites on those days. Because Instagram does not work well with text, images from the blogs were used and a key phrase taken out of the associated blog.
- Tuesday, was “Thought of the Week.” Generally, this was taken from a successful tweet that occurred on Twitter and placed on an appropriate image.
- Thursday was “Verse of the Week.” The verse that was used generally related to one of the three blogs used that week. The image was then created with an engaging picture and the associated verse. The highest performing posts generally occurred with these verses.
- Saturday was “Get Involved Day.” Each week a giving opportunity was selected and an image from the organization’s website was chosen. An associated caption was also assigned and posted. In general, this was the poorest performing day.
- Ad Doc posts were posted during week nine and ten. These images/posts were developed based on high-performing tweets from prior weeks. A high performing tweet on Twitter was matched with an image and then posted to the Instagram site. This was a test to determine if there would be acceptability to two posts a day. While total engagement increased, the percentage and number of engagements by post decreased, suggesting that adding a second image diluted engagement in the other posts. However, overall engagement increased on the day two posts occurred.

An important element of posting content on Instagram is that the site *only allows posts from mobile phones or tablets*. The site does not allow posts from desktop or laptop computers.

And content should be posted after 9 a.m. Posts that occur in the off hours do not generate interest quickly enough, and this appeared to affect the algorithm that creates the reach with content.

**Algorithm** observations on this site closely matched the mechanics of the other sites. Again, there is not a definitive statement that exists for how any site's algorithm works. Content and engagement directly affect the algorithm. We determined this through the statistics the sites produce for the user. An image posted on 11/2/17 achieved the highest engagement of all the Instagram posts during the test period.<sup>32</sup> Its total engagement (likes, comments, and shares) equaled 175 forms of engagement. Its overall reach equaled 446 users, the highest during the test period. It is important to note that the caption on the post, "Faithful patience allows God to work without our interruption," was original material developed during the research period.

Conversely, a post on a Saturday, 11/12/17, produced a very low reach of 235 users or only 20 percent of the followers. The engagement on the post was also a low amount of 44.<sup>33</sup> While these results are higher than the average for other users, for comparative purposes they are a strong indication of the importance of content and interest for the follower.

It is important to note that these statistics are only provided on mobile devices, under the caption "View Insights." These insights are real-time statistics and are retained on the site.

**Reach** efforts were affected by content that was engaging and driven by absolute conformity to the site's personality. That is, it was image-based with condensed, thoughtful

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<sup>32</sup> From Instagram page on 11/2/17.

<sup>33</sup> From Instagram page on 11/12/17.

wording. Both reach and engagement were also affected by a highly connected follower group. Follower development using mutual engagement activities was an important factor as well. Reach is also affected by how often you engage with the site. The algorithm appears to give you a bonus you if you frequently use the site and engage with others.

**Engagement** on this site, both in general and specific to our testing, is higher than on other social media sites. One of the primary reasons is the use of the “double click” feature. For instance, when you see an image you like, just double tapping the screen creates a like. The other sites require a point and click approach, which takes longer. Similar to reach, engagement on this site was high because of the targeted follower development approach.

**Hashtags** are widely used on Instagram to spread your image outside your follower base. There are hundreds of faith-based hashtags that exist, such as #Jesus, #God, #faith, and #Jesuslives. These hashtags can be entered either as part of the caption or as a comment. When placed alongside an image, that image is then distributed out to join other images using the same hashtag. A hashtag called #Jesus, has over eighteen million images posted.<sup>35</sup> By associating an image with one of these hashtags or conversations you significantly expand the number of users who can see your image. This creates more followers and engagement, as people from outside your follower base see the image and can engage or follow based on this viewing.

One of the critical ways to increase your views with these hashtags is to place a hashtag with your image that will connect it with enough viewers but where there aren't too many other images. The reason is to secure a high placement on the landing page for the hashtag. For

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<sup>35</sup> From hashtag #Jesus on Instagram on 11/20/17.



instance, we found that with #Jesus our placement was hidden among the eighteen million other posts associated with that hashtag and so we never hit the landing page. We did post to #Jesus to test views. However, with the hashtag #Jesustakethewheel we would consistently be on either the main landing page or in the recent post page's first page. Being placed higher ensures better visibility. In general, we found that limiting our hashtags to twelve and focusing on hashtags that specifically matched the appropriate interest of potential followers worked best. Our best performance occurred where fifty thousand to four hundred thousand posts existed with a given hashtag, which allowed us to be on that hashtag's landing page.

**Paid Awareness or Advertising** can occur on Instagram. In general, the results were suboptimal and did not create the same engagement as organic efforts. Our Verse of the Week results from advertising were a strong example of this difference. We paid five dollars to reach people with a "Christian interest" over the age of twenty-one. The post reached more than six hundred people. The engagement constituted 45 forms of engagement or less than 7 percent engagement of viewers per reach.<sup>36</sup> Conversely the organic post of the same image produced a reach of 330 and had an engagement of 129. The organic reach was close to 80 percent of the previous week's follower base and an engagement of 38 percent from those who viewed the image.<sup>37</sup> While both results were well above the average Instagram follower's results, proving that the posted image was a strong one, the paid results were far weaker than the organic results for the same image. Other tests on paid advertising produced similar results.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> From user Instagram site page analysis or "View Insights" on 11/22/17.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Two important notes about paid awareness or advertising; while the results were suboptimal for our purposes, there are two reasons why it could help another user. The first involves follower development. If organic follower development is weak or the effort is time-constrained, paid advertising can create an image that will lead some people to follow the user. While the impact will be significantly smaller than from organic efforts, it will produce some followers if the content is of high quality and sent to the right target audience. The second reason paid advertising can help is that Instagram allows “geographic targeting.” In other words, if you are a localized faith-based organization, you can pay to have your images sent to people within your targeted geographic location.

To advertise, you first need to set up an account with a credit card. Then hit the “Promote” button and follow the instructions for how much you want to spend and who you want your target audience to be. The audience can be targeted by interest, age, or geographic location. Once you have answered these questions, the system will give you the expected reach, and from there you can predict the number of forms of engagement you will receive. We generally found that engagement equaled 5 to 10 percent of reach. The average Instagram user achieves 4 percent, from our own studies.<sup>39</sup>

It is recommended before spending a large amount money, start with an ad that costs five to twenty dollars. This will provide enough ad reach, in excess of two to four thousand individuals, to indicate the ad’s effectiveness. This also gives the individual/organization a period of experimentation without a large investment.

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<sup>39</sup>Study of engagement results from other Instagram users on October 5, 2017.

Another advantage of Paid advertising is the opportunity to announce an event and to increase the reach outside of the current follower base. This can be done by specifying a “geographic area” near the event and promoting the announcement of the event that has been posted on the site. Effectively reaching people outside the follower base’s geographical area.

**Mutual Engagement Technique** consisted of two daily activities. The first involved the maintenance of the existing follower base and the second involved users discovered on the hashtags pages. In general, if the method followed was a like, a comment, and if need be a follow, then fifty users could be engaged within an hour.<sup>40</sup>

Ensuring that the follower base is properly engaged is a critical factor in maintaining the base, thus daily mutual engagement is recommended. Instagram provides this data on the user’s news feed, which can be reviewed each day. The process includes looking at an image and reading the caption, then if you like the image/caption, double clicking on the image and registering your like. For this project a like was always followed by a two-sentence or more comment. For instance, if someone posted what we thought was an important thought, the comment was highly related to the thought the person was presenting. If the image was about the grace of God and that it was freely given, then the comment would address grace and its availability specifically. The second part of the comment was always a show of appreciation for sharing, saying something like “Thank you for sharing” or “Thank you for the wonderful reminder.” This is highly unusual in its effort, but both I and the advisory group felt that just liking the image was superficial.

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<sup>40</sup> From daily manual time studies during

For posts in the hashtag conversation that were visited daily, a similar process would occur, with the added step of following the user if the person met this project's criteria. The person had to be over twenty-one, interested in faith, and not a "groomer."

Mutual engagement was done in this manner to emulate what we believed Jesus would do. You could just double click an image to like the post and in effect increase you daily contact to 360 users, but for the Instagram piece of this project we opted to use methods that were the most engaging.<sup>41</sup>

**Weekly Time Effort:** Fourteen to sixteen hours per week. Each image takes one hour to photograph, or to find an image that matched a caption. Only original images or free images from Adobe were used. Less time could be spent by just using random images and creating a thought to go with them, but this effort would not gain as much engagement.

The second effort was with daily mutual engagement activities. In general, one hour per day, five days a week, was spent on this activity after week five.

Two hours a week were spent reviewing results and determining what the insights were producing. Finally, we responded to comments that were more than one word from a follower, by thanking the user for his or her comment. On average this took two hours a week.

It is important to note that for all four sites, once a sizeable number of followers are created, they need strong weekly content and daily communication to maintain the base.

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<sup>41</sup> Test performed on 10/17/17 to determine how many Instagram users could be liked in one hour through double clicking. One every ten seconds when the post was adequately viewed.

**Where Did We Find God/Jesus on Instagram?** Instagram is a site of imagination and condensed messages that inspire. God is found in this imagination through inspiring and creative posts. For the individual viewer, the images create a connection with God. From their own personal lenses and memories these images connect them to their lives with God. To create this spiritual connection, the person posting an image has to be creative in both the visual and text. Neither of which can be tedious or drawn out. Simple and concise messages that get to the point work, similar to the Parables of Jesus.

For the person engaging on this site and looking for faith-based messages, over an extended period of time impressions and thoughts begin to paint a tapestry of God's presence. Many times in the hours spent on this site, consistent messages would appear to me that cemented or enhanced my own connection with God. Not only was I giving messages, but I was also receiving them. Almost as if I was drawn into the stories through a compelling force. This was an unintended by-product of the research.

God/Jesus is also in the hashtags, waiting for the user to visit. Under these hashtags are found simple messages conveying how other people feel about Jesus. You can venture through millions of posts by searching #Jesus or make a more targeted search and find thousands of images by searching #Jesustakethewheel.

