

# **SPIRITUAL EDGEWALKERS: MISSIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY**



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Picture on cover  
**Man Walking Razor's Edge**  
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## **Preface:**

I wrote this book in 2006 and self-published 500 copies. It was very well received by a variety of groups who were part of my circle of relationships. The Lord blessed as I shared it in men's retreats, young adult retreats and with several community development groups. The Lord also allowed me to present this concept as a preaching series in large and medium sized churches.

As a seminary professor I was invited to share this material at regional conferences and church leadership conferences. Each time the material resonated with the audience and there was a desire to take these ideas back to the local church with a view to reaching out to the communities around their church.

Because of some health issues with me and my wife I had to cut back on speaking and traveling and I let the manuscript languish on my shelf and never pursued getting it published on a broader level.

My interest has been renewed over the past three years because of the polarization in our society both religiously and politically. I see the church struggling to engage in constructive dialogue with the current polarizing trends. The fruits of globalization have now become embedded in our culture and the church seems to be in crisis as to how to respond. Tribalism and nativism have risen in our culture and communities and there is great confusion of how to adjust to the men, women and families who are very different than us. Therefore, I have picked up the manuscript again because I believe it has the potential to give some guidance for the church to engage the issues of globalism rooted in our current society.

# 1

## **Spiritual Edgewalking - Learning to Live on the Edge**

*Edges are important because they define a limitation in order to deliver us from it. When we come to an edge we come to a frontier that tells us we are now about to become more than we have ever been before. As long as one operates in the middle, one can never really know the nature of the medium in which one moves.*

– William Erwin Thompson<sup>1</sup>

I first learned to live on the edge in my first pastorate in Dallas, Texas while I was attending Dallas Theological Seminary. I was the pastor of a little inner-city church, called Faith Bible Church, which was made up of Mexican Americans and three Native American tribes: Apache, Choctaw, and Sioux. Added to this ethnic mix were Appalachia whites from Kentucky and Tennessee, as well as some homegrown Texans.

At the same time, I was attending a seminary which was very middle class, academic, and white. Overlaid on top of these contexts, I was driving forty-foot tractor-trailers for Southwestern Railway to earn money for school and support my family – and truckers are a very different cultural group who speak a much different spiritual language.

As my life and work took me into these disparate cultural settings, it was hard for me to remember who I was. I would constantly have to be aware of the cultural differences of each group and adjust my approach and talk to be sensitive to their culture without trying to be like them – otherwise I would look foolish. I remember how tiring it was to continually engage all those cultural contexts. Mental, physical and spiritual fatigue would set in from time to time and I would have to retreat with my family to a setting where I could gain a perspective of who I was and what my ministry was all about.

In her book *Edgewalkers: Defusing Cultural Boundaries on the New Global Frontier*, Dr. Nina Boyd Krebs describes what I was experiencing. She defines edgewalkers as people who

*... do not shed one skin when they move from their cultures of origin to the mainstream and back. An edgewalker maintains continuity wherever he or she goes, walking the edge between two cultures in the same persona. They handle the implied or direct criticism that their difference stirs up and explain what they are trying to accomplish.* <sup>2</sup>

I didn't realize it at the time but in that first pastorate in Dallas, I was becoming an edgewalker. Somehow, I managed to keep my identity clear while *engaging* and *embracing* the cultural complexity that faced me on a daily basis. Dr. Krebs identifies this characteristic as one of the marks of an *edgewalker*.

*Edgewalkers embrace cultural complexity, with unusual creativity; they provide insight into ways groups and individuals can deal effectively and openly with difference.* <sup>3</sup>

Little did I realize that this early ministry was going to shape the rest of my ministerial journey. For the past forty-one years my family and I have been engaged in cross-cultural or inner-city ministry, pastoring, teaching, organizing and working with community development projects.

As I was reading Dr. Krebs' book I became acutely aware of the spiritual parallels and implications for Christian leadership and the church. Dr. Krebs introduces a form of new age spirituality in her book, which is where mainstream society is anchored. However, as an Evangelical Christian minister I realized very quickly that she had opened a door for a whole new understanding of Christian ministry for leadership and the church. Dr. Krebs challenged me to my very core because she made bold statements of what *edgewalkers* do and I realized

that this is what the scriptures indicate the church should be doing but often fails miserably. For instance, she says that "Edgewalkers integrate complexity rather than splitting differences into conflicting components. They manage paradox as a way of life." <sup>4</sup>

The Church, the Body of Christ, is supposed to be able to embrace Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female and yet we find our local churches and Christian agencies not reflecting that reality very well. Sunday morning is still the most racially and ethnically segregated time in America. I am, however, encouraged by the growing number of heterogeneous churches which are multi-cultural, multi-lingual and even multi-congregational emerging in our urban areas. The church growth model expressed over the past 30 years was built on the homogeneous growth principle, which cemented the church in a mono-cultural, mono-lingual context. This movement has structured the church to be mono-cultural and has stifled the great ministry of reconciliation the Lord Jesus Christ called us to in 2 Corinthians 5:16-19.

*So, from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we regarded Christ this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation; the old is gone and the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (NIV)*

Today the Church still struggles to embrace the people groups it has reached through its mission programs for the past 100 years. It is no secret that the world has come to the doorstep of the church in North America and we have not opened the doors to receive the nations of the world. Nor have we done a very good job of embracing the poor. In my forty-one years of



ministry, I have experienced that the economic barriers in the church are greater and harder to overcome than racial and ethnic barriers. It is much easier to accept people of color if they are doctors, lawyers, and professionals. When the church must face the challenge of accepting people of color who are of low income, we have a very poor batting average. Look at your own church and ask yourself, what is the economic diversity of my church? How many poor people do we have who attend? How many wealthy people? Are any people of a lower income bracket in positions of leadership?

Another statement by Dr. Krebs challenges the church in the area of our ministry of change to become a community characterized by reconciliation.

*Edgewalkers are leaders in change, creating community locally and beyond, taking opportunity to create connections that transcend ethnic, cultural and spiritual barriers. Although they rely on colleagues and people from their own cultural groups for support ... edgewalkers take their spirit of community with them wherever they go. They move beyond safe enclaves of their cultural groups into borderlands of difference and change. Moving into that place "where love and need are one," they build relationships with people different from themselves, creating community that is bound by neither time nor space.*<sup>5</sup>

I thought for a moment I was reading Acts 2 where the early church overcame great cultural, class and racial barriers and had all things in common. "Love and need" were one. Can we make this kind of statement about our churches? Do we create a community "where we move beyond the safe enclaves of our cultural groups into the borderlands of difference and change?" How culturally competent is the church in reaching out to a global society?

Dr. Krebs outlines some crucial steps in the development of cultural competence. I have summarized nine of them

1. Define your relationship to your own culture.
2. Move beyond blame and cultural splitting by learning to hear and relate to values different from your own.
3. Discover what an individual's ethnicity means to her or him rather than assume that someone is a certain way because of identity with a particular group.
4. Communicate effectively by containing your rage, in order to cooperate in creating culturally competent policies and services.
5. Harmonize differences by understanding that power struggles don't work, and no single approach is the best for all tasks.
6. Build long term relationships and commitments – they are more important than money and power.
7. Embrace the importance of culturally competent work and endeavor to support steps toward cultural competence from the top and throughout your organization.
8. Operate your agency, institution or business in a cost-effective manner.
9. Accept culture-specific characteristics of racial and ethnic minority groups and acknowledge them in identifying needs and planning services and products. Value diversity, acknowledge differences, continuously conduct personal and organizational cultural self-assessment, recognize dynamics of difference, institutionalize cultural knowledge, and adapt policies, services, programs and infrastructure.

How would your church rate if it were evaluated along these guidelines? Many of our churches would not measure up to the criteria reflected in the previous statements. My purpose is not to attack churches but to challenge them by the insights that Dr. Krebs discovered by interviewing edgewalkers across the nation.

If Krebs' findings are what psychology and sociology have surfaced to describe effective edgewalkers in a global society, then what do the scriptures and our theology say about becoming spiritual edgewalkers? Christians should be more than just edgewalkers. Because we have the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives, we should become spiritual edgewalkers.

One of the obvious differences between Krebs' approach to spirituality and mine is that I look to the scriptures as authoritative for life and practice. However, this does not mean that I cannot learn a great deal from Krebs' expressions of spirituality. I believe that all truth is God's truth, no matter where it is found. There are many truths contained in psychology and sociology and Christians should utilize them to carry out ministry in an effective way. And, I must be willing to learn from Krebs even where our understandings are fundamentally different. Christians today must be equipped to dialogue and engage the viewpoints of various religious groups. We must learn to respect the viewpoints of those with whom we differ and create a space for true dialogue.

For the Christian, the basis for evaluating the truth of a concept or statement is whether it aligns with or is supported by the Bible. I am also critically aware that the scriptures can be used to support any concept if taken out of context. Therefore, it is my commitment to examine biblical passages in their context to discover what spiritual edgewalking looks like from a biblical perspective.

Edgewalkers find themselves walking the fine edge between two or more cultures. They always must redefine their context and learn to engage and embrace the values and people of each culture. As a Christian I am challenged to walk on the edge between two worlds. I belong to another kingdom, which is embedded in and yet very different from the world in which I live. Jesus, in his passionate farewell prayer says:

*I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (Jn. 17:13-15 NIV)*

Jesus sets us apart to be sent into the world, to engage the world and embrace the pain and suffering of the world with the transforming power of the gospel. He did not ask us to merely survive until he comes. His mandate is for us to be the "sent ones" who walk on the edge – not stay in the comfortable middle but engage the world with the transforming power of his presence and his gospel. We are to be the new community in an alien environment. This new community displays and unleashes the power of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God.

Our mission in this world is to engage the many nations and peoples of the world with the good news of the kingdom and become the new community where the barriers of race, ethnicity, class and gender are dissolved.

As Christians, we tend to respond to our context in the world in five major ways.

1. Isolation: We separate ourselves from the world and stay in the safe confines of fellow Christians and do not engage the world with the transforming power of Christ. We live in the comfortable middle.
2. Accommodation: We become chameleons and act like Christians when we are around believers and act like the world when removed from fellow Christians to avoid criticism by the world. We are

constantly shifting or splitting between our spiritual heritage and the world's conforming values. We have sacred/secular lifestyles instead of an integrated lifestyle.

3. Assimilation: We remain silent or give lip service to Christianity and the power of Christ and over time we cannot be distinguished from the world because we have adopted the world's value system and cultural expressions. We become cultural Christians who live good moral lives but do not have a personal love relationship with Jesus.
4. Confrontation: We are constantly battling culture and treating it as the enemy rather than embracing and engaging it in a prophetic and transforming way. Jesus came to actively embrace and engage the fallenness and pain of this world so that we might be reconciled to the Father. Jesus bore a prophetic witness to the systems of this world to remind them that they are under God's sovereign rule. This confrontational spirit is clearly reflected in the strident militancy of the religious right.
5. Transformation: We affirm our identity in Christ and his community to engage our sector of the world and embrace the fallenness and pain of humanity with the transforming power of the Gospel of Christ. We learn to live on the edge and discover the empowering presence of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

As Christians we do not fall into just one of these categories, but we find ourselves responding to our world and culture in different ways at different times. There are times when we must make a stand and challenge the culture around us. There are other times when we will seek to transform our culture with the gospel of Christ. So then, what does a spiritual edgewalker look like? I would like to offer this as a working definition:

*Spiritual edgewalkers are Christ followers who affirm their identity in Christ believing they are sent to skillfully engage the diverse sectors and structures of the world and embrace the fallenness and pain of humanity with the transforming power and presence of Christ through their walk and their talk.*

The concept of being “sent ones” is at the very core of the Missional Church movement, which is beginning to sweep across our churches. For many decades, we have understood the church as a “sending church.” We have believed that it is the job of the church to send out men and women to win the world while the great majority of Christians sit in the church expecting their consumer needs to be met. Because we are not good at spiritual edgewalking, we have shifted with the expectations of the culture to the comfortable middle instead of each of us engaging our context with the transforming Word of God. Therefore, we have a distorted view of what the church should be like.

Darrell Guder in his book “The Missional Church” describes the impact the church growth movement has had on the North American Church. The church growth movement, he says,

*focused on reaching persons outside the church to incorporate them into the church. To do so, it intentionally planted congregations within given social boundaries so that persons could meet Christ without having to cross cultural barriers. It accepted social homogeneity as a necessary condition for congregational formation.<sup>7</sup>*

Years of homogeneous church growth theology and philosophy have produced a church that is consumer satisfaction oriented. People come on Sunday to have their desires or needs met. If the music is not just right or the preaching is not dynamic enough or the people do not greet them in just the right way, they will go down the street to the next vendor (church) and

get what they want. Somewhere in the past thirty years we have lost the idea that church and worship is about what I give and share in the congregation of believers and not just what I get from the church. The consumer-oriented pitch of our culture which says, "let us entertain you," or "we do it all for you," has finally shaped our expectations of church. The severe competition of our culture, social structures and media, which are constantly in rating wars, has seeped into the mentality of the church and our ecclesiology. We find ourselves competing with society and the other churches in our towns and cities to entice newcomers to give us a try.

So much focus has been on the church as an organization that we have found ourselves constantly tinkering with programs, worship styles, outreach and communication techniques as a way to create a church that will attract the world. Sadly, this has only led to worship wars, church splits, and a church that is filled with human brokenness and critical expectations without experiencing the power of the kingdom of God.

Guder provides a wonderful insight when he says,

*Those who imagine the church's role as "building" the reign (kingdom) of God may also use words like "establish," "fashion", or "bring about." The reign of God in this view is perceived as a social project. The church is sent out by God to achieve that project, to create it. This view tends to place the reign out there somewhere, where we go to construct it as architects, contractors, carpenters, or day laborers.<sup>8</sup>*

Where did we lose this overarching concept of the reign of God and the church as a vehicle through which the kingdom is manifested in the world? Guder goes on to say,

*First the church has tended to separate the news of the reign of God from God's provision for humanity's salvation. This separation has made salvation a private*

*event by dividing "my personal salvation" from the advent of God's healing reign over all the world. Second, the church has also tended to envision itself in a variety of ways unconnected to what must be fundamental for it – its relation to the reign of God.<sup>9</sup>*

As I observe preaching and evangelism today it appears to me that we have become experts at sharing the "gospel about Christ" but have failed to understand and communicate the "gospel of Christ" <sup>10</sup>

*Their gospel was not only "about Jesus" – It was also the "gospel of Jesus," the gospel that he preached. This was so because the Jesus whom they announced as the risen Christ of God, the living Lord of the nations, embodied the message spoken from his lips. Jesus' good news that the reign of God is at hand is clothed with meaning by his continuing presence as the risen, reigning and glorified Lord. Believing in Jesus Christ also means believing Jesus Christ about the reign of God. <sup>11</sup>*

When one examines the book of Acts, it is clear how the "gospel of Christ" and the "gospel about Christ" were held in healthy tension. Jesus had just forty days to prepare his disciples for his departure. You would think that he would train them in evangelism, church growth strategies, liturgy and worship practices, and church polity. However, in Acts 1:3 we read, "After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God." (NIV) It seems Jesus knew that if the disciples would keep their focus on the kingdom or reign of God, the church would take care of itself. Church would remain flexible and adaptable as men and women received the king and the kingdom into their lives individually and collectively. After Christ's ascension and the day of Pentecost we find this description of the church in Acts 2:42-47



*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (NIV)*

There was tremendous power unleashed as the early church kept its focus on the reign or kingdom of God. Marva Dawn gives an excellent description of these major activities of the early church and their relationship to overcoming the principalities and powers or the systems of this world in her book *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God*.<sup>12</sup>

Another example of this wholistic gospel is when the early church in Jerusalem was persecuted and Philip became a spiritual edgewalker by going to Samaria to preach the gospel. Notice the balance of his message in the face of persecution and demonic powers as found in Acts 8:9-13.

*Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And*

*he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. (underlined for emphasis)(NIV)*

Notice the phrases "the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." The kingdom or reign of God signifies that every aspect of the world as they knew it and as we understand it today is under the authority of the risen Christ who has victory over sin, death and principalities and powers.

The Apostle Paul follows the same pattern in his ministry and presents a wholistic gospel, which holds in balance the kingdom or reign of God and the risen Christ who is both savior and king. When Paul arrived at Ephesus he followed the same pattern as recorded in Acts 19:8 "Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God." (NIV) The central focus of Paul's message was the reign of God which reminded people that Christ not only provided personal salvation but also broke the power of Satan along with the principalities and powers or fallen systems which try to control the world. This is a message of liberation on the personal, corporate and structural levels in society. As Paul bids farewell to the Ephesians, he rehearses his ministry of "preaching the kingdom" to them. Like Christ, Paul did not spend time talking about evangelism, church growth or worship practices but kept the fledgling church in Ephesus focused on the Kingdom. He would remind them that no matter how bad it got, they were to hold on to the fact that Christ the King was in control.

Finally, when Paul comes to the end of his career and is under house arrest we still find this wonderful balance in his message of the "Kingdom of God" and the "name of Jesus." In Acts 28:23-24; 31 we find this account of his preaching and teaching.

*They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and they came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening, he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe... For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV - underlined for emphasis)*

Is it possible that because of the shifts in our culture from pre-modern to modernity and now to post-modernity that the church has shifted from a wholistic gospel to just the "gospel about Christ" and lost the dimension of the "gospel of Christ" which is the "reign of God?" In most evangelism training programs, we are well trained in presenting the "gospel about Christ" but we have very little training, knowledge or skill in presenting the "gospel of Christ" which is telling men and women about the kingdom of God. Could it be possible in a post-modern culture if men and women heard about the reign of God or Kingdom of God which focused on justice, equity, hope, peace, community, righteousness, and holiness, they would be attracted to the risen king?

To become a spiritual edgewalker who engages a post-modern society we need that healthy balance of preaching and living out the whole gospel of Christ. The whole gospel includes the gospel of Christ, which is the reign of God and the gospel about Christ, which is his death, burial, and resurrection that gives victory over sin and death.

What does it mean for spiritual edgewalkers to present a wholistic gospel? Let me share an attempt to describe a wholistic gospel. The wholistic gospel is sharing the good news that Jesus Christ the risen king, has conquered sin and death

through the cross. Those who receive him have their sins forgiven and become part of the new community (the church) through which his kingdom breaks forth in every generation with power, justice, equity, hope, peace, sacrificial love, righteousness, and holiness.

Spiritual edgewalkers are not just ordinary followers of Christ. They are men and women who are secure in their identity in Christ and boldly step into new settings with creative strategies. They break old paradigms and create a space for fresh thinking and ministry. It is my hope that this book will stimulate you to become a spiritual edgewalker.

In this chapter I have introduced the concept of edgewalking and provided a working definition of a spiritual edgewalker. Chapter 2 will examine the relationship of spiritual edgewalkers as missional leaders. Chapter 3 will explore the implications for spiritual edgewalking in a global community. Chapters 4-7 will focus on several Old Testament men and women who engaged and transformed their culture and context. We will try to discover from the scriptures what made them effective spiritual edgewalkers. Chapters 8-11 will focus on the lives of New Testament leaders who engaged a very pluralistic and multi-cultural world resulting in the establishment of transformational kingdom communities called the church. Chapter 12 will develop a profile of spiritual edgewalkers by summarizing the major characteristics of the Old and New Testament characters we have studied. Chapter 13 will guide you in preparation for spiritual edgewalking. Chapter 14 will challenge you to begin the process of edgewalking in the global community.

Will you join me in becoming a spiritual edgewalker?

## 2

### **Spiritual Edgewalkers: Becoming the New Missional Leader**

Spiritual edgewalkers are Christ followers who affirm their identity in Christ. They believe they are sent to skillfully engage the diverse sectors and structures of the world. They embrace the fallenness and pain of humanity with the transforming power and presence of Christ through their walk and their talk.

I believe there are two key characteristics of spiritual edgewalkers that will equip them to be the future leaders for the Missional Church. The first is the affirmation of their identity in Christ. To be grounded in Christ and to be secure in your identity through your relationship to Christ and not on performance, ethnicity, or race allows one the freedom to engage one's culture and context. To know who you are is critical when trying to deal with cultural and organizational transition. Insecurity in identity prevents risk taking.

At Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, I teach a course entitled "Cross Cultural Encounter." Students spend ten days in Los Angeles and ten days in Fresno, California where they are exposed to over fifty different ministries. They are taken out of their comfort zones and placed in settings where they must engage people of different races, ethnic backgrounds, lifestyles, and theological constructs from Christian and non-Christian perspectives. They visit the county jail, juvenile boot camp, a Buddhist temple and Islamic Study Center, various Christian and non-profit social agencies as well as psychiatric centers and major hospitals. They observe cremations of indigents who are not claimed by relatives and see death up close and personal. They see successes and failures in ministry settings.<sup>13</sup>

One of the things I have noticed over the past ten years is that as the students begin to engage that which is different from themselves they begin to clarify who they are. They become

aware they have a core theology, which is critical for their stability and it becomes non-negotiable. They also learn quickly what areas of their epistemology are open for dialogue and change. I have also observed as the days go by and fatigue sets in, the students begin to draw closer to the Lord and to each other. A new sense of community begins to surface where openness and honesty take on a new depth. The personal façade begins to disintegrate, and the real person emerges with crying, outbursts of anger and questioning of reality. However, space is created in this new community for open and honest exploration of difficult and life changing questions. There is an inner strength that appears and the fear of engaging the unknown is replaced by a confidence to press into each new situation with a deep desire to explore and learn, knowing this process will solidify their own identity and their identity with the group.

I have often wished I could take churches on this kind of encounter. I am convinced it would create a new community of openness in our churches where men and women could be who they really are instead of hiding behind masks that help protect the status quo. A new type of leader would emerge who would be confident to engage the issues, problems and transitions of the church and culture. We would see spiritual edgewalkers begin to emerge.

In a recent article in the Trinity World Forum. Dr. Duane Elmer states that a recent study identified three competencies significant for achieving effectiveness in a cross-cultural context.

*The most important of the three competencies was interpersonal relationship – initiating and sustaining relationships with the host country people. This competency emerged as so critical to effectiveness that it dwarfed the other two in significance. The second competency, statistically significant but not with the same prominence, was a strong self-identity.*

*The person who knows who they are and is comfortable with who they are tends not to wear a "mask" but comes across as genuine. They do not pretend to be what they are not. The third competency was realistic pre-departure expectations.* <sup>14</sup>

Although Dr. Elmer placed the competency of self-identity second, I doubt very much if a person would have good relationship-building skills if they did not have a good sense of self-identity. Good relationships are seldom created where people are wearing masks. He states in his article that the person who is comfortable with who they are tends not to wear a mask. In a globalized, post-modern world, authenticity and genuineness are premium characteristics for building relationships and engaging men and women in critical dialogue. Spiritual edgewalkers are characterized by a strong sense of self-identity.

The second ability of a spiritual edgewalker is to engage their culture with the transforming power of the gospel of Christ. I am fascinated by the word "engage." It is a much better word than encounter. We can have an encounter and not learn anything from it because we fail to process or interact in any in-depth way. But when we engage someone or something it demands we interact with it in a dynamic way. This term is used a great deal in the military when combat is going to occur. It is often phrased "We are engaging the enemy." Life-changing and life-threatening circumstances are going to alter forever the persons caught in that engagement. When Christians move out of the comfortable middle and engage the brokenness of the world they find it to be a life-changing experience. They begin to ask new questions and process the Christian life at a new level. In my classes at seminary I can tell in a minute, by the type of questions asked, which students are engaged in ministry and which students are just studying for the ministry.

When we say we are engaged to someone it means that we have moved to a new level of sharing, planning and dreaming of the future with another person. Often in my role as pastor, I watched engaged couples in pre-marital counseling sessions share how their relationship with the other person had changed them and clarified what they like and dislike. It was a pleasure to see couples, who had really engaged each other because they had a clear understanding of what they brought to the relationship, not just what they wanted from the relationship.

I believe it is the same experience for Christians and their relationship with the church. Those who engage Christ in a deep way know who they are and what they bring in their relationship with the church and the world. Those who settle for a shallow relationship with Christ are always looking to have someone else meet their needs and they bring little to shape the church or the world.

Our Lord revealed this same truth to his disciples in John 15 when he talked about the vine and the branches. He was encouraging his followers to engage him in a life-giving way. In verses fourteen and fifteen he says

*You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (Jn. 15:14-15 NIV)*

The disciples' constant engagement of Christ in their daily lives moved them from being slaves who obeyed because they were commanded, to friends who obeyed because the Lord had revealed the business of the Father to them. They were operating at a new level of relationship and identity with Christ, no longer slaves who were kept in the dark concerning the business of the father but friends who had a special bond and assurance in their relationship. Jesus had just made the



statement *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (Jn.15:12-13 NRSV)

When our relationship rests in the security that someone would lay down his or her life for us, there is not much in the world that can intimidate us. Security in identity allows for risk-taking and engagement of the unknown. It is this kind of person that is needed to guide the missional church. *Spiritual edgewalkers affirm their identity in Christ and engage the world with the transforming power of the gospel by their walk and talk.*

A new type of leader is needed to guide and shape the emerging missional church. The "Gospel and Our Culture Network" and the "Missional Church" movement emerging in North America is reframing how we should think about church. The Missional Church movement is shifting our thinking from being church-centered to being kingdom-centered, from being a sending church to be a sent church, from the creation of the church as the primary focus of the gospel to the creation of disciples who engage the world with the transforming power of the gospel.

*We have begun to see that the church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness. God's mission embraces all of creation. "God so loved the world" is the emphasis of the beloved gospel summary in John 3:16. This does not mean that the church is not essential to God's work of salvation – it is. But it is essential as God's chosen people "who are blessed to be a blessing to the nations."*<sup>15</sup>

If we embrace the concept of our God as a "missionary God" who desires that all should enter into his kingdom, we begin to understand the church as a "sent people." David Bosch states this succinctly:

*Mission (is) understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It (is) thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the 'Missio Dei' as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit (is) expanded to include yet another "movement" Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. <sup>16</sup>*

The major shift from being a sending church to becoming a sent church will require a new kind of leader. A missional leader must be able to keep a global focus and yet mobilize the church to impact all sectors of society within its sphere of influence. If *all Christians* are sent, then what is their mission? Our traditional thinking was to enlist men and women who sensed a call on their lives to either the ministry of the church or to become part of the missionary enterprise that evangelized and planted churches around the world.

However, if we begin to see we *all* are called first to be faithful followers of Christ and to love Him with all our heart, soul and strength, and then that we *all* are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, we quickly realize our mission field begins with everyone within our sphere of influence. If our focus is not on building the church but helping men and women enter the kingdom of God through the cross of Christ, we will have less expectations of what church should provide and more excitement about what we as the body of Christ, the church, can do. If our focus is on bringing men and women into the kingdom of God, under Christ's sovereign rule, and introducing them to the new community of Christ, then the church will certainly grow.

Isn't it ironic that growth of the church should be a by-product of being focused on the kingdom of God instead of being focused on the church? If our mission emphasis is church focused, we will spend all our time tinkering with the church and its programs to make it an efficient model that attracts the

world into its confines. This results in our churches relying on "coming strategies" instead of "sending strategies."

