

SPIRITUAL ECONOMICS



In 1921, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was stricken with polio, a disease he struggled with until his death in April 1945. On the tenth anniversary of FDR's death, Dr. Jonas Salk announced that the polio vaccine he had developed was ready for use by the general public. Over thirty years later, in the late 1980s, thousands of doses of oral polio vaccine were being stored in drug company refrigerators. Yet hundreds of thousands of polio cases were still being reported around the globe. The supply was plentiful. The problem was a failure of distribution.

In stepped Rotary International, which set a lofty goal—to eradicate polio from the world. The organization raised more than \$200 million to buy enough vaccine to meet the entire global need. But they, too, confronted the same massive problem—distribution. Working in conjunction with the World Health Organization, Rotarians developed a strategy that called for identifying the most needy countries and designating “national vaccination days.” Thousands of health officials and volunteers vaccinated entire countries against polio in a matter of days or weeks. By 2001, only 500 cases of polio were reported worldwide. By addressing the challenge of distribution, the Rotarians have saved thousands from premature death or disability.

Basic economic principles revolve around supply, demand, and distribution. A business enterprise may have abundant capital, solid management, and a worthy product. None of it will matter even a little bit if the enterprise cannot address the challenge of *distribution*. No matter how strong the demand or how abundant the supply in the warehouse, if the enterprise cannot get the product into the hands of the consumer, its demise is inevitable.

Many of the world's problems are a result of failure to meet the challenge of distribution. While the granaries in many developed

nations overflow, millions go to bed hungry each night. We've all read the accounts of how rival factions in various Third World countries prevent grain from reaching starving people. The problem is *distribution*—figuring out how to bridge the gap between abundant resources and desperate demand. Tons of much-needed food and water sat in warehouses in Umm Qasr in the spring of 2003 while Iraqis went without basic necessities because Iraq's distribution system was virtually non-existent.

One of the key components to America's prosperity is its distribution system, that is, our ability to identify a need, develop a product or service to meet the need, and then deliver it to the customer quickly and efficiently. Although Sam Walton (the richest man in America until his death in 1992) has been called a retailer, the true key to the success of Wal-Mart is automated distribution. It efficiently delivers goods to its more than 3,200 facilities in the United States and passes on the savings to its more than 100 million weekly customers.¹

THE SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE

This same dynamic applies to the realm of spiritual resources. All over the world, people are looking as never before for spiritual answers and resources. As human solutions continue to fail, more and more people are seeking divine help. Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech Republic, has said, "Communism has left a vacuum in the hearts of men." Stories of spiritual hunger from the former Soviet bloc pour into the West.

But by no means do the spiritually oppressed in the former Soviet Union have a corner on spiritual need. In 1995 researcher and futurist George Barna estimated that the number of people in the United States who do not have a relationship with Jesus would reach 235 million by 2000,² making the U.S. home to the world's fourth largest non-Christian population.

Americans are not so much antispiritual as they are indifferent to religious institutions. In 2000, Barna reported that the number of unchurched adults had been on the rise for three years, leaving one out of three adults unchurched.³ Nevertheless, there is more openness to spiritual answers today than in previous decades. Two-thirds of

unchurched adults want to experience God in a deeper and more tangible and significant way.⁴ But Americans are not automatically turning to the church for this experience, as did their grandfathers and grandmothers. Instead they are trying counterfeit spiritual remedies.

THE SUPPLY

If you know the God of the Bible, you certainly know there is no problem on the supply side of the spiritual economics equation. “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,” wrote the apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:20–21), “according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

God’s resources are limitless; his grace and love have no boundaries. And he longs to pour out this spiritual wealth on desperate and spiritually needy people. Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi, “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Given that we worship a God of *unlimited abundance*, the spiritual problem is clearly *not* a matter of supply. This leaves only one alternative: distribution. Simply put, the ways in which we’ve been delivering the spiritual goods have not been working. The idea, for example, that we can open a “distribution center” on some street corner and expect those in spiritual need to come to us has not worked. In fact, God did not intend for it to work. God is not in the retail business. He has chosen one-on-one mass distribution as his method to distribute his grace.