**Conclusion:** Instagram was the best performing of all four sites. Generally, this was because of the extra effort put into developing a targeted follower base. By building the follower base one person at a time and avoiding extensive canvassing activities, we obtained more authentic followers. Combined with an easy to use site for engagement, this meant we were able to achieve significantly better than average results. This site became the model for high touch

and thoughtful interaction, to show the reader the results and the methods from this behavior. Even though it generated the lowest number of followers, both its reach and its engagement were much stronger than the other three sites.

## **Twitter Results**

### ***Key Statistics***

**Followers:** Beginning base equaled zero. After four weeks we had 1,461 followers.<sup>42</sup> In the weeks after the research period, followers had grown to over 2,900.

**Engagement Rate for Weeks Nine and Ten:** 45 percent of the previous week's follower base.<sup>43</sup> Ten forms of engagement per post or twelve for every one thousand followers.<sup>44</sup> Average for Twitter is around one form of engagement for every one thousand followers.<sup>45</sup>

**Reach of Followers for Weeks Nine and Ten:** The average image post reach was 54 percent of followers during the final two weeks, off the previous week's follower base.<sup>46</sup>

**Follower Development Methods** consisted of three techniques. The first was organic acquisition, the second was mutual engagement canvassing, and the third was mutual interest and connection canvassing.

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<sup>42</sup> See Appendix 1 for results.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Per bruce\_1\_Hartman page, for all items posted during the week ending 11/3/2017 and week ending 11/10/2017.

<sup>45</sup> Based on a three-week study of other faith-based users, until a level of accuracy reached 95 percent consistency in a thirty-person sample.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix 1 for results.

In organic follower development, each day twenty to thirty followers were added through their own initiation. With Twitter, as with Instagram, users can follow you without your having to accept their following. Twitter produced far more of this type of follower, because there is no limit on how many people a user can follow. Note that Instagram has a limit of 7,500. The removal of this restraint, coupled with the unusually high engagement we achieved, was the reason for the daily organic increases. It should be noted that some of these followers represented promotional efforts and some were single people looking for a romantic connection. In both cases we did not follow back.

Similar to Instagram, we used mutual engagement canvassing. As a reminder, this involved seeking out like-minded users, reviewing their tweets, and if we liked their posts, we would like, comment, and follow. Different from our comments on Instagram, these comments were created to be retweetable. While the comments demonstrated that we had read and understood what was being posted, we would create a more global and less personal response.

Twitter also is very suitable for mutual interest and connection canvassing. We would seek out followers who had a large follower base, more than five hundred, and who had very similar faith interests. From there we would click on their follower number, and a list of all their followers would appear, with notations of who we were already following. With those we were not following, we would look for similar faith interests, and if we found them, we would follow that user. It should be noted that as with Instagram we did not follow people with strong political messages, promotional users, people under twenty-one, or people with radical faith views. Again, all this was done to protect our faith brand and avoid controversial entanglements. It should also be noted that in general follow backs are less formal on Twitter and happen at a rate

of less than 50 percent. However, those that do follow back are more engaged than those from Facebook and LinkedIn. This contributed to the sharp rise in followers each week, but unlike on Facebook and LinkedIn, where we also had large increases by week, the engagement results did not suffer.

**Content Development** is less time-consuming here than Instagram. We used three forms of content: Instagram images, original tweets, and quoted retweets. On average the time spent on content was two hours a week.

The originally developed tweets on Twitter in the last two weeks of the research period also became a source for future thought content on Instagram, but they were also the largest generator of engagement. These original tweets were developed two to three times a day and posted throughout the day. At the time Twitter only allowed 140 characters (it's now 280), so the writing had to be condensed to fit that frame. We also tried to reword the content to match what the reader wanted to hear. In general, how would the statement help their faith lives? It also had to be global in nature, which meant converting individual assertions to universal assertions, such as "you" becoming "humankind" or "we." Thoughts had to be more complicated than "Humankind should . . ." An example of this is the tweet pinned to the profile on my user feed, which states, "God desires that we learn faith and perseverance in adversity and humility in success." This tweet received well over 150 forms of engagement or one hundred times the average tweet, per one thousand followers.

Another example was a simple image tweet that said, "Humankind's purpose is to 'love thy god and love thy neighbor.'" Again this tweet received an extraordinary reception. In itself it explains the process of gaining people's acceptance by helping them versus demanding things



from them. While simple, it speaks directly to people wanting to hear what will help them, and not what we want to tell them. This harkened back to my process of trying to obtain my licensed local pastor designation, when I was asked what my core theology was. I replied with this simple verse. To which I received disapproval from the district board of ordination of the United Methodist Church. In fact, one member said it was so poorly thought out, she was sure I didn't believe in God. Herein lies the irony: the potential churchgoer received this tweet strongly, but the guiding group of the church found it unacceptable. This simple story underlines the importance of keeping faith thoughts condensed, a place where the institutional church is missing the mark.

Buried in the social media world lies the answer for the church: it's not what you want to say, but what the value is for the individual. In the business world this is called "meeting the needs of the customer." These types of tweets had the highest form of engagement, not because they were complex, but because they met a need.

Another form of content came from quoted retweets. A retweet is a tweet that shows up in your personal newsfeed and that you then select to share with your followers. When the retweet button is selected, you are given the option to share the tweet without comment or to add a comment. The latter is called a quoted retweet and is preferable to just retweeting, as it allows you the opportunity to share high-quality content and to add your own thoughts to it. In general, this form of content was well received.

The final source of content came from Instagram. Each day our daily Instagram image was also posted on Twitter. The average engagement ran 40 percent of the results from originally

crafted tweets. While not as well received as the others, they still produced a higher than average engagement.

**Hashtags** were used minimally. The majority of the hashtags came as a result of the Instagram posts. In general, the use of hashtags did not prove to add engagement or reach. Retweets of our content provided the expansion beyond our follower group.

**Paid Awareness or Advertising** proved ineffective. One ad was run and reached seven hundred people. There was no engagement. The cost was five dollars.

**Mutual Engagement Technique** primarily consisted of one activity that took one hour per day. We would review our Twitter feed each morning for one hour. Similar, to Instagram, we would like and comment. If we felt the post was retweetable, we would make a comment and like. We made our comments more global than we would on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn. While we would write directly about the comment, we expanded the thought to a more universal message. The primary reason for this was that we noticed it would lead to more likes of the comment, not only from the user whose post we were commenting about, but also from others, thus expanding our ability to spread faith-based messages.

On average, with mutual engagement you can contribute to fifty posts an hour.<sup>47</sup> As with the other sites, it is an important effort to maintain an engaged follower group on Twitter.

**Weekly Time Effort:** Approximately ten hours a week. Broken down as follows: follower development equaled three hours a week, content creation took two hours per week, and

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<sup>47</sup> Based on manual time studies conducted in week nine.

mutual engagement took five hours per week. This was measured in week nine and ten on an average base of eleven hundred followers.

**Where Did We Find God/Jesus on Twitter?:** As with image posts on Instagram, tweets had to be condensed and imaginative, with the added emphasis on the nature of God. While very personal messages can be tweeted, they become limited in reach. Simple and thoughtful messages about the value of God and Jesus contained in universal statements received the highest engagement. But messages about God had to be exact and well connected. They could not be poorly written, and they had to have content that made people think, similar to the Parables of Jesus. And these messages had to draw people into thinking about God and Jesus from their life perspective. The more universal the message, the higher the engagement—again, similar to the Parables of Jesus: simple messages that made people think and imagine.

**Conclusion:** With Twitter the follower base, reach, and engagement rose very quickly over the four weeks of the test period. There were two reasons for this fast growth.

The first was based on the work and lessons learned on the other three sites in weeks one to six. We principally stuck with the concept of developing an engaged follower group and used the techniques we learned on the other sites. Mutual engagement canvassing and mutual connection/interest proved to be the best form of follower development. Our reach and engagement almost from the start were well above industry standard. Adding to this was the understanding that content had to be crisp, imaginative, and thoughtful.

The second reason was that for our methods the Twitter site was a good match. This is an important statement for potential users. Each person has a communication style that is uniquely different, and its match to the site will dictate results there.

All of our techniques around mutual engagement were easily accomplished on Twitter and in tune with the average Twitter user. Over the previous six weeks, before we started using Twitter, we had identified that short, well-directed messages worked best. Affirming the value of God from the perspective of the users' world proved to work well with Twitter.

Additionally, as on the other sites, where a significant amount of content is distributed each day, the user has a lot to choose from and the shorter and more thoughtful messages worked best. The site's algorithm would recognize what was working and expand the reach.

## **Facebook Social and Business Page Results**

### ***Key Statistics***

**Followers:** Beginning base equaled 397. After ten weeks we had 4,733 followers.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Appendix 1 for results.

**Engagement Rate for Weeks Nine and Ten:** 8.2 percent of the previous week's follower base.<sup>49</sup> .15 percent of followers by image.<sup>50</sup> Average for Facebook Corporate is .17 percent of followers.<sup>51</sup>

**Reach of Followers for Weeks Nine and Ten:** Facebook does not provide reach statistics on a combined basis, except for Facebook Business. On Facebook Business we had a reach of 18 out of our base of 470 followers, or 4 percent.

**Facebook Social and Business Definition:** Facebook offers two vehicles for communication of messages. The first is the more familiar Facebook Social, and the second is Facebook Business. Facebook Business is an extension of the social page. Facebook Social limits the number of followers to five thousand, but on Facebook Business an unlimited number of followers can occur, so it is designed for large organizations who want to expand their follower base.

When canvassing for new followers, in some cases when you send a friend request to a you will receive a message that says, "Person has exceeded their limit of five thousand followers and can no longer accept friend requests." That person would then have to set up a Facebook Business page extension to have more followers.

Due to this factor, we felt that setting up a Facebook Business page extension was an important area to research due to the corporate nature of our project. For a faith-based

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Per bruce.l.hartman Instagram page for all images posted during weeks ending 11/3/2017 and 11/10/2017.

<sup>51</sup> [http://get.rivaliq.com/hubfs/eBooks/Rival\\_IQ\\_2017\\_Social\\_Media\\_Benchmark\\_Report.pdf?submissionGuid=440564b1-6fdd-4c3d-bf3e-53c2e0567f51](http://get.rivaliq.com/hubfs/eBooks/Rival_IQ_2017_Social_Media_Benchmark_Report.pdf?submissionGuid=440564b1-6fdd-4c3d-bf3e-53c2e0567f51).

organization that wants to obtain a large follower group, this is a requirement. While still a part of Facebook, this extension was evaluated separately for function and methods. As such, you will see references to both Facebook Social and Facebook Business throughout this section.