*On the one hand, many churches are aggressively trying to become need-oriented, market driven, and user-friendly groups relying on all the latest technologies and methods available to reach their target populations. The question this approach raises is whether these churches have themselves become a reflection of a set of postmodern processes. On the other hand, some churches are having to examine seriously the core relationship between gospel and culture and are working to disengage from the dominant culture. The question this strategy raises is whether these churches will be able to reposition adequately without retreating from an effective engagement of the broader culture(s).<sup>17</sup>*

Missional leaders who can guide the church through this precarious process will need the special qualities of *spiritual edgewalkers*. Missional leaders will have to lead a process of change and "re-formation" to embrace sending strategies. This is not just about creating some new program; it is about creating a new corporate culture or a "new think" for the church. The spiritual edgewalker will have to guide the church in much the same way that he or she has become a spiritual edgewalker. Alan Roxburgh has captured this process in his book *Crossing the Bridge*.<sup>18</sup> He describes how the church will move through five phases in the process of transformation or reframing the church into a missional community. In my own experience of working as a church consultant with over thirty-five churches going through major transition and revitalization, I have seen these same phases at work.

Let me try to summarize Roxburgh's five-phase process. The first phase is "*stability*," in which most everyone desires to maintain the structures that reflect how people perceive things ought to work. In this phase, people will tolerate "evolutionary

change," which is very small increments of change over a long period of time, as well as "developmental change," which "occurs as improvements are made on the existing systems and practices." The key word in this phase is *continuity*. Anyone challenging the status quo is marginalized quickly.

Spiritual edgewalkers introduce a new language into this mix that captures clear biblical values to stimulate change. Spiritual edgewalkers must discern between "outer language and inner language".<sup>19</sup> Outer language is the more formal explanatory and objective language used to describe, discern and dissect issues and problems. Inner language is more of the intuitive and feeling language shared from the heart and is seasoned with a great deal of emotion. The inner language will be critical for transformation because it speaks to the center of a person's life and ignites hopes and dreams. The spiritual edgewalker will focus on reframing theological constructs in fresh and exciting ways so they become part of the grapevine conversation. During the transition process, spiritual edgewalkers will engage and embrace traditionalists as well as change agents.

When Dr. Willie Nolte was called to First Baptist Church in Fresno, California, the church was over 100 years old and filled with older men and women of faith. Even though he was in his thirties, Willie worked hard to hear the outer and inner language of his congregation. He found out that their desire historically, was to be a church in the heart of the city with a heart for the city. They had left the downtown area of Fresno and moved north long ago and now the city had grown beyond them. As he studied some maps, he realized they were a church in the geographic center of the city. Therefore, he created a vision statement that stated they were a "Church in the Heart of the City with a Heart for the City." By recapturing the original dream and forming it into a new vision the older people have joined him in the exciting journey of change and reformation.

The second phase is "*discontinuity*" in which "internal and external stresses begin to push against the system's habits and practices." In this phase, it is assumed that the old ways of doing things will be able to guide the church through this time of instability. There is usually an entrenchment of tried and true traditions and values. Micro-management of details becomes the favorite pastime. Those embracing the discontinuity are often seen to be traitors and sometimes pressured to leave. Spiritual edgewalkers will have to be reconcilers and engage polarized parties in constructive dialogue. The recapturing and rehearsing of the original vision and mission of the group that required risk taking and sacrifices in the birth and early growth of the church will help the church to refocus its attention away from micro-management to re-visioning.

The third phase is "*disembedding*," which is a sense of chaos where the systems and structures are no longer able to manage the pressures and changes taking place. "Power struggles emerge. Conflict and blaming are common."<sup>20</sup> The church at this point usually moves into survival mode. Much debating, negotiating, and confrontation are the norm. This phase is close to the grief syndrome in which people are trying to cope with loss. Some are rationalizing, are angry, are negotiating, are withdrawing into depression and are beginning to adjust to new concepts as a potentially good thing. Roxburgh demonstrates that "disembedding" is really an outcome of the path that the church has followed during modernity.

*Disembedding is not a by-product of modernity; it is the core agenda. One irony is that the methodologies and systems developed to counteract this disembedding are drawn from modernity. That is why, for example, we have seen the emergence in this century of pastoral leaders (i.e., an attempt to define the traditional model of pastor into modernity categories) as efficient managers trained to solve*

*problems. This paradigm of leadership not only deepens the church's loss of identity, but also shapes leaders who look for solutions primarily in the new-and-the-next. These leaders are essentially cut off from any meaningful engagement with the Christian story's response to modernity.* <sup>21</sup>

The fourth phase, the *in-between-world transition*, is the most difficult phase of the process. It is learning to live without any sense of markers and become comfortable with chaos. The great tendency is to look for some outside source of help to bring order to the chaos. However, the outside sources are built on the old paradigm of control and equilibrium. Roxburgh says the "in-between phase is the tension between two options: to recapture what has been lost or risk the discovery of a new future."<sup>22</sup> This is a protracted period of time because a new language and new systems must be introduced and established. In a world where efficiency is one of the highest values there is great pressure to look for a quick fix instead of the slow process of internal and external transformation.

The spiritual edgewalker must keep a kingdom-focused ecclesiology in view if this transition is going to occur. Otherwise, the system will fall back into a church centered or ecclesiocentric mode of operation. It takes time to cultivate new infrastructures that are oriented toward sending and mobilizing instead of toward coming and consuming.

The fifth stage, "*re-formation*," is when the system has emerged from transition and constructed a new identity around the old story, the transforming power of the cross. "A new language, a new set of roles, and a new set of rules have emerged to reveal structures, and ways of living out the old story, that will bear little resemblance to the earlier period of stability."<sup>23</sup>

The "re-formation" of the church will require leaders who are spiritual edgewalkers to have special skills for engaging the

issues, problems, barriers and diversity of viewpoints generated through this process. Spiritual edgewalkers will also need special skills to embrace the great diversity of people, such as the gatekeepers, the traditionalist, the constitutionalist, the radicals and the passive by-standers who emerge. Their role is to guide a church through a death and rebirth process in which the whole gamut of emotions and reactions will be present in various members of the congregation. The spiritual edgewalker must be able to embrace the anger, confusion, depression, frustration, as well as the excitement, visioning and creative strategizing. The church needs spiritual edgewalkers to guide the transitional shift from being a program focused to a kingdom-focused church.

Not only has there been a shift in the church from a church centered approach to mission but there are also several other major shifts going on world-wide that are pressuring the church to become missional in its approach rather than ecclesiocentric. These major shifts are from provincialism to globalization and from suburbanization to urbanization. In this next chapter I will explore the role of spiritual edgewalkers in equipping the church to cope with the globalization and urbanization of our culture.

### 3

## **Spiritual Edgewalkers - Engaging the Global Community**

The church of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is like a fly caught in the web of globalization. As it struggles to get free it becomes more entangled and strangled. The men and women to whom we have sent missionaries for the past one hundred years are now at our doorstep, yet we are still trying to live in our provincial colonialist idealism. Globalization has created a new international interdependent community in every city and town in North America. The capacity of the church to embrace a global culture is eroded by the efforts of church growth philosophies that encourage the church to find the right target audience and construct the right marketing tools to get that group through the doors of the church.

Globalization is a pervasive force that is penetrating every facet of society, changing the way we live on a permanent basis. In his book *Longitudes and Attitudes*, a Pulitzer Prize winning author, Thomas Friedman, researches the global events that led up to 9/11. He builds a case that 9/11 could not have happened under the old international system called the "cold war system," but the emergence of globalization in the 1980's created a new environment for individuals to hold the world hostage with the threat of terror.

As I read Friedman's description of the "cold war system" I realized how the church mirrored the key elements and values of this old system. The church became captive to a cold war mentality. Notice the similarities of the church's posture in the world in this old system.

The cold war system was characterized by one overarching feature – and that was division. That world was a divided-up, chopped up place and whether you were a country or a company, your threats and opportunities in the cold war system tended to grow



out of whom you were divided from. Appropriately, this cold war system was symbolized by a single word – wall, the Berlin Wall. <sup>24</sup>

When I came to Fresno in 1990, the churches of the city were totally disconnected from each other. There was little cooperation or collaboration among congregations, denominations and even Christian leaders. This disconnect was not only true in the church community but also in the political, economic, educational, and healthcare systems of the city. When the Rodney King riots hit Los Angeles, there was a great sense of impending violence and chaos in Fresno. This critical event was the catalyst for Christian leadership and the churches of Fresno to gather for prayer summits that changed the environment of our city.

Out of these prayer summits was born the “No Name Fellowship,” a gathering of Christian leadership from every sector of the city. The unique title “No Name Fellowship” was adopted to prevent the gathering from being labeled theologically and politically. The group included Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, South East Asians and men and women from a great diversity of denominations.

Our mission was “To release God’s resources to rebuild our city through reconciling relationships.” No Name Fellowship was built on three E’s – Exposure, Exchange and Embrace. With that mission and strategy in mind, the No Name Fellowship began meeting in various locations in the city to expose leadership to the critical situations and issues. No place was off-limits. Meetings were held in the county jail, juvenile hall, hospitals, rescue missions, and high school campuses to explore the needs and the critical issues that had to be addressed by the Christian community of Fresno. At each setting we had an exchange of information and ideas by those who were ministering to these critical issues. Finally, we would embrace those working in these areas in prayer and call on

God to raise up leaders from the group to come alongside the brothers and sisters who were making a difference.

Soon, churches and Christian leaders from every sector began to collaborate on projects that would transform our city. In 2001 Billy Graham came to Fresno. Dr. Graham and his staff said Fresno was the best example of cooperation and collaboration of churches and Christian leaders they had ever seen. Usually when the Billy Graham Association comes to a city, they must spend six to eight months building a sense of cooperation and collaboration among the ministries of that city before the planning can get started. This was not needed in Fresno.

Has Fresno arrived? No! Denominational, racial, ethnic, economic and political barriers still exist in the city, but we have come a long way in overcoming them. We are moving from the old cold war mentality toward a newer more globalized perspective that is expressed through networking and connectedness.

The contrast to the old cold war system is the new international system called globalization. Friedman defines globalization as follows:

... as the inexorable integration of markets, transportation systems, and communication systems to a degree never witnessed before – in a way that is enabling corporations, countries and individuals to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before, and in a way that is enabling the world to reach into corporations, countries, and individuals farther, faster and deeper and cheaper than any way before.<sup>25</sup>

This new system is already shaping how the church functions, especially in the area of missions. We have instant communication and live video pictures from the field though

the World Wide Web. The distance between the missionary and the church has been reduced to just a click of a mouse.

The globalization system is different. It also has one overarching feature – and that is integration. The world has become an increasingly interwoven place, and today, whether you are a company or a country, your threats and opportunities increasingly derive from who you are connected to. The globalization system is also characterized by a single word – web, the World Wide Web.<sup>26</sup>

The church is not always prepared to handle this instant communication. Before, communication went through a mission board and was screened and massaged so the local congregations would have a very positive view of the field, lest they reduce their financial support. There was constant fear of saying something negative or sharing problems that were happening on the field. Consequently, churches lived in a certain naiveté of how missions were accomplished on the field.

Now there is direct communication that is unfiltered and often critical of the conditions on the field. Churches are faced with reality and the difficulty of taking the gospel into cross cultural settings. This has had a profound impact on the number of people becoming career missionaries. The church has settled for short term missions, which is safer for the participants but harder on those who are trying to bring lasting transformation on the field. The question must be asked, “Do we have a missiology ready to embrace globalization?”

The Association of Theological School’s Journal explored the implications of globalization relating to the church and theology. Don Browning, one of the researchers on this project, says,

For some, globalization means the church's universal mission to evangelize the world, i.e., to take the message of the gospel to all people, all nations, and all religious faiths. Second, there is the idea of globalization as ecumenical cooperation between the various manifestations of the Christian church throughout the world. . . .

Third, globalization sometimes refers to the dialogue between Christianity and other religions. Finally, globalization refers to the mission of the church to the world, not only to convert and to evangelize, but to improve and develop the lives of millions of poor, starving, and politically disadvantaged people.<sup>27</sup>

The church needs spiritual edgewalkers who will embrace the global mission of the church to share the message of the cross, a message that brings personal transformation of everyone who receives and believes it. We need spiritual edgewalkers who seek to unleash the transforming power of the reign of God in and through the structures of the world to improve and develop the lives of the poor, marginalized and politically disadvantaged.

Mark Heim adds several other dimensions to the concept of globalization that are relevant to spiritual Edgewalkers;

*First, it (globalization) was a substantive refinement of thinking about global mission; it represented the sensitivities and wisdom necessary for a late twentieth-century missionary effort that would avoid the cultural triumphalism of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century efforts, that was anthropologically informed, and that provided a world perspective for the proclamation of the Christian gospel.<sup>28</sup>*

Spiritual edgewalkers can avoid the "triumphalism" of previous generations by understanding that the reign of God is

something people receive or enter. It is not a crusade in which people are brought under submission to the gospel. The spiritual edgewalker engages the culture, religion, and political context as a learner, open to discovering new dimensions that would enhance their own faith system. However, they clearly understand that the Word of God is the litmus test for all proposition of truth.

Heim shares a second dimension of globalization.

*Second, globalization served as a reference for the worldwide and ecumenical connections among Christian churches and movements – a kind of connection or interaction that avoided granting privilege to Western cultural and religious perspectives. This meaning of globalization conveyed a commitment to gain from and value the insights of Christians who were from other cultural settings as much as from those of European and North American origins.* <sup>29</sup>

In Thomas Friedman's definition of globalization, he states that the key word is connection rather than division. The spiritual edgewalker's posture of engaging other cultures and religious perspectives allows them to affirm and value the best in other religious traditions but at the same time hold up a distinctive view of the uniqueness of Christ in the dialogue. This approach allows space for deep conversation and discussion, yet holds the truth as understood from a biblical perspective. Pluralism is not the enemy, but it provides an open forum for intense and creative dialogue. The Christian who craves the comfortable middle or who retreats to the safety of Christendom (the confines of the church in which they live their lives) will never engage the world at this level.

*Third, globalization meant a focus on justice and liberation from oppression, including the critique of political systems that oppressed, a theological care for the world's poor, and a challenge to political and*

*economic systems that cultivate or perpetuate racism, poverty, and human oppression.* <sup>30</sup>

The church needs spiritual edgewalkers who have a clear understanding of the “gospel of Christ” and the “gospel about Christ.” Therefore, they can preach and model the kingdom of God. They can explain how the kingdom can and will break through in every facet of life. The life of Christ demonstrates this very principle. There is not a sector of life that Christ’s ministry did not liberate from the power of Satan, and the Holy Spirit can not give power to call into account to reflect the values of the kingdom.

*Finally, globalization reflected a theological re-thinking of world religions. This fourth use of the term builds on the conviction that in an increasingly post-denominational, even post-Christian, world and in North America where other world religious traditions are practiced in the same neighborhoods as Christianity is practiced, Christianity could no longer have its old privilege as presumption of finality.*<sup>31</sup>

Spiritual edgewalkers realize the dogmatism of modernity will no longer work in a post-Christian, post-modern world. A good example is the dogmatism of the far right. It is perceived by the world as arrogant and strident. Therefore, the message is rejected not because of its content but because of its presentation. We do not have to compromise on the content of the gospel, but we must learn to present this precious truth in a way that engages those who are indoctrinated with the post-modern thinking and value systems.

By affirming their identity in Christ, spiritual edgewalkers can convey the truth of the cross without building walls or using bully pulpits. Through engagement with post-modern thinkers, they discover open doors that allow the gospel to penetrate deep into the soul. Arrogance and stridency only close those

doors and create barriers that prevent the gospel from being relevant and transforming.

The ATS study also ventured into the theological implications of globalization including the concept of a global aspect of the "priesthood of the believers."

*What about a global priesthood of all believers? It is news to most Christian lay people that they belong to a global fellowship of human beings that is the largest and oldest multinational organization in the world, and that the demographic center of the Christian Church today is in the Southern hemisphere, and that there are more Christians in China than in Sweden.* <sup>32</sup>

Spiritual edgewalkers explore the major and minor shifts occurring in the world and seek to interpret them in a relevant way for the church and its mission. Most business people in our churches guide their organizations by interpreting the major trends and shifts in the culture and the global market - and yet never think of applying this insight to the church and its global mission. Part of the reason for this is the provincialism of most pastors who can only see within the walls of their church. They don't perceive the shifts in their communities until it is too threatening and then they move the church to a more "comfortable" location. If they cannot perceive the minor shifts, then how can they see the major shifts in our culture and the global context?

*The retreat of Christendom and the emergence of the less friendly, often indifferent, and sometimes hostile environment of secularism have focused local congregational mission, not on the global arena, but at the front door of the church.* <sup>33</sup>

Spiritual edgewalkers counteract this kind of provincial thinking by seeking to mobilize every sector of the church to create a local and global strategy, the intent of which is to unleash the

power of the gospel and demonstrate the values of the kingdom of God. The opposite, the self-isolation church, is the emergence of the "mega-church movement." These powerful mega churches can construct their own mission strategy with no regard for history or context.

*A second trend is the growth of the mega-churches, which are built on a customer orientation and see their mission in terms of meeting the needs, wants and desires of people within driving distance of their residence. The size and power of these communities make it difficult for them to work within the denominational mission structures. ... The irony in many of these mega-churches is that sometimes they do evolve a missionary zeal for missions in far-off places, imitating in some degree the traditional missionary structures of a denomination. But the result can well be a new force of provincialism – mission chosen according to "our" vision and financed according to "our" decisions – untutored by the wisdom and history of a larger Christian Community. <sup>34</sup>*

I have served as a pastor of the small inner-city church located in the slums and I have also had the privilege of working in and being interim pastor of a mega-church. Both are extremely valuable to impact the incredible diversity of our culture and society. However, the previous statement rings true. The mega-church has the money and personnel to do things the small or medium sized church cannot do. Therefore, it often perceives the denominational and missional structures as being needed by the small and medium sized church because they cannot do it on their own. This creates a spirit of independence to strategize based on their own resources, because they often believe they are helping the denomination by not using resources needed by the small or medium sized church. However, this disconnect eventually leads to a disengagement of not only the denomination but most of the sister churches. A new fellowship with other mega-churches is often created. This



reflects the homogeneous church growth thinking that has warped our mission efforts over the past half century.

Spiritual edgewalkers see the value of connectedness and seek to engage the great and the small in the new community because of a clear understanding of the reign of God. In the new community there is equality and equity where everyone and every organization is valued as a strategic representative of the kingdom of God. In Ephesians 2:19-3:12 the Apostle Paul builds a powerful case for this kind of thinking. The New American translation uses phrases like "fellow-citizens," "fellow-heirs," "fellow-members," and "fellow-partakers" to describe the church. This cluster of terms says a great deal about our connectedness being the way the church becomes a sign and revelation that confronts the principalities and powers of this world. According to Paul Christ intended that the church would be the vehicle through which the power of the kingdom would be unleashed to confront the principalities and powers.

*His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:10-11 NIV)*

Christ has conquered the rulers and authorities of this world and the church collectively is to demonstrate this victory. This is done through its unique qualities of being fellow-citizens of God's household, fellow heirs with the seed of Abraham, fellow-members of the body of Christ and fellow partakers of the Holy Spirit. This empowers us corporately to call these rulers and authorities to their proper place under Christ's rule. Spiritual edgewalkers value and cultivate the connectedness of the body of Christ to unleash the transforming power of a wholistic gospel.

*John Yoder stresses that the community of those who seek to follow Jesus will be the primary social structure through which other structures can be changed and that pattern is one of "creative transformation" through "revolutionary subordination." Thus, the powers will be neither destroyed nor "Christianized" but rather tamed.<sup>35</sup>*

Spiritual edgewalkers realize that globalization is a loaded term because it has spiritual, economic and political ramifications which might appear to be oppressive to some countries. Therefore, spiritual edgewalkers seek to engage our international colleagues to discover a non-Western viewpoint about missions and globalization.

*In the midst of the economic crisis, which triggered the society wide turmoil in Indonesia, "globalization" appears as a deeply sinister force to our Indonesian colleagues. For them it designates the globe-encircling hegemony of a particular cultural diffusion from the West, the interlocking domination of trans-national capital in partnership with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and unaccountable predatory financial institutions. This "globalization" is a self-totalizing system of domination in whose grip cultures, peoples, and nations are crushed, incorporated into a machine that overwhelms humanity at the service of a managerial elite who have more in common with one another than with the populations from which they derive.*

*When theological educators in North America use the term "globalization," we must realize that colleagues in other parts of the world, such as Indonesia, may understand us as their enemy by affirming this global dominion. Such a misunderstanding could alienate us from a large segment of the world's people.<sup>36</sup>*

Spiritual edgewalkers provide space for theological interpretation of world events to be expressed and utilize these perspectives to help shape new and creative theological constructs for dealing with global issues. Spiritual edgewalkers move beyond just learning about other faith systems. They seek to understand the “complex dynamics” of traditional and emerging faith systems.

*There is a move away from “world-religion” language, to talk about formation of Christian/religious identity and a plural/global world. The point of this shift is that it is not enough simply to learn about “other faiths.” We need to understand the complex dynamics of religious formation when a great variety of other faiths is all around us.*

*Furthermore, the current emphasis on cross-cultural relationships not only as “international,” but more broadly relations within groups or institutions in which the international and central focus of the relationship involves crossing boundaries of cultural difference.<sup>37</sup>*

Spiritual edgewalkers embrace and engage diversity to seek new areas of space where dialogue and discovery of mutual ground allows for a creative connectedness both locally and globally. Cynthia Kember, founder of the Edgewalker Institute, shares a similar point of view when she describes cultural edgewalkers.

*The “Edgewalkers” concept is also significant. Because the old solutions aren’t working any more, modern leaders must not only understand global market complexities, they must recognize how these shifts and changing perceptions impact their future as well. Thus, “edgewalking” - the emerging new leadership paradigm - reflects a deeper broader, richer experience of the world. Indeed, the ability to live at the edges – between differing cultures, mindsets, and points of view where all new ideas and paradigms are*

*born – is key to leading successfully during transformational times.* <sup>38</sup>

In the Christian arena we need spiritual edgewalkers who join this new leadership paradigm to guide the church during the new international system called globalization. Believers can no longer stay in the comfortable middle but must learn to live at the edges to discover new ways of engaging the world around them with the gospel.

Thomas Friedman shares a new dimension of globalization that parallels the concept of spiritual edgewalkers. He mentions globalization is controlled by the role of "Superpowers" such as the United States, and China, that have the power to shape world ideas and policies. Secondly, there are "Supermarkets" which are controlled by what he calls the "Electronic Herd." These are the millions of investors who move money around the world in nano-seconds and can literally destroy countries by withdrawing their support or confidence in any given national economy. The fall of the Indonesian economy in 1998 is a good example of this Supermarket power.

The third force shaping globalization is the "Super-empowered individual."

*The third balance that you have to pay attention to - the one that is really the newest of all and the most relevant to the events of 9/11 – is the balance between individuals and nation-states. Because globalization has brought down many walls that limited the movement and reach of people, and because it has simultaneously wired the world into networks, it gives more power to individuals to influence both markets and nation-states than at any time in history. Whether by enabling people to use the Internet to communicate instantly at almost no cost over vast distances, or by enabling them to use the Web to transfer money or obtain weapons designs that normally would have*

*been controlled by states, or by enabling them to go into a hardware store now and buy a five hundred-dollar global positioning device, connected to a satellite, that can direct a hijacked airplane – globalization can be an incredible force-multiplier for individuals. Individuals can increasingly act on the world stage directly, unmediated by a state.*

*So, you have today not only superpower, not only supermarkets, but also what I call "super-empowered individuals." Some of these super-empowered individuals are quite angry, some of them are quite wonderful – but all of them are now able to act much more directly and much more powerfully on the world stage.<sup>39</sup>*

A good example of this is Osama bin Laden's attack on 9/11 which destroyed the twin towers in New York and almost destroyed the Pentagon in Washington DC. He was able to bring a network of terrorist cells together through the world-wide-web and satellite phones to coordinate a devastating attack on the greatest Superpower in the world, the United States. This attack resulted in the first time in history that a superpower went to war against an individual and not a nation-state.

*Osama bin Laden declared war on the United States in the late 1990's. After he organized the bombing of two American embassies in Africa, the U.S. Air Force retaliated with a cruise missile attack on his bases in Afghanistan as though he were another nation-state. Think about that: one day in 1998, the United States fired 75 cruise missiles, at \$1 million apiece, at a person! That was the first battle in history between a superpower and a super-empowered angry man. September 11 was just the second such battle.<sup>40</sup>*

Imagine this ability of one "super-empowered individual." What could a "super-empowered spiritual edgewalker" accomplish? That power can be used for good or for evil. Friedman shares the story of Jody Williams.

*Jody Williams won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for helping to build an international coalition to bring about a treaty outlawing land mines. Although nearly 120 governments endorsed the treaty, it was opposed by Russia, China and the United States. When Jody Williams was asked, "How did you do that? How did you organize one thousand citizen groups and nongovernmental organizations on five continents to forge a treaty that was opposed by the major powers?" she had a very brief answer: "E-mail." Jody Williams used e-mail and the networked world to super-empower herself.* <sup>41</sup>

These examples are both tremendously exciting and deeply troubling. Christians have not even begun to realize the potential of being spiritual edgewalkers. We must realize that the Christian movement is more than a movement of individuals, but a collective body where we are "fellow-citizens," "fellow-heirs," "fellow-members," and "fellow-partakers" of the promise which is the Holy Spirit. The body of Christ is the spiritually networked world capable of bringing transformation and redemption to a global society. Spiritual edgewalkers collectively could and should challenge the economic, political, educational, and social structures in our world by demonstrating individually and collaboratively the values of the kingdom of God and by proclaiming the good news of the Cross of Christ.

## **Old Testament Spiritual Edgewalkers**

After reading Nina Boyd Krebs' book on "Edgewalkers" and working with a definition of spiritual edgewalkers, my reading of the Old Testament took on new meaning. I was surprised by the number of Old Testament individuals who were also challenged or led by God to move out of their comfort zones and engage new cultural contexts. Some individuals such as Abraham and Nehemiah sensed a deep call of God to leave their country, go into a foreign land and engage people of diverse cultures and very pluralistic contexts. Others like Daniel, Joseph, Ruth, and Esther found themselves caught in turbulent times or providential circumstances that removed them from their comfort zones and placed them in contexts where they had to become spiritual edgewalkers to survive.

Once again, I was struck by how parallel these stories are to many of our stories. Some of us have a deep burden or calling to leave our comfort zones and venture into unknown territory. Others are ripped out of our cultural safety net and cast into uncharted waters to learn how to survive in a foreign context.

Most of us are living in turbulent times, where our world is changing and shifting more rapidly than we can adjust. Our communities have seen new people groups, religions and worship places pop up in staggering numbers. We are forced to become spiritual edgewalkers in our communities and churches. The Old Testament leaders I have chosen represent men and women also caught up in turbulent times. They became spiritual edgewalkers not by choice but because they were forced to adjust to a new context and new world.