GOD’S DISTRIBUTION METHOD

It’s fascinating to consider that, of all the methods the Creator of the universe could have used to spread his grace to the world, he chose to use men and women—ordinary Christians—not a few select, elite spokespersons. As he departed this earth, Jesus told his followers, “And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

God calls you and me as his witnesses, and we do not need to search hard to find a mission field. Our mission field is the place

where we already spend most of our time, namely, our workplace. By being an ambassador for Jesus in the workplace, each of us can become a pipeline of God's grace to people who would never darken the doorway of a church. Now *that* is distribution!

God wants to use us to accomplish something so grand we can hardly imagine its significance. For each person this *something to be accomplished* is totally unique. Sound daunting? Relax! God has given you everything you need.

EVANGELISM AS A PROCESS

Many Christians of our generation were taught mechanical, aggressive (some would say intrusive) methods of evangelism that produced minimal results, despite the claims made by the organizations espousing

The longer I am in business, the more passionate I become to be the hands, the feet extended of Christ. I see so many people who have not known God, don't think about God, don't talk about God. I want to provoke people to at least think about God. I want them to experience the love of Christ through me.

ANNE BEILER, FOOD SERVICE

these methods. I (Bill), motivated partly by guilt, took part in several evangelism seminars or courses, but the results became predictable. I would get inspired, go out and try what I'd learned, fail, stop trying—and feel even more guilty. I finally concluded that I just wasn't gifted to share my faith with others, which made me feel like a substandard Christian.

In the medical arena, I (Walt) found that an aggressive approach to evangelism was not only uncomfortable (both for me and my patients) but was also largely unfruitful. One day I just quit trying, content to consider my practice as merely a secular "tentmaking" operation while carrying on my ministry in the context of church life. Yet my heart was troubled. Every day I saw twenty to thirty non-Christian patients who desperately needed both physical and spiritual healing, and I came to believe I had nothing to offer them in the latter area.

The problem was that, as with many Christians, we (both authors) thought of evangelism as an *event*—a point in time when we mechan-

ically recite the facts of the gospel message and encourage non-Christians to place their faith in Jesus. It was liberating for each of us to discover that evangelism, according to the Bible, is not an event but a *process*. Evangelism is organic—a lot more like farming than selling. This concept radically changed our lives and our ministries—Walt’s in medicine and Bill’s in professional ministry.

Event-centered evangelism defines success as getting a person to pray to receive Jesus as personal Savior. But when evangelism is seen as an organic process, this “decision” is only the climactic step of a long process that God uses to draw a person to himself. God’s process typically enlists a number of people with a variety of gifts—each playing a different but vital role in helping someone take a step closer to Jesus. Accepting God’s gift of salvation—obviously the goal of evangelism—is dependent on many steps before it. Bill Kraftson of Search Ministries observes that each Christian who encounters a non-Christian is like a link in a chain. “It’s great to be the last link in the chain,” says Kraftson, “but it’s not more important than any other link. We just need to make sure we’re not the missing link.” Jim Petersen of the Navigators likewise views conversion as a process: “Few of us make it in one big decision. Instead, it’s a multitude of small choices—mini-decisions that a person makes toward Jesus.”⁵

THE DISTRIBUTION PROCESS

The Bible consistently employs an organic rather than a mechanical model to explain how God draws a person to himself. Paul uses the agrarian analogy in his passionate comments about the growing factions competing in the Corinthian church:

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.

1 Corinthians 3:5–9

After speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus uses the organic model to teach his disciples about the process of evangelism. The disciples were about to lead people to Jesus—or as he puts it, “reap” in a field that had previously been cultivated and planted by others:

Do you not say, “Four months more and then the harvest”? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying “One sows and another reaps” is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.

John 4:35–38

Jesus also uses an agrarian analogy to explain why some people respond to the word of God while others don't:

A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Matthew 13:3–8

The seed—“the message about the kingdom” (Matthew 13:19)—falls on soils at varying stages of cultivation, representing the varying degrees of readiness of the human heart. The path—representing hard, uncultivated hearts—can't receive God's word. The rocky places and thorny soils—partially cultivated hearts—receive the words, but life can't flourish. The good soil—well-cultivated hearts—brings forth an abundant harvest.

Jesus' point is clear: A person's journey toward a relationship with him and the experience of eternal life is a process—a long process.

And as with raising a crop, a lot of hard work is required before there is any talk of harvesting.