**Follower Development Methods** for Facebook offer a number of ways to acquire followers, and much of what follows is cautionary. Many of the techniques that were used did not generate an engaged follower base, even with the acquisition of four thousand followers. It should also be noted that no person can become a follower without the user's approval, and this is different than Instagram or Twitter, where followers are automatically added just by hitting the "Follow" button.

The first method of follower development we used was the acceptance of friend requests. Here begins a process where you have to be careful with obtaining friends. On the first day we had twenty-one friend requests. During the first two weeks most got accepted by our hitting the "Confirm" button. Each succeeding day a similar result would occur, but most days the number drifted down to around seven. At the end of the second week, we noticed that our engagement hadn't increased and we began to review why not. We started by looking at the individual friend requests we had accepted and noticed that they weren't strong potential followers. We found that many didn't have active profiles and appeared to be spam.

In some we noticed that they didn't have photos or an extensive list of friends. Most importantly, when we looked at their news feed, we didn't see a healthy amount of content. In some, the content had just been created around the time we received the friend request and then there were large gaps. For example, there would be five or more posts all at the same time and then a gap that said, "Posts from 2015." These were from spam or fake accounts.

Or we would notice an extensive number of posts that had two or fewer likes, many of which were from the users themselves. In many cases they were posts that they had shared from someone else. Again, another indication of spam.

Over time we learned four things to check before confirming a friend request. The first was to check each user's friend list for photos and friends. If we found either to be missing, we knew that the user was a fake account. The second was to review the user's news feed, and if we discovered a large number of postings with fewer than a two score in engagement, we assumed that the person was either spam or too controversial for us to allow them to be a follower. The third item we looked for was a large gap between the first postings and subsequent posts. This was another sign of a user that was spam. The fourth and final review was who the user was friends with. If the friend list wasn't consistent with the user's profile, we also assumed spam. For instance, if the person was a female but only had male friends, then this was likely a fraudulent account. Or if the user was older and had a large number of younger followers, we would view this as inconsistent as well.

In summary, while we received each day three to ten friend requests, we rejected 80 percent of these requests due to a suspicious profile. After week two this was our approach.

The second method of follower development we used was to follow Facebook's suggestions for finding friends. Each day a list of potential friends would be listed by the site, under the heading "People You May Know." Sometimes the suggestion list would number close to one hundred suggestions. All that needed to be done was to click the "Add Friend" button and an invitation would be sent out. The response rate was generally very high, exceeding 50 percent on many days. We applied only one restriction on this list of suggestions: we had to have at least

five mutual friends. Again with this group we noticed very low engagement, and when we searched these profiles, we noticed similar results as we had with those friend requests that came each morning. Many of the accounts seemed suspicious. We stopped this process in week four.

The third and final follower development method we engaged in was using trusted friends' followers. A trusted friend was someone that we knew personally. If the person had more than five hundred friends, we would review their friend list for potential followers. Facebook provides you with a listing of all these friends and how many mutual friends you share with them. It also allows you to send a friend request from this list, by simply hitting the "Add Friend" button. We would review the list for users with whom we had at least five to ten mutual connections and send out as many as two hundred requests in a day. The average acceptance rate was 35 to 40 percent.<sup>52</sup>

However, we noticed after a few days that Facebook has a limitation of one thousand on the number of friend requests that can be outstanding at any given time. To send more you have to withdraw previously sent invitations. This process required reviewing our sent invitation list and clicking on "Cancel Request" and then clicking on the "Confirm" button. The time frame to delete one hundred sent invitations is approximately twenty minutes.<sup>53</sup>

When we invited two hundred potential friends and eliminated two hundred old invitations, the time to complete both efforts was approximately one hour.<sup>54</sup> While this process generated reliable and legitimate users as friends/followers, engagement with them did not rise.

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<sup>52</sup> From manual time studies.

<sup>53</sup> From manual time study on October 16-20.

<sup>54</sup> From manual time study on October 16-20.



In summary, follower development methods on Facebook were designed to create a large group of followers quickly to test the effect on engagement. From September 3 to October 22 this activity occurred and followers rose by 3,800.<sup>55</sup> However, engagement did not rise above industry averages, in part because of these methods of mass canvassing.

**Content Development** consisted of blog posting with images and shared Instagram material. Each week three blogs with faith-based messages were created and posted, one each on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.<sup>56</sup> The blogs were original material and each was centered around a verse in the Bible. Generally, a life story was used to connect with the verse. An image was then attached. The process of creation, editing, and image attachment took approximately three hours per blog. These blogs had a heavy connection to business and everyday life in general. All forty-three blogs used for this test can be seen on [www.brucehartman.com](http://www.brucehartman.com).

While the blogs were critically well received, their engagement and reach only achieved industry-average results. The reasons for this performance will be discussed in later sections.

Additionally, on Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, posts from Instagram were also posted on Facebook. The effort involved was less than fifteen minutes per post. A copy of the post was shared and a brief caption was written. Again, the results were no better than industry standard.

Interestingly, on the final day of the research project, November 12, a personal blog was posted, and it achieved ten times the engagement of the other blogs and images.<sup>57</sup> Not only was

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<sup>55</sup> See Appendix 1 results from September 3 to October 22.

<sup>56</sup> See sample blog as Appendixes 3 to 5.

<sup>57</sup> See post as Appendix 7.

the post personal in nature, it could be read in its entirety without having to connect back to the website, as was necessary with the other blogs. This provided a clue as the faith-based nature of Facebook. Facebook is a community-based site and God exists in community on Facebook. Global or universal messages will not be as well received as very direct and personal posts.

We received another clue about the community nature of Facebook when, after the test period, we experimented with using the suggested “Facebook format for posts,” and received four times the average response we’d had to the blogs. From these particular results we learned that Facebook is social and not text oriented. Simple or personal posts perform best. While the blogs were more professional in quality and content, they worked against the normal behavior required to review the daily Facebook feed. In general, the average user has a number of posts to read each day. If a user spent one hour a day reading and responding to his or her news feed, then our time study suggested only fifty posts could be reviewed.<sup>59</sup> In our own case, in order to review the maximum amount of content using the one-hour time frame, we would ignore any post that was long or took us to another location. We noticed this on our blogs as well. God is present here on Facebook in condensed and community-oriented messages.

**Algorithm:** The Facebook social algorithm was reviewed and researched extensively during weeks nine and ten. While there are thousands of factors that govern the algorithm, the following comment summarizes why there is an algorithm and its purpose. Adam Mosseri, Facebook’s VP of product management for News Feed, explained the need for an algorithm in a blog post: “When we launched News Feed in 2006, it was hard to imagine the challenge we now face: far too much information for any one person to consume. In the decade since, more than a

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<sup>59</sup> From manual time study conducted November 5 to November 11.

billion people have joined Facebook, and today they share a flood of stories every day. That's why stories in The News Feed are ranked—so that people can see what they care about first, and don't miss important stuff from their friends. If the ranking is off, people don't engage, and leave dissatisfied. So one of our most important jobs is getting this ranking right.”<sup>60</sup> In summary, there is too much content being published, and Facebook needs to pare down the content each user sees or the user's news feed will become overwhelmed. This statement from Mosseri is important because the other three sites have similar characteristics and it gives us clues as to why social media has an algorithm for distributing material.

The major factor that we found was that acceptance of our content was most critical. If acceptance was low, then the distribution of the posts was limited. Mosseri goes on to explain that four major factors are used to determine what is “good content.” They are: who posted it, what type of content it is, when it was posted, and what interaction it has had.<sup>62</sup>

Essentially, the algorithm looks at previous posts by a user, and if your engagement was low with them, then it limits future reach for that user with you. The content benefits from being easily read and not containing links that take the individual off of Facebook. It shouldn't appear “spammy” and should be topical.<sup>64</sup> Posts that occur early in the morning, when fewer users are on, will get higher priority as there is less competition. However, the post will also get less interaction, which will limit its future reach.<sup>65</sup>

In reviewing our blog posts, we found that while they were visually appealing and well received by those who read the posts, they weren't aligned with the Facebook principles. First,

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<sup>60</sup> Kendall Waters, “Facebook Algorithm,” <https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-algorithm/>.

<sup>62</sup> Kendall Waters, “Facebook Algorithm,” <https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-algorithm/>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

they required the user to leave Facebook to be read. Clicking on the post directed users to the website [www.brucelhartman.com](http://www.brucelhartman.com). Secondly, interactions were low because the content couldn't be read in less than a minute. This combination produced reach and engagement that, while equal to industry standards, was lower than we experienced on other sites.

To prove this, during the last three weeks we created two posts that were shorter and could be read on Facebook, and they produced much higher engagement than the links to my blog. The first was a November 7 post called "Five Reasons Jesus Was Pro-Business," which produced twenty-two forms of engagement or three times the amount of engagement of the other Facebook posts. Additionally, on November 12, a personal post that could be read quickly was posted and received 108 forms of engagement, ten times our normal engagement.

To continue testing this theory past the research period, we also posted short messages derived from the best performing Twitter posts and put them in the block format that Facebook suggested. These were posted on November 21 and November 22 and generated thirteen and twenty forms of engagement, versus an average of four.

In summary, the blog links and other earlier posts suffered because they did not meet Facebook's algorithm criteria. As time wore on during the test period, engagement stayed stagnant, and it appears that reach declined. In hindsight, we could see that Facebook works best with short messages that are community-oriented and that use Facebook's suggested format.

**Paid Advertising and Facebook Business:** One of the interesting things about Facebook is that you can only advertise on the Facebook Business page. From your Facebook Social account, you can set up a business page and begin paid advertising to attract followers, sell products, or have your message reach a larger audience. During the research period, we tried extensively to utilize this functionality and generally had poor results. When we inquired about these poor results

with commercial enterprises, we received similar feedback. Geoff Mitchell of Mitchell Squash said, “I wouldn’t waste any time on advertising on Facebook, the results are terrible.”<sup>66</sup>

In total we spent roughly one thousand dollars advertising both the Facebook Business page and promoting the blog. While our reach was more extensive than our organic reach, engagement was remarkably low. For instance, on October 24 we spent thirty-five dollars promoting an image about Hebrews 11:1 and reached more than six thousand people.<sup>67</sup> The engagement; or individual likes, comments or shares only totaled forty-one, while a better result than industry average, cost eighty-five cents for each form of engagement and ran at only 1.5 percent of reach.<sup>68</sup> Our organic engagement generally averages 10 to 20 percent of reach.