## **4**

### **An Egyptian Spiritual Edgewalker – Joseph**

Joseph became a spiritual edgewalker through the harshest and cruelest circumstances that can be imagined. He was not like Daniel who because of external political forces was removed from his comfortable life and carried to a new culture. Nor is he like Ruth who because of famine was forced to make a choice of a new culture and people. It was internal family forces that ripped Joseph from his place of favor and shoved him into a new cultural context where he would have to be an edgewalker. Joseph was sold into slavery because of the hatred and deceit of his very own brothers. One of the most crushing blows anyone can experience is to be abused and abandoned by their own family. There was no one to plead Joseph's case. There was no one to hear his cry!

In urban ministry I have ministered to every imaginable kind of spiritual, emotional, physical and sexual abuse within families. I have watched families hurt, maim and kill one another. During my first pastorate, while I was a second-year seminary student at Dallas Seminary, I got a call one day from a frantic woman on the phone saying, "Come quick, Uncle John's been shot!" I recognized the voice and immediately jumped into my car and sped to the house where the call was made. When I arrived, I saw Uncle John staggering down the sidewalk towards his pickup truck, blood gushing from his side. I stopped him and laid him down in the yard and tried to stop the flow of blood until the paramedics got there. I could hear the sirens in the distance because the first call was not to me but to 911.

The paramedics arrived and began to work on Uncle John and I went into the blood-smeared house to see what had happened. The police were arriving on the scene and because I was a pastor they let me talk with the family to find out what had happened. The account I was given was that the mother owed her brother, Uncle John, some money and could not pay



it then John showed up in a drunken stupor demanding to be paid. In his cloudy condition, he became aggressive and began to physically abuse the mother. A son in the family who loved guns and was a security guard had rushed into the room with a 357-magnum pistol and ordered John to back away. In his confusion, John turned and reached for the young man only to grab the pistol and pull on it. The nephew's finger was on the trigger. The gun went off blowing a good size hole in John's right side. The police took the young man into custody and sent Uncle John to Parkland Hospital.

I stayed a bit longer with the mother of the house and tried to calm her down. I ministered to her and I then went to the hospital to inquire about the condition of her brother, Uncle John. By the time I arrived at the hospital a large group of this family had gathered. When I entered the emergency area there was already a good deal of agitation and hostility growing towards the nephew that did the shooting. One young man, who was the son of Uncle John, was stirring up the crowd and was talking about taking revenge. Most of the violence and killing in our community was between family members and motivated by a deep sense of an eye for an eye, until the whole family is blind.

I listened for a few moments, walked through the crowd and grabbed the young man by his shirt and lifted him off the ground and said, "I am a minister and I am here to pray that your father lives through this. If you are going to talk about revenge and killing, then I am not going to pray for him. Unless you change your mind right now your father will have no one to pray for him!" At that I threw him into one of those plastic molded chairs and said "I will be in the chapel! If you are willing to forgive then come and let me know and I will pray for your father." In urban ministry, that is what we call "direct counseling."

It was only a few minutes before this young man came to the chapel and said he would forgive the cousin and asked if I

could pray for his dad. It was then that I realized I was really in trouble. What if I prayed and John died - then what kind of violence would happen? I remember having quite a conversation with the Lord that afternoon.

John survived with one less kidney and without a spleen. There was no retaliation within the family. The nephew was released on an accidental shooting charge and assigned to me for a period of probation. Pastors get to play a lot of interesting roles in inner-city work. Somehow, my professors forgot to mention these kinds of situations in class when I was in seminary.

Joseph had no one to come to his side and plead his case or help him in his distress. His brothers had concocted a jealous plot to kill him but instead sold him to a band of Midianites. Then they convinced their father that Joseph was dead by showing him the coat, which he had made for his son covered with blood. Everything Joseph had understood about family had now been shattered. Instead of being a brother he was now a slave being carried to a foreign land. Can you imagine how shattering this must have been for Jacob and Rachel as well?

Spiritual edgewalkers are often born in the crucible of pain, suffering, tragedy, and chaos. Every story in Dr. Krebs book on Edgewalkers<sup>1</sup> relates to pain from discrimination, rejection, abandonment, or hatred. Every major character in the bible that had a transformational lifestyle went through fiery trial. Joseph is no exception. It was pain that shaped his life and forged him into becoming a spiritual edgewalker.

We live in a world that avoids pain at all cost. The media constantly reminds us we do not need to experience pain. Just take a pill! I grew up in a family where we denied pain. If you were sick you hid it from everyone because it was a sign of weakness to complain about pain or sickness. My dad would ridicule us and tell us no one likes a whiner. Therefore, my two

brothers and I have found it difficult to recognize and deal with physical, emotional and spiritual pain in our lives. We learned to live in a constant state of denial. However, recently my older brother, my twin brother and I have had to face the reality of pain and weakness as we all had to undergo heart transplants within seven years of each other. Our wives have been used by the Lord to teach us how to talk about pain and suffering and not to mask it but change and grow in our lives through it.

The other great tendency in our culture is to try to put grief or pain behind us quickly. We are lured into thinking that everything in life has a quick fix, so why not pain or grief? Well, it just doesn't work that way. We do not allow people time to grieve or work through pain. There are certain kinds of pain such as divorce, death of a loved one - or greater yet the suicide of a loved one, sexual abuse or abandonment that stays with us the rest of our lives. How many times are we asked, "Are you over it yet?" The person asking is usually looking for their own reassurance because they are anxious and don't know how to relate to your pain. The hurt of losing my dad with a heart attack when I was in high school and my mom with cancer when I was in seminary is always just below the surface. <sup>2</sup>

Joseph had a unique inner quality and spiritual perspective that allowed him to rise above his painful circumstances, demonstrate great gifts and abilities and exercise reconciliation at a critical time in the life of his family. This spiritual perspective is clearly demonstrated as Joseph confronts his brothers toward the end of the story as recorded in the scriptures.

*Then Joseph said to his brothers "Come close to me. When they had done so he said, I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years there has been*

*famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” Gen. 45:4-7 NIV*

Joseph demonstrated spiritual edgewalking at its best. He lived on the edge of life, looked beyond his own personal circumstances and saw that his life was not just about himself. It had a purpose far greater than his personal disappointments, desires or pleasures. He indicated in the above passage and again in Gen. 50:19-21 that the intentions of the brothers to harm him have been used by God on a much grander scale. His life was to be the point of deliverance not only for his family but for all the people of Egypt. Spiritual edgewalkers attempt to look beyond themselves and their personal circumstances to discover the purpose of God for their lives in serving others.

Let's return to the beginning of the story and see how Joseph became a spiritual edgewalker. Why did Joseph's brothers dislike him to the point of trying to kill him? There are many commentaries that create a profile of Joseph as an arrogant young favorite child. He boasted of his dreams - which he believed demonstrated, his favored position in the family. Therefore, commentators assume he was the cause of the problem.

However, as I read the story I am more inclined to agree with the view of Ronald Wallace in his book *The Story of Joseph and the Family of Jacob*.<sup>3</sup> He indicates that the root of the problem is not so much familial rivalry but spiritual conflict. The difference between Joseph and his brothers that caused such great tension and animosity was not just a birthright issue but a *spiritual* birthright issue.

If you remember the story, Jacob was tricked by Laban, the father of Leah and Rachel. (Gen 29:15-30) Laban promised

Rachel to Jacob if he would work as a shepherd for seven years. On their wedding night Laban sent Leah, the older daughter, to Jacob instead of Rachel and when Jacob woke up the next morning he was with Leah instead of Rachel. Therefore, he had to work seven more years to gain Rachel, who was his first love.

Leah bore Jacob four sons (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah) but Rachel was barren. This dilemma caused a great deal of ridicule and jealousy between Rachel and Leah. Rachel, in a barren anguish, offered Jacob her maidservant Bilhah with whom he had Dan and Naphtali. Then when Leah realized she could not have any more children she offered her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob and they had Gad and Asher. God then opened Leah's womb again and she had two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun and a daughter Dinah.

Finally, after ten sons were born, Rachel had Joseph and Benjamin. Jacob loved Joseph and Benjamin the most and set Joseph apart by making him a distinctive robe or coat. There is great variation as to what made this robe distinct. Some commentators say it was multi-colored, others say long-sleeved and others say it was richly ornamented. The text does not allow us to determine exactly what made it distinctive, but the results are the same. The robe caused intense jealousy among the six brothers who were born to Leah.

The six sons of Leah were the oldest and therefore felt superior to Joseph who was next to the last born out of twelve children. However, when you examine the lives of these six brothers in the scripture you find some unpleasant traits. In Gen. 34 we find that Simeon and Levi deceived the Shechemites into being circumcised with a promise to share equally with them the land. After the Shechemites were circumcised and unable to fight, Simeon and Levi came against the city with their swords and killed all the males in the city and looted the city for revenge because their sister Dinah had been violated by Shechem, son of Hamor.

In Genesis 35 the story is told of Reuben committing incest with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine, who bore Naphtali and Dan. And in Gen. 38:1-26, Judah went to live with the Canaanites and had three sons. Judah found a Canaanite wife named Tamar for his first-born son Er, who was killed by God because of his wickedness. Tamar was then given to the second son Onan, who refused to have children with her and was killed because of his wickedness. Judah made false promises to Tamar and was tricked by her when she played the part of a prostitute and she became pregnant by him. Finally, Judah found out Tamar was pregnant and desired to kill her for playing the part of the prostitute, only to be reminded by Tamar, who had kept Judah's seal and staff, that he was the father of the child.

As Wallace points out,

*What made Joseph so radically different from his brothers comes to full light in his rejection of Potiphar's wife: "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (39:9). The division within the family involved much deeper issues than who belonged to which mother, or who had a long-sleeved coat and who had none. We can understand it fully only by realizing that the brothers at this time were, as a body, adopting aims and values of their own, in reaction to the family tradition. Only Joseph, apart and alone, had listened to the same call that had isolated Abraham, Issac, and Jacob from their "world," the call that had made them men of God and different. In Joseph, the brothers faced a new and vital embodiment of the view of God and life they had already excluded from their own pattern and way of things. They hated him the more because they clearly recognized it in him. Each in his turn had crushed it from within himself. Joseph to them was what they had decided not to be."*<sup>4</sup>

The use of dreams by God to speak to his people was not uncommon in that day. The role of the seer or dreamer was of great value in the surrounding nations as well within Israel. Joseph is chosen by God to be a prophetic voice to his family and to the nations. However, the brothers and even Joseph's father failed to recognize the difference between a prophetic voice and personal ambitions. The more I read these accounts of Joseph sharing his dreams, the more I came to admire his courage to share God's word in a very difficult context. Imagine for a moment how hard it is to bring the Word of God to your own family. For most people this is the most difficult task they face in trying to share their faith. It is so much easier to share the Word of God with strangers than with our own relatives.

Joseph had the courage to declare the word of God. This side of Joseph was never explained to me as I grew up in church and Sunday school. I always heard the story interpreted in a way that it made it seem like Joseph was bragging and trying to taunt his brothers with these wild dreams that clearly demonstrated they were to take a position of submission to him. Like most families the competitiveness of siblings and especially that of boys is intense. Therefore, to have one brother declare a truth it would seem as though he were trying to pull rank and cause the others to submit. But what if that word was from God and the person delivering it felt, like Jeremiah, it was like fire in his bones that he could no longer hold within? I have come to realize it took tremendous courage to declare the Word of God in such a setting. Even Joseph's father rebuked him and yet the text says in Gen. 37:11 "that he kept Joseph's words in his mind."

As a spiritual edgewalker Joseph was prophetic in the sense he was faithful to declare the Word of God and let it confront the context. He walked a fine line between declaring the Word boldly and yet not coercing his family. It is not our job to change people, but we must have a passionate belief that people can change, both inwardly and outwardly. Bedrock

truth is revealed in Rom. 10:17 "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (NIV) It is the job of the scriptures and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit to bring transformation to a person's life. Our job is to be faithful in presenting the Word of God.

We also must realize not everyone presents the Word of God in the same manner. Joseph was bold and declared the message to his family. He was probably quite young and had little experience in tact. However, God used his message to set in motion a chain of events that would eventually result in the salvation of not only his family, but the nations around Egypt.

I have learned over the years to never despise anyone who presents the Word of God. When I take my students on excursions into the major cities and we inevitably meet some preacher on a street corner shouting out a message from the Word of God, I remind myself, and my students God is using that person to bring His message to someone I would probably never reach. Even though this is not what you or I have been called to do, nor is it a medium you or I might agree with, it is the Word, which is powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, that can pierce through bone and marrow and reach the soul. If you have personally done street preaching and open-air gospel presentations, you know it certainly takes you out of your comfortable middle to the edge of faith to proclaim the message of God. For most of us we are out of our comfort zone in just talking across the fence or inviting people into our homes or hooking up with someone to guide them through Operation Timothy.<sup>5</sup> Spiritual edgewalkers should be willing to leave the comfortable middle to share the truth of God's word with a broken world.

Joseph did not just proclaim the Word of God, but he lived by it. This truth comes to light in his encounter with Potiphar's wife. (Gen 39) Joseph was bought by the captain of Pharaoh's guard and was quickly elevated because of his administrative



skills and wise decisions. Joseph was placed in charge of Potiphar's entire household and became the vehicle through which God poured out his blessing on Potiphar's household. As representatives of the kingdom of God we are to unleash God's blessing in whatever sector of life experience God places us. There is a significant role for every believer to bring transformation to the business, the educational, health-care, political, or whatever sector in which you have been placed. This concept has been lost in a good number of our churches. We have turned the church into a recruiting ground to try to capture everyone to be involved in the church. However, the church is not just a gathered body of diverse people who embrace Jesus in a personal way. It is also a scattered body of unique people with diverse occupations who take the presence of Jesus with them into the marketplace where God has placed them. Our churches contain men and women from every sector of society who can unleash God's transformational power in that sector or help that sector unleash God's resources to help the poor.

Joseph was not preaching in Potiphar's household. He was using the skills and abilities God had placed in his life and using them with integrity to benefit his employer. This resulted in him gaining great favor in Potiphar's eyes, so he was trusted with all of Potiphar's possessions. If we as Christians would demonstrate the same kind of work ethic and integrity of lifestyle, we would gain the same kind of favor in non-Christian settings. This kind of lifestyle would provide a base for us to share that the source of our moral values, work ethic and integrity is Jesus Christ.

We tend to put too much pressure on ourselves to evangelize and consequently we are always worried about the presentation rather than the lifestyle. When the Christian lifestyle is done well, the presentation is easy. I am not saying the presentation is not important, because I personally believe no one will get into heaven by just looking at my life or the life of any other believer. Romans 10:17 clearly states faith is born

out of the Word of God. Therefore, we do have to share at some point that Jesus entered this world, lived a sinless life, died and rose again from the grave that we might have victory over sin and death.

We tend to swing the pendulum to one side or the other. We are often all about witnessing or all about lifestyle evangelism. In a post-modern and post-Christian world we must bring a new balance to the process of disciple-making. Our story must be authenticated through our consistency and integrity in the market place.

Joseph's integrity was soon put to the test when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him into an illicit sexual relationship. However, Joseph had integrated the Word of God into his life and it had shaped his concept of justice toward his physical and spiritual masters. His response to this woman (who is never given a name), demonstrated that he was not willing to violate the trust relationship of his employer, his physical master, nor is he willing to violate the trust relationship with God, his spiritual master.

Joseph's ability to listen to God provided him with a spiritual sensitivity that empowered him to resist this temptation. We have no idea what Joseph's spiritual devotional life was like, but we do know that he was sensitive to the leading and the voice of God. He spiritually encountered the living God.

It would have been so easy for Joseph to rationalize that since he was abandoned and rejected by his own family, it would be all right to adopt an Egyptian lifestyle and enjoy the good life. Like Daniel in Babylon, Joseph had to make a critical decision with grave consequences. No one would know and actually no one could blame Joseph if he lived a dual life or assimilated into the Egyptian culture. However, integrity is doing what is right when no one is around. Joseph valued his relationship with God and with his employer more than a sensual and sexual relationship with this powerful woman.

The response of Potiphar is interesting in that he could have had Joseph killed immediately. This certainly would be the normal response to an unfaithful slave in this Egyptian context. The fact that Potiphar spared Joseph's life and put him in prison indicates that he did not totally believe his wife's charge. Therefore, he spared Joseph's life but was forced by the circumstances to place him in prison. Whether Joseph was in the palace of the Captain of the Guard or in prison, his integrity and lifestyle were the same. His trustworthiness and efficiency in his work helped him gain favor with both prisoners and guards.

It is impossible to examine all 13 chapters in this limited space, so I will focus primarily on Joseph's encounter with Pharaoh and his transformational role in community and economic development. Dreams remain the focal point of these chapters, just as they were in the previous sections of scriptures describing Joseph's life. But now it was Pharaoh who had such vivid dreams that he knew they must have some significance for the future of his kingdom. Pharaoh gathered all the magicians and wise men of Egypt and inquired as to the interpretation of the dream, but they could not tell him the interpretation. Then, the king's cupbearer remembered Joseph interpreted his dream while in prison and that it came true. Therefore, Joseph (who is identified as a young Hebrew) is called out of prison and brought before the Pharaoh. Somehow Joseph's cultural and spiritual identity had not been lost in the Egyptian culture. He had remained true to his cultural heritage and those around him are aware that he was a Hebrew.

When Joseph appeared before Pharaoh he was requested to interpret the dream. Joseph immediately recasts the king's request from being on a human level to a spiritual plain. He confessed his ability to interpret dreams was not of human origin but of supernatural origin. "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." (Gen 41:16 NIV) Joseph interjected Jehovah the God

of Israel and thereby created a space in the Egyptian pantheon of gods for the God of Israel. It would have been easy for Joseph to remain silent about the source of his power. After all that had happened to him it was quite amazing that he so quickly praised the omniscient God of the Hebrews. Remember, Joseph had been almost killed by his brothers and then sold into slavery, unjustly accused by his employer's wife and placed in prison. Instead of withdrawing from God and disconnecting from his faith, Joseph was fully dependent upon the God of Israel and saw Jehovah as the prime mover of history.

Joseph's declarations open our theological perspective to embrace the idea that God does not only speak to the descendants of Israel, but he speaks to those who are outside this covenant relationship. This is a hard concept for many Christians to comprehend. They often look at non-Christian religions as having no value and believe God cannot possibly reveal himself in any other religious system. Yet when one studies the Old Testament it becomes apparent God speaks through many of the pagan kings to reveal his will and plans for this world. Nebuchadnezzar's dreams revealed the future of the nations of the world, and here Pharaoh's dream reveals the future of the Egyptian world which also impacts Israel. God loved the world and the nations of this world and revealed himself to every generation (Heb. 1:1-3). How they responded to his revelation is often distorted by their personal and cultural biases, just like our understanding of his revelation is distorted by an American, materialistic, democratic viewpoint.

In my ministry I have engaged a great number of religious traditions both here and abroad. I have discovered within their systems new insights into many of our Christian concepts such as reconciliation, justice, peace, and sacrificial love. Things I thought were uniquely Christian can be found in many of the religious systems of the world. Could it be God has revealed truth in and through these other religious systems? I would have to say, yes. Does this mean that I have abandoned the

uniqueness of Christ and his claim to be the way, the truth, and the life? I would respond, no!

However, when I have viewed other religious systems as containing some of the values and concepts of Christianity, it allows me to embrace and engage those systems with a desire to learn from them as well as a desire to share the unique difference of Christianity. This perspective creates a space for creative interaction and dialogue where new insights and personal convictions can be shared without the intense divisiveness of polarization.

Joseph created a space in the Egyptian religious system for the God of Israel to be seen as omniscient and omnipotent and consequently, greater than all of the gods of Egypt and even the Pharaoh. He also communicated God was willing to give Pharaoh the answers he desired but God would act according to his plan and Pharaoh was the one who would have to respond. *Gen. 41:15-32*

When Pharaoh looked for a man to develop a strategy in response to the dreams, he was led to Joseph. He had seen in Joseph a consistent core of truth that was certain and yet allowed space for others. Pharaoh recognized power and wisdom in Joseph that was not in the other leaders in his court.

*Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all of this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you. (Gen 41:39-40 NIV)*

Through Joseph's prophetic words, a kingdom of this world is brought into subjection to the kingdom of God. Joseph became the person who carried out a plan of redemption and grace to the Egyptian and Israelite world. In our narrow evangelical

theology, we usually only see God as the redeemer of Israel; however, God has been a redeemer for many peoples of the earth and he is a God who hears the cries of the helpless wherever they may be. Walter Brueggemann wrote a challenging article on this concept titled "Exodus in the Plural (Amos 9:7)"<sup>6</sup> where he entertains the notion that Amos' prophecy reveals God as the deliver of many nations not just Israel.

*Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?  
Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt?  
the Philistines from Caphtor  
and the Arameans from Kir? (Amos 9:7*

This startling verse indicates that God has heard the cry of pagan nations such as the Cushites (Ethiopians) Philistines and the Arameans and has been their deliverer just like he has delivered Israel. This prophetic insight allows us to understand our God as a missionary God full of grace, who desires redemption for the whole world. Israel had become complacent toward the nations and had adopted their cultural and religious ways rather than lifting up the name of God like Joseph had done before Pharaoh. Joseph indicated that the sovereign God of the cosmos is in control and is a redeeming missionary God by revealing his will even through pagan kings. For most of us, this is a very big stretch to our theology.

Brueggemann gives some interesting insights concerning the actions of those who think they are God's sole possession on the earth.

*The problem he (Amos) addressed is not that the Israelites did not believe in Yahweh but that they believed too much. They believed not only that Yahweh alone is God but also that Israel alone is God's people. A consequence of this ideological linkage is that Israel became self satisfied in its ethics and in its*

*worship, so that its very "orthodoxy" became a warrant for self-indulgence (cf. Amos 4:4-5, 6:1-6) <sup>7</sup>*

Joseph had no such isolationistic view of God but understood that Yahweh was carrying out His plan even through Pharaoh. It is this same kind of thinking that allowed Joseph to integrate the actions of his brothers into his theology. Instead of treating them as enemies he understood that no matter what their actions, God had been working behind the scenes as the great deliverer and redeemer. This is expressed in his statement to his brothers in Gen 45:4-7

*Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance." (NIV)*

Joseph had the ability to look behind the scenes of the human dilemma and see the hand of God at work. As a spiritual edgewalker he understood the greatness of God's grace to save not only Egypt but to save his very own family so that a remnant might be preserved. Joseph does not focus on himself but keeps his focus on the world and lives at the edge, experiencing God's redemptive work in physical and spiritual ways. Think how easy it would have been for Joseph to withdraw into himself and become a survivor instead of a vessel of grace for those who were in need. Joseph realized it was not all about him, but it was about God's redemptive work in the world.

Is this not a lesson the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to learn as well? Have we fallen into the trap of thinking we are the sole possession of God and it is all about us? The consumer mentality of church today is built on the expectation that God is in the business of meeting our needs. Consequently, we have become myopic and failed to see the great work of redemption God wants to do among the needy around us. We tend to only think of the spiritual dimension instead of thinking in a wholistic way. God uses our acts of kindness and ministries of mercy to draw men and women to himself. When the Church displays the works of grace and mercy that so typify the kingdom of God, people become desirous to embrace the King.

Have we like Israel, become so satisfied with our ethics, worship and orthodoxy that we are missing the opportunity to be part of the great redemptive work of God in our world? Denominational statistics demonstrate the church in America is in decline. Is it any wonder the church of North America is a sick church? Maybe we need a whole generation of spiritual edgewalkers like Joseph who will engage and embrace the systems of this world to unleash their resources to help the needy and disenfranchised, so kingdom values will be displayed, and men and women will look for the King of Kings.

As we look at Joseph we can see that spiritual edgewalkers are:

1. Born in the crucible of pain and suffering.
2. Look beyond themselves and their personal circumstances to discover the purpose of God for their lives in serving others.
3. Willing to sacrifice their place in the comfortable middle to share the Word of God in difficult contexts.
4. Become prophetic by sharing the Word of God boldly.
5. Willing to leave the comfortable middle to share the truth of God's word with a broken world.
6. Unleash God's blessing and presence in whatever setting God has placed them.



7. Demonstrate integrity in the marketplace to gain a place of favor in which they can share their story of faith.
8. Create space through consistent living where faith issues can be explored and embraced by observers.
9. Resist temptation by developing a listening spirit to God's voice through His Word.
10. Ground their integrity in biblical values and not circumstances.
11. Utilize their spiritual core values to keep them from compromising their lifestyle
12. Create space within other religious systems to explore the uniqueness of Christ.
13. See God as a missionary God full of grace desiring the redemption of all the nations of the world.
14. Unleash the resources under their control to serve the purposes of the kingdom of God.

## 5

### **A Moabite Spiritual Edgewalker – Ruth**

Tragedy is often a powerful shaper of life and character. The pain of loss can either draw out the best in someone's character or it can destroy that person. It is ultimately a personal choice how to respond to the great calamities of life. The Old Testament story of Ruth is rooted in the depths of tragedy, yet out of the ashes of pain and loss comes one of the most beautiful stories of courage, commitment and faith. Ruth becomes a spiritual edgewalker out of necessity. She is left with very few choices but demonstrates incredible ability as she walks on the edge of life moving into a brand-new culture, new country, new religion, and new marriage. Her life providentially becomes entwined with the lineage of David, King of Israel, and Jesus, King of Kings.

Ruth was from the land of Moab which was the region East of the Dead Sea. The nation of Moab was bordered on the South by the Edomites and on the North by the Ammonites. Moab and Ammon were the children of Lot born through incestuous relationships with his daughters. After Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Lot's daughters thought they would not have children because they lived in a cave hidden in the mountains outside of Zoar (Gen.19:30-38). The daughters enticed Lot to drink too much wine and then went in to him and became pregnant. This is the beginning of the Moabites and Ammonites. The Moabites and Ammonites had a history of rejecting the Israelites when they wanted to pass through their land. The king of Moab hired Balaam to curse and destroy Israel. However, through a divine encounter with God speaking through his donkey, he blessed Israel. ((*Numbers 22-24*) When this tactic failed the King deceived Israel by sending the women of Moab to mingle with Israel and consequently they fell into apostasy by embracing the gods of the Moabites. (*Num. 25:1-2*) Throughout Israel's history they are reminded to separate themselves from "all those of foreign descent." (*Neh. 13:1*)

Our story concerning Ruth begins when famine came to the land of Israel in the time of the Judges. Naomi, her husband, and two sons went down from Bethlehem of Judah to the land of Moab to find food. The names in the book of Ruth reveal the intention of the story. Bethlehem means, "house of bread," but because of a sin cycle going on at the time of Judges, Yahweh allowed a famine in the land. The name of Naomi's husband was Elimelech, or God is King. The sovereign presence of God is seen working behind the scenes throughout the book of Ruth. The sons of Naomi are named Mahlon (sickly) and Kilion (pining, weak) and they lived just ten years after they married Orpah and Ruth, who were Moabites. Naomi also made a play on words on her name when she returned to Bethlehem after her husband and sons died. She said do not call me Naomi (pleasantness or delight) but call me "Mara" (bitterness) (Ruth 1:20-21).