JESUS' GUIDE TO ORGANIC EVANGELISM

Based on an agrarian model, evangelism can be divided into four phases: cultivating, planting, harvesting, and multiplying. According to Jesus, the hard work of evangelism is not the harvest phase but the *cultivation* phase. Cultivation focuses on the soil of the human heart, which includes addressing emotional barriers. It requires our presence with non-Christians. The goal of cultivation is to help others begin to see the benefits of being a child of God. An important part of cultivation is to develop trust in the messenger, for if people don't trust us, they will never trust our message. Thus, the first step entails building relationships and then living in a way that creates trust. This does not mean we must live impeccable lives, which is something that can't be done anyway. But we can live authentically and honestly—demonstrating to others that we ourselves are in need of grace.

The *planting* phase addresses intellectual barriers—misconceptions, misinformation, and ignorance about God and the Christian faith. It requires thoughtful conversation as part of planting seeds of biblical truth, seeds designed to build an understanding of who Jesus is, what he wants from us, and what he wants to do for us. As we develop relationships with non-Christians and they become attracted to what Jesus is doing in us, we can begin to explain how Jesus has made, and continues to make, a difference in our lives. It begins slowly, with just enough truth to pique interest. As curiosity grows, so does the appetite for the truth. As non-Christians come to grips with spiritual truth, they are likely to discover significant discrepancies between the Bible and their way of thinking or philosophy of life. They'll need answers—presented patiently and humbly—to their intellectual questions.

The *harvesting* phase focuses on a person's will and its resistance to make a decision to trust Jesus. Even after someone's emotional and intellectual barriers have been broken down, the will remains. Men and women can neither think nor feel their way into God's kingdom. Though these elements are foundational, ultimately every human being must make a choice. Involvement during this phase requires

MICRODECISIONS OF FAITH⁶

DISCIPLE	Chooses to live by faith	+ 5	MULTIPLYING	<p>SPEAKS TO: THE WHOLE PERSON ADDRESSES: SOCIAL BARRIERS TO OVERCOME: ISOLATION BY: PARTICIPATION IN THE BODY GOAL: GROWTH ANSWERS: WILL I LIVE FOR CHRIST? EXAMPLES: JERUSALEM CHURCH (ACTS 2:41-47) THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH (ACTS 11:19-26)</p>
	Chooses to share faith	+ 4		
	Makes Christlike choices	+ 3		
	Joins in community life	+ 2		
	Assimilates God's Word	+ 1		
BELIEVER	Trusts in Christ	0	HARVESTING	<p>SPEAKS TO: THE WILL ADDRESSES: VOLITIONAL BARRIERS TO OVERCOME: INDECISION & UNWILLINGNESS TO CHANGE BY: PRAYER & PERSUASION GOAL: TRUST CHRIST ANSWERS: WILL I TRUST CHRIST? EXAMPLES: PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA (ACTS 26:1-29)</p>
	Turns from self-trust	- 1		
	Sees Christ as the answer	- 2		
	Recognizes spiritual need	- 3		
SEEKER	Considers the truth of the gospel	- 4	PLANTING	<p>SPEAKS TO: THE MIND ADDRESSES: INTELLECTUAL BARRIERS TO OVERCOME: IGNORANCE, MISCONCEPTIONS & ERROR BY: PRESENTATION GOAL: UNDERSTANDING ANSWERS: WHO IS JESUS? WHAT DOES HE WANT FROM ME? EXAMPLES: ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH (ACTS 8:26-39)</p>
	Understands the implications	- 5		
	Aware of the gospel	- 6		
	Recognizes relevance of the Bible	- 7		
SPECTATOR	Looks positively at the Bible	- 8	CULTIVATING	<p>SPEAKS TO: THE EMOTIONS ADDRESSES: EMOTIONAL BARRIERS TO OVERCOME: DENIAL, INDIFFERENCE, FEAR & ANTAGONISM BY: YOUR PRESENCE GOAL: ATTRACTION, TRUST YOU ANSWERS: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME? EXAMPLES: WOMAN AT THE WELL (JOHN 4:4-30) NICODEMUS (JOHN 3:1-21) MATTHEW 13:1-23</p>
	Recognizes difference in the messenger	- 9		
	Aware of the messenger	- 10		
	Going his/her own way	- 11		
	Avoids the truth	- 12		
CYNIC				

prayer and continued conversation toward the goal of the person's receiving Jesus as Savior. In harvesting, we graciously persuade and consistently pray for God to draw our friend to himself.