The issue with Facebook Business paid advertising is the value proposition. Is it worth approximately one dollar to get a like, follow, or comment? This depends on the business or nonprofit involved. For instance, in an interview with Blythe Kriete, the marketing manager of Avery Creations, a high-end furniture manufacturer that sells directly to the consumer. When asked the question “How do you like Facebook Business paid advertising?” she replied, “It’s terrific, I can target my customer by interest and geography, and a simple forty-dollar ad always generates a sale.”<sup>69</sup>

Her comment unearths two important concepts that a faith-based organization should be aware of. The first is that Facebook allows for targeting by interest and geographic location. Avery Creations asks Facebook Business to send their ad to people over thirty who are family oriented. This is the profile of the customer who will buy their products. Additionally, Blythe targets by

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Geoff Mitchell, owner of Mitchell Squash on October 10, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/BruceLHartmanMinistry/insights/?section=navPosts>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Conversation with Blythe Kriete, marketing manager for Avery Creations, November 27, 2017.

geography, because she is a regional supplier. The second concept that is unearthed here is that for Avery Creations, a forty-dollar ad buy to sell a two-thousand-dollar table makes sense as a value proposition.

In our advertising, we did the exact things that Avery Creations did and achieved the same results. However, we felt that spending a dollar for each engagement was not a good value proposition. For a faith-based business or nonprofit it might make sense, but it can be expensive. A new church start-up, for example, using targeted advertising to create awareness might view this as worth the effort and money.

For this research project we felt obligated to explore the advertising out of a sense of completeness, but found it ineffective for our needs. We also discovered a potential fraud that can come out of advertising with Facebook Business. In the effort to test advertising for follower acquisition on Facebook Business, we spent close to eight hundred dollars advertising our Facebook page. We did this from September 3 to October 8. By October 8, our number of followers on Facebook Business had risen very quickly from zero to sixteen hundred. What we didn't notice was an increase in engagement.

In an attempt to discover what we were doing wrong, we found an article in the Washington Post that explained what had happened. The article discusses the results of a blogger who also advertised for followers and had similar results. What he discovered was that he had become part of a "click farm" scheme.<sup>70</sup> Essentially, here is how it works: another person who is looking for "likes" pays a third party, generally from a developing country, to get those likes. From reviewing the ads placed on the internet, we discovered some of these sites, Igoviral, for

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<sup>70</sup> Bryan Fung, "This Blogger Paid Facebook to Promote His Page, He Got 80,000 Bogus Likes Instead," <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2014/02/10/>, 02/10/2014.

instance, advertises that it can get you five thousand likes for one hundred and forty-nine dollars. It should be noted that Facebook Business specifically forbids this activity, by both the user and the provider, in its terms of service.

Essentially what the click farm does is collect the money and have people sitting at a computer faking “likes” on the paying account’s ads.<sup>71</sup> The person liking the ads makes a nominal amount, leaving the rest of the money as profit or to spend covering up the activity. This activity can easily be detected by Facebook, so the click farm searches out legitimate, nonpaying Facebook ads, such as ours, and likes them as well to cover up their tracks.<sup>73</sup>

After reading this article, we researched our followers on Facebook Business and discovered that we had been hit by this fraud. While we ran legitimate ads, the click farms liked our ads to cover up their fraudulent activity.

This disrupted our results in three ways. The first was with our overall followers. We spent three days researching each like/follower we had received and eliminating these illegitimate ones from the results. Of our sixteen hundred followers, only four hundred turned out to be legitimate. The second disruption was that this activity severely hampered our reach and engagement. As Facebook’s algorithm only sends out posts to a fraction of your followers, and this population was included in our total followers, our reach to legitimate followers was greatly reduced. The Washington Post article pointed this out as well.<sup>74</sup> The third and final way this activity hurt our results was that the algorithm viewed our Facebook account as a poor account because we did not achieve strong engagement results.

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<sup>71</sup> Bryan Fung, “This Blogger Paid Facebook to Promote His Page, He Got 80,000 Bogus Likes Instead,” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2014/02/10/>, 02/04/2014.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

In response, we adjusted all our numbers to include only organic efforts. When you review Appendix 1, you will note two things: first, that there is no recorded engagement for Facebook until September 30th. This was done as we could not verify the accuracy of these results and opted to maintain a conservative stance and eliminate all the data. The second thing you will notice is that Facebook Business followers stayed stagnant from September 24 on.

Bear in mind that the ads we placed were faith-based and targeted to Christian businesspeople. This is important because none of the likes we received fit this category.

The learning here is that while ads can be effective if the value proposition exists, the initial ad results have to be looked at suspiciously. After this incident we did run two more ads and had to cancel them immediately, as we were still being targeted by click farms.

**Mutual Engagement Techniques** were not used until week nine and ten of the research period, due to the time and effort it took to canvass for followers and produce the blogs. The engagement period occurred during the last two weeks of the research. When you look at Appendix 1, you will note that 53 percent of all engagement occurred during this period.<sup>76</sup> This was largely a result of using the mutual engagement technique of liking and commenting.

For one hour each morning we reviewed our Facebook Social news feed and responded to those posts that we felt we could respond to adequately. As with the other sites, based on time studies performed from November 1<sup>s</sup> to November 5, fifty posts could be responded to during this hour. On average 60 percent or thirty forms of engagement occurred per day in response to these comments. These were easily tracked by tabulating daily the engagement specified on the notification feed provided by Facebook. The comments were similar to Instagram and were

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<sup>76</sup> See Appendix 1.



highly directed to the user's post and followed by a statement of appreciation. In general, the comments would be of encouragement for the user's observation and were very personal. Many days, prayer requests were answered. We took a different tack with prayers than other users. Instead of the one or two words with which other users responded to a prayer request, we would write a prayer out in full and state that it was written "in Jesus's name."

Facebook also has a share button, similar to Twitter. Not all users allow a sharing of their posts. While not measurably impactful for creating engagement, sharing was tested to determine its value.

Because of the algorithm for Facebook, which relies heavily on the user's activity for providing items for the user's news feed, we noticed that the mutual engagement had to be limited to one per day per the individual on the news feed. Otherwise the news feed would become heavily skewed toward the user whose posts were liked. In other words, if too many likes were directed to one user, then that user would dominate your news feed in the future.

Mutual engagement using liking and commenting on Facebook Social worked with similar results as on Instagram. Our activity was much more involved than other users', who would note only a like or a one-word comment. This extra effort produced the high engagement percentage per comment during weeks nine and ten.

Weekly Time Effort: On average, fourteen hours for content development and either mutual engagement or follower development. Content development equaled nine hours a week. It should be noted that the content development was shared on LinkedIn and portions were taken to

Instagram and Twitter. All the content developed can be seen on [www.brucehartman.com](http://www.brucehartman.com), under “Blog.”

Each week five hours were spent on either follower development or mutual engagement. Weeks nine to ten were strictly mutual engagement.

**Where Did We Find God/Jesus on Facebook?:** We found God in the “community” that exists on Facebook. While we posted images and blogs on the site, they only received a muted response. It wasn’t until we became actively engaged in the individual posts on the daily news feed that we saw the compelling force of God that existed on the site. People shared their thoughts on God and asked for prayers. We responded to their thoughts in an encouraging way and received responses of thank you and appreciation. Our responses always included a like and at least a two-sentence comment. The comments were far longer than the vast majority of comments by other users and almost always received a response back. We could feel the appreciation from someone whose humanity and faith were affirmed.

We also observed prayer requests, sometimes numbering more than ten a day. These requests might involve simple life circumstances or large medical issues. We responded to them with a formally written prayer that ended with “in Jesus’s name.” Our approach was simply to say we were praying, but also to write highly directed prayers that addressed the specific request. While this was unusual, we felt compelled to respond this way because we could feel the suffering and simply liking the post felt disingenuous.

When we read the news feed every day, we saw God working in people’s lives, as they expressed their joys and concerns. We saw God in their affirmation of faith. God was there in community.

**Conclusion:** The learning was more about what not to do. As with all the social media sites, widespread canvassing to build a follower base and not using mutual engagement methods early led to a weak follower base. The second lesson was that content had to be what the reader had time to see. Generally, readers' news feed is very long, and they will opt to read shorter, more creative posts rather than blogs. The Facebook algorithm will adjust reach down for posts that don't satisfy their criteria. The third lesson was to be careful of Facebook advertising for fraud and for its value proposition.

We did discover, especially in weeks nine and ten, that all forms of mutual engagement worked. This a community that is personal. There are many Facebook groups of community that a user can join to share his or her interests. In these groups we saw communities of shared interest.

## **LinkedIn Results**

### ***Key Statistics***

**Followers:** Beginning base equaled 1,024. After ten weeks we had 4,240 followers.<sup>77</sup>

**Engagement Rate for Weeks Nine and Ten:** .14 percent of previous week's follower base.<sup>78</sup> Average for LinkedIn is .054% of followers.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> See Appendix 1 for results.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> LinkedIn Company Pages, <https://blog.bufferapp.com/linkedin-company-pages>.

**Reach of Followers for Weeks Nine and Ten:** Equaled 43.5 percent of the previous week's followers.<sup>80</sup> Week ten achieved 70 percent and significantly skewed the results. This was the week that "Five Reasons We Know Jesus Was Pro-Business" was posted.

**Follower Development Methods** were similar to Facebook and used significant mass canvassing efforts. We experimented with three methods to test their viability. The first was a completely blind canvassing method, where LinkedIn provided a suggestion list of people to invite as connections. Note that LinkedIn calls followers "connections." In this method, each morning for approximately one hour, one hundred to three hundred standard invitations were sent out based on LinkedIn suggestions. Like Facebook, LinkedIn requires the person being invited to accept the invitation. The average acceptance rate was 30 percent. What we noticed was that LinkedIn provided a list based on an algorithm of who already existed in the follower base. The suggestions we received mirrored the profiles of the people we already had as followers. To create diversity, we would limit the number of invitations we sent to people from similar companies or with similar interests.