These two widowed women had to challenge a male dominated society in which women without husbands were marginalized. Joan D. Chittister has written a powerful book, "The Story of Ruth: Twelve Moments in Every Woman's Life," which captures the struggle of women in a society that tends to oppress them.<sup>8</sup> The struggles of Naomi and Ruth parallel those women in every society who are marginalized.

The systems produced through culture, economics, politics and religion are fallen systems and are oppressive to those who do not have power. Therefore, the poor or those who have experienced calamity in their lives get caught in these systems and find they are helpless. Spiritual edgewalkers do not allow the systems to overcome them or marginalize them but engage the systems of the world by affirming their identity and demonstrating the transforming power of God in their walk and their talk. This statement characterizes the life of Ruth. She demonstrated the tenacity of faith by her willingness to leave the familiar and engage a whole new set of unknown systems.

The transformational point in Ruth's life is demonstrated in her choice to leave Moab, and go with her mother-in-law, Naomi. Although Ruth is a Moabitess she made the decision to embrace the God and the people of Israel. Ruth had to understand when she made this decision that there was little chance the people of Judah would accept her as a member of their community.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the story, Ruth is referred to as a Moabite woman, which signals she was forced to walk between two cultures. However, her statement to Naomi, which is used in many marriage ceremonies, demonstrated her new inner allegiance and spiritual core.

*But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will become my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." (Ruth 1:16-17 NIV)*

Ruth was declaring her new identity and making a break from her past to a new allegiance to the living God of Israel. This new identity would sustain her and allow her freedom to trust God to guide her in dealing with the systems of a new country and culture. Ruth never seems to assimilate into the culture of the Israelites but walks that fine line of being both a Moabite and yet an Israelite wife fulfilling the laws of the covenant.<sup>10</sup> Orpah, on the other hand, made a choice as well. She decided to return to Moab and embrace her people and her gods.

Ruth is faced with long term discrimination on a physical level even though her heart has claimed a new allegiance to the God of Israel. However, her spiritual tenacity and faith to follow the Lord and the wise counsel of her mother-in-law allowed her to rise above the stigma of being a Moabite and become a "woman of noble character."

Spiritual edgewalkers tend to transcend the physical discrimination of the world by embracing the living God through Christ and become part of a new spiritual family that crosses all racial and ethnic boundaries. Nina Boyd Krebs discovered the people she identified as “edgewalkers” sought spiritual or mystical encounter that helped them find special connectedness with others.<sup>11</sup>

Krebs points to a general cosmic connectiveness, a “unifying spiritual energy that connects people.” We as Christians find our common denominator in the person of Christ, who we believe is the full and final expression of the living God. He has broken down the walls of discrimination. Ruth made this connection with the living God in whose image she was created. Because of that, she was capable of relating to and embracing a very different political, economic, religious and cultural group of people.

Ruth’s statement uses both “Elohim” (the almighty God) and “Yahweh” (the covenant making God) which seems to indicate Ruth had a pretty clear understanding of Naomi’s God. The phrase, “your God will be my God,” demonstrates a major break from her past and the beginning of a new adventure with the God of Israel guiding her. Ruth put aside her allegiance to the Moabite tribal god Chemosh, who demanded Moabite children be passed through the fire. In Numbers 21:29 the Moabites are referred to as the “People of Chemosh.” Ruth had seen the cruel demands of this tribal god and had come to understand the contrast to the Covenant God of Israel who sought to deliver his people. She publicly embraced the living God of her mother-in-law.<sup>12</sup>

The personalization of a relationship with the living God brings into our lives the reality of what it means to be created in the image of God (*Imagio Dei*). Understanding the theological concept of “*Imagio Dei*” works two ways in our lives. First, it helps us realize we are created in God’s image and therefore

our identity is not dependent on the expectations or evaluations of others. Our identity is based in a relationship with the eternal God, our creator. Our goal in this relationship is to discover his creative design for our lives and to use the gifts and talents he has invested in us to return glory to him. Second, when we begin to see people around us as created in the image of God, we will value them in a new way. We will realize that no matter how they act, or what they look like or smell like, what social strata they are caught in, or what they have done, each person is precious and has great value to God.

This powerful truth has helped me greatly in ministry to keep in check my feelings or responses to gang-bangers, alcoholics, drug addicts, slum landlords, white-collar criminals, and corrupt politicians. Each one is precious to God and of great value as his creation. Therefore, I am to love them no matter how warped by sin they might be. It is not about loving the sinner but not the sin. This kind of mental bifurcation leads to a shallow relationship built on performance. We must learn to love men and women in their sin. Christ loved us while we were yet sinners.<sup>13</sup>

Ruth not only declared her allegiance to Naomi's land, people and God but she declared her allegiance to Naomi. The text says Ruth clung to Naomi. The word for "cling" in this text is the same in Genesis where a man is told to leave his mother and father and cling to his new wife. Ruth put her personal desires aside and worked for justice and the redemption of Naomi. Little did Ruth realize that her personal redemption by Boaz would also be the redemption Naomi needed.

After this initial declaration of allegiance, the rest of the book of Ruth demonstrates Ruth's commitment to caring for Naomi and to defining her new role in a Jewish society. Slowly, Ruth became aware of the laws and the Levitical customs that allowed for those who are widows and poor to sustain themselves by gleaning the fields after the harvesters have cut

and bundled the grain. Ruth was ready to embrace this new reality and trust the Lord for provision.

There are those who interpret Ruth's quest as one of becoming independent, free from Naomi and the structures of a Jewish society. This kind of thinking tends to reflect the individualistic thinking of our current society, which often leads to isolation and the destruction of community.

*If the book of Ruth says anything to our time, it is about a woman's claim to independence, to be a freely functioning person rather than a thing. Ruth the alien, the minority, "the woman of color" in a Jewish world, faces a stony environment with small chance of besting it. She is an ethnic outsider, a widow, and a woman alone. In the final analysis, she has little upon which to rely but a strong sense of self, the virtue of bravado, and the magnet in her heart that drew her with relentless might toward the Creator's will for all creation, herself included.* <sup>14</sup>

I do not agree that Ruth was striving for independence. Ruth was operating with the concept of interdependence by consulting and listening to her mother-in-law for guidance. Ruth seems to understand the benefits of community. As the story unfolds, she found herself in the very field of one who could be her kinsman-redeemer. There is a fine line between independence and interdependence where we understand our individual identity but choose to rely on the counsel of God and the new community to guide our decisions.

It is insightful to note the way the new community helped those who were helpless. The community demonstrated an interdependence between relatives, employees and employers to create a "workfare" system where people retained dignity and yet were able to have their needs met. This is a remarkable contrast to a "welfare" system which creates long-term dependency and destroys human dignity and initiative.

Ruth was both the worker and the provider. She modeled a balance of self-sufficiency and yet interdependence, self-motivation yet obedience to Naomi's guidance. Spiritual edgewalkers attempt to overcome poverty and helplessness by developing interdependent relationships in the new community.

Ruth displayed a quality of selflessness as she gave herself to the work on behalf of her mother-in-law. Ruth shared her food, her presence and love with Naomi. She sought justice not only for herself, but for Naomi as well. Her redemption would be the redemption of Naomi. As an alien and stranger, she overcame barriers by sharing her life with those around her. Her ability to overcome cross-cultural boundaries was based on her kindness to Naomi. Boaz observed her life and made her an insider instead of an outsider because her reputation of kindness preceded her. Boaz says,

*I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband – how you left your mother and your homeland to come and live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. (Ruth 2:11-12 NIV)*

Ruth's sacrificial love and posture of servanthood broke down the cultural and economic barriers and opened the door for reconciliation, a new relationship and a new economic stability. Ruth's daily work and walk did not go unnoticed by the field hands or the foremen of the fields. All who had worked with her knew her story. Her sacrificial love and work preceded her, and Boaz was moved by her visible testimony. Her actions demonstrated the work of Christ on our behalf in which he exercised sacrificial love to break down the walls, so we might be reconciled to God and to each other. This was a great example of "hesed" - God's loyal love to his people.



In both Naomi's and Boaz' blessing (Ruth 1:8,3:10) this term "hesed" was used. Naomi prayed "may the Lord show kindness (loyal love) to you as you have shown to your dead and to me." Naomi recognized both Orpah and Ruth had demonstrated this kind of selfless love to their husbands and also to her. Boaz recognized this same kind of selfless love when Ruth comes to the threshing floor and offered herself to be married. (Ruth 3:10) He realized, as a Moabite, Ruth had no obligation to carry on the name of her husband. She could have sought out a younger man to be with and enjoy her life. But Ruth's motivation was the redemption of her mother-in-law. Boaz blessed her for her kindness (hesed).

In the Hebrew language there is a wholistic dimension to the word "hesed." One of the dimensions is when a person demonstrates action toward another because it is essential for the survival or basic well being of the recipient. This is not an action that meets some frivolous or temporary need in the person's life. Another dimension of "hesed" is where only a special person can do the specific act of love. There is no one else immediately available to accomplish the act. Yet another dimension of "hesed" is an act of love as the result of a powerful relationship that already exists between the parties and is redemptive in nature.<sup>15</sup> It is a loyal love that compels action.

Boaz demonstrated this same kind of loyal love toward Ruth and Naomi by fulfilling his role as the kinsman-redeemer. One wonders why Boaz took such an interest in providing for and protecting Ruth. One of the reasons that came to my mind is Boaz was a spiritual edgewalker as well. He was the son of Salmon whose wife was Rahab the harlot, rescued from Jericho. Rahab was a Canaanite woman who demonstrated faith in the God of Israel and was spared (Joshua 6:22-25).

Boaz grew up in a multicultural home. Surely, he knew some of the prejudice and discrimination that came from having a Canaanite mother. This gave him a much greater sensitivity

and compassion for Ruth as a Moabite woman. As a spiritual edgewalker, he displayed God's loyal love to Ruth and redeemed her.

There is another unique dimension of Ruth as a spiritual edgewalker. When Ruth met Boaz, he asked the Lord to bless her and then he made a powerful statement. He made the blessing on the fact that Ruth had sought refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. Shortly after this Ruth came to Boaz under the guidance of Naomi, uncovered him and lay at his feet. In doing so she offered herself to him in marriage. When he awoke he was startled to find a woman at his feet and then discovered it was Ruth. Ruth responded by saying "*Spread the corner (wing) of your garment over me, since you are my kinsman-redeemer.*" The refuge she sought under the wings of the God of Israel was the same refuge she sought under the wing of her kinsman-redeemer.

The last chapter of the book reveals the degree to which the Israelites had problems with the Moabites. The whole transaction of redemption leaves out Ruth's name until Boaz has made his public commitment and called for those who were witnesses to confirm his commitment. The story within the story is the nearer kinsman-redeemer. This individual was willing to redeem the property but when told he would have to raise up a family with the Moabite widow of Mahlon, Elimelech's son, he turned down the deal. He did not want his bloodline corrupted by a future mixed-breed son who would be in line for an inheritance. Boaz, on the other hand, made the clear pronouncement that he was not only buying the land, but he was taking Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as his wife to maintain the blood line and retain the land for the heirs.

With his declaration, Boaz made public the redemption and inclusion of a Moabite in his bloodline. This declaration and act was so momentous it is recorded not only here, but also in Matthew's gospel in the lineage of Christ from the house of David (Matt. 1:5).

Let's summarize the qualities and characteristics of spiritual edgewalkers that we have discovered in this tender story of Ruth and Naomi.

Spiritual edgewalkers:

1. Engage pain and tragedy by trusting God as their source of power and comfort.
2. Confront the oppressive and discriminating systems of this world by embracing their identity with the living God.
3. Transcend the physical discrimination in the world by committing themselves to the new community.
4. Ground their identity in "Imagio Dei" and seek to discover and use the gifts and talents
5. See men and women in the world as created in the image of God and, bestow on them value and dignity.
6. Walk a fine line between independence and interdependence when they rely on the counsel of God and the new community to guide our decisions.
7. Overcome poverty and helplessness by developing interdependent relationships in the new community.
8. Demonstrate sacrificial love to overcome the barriers of racism, classism, and sexism.
9. Exercise sacrificial love to draw men and women into the kingdom of God.
10. Seek refuge under the wings of their redeemer when faced with overwhelming problems.
11. Demonstrate their allegiance to include the outsider, outcast and the sojourner in the family of God.

## 6

### **A Babylonian Spiritual Edgewalker – Daniel**

Daniel is perhaps my favorite example of a spiritual edgewalker. We are fortunate to have a good amount of detail in the Old Testament about his life and ministry in Babylon. The book of Daniel gives us great insight into Daniel's adjustment as he was taken to Babylon and became the political advisor for four kings. From the historical accounts we can construct what it was like in his early childhood and begin to understand the climate and environment of his day.

As a young boy, Daniel heard the great prophecies in Israel and saw the northern kingdom of Israel being taken into captivity by Assyria. While in his teens, Daniel heard two great prophets, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, prophesying in Jerusalem about the potential future captivity that was facing Judah. Little did Daniel know that soon he would be caught up in the political power struggles between nations and find himself in Babylon.

A new king in Babylon dominated the political climate. Nebuchadnezzar was a young powerful king in Babylon, and he decided to flex his muscles by invading Israel and Egypt. In 609 BC, Pharaoh Neco of Egypt traveled north to help the king of Assyria. Even though he is warned not to, Josiah the King of Judah met him in battle. Josiah was killed in the battle of Megiddo and his son Jehoahaz became king in place of his father. Pharaoh Neco made several changes in regal leadership of Judah and finally placed Jehoiakim as the King of Israel in 608 BC.

In 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land and defeated Egypt in the battle of Carchemish. He moved south and captured Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:1-25:21; Daniel 1:1-6). Daniel and his three teenage friends were taken captive on the first invasion along with many of the temple vessels and were transported to the capital city Babylon. It was the custom of

that day for the conquering king to take the brightest and best of those who were of royalty and nobility back to his capital city and reprogram them for service in his royal court and government. We learn from chapter one of the Book of Daniel that Daniel and his three friends clearly met that criteria. (*Dan 1:3-6 NIV*)

Nebuchadnezzar's strategy was to convince his captives to think like and live like the Babylonians. His goal was to assimilate them into the dominant culture. He wanted the brightest and best from all the nations he conquered to embrace the Babylonian religious, political and economic culture. From chapter one of Daniel we get a glimpse of this strategy at work. Sinclair Ferguson in his commentary on Daniel identifies four strategic tactics: "isolation, indoctrination, compromise and confusion" used in the assimilation process.<sup>16</sup> This process represents four critical challenges that spiritual edgewalkers face daily.

The first tactic was "isolation." Daniel was torn away and isolated from a monotheistic Jewish setting in which his life revolved solely around the Temple of Solomon and all its rituals. He was transplanted into a very pagan and pluralistic cultural context. Daniel and his friends were separated not only from their families but also from their religious and social roots. Nebuchadnezzar used isolation to his advantage to brainwash these young men.

I agree with Sinclair Ferguson as he describes the impact of this kind of isolation.

*In the first place, they were isolated from the influences that would mold their lives and characters in the ways of the Lord. In Babylon they were separated from the regular public worship of God, from the teaching of the Word of God, and from the daily illustration of what it meant to be a citizen of Jerusalem. Separated from the furnace of godliness,*

*the king anticipated that the last dying embers of true faithfulness to the Lord would die out.<sup>17</sup>*

This traumatic transition for Daniel and his friends placed a great deal of pressure on them to clarify exactly who they were and how they were going to interact with their new context. Isolated in a foreign land, Daniel faced a multitude of barriers he would have to cope with in order to be a transformational agent in his new context. Daniel had to face ethnic and racial barriers.

Daniel was now part of an imperialistic governmental court that derived its power from a king who was guided by magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers. Everything in Babylon was connected to a pantheon of male and female gods. Each city-state had its own gods. The gods of Babylon had overcome the God of Israel and the very utensils and instruments for worshipping Yahweh were now resting in the temple of the Babylonian gods. Even the social fabric of the Babylonian Empire was rooted in the religious orientation of their gods. Daniel had grown up in a monotheistic theocracy where Yahweh was the only true God and all other gods were false gods. Now he was immersed in a society built on magical and mystical practices of paganism.

The second tactic in the Babylonian strategy was "indoctrination." The young men were given a free three-year education. Imagine a free ride to the best education in the world, the ancient equivalent of going to Yale or Harvard. The capital city, Babylon was one of the "Seven Wonders of the World" because of its engineering feats in constructing the hanging gardens. It had a library containing over 200,000 tablets. The Babylonians were not some ignorant barbaric tribe. They were the world's leader along with Egypt in education, science, and engineering. Babylonian astronomy was such an exact science that some of its discoveries are relevant today. Nabuiramannu (500 BC) was able to calculate the length of the month to be 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes,

and 5.05 seconds by constructing a water clock. His calculations are only 1.56 seconds different than the time measured by the atomic clock. <sup>18</sup>

The educational system of Babylon was greatly influenced by the mystical and magical. In Daniel 2:2 there is a list of those who had power in the courts of the king and certainly shaped the education of the leadership of Babylon. Magician is the Hebrew meaning engraver, stylus, which was used for inscribing on clay tablets the sacred writings. Enchanter means a conjurer of spirits, a necromancer (one who calls upon the dead) or incantation priest. Sorcerer means to practice witchcraft or prepare magical portions and herbs for casting spells. Pharmacology is a part of religious practices down through history. The use of hallucinogenic drugs allows the spirit realm to invade the physical realm as the mind becomes vulnerable to attack because the person using the drugs is no longer in control of his/her mind. Astrologer means skilled in tracking the stars and determining the future through this science. The Hebrew root "kaldu" is expressed in the term Chaldeu from which we get Chaldeans. These astronomers and astrologers were like the Magi who came from Persia looking for Jesus. They were so valued as interpreters of the future. They became the ruling class in the court of the king. <sup>19</sup>

The third tactic in Nebuchadnezzar's strategy was "compromise." Daniel and his three friends were treated to the good life. They had the best of the king's food and wine from his own table. They were elevated to a place of privilege in the king's court with all the advantages of political prestige. The idea was to get them to buy into the good life. The power of prestige and materialism was a tremendous lure to move a person away from their commitment to their old traditions. "High living very easily masters the senses and blunts the sharp-edged commitment of new Christians." <sup>20</sup>

The compromise of not eating food prepared in the tradition of the Israelite religious laws would be a way of discarding the

moral and spiritual values that had been imbedded into the daily life of the Jews. Compromise starts with the smallest of decisions and eventually leads one to make major changes that often lead to a destroyed testimony and life. I came across this passage in "Mere Christianity" by C. S. Lewis that captures this tiny movement and its powerful consequences.

*. . . every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures and with itself. To be one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other kind of creature means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to one state or the other<sup>21</sup>*

The fourth tactic in the Babylonian strategy was "confusion." There is little more important in a young person's life than their attachment to their name. The Israelite name was essential because it was often tied to the source of all names, Yahweh. When reading the Old and New Testament books it becomes apparent how important names become in relating the story of God's redemption and work in this world.

I am intrigued that when young people in our inner-cities join gangs, the first thing the gang demands is to change their names and give them a new identity. This new name links them to their gang or family. Each year, when I take my students to Los Angeles we visit the First Evangelical Free Church in the Pico area, which is a very heavy gang populated area. We visit a half block long mural on the back of a building,



facing an alley. The mural depicts the passion week of Christ: his trial, beating, carrying the cross, crucifixion, burial along with the resurrection. At the top of the mural are some 45-50 gang names that identify those who have been killed in the community over turf warfare. Pastor Doug Moore explains these young people had other names given to them at birth, but they had assimilated into a new family, a gang, and began to think and live like that new family. It cost them their lives. An interesting side note is there is very little tagging on this mural by other gangs because of its religious significance and the fact that it is a memorial to everyone killed in the community. This gives a glimmer of hope the Spirit of God is still at work in the community.

Daniel and his friends were placed in a similar situation. Nebuchadnezzar cleverly renames Daniel and his friends with a design to erase their birth family and give them a new family. These new names were all related to the gods of the Babylonians. Whenever the young men were spoken to, their name exalted the name of a foreign god and washed away the memory of the God of Israel. The loss of their names being related to "el" for "Elohim" or "yah" for "yahweh" was a powerful tool to confuse Daniel and his friends.<sup>22</sup>

Daniel's responses to these pressures reveal some characteristics and principles for being a spiritual edgewalker. One of the first things we notice is that Daniel's name is consistently used instead of Belteshazzar, the name given to him by King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel always had a clear sense of who he was and where he was from.

Krebs says one of the primary characteristics of an Edgewalker is,

*An Edgewalker maintains continuity wherever he/she goes, walking the edge between two cultures. They do not shed one skin when they move from their culture of origin to the mainstream and back.<sup>23</sup>*

I believe this posture is true of Daniel's life in Babylon. Daniel never assimilated into the Babylonian culture nor did he split or try to shift in various situations.

*The fact that in the royal court people could still remember that Daniel was Belteshazzar's real name is a testimony to the way in which he continued to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land (cf. Dan. 5:12-13).<sup>24</sup>*

This internal integrity of identity brought Daniel to the forefront as a leader and placed him in positions of great power. Daniel's transformational ministry outlasted four kings. He was brought to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar in 605 and became prime-minister. He continued this role under Belshazzar who was co-regent of Babylon and then Darius of Medo-Persia. Finally, he served Cyrus the Medo-Persian's who allowed the captives to return to Jerusalem in 536. Daniel 1:21 states Daniel was one of the wisest men in the king's court and he remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. "During his approximate 69 years of ministry he remained true to his identity with God. He is almost always referred to as Daniel by those in power; only seven times in the entire book is he referred to as Belteshazzar without an explanation that this is Daniel."<sup>25</sup>

A second characteristic of spiritual edgewalking is how one views history. Spiritual edgewalkers look beyond circumstances and try to see the hand of God. Daniel chapter one verses one and two indicate Daniel's perspective was shaped by the God of History; he looked behind human events and saw God at work. The contrasting statements in verse one, give us insight to Daniel's perspective. "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem" is juxtaposed by "and the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand."

When chaos happened, Daniel was able to see beyond human events and understand from the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah that God was at work fulfilling the statements of

judgment. Daniel trusted the Word of God, as given through the prophets, to be the lens by which he interpreted history and the circumstances around him. He was looking for God's design in human events and not just reacting to the chaotic events like the rest of the population. Daniel sought spiritual meaning in tragic times. This kind of perspective gave him stability and confidence even though he had no idea of what the future held for him and his three friends. As a spiritual edgewalker, Daniel walked the edge of two worlds: the world as controlled by evil and sin, and the world under the reign of God. One brings chaos, judgment, and death and the other produces faith, hope and life. Daniel engaged life with a clear understanding of the reign of God. Spiritual edgewalkers learn to look past the human events of history and focus on the reign of God in which justice, equity and holiness will be established.

As a spiritual edgewalker, Daniel always demonstrated his allegiance to Yahweh of heaven and finally convinced Nebuchadnezzar this God was more powerful than the king himself. In his first encounter with the king concerning his dream, Daniel proclaims, *"No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals the mystery. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the days to come."* (Dan 2:17-18 NIV)

As a spiritual edgewalker, Daniel engaged the king with the true source of his power and identity. Even though Daniel was seen as one of the wisest of all the court, he always gave credit to God for his work. This posture allowed Daniel to remain humble and gain favor with those who encountered his life. Even when King Darius was tricked by Daniel's enemies and had to throw Daniel in the lions' den, it was clear that Darius loved and respected Daniel. He couldn't wait to see if Daniel was alive the next day. Daniel and his three friends were not intimidated by the challenges of their day because

they knew who they were and depended upon the great God of creation.

Daniel demonstrated his edgewalking ability as he engaged and tested the cultural norms of his day with the promises and statutes of God's word. In chapter one verse nine, it mentions God gave Daniel favor in the eyes of the official under whose care Nebuchadnezzar had placed him. Instead of being submissive and compliant, Daniel engaged the official in a test of the norms and cultural expectations of that day. He could have played it safe, remained in the comfortable middle, and received the benefits built into the culture of his day. Daniel was, instead, willing to take a risk and challenge the cultural norms. He knew to whom he belonged, and where he came from and this gave him the security to challenge the social, political and religious structures of his context.

Daniel did not demand but offered a creative alternative based on his religious and moral values and provided space for the official to participate in the decision-making process. Daniel was a master at creating space for new and exciting understandings of the events of daily life. In this same passage Daniel opens the door for critique.

*Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see. (Dan. 1:12-14 NIV)*

Notice the space Daniel creates for the official who is in charge. "Test us and then treat your servants in accordance with what you see." What a powerful statement! How many of us would be willing to make this kind of statement to our Muslim or Buddhist friends? Is our confidence and identity in Christ that secure? Do we have a lifestyle that we are willing to let the world examine or test and then allow them to treat us in accordance to what they have seen?

Spiritual edgewalkers attempt to walk the edge between cultures and create space for dialogue and creative alternatives. If a person is intimidated by the political, religious and social structures, there is a much greater probability this person will compromise and assimilate into the structures that are seen as being more powerful. A spiritual edgewalker develops a clear sense of their identity and a thorough understanding of God's Word. Consequently, they are not intimidated by other political, religious and social structures, but can create space for dialogue in a non-threatening way. Spiritual edgewalkers seek to open doors for the development of new and creative alternatives instead of closing doors and retreating to entrenched positions.

Daniel demonstrated his edgewalking abilities by engaging the powers and paganism of his day with the power of the living God. He knew the true source of power in the world. Daniel was not intimidated by Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful king in the world because he knew God was the one who sets up and tears down kings and authorities. Daniel's prayer in chapter two gives us this insight.

*Praise be to the Name of God forever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals the deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness and light dwells with him. I thank you and praise you, O God of my fathers; you have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the King. (Dan 2:20-22 NIV)*

Daniel could engage the spiritual and physical powers that faced him because he understood the true source of power was in the living God. This was not a battle of flesh and blood

but one of spiritual warfare where the systems of this world were fallen and controlled by Satan.

As a spiritual edgewalker, he simply told the truth according to the Word of God and the character of God. Spiritual edgewalkers need not get caught up in power encounters but must focus on truth encounters because the truth is what sets people free. Those who deal in spiritual warfare have come to realize that declaring the truth of God's Word and exposing the darkness to the light of Christ, who is the truth, forces the darkness to flee.

Daniel engaged and overcame the seductive powers of paganism by relying on the power of God. He was not intimidated by the power of the magicians. He saw their inability to do the truly miraculous and even came to their aid when the king was ready to destroy them. Daniel did not hate the individuals who were caught up in the systems of this world and their warped doctrines. He had a great deal of compassion on them and sought to display the truth, so they might be set free. Daniel did not do this in stridency or arrogance but demonstrated humility, giving God the credit for the work being performed.

Spiritual edgewalkers understand the purpose of God's reign is that everyone would come to redemption and none should perish. Therefore, they are not strident or arrogant but exercise the same patience and sacrificial love God demonstrated when he sent his son to die so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Daniel also understood righteousness and did not buy into the deceptive practices of his fellow magicians. He could have tried to fake it to save his neck. But, righteousness guided his life, and this required him to be true to his values and faith. Daniel trusted God would speak in critical times. Even when it was the eleventh hour, he still trusted the Lord instead of relying on his own wisdom and strength.