The final phase, *multiplying*, entails implanting the new life into a community where it can grow and flourish. The goals of this phase are growth and reproduction. When new life is birthed, we need to give it proper care, ensuring that it has an environment that encourages growth and development toward maturity.

WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOUR WORKPLACE?

If our efforts to go public are to bear fruit, they must take into account contemporary cultural attitudes as well as realities in the twenty-first-century workplace. People are under pressure; schedules are tight. Each working environment is distinctive; relationships between and among supervisors and subordinates, or between employees and clients or patients, vary. A cookie-cutter approach to evangelism is doomed. In fact, some of the old gospel-sharing methods are unwise, if not flat-out unethical. A workable model for evangelism must respect the nonbeliever's integrity and vulnerability while also considering the professional's fiduciary responsibility.

As a younger Christian, I was much more aggressive about sharing my faith. Now I am much more aware that it is God's work. I am just trying to be faithful on a day-to-day basis. I am much more cautious, because the battle is severe, and if it ever becomes known organizationally that you have an agenda, you can get in trouble.

JACK ALEXANDER, TRAVEL
AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

We have found that when people who are not gifted evangelists overemphasize the harvesting phase, they produce more frustration than fruit. They may even further harden the soil of unbelieving hearts. However, when these same men and women exercise their God-given gifts in the cultivating phase of evangelism, they have many more planting and harvesting opportunities. Evangelism is organic. Although this may come as a surprise to some, it is no surprise to any farmer—or to God.

All of us who follow Jesus must think carefully about how we can best make him known in our own workplace, given its particular limitations and constraints. Some work environments afford greater freedom and flexibility to spend time talking about spiritual topics. Others (such as a doctor's office) are highly scheduled and restrictive, allowing virtually no time for prolonged conversations. Some work environments are even hostile with regard to spiritual talk. Those who have a fiduciary responsibility and hold a professional knowledge unavailable to those they serve must take great care not to exploit another's position or situation. Whatever your arena, and however aggressive your workplace may allow you to be, being a "religious jerk" is never appropriate!

Throughout history and today we have witnessed various models for evangelism. We have identified five.

The *proclamational evangelism* model features public preaching and announcing the truth to a large audience. The best-known proclamational evangelist of our time is Billy Graham. Proclamation is modeled in the New Testament by John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Stephen, and Paul—all of whom preached the gospel to audiences.

Confrontational evangelism occurs when someone initiates a conversation with an individual (usually a stranger) with the specific aim of leading the person to Jesus. The Bible includes a few examples of this kind of evangelism: Jesus with Nicodemus, Jesus with the Samaritan woman, and Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch. Campus Crusade for Christ popularized this model. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the great search for truth was on at the university campus, this method fit the culture perfectly and was instrumental in both Bill's and Walt's journey of faith and understanding of the gospel.

Though many people are intimidated by talking to people they've never met, there are Christians who love to talk to perfect strangers about Jesus. They come back from business trips with incredible stories about how they met this or that stranger and led him or her in a dramatic way to Jesus. It's easy to think of these individuals as the gifted evangelists who are set apart to carry out the bulk of evangelistic activity for God.

While some people may be ready to hear about Jesus, not as many people are as ready to hear about Jesus from a perfect stranger as they

once were. While making the gospel clear, the danger of confrontation is twofold. First, if a person feels pressure to respond before he or she is ready, the experience can create another emotional barrier that must be overcome before the person will trust Jesus. Second, when people who are not gifted evangelists force themselves into this mold, the result is rarely a positive experience—for the evangelist or the evangelized.

Intentional evangelism refers to creating opportunities to expose friends and colleagues to Jesus in a nonreligious, nonthreatening atmosphere. It's what Matthew (also known as Levi) did when he became a follower of Jesus. Instead of inviting his disreputable friends to the synagogue, he asked them to his home for dinner (see Luke 5:27–29).

In the intentional evangelism model, someone hosts a nonthreatening event that creates in non-Christian friends a sense of curiosity, which the host can intentionally pursue after the event. The event is more about sparking an interest than making converts. Intentional evangelism is based on forming a relationship of significant trust with a non-Christian friend and on the hope that the event will stimulate the non-Christian without causing him or her to feel “set up.” This usually means that the event will not feature a pushy appeal to trust Jesus.