After week two, we tried a more targeted method to avoid recruiting only faith-based contacts and moved to commercial-specific canvassing. LinkedIn allows this by giving the user the ability to create parameters for the invitations. In effect, this allows for specific industry, job description, and geography invitations. LinkedIn also allows you to customize the invitation sent out, which we did in this second method. But the customization increased the time it took to send out the invitation. Initially, we sent one hundred invitations out each morning and received a 40 percent acceptance rate. The difference between the two methods, standard versus a customized

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<sup>80</sup> See Appendix 1 for results.

invitation, was a critical factor in the increase. Through the next four weeks we experimented with expanding the number of invitations to three hundred a day, with little change in the acceptance rate. By using customized invitations we also changed the algorithm for the blind suggestion results. As our users became more diverse, the suggestion list became more diverse.

Because of the more diverse suggestion list, in week six and week seven we went back to the blind method of using LinkedIn suggestions, but added customization on the invitations to connect. When we did this, we achieved similar results to the industry-specific acceptance rate. This proved that sending out customized invitations was a critical factor in improving acceptance rate.

For weeks eight to week ten, we stopped canvassing and it showed up in the results. In week eight we still acquired 188 new followers, but this was a residue from week seven. Weeks nine and ten represented organic additions, where people asked us to connect. This resulted in just over 100 new followers. Subsequent to the research period, we still receive ten to twenty requests a week from people who ask us to be their follower, which in turn creates them as followers of us.

It is important to note that, similar to Facebook, no one can become a follower of yours on LinkedIn unless you accept their invitation. When you do accept the invitation, you become followers of each other.

Overall, while this process worked in developing followers (three thousand new followers were added during this research project), the sense of mutuality did not exist, as can be observed from the low engagement rate. While the average engagement rate was equal to the

industry standard, it did not match the above average performance on Instagram or Twitter, where a more mutual process was used to develop followers.

**Content Development** was similar to Facebook. Blogs were posted on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Instagram images were distributed on the other days. Similar to Facebook, these posts did not achieve above industry standard results. LinkedIn received the content developed for Instagram and Facebook, and little extra effort was used to develop content, with the exception of the post “Five Reasons We Know Jesus Was Pro-Business.”

As noted in the introduction, this one blog post generated the most interest, well over one thousand views, far exceeding other posts. It appears as Appendix 2. In fact, almost 10 percent of the views received over the ten-week period occurred with this post. The post was generated ad hoc and outside the normal content development. Its goal was to reach people with a very direct message of how Jesus could help them. Not the same form of message that they had been receiving from our blog or in church. A message directed at them. When I asked John Robinson, an advisory board member and former CEO, why this post was well received, he stated, “Because you didn’t tell them what you wanted to say, you told them how Jesus could help them. You gave them a solution. That’s the key to customer service.”<sup>81</sup> A commercial term connected to a faith message, similar to the Parables.

Another form of LinkedIn-only content that worked was a picture of a solitary boat moored in a harbor in Portland, Maine, on a foggy morning. The caption said “With God we are

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<sup>81</sup> Conversation with John Robinson, Advisory Board member, 11/22/2017.

never alone.” This post generated more than seven hundred views and had a high engagement. A simple message and an engaging picture.

We also posted another blog written ad hoc, called “Seven Reasons We Know Jesus Was Pro-Human.” While not as well received as the “Pro-Business” blog, it did receive more than five hundred views. This blog also gave us another clue as to what works on LinkedIn: lists! While not deep in a literary sense, it gave a list in a short format of things to understand. We discovered this technique by studying other posts on LinkedIn. Lists work.

**Algorithm:** LinkedIn works similarly to the other three sites but appears to use “views” as the key determinant for creating reach. For instance, the “Jesus Was Pro-Business” post was viewed by more than one thousand people. However, most other posts on LinkedIn were viewed by fewer than two hundred. Indicating that the algorithm recognized dispersed a post to a larger number of followers if the post was initially well-received.

**Paid Awareness or Advertising** does exist on LinkedIn, and we tried this function to promote the blog. Using the Sales Navigator function, we ran a promotional ad, and while its reach equaled seven hundred people, there was no engagement. The function is clunky to use, but it does provide geographical and targeted advertising features, and as with advertising on Facebook, it will work to increase awareness, post a job opening, or sell a product.

**Mutual Engagement Techniques** did not work well on LinkedIn. While we used the like, comment, and share method, the response was muted. In general, the site is more about networking than engagement. We saw this both in some of the responses and the industry standard’s low engagement rate.

We received two responses to our posts that indicated a reluctance to engage with purely faith-based posts. The first was from the individual who recoiled at having a faith-based member send him an invitation to become a connection/follower. The second response was from an individual who was offended that religious content was being posted on LinkedIn, who responded to a post by saying, “Whether I agree with you or not, this site is for business issues only.”<sup>82</sup>

While two comments that clearly define the user’s inclination to see business-only messages cannot speak for the entire site, the response to “Jesus Was Pro-Business” does give a stronger clue that this sort of post is the best vehicle to increase engagement.

LinkedIn in general has a very low response rate. For every two thousand followers, a user should expect to get one form of engagement.<sup>83</sup> So it wasn’t surprising that mutual engagement on individual posts was muted.

**Second-Level Connections and Groups:** One of the unique features about LinkedIn is that it allows access to second-level connections and groups. Second-level connections are those people who are connected to a first-level connection of yours, or an existing follower. When looking at Appendix 1, you will note on the schedule that the number equaled more than one million potential viewers of material.<sup>84</sup> They can be reached through the sales navigator function. However, when you are attempting to reach this group to create awareness, your messages have to be highly directed to business and/or feature an engaging image.

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<sup>82</sup> Response received on 11/23/2017 regarding the “Everytown” post on LinkedIn.

<sup>83</sup> LinkedIn Company Pages, <https://blog.bufferapp.com/linkedin-company-pages>.

<sup>84</sup> See Appendix 1.



Additionally, LinkedIn provides the opportunity to join or create groups. We did join fifty groups, ten of which were faith-based. By doing this we expanded our message delivery to have a potential reach of 720,000 other users.<sup>85</sup> We did post content on the groups and received some engagement, but not measurably better than with our followers.

For a faith-based organization, creating your own groups would also work well, if the group was closely connected to your central message.

**Weekly Time Effort:** Five hours per week for follower development from week one to week seven. During the last three weeks these five hours were spent on mutual engagement.

**Where Did We Find God/Jesus on LinkedIn?:** Simply put, God can best be reached here by working through the lens of a businessperson. Delivering messages that don't take this into account will not achieve results that are better than average. This doesn't mean God doesn't exist in the hearts of businesspeople, it means an adjustment has to be made in the approach. People find God on this site through a very personal connection with their vocation, related images, and the use of lists. The site is designed for networking or as a place to find a job. To tap into God on this site, this has to be kept in mind.

It would be easy to say that this group is soulless and only interested in those things that can help them prosper in their careers. But this limits the possible existence of God in their lives. Expanding posted thoughts to be viewed through their lenses doesn't change the message, but

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<sup>85</sup> See Appendix 1.

allows it to enter their territory. This is remarkably similar to the content of the Parables. Jesus did this in the first century and it will work in the twenty-first century.

**Conclusion:** The lessons from LinkedIn are that it is a networking site designed to help businesspeople become connected and that it is very effective for job searches. Because of this it is not a productive site for either faith-based or secular messaging unless this is taken into account. This is seen from its low engagement rates in general. While we exceeded the industry standards, this site was far less effective than the other three sites in relaying messages, unless the messaging showed value in how Jesus can help through their lens. Jesus gave us the clue through the Parables on how to reach this group—by speaking their language, as can be seen by the extraordinary response to the blog called “Five Reasons We Know Jesus Was Pro-Business.” The site can become more accessible to a faith-based organization if the messages are in the form of lists, relevant images, and posts that show directly how a businessperson can benefit.

Mutual engagement methods are limited in their effectiveness, not only with our efforts, but in general. This is evident in the universally low engagement this site achieves.

### **Weekly Time Commitment to Model**

One of the important things to note about social media is that, whether you are one site or four, it requires an almost daily commitment to keep past efforts productive. Followers don't go away and content needs to be delivered on a consistent basis. Each day there will be messages from others, requests to be friends, and observations to be made.

In building a model around ten thousand followers, we created time studies to determine how long activities took. From these studies calibration can occur for smaller or larger models.

For instance, if a person wants to grow at a slower pace than this research project, the effort can be scaled back. Or if only one site is selected, then the effort can also be scaled back. The same is true with content. We wrote three blog posts and created seven to ten images a week. Content can become less or more, but these choices will create a different time frame.

We have attached two weeks of daily activity logs to help identify these time frames by activity and site. The two weeks are week six and week ten. They are included in the appendix as items ten and eleven.

**Content Development** on average required twenty-one hours a week. Blog development took nine hours per week. Each blog post from start to finish required three hours of work. Ten images required ten hours per week or one hour per image. Each week ten to fifteen tweets were created and required two hours all together.

Blog post creation had a number of steps. First was the selection of the story and the associated Bible verse, which required background research. An outline was then created and followed to produce the raw post. The second step was developmental editing, in other words did the story tie together in content and theologically? Also, did the story stay true to our embedded theology? The third step was final proof editing. The fourth and final step was to create an image that went along with the blog post. Each step varied in time, but generally when the week was done we had recorded nine hours. The posts were then placed on our blog's website and from there distributed to LinkedIn and Facebook.

Image creation took ten hours per week. The process involved planning around the blog and connecting images with the messages. Three of the images were essentially created in blog

development but modified for Instagram and Twitter. The remaining images were created out of the best performing tweets on Twitter, coupled with a brief message from one of the blog posts, a “Get Involved” message on Saturday, and a verse from one of the posts. Where we could, we used images that were original and matched them up to our short captions. Our other option was to use Adobe, which provides free images. The main effort in this process was finding an image that worked creatively with the message. From this point we posted the image on all four sites, except not on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for LinkedIn and Facebook.