His reliance on individual and corporate prayer demonstrates the communal aspect of spiritual edgewalking. Because we are so conditioned to seeing things from an individualistic perspective, it is easy to miss the value of community in the book of Daniel. However, it says repeatedly Daniel sought out his friends and engaged the challenges he was facing. Notice in chapter two verse twelve it states,

*Then Daniel returned to his house and explained to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.*  
(Dan 2:48-49 NIV)

Daniel was not a "lone ranger" doing battle for justice on his own but he had a core of friends he included as he grew in power and importance. Daniel also lifted up his friends as he was lifted up.

When dealing with the systems of this world, we need to remind ourselves that prayer is one of our most powerful weapons. We in the church often lack the ability to grasp the political and social events on a broader level and see the potential for the power of prayer in changing these events. Even when we do, we often draw back from fully engaging these structures with prayer. Daniel clearly understood the power of prayer even when it jeopardized his standing with the king. Daniel was willing to engage the systems with the true source of power, prayer.

Just as Daniel was able to look behind the scenes to see the hand of God at work in the captivity of Israel, so he was able to understand God's power working through prayer to sustain and transform his life. We often glibly say that we will pray about or for something without comprehending the incredible

power and strategic nature of prayer as a tool to impact and bring into subjection the systems of this world.

*It is precisely the demonic character of power which makes prayer the most important political action that the Christian could possibly take, prayer which is a sharing in the struggle of Jesus Christ, prayer that the authorities might be brought into subjection, prayer that they might be exorcised, prayer that their power might be turned toward justice and good. Prayer is much more important than all the declarations, demonstrations, elections, etc. . .* <sup>26</sup>

Daniel was a spiritual edgewalker and engaged the systems and power brokers of his world with the truth of God's word, and at the same time he utilized the great power of prayer to guide him in that encounter. He sought not to redeem the systems but to tame them and bring them into submission. He desired the systems to work in accordance to the reign of God so that God gets the glory rather than man. In each instance where Daniel engaged the political structures, it was the king that submitted to and praised the sovereign God who reigns.

In summary, Daniel's story reveals to us that spiritual edgewalkers:

1. Know who they are and to whom they belong if they are to resist the conforming pressures of this world.
2. Learn to look for God at work behind the scenes of daily life in times of chaos if they are to experience stability and hope.
3. Are grounded in the Word of God to test the cultural norms of society.
4. Place their faith in the power of the living God to overcome or tame the rulers and authorities of this world.



5. Define daily life through committed prayer and devotion.
6. Engage the power of the community of believers to face obstacles and trials in daily life.

## 7

### **A Persian Spiritual Edgewalker – Esther**

Out of all the people I have chosen to use as example of spiritual edgewalkers, Esther is the most difficult to work with. When I first read the book of Esther, I was struck by the fact it appeared Esther had assimilated into the Persian Culture. There is very little evidence that Esther tried to carry on a Jewish existence within her context in Persia. There is no mention of Jewish dietary laws or customs; she concealed her identity to gain all the advantages of society. This young Jewish woman was willing to give up her virginity and become wed to an uncircumcised pagan Persian ruler to gain wealth and prominence. She used her beauty for personal gain and was totally unaware of the needs of her people until confronted by her cousin Mordecai. Even then, she seemed reluctant to save her Jewish heritage. As reigning queen, there was no indication that Esther opposed the societal exhibitionism, womanizing and drunkenness that characterized Ahasuerus the king and in which Vashti, the pagan queen, had refused to participate. This is not a very good description of a spiritual edgewalker.

The book of Esther has been criticized down through the centuries because there is no mention of God (Yaweh) in the book. There are no prayers, no visions or miracles presented in the book. Queen Esther and Mordecai her cousin are presented as very pragmatic people instead of Old Testament examples of faith or spiritual heroism. However, the book written about Queen Esther during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah stands solidly in the canon of Scriptures for both Judaism and Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

The book has an earthy quality much like most of us experience on a daily basis. Is it not true most of us go about our daily routine semiconscious of God being in the background working and helping at every corner of life's challenges? Most of us do not wear God or Christ on our

sleeves so everyone knows we are Christ followers. If someone were to write about your life, would it look much different than Esther's or Mordecai's life? Would it express an implicit faith in Christ as we work in our daily routine or would it be explicit by declaring and presenting the presence of Christ openly in our decisions? From my observations of Christians, it is more the implicit expression of Christ that is evident in their lives rather than explicit expression.

So, why choose Esther as a spiritual edgewalker? Because Esther, like most of us, needed a crisis to wake her up to embrace her identity, to engage the world and its systems with her faith. The beauty of the bible is that it presents the reality of life with all its shortcomings and shining moments, its failures and the successes, its fallenness and repentance, its losses and rewards evidenced in daily life.

Esther is a wonderful example of someone caught up in the cultural milieu of the day, compromised and coerced by circumstances to conform to the systems of the world. It takes a crisis to wake her up to her spiritual identity in God and to the power of faith to engage the issues and problems of her world. At that split moment she discovered a faith planted deep within her. She embraced her identity as one of God's covenant people and exercised faith and courage to challenge her context. In doing so, she unleashed the transforming power of the living God. How many of us have found ourselves right where Esther was, and it took a crisis to explode our faith and bring it to the surface, where we utilized and expressed it to make a difference in our world?

Let us begin our examination of this powerful book and this courageous woman to discover some characteristics of spiritual edgewalkers. We are introduced to Esther in 1:5-7.

*Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai Son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of*

*Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. Mordecai had a cousin name Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl who was also named Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died. (NIV)*

Imagine what it must have been like to be a child during such great turmoil! An invading army has entered your city and took everything valuable and then destroyed it and broke down the walls, so your hometown was no longer recognizable. You and your parents were taken captive to a foreign land. Then, to make matters worse, your parents die, and you are orphaned in this unfamiliar place. How terrifying for this little girl! Fortunately, Esther had a cousin, Mordecai, the nephew of her father Abihail, who graciously took her in and provided a safe and secure home.

Esther's Jewish name was Hadassah, which means *myrtle*. Myrtle is an evergreen tree whose dark glossy leaves and white flowers were crushed and used in perfume or to spice food. The myrtle tree had spiritual significance for Israel. It was a symbol of peace and joy. This is exactly what Hadassah provided for the remnant in Persia in a time a crisis. Like Daniel and his friends, all the Jews in captivity were given new names and Hadassah was no exception. Her name was changed to Esther, a Hebrew equivalent to Ishtar. The name was the Babylonian goddess of fertility. These name changes were designed to cause the captives to make a break from their Jewish culture and assimilate into the dominant culture. A person's name is extremely important in establishing their identity and personhood. Esther had assimilated into the culture of Babylon and now Persia. She was probably a third or fourth generation of exiled Jews.

Jehoiachin was taken captive in 598 BC as recorded in 2 Kings. 24:15-16. On Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem, he

took the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the leading men and women of the land. Esther's grandparents were probably caught up in this exile. It is now about 483 BC, which is 115 years later, so Esther would have very little understanding and adherence to the culture and practices of Judaism. Therefore, it is no wonder we find so little evidence of her Jewish heritage as compared to Daniel and his three friends who had been steeped in Judaism. Since marriage in the cultures of Babylon, Persia and Israel was performed at a very young age, Esther could easily have been thirteen to nineteen years old when this was taking place. What would we expect today of a teenager caught in this same kind of circumstances? It would be natural that a teenage girl chosen to become part of a beauty contest would be delighted and would thoroughly enjoy all the attention given to these special contestants.

The narrative says these young women were placed under the care of a eunuch, who would make sure they were provided the best of everything. Esther's beauty stood out and she was provided with beauty treatments and special foods for twelve months. She was assigned seven maids who gave her massages with oil of myrrh every day for six months and then for another six months special perfumes and cosmetics. Esther must have felt like a kid in a cosmetic store with an unlimited Visa card. Anything she wanted she could get.

So, on the one hand, there was the allurement of all the beauty and care to confuse and pressure her to conform to Persian culture; on the other hand, there was Mordecai who came to the court daily to check on her. He had forbidden her to reveal her Jewish roots and forced her to suppress her true identity. Imagine the mystery in her life, wondering why she had to deny her nationality and family background in the midst of all of this sudden beauty and splendor. This would throw any young teenage girl into an identity crisis. It is no wonder she hid her identity as a child of the covenant-making God.

Nina Boyd Krebs in her book on Edgewalking talks about splitting (living two separate lives because of fear in both worlds) as a common response when a person finds themselves caught between two worlds.

*Splitting within an individual is an unconscious mechanism that slips into place in response to fear. The urge is to oversimplify and distance rather than open up and explore... Rather than acknowledge fear and work with it, some people experience fear or vulnerability as hatred of someone else and develop a righteous attitude about it.* <sup>28</sup>

Esther certainly had much to fear. She was in the palace of a Persian king and knew she was a foreigner who could not only be rejected but killed by the king. Once Esther entered the king's harem, it would be extremely difficult to reveal she was a Jew. Consequently, she split and became like those around her.

*When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up. 2:19-20 NIV*

Mordecai evidently was one of the royal officials, possibly a noble in the king's political system, who gathered at the gate of the city to conduct official business and hear requests of the people. While carrying out his duties, Mordecai discovered a plot to assassinate King Xerxes. He reported it to Esther, who was now the queen. She in turn reported it to King Xerxes. (Esther 2:21-23) The perpetrators were apprehended and hanged. Mordecai's good deed was recorded in the official court records. Little did anyone realize that this good act would be the foundation for the future deliverance of Israel.

Shortly after this event, King Xerxes promoted one of the nobles, Haman, above all the nobles. In this new position of honor everyone was to kneel down and pay homage to Haman. However, Mordecai, a Jew whose allegiance was solely committed to Jehovah, would not give his allegiance to a man, especially one of the enemies of Israel. Haman was an Agagite (or better translated an Amalekite), a long-term enemy of the Jews. The Amalekites had battled against Israel since the time of Abraham, when Lot and his family were taken captive by them. The Amalekites had repeatedly attacked Israel down through their history to the time of David. In the days of Hezekiah, King of Judah, they were finally defeated and became a dispossessed people. Their hatred of the Jews stayed with them as they were assimilated into other nations and cultures.

The disobedience of Mordecai gave Haman the opportunity to turn his hatred and revenge on him. In addition, Haman conjured a plot to exterminate all Jews from the Persian Empire. It is this plot and the resulting decree adopted by King Xerxes that created the crisis in which Esther would have to adopt a new role and emerge as a spiritual edgewalker. She could no longer personally enjoy the benefits of her position but would have to engage the political system to expand those benefits to help her people. When Mordecai learned of the decree he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth (a sign of mourning), and stayed outside of the King's gate. (Esther 4:1-5) When word of Mordecai's distress was relayed to Esther, she was moved out of her comfortable middle and began a series of steps that exemplify a spiritual edgewalker.

Esther first sent clothes to Mordecai and then sent her personal attendant to learn of the source of his distress. (4:4-5) She was desirous of understanding the substance of the issues that were troubling her surrogate father. Mordecai reported the details of Haman's plot and the amount of money Haman was willing to pay into the treasury of the King to carry out his scheme. The text of the decree was also given to Esther to

verify the process of extermination which would affect her and all the Jews.

Rather than hiding from reality, Esther embraced the pain and brokenness of a fallen society. She could have ignored the rumors and lived in a false reality but instead she sought out the truth. She explored the source of the pain and brokenness and was willing to confront reality rather than retreat to her own personal safety.

Mordecai also strongly urged Esther to take action and go into the king and plead for mercy on behalf of her people. Esther was faced with a personal dilemma, forced to calculate the cost of her actions. If she acted unwittingly she could be put to death and that would achieve nothing for her people. On the other hand, to do nothing would result in the destruction of her and her people. Therefore, she shared her fears with Mordecai, who affirmed the obvious results of remaining silent. Mordecai reminded Esther that God (although he is not mentioned) has others who can deliver Israel, but the consequences of her actions will be grave for her and her family.

Esther responded by acting like a true spiritual edgewalker. She sent Mordecai a message to gather all the Jews to declare a fast for three days. She declared that she and her maids would also fast for three days. Then she would go into the king even though it was against the law and she might perish. This was a call to prayer throughout the Jewish remnant. Esther realized that it was not a battle of flesh and blood but a spiritual battle that would be won by fasting and prayer. She was casting herself on God for protection and she engaged the whole believing Jewish remnant with her rather than trying to accomplish this through rugged individualism. The value of the community in winning spiritual battles cannot be underestimated.

This was the defining moment for Esther. She had now left the comfortable middle, stepped to the edge of faith and put her



life totally into the divine providence of God. She moved beyond her own experience and identified with the pain and brokenness of her world. She embraced her identity and realized she had been placed in the palace with access to the king for "such a time as this" to be a deliverer. Esther now knew who she was and her purpose in life.

One of the most exciting places to be is at the edge of your experience and realize if God does not work what you are about to attempt is going to be a total failure. My wife Nancy and I had worked hard during a hot Texas summer to fix up a little cracker-box house owned by our church. It was in one of the highest crime and highest poverty areas of Dallas called West Dallas. These tiny homes were built during the 1940's and slum landlords owned most of them. One lady in our community owned 125 of these homes and would come every Friday for the rent. If someone did not pay the rent on Friday she would appear on Saturday with the sheriff evict them and put their belongings out in the street.

We had just finished putting new windows and doors on our little home because the house had been broken into so many times it was impossible to lock anything. We had put new sheetrock on the walls and rewired the house, so the lights would go on when you flipped the switch. The houses had been raised off the ground about 18 inches and put on cedar posts. The floors were just plank and you could see the mud below the house through the cracks. So, we put down roofing tarpaper on the floor to keep out the cockroaches and the mice. We were very proud of the work we had done.

On a hot Saturday in August we moved into our little home. The only new possession we had was a new refrigerator. The rest of our furniture was purchased from garage sales and pawnshops. When I placed the new refrigerator in the corner of the tiny kitchen, I heard a crack and the refrigerator fell through the floor into the mud eighteen inches below. This was a little sign of what living in a slum was going to be like. Were

we willing to place everything we had, including our children, into the hand of God?

On that same Saturday evening, exhausted from moving we had just gone to bed when the phone rang. It was the police! They wanted to know if I was the pastor of the little church across the street from our house. I said yes? They explained that a group of gang members had broken into the church and was ransacking it. They had the church surrounded. Could I come over and let them in to capture the kids?

I looked out our bedroom window and sure enough there were police cars around the church. I immediately went over, unlocked the doors, the police scurried in and caught seven members of the Latin Kings, one of the largest Spanish gangs in the neighborhood. The police wanted to know what I wanted to do. Here is where I had my wake-up call like Esther. If I let them go, they would smell weakness and come back and terrorize us time and time again. If I sent them to jail, what would happen to my children and wife by the other gang members. I was in my second year of seminary and it did not offer "Gang Issues 101." I was caught on the edge of faith with a seemingly impossible situation. No matter what I decided it would have an impact on my family and my church.

The Holy Spirit intervened and helped me remember I had a friend who worked in Juvenile Hall in Dallas. I asked the police if they could take the gang members there and hold them overnight before I pressed charges. I then got all the names and addresses of the gang members. In the morning I went to each of their homes and informed whoever was their parent or guardian their son or daughter had been caught destroying the inside of our church. The response was alarm and anger because all the people I talked to were Catholic in background and were deeply upset that their child had been part of destroying a Protestant church. My goal was not to send the young people to jail but to have them released to me for community service, which would be painting the outside of our

church. All the parents agreed. So, these seven gang members were to come to the church for three Saturdays and help me and my deacons paint the church. One young person immediately went back to Mexico. The other six stayed and worked on the church. The results were that four of the young people came to know Christ personally. The other major result was that all the other churches had a problem with graffiti but not our church. It belonged to the Latin Kings because they painted it. God works in wonderful ways to provide protection for His people.

It is very intriguing to me how Esther went about her contact with the King. She engaged the political powers through her willingness to serve. There was no spirit of anger, hostility or out of control complaint but instead she was willing to confront the person who was behind the plot to kill the Jews. In the presence of the King, Esther invited the King and Haman to a banquet. She moved the issue from a formal setting to an informal one and from a hierarchical structure to a relational structure. Both of these moves were extremely important in disarming power and providing space for deep sharing and open dialogue. There is little space in the formal structures to move beyond facts to feelings and implications. Informal structures create an open space where issues can be explored, and consequences can be examined.

At the first banquet Esther did not ask the question but simply served Xerxes and her enemy Haman. Her servanthood brought favor from the king and Esther asked him and Haman to another banquet the next day. (Esther 5:6-7) Once again in the story of Esther the providence of God is evident because that very night, the king could not sleep and discovered in the chronicles of the king that Mordecai had saved his life. The next day before the banquet the king asked Haman what should be done for a person whom the king wanted to honor. Haman selfishly thought it was about him. He went to the extreme and suggested the royal robe be placed on the individual and he be placed on one of the king's horses and

paraded throughout the capital city with a noble shouting "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor." The king loved the idea and commanded Haman to do this for Mordecai because Mordecai had saved the king's life (Esther 6:1-11). Humiliated Haman obeyed and rushed home to grieve only to be met by the messenger of the king reminding him of the banquet.

Things went from bad to worse for Haman because at the banquet Queen Esther shared she and her people had been sold for destruction, slaughter and annihilation. She pleaded with the king to save her life. The king inquired as to who would do such a thing and Esther identified Haman as the adversary who sought to kill her. Haman was terrified, and the king was filled with rage. All these events unfold like a tragic comedy. The King left the room to catch his breath and subside his anger. Haman rushed to Esther to plead his case and falls on her couch just as the king returns. The king thought that Haman was trying to rape his wife and commanded Haman be put to death on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai (Esther 7:1-10).

Esther was a spiritual edgewalker by not shrinking from conflict but confronting evil with the truth. When the truth is brought into the light, it is powerful and will overcome the darkness of evil. Esther had the courage to expose the darkness of Haman's plot. A great reversal occurred. The signet ring of the king and the power given to Haman were now transferred to Mordecai and Esther was given the estate of Haman.

With Haman out of the picture, the first crisis was over, but the second crisis was just beginning. The law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed once the king declared it. Esther, once again, stepped out of the comfortable middle and as a spiritual edgewalker, created space to provide an alternative to the king's command. The king issued a new decree that would allow the Jews to defend themselves from the attack of their enemies. The second crisis was overcome,

and a day of celebration called Purim was declared for the deliverance of God's people. *Pur* is the Hebrew word for the *lots* or dice, which were cast by Haman to determine what day they would kill the Jews. The Jews have celebrated the feast of Purim to this day. It is a time of great joy and gift giving.

Let's summarize some of the characteristics of spiritual edgewalkers found in Esther. They:

1. Embrace the pain and brokenness of this world to unleash the transforming power of God to bring healing and hope.
2. Face traumatic events by looking to physical and spiritual family bonds for true identity and security.
3. Consistently review their personal and family history to maintain their cultural identity and not be assimilated into the dominant cultural context.
4. Learn to resist the compromising power of materialism and popularity.
5. Face crisis by embracing their identity in Christ and moving from the comfortable middle to take a stand at the edge of faith.
6. Willingly encounter the powerful forces of cultural assimilation on a daily basis.
7. Learn to face their fears and share them with others.
8. Seek the prayer and support of the body to overcome the spiritual and physical obstacles that seek to destroy them.
9. Create space where confrontation and dialogue can be explored.
10. Celebrate the works of God to be reminded of God's faithfulness and power and to lift up his name in the world.

## **New Testament Spiritual Edgewalkers**

The birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost created a new international community of Jews and Gentiles. In Acts 2:9-11 it records when the Holy Spirit descended on the crowd that day there were *Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs* as well as the Galileans who were followers of Jesus. A microcosm of the world heard, in their unique language, the message Peter proclaimed.

The multicultural nature of the early church brought forth spiritual edgewalkers who stepped out on the edge of faith and led the church in its growth to become the body of Christ that embraced bond and free, rich and poor, male and female, Jew and Gentile. In this section of the book, I am going to explore four individuals for the principles and characteristics in their lives that contributed to their becoming spiritual edgewalkers.

The church grew quickly and moved from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, to Asia Minor, and finally to Rome. Its expansion constantly put pressure on leadership to adjust to new cultural settings and embrace new people groups. The Church would reflect the kingdom of God, which is inclusive of everyone who bows the knee in allegiance to Christ Jesus the King.

The men and women who helped the church in this expansion time were truly spiritual edgewalkers. They live on the edge of faith and took great risks to help the church reflect the values of the Kingdom of God.

## 8

### **A Jewish Spiritual Edgewalker – Paul**

The Apostle Paul was a master communicator. He appeared on the scene when the church had little literature on the life of Christ, no training institutions, and only the beginnings of community. He authored some of the first Christian literature and when the church sealed its canon, thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were attributed to him. His Hebraic training, religious enthusiasm, training as a Pharisee, and Hellenistic background as a Roman citizen, blended together to make him the best of both Eastern and Western culture.

Paul effectively moved across four cultural settings. He communicated the gospel, gathered believers and established churches. He impacted the Semitic Culture (Palestine, Israel), Asian Culture (Asia Minor – Turkey), Greek Culture (Macedonia and Greece), European Culture (Italy). He was a pioneer in missions and his stories and letters are motivating people to missions and evangelism today.

I would like to focus on two parallel passages. Acts 17 provides us with a glimpse into Paul's cross-cultural communication skills as he enters Thessalonica and Athens, the cultural center of Greek thought. In contrast, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 provides us with a glimpse into Paul's personal reflection on his entrance into Thessalonica. We gain two very different perspectives of the same event. Paul had great technical skills in communicating the message cross-culturally and he also had incredible relational skills to move the message from the head to the heart. The comparison of these passages will allow us to understand the internal and external dynamics of a spiritual edgewalker.

Before we explore these two chapters let's examine the context of Paul's movement from Asia Minor to Macedonia. Paul had sensed resistance from the Holy Spirit in his movements in Asia

Minor. Each time he and his co-missioners tried to make a move, either the "*Holy Spirit kept them from preaching*" or "*the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to*" enter a new territory. This is a very unusual construction mentioning that both the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus were at work in guiding Paul in the next venture in reaching the world with the gospel of Christ. The Apostle Paul was leading the church into another great extension in the movement of the gospel to reach the center of the Roman Empire. Paul had been targeting major cities all along the Roman thoroughfares in Asia Minor and now he connects with the Egnatian Way, which was the Roman road system throughout Macedonia and Greece.

The impact of Greek and Roman culture was stamped on the cities of the time of Christ and His followers. Paul was a genius in utilizing cultural patterns and the technology of his day. He understood the cultural communication patterns on both the macro and micro level. The macro level was the key cities on the Aegean, Egnatian and Appian Ways. These were Roman super highways that formed a communication link to the whole Roman Empire. What was communicated in one place quickly spread to other areas and became a foundation for sharing on a micro level. The micro level was understanding how to communicate effectively in each cultural context he encountered.

The entrance into Macedonia and the utilization of the dialogical method of communication demonstrates a clear understanding of the cultural communication patterns on a micro level. The fact that Paul went to the synagogue, marketplace, or where philosophers gathered demonstrated he understood the fabric of communication patterns in that local area. The business networks, religious networks, and educational networks were impacted quickly and effectively by a dramatic debate, confrontation or conversion. Paul had the unique ability to secularize and urbanize the gospel of Christ without compromising the essence of the message. He was able to inject the gospel into a complex world where men and women lived



with difficult choices, ominous threats to their lives, and cruel political structures which oppressed everyone. This kind of communication set the stage for affecting the whole city and laid the foundation for a solid church in a very short period of time. We have no way of knowing whether Paul had a specific strategy in each place but his methods whether they were intuitive or pre-planned were certainly effective.

Paul responds to the vision given of a man from Macedonia begging him "Come over to Macedonia and help us." One would think this kind of clear call would mean the Lord was surely going before them and there would be open doors for the gospel. Paul travels to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of Macedonia. There is no indication there was a synagogue in Philippi.

From this context it is apparent Paul was a spiritual edgewalker, walking the fine line between human desire and the leading of the Holy Spirit. He also walked the fine line between the use of technology (Roman road system and major urban centers) and reliance on the Holy Spirit to move the message.

Now let us turn to our parallel passages and explore the technical and relational skills in Paul's communication process. We quickly see Paul engaged the cultural patterns of his day. He used the central gathering place for communicating with the Jews, the synagogue (Acts 17:2). He also used the major gathering place for the Romans and Greeks, which was the agora or marketplace (Acts 17:17). In the center of every marketplace was a platform called the "bema" where the daily news, governmental proclamations and philosophical debates were given, and contests were judged. This was like a magnet in each agora. People would cluster around to hear the latest news. When I traveled to Turkey and Greece recently following the journeys of Paul, I saw many examples of the agora. It was the ideal communication technology for Paul to use in the Roman and Greek culture.

Paul also used the communication style of the region. The Greek/Roman world was built on philosophical debate or dialogue. It is in Acts 17 where we first find the word "dialogomai" used. This word is found ten more times in the book of Acts concerning Paul's communication and each time it is within a Greek/Roman context. Paul was familiar with the communication styles of each region! He was also trained as a Pharisee and rose to the top level within the ranks of the Pharisees because he was a great debater. His Jewish and Roman background prepared him to take the gospel across many cultures.

Paul was a genius in knowing what type of communication pattern the best method of communication would be to share the good news of the kingdom and the name of Christ. He knew the Jews in that area would have been Hellenized or conditioned to this type of communication, so he used this same communication process in the synagogue (vs. 2-3) as well as the marketplace (vs. 17). He understood how culture conditions our communication and listening process, so he capitalized on the context to make sure the listeners were engaged in the Word of God at a deep and personal level.

In verse three of our Acts passage, there are two participles which are verbal adjectives that modify or amplify the main verb dialogue. They give some insight as to the process of reasoning or debating. The first participle is the Greek word "dianoigoon" which means to open up thoroughly, unfold or expound. In this process of dialogue Paul opens the Word of God to those around him in such a way that they understand the significance of the truth. This was not a shouting match or a casual argument - the process had direction and purpose in it. It was rooted in the Word of God.

The second participle or verbal adjective that modifies dialogue or debate is "paritithemenos" which means "to place alongside, i.e. present (food, truth); by implication, to deposit (as a trust

or for protection)" (Strong's Hebrew/Greek Dictionary). Paul not only had the ability to expound the Word of God, but he set it up as truth to which others had to respond. If people had a disagreement they would have to argue with the Word of God, not just with Paul. A good exposition places the Word of God in a place of authority to which people must respond. I believe this text also means Paul related the Word of God to reality, so it was proof of what was true and what was false. As a spiritual edgewalker, Paul walked a fine line between personal dogmatism (which is closed to response) and good exposition (which allows for reaction and response). It is so easy to become dogmatic and strident in our handling of the Word of God and close the door to dialogue that allows space for questioning and processing.

There is a third term used in the Athenian context that gives insight as to Paul's technical skills in communication. In verse eighteen it says, *"And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him"* (NASV). This is a much stronger word and comes from the Greek word *"sumballo"* which means "to combine, i.e. (in speaking) to converse, consult, dispute, (mentally) to consider, (by implication) to aid, to personally join or attack" (Strong Hebrew/Greek Dictionary). The Greek word *"ballo"* means to cast or throw and *"sum"* means alongside. So, it means the philosophers were throwing comments at Paul and from the context they were derogatory. "What is this babblers trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." "They said this because he was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection"(NIV).