Events might feature a speaker that non-Christians would be interested in hearing. For several years I (Bill) hosted what we called the Leadership Breakfast during the pro-am golf tournament in Tyler, Texas. Several of the touring pros from the PGA are believers. Each year we invited one of them to talk a little about golf and to tell his faith story. Christians were encouraged to host a table and invite friends. More than three hundred men and women, many of whom wouldn't dream of attending church, came to hear a professional golfer. Another type of intentional evangelistic event is a forum, or discussion party. Rather than focusing on a speaker, this gathering is centered around discussion of questions people have about God or Christianity. Search Ministries and the Alpha course are two examples.

Passive evangelism uses symbols, objects, or art to arouse curiosity in the observer. We sometimes call this “trotline evangelism,” after the fishing practice of baiting a series of hooks on a line, then leaving and coming back later to check the line. You put out the bait and hope a fish—or, in the case of evangelism, a person—bites. Religious

art on the wall, tracts and magazines left in offices and waiting rooms, even Bibles, are conspicuously placed in hopes that someone may ask a question about God. The Old Testament is full of symbols designed to create curiosity, and many aspects of the Jewish ceremonial law were designed to draw people toward asking questions. Even the temple in Jerusalem was, in some sense, a giant symbolic tract designed to teach people how to approach God.

The benefit of this model is that it's always at work, even when you're not. It continues to say something even while you are absent or silent. The drawback is that it lacks subtlety. What's more, if the office atmosphere doesn't match the decor, a credibility problem arises. If you announce by what you put on the walls that you are a follower of Jesus, you'd better be sure to reflect the values of Jesus in the way you speak and act.

Relational evangelism builds a bridge of friendship based on common ground between a Christian and non-Christian. Relational evangelists see evangelism as a process rather than an event (see chart on page 24). In this model, success is measured on the basis of helping a person take one more step toward Jesus today.

This type of evangelism was the backbone of the strategy that resulted in the growth of the early church from a few hundred on the day of Pentecost to over half a million by the end of the first century. Christians everywhere chatted about Jesus to their friends, relatives, work associates, customers, masters, slaves, and fellow soldiers. According to church growth experts Win and Charles Arn, "Webs of *common kinship* (the larger family), *common friendship* (friends and neighbors), and *common associates* (work associates and people with common interests or recreational pursuits) are still the paths most people follow in becoming Christians today."⁷

The Arns cite the results of a survey in which approximately 14,000 people were asked the question, "What or who was responsible for your coming to Christ and your church?"⁸ Eight responses were rated as follows:

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| 1. A "special need" drew them | 1-2 percent |
| 2. They just "walked in" | 2-3 percent |
| 3. A pastor | 5-6 percent |

4. Church “visitation”	1–2 percent
5. Sunday school	4–5 percent
6. Evangelistic crusade or television show	0.5 percent
7. A church “program”	2–3 percent
8. A “friend/relative”	75–90 percent

The results of this survey highlight the importance of forming solid relationships (friendships) as part of the process of evangelism, regardless of which of the above models of evangelism you may employ.

This book explores the specifics of how to engage actively and fruitfully in the evangelistic task. The *fact* that we ought to be engaged in this task should not be an issue. After all, another person’s eternal destiny is at stake: Revelation 20:15 declares, “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

The decision to go public affects believers as well. To refuse to join God as a distribution point of his grace is an act of blatant disregard for God’s will and plan for our lives. We cannot stop the flow of grace without doing harm to ourselves. Paul singles out the sharing of our faith as a key to our mature spiritual identity: “I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ” (Philemon 6).

Certain functions are essential for human life—breathing, drinking, and eating being among them. These functions keep us alive and growing. If we want to remain spiritually alive and growing, we *must* speak of our faith with others. It’s a sustaining requirement of spiritual life.

We are all workers in the Father’s field. When we go public with our faith in our workplace, we join in his process of drawing men and women to himself. For most of us, it won’t involve preaching to groups or aggressively talking to strangers about their relationship with Jesus. Instead, it will focus on the *cultivating* phase, doing what Jesus called “the hard work” (John 4:38)—building meaningful relationships with people over time.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Evangelism is not an event but a relational process, and God has gifted each of us to play a critical role in drawing men and women to himself.