Twitter content took two hours a week. A concept idea would be created and then written out on paper. We would then tailor this sample for Twitter. This meant at the time ensuring it was only 140 characters (Twitter’s limit is now 280), plus ensuring that it wasn’t preachy or scolding. The message then would be condensed to something universal and any unnecessary wording would be eliminated. The average tweet took from five to fifteen minutes to develop.

**Follower Development** took fifteen hours a week, during the period of week one to week seven. On each site we spent about one hour a day for five days each week. On Facebook and LinkedIn, we produced more invitations than on Instagram. Instagram involved mutual engagement canvassing, which limited invites to fifty a day. Later, as we added Twitter, we cut back on the other sites to less than one hour a day and applied that time to Twitter.

**Mutual Engagement** took eighteen hours a week during the period of week eight to week ten. We spent one hour a day on each site for five days, with the exception of Twitter. We spent a half hour each day on Twitter, as mutual engagement on Twitter was a less time-consuming process because of the site function.

**Research** took around ten hours per week. Each day we would read articles about best practices and look at the results that were created the previous day to determine what worked and what didn't. While this might not appear significant, the effort is vital. Social media is a multifaceted exercise with a significant amount of learning required. Without doing research this project would have been hampered. Also, taking an hour a day to conduct a thorough review of all the sites is extremely important. From this last exercise we gained valuable insight.

**Numerical Tabulation and Report Creation** took five hours a week. On both Sunday and Monday morning, we compiled the statistics for Appendix 1 and input the results. While the numbers are readily available, it still took two and half hours to produce the statistical report each Sunday. On Monday, we also provided a written report for the advisory group. Appendix 13 is a sample copy of the weekly report sent to the advisory group. While this type of effort wouldn't be required for a non-research project, a scaled version of this process is highly recommended. Many insights were discovered in the weekly reporting.

**Administrative Time** equaled two to five hours a week. Generally, this involved reviewing site security and ensuring passwords were protected. It also involved preparing for an upcoming advisory group meeting, as well as one-off meetings with advisory group members to share ideas or provide education on an issue.

In total, the time it took to manage a ten-thousand-follower base across four sites was between fifty-three and fifty-nine hours a week.

## Chapter 4 Conclusion

Over a twelve-week period, which included two weeks of construction and setup, followed by ten weeks of research, social media was tested as a way of delivering faith-based messages to a community that has billions of connections. More than ten thousand followers were created and close to three hundred individual faith-based messages were distributed on four of the most popular social media sites—Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter. These messages were read more than fifty thousand times. The project received back in the form of engagement more than ten thousand likes, comments, or shares.

During this period of research, we tested many methods that a faith-based organization could use to reach a large population using social media. These tests were not conducted with a results orientation, but with a research orientation. In other words, the objective was to test methods that would make the world of social media accessible to faith-based organizations. As with any test, some methods worked and some didn't.

Our overall goal was to develop those methods that would show that social media images and posts could be the twenty-first century's version of the Parables of Jesus, a way of communicating the simple messages of God using new methods. In this effort we found a world where people desired to know more about God, Jesus, and their faith. A world that reacted favorably to short, simple messages that stimulated imagination and thought. A world that reacted similarly to social media as people had to the Parables of Jesus in the first century.

The institutional church is in a chronic state of decline, driven by a poor set of logistics and a general lack of agreement about policies, doctrine, and trust in the church. Over the last

few decades the church has kept its message-generation the same and not adjusted to these issues or contemporary trends. As Pastor Jimmy said, “The church is stuck in the fifties.” While at the same time the population has moved on to other places to get their information. Over the last decade use of mobile devices and social media has grown exponentially. In fact, 91 percent of Americans use mobile devices.<sup>1</sup> Social media has grown to reach two out of three Americans, and 90 percent of all adults in their twenties.<sup>2</sup> Worldwide, people now spend more than two hours a day on social media.<sup>3</sup>

If Pastor Jimmy is right that the church is stuck, why shouldn't the church become more entrepreneurial in intersecting the delivery of faith based messages using current secular trends. In reviewing the 1925 book called “*The Man Nobody Knows*” authored by Bruce Barton, Wayne Elzey describes Jesus as a great salesman. He states, “Jesus' skill in capturing the attention of crowds of publicans and sinners, his "personal magnetism," his parables ("the greatest advertisements of all time"), his pep and "executive ability" ranked the New Testament as the best textbook on methods of salesmanship.”<sup>4</sup> His description of Jesus’ use as parables as “the greatest advertisement of all time,” can be likened to Social media in our contemporary period. A place “where people are.” Jesus used a medium that people could understand and hear, the Parables.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Rainie, “Cell Phone Ownership Hits 91% of All Adults,” <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/06/cell-phone-ownership-hits-91-of-adults/>.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, Beck, “Pew Survey, Nearly Two Thirds of All Americans Use Social Media,” <https://marketingland.com/pew-survey-nearly-two-thirds-of-all-americans-use-social-media-146026>.

<sup>3</sup> Daily Social Media Usage Worldwide, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/>.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Elzey, “Jesus the Salesman: A Reassessment of *The Man Nobody Knows*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (Oxford University Press), vol. XLVI/2, 1978: 155.

Barton was asked to write another book by a CEO of a large corporation. His appeal to Barton was stated as follows, "The theologians may shoot you at sunrise, but the questions I have asked are what we ordinary fellows want to know."<sup>5</sup> A call from the secular to speak plainly and avoid condemnation of the common person. The CEO's call marries the efforts of Jesus in attempting to reach the "common person" by those outside the walls of study and a reaching to "where people are." The CEO's request is to intersect faith through messages that the masses could attach themselves. For the entrepreneurial faith based organization, this intersection is vital and provides a chance for a future.

People are ready and available for faith based messages. In fact, over time the belief in God has not abated. More than 90 percent of Americans still believe in God. More than 50 percent pray consistently. Those associated with a religious institution have even higher rates of belief; 97 percent believe in God and two-thirds pray. Yet only 20 percent attend a church on a regular basis.

As time has moved on, our commercial or secular sector has become increasingly ignored. More than 50 percent work and in turn struggle with the logistics of attending church. They feel disenfranchised by an institution that views them at best ambivalently, and at worst, as Harlan Kent said, "as soulless creatures."

However, history tells us that many of the mass movements of Christianity have been led by the secular world. Whether it was a tent maker named Saul or the twelve original disciples, there is a tradition in Christianity of accepting and working with the secular.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 157.



For the Church, social media stands as one of those vehicles that can be embraced to “make converts of all the nations.” In a time when the Church’s efforts at evangelism have dissipated, social media provides a new avenue to enter. But it requires the Church to turn back to its origins while at the same time embracing the avenues of contemporary culture and the movements of humankind. It requires a relearning of the value of the commercial world. It requires a modeling of Jesus’s approach to spreading the good news. Go where the people are and talk in their language. Provide to humankind practical lessons of why and how the message of the Gospel can help them.

No commercial enterprise will survive by standing still. No commercial enterprise will survive by telling customers what they need, but they will survive by discovering where their customers are and what they actually need. No one sews an old cloth onto a new garment or pours new wine into an old wineskin.

Messages found on social media represent connections that people understand. Faith exists on social media. The secular world and Jesus know how to affect change and provide a model for the institutional church.

Change doesn’t occur by standing still; change occurs through purposeful movements to the new. Jesus came to bring about change and to restate the ways of God in a new way. He did this by connecting with the masses as an identifiable character called a *tekton*. He applied the lessons of the commercial world and transformed them into parables to deliver the lessons of God.

Jesus also did not affect change from within. He used twelve people with no religious affiliation to help him with his change. He used people like a despised tax collector to help in his earthly mission. Like most commercial organizations, Jesus knew that change is hard to effect by using those in power. These twelve people were available to help because they also desired a new way and they were not encumbered by the personal temptation of an existing power structure. People that are part of such a structure will resist change out of fear of losing power.

Social media is causing a need for change, both in the secular world and with faith-based organizations. A prime example in the commercial world is the shopping mall. According to Credit Suisse more than 20 percent of the malls in America will close in the next five years, largely as a result of internet shopping.<sup>6</sup> The stores in these malls are under pressure to survive. Many are turning to a blended strategy to counteract this trend, a model that includes retaining a brick and mortar presence, but contains an extension into the world of ecommerce.

For faith-based organizations and the institutional Church, a similar movement can occur. This movement creates the possibility of three types of organizations. They are:

- A full brick and mortar church with little social media presence
- A partial brick and mortar organization with a social media presence
- A purely social media presence

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<sup>6</sup> Makeda Easter, "Up to 25% of U.S. Shopping Malls May Close in the Next Five Years, Report Says," <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-malls-closing-20170531-story.html>.

Each of these types of organizational structure requires purposeful thought in either standing still or changing. The key factors are the preference of constituents and resources available.

For instance, a church with a small budget and a small but loyal membership might have strong resistance to establishing an online presence. An option for this group would be to use social media as outreach.

A larger church with a healthy budget might have the resources to expand their online presence. If a church is looking to expand, then an online presence could be very helpful in this communication. A pastor looking to connect more with his or her congregation could use Facebook as a way of staying in touch.

It is important to note that once a social media presence is established, it needs to be cared for and nurtured. Without consistent attention, the results will be minimized.

This study was designed to help faith-based organizations learn how to move into social media to satisfy the needs of their constituents. The methods analyzed were intended to provide lessons in what works and what doesn't work with the movement into social media. While the study was not designed to be results-oriented research, the results achieved in a short ten-week period were surprisingly strong, far better than anticipated, indicating not only that the identified methods work, but that within the faith community there is a strong desire to be reached in this fashion. For the organization using this study, there exist three things that will help. First is the methods outlined here. Second is the compelling desire of the people to know God better. Third is the compelling force of God. The movement to change in message delivering will be helped by all three.

As a final note, for those desiring to enter this world, know that you yourselves will be changed. Over the course of ten weeks my own views and thoughts evolved. I learned through the Pew Research studies about the importance of faith to more than 90 percent of Americans. I saw it every morning in the news feeds I reviewed. My own faith was strengthened by those who correspondingly posted messages of faith and hope. I learned that God exists not just in text, but in images and imagination. While the latter can be easily dismissed as too simple, they are what people want. They want their imaginations stimulated. They want to ponder short messages and not labor to pull out the nuggets from a lengthy discourse. They want vivid messages that draw them more deeply into their lives and provide a clue of how their lives can be enhanced. They want their humanity affirmed and their prayers answered. We can't recreate the lenses with which they enter the story. We can only find the lenses.