The apostle Paul was willing to change his communication methodology to engage the cultural context with the Gospel. There are some 17-18 words used to describe methods of communication of the gospel throughout the book of Acts: testifying, preaching, teaching, witnessing, debating, conversing, heralding, etc. These words indicated the New Testament evangelists, pastors and leaders had great flexibility

in communication styles. Even though they changed their methodology to meet the context, they were careful not to change the message. In Acts 17:2-3, Paul kept the central focus of his message Jesus was the Christ and he had to suffer and rise from the dead. No matter where Paul started his message it would always move toward Christ's death and resurrection.

This premise proves to be true even in his message in the meeting of the Areopagus. Paul engages the worldview of the philosophers and religious leaders of Athens. He creates a space for a new level of dialogue by finding a center point from which all could begin. However, philosophical and theological argument eclipses their constructs. He does not attack their belief systems but provides an alternate to theirs by showing respect and establishing common ground from which to build his premise.

*Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. (Acts 17:22-23 NIV)*

Edgewalkers develop space for creative expressions of the truth. The process of engagement with other worldviews is one in which we seek to find bridges or entry points where there is space for true dialogue. This is not a chess match boxing in our opponent and finally getting the win by checkmate. It is first not seeing the other person as an opponent or adversary but as one who is created in the image of God and needs to truly understand the intimate relationship possible between creation and creator. This change in mindset allows a greater flexibility to engage a person in true dialogue that opens up space for ideas to be explored and challenged. This is much riskier than bulldozing one's way into another's belief system and establishing one's turf. This is a spiritual dance in which the

parties move forward and backward discovering together the beauty of truth and grace. Paul's message in Athens reveals the beauty of that dance.

First, Paul affirms the Athenian's sincerity in religious devotion. He embraces them in their search for worldview answers. The Athenians were so zealous they were afraid they might miss some god, so they identified one as the unknown god just to cover all the bases.<sup>1</sup>

As Paul embraces them he takes them to a new level by introducing the idea that the "unknown god" they seek to understand is so great that even their temples cannot contain Him. The Greek and Roman concept of space was very important to Greeks and Romans. The Greeks seemed to think that the greater the god/goddess or ruler, the greater the space that should be given to him or her. Paul introduces them to a new "Theology of Space" when he says: *The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands (Acts 17:24, NIV).*

Paul was stretching their epistemology and introducing them to a God greater than any god they had ever worshiped. Paul must have been awestruck as he made his way through Athens to the Acropolis and the Parthenon, where the greatest space was given to Athena. The Panathenian Way was the main road from the sea to the Acropolis. Paul would have walked up this road and through the city to finally reach Mars Hill and the Acropolis.

*On the southern slope of the Acropolis was the Theater of Dionysus, where Greek drama had its origin. It contained seventy-eight tiers of seats with a capacity of 17,000 spectators. The orchestra was sixty feet in diameter with a raised stage. . . . Southeast of the Acropolis was the Temple of Zeus with 104 Corinthian columns 50 feet high and 5 ½ feet thick at the bottom.*

*The grandeur must have been breathtaking. Yet the Acropolis itself provided the most awe-inspiring sight. Paul would have entered from the west, passing through the Propylaea, a gateway of white marble built by Pericles and costing the equivalent of over 30 million dollars. At the right of the gate was a forty-five-foot-high monument with a chariot and four horses atop a 30-foot rectangular marble slab. Just inside the gate was a huge statue of Athena, sculpted by Phidias, and the small temple dedicated to Athena and entitled the "Wingless Victory," probably so named to keep victory from flying away from the city.<sup>2</sup>*

*The Parthenon was actually a temple to Athena the patron goddess of the city. It was erected by Pericles between 447-432 BC. It is 238 by 111 feet in size, with eight Doric columns on the ends and seventeen on the sides, each 34 ft high, six feet in diameter at the base. A Doric frieze of ninety-two panels stood atop the colonnade and encircled the Parthenon. These panels portrayed special scenes from mythology. Inside another continuous frieze 525 ft long depicted the annual Panathenaic procession to the temple.*

*In the east room was the statue of Athena, forty feet high, with her flesh formed from ivory and the rest made of gold. In her right-hand Athena held a 6 ft high statue of victory. On Athena's breast was the head of Medusa; inlaid with ivory on her helmet is the image of the sphinx, and in her other hand is a spear.<sup>3</sup>*

This statue was one of the Seven Wonders of the World and must have been breathtaking. Paul was overwhelmed by these sights and grieved by their paganism.

Paul challenges the Athenian understanding of transcendence and immanence. He places before them an unknown God, who is self-sufficient and transcendent, so no human person can

add anything to the stature or character of this God. This God is the source of all life and we all owe our life and breath to him (Acts 17:25).

Paul then makes his second move and introduces the Athenians to a new "theology of race." The great transcendent God of whom he has spoken has made everyone from one individual. "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places they should be." (Acts 17:26 NIV) All races find their origin in him. This God embraces everyone and there is no one who is outside of his reign. This is a global concept of the commonality of the races. No one race has a greater standing before this God. Paul has created space for the equality of humankind in an oppressive society. In the Greek and Roman world there were great class and racial differences. It is not unlike today in which there is a great divide between rich and poor, often following along the lines of race.

Paul adds an additional movement to this dance by introducing a new "theology of place" (Acts 17:26-27). This unknown God moves with purpose and has scattered the nations across the world, so they might seek him. He can establish the eons of time and by his sovereign power places the nations exactly where they should be. The message of Acts 17 is the divine explanation of the events of Genesis 10. The hand of God places the nations listed in Genesis 10. The confusion created at the Tower of Babel is corrected on the day of Pentecost, when men and women from almost every nation heard the gospel in their own tongue. The birth of the church, the new community of Christ, is made up of every tongue, tribe and nation and its focus is on the risen Christ. God's purpose is that men and women from every nation would reach out and find him and become a new community where equity and justice would prevail.

Now Paul introduces the final step in this creative dance. He introduces a new "theology of grace." He uses the Greek and Roman poets to establish common ground on the thinking that we are God's offspring. But he quickly makes the correction that we cannot create an image of Him - for then He would be humankind's creation. However, this God is gracious in that He is patient with ignorance. He challenges everyone to change his/her mindset or worldview and worship Him instead of creation, because judgment is in the future. But this unknown God is gracious and has set up One to judge the world at an appointed time and has verified His authority to do so by raising him from the dead. Paul does not use the name of Jesus here, but he has been debating and dialoguing for days with the best of the philosophical community about Jesus' death and resurrection. So, there is no mistaking who he is referring to in his statement that the proof of God's work is the person who has been raised from the dead. I have mentioned this before, but it bears repeating at this point. The litmus test for truth is the revealed Word of God. We must test all philosophies and worldviews against the revelation of God.

We have seen from just this one chapter that the apostle Paul was a genius in cross-cultural communication. If we were to explore the rest of the book of Acts, we would see the magnitude of his technical skills in engaging the world with the gospel of Christ and the gospel about Christ.

Now let us go to I Thessalonians 2:7-13 and listen to Paul as he reflects on his entrance into their context from a personal and relational point of view. Paul did not rely just on technical skills to communicate the gospel but realized the relational dimension of communication is what moves the message from the head to the heart.

In chapter two verse one Paul states "*You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure.*" The word Paul used here for failure is the Greek word "kenos" which means empty or vain. Paul was stating they had a very effective ministry among the



Thessalonians. This can also be seen in chapter one where Paul commended them for their spiritual growth. They had become a model church to all of Macedonian and Achaia and their faith had become known everywhere.

However, as Paul reflected on how this happened, it is surprising he never refers to any technical skills like debating and expounding the Word of God. Instead he uses very relational terms to describe their ministry. There are three major images in I Thess. 2:7-13 that not only characterized Paul's ministry but also describe spiritual edgewalkers.

The first image is that of a mother and infant child (2:7-8). The apostle reveals his feminine side in these statements. I have personally always pictured Paul as some gruff stoic Pharisee. In today's biblical literature he is certainly labeled a male chauvinistic personality with a strong bias against women. However, I do not endorse that view. There are glimpses of Paul throughout his epistles where he shows great respect and value for women. This is one of them. He likens himself to a mother who is embracing a young infant in one of the most intimate interactions possible, that of breast-feeding. The Greek words he uses describe a nursing mother caring for her child.

This image of mother and child is a valuable picture of what should happen when we attempt to share the gospel with someone. Paul says it is an intimate encounter where we embrace the individual and share the life milk of the Word of God. Another dimension is added to this picture as Paul says the Thessalonians became so "affectionately dear" to him that he shared not only the gospel with them but his very own "soul." The Greek word for "affectionately dear" is only found here in the New Testament. It is a special term that means to yearn or have deep feelings for someone. Effective communicators or spiritual edgewalkers are those who have the ability to immediately bond to someone or to a group and demonstrate deep compassion and concern for them. The

other word in this passage that is powerful is "soul." Most translations say, "*we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well*" (NIV). The word for lives is really "psuche" which means breath or life-giving soul. It is much deeper than just sharing your life with someone, but you actually give a piece of your soul, your innermost being, to the person with whom you are sharing the good news.

The second image, that of a "laborer," is found in chapter two verse nine. "*Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you*" NIV. In this passage, two key terms stand out as descriptors of the role of a laborer. The first is toil, the Greek word "kopon," which means to be cut or to toil and lose endurance. When we embrace people we also embrace their pain. When Jesus wanted to bring transformation to our lives he embraced the pain, suffering and sin of the world on the cross so that we might have victory over sin and death. Paul was willing to pay whatever price was necessary to see people enter the kingdom of God.

The second Greek word is "mochthos," which means to "toil with difficulty or sadness." There were times Paul wept for the Jews and Gentiles he was trying to reach with the gospel. His work was filled with great difficulty. He was put in prison, beaten, stoned, cast out of cities, etc. He had to learn to toil with great obstacles in the ministry. Ministry is not easy. This term is also used to describe "birth pangs" a mother experiences when a child is being born. Birth, whether spiritual or physical often involves a great deal of pain.

The third image found in this passage is that of a "father" who models the Christian life and is willing to mentor young Christians.

*You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who*

*believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. (2:10-12 NIV)*

There are so many wonderful picture words in this passage it is hard to do them all justice. There are three characteristics of a father as a model. Paul says he and his friends were holy, righteous and blameless in their behavior among the Thessalonians. Each of these terms provides a unique dimension not only of a model Christian but also of a spiritual edgewalker. The term "holy" does not mean just our standing before Christ; it is also the practical side of holiness in which one lives their life in purity, consecrated to follow Christ and his Word. The second word "righteous" means to live equitably or justly with those around you in the world. Christians need to handle their transactions with the world with great care and integrity. The third term "blameless" means that we live in such a way, so people cannot find fault with our lifestyle. It means to keep short accounts, so someone cannot get hold of you and drag you down. Paul understood the need for a consistent spiritual walk to match his talk if he were to be effective in reaching across cultures.

The next set of words in verse 11 deals with the mentoring relationship one should provide for young believers. Paul liked to cluster words together to paint a picture of what we need to be like to be effective in moving young Christians to maturity. He did not bifurcate evangelism from discipleship but understood that the Great Commission commands us to "make disciples." When we separate the gospel of Christ from the gospel about Christ we end up with a shallow evangelism that allows babes in Christ to wander around looking for a place to belong. However, when we keep them together we introduce people into the kingdom with its value system and to the new community, which represents the kingdom here on this earth.

The first word in this cluster is “encourage,” which comes from two Greek words: “para,” which means alongside, and “kaleo,” which means to call. The picture here is one who is called alongside to help. The Holy Spirit is referred to as the “Paraklete,” one who is called alongside to guide us into all truth. As Christians, we are called to be alongside of each other to help with the journey of faith.

The second term is the Greek word “paramutheomai,” which is a double word broken down into “para” (alongside) and “mutheomai,” which means to console, comfort, or instruct. Mentors are those who come alongside new believers and provide comfort, consolation and instruction to help that person move toward maturity.

The third word in the cluster is “marturomenoi,” the Greek word for one who is a witness or martyr. It is translated in our text as urging, but this does not really capture the essence of this wonderful word. It means that mentors are willing to solemnly testify and put their lives on the line for what they believe. The mentor is fearless and is constantly urging people to believe the message for which they are willing to give their lives.

Paul is instructing us as spiritual birth parents we play a role of modeling and mentoring our spiritual offspring if they are to move from being babes in Christ to mature Christians. Paul closes this passage with a prayer of praise to God for the growth that has taken place in the Thessalonians.

*And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of me, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (2:13 NIV)*

Authenticity of lifestyle in sharing the word of God is critical for those receiving the word to hear it not as a human word but as

a divine word. Paul walked on the edge by balancing his walk and his talk bringing authenticity to the communication of the gospel of Christ.

Let's summarize the characteristics of spiritual edgewalkers we have seen demonstrated by the apostle Paul.

Spiritual edgewalkers:

1. Show sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus.
2. Live with a creative balance using available technology and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
3. Utilize the available cultural places for communication to share the Good News of the kingdom.
4. Embrace the communication styles of the context in which they wish to share the Gospel.
5. Demonstrate a balance of exposition of the text and its relationship or application to daily life.
6. Present the word of God in a way that allows space for discussion and debate, so others can explore the truth.
7. Graciously respond to personal attacks in order to create space for continued dialogue.
8. Demonstrate flexibility in methodology of sharing the Good News in order to engage the cultural context, but never compromise the message of the Good News.
9. Engage the variety of worldviews by discovering common ground and then offering creative theological and philosophical alternatives for consideration.
10. Demonstrate a balance between technical and relational skills when sharing the good news.
11. Share the gospel with the compassion and care of a nursing mother.
12. Embrace the pain, sadness and difficulty of the world with the restoring power of the cross.
13. Model authenticity of the Christian life for new believers through consistency of their walk and talk.
14. Mentor young Christians like a parent to move them toward maturity in their Christian walk.

## 9

### **A Roman Spiritual Edgewalker – Priscilla**

Prisca stands out as a woman of significance in the New Testament. She is mentioned seven times in Acts and the Epistles.<sup>4</sup> These seven passages will give us a composite view of this spiritual edgewalker. She, like Paul, moves easily across cultural boundaries and is skilled in teaching the Word of God in a great variety of contexts as well as to men and women in the early church.

There are two different perspectives in dealing with Prisca, one by Luke and the other by Paul. From Luke in the book of Acts we can see the artisan dimension of Prisca's character, whereas Paul emphasizes the missionary dimension of her life. Luke mentions Prisca and her husband Aquila as they relate to other leaders such as Paul and Apollos, whereas Paul allows Prisca and Aquila to stand alone on their accomplishments. In Luke, this outstanding couple is secondary to the main characters, whereas Paul presents them as missional leaders based on their ministry. Luke always uses Priscilla, the more informal Greek derivative whereas; Paul always uses "Priskan" (Prisca), the more formal Roman derivative. I believe Paul had a deep respect for Prisca and her abilities as a businesswoman, teacher, and missional leader.

We do not have Prisca mentioned without her husband Aquila, which indicates they were an excellent team. However, the fact that Prisca is mentioned first in five out of the seven references seems to indicate Prisca was the dominant personality in the relationship. We can't prove this position, but it does pique one's interest that she is mentioned first, especially in a male biased New Testament culture. For instance, Luke never mentions them apart from their connection to a strong male figure such as Paul or Apollos. But Paul presents them on their own merits for the ministry they had accomplished in teaching and church planting. Paul also highlights the incredible risks they took on behalf of him and the missionary progress of the

gospel. Because the New Testament never separates them neither will I, although I do believe Prisca is the main focal point of their ministry. Also, out of respect, I will use the Roman name Prisca that Paul used consistently in his references to her instead of the Lukan term.

The Acts 18 passage is the only major narrative that gives us some insight to their background and the context in which they became Christians. Aquila was a Jew from Pontus, a region mentioned in Acts 2 as having representatives at the Day of Pentecost. Perhaps the converts from Pontus were the ones that led Aquila to the Lord. Aquila was a tentmaker or worker in leather. In his business he traveled to Rome where he met Prisca, who was of Roman descent. They were married and became partners in the tentmaking or leather working business.

It is obvious from the text that Prisca also became a Christian and together with her husband became leaders in the church at Rome. In AD 49 there was an uprising within the Jewish community under the rule of Emperor Claudius, which resulted in the deportation of the Christians. Prisca and Aquila were deported from Rome and went to Corinth (Acts 18:1-2). Prisca and Aquila returned to Rome after AD 54 because the persecution of Emperor Claudius had ended and so they were with Paul in Rome during his captivity. We know from Paul's account in his letter to the Roman church that Prisca and Aquila had a house church in Rome and they risked their lives on his behalf. Prisca and Aquila joined the ranks of spiritual edgewalkers as they traveled from a Roman culture to a Greek and Asia Minor Culture. They had a powerful ministry in each place God moved them.

When Prisca and Aquila were in Corinth they set up their tentmaking business and started a house church in the front of their shop. Most house churches in the time of New Testament were held in larger homes, often the wealthier class. One

example is Philemon, whose household was large enough to have slaves.<sup>5</sup>

Prisca and Aquila probably reproduced this model of house church in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and wherever they traveled. They were true tentmakers in their approach to ministry. Their trade sustained them financially, but their trade was also a great entry point into the marketplace where they could share their faith. Like their mentor, Paul, they could say they were not a burden on the church in carrying out their ministry. Like spiritual edgewalkers, they were able to integrate their spiritual lives in the marketplace. They did not have a sacred and a secular life but discovered their call was to love Christ and to share him in whatever setting God placed them.

When Paul arrived in Corinth he immediately heard of Prisca and Aquila and joined them in their business of making tents (Acts 18:2-4). Prisca and Aquila had the privilege of hearing Paul daily dialogue/debate (*dialogomai*) with the Jews and the Greeks. This was the same method Paul used in Thessalonica and Athens to communicate the gospel of the kingdom.

Prisca had a great mentor to train her in the skill of reasoning and debating from the scriptures in a Greek culture. She was able to gain a powerful scriptural and theological foundation for future ministry. It is no wonder she could approach Apollos later and help him understand more fully the implications of the gospel of Christ and the gospel about Christ. As a spiritual edgewalker, she was able to be both teacher and learner in the same context. Spiritual edgewalkers have a freedom to submit to the teaching of others and have the confidence to become teachers for those who are less educated in the word of God. They are ministering servants being disciplined but at the same time discipling others. This creates a great balance in the Christian life. Over the next ten years, Prisca and Aquila's path would cross Paul's during their ministry.



When Paul decided to leave Corinth, he took Prisca and Aquila with him (Acts 18:18-19). They were not only partners in business but also partners in ministry. Even though Prisca and Aquila were never called missionaries, they were called fellow-workers with Paul, which is technically the same thing as missionaries (Rom. 16:3). Paul evidently had a great deal of trust in them and their teaching ability because when he decided to go to Syria he left them in charge of the new effort in Ephesus.

While Prisca and Aquila were in Ephesus, Apollos, a very brilliant scholar in the scriptures arrived from Alexandria (Acts 18:23-18). He had grown up under the theology of John the Baptist and knew about the ministry of Jesus and how He fulfilled the messianic promises of God. Apollos was able to debate with great skill in the Synagogue. Prisca and Aquila, like Paul, made the synagogue the focal point of their outreach strategy. It was there they heard Apollos and immediately befriended him. They asked him to live with them at the tentmaking shop. In their shop and home, they were able to explain to him the unique baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Ivoni Richter Reimer writes:

*What appears to me important at this point, about the missionary activity of the artisan couple, is that although Apollos did all this teaching so accurately (Akiribos), their teaching was still more accurate (akribsteron). (Acts 18:26)! <sup>6</sup>*

Whatever accolades are given to Apollos can certainly be given to Prisca and Aquila. They had superior knowledge of the word of God, they were excellent teachers, and they had a more complete Christology and Pauline theology than did Apollos. "They teach the teacher." <sup>7</sup>

In Acts 18:26, it says they "explained to him the way of God more adequately" (NIV). The word for "explained" in the Greek text is from a compound word "*ek-tithemi*," which means to "explain, expound, expose, declare, set forth." The term "*ek*"

means out and "*titheml*" means to set out or cast out, so you get the idea that Prisca and Aquila were able to cast out of or set forth from the scriptures a better way of understanding the work of Christ on our behalf. This term is only used in Acts four times and in each context, it means someone can give a full explanation or exposition of the scriptures. This term is used to describe their mentor Paul in Acts 28:23 where he says,

*They managed to meet Paul on a certain day and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening, he explained (ektitheimi) and declared (paramarturomenos) to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. (Acts 28:23 NIV)*

Paul was Prisca and Aquila's mentor for several years in Corinth and Ephesus, so they had a thorough understanding of how to expound the scriptures just like he did. This skill in expounding the word of God is what made them excellent missionaries, pastors and church planters.

We don't know how long Prisca and Aquila tutored Apollos in Ephesus but after a period of time Apollos decided the Lord was leading him to Achaia and back to Corinth where Prisca and Aquila had just ministered. I believe this was no coincidence but the results of the influence Prisca and Aquila on Apollos by sharing the difficulty of the ministry going on in Corinth. Even Paul had tried to debate with the Jews but was abused and rejected. Apollos, who was a brilliant scholar, was eager to give it a try in Corinth. The text says,

*On arriving he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. Acts 18:27-28 NIV*

Prisca and Aquila understood the concept of planting the seed, watering, and reaping the harvest. Everyone has a part to play in the process of disciple-making and church planting. As spiritual edgewalkers they were to play a great variety of roles to bring men and women into the kingdom of God and to equip them for ministry.

This is the end of the narrative sections that describe the ministry and role of Prisca and Aquila. The other passages are greetings given to the churches that include references to this incredible team. However, from these passages we can glean some additional insights to their spiritual edgewalking abilities.

Prisca and Aquila were skilled in church planting and church growth. This is affirmed in 1 Corinthians 16:19 which was written by Paul when he was in Ephesus. We know Prisca and Aquila had established a house church in Corinth and Paul has had contact with them. Their pattern of ministry was consistent. As spiritual edgewalkers they gathered believers into spiritual communities where they experienced and learned to demonstrate the values of the kingdom of God. It is quite amazing Prisca and Aquila disappear from the Lukan account altogether. It is hard to tell whether this is a bias toward women on Luke's part or the fact that he only mentions those who are directly ministering with key male leaders, such as in the Acts 18 account with Paul and Apollos. One can only speculate.

In her book *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*, Ivoni Reimer points out there are only five women that Luke gives any real space or time to in the expansion of the church. One is Sapphira, who was disobedient to the Holy Spirit and was killed by divine judgment. The other four are Tabitha (9:36-43), Lydia (16:13-15, 40), the prophetic slave girl (16:16-18) and Prisca (18:1-3, 18-19, 24-28).<sup>8</sup> In contrast, when one reads Paul's letters to the churches they are filled with greetings concerning many women in the ministry. It appears Paul had a greater appreciation of women in the ministry than did Luke. It

is evident Prisca and Aquila had a special place in Paul's heart for their consistent ministry of teaching and church planting.

From Romans 16:3-4 passage, we can gain several dimensions of Prisca and Aquila being spiritual edgewalkers. First, they are called fellow-workers - a better translation would be co-laborers. They had joined Paul in dealing with the toil and hardship of the ministry. They, like Paul did not want to burden the church to support their ministry, so they were willing to be tent-makers or leather workers to be self-sustaining. Prisca and Aquila walked a fine line of being connected to the body of Christ but not using the body of Christ to accomplish their own vision or dreams.

Paul expresses special thanks for the work of Prisca and Aquila. The proximity of Paul had no bearing on the faithfulness of Prisca's and Aquila's ministry. They were faithful co-laborers whether he was in Ephesus with them or whether he was in other cities sharing Christ and strengthening the churches. Co-laborers are committed to the work because of their great love for Christ. What they did daily was not to allow themselves to be measured by others but by the Lord himself. As spiritual edgewalkers Prisca and Aquila were motivated by their love for Christ and not by of the praise of others, the expectations of the church or even the success in the ministry. Many Christian workers get sidetracked and become dependent upon the accolades or recognition of others or some standard of success created by our culture and allowed to be the motivating force in their lives. When these expectations or success goals are not met, their motivation wanes and they become depressed, crash and burn in the ministry.

I spent several years working at Link Care Center in Fresno. This is a ministry to missionaries and pastors who have come to a breaking point and are no longer able to minister because of serious problems in ministry or their families. Many of these problems were caused by the high level of expectation on the lives of these wonderful servants. They were forced to buy into

the success standards of churches and missional agencies based on economic or numerical factors influenced by middle and upper middle-class business standards. Little room was left for failure or slow growth. Therefore, missionaries and pastors who were caught in difficult cross-cultural, inner-city, or highly resistant tribal/religious areas were overwhelmed by the expectations and soon became disillusioned in the ministry.

I am impressed by how the New Testament writers, especially Paul, are so honest about the difficulties of ministry. Often Paul would give a long list of obstacles he was facing that had deterred the ministry from going forward. Somewhere, the church has lost the ability to accept setbacks, deep-seated barriers or failure. The fact that the bottom line often is money and efficiency (the most bang for our buck) has left little room for those who do not see their ministry flourish. I have pastored several inner-city multi-cultural churches and know the process of church growth is exacerbated by the need to maintain reconciling relationships and to overcome economic, racial, ethnic, and spiritual barriers. We cannot place the same expectations of growth on an inner-city cross-cultural church as we do a suburban mono-cultural church. I have consulted with numerous denominations and I am puzzled by the fact that they expect all churches in North America to be able to grow and become self-supporting in the same timeline. We are willing to recognize we may have to support an overseas church for a generation or two, and yet the setting of the overseas effort and the inner-city cross-cultural setting here at home are almost the same. As spiritual edgewalkers, we need to be motivated by our love for Christ and our commitment to his mission and not the expectations of the world's systems of which the church is a part.

The second insight we gain from this passage is that Prisca and Aquila risked their lives for Paul and the whole church of the Gentiles. We do not know exactly where or when this occurred. However, we do know Paul created a tremendous disturbance in Ephesus and the whole city was in a stage of riot. Thirty to

forty thousand people had jammed into the amphitheater to oppose Paul and his co-workers for preaching the good news. For hours they were shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." I have stood in that very theater in Ephesus and could imagine how terrifying that must have been. Yet, Paul wanted to go into the theater and speak to them. He was either the boldest and most courageous man alive or the dumbest. I embrace the first. Paul had to leave and went to Macedonia to strengthen the churches. His words in 1 Cor. 15:32 that he "fought wild beasts in Ephesus" gives us a clue to how Prisca and Aquila risked their lives for him. It doesn't really matter where or when this happened. The fact is Prisca and Aquila as spiritual edgewalkers were willing to risk their lives for the gospel and their fellow workers in the ministry. Prisca and Aquila did not stay in the comfortable middle but walked on the edge of the culture where risks were taken so the transforming power of the gospel could be released through their walk and talk.

The final mention of Prisca and Aquila is in 2 Timothy 4:19, when Paul is at the close of his ministry and life. This comment by Paul is a great testament to the longevity of Prisca's and Aquila's ministry. Their house church is not mentioned here but they are connected in this passage to the household of Onesiphorous. It is evident from 2 Tim. 1:16-18 that Onesiphorous had risked his life for Paul and perhaps that is why he includes Prisca and Aquila in this same passage. Onesiphorous was in Ephesus with Prisca and Aquila and had a refreshing type of ministry to Paul. Considering what Paul has said in Rom. 16:3-4 it would appear that Prisca and Aquila had the same kind of ministry to Paul as Onesiphorous. They not only refreshed Paul but like Onesiphorous sought out Paul when he was in chains in Rome and ministered to him there.<sup>9</sup>

A man's last words are often lasting words and I believe that is true for Paul. He wanted everyone to remember the faithfulness of this couple and their life of ministry. He desired to acknowledge their risk-taking for the gospel, for the

brothers and sisters in the faith and especially for him when he was free to minister as well as when he was in prison. As spiritual edgewalkers, Prisca and Aquila were faithful to Christ, their brothers and sisters in Christ and did not shrink back from the challenges and risks of ministry.

Let's summarize what spiritual edgewalker principles we have gleaned from Prisca's and Aquila's lives. Spiritual edgewalkers:

1. Move from one culture to another without losing their identity and assimilate but retain their identity and engage each new cultural context with the gospel of Christ and the gospel about Christ.
2. Integrate their spiritual lives into the marketplace.
3. Do not split their lives between secular and sacred but discover their call is to love Christ and to share him in whatever occupation or setting God has placed them.
4. Can be both teachers and learners in the same context.
5. Are followers of Christ being disciplined by someone older in the faith while at the same time discipling someone younger in the faith.
6. Demonstrate in-depth skill in expounding the word of God by exploring diverse theological positions.
7. Embrace those who differ theologically and are willing to dialogue, expound and engage the differing theological issues instead of separating and criticizing them.
8. Learn to find common ground on which to develop dialogue where doctrine can be clarified and corrected.
9. Are willing to play a great variety of roles to bring men and women into the kingdom of God and equip them for ministry.
10. Are deeply committed to the gathering of believers into new communities where they can experience and learn to demonstrate kingdom values.

11. Value highly their connection to the body of Christ but do not use the body of Christ to fulfill their personal visions or dreams.
12. Are motivated by their love for Christ and his mission and not by the expectations or praise of others.
13. Do not buy into the world system's model of success as their standard for ministry.
14. Do not stay in the comfortable middle but walk at the edge of culture where risks are taken so that the transforming power of the gospel can be released through their walk and talk.
15. Are faithful to Christ and their brothers and sisters in Christ and do not shrink back from the challenges and risks of ministering with others.



## 10

### **A Samaritan Spiritual Edgewalker – Philip**

Philip was the first disciple to move out of the comfortable middle of Jewish society in Jerusalem and go to Samaria to preach the gospel. His life as an evangelist stands out from all the rest of the disciples. Philip's journey from an ordinary nobody to a deacon, to an evangelist, to a person who brings transformation in a whole new culture is parallel to many of us who have journeyed that same path. We found ourselves being motivated and challenged by needs and circumstances around us and as we responded, there were those with spiritual insight who encouraged and prodded us to positions of responsibility. As we look back on our lives we discover more about the call of God than some great vision of the future or unique burden that grew in our lives. Not everyone has a dramatic call like the Apostle Paul. I would like to think that a good number of us over time have fallen in love with Jesus and entered a journey that took us far beyond what we could think or dream.

I have observed those who become spiritual edgewalkers are those who have been flexible and obedient. They respond to the unique challenges and circumstances of their journey in a positive way. They do not just react to what is happening around them, but they discover meaning and direction during dramatic circumstances and they engage new challenges. They move to new heights in their lives instead of retreating to the comfortable status quo. This is certainly the case of Philip the Evangelist. Let's examine the context and the environment in which he became a spiritual edgewalker.

The church has just been born on the day of Pentecost and it was growing at full throttle. Hundreds, even thousands of people were being saved daily and added to the fellowship of the church. Miracles and wonders of the presence of the Kingdom of God are on full display through the disciples of Christ especially through Peter. There is a new community emerging in which people are demonstrating a unique quality

of sacrificial love. They are selling their property and sharing their lives in a depth never witnessed before.

There have been a few hiccups along the way. Annias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and their dramatic death brought a whole new understanding of the power of the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Sadducees were becoming jealous and were arresting the Apostles and putting them in jail. However, an angel of the Lord was sent to release them and the very next day they were in the temple courts preaching.

Another hiccup was the emergence of a large group of Grecian Jews who felt the Hebraic Jews were discriminating against them. This issue brought the spectacular growth of the church to a screeching halt. The Apostles knew immediately they would have to resolve this problem if this new movement called the church was to have honor and favor in the sight of the world and give credence to the transforming power of the Gospel.

This is where Philip entered the picture. Philip was a Grecian Jew chosen by the apostles to be one of the early groups of leaders called deacons who would serve the special needs of the Grecian Jews. The qualifications for the group were *"to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom."* Since Philip was among this group we can assume he met these qualifications. There were certain evidences from Philip's life that made him, and six others stand out from among the rest of the leaders to be chosen and presented to the apostles for commissioning to serve Christ. The primary focus in choosing these individuals was not so much on what they believed but on the character of their walk before the Lord. They demonstrated the ability to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and the skill to apply their knowledge of Christ to everyday situations.

When Philip stepped into an arena of new responsibilities and challenges of being a deacon, little did he know this group

would become the catalyst for the expansion of the church from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and the remotest parts of the earth! Philip would play a strategic place in moving the gospel from Jerusalem cross culturally. The catalyst for this move would be a fellow deacon called Stephen, whom God raised up as a powerful voice. God's power came upon him and great signs and wonders accompanied his proclamation of the good news of Christ and the Kingdom of God. Foreign-born Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia began to debate Stephen. But when they could not win the debate, they decided to trap him in the act of blasphemy that would result in Stephen's death. Stephen was called before the Sanhedrin and preached a powerful history lesson – a "bible walk-through" – which culminated in the accusation that the Jews had not listened to their prophets, but they put them to death and now they had put the final prophet Jesus, the Messiah, to death. Stephen's message caused such turmoil among the Jews he was dragged outside the city and was stoned to death. Stephen became the first martyr of the Church.

The death of Stephen becomes a catalyst for the expansion of the church. Persecution began in earnest against the church, led by a young Jew named Saul. The apostles became frightened and hunkered down in Jerusalem, but the young disciples and deacons were scattered to Judea and Philip, a young deacon, went to Samaria. Saul continued his rampage until he was finally stopped by the Lord on the road to Damascus where he submitted to Christ and was transformed into the Apostle Paul. Hearing of the conversion of Paul, Peter launches out from Jerusalem on several missionary tours where he observed Gentiles being saved and accepted into the body of Christ.

The expansion of the church was bringing new challenges for the Apostles. Should Gentiles be full members of the church? Should they be circumcised or not? The early church was very Jewish in its outlook and it was hard to know what customs from Judaism should be carried over into this new community

called the body of Christ. Another question was whether the church in Jerusalem could control the spread of the church and provide guidance, so the church was uniform in belief and practice. The choosing of deacons had already challenged this kind of thinking and a way was made to include the Hellenistic Jews.

During the persecution in Jerusalem, evangelists from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch of Syria to share the good news with the "Greeks." God blessed their efforts and many disciples were brought into the kingdom. News of their success quickly reached Jerusalem and the leadership sent Barnabas, the Pastor/Teacher to establish a church. It was probably a move by Jerusalem to keep close control on this emerging Gentile church. The expansive growth of the Antioch church caused Barnabas to search for the Apostle Paul, who had been sent by the Jerusalem church to reach the Greeks. Under Barnabas' and Paul's ministry, the disciples at Antioch were trained and became the first to be called "Christians" or "Christ Followers." However, God was not through with this emerging Gentile church. Agabus a prophet came from Jerusalem to Antioch and prophesied a famine would impact Judea. In response, the church of Antioch sacrificially gave money to help the church (churches) of Judea. All four of the spiritual gifts listed in Ephesians 4 contributed to the birth and growth of the Church in Antioch. Is it any wonder the believers in Antioch were first called "Christians" or "Christ Followers?"

Every time I read the book of Acts I am struck by how God works behind the scenes to accomplish his purposes for the people of God. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said the church would be His witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and, beyond to the remotest parts of the earth. The little band of deacons that included Stephen and Philip became the seedbed for this incredible expansion of the church.

Let's turn our attention on Philip and see what makes him a spiritual edgewalker. What is hidden in the context of Philip's

life that leads him to venture into Samaria with the gospel of the Kingdom? First, Philip had a multicultural background and knew how people felt when discriminated against from the other side. He knew what it was like to walk the edge between two cultures. He was both Jew and Gentile, a Hellenistic Jew, and it was not an easy life being caught in the middle. The Hebraic Jews considered Philip, like so many Hellenistic Jews, a half-breed. I believe this background contributed to Philip going to Samaria. He understood the context of that culture well.

Another reason might have been that his good friend, Stephen, who had just been martyred, was a Samaritan. There is some indication that Stephen's message to the Sanhedrin was from the Samaritan Pentateuch, which was developed during the inter-testamental period and was found among the Dead Sea scrolls in Qumran. The Samaritans had built their own worship center during that time in Mt. Gerazim, which is referred to by the woman at the well in Sychar, in her conversation with Jesus. (John 4:1- 38)

If you study Stephen's message carefully, he referred to Jacob's body being brought back to Shechem. *Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb of Abraham bought from Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money. (Acts 7:16)* One of the major differences between the Samaritan and the Hebraic Pentateuch was the issue of the burial place of Abraham and Sarah, Issac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. The Jews claimed the cave of Machpelah in the plains of Mamre in Hebron as the burial place of the patriarchs as recorded in Gen. 23:1-20. The Samaritans translated the place to be Shechem, which was the first capital of the divided kingdom and referred to as Sychar where Jesus dialogued with the woman. Philip may have been influenced by his fellow deacon Stephen and therefore, went to Samaria when Stephen died.

Philip also understood prejudice against the Samaritans from the Hebraic Jews in Jerusalem and so he decided to go to the focal point of that prejudice. He could certainly identify with the Samaritans and relate to them out of his personal experience. Whatever the reasons, Philip was motivated to go to Samaria.

In Acts chapter eight we can observe some of the characteristics that made Philip a spiritual edgewalker. This passage gives us insight into his first mission in a cross-cultural context. As a spiritual edgewalker, Philip preached a wholistic gospel to the Samaritans. *But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women (Acts 8:12).* Philip preached the "gospel of Christ" which was the kingdom of God overcoming all barriers and the "gospel about Christ" which tells of his death, burial, and resurrection providing victory over sin and death.

This is a liberating gospel for the Samaritans. It included them in the kingdom of God, because Jesus died for the Samaritans as well as the Jews. In this kingdom there would be men and women from every tribe, nation and tongue. No one who called on the name of Jesus would be left out of the kingdom - it would be inclusive. This was very different from the Jewish message and theology they had heard and experienced. That theology was exclusive. The Good News was the Samaritans could be part of the new community in which Jew, Gentile, Samaritan, bond and free, male and female would have equity. Philip walked the edge between two cultures and religions and brought hope and transformation to both.

The Samaritans also experienced the liberating power of the wholistic gospel of the kingdom that invades every realm of human experience. They saw miraculous signs and wonders, as well as physical healing and demons cast out through the power of the kingdom. For a long time, they had been deceived by Simon, the sorcerer, who had amazed them by his

magic. But they quickly saw the difference when Philip proclaimed the true kingdom of God and the power of God was unleashed in their presence. There was no formula or magical potion like the sorcerer; instead, Philip brought them a person named Jesus who could deliver them spiritually and physically. This Jesus was the Christ and the King of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, Jesus had rule over every dimension of life. There was no place or thing that Jesus could not transform by his power.

A second characteristic of spiritual edgewalking Philip demonstrated was his confidence that the power of the Gospel can overcome counterfeits of this world. Philip certainly had heard of Simon the sorcerer. But he did not change his message to accommodate or to challenge Simon. He demonstrated confidence that the Word of God and the power of the kingdom would break through and show what was true and what was counterfeit. Philip knew the signs and wonders were a by-product of preaching the Word of God, which allowed the kingdom of God to break through into human experience and bring deliverance. Simon the sorcerer, on the other hand, was caught up by the signs and wonders instead of the truth of the kingdom of God. This was demonstrated later when Simon attempted to purchase the ability to dispense the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:19). As spiritual edgewalkers, Philip and the early leaders of the church did not get enamored by signs and wonders but focused on preaching the gospel of Christ, the kingdom of God and the gospel about Christ, the victory on the cross.

Philip also demonstrated his spiritual edgewalking through building unity and reconciliation with the church in Jerusalem. When the church in Jerusalem heard about the transformation of the people of Samaria they sent Peter and John to make sure it was the same as what had happened in Jerusalem. Philip embraced them and saw the Holy Spirit come upon the church in Samaria through the laying on of Peter and John's hands. This process tied the movement happening in Samaria

to the same movement occurring in Jerusalem. It would have been tragic if the early church had been split with two centers, one in Jerusalem and the other in Samaria. This would have perpetuated the divisions of the past between the Jews focusing on Jerusalem and the Samaritans focusing on Mt. Gerazim. Philip gave Peter and John full access to the church in Samaria, so that unity would be established between Jerusalem and Samaria avoiding sectarianism.

Sectarianism is hindering the church today. It prevents us from working together in unity to unleash the transforming power of the Gospel. We experienced this among the Fresno churches. However, after much prayer God began to work throughout our city and new ministry collaborations began to form. God gave me a vision to bring together the faith-based non-profits in the city to a monthly forum called Citybuilders Roundtable. Non-profits that normally competed with each other for turf and money became collaborative and began resourcing each other for mutual ministry. God was working miracles with new ministries being born and the body of Christ grew together in unity.

I was asked by the leadership of No Name Fellowship to begin a new organization that would penetrate the highest crime and highest poverty area of the city. With this blessing I formed a board and started the Fresno Leadership Foundation (FLF), which was patterned after the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation. We chose five high crime, high poverty communities which were centered by an elementary school. It was our desire to build the capacity of leadership in these communities to take back their communities from gangs and to become stable and economically viable. A second trust was to build the capacity of partner ministries in these areas. Fresno Leadership Foundation raised about \$200,000 each year for two years and gave grants to the Christian agencies working in these neighborhoods. However, we quickly realized we were becoming a Christian United Way and were creating a dependency. This caused us to change our direction, so we



dismantled that program and focused on capacity building within these organizations, so they could enlarge their boards and expand their funding base.

Fresno Leadership Foundation has now become One By One Leadership Foundation and is one of the premiere Community Development agencies in the United States. Barbara Elliott, a former international correspondent for PBS has written about One By One Leadership Foundation in her book *Street Saints, Renewing America's Cities*.<sup>10</sup> Over the past thirteen years we have seen God do great miracles in Fresno. We have been given the All-American City Award, one of 10 cities in the United States, based on several of the Christian ministries in the city started during this period, as well as the unity of leadership in the city.

This unity the Philip, Peter and John built in Samaria caused the church to thrive. God was doing great things in Samaria and you would think that Philip would settle in and enjoy the work God was doing. However, Philip was willing to leave a very successful revival and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8:26-40 there is a startling story of Philip leaving a ministry at its high point to go to some distant desert place to share the good news with just one person. Philip did not just cross ethnic boundaries but now he crossed racial boundaries in his encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch. An African American friend of mine, Raleigh Washington of Promise Keepers, likes to mention that, "Ethiopians are black today and were black in the past and will probably be black in the future." Philip saw no boundaries in the presentation of the good news of the kingdom. He saw this gospel break down barriers between Jew, Gentile and Samaritan and was confident that it would be able to liberate an Ethiopian. We are told in the text that the Ethiopian had been in Jerusalem to worship and was returning to his own country. He probably was a God-fearer but had not heard of the liberating power of Jesus Christ.

The Ethiopian is reading from the book of Isaiah the Prophet when Philip engaged him. Philip took time to explore the depth of understanding of the Ethiopian and used that as a base on which to explain the work of Christ and the Kingdom of God. So often in our anxiousness to present the gospel we rush in and pay no attention to what the other person believes. We often fail to find the simple bridges in a person's faith structure to introduce the good news of Christ. As a spiritual edgewalker, Philip was willing to begin where the Ethiopian was and explore with him creative new spiritual insights. He led the eunuch to embrace Christ. Engaging a person at the point of their spiritual understanding is more important than a pre-set presentation of the gospel.

Philip knew the Word of God so well he could enter into the conversation of the Ethiopian and the text. God had already prepared this man's heart by drawing him to the messianic text of Isa. 53. Philip used this prophetic text to share the good news that Jesus was the Messiah. Philip perceived the Ethiopian understood the concept of the kingdom and the coming messiah but was struggling whether the prophet Isaiah was referring to himself or to someone in the future. Philip shared a wholistic gospel that included the good news of the kingdom and the power of the resurrected Christ.

In a post-modern, post-Christian world, it is extremely important to know the Word of God thoroughly if we want to engage men and women who are searching for understanding and truth. When churches move to a high tech, high media presentation of the scriptures, it is easy to leave our bibles at home and depend on what we see on the power-point screen. It is easy to become passive learners and not do the kind of study that enriches the soul and changes the heart. We rely on second hand information about Christ and the Christian life instead of digging it out for ourselves. The personal study of God's Word is essential if we are going to walk on the edge of our culture and call for transformation.

The rest of Philip's life evidences his ability to cross barriers and walk on the edge of faith. From the Ethiopian, he was swept away to Ashdod and then to Caesarea where he raised four daughters who become prophetesses (Acts 8:40; 21:9). The integrity and quality of his life in ministry is reproduced in his daughters. There is no greater joy for a parent than to see their children embrace Christ and sense God's call on their lives. Philip was able to walk the fine line between ministry and raising his family well. His home was a place of hospitality as shown by the visit of Paul when he left Ephesus and began his journey to Jerusalem (Acts 21:8,9).

Sadly, we have read many stories of evangelists and Christian workers who did not have integrity but were "spiritual splitters," living one life in public and another in private. It is so easy in our culture today to buy into the public and private split when the media so quickly publishes such statements as: "What I do in private is nobody's business." False! If a person's character and actions are in sync, they have integrity, but if they are split there is little integrity. As spiritual edgewalkers, we need to learn to live life consistently in many contexts.

In Acts 21:8-9 Philip is given the title of Evangelist and is called "one of the seven." His legacy is one of following Christ and engaging a complex society with the good news of the kingdom and the gospel about Christ. Let's summarize the spiritual edgewalking principles we have discovered in Philip's life.

Spiritual edgewalkers:

1. See circumstances as a way to discover new avenues of ministry.
2. Use their multicultural background to bridge to marginalized people.
3. Embrace prejudice and discrimination by using it as a base for creative ministry.

4. Demonstrate confidence in the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to overcome spiritual counterfeits offered by the world.
5. Commit themselves to reconciliation and the unity of the Body of Christ.
6. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit even if it means leaving a successful ministry.
7. Walk a balanced life between family and ministry so their children will embrace God's call and ministry for their lives.
8. Live consistently, not splitting between public and private life.

## 11

### A Cyprian Spiritual Edgewalker – Barnabas

Barnabas is unique because he is a number two person working alongside the Apostle Paul. Not everyone is cut out to be the number one leader! There are those who are tremendous helpers and enjoy working in the shadow of someone else. Spiritual edgewalkers are not always in the number one position in leadership but often are more powerful in their supportive role within an organization. Too often people get caught in the "Peter Principle" and they are elevated to a position beyond their capabilities. Failure, disappointment and damage to the person and to the ministry are often the tragic result. It is tempting to take a person who performs well in one area and think they are going to be excellent in an area not related to their gifting or passion. Missional leadership is most powerful when passion and gifting come together with opportunity and vision.

Barnabas was really a Levite by the name of Joseph. This means he was from the priestly tribe and probably was involved in leading worship in a local synagogue. He was consecrated to the Lord and may have been in the temple area on the Day of Pentecost. We are not sure how he heard the gospel, but he is an early convert and his name is changed because of his lifestyle.

The name Barnabas means "son of prophecy," or "exhortation" and certainly reflects the type of ministry he had after his conversion. He was evidently a powerful preacher and had an effective ministry among the Jewish leaders.<sup>11</sup>

In Col. 4:10 we discover that Barnabas and John Mark are cousins. Barnabas took John Mark along with Paul on the first missionary trip but turned back at Perga to go home in Cyprus. *In Acts 11:24 he is described as "a good man and full of the Holy Spirit" (compare Isa. 11:2; 1 Cor. 12:8,11) "and of faith," traits that gave him influence and leadership.* His reputation

would prove valuable when Saul was converted and tried to associate with the Christians in Jerusalem.

There are four small portraits of Barnabas in the book of Acts that develop a composite picture of him as a spiritual edgewalker. The first small portrait found in Acts 4:36-37, gives us insight into his background and the context in which he ministered. Barnabas was from the beautiful island of Cyprus. He moved to Jerusalem and became involved in the temple. After his conversion, Barnabas quickly became a leader in the early church and had a deep compassion for the poor. As he saw the poor coming to Christ, he was moved to sell a piece of property and donate the monies to the church to be used to meet the needs. We are not told where this property was. It could have been a field right there in Jerusalem, but I prefer to believe it was back on the Island of Cyprus and he was saving it to build a little retirement cottage.

Isn't it interesting how Christ often rearranges our priorities when we are committed to following kingdom values? Barnabas learned the biblical principle of stewardship very early in his life. He learned that everything we have belongs to God. 1 Tim. 6:7-10 says: *"After all, we didn't bring anything with us when we came into the world, and we certainly cannot carry anything with us when we die."* As a spiritual edgewalker Barnabas held his possessions lightly and released them for kingdom work.

What would life be like, if we all lived with the understanding that everything we have belongs to God and we need to justify what we keep? How would our lives be different? We can become very possessive of certain things and they can get in the way of our listening to God and his call on our lives. Materialism is one of the greatest problems in the world and church today.

*Consider the situation in our world: in 1999 Bill Gates, Paul Allen, and Steve Balmar of Microsoft had almost*

*\$140 billion in assets – more than the combined gross national product of 43 least-developed countries and their 600 million people. Or a trivia question that is hardly trivial: On what did the U.S. citizens spend more than the gross national product of 90 nations (out of the world's 130)? The answer: trash bags! <sup>12</sup>*

Most of us tend to see money as neutral and don't understand to what degree classism influences the decisions that are made in our churches today. Most of my ministry has been in inner-city contexts and it has amazed me that even today, the gap between suburban and inner-city churches has narrowed very little. There is minimal partnering and sharing of resources by suburban churches with churches in these depressed communities where resources are so desperately needed. Churches become so caught up with building new and larger buildings that their debt load prevents them from responding to their sister churches in the "at-risk communities." Instead of becoming church planting churches, they continue to enlarge their facilities to draw people from farther and farther away from their local community.

Marva Dawn shares an interesting insight concerning our stewardship of money as it relates to weddings held in our churches and the opportunity to engage in mission.

*I won't even hazard a guess at how much is spent on the average church wedding (when \$10,000 for one bridal gown is not out of the ordinary), but can the fortunes spent be compatible with true fellowship, with God's commands, when people are starving? One nearby pastor suggests to each bridal couple that they give to the church (for its mission) a tithe of what they spend on their wedding. <sup>13</sup>*

Materialism is not just something that affects the rich; it also affects the poor. It persuades them to make foolish decisions based on the false promise of identity and status if they just

buy a certain beauty product, piece of electronic equipment or specially designed car. I have personally visited homes in a slum area that had the latest big screen TV but not enough money to feed and clothe their children. Unless we are willing to engage the poor and help them gain a perspective of stewardship, they will remain poor because of warped decisions promoted by our culture through the media.

The second small portrait in Acts 9:26-28 reveals that Barnabas was willing to share his life and integrity to help outcasts become insiders in the Body of Christ. He was used of the Lord to help one of the great persecutors of the church join the leadership of the church. The apostle Paul had been miraculously converted on the road to Damascus. He had received his sight and call to preach the gospel of Christ, through the ministry of Ananias. Paul had come from Damascus to Jerusalem and was trying to associate with the believers. They were extremely suspicious of him. It had to be very hard for those who had been cast into jail or beaten because of Paul's actions toward the church to believe his conversion was genuine. They had doubts deep in their hearts that this man could actually be a Christian. Imagine what it would be like if your worst enemy would come to Christ and then ask to join you in a ministry venture!

Barnabas was willing to walk on the edge and become a bridge builder in this time of mistrust. He was willing to risk his reputation and integrity so someone who was an outsider could become an insider. I believe Barnabas knew a great deal about the grace of God. He demonstrated a confidence that the God who was able to embrace us even when we were sinners could reach out and embrace the persecutor Saul, now called Paul. The church today is in desperate need of such men and women, who will take a risk and extend grace so that someone who is an outsider can become an insider.

I was interim pastor at Northwest Church in Fresno when the Billy Graham Mission came to our city. The Graham



organization promoted a process called Operation Andrew was designed to reach those outside the walls of the church with the Good News. It was a wonderful opportunity to pray, befriend someone, and be the bridge builder in their lives so they could come to Christ. We could help them move from being outside the kingdom to becoming an insider in the kingdom. Through personal relationships men and women could find a safe place in the body of Christ. The wonderful thing that happened was many people came to Christ before the stadium gatherings because men and women of the church were praying and extending God's grace in relationships.

I like Barnabas because he was willing to be a #2 person as well as a #1. He did not let his position or reputation as a leader within the early church stand in the way of serving others. He was willing to take a supportive role of Paul so that Paul could become part of the new community and join the ministry of the kingdom. As you read the book of Acts, you will discover that Barnabas and Paul are listed just three times. Whereas, Paul and Barnabas are listed eight times. Luke seems to indicate the order of importance by these statements. Barnabas was just as comfortable in supporting Paul in the ministry as he was in leading certain ministries himself. Growing up as a twin I know what it is to be a number two. No one could ever tell us apart. I was always called by my brother's name. My brother and I had to put up with a constant confusion concerning our identity.

We need to remember that God uses everyone - the number twos and twelves and thirty-eights and one hundred and fifty sixes. We all have a place in His work and kingdom. Each of us has a special place where we can share our lives with someone and make a difference.

The third small portrait in Acts 11:22 reveals that Barnabas used his gifts to build up the body of Christ. Barnabas found out where God was at work and joined Him there. This is such a great principle! Barnabas heard about an evangelistic

crusade in Antioch and was sent there by the Jerusalem leadership. *"When He arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them."* Barnabas came alongside the evangelists from Cyprus and Cyrene who had been spreading the gospel and joined them in discipling the new converts. He saw where God was at work and began to use his gifts to further the ministry there. So many Christians spend endless hours trying to do something original or starting their own ministry rather than joining in what God is doing and enhancing the work of the Kingdom alongside some other brothers and sisters. Western culture tends to breed a strong spirit of individualism.