They want God and Jesus.



## Appendix 2

### The Five Reasons We Know Jesus Was Pro-Business

Many of us think about the four Gospels and Jesus in very spiritual terms. But there is also a story hidden away in the Gospels that is remarkably and deeply connected to the business world. Most of Jesus's messages and his life were highly connected to the world of commerce. For instance, did you know:

1. Of the forty-two parables listed in the Gospels, thirty-five directly relate to business. Such as the Parable of the Coins or the Parable of the Lost Coin. These parables were spoken in a language that was relatable to the first-century marketplace.
2. Jesus was a carpenter, not only a skilled artisan, who worked in his father's for as many as eighteen years.
3. None of Jesus's initial twelve disciples were from the religious world. They were fishermen, tax collectors, and others from the marketplace.
4. Of Jesus's 132 recorded public appearances, over 100 were in the marketplace.
5. Jesus was a great salesperson, the original networker, and his leadership style was strongly collaborative. He did, after all, build the world's largest organization.

Yes, Jesus was the Son of God, but he knew three simple truths: We all have bills, we all need to pay our bills, and we all want a connected relationship with God. Addressing these concerns, Jesus is pro-business.

Take a look at the Gospels from this perspective and you will discover a wonderful story of not only how to survive but how to thrive in your business life.

## Appendix 3



— Luke 11:28

### **Finding God in Unusual People**

While at Drew University getting my Master's in Divinity, I noticed an unusual woman named Theresa. I had seen her a few times, sitting alone quietly on a bench. Prior to class we students often milled around the school's front door and shared our weekly stories. Theresa usually sat waiting on the bench. She was a large woman and sat there quietly ignored by her classmates. After noticing this a few times, I went over and introduced myself and asked her how she was doing. She smiled and after a few brief questions about her life, she opened up. She told me she worked at night in a hospital as a chaplain. By day she went to

seminary to get her master's degree. She also ran a successful business cutting coupons that she used to help others save money. There was sitting on that bench an unusual person, leading a wonderful life.

Previously, She had been destitute and without money, shunned by society because she didn't fit in. She prayed for help, and she felt that God had shown her how to earn a decent living cutting coupons and splitting the savings with her customers. Over time, she developed a sizeable following and began to earn enough money to dress well, feed herself, and pay for school. At night she sat with the dying in a local hospital, guiding them home. Only when asked would she reveal these magnificent experiences of transition.

***“Over time my other classmates began to see the richness of this unusual woman.”***

Over time my other classmates began to see the richness of this unusual woman. I frequently ran ideas by her, which helped me with practical insights into theology. We all grew to respect her faithfulness and commitment to God. Just before we graduated, a fellow student, who was an extraordinary artist, created a mural of our classmates that he donated to Drew University. It hangs today in Seminary Hall. At the top of the mural, bathed in light, is this magnificent woman.

***“There is a rich person beneath the quiet. Perhaps a blessed person, who can inspire us.”***

How many times have we seen that quiet person sitting alone? Why does that person sit alone? What is deep inside him or her that we should know? Perhaps such a person is blessed because he or she knows God. Perhaps that person has a story to tell. In school and in the market place we know these people. In each of our lives there is at least one of them. There is a rich person beneath the quiet. Perhaps a blessed person, who can inspire us. Perhaps a person blessed by God. We won't know unless we ask.



Blessings, until next time,

*Bruce L. Hartman*

### **Parting Thoughts**

What is the name of the person we know who sits alone on the bench?

What can we learn?

How can we discover greatness in all that we know?

## Appendix 4



*“So God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”*

— Genesis 1:27

### **Imago Dei**

George was raised in a wealthy home and went to Harvard. Instead of studying economics or business, he pursued a path of social advocacy. He eventually graduated with a master’s in Social Work. From there, with his wife, he started an organization called Street Squash, a program that provided inner city youth with access to college. The sport of squash was used to add an advantageous credit for the young people when applying to college, but it was not the primary focus of Street Squash. The students were provided with a place to go after school and study. They had tutors and visited college campuses. The goal was to create access for a segment of our population that needed a head start. George could have been a great investment banker, but chose instead a life of helping.

From his kitchen table George built an organization that has sent thousands of youth to college. And he has helped in the establishment of fourteen other programs throughout the country. The graduation rate of students from these programs is substantially higher than national statistics. The youth from Street Squash achieve an almost 90 percent graduation rate. Without Street Squash, their chances were 15 percent. George only sees goals. He only sees that the youth are people. He knew that squash gave the students athletic content for their college résumés, and he knew Squash would help him with fund-raising.

***“George reflects the Imago Dei, and his life focus is on helping, not labeling.”***

Today’s verse comes from the book of Genesis and reflects the earliest statement from God on how humankind is viewed. We are all made in the image of God. Theologians call this Imago Dei. In today’s world of labeling from all corners, people like George gets lost in the din of noise about racism, liberalism, conservatism, misogyny, and all the other labels we use to describe one another. Our news media encourages labeling because it increases viewership, which in turn increases revenue. All at the expense of the *imago Dei*. I know George and wish he was better known by others. George reflects the *imago Dei*, and his life focus is on helping, not labeling.

***“There are no differences or labels from one to another when we think of people as images of God.”***

In this time of great divide between all the various factions, it is important for us to reflect on what God means with the image of God. There are no differences or labels from one to another when we think of people as images of God. When we label, we diminish the intent of God. The solution to this great divide is turning back to God’s original intent and away from the commercialization of labels.

Blessings, until next time,

*Bruce L. Hartman*

### **Parting Thoughts**

How do we see people when we first meet them?

What does the *imago Dei* look like?

How do we feel when we are labeled?

## Appendix 5



*“And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, ‘May no fruit ever come from you again!’ And the fig tree withered at once.”*

— Matthew 21:19

### **Do the Fruits of Our Efforts Produce Great Customer Service?**

I was talking with the business manager of a large automobile dealership and asked him, “How many cars a month does your best salesman sell?” He replied, “Thirty a month, month in and month out.” I was stunned. That was almost one and a half each day he worked. Considering the immense amount of paperwork and government forms that had to be filled out for each car, it was even more impressive. The salesman’s name was Steve, and not only did he sell a lot of cars, but he always achieved very high customer service scores. I queried the business manager about how and why Steve was so consistent. His

reply was that Steve's steady business came almost entirely from past customers' referrals. He had gotten to a point where he only had to provide good customer service and no longer needed to make cold calls.

***“The fruit of his efforts was a steady stream of loyal customers.”***

Steve sent out birthday cards to all his customers. He advocated for them when there was a problem. He would take their cars and get gas for them. He knew everyone by first name. In short, he put his customers first. The fruit of his efforts was a steady stream of loyal customers. His fig tree bore fruit because he cared. Customer first and himself second was the only way to accomplish this amazing feat.

How many times have we felt like a salesperson just wanted to sell something to us to make his or her goals? How many times have we felt cheated because of an extra add-on charge? How many times have our interests been put last? We are left feeling used and just there for people to get our cash. Many of us walk away silently and never do business with that person or company again. The salesperson may have won that day, but lost a future customer and many referrals. For a short-term gain there is a long-term loss.

***“Do we really listen to the customer or are we only interested in the sale?”***

In today's verse Jesus condemns the fig tree because it bore no fruit. It provided only leaves. Its purpose was to produce fruit, but it bore none. Many of us are guilty of this as well. We strive for that big sale. It makes our numbers good and our bosses happy. But silently we ignore the customer and in turn choke off our future. Our withered fruits become our reputation. Do we really listen to the customer or are we only interested in the sale? Would we continue buying something from someone like that, knowing we don't come first? Jesus knew that good business is great customer service.

Blessings, until next time,

*Bruce L. Hartman*

### **Parting Thoughts**

Do we listen to our customers or do we push our goals?

How many repeat sales do we get?

How do we show value to our customers?

## Appendix 6

### Twitter Posts

**“When we worry, our heart doesn’t leave space for God. When we pray and trust God, we leave space for miracles.”**

Engagement 44, or twenty times the industry average for Twitter, based on engagement per one thousand followers.

**“The way to God is through Jesus, in him we have an advocate for our dreams and prayers.”**

Engagement 27, or thirteen time the industry average.

**“In Jesus’s words to love our neighbor, it contains an obligation to go beyond being kind. Giving and sharing is part of this obligation.”**

Engagement 30, or fifteen times the industry average.



## Appendix 7

### Post on Facebook on November 11

“Today ends my ninety days of research for my dissertation about faith and social media.

Hopefully it leads to my receiving a doctorate in Ministry this spring.

I learned about the overwhelming desire of humankind to be connected to God.

I learned about the power of affirmation and its value for humankind.

I learned that in this world there are joys and sorrow, to which we can celebrate and comfort.

I thank all the people who helped in this journey and may peace, love and joy fill your lives.”

*Received 108 forms of engagement, largest of the test period.*

## Appendix 8

### Week 4 September Report for the Advisory Group

#### Overall Summary

The weekly gain in followers was 1836, bringing our total to 8750. Engagement significantly increased to 6732 for the week and the engagement rate for the week was 97%. This was largely driven on the Facebook Business page. Three posts had significant views that generated over 4000 forms of engagement. However, this coming week, I will be evaluating the quality of the engagement on Facebook Business. On the surface it appears the data I get off this site is very suspect and overstated. Until we fully understand this issue I am ignoring the Facebook Business page results. I explain this issue in greater detail below under the section called “Click Farms.”

During the week we discovered two major issues. They are:

- **Reach** As our followers have grown, our likes and comments have not grown as much. In looking into this issue I discovered that not all of our followers receive our posts. This is true on all the four sites. For instance, on Facebook Business when we post a blog as little as 48 people see our posts, even though we have over 1600 followers. In researching blogs posted on the Internet, I discovered that most people have this same problem. It appears that each of the four sites uses an algorithm to distribute posts or images. So while on the surface it would appear that as you grow followers your reach would increase, this is not the case. The four sites use artificial intelligence to calculate your distribution. As such, understanding the four algorithms is an important effort for this week. Previously, we had thought that developing followers and measuring engagement were the two most critical items in social media. It appears that managing reach to your followers is just as important.