The spirit of individualism is a very powerful force in Christian circles. We have carried over the independent spirit from our culture into the church. When you read many of the New Testament books, especially Ephesians, you will find that most of the pronouns are in the plural rather than singular. There was constant encouragement to live and work in community to build the body of Christ. The corporate sense of the church has been eroded over the years and the body has become fragmented by this rugged individualism. I have observed this cultural anomaly among pastors and Christian leaders as well. There is little cooperation and often defensiveness among pastors and leaders to guard one's turf instead of rejoicing that God has sent someone else into the harvest field.

Barnabas began to teach and disciple the new believers, so they could mature in Christ. Evangelism is only the first step on a long journey. Young believers need someone to walk with them all the way to maturity. The word for encourage is "*para kaleo*" and it means literally to "call or come alongside." This is what we are to do for each other. We are to come alongside and help each other in the journey of faith. In this passage, Barnabas is using his gift of pastor-teacher. He knew how to use the word of God to strengthen new believers, so they would move to maturity.

Second, this passage says that Barnabas was “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith.” God blessed the work and large numbers of people were brought to the Lord. First, we see that Barnabas’ walk matched his talk. We have no testimony unless we have a consistent walk with the Lord. People don’t expect us to be perfect, but they do expect us to be consistent and improving. Many people can’t hear our message because our walk is drowning out our words.

This passage also shows that even though Barnabas’ gift was pastor-teacher, he also shared his faith, because many came to Christ. It was not only his walk but also his talk that brought growth to the body of Christ. I have an axiom that I live by and it is: absolutely no one will enter the kingdom of God by looking at the personal life of anyone. You see, even if someone could live perfectly it still would not get anyone into the kingdom. They must hear the gospel of Christ and the gospel about Christ – they must hear about Christ’s death on the cross, and His resurrection that conquered sin and the devil. Our culture has convinced us that a passive approach such as witnessing with our lifestyle will bring people into the kingdom of God. But that is not true. There must be content to our faith. Paul and Barnabas knew clearly that men and women needed to hear the gospel of Christ and the gospel about Christ.

*The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with the heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Rom. 10:8-10 NIV)*

Christ-followers solidify their faith when they go public concerning their decision to embrace the living Christ.

Finally, we come to our fourth small portrait of Barnabas in Acts 15:36-41 which reveals Barnabas' allegiance to his fellow workers. This is the dark portion of the portrait because it records a time of strife between Barnabas and Paul over young John Mark. Barnabas took John Mark with him along with Paul on the first missionary trip, but John turned back at Perga to go home to Cyprus. When Paul wanted to go back to each city and strengthen the believers, Barnabas again wanted to take his cousin, John Mark, even though he failed on the first missionary journey. But Paul refused. Paul and Barnabas had a big fight and parted company. I love the scriptures because they don't sugar coat things; they deal with reality. Christians do not have to withdraw into some isolated spiritual realm to deal with the problems of the world. We use the promises of the word of God, the power of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of the body of Christ to deal with the realities of life, no matter how painful or tragic.

Barnabas was able to look beyond personal failure and see the potential in young John Mark. He was willing to make the commitment for the long haul. This proved to be a wise decision because when Paul came to the end of his life he said in 2 Tim. 4:11, *"Bring me my books, and my papers and my coat which I left with Carpus in Troas and bring me John Mark for he will be helpful to me."* Barnabas shared his allegiance with young John Mark. We need to be reminded of this when we are trying to win someone to Christ or we are discipling a new believer. We have to look beyond many failures and see the potential of this individual in the kingdom of God. Spiritual transformation takes time and there will be many issues and problems along the way that could disrupt the process of moving to spiritual maturity. Also, we cannot give up on a person when we are sharing the Good News with them. We never know when they will respond.

My pastor pursued my dad for eighteen years before he came to Christ. My dad used to do horrible things to my pastor when he would visit our house. He would deliberately try to say

things and do things that would run the pastor off. He was the Archie Bunker of spirituality! But my pastor just kept coming back, patiently sharing the love of Christ. Finally, my dad received Christ when he was fifty-two years old. My dad's life was dramatically changed. I had the privilege of being home and seeing my dad get involved in the church and sing in the choir and start to become a godly man. One year later my dad was with my pastor at a Red Cross meeting. They were taking a refresher course on first aid. Suddenly my dad reached over and grabbed my pastor's hand and squeezed it tightly, turned blue and died instantly of a massive heart attack. My pastor, who pursued my dad for eighteen years, was the one who held his hand as he was ushered into the very presence of Christ his savior.

We are so conditioned by our culture to expect everything instantaneously. We even wait at the microwave tapping our fingers because the food is not getting cooked fast enough. We all want the latest computer because it is faster, or we can't wait for DSL or wireless, so we can have instant access to the worldwide internet. In our desire for efficiency we often fall into using the warped values of the world and then expect the Lord to bless our efforts.

*Christians who are conformed to the world introduce into the church the value judgments and concepts of the world. They believe in action. They want efficiency. They give first place to economics, and they think that all means are good.... They are defined by their sociological milieu. The Protestant thinks to adopt the means, which the world employs. Since he finds those means useful in his profession, or in his leisure time, they stand so high in his estimation that he cannot see why he should not introduce them into the Church and make the things of the spirit dependent upon them. He never faces the problem of these means.... They are effective. Hence, they are good. Since they are in a sanctified world and are effective, why not make use*

*of them in the Church? The criteria of his thinking as a Christian are so vague, and the demands of his faith are so "inward" that he is unaware of any contradiction between the world's means and the life of faith.<sup>14</sup>*

Spiritual transformation is a process that may take a short or a long time, but regardless, we must be patient and rely on the Holy Spirit to work in a person's life. The means that we use in sharing the Good News are as important as the end results. We must weigh our means very carefully and understand the long-term effect a certain action might have on the body of Christ.

We have seen four small portraits of Barnabas so let's pull them together in a composite picture. Barnabas encouraged the church and believers by sharing his possessions, his reputation, his faith and his allegiance. This is a wonderful picture of a spiritual edgewalker.

Let's summarize the characteristics of a spiritual edgewalker embedded in the life of Barnabas.

Spiritual edgewalkers:

1. Hold their possessions loosely and make them available for kingdom work. They do not see money as neutral but combat materialism by releasing their resources through the church for missional ventures.
2. Are moved to compassionate acts by the needs of the poor.
3. Leverage their reputation to help outsiders to become insiders in the family of faith. They become bridge-builders to overcome barriers, so the body of Christ can be inclusive rather than exclusive.
4. Volunteer to play a variety of roles to see the Body of Christ grow and the kingdom of God expressed in the world. They utilize their gifts to build up and strengthen the body of Christ.

5. Find out where God is at work and join him there with their gifts.
6. Complement the other spiritual gifts at work in the body of Christ.
7. Utilize their walk and talk to share the gospel of Christ and the gospel about Christ.
8. Look beyond failure in new believers or potential believers and extend God's grace patiently allowing the Holy Spirit to work. They share their allegiance and do not give up the hope of spiritual transformation for non-believers and disobedient believers.

## **The Adventure of Spiritual Edgewalking**

It is not enough to just study spiritual edgewalkers in the Bible, but we must take the next step in our spiritual journey by wrestling with the implications of these insights. In this next section I will develop a profile of a spiritual edgewalkers from the passages we have studied. We need to see what a spiritual edgewalker would look like in the global community. God is looking for men and women who are willing to step out on the edge and become spiritual edgewalkers. This next section will provide some concrete ways for you to prepare and become a spiritual edgewalker in the global community.

### **12**

#### **A Profile of Spiritual Edgewalkers**

So! What does it take to be a spiritual edgewalker? What is the profile of a spiritual edgewalker? How does someone become a spiritual edgewalker? These are questions that should be answered. Let's go back and see what insights we can glean from the men and women we studied in the Old and New Testaments. I believe you will discover some surprising insights.

First, God uses ordinary people to become spiritual edgewalkers. There were no special qualifications. Most of the men and women we studied were average people going about their daily lives until some critical event intersected their lives. Instead of just going with the flow of life, they made a choice to step out on the edge of faith and attempt to make a difference. They had no special training or preparation except that they were willing to take a risk in their lives.

Joseph, Esther and Daniel were suddenly uprooted from their comfortable middle and faced with a new challenge. Some of you may be facing a move, such as a job loss or corporate move. Ruth had to make a decision of whether to stay in a



place of dying or seek a new life. Paul had a traumatic encounter with the living Christ that changed his whole orientation in life. Some of you have had a traumatic event in your life such as illness, loss of a loved one. Others of you have encountered the living Christ and are getting free from an addictive behavior and have the opportunity to start life on the edge. Barnabas saw the birth of a new movement called the Church and was touched by the needs of the poor, he responded by eliminating his security blanket and by stepping out on the edge to share his possessions, faith and allegiance to those in need. Some of you have seen the poverty and racial discrimination around you and know you could make a difference. Prisca and Aquila were forced to leave their comfortable middle because of a government's decision. Some of you have become discontented with our government's decisions and know you could make a difference in the way justice, equity and truth are carried out in our society. Philip was appointed because he had a unique cross-cultural background and could be a reconciler and mediator for the gospel of Christ. Are you blessed by having a multicultural heritage? Do you feel God urging you to use it to bring reconciliation and healing among people groups? If you are willing to leave your comfortable middle, you could be a spiritual edgewalker.

Once our characters made the choice to leave the comfortable middle, all kinds of things began to happen in their lives. They experienced the presence of God in fresh and powerful ways. They became confident in areas of their lives they never knew existed. They discovered gifts that were latent and would never have come to the surface if they had not taken on new challenges. They found spiritual power to be a reality of everyday experience instead of a rare experience. They had become alive spiritually!

It is also surprising that many of these spiritual edgewalkers were young people, probably in their teens. This is exciting, because it reveals God is always in the process of raising up a

new generation of leaders to guide the church into uncertain and critical times. There are no age or gender limitations to becoming a spiritual edgewalker. The youth of our day are risk takers. They have grown up with the motto "No Fear". The idea of extreme sports has consumed a whole generation where young men and women push their lives to the extreme just to feel the rush of brushing with death or great danger. What would it be like in the Christian movement to enlist this generation to forge new frontiers in our great urban centers and in our great mega-cities around the world? Through short term missions, urban plunges, and cross-cultural encounters we can call young men and women to sense a new purpose and hear the call of God on their lives. Let's challenge the young men and women of our church to find a rush in life by pressing into the high-risk communities of our world. Are we demanding enough of the younger generation in our churches or are we still locked into the "let us entertain you" mindset? Churches are so afraid to call our young people to commitment for fear of losing them that they settle for programs that allow them to stay in the comfortable middle.

What would happen to our churches and youth groups if each month we followed the pattern of the three E's of No Name Fellowship we spoke about in earlier chapters. Each month they would *explore* a new area of need in the city or community around their church. An existing ministry or agency leaders would provide an *exchange* by sharing the challenges and critical issues of their ministry and provide some concrete ways the church or youth could *engage* these issues or problems. This would move the church out of its comfortable middle and provide an environment for God to speak into the souls of an emerging generation.

Secondly, none of the people we studied intended to be a spiritual edgewalkers. But they found themselves responding to a changing, turbulent world that demanded they step up to the challenge and become transforming agents of the gospel of Christ. Most of them were forced into becoming spiritual

edgewalkers by circumstances far beyond their imagination. Their ability to respond positively to cataclysmic events with newfound faith and determination forged their lives into spiritual edgewalkers. They were willing to let go of the past and risk everything on the future. A spiritual edgewalker is one who seizes the future with faith and hope.

Our cities and society are filled with critical issues. We just need to open our eyes to them and get engaged. Drug abuse, teen pregnancy, juvenile crime, STD's and HIV/AIDS, teen and elderly suicide, homelessness, hunger, poverty, illiteracy, and racial prejudice are all epidemic in our society. The California prison system is planning to build new prisons based on whether children can read at a fourth-grade level in fourth grade. If children are reading three grades behind at fourth grade, there is a 90% probability they will end up in the prison system. These critical issues are not overseas they are in every town, city and community around our churches.

Every community is experiencing the dramatic impact of internationalization. New people groups and new religions are emerging everywhere. New mosques and temples are popping up in our communities providing opportunities for dialogue and a new understanding of other religions and our own faith. However, we tend to stay in the comfortable middle and believe that others will explore and engage these issues. We are robbing ourselves of growing and experiencing God's greater purpose in our lives.

The spiritual edgewalkers we studied found a greater purpose in their lives as they stepped out on the edge of life and faith. God met them in their most critical time and shaped their lives. If they had held back and stayed in the comfortable middle they would never have found God's great plan for their lives. As each one drew closer to God, the more they understood his purpose for their lives.

There is much emphasis today on finding one's purpose in life through Rick Warren's "Forty Days of Purpose." The beginning point is to discover that God designed you for himself and therefore we belong to him. He has created each of us in a unique way and has fashioned us for his purpose. There are several options to discover that purpose. We can just make up our mind what the purpose for our life is and dictate our own destiny. This often leads to selfish desires and destruction. Another option is to allow others to dictate what they believe our purpose should be. This could lead to living someone else's dream or in someone else's shadow. The greatest adventure is to encounter the living God to see what he wants for our lives.<sup>15</sup> However, he cannot call you or guide you if you stay in the comfortable middle watching others meet God's challenges. It is necessary to step out in faith and then He will show us His design for our lives.

Thirdly, all the edgewalkers we studied were secure in their identity. They knew who they were and to whom they belonged. Daniel demonstrated a deep understanding of his roots when he turned down the food the king offered. He understood who he was and was willing to challenge the structures by faith. Esther, even though she had assimilated to some degree, when called upon had the courage to risk everything because she understood her time of destiny in God's plan. Joseph testified he understood that even though his brothers had sought to do him harm, he had a deep belief God had a greater purpose in his life. Illustrations of confidence in one's identity could be drawn from each of the men and women we studied.

Numerous times in the New Testament we are reminded of Christ's redeeming work on our behalf. Paul in Ephesians chapter one reminds us that we were "chosen in Him (Christ), adopted as sons (and daughters), redeemed through His blood and we were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise." This great chapter affirms our identity in Christ - we belong to Him! What a great confidence this gives us as we face the calamities,

chaos and turbulent times of life. If a catastrophe happens, the world rejects us or are betrayed by our friends, we know without a doubt that we belong to Christ. As human beings, we all desperately need that deep sense of belonging. The little phrase "in Christ" is very powerful. It reminds us we are not alone, but we are in Him and therefore have all the promises and power of Christ to face the world. Paul moves from this great truth to a marvelous prayer that we would have the eyes of our heart opened to the majestic wonder of our relationship with Christ and the supernatural power available to face life. With this kind of knowledge, we need not be afraid but can step out on the edge of faith and experience God's great power in our lives. Insecure people do not do well at risk taking. They are too worried about their own self-image. However, we know that our self-image is wrapped up in Christ.

Paul writes in another passage in Col. 3:12-13 that we have been "chosen of God, holy and beloved." We all love to be chosen. I remember so clearly the playground baseball games and how important it was to be chosen early. When someone was left until last, you could see their head droop and sense the humiliation they felt. Well, in Christ there is no being chosen last. Somehow in the mystery of God we are all chosen in Christ. It is something I believe but can't fully explain. We are also declared "holy" by the work of Christ so Satan cannot accuse us and drag us down by doubts and fears. And finally, we are "beloved." This is such a powerful concept because it provides a great deal of security. To know we are beloved by someone gives us the ability to take risks. If we are constantly trying to gain approval, then we are very hesitant to take risks – we end up being people pleasers instead of edgewalkers.

In this same passage Paul commands, us to "put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other." If you are secure in Christ, you can engage others without having to be overbearing or selfish. When we are insecure it is very hard to give ourselves in ministry to others. We tend to expect others

to minister to us. The edgewalkers we studied were able to embrace the pain and suffering of others as well as their own because they knew who they were and to whom they belonged.

Fourthly, all the spiritual edgewalkers demonstrated a deep value for community. None of them were individualistic but relied on the community for support and guidance. Each was able to call others to pray and fast with them. They openly sought guidance from others, rather than just making decisions on their own. Some, such as Esther, were even willing to put their lives in jeopardy for the community. They demonstrated the power of the community to shape their theology, decisions and to discern the future.

We have lost the sense of community in our churches. The rugged individualism of our day has shredded the fabric of our relationships. There is not a sense of interdependence in most of our churches. We also do not consult the community in decision-making but feel it is no one else's business what decision I make. Often our theology is very eclectic because it is not shaped by a community of believers but has been constructed by bits and pieces from a great variety of radio and TV preachers. It is a very individualistic theology and the only thing that matters is does it work for me. The litmus test is not the community of faith to which I belong or even the bible but the fact that I believe it.

The seminary in which I teach has a deep intentional commitment to community. Anabaptist's value greatly the concept of community. We emphasize very strongly the idea of doing theology in community. It is intriguing to watch students who come from other traditions as they engage the faculty and students on campus. Most of them have developed their theology in isolation through personal study of the Word or having listened to a favorite theologian on the radio or TV. They are often surprised when confronted in class with several views to a given theological position and then challenged to

study the scriptures with others to see whether their position holds true.

Because we hold to a strong biblical theological approach to the scriptures, rather than a strong systematic approach, we do not give many dogmatic formulas from the scripture. But we urge students to study the scriptures with others to discover and formulate their theology. Some students can't really handle this, they would rather have someone tell them what to believe or they pontificate on their position as though it were the only one. They tend to struggle with their isolation. However, by the end of their three or four-year program, the great majority of our students share in their exit interviews how God has transformed their lives because they have seen and experienced the power of community in caring for them and shaping their theology.

At the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary another expression of community is a discernment process for faculty and students. It involves gathering some students, faculty members, and friends who know you well and having them discuss your calling and the effectiveness of your ministry. The person being discerned writes a paper that describes calling, gifting, passion, and specifics about their ministry. The group reads this paper and then meets with the person being discerned and discusses how the person's life measures up to what he or she has written. This is a very powerful time in which friends can speak into one's life and give guidance, encouragement, correction and support. The process usually takes about one and a half hours and ends with a time of prayer and blessing. Students and faculty are greatly encouraged and helped by this process. We have seen students change their direction in ministry because of the affirmation of the community in areas they had not seen. We have had faculty take some additional training to improve weak areas in their teaching. Although most everyone dreads going through the process it proves to be one of the most positive and affirming times in our lives. Even when correction is

suggested, it is done with the commitment to support the person, so God's best is accomplished in that person's life.

I recently introduced this discernment process into a multicultural, multi-staff church I was pastoring. It was met with some skepticism but after it was experienced it was seen as a much better process than any evaluation or lack of evaluation previously used in the church. Very few churches have any form of evaluation for its pastoral and support staff. Consequently, there is little accountability. Could this explain why we have staff failing spiritually and morally? When this process is done by church staff there is a greater commitment to each other and Christ's presence is experienced more deeply in relationships.

Fifth, all the spiritual edgewalkers created space in their cultural contexts and relationships for confrontation and dialogue about the supernatural work of God. In the previous chapters, I have written a great deal about creating space for the purpose of dialogue. In a postmodern, pluralistic and relativistic society the church can no longer expect to be dogmatic and have a hearing. Most of society will see that form of presentation as arrogant, strident and offensive. This does not mean we cannot be dogmatic or have positions we believe are our core theological constructs. For instance, the uniqueness of Christ is one of the non-negotiables for me. This means that I will not budge on the biblical statement that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. I believe this truth is what distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Salvation is based on a relationship with the risen Christ and not works of righteousness, which when measured on some mystical balance scales, outweighs the bad deeds of a person. In my dialogues with humanists, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and men and women of more liberal faiths, I have discovered that the uniqueness of Christ is the primary point of tension.

The challenge is creating space to introduce this theological idea into other systems of religion. We saw Paul in Athens



create space in the pluralistic religious system of that great city. He found an entry point through the “unknown God” for the truth that God’s grace was extended to everyone and the risen Christ would be the final judge of good and evil on the earth. This was the uniqueness of Christ!

As Christians, we must begin to take other religions seriously and study them in our churches with great diligence. We need to learn how other religions can benefit us and discover the entry points for sharing the uniqueness of Christ. We can learn a great deal about peace and meditation from the Buddhist. Philippians chapter four speaks a great deal about experiencing the peace of God, the peace that passes all understanding and the God of peace. Paul challenges the believers to meditate on the best that they have heard and seen in Christ and the Christian life.

*Finally, brothers (sisters), whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think on these things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*  
(Phil.4:8-9 NIV)

The concept of meditation is a very good spiritual discipline. Just because the Buddhists have a different center to their meditation doesn’t mean it is not valid for Christians to learn to meditate on our center, Jesus Christ.

We also need to look for the entry points for dialogue with other religions. For instance, the Koran is filled with references to Christ. One can build a very good case from the Koran for Christ as the living Word, the Spirit that proceeds from God and Jesus the Messiah. What better entry point do we need to create a dialogue with Muslims than to explore what the Koran and the Bible teach about Jesus Christ? Most Muslims are totally unaware the Koran has so much to say about Christ.

However, this means Christians need to read and study the Koran to converse intelligently with Muslims. Currently, Muslims are so interested in Christians reading the Koran they are giving away free Korans to those who inquire. There are several websites that give away free English translations of the Koran.

If we are serious about becoming spiritual edgewalkers we must expand and dramatically change what we study in the educational program of the church. Do you realize that seventy to eighty percent of what we get in church is about developing a personal Christian life? Only about ten to twenty percent is about engaging the world with the gospel of Christ. What would our churches be like if we spent eighty to ninety percent of our effort equipping men and women in our congregations to engage the world outside the walls of the church with the truth of Christ. I believe we would find men and women who would be growing much deeper in their experience with Christ and having a greater desire to use God's Word rather than just to know God's word. I believe we would find the birth of spiritual edgewalkers - men and women who would find their calling and passion to serve Christ by stepping out to the edge of faith to meet a critical need in our community and society.

Spiritual edgewalkers are men and women who engage the world with the good news of Christ through their walk and their talk. The only way to become a spiritual edgewalker is to step out of your comfortable middle to the edge of your faith and experience the transforming power of Christ. The next chapter will develop some preparatory steps to becoming a spiritual edgewalker.

## 13

### Preparing for Spiritual Edgewalking

In this chapter I have gathered all the actions and characteristics of the spiritual edgewalkers we have studied in the Old and New Testament and placed them in categories as a guide in spiritual edgewalking.<sup>16</sup> These could easily be used as a study guide for small group discussion. Take a section at a time and answer the questions. Then discuss them with your accountability group or with your Christian friends. Constantly ask for feedback to see if your fellow Christians discern the same things in you as you believe are in your life.

#### **Personal Preparation for Spiritual Edgewalking (Seven Weeks)**

##### 1. Engaging Christ – Week One

- a. Explore your identity in “Imagio Dei.” How has God created you uniquely from everyone else in your family? How do you see God’s handprint on your life? List some things you do that no one else around you does. List some abilities and gifts that others have verified in your life.
- b. Discover who you are and to whom you belong, so you can resist the conforming pressures of this world. Do you tend to be a people pleaser or are you willing to take risks? How secure are you in your personality? Do you tend to look to others for affirmation? List some ways your relationship with Christ allows you to go against popular opinion or to take a risk.
- c. Seek to discover and use the gifts and talents God has placed in your life by engaging in some type ministry. Gifts are not discovered in isolation or with testing devices but by the affirmation of the people of God to your actions and ministry. What gifts might be latent in your life? If you stepped

out of your comfortable middle would they be discovered?

- d. Cultivate sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus. When do you feel closest to Christ? How often do you sense the work of the Holy Spirit providing guidance or empowering your decision-making or actions? List several instances where you can definitely say the Holy Spirit has intersected your life. Name a time when you sensed the presence of Christ and were overwhelmed by Him.

## 2. Engaging God's Word – Week Two

- a. Develop a listening spirit to God's voice through His Word. Do you study the Word of God just to know it or do you investigate the Word of God to see Jesus or the character of God? When was the last time God spoke to you through His Word? Explain. List several scriptures God has used to give you guidance or assurance.
- b. Resist temptation by grounding your integrity in biblical values and not circumstances. How are your values different from co-workers or your neighbors? How consistently do you live by your biblical values (scale of 1-10)? List several biblical values that have helped you resist temptation. List some biblical values you live by on a daily basis.
- c. Become grounded in the Word of God to test the cultural norms of society. How have the norms of culture impacted your personal or family life? How has culture changed the way your experience church? List several ways the Word of God confronts the trends found in family life today. Share some ways God's Word confronts the business culture in which you work.
- d. Explore diverse theological positions through in-depth study of the word of God. How would you evaluate the depth of your study on a scale of 1-10, with one being

very shallow? Name several key passages you believe are most helpful in sharing that Jesus is our savior. Name one or two theological points you believe are essential to your Christian faith; if they were taken away your faith would crumble.

- e. Demonstrate confidence in the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to overcome spiritual counterfeits offered by the world. What do you believe is one of the greatest counterfeits Satan has used to deceive contemporary society? How have you recently used the Word of God to combat a false idea?

### 3. Engaging Prayer – Week Three

- a. Define daily life through committed prayer and devotion. When do you most desire to pray? What tends to call you to pray? How often do you pray about daily matters? List some ways your prayers have affected your daily routine.
- b. Develop listening ears to hear God speak during your prayer time. How often do you take time in your prayer time to listen instead of listing your requests? How often do you hear God speak to you in your prayer time? Describe a time when the Lord spoke to you and it changed your life. In what circumstances do you most generally hear God speaking to you?
- c. Utilize prayer in spiritual warfare. How have you experienced spiritual warfare in your personal life, family life? How have you confronted spiritual warfare? List several times when you were defeated in spiritual warfare and several times when you were victorious in spiritual warfare. What was the deciding factor?
- d. Rely on prayer and fasting to unleash God's transforming power. Share sometimes when you have prayed and fasted? What were the circumstances that called for prayer and fasting? What were the results of the times when you have

prayed and fasted? Have you called others to join you or have you joined others to pray and fast? Explain the circumstances and results.

4. Engaging in Community – Week Four

- a. Overcome individualism by relying on the various communities in which God has placed you. What are the communities in which you participate? Which of these communities do you rely on the most? List several ways a particular community has helped sustain you.
- b. Choose to walk a fine line between independence and interdependence by relying on the counsel of God and the new community to guide your decisions. How do you tend to make critical decisions? How often do you rely on God to make critical decisions? List some ways you have solicited help from your faith community to discern a direction for your life or in making a critical decision.
- c. Test your biblical framework or theological ideas with the faith community to which you belong. Are there some things your friends believe that you think are weird? Is there something you believe you are afraid to share with others? Where is your faith system mostly shaped (church, TV, radio, friends, group bible studies, personal bible study, etc)? Name three people with whom you share your insights and discoveries in the scriptures.

5. Engaging Circumstances – Week Five

- a. Learn to see pain and suffering as a time to grow spiritually and closer to God. How do you tend to react to pain and suffering? How are you different from your neighbors in dealing with pain and suffering? What purposes do you believe God has in pain and suffering? List several ways you have

grown spiritually or closer to God during pain and suffering.

- b. Engage pain and tragedy by trusting God as your source of power and comfort. How often do you get involved in other people's pain and suffering? If you do not, why? How has God shown you his power and comfort during pain or tragedy? List several times when God used you to bring comfort to someone facing pain or tragedy.
- c. Face traumatic events by looking to physical and spiritual