- **Click Farms** Late on Sunday we discovered the term “click farms.” Essentially they are places in developing countries where people are hired to click the “like” key and create fake Facebook accounts. They are a result of ads that are placed on the Internet that claim you can get 1000 likes/followers for \$70. These ads are not run by Facebook, but impact all users. Essentially once a person pays for these ads a person at one of these farms is then paid \$1 to hit a like button 1000 times on various fake accounts. The person who paid for the ad then believes that they just earned 1000 likes. However, none are real. Facebook searches for this activity and tries to prevent it from occurring. We did not pay or engage in any of these ads, but were still affected.

To cover up their activity and not get caught by Facebook, the click farms use legitimate ads, in effect adding likes to real Facebook accounts to mask their fake activity. It appears this happened on three occasions to our Facebook Business page last week. This week we will be investigating how to prevent this activity in the future. Coming up with a solution is critical, as we will not be able to use Facebook Business in the future to promote our page. There are a substantial number of blog posts and articles on this issue on the Internet, including Facebook’s awareness of the issue. It does look like the best avenue to work around this is with very specific targeting of our posts.

We tried two new techniques in follower development on LinkedIn and Facebook. Both produced better results than I expected. On Facebook we identified “trusted” friends whose friends exceeded 225. I then looked for people on that list with whom I shared at least 5 mutual friends and submitted an invitation. For four days I sent out three hundred invites and had a 34% acceptance rate. With LinkedIn I expanded the targeted and personalized invitation process based on mutual connections I had by industry group. Again, for four days we sent out three invitations and had a 35% acceptance rate. These two tests were the largest contributor to the follower growth this week.

Instagram engagement continues to run around 20% of beginning of week followers, which is in the top 1% of all users. However, we did not make the front page of our hashtags on a consistent basis as in the past. In the niche hashtags (1,000–100,000 posts) we made the second page each post. This is an area where the “reach” issue is affecting our results.

This week’s posts and image themes will be based on “Imago Dei,” or the concept that all humankind was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27–28). So as you read the three blogs and view the seven images on Instagram this week you will see references to Imago Dei.

We did change with our creative person this week, which allowed for a more consistent flow of content. We will also be adding Twitter this week. We tested Twitter this past week without issue.

## **By Social Media Site**

### ***LinkedIn***

The weekly gain in followers this week was 613, bringing our total to 3147. This week our targeted invitation method was tried for four days and drove this result. We received an acceptance rate of 35% on invitations sent, which was equal to our blind invitation test we did a week ago. For this coming week, we are going to continue the blind test, limited to inviting only those people where there are more than ten mutual friends. We will only be sending a thousand invites for the week. As stated last week, we are significantly above our allocated three thousand invites and LinkedIn has continued letting us send out invitations. We are a premium account and have a high rate of acceptance, and their internal algorithm may be the reason they are allowing us to continue to exceed their restriction. For engagement we are running around 20% for each post.

For next week, we will be adding four images in addition to the normal three blogs we try to post each week. The images, which are similar to the Instagram images, are not posts, but visuals with a short caption. We will do this for “Christian Business professionals only.” We belong to a number of these

groups on LinkedIn. When we have tested this in the past, they have proven to be very successful in increasing engagement.

LinkedIn has some powerful marketing tools, which we have not used yet but will be studying this week. Additionally, LinkedIn has groups that we need to increase our daily engagement with. This is important as it represents over 700,000 members that we have access to and should become more involved with. We will begin working on determining how to effectively gain access to this group. LinkedIn, like the other three sites, limits distribution of material with an algorithm, which we will study this week.

### ***Facebook (Non-Business)***

Our new followers increased by 732 this week to bring our total to 3,444. Late last week I discovered a way to connect with existing followers and their friends group. We began searching for people with more than 225 friends and then searching their connections. We limited the request within a band of 5–100 mutual followers, and gained access to a larger group to invite. Initially this proved very successful. However, Facebook limits you to only having 1,000 invitations out at any point in time. This required canceling previous invitations that had been sent out. On average we eliminated 200 invitations each morning. This took thirty minutes a day to complete, as the process is very labor-intensive. Until we understand the reach issue with this site, we are going to hold off on acquiring new followers.

### ***Facebook (Business)***

We acquired 414 new followers this week and now have 1,656 total followers. This was the fastest growing group of new followers, but late in the week we discovered that Facebook Business was not distributing our material to our followers and due to our size we are being affected by “click farms.” As such our efforts will be to figure out what this means and how we can move forward. This is a universal issue and the Facebook community is loudly complaining to Facebook. This is a major setback in

forward progress. It is critical to find a solution as this is a strategic growth area, because there is no limit on how many “quality” followers you can acquire, and ultimately we would like this site to become the biggest group of followers.

## *Instagram*

We acquired 77 new followers this week and now have 503 total followers. While the rate of new followers slowed this week, we continued to experiment with new techniques during the week. We have found that by “liking,” adding a comment to another person’s image, and then following that person we can increase our followers at a higher rate. In researching this method, I found an article that stated this was a preferred method and would achieve a significant improvement in the quality of the followers. Quality followers are our goal, not number of followers. The method did work, but was labor-intensive. We will continue this for next week, plus begin following “acceptable” people who have “liked” an image we posted but still haven’t started following us. This should create new followers. We determined that “acceptable” people to follow are those over the age of twenty-two who have shown mutuality in following others in the past.

As with the other sites we discovered that not all our posts go to followers each day. So the “reach” isn’t growing as we had expected. Again there is an algorithm that we need to figure out and we will work on this discovery this week.

We are also discovered that the best time to distribute an Instagram message is at 3 p.m. and not 3:30 a.m., as posts that don’t get immediate “likes” fall back in the feed. At 3:30 a.m., not many people are up and our like rate per minute is very low. Our reach decline may have been affected by this problem. Again, a research item for this week.

This past week we evaluated having a person click the image before being allowed to go to the site. This would reduce engagement and we passed on this idea. We will, however, include the site link in the caption this Thursday and Friday to see what effect it has on both the site and engagement.

Our engagement for the week grew as the number of followers and image postings grew. We are running at 20% engagement per image posted, which is well above the average of 5% for other Instagram users. Additionally, this is helping with placement in the front page of individual hashtags. We are consistently being placed on the first or second page of the landing pages for the hashtags we use.

Please note that for each image we assign twelve hashtags to specific areas of interest. For instance, #christianbusinesswomen is a specific interest area or hashtag that people look at. Generally, we try to post to faith-based or business-based hashtags (or areas of interest). We limit ourselves to those hashtags that have between 10,000 and 50,000 other posts. Above 50,000 we get lost. Engagement is critical to gaining new followers.

We have no limit on how many followers we can acquire. As such this is an important area to grow. However, we are limited to only being able to follow 7500. This will be a discussion point when we hit this mark. We are currently at 1700.

## ***Website***

For the week we had 221 clicks to read a blog. This is up 50% from the previous week. However, at 6 p.m. Wednesday we had one person repeatedly visit the site 55 times and leave immediately each time. This drove down our “time on the site” statistics and overinflated our total numbers. Also, the time people spent on the site increased to 2m and 17s. This is important, as the longer people spend on the site, it shows a higher engagement.

We will be making a few adjustments to the site over the next two weeks. First, we are allowing images on the website to be reposted from the site, and these will be captured in a new section called “Inspirations.” This will allow us to post these images more effectively to LinkedIn and Facebook Business. Secondly, we are making some cosmetic changes to the site to help visitors know where to go to look at blogs and images.

## Appendix 9

### Parables of Christ

Parables (Market-related Highlighted Purple)

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
New Cloth Patch on an Old Garment		9:16		
New Wine in Old Skins		9:17		
Lamp on a Stand	5:14-15		8:16-18	
Wise and Foolish Builders			6:46-49	
The Money Lender			7:41-43	
Rich Fool			12:15-21	
Watchfulness			12:35-40	
Faithful and Wise Servant			12:42-48	
Unfruitful Fig Tree			13:6-9	
Parable of the Sower	13:3-23			
Weeds Among Good Plants	13:24-30,36-43			
The Growing Seed		4:26-29		
The Mustard Seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19	
The Yeast		13:33	13:20-21	
Hidden Treasure		13:44		
Fine Pearl	13:45-46			
The Fishing Net	13:47-50			
Owner of a House		13:52		
Lost Sheep	18:12-14			
Shepherd and His Flock				John 10:1-18
Master and Servant			17:7-10	
Unmerciful Servant	18:23-34			
Good Samaritan			10:24-42	
Friend in Need			11:5-8	
Lowest Seat at the Feast			14:7-14	
The Great Banquet			14:15-24	
The Cost of Being a Disciple			14:25-35	
The Lost Sheep			15:3-7	
The Lost Coin			15:8-10	
The Prodigal Son			15:11-32	
The Shrewd Manager			16:1-8	
The Rich Man and Lazarus			16:19-31	



Workers in the Vineyard	20:1-16	
The Persistent Widow		18:1-7
Praying: Pharisee and Tax Collector		18:9-14
Servants and Money		19:12-27
The Two Sons	21:28-32	
Wicked Vineyard Servants	21:33-44	
Wedding Banquet		
Signs from a Fig Tree	24:32-35	
Wise and Wicked Servants	24:45-51	
Foolish and Wise Virgins	25:1-13	
Servants Must Remain Watchful		13:32-37
Three Servants Given Money	25:14-30	
Sheep and Goats will be separated	25:31-46	

Total forty five Parables; thirty five contain marketplace references or terms, which are highlighted.

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## **Social Media Research**

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### **Interviews Conducted**

Cynthia Campbell, church planning member, January 3, 2017.

Harlan Kent, former CEO of Yankee Candle and Alex and Ani, December 1/2017.

Blythe Kriete, marketing manager for Avery Creations, November 27, 2017.

Geoff Mitchell, owner of Mitchell Squash, October 10, 2017.

John Robinson, Advisory Board member, November 22, 2017.

James T. Weaver, pastor of the UMC of Oriental, October 15, 2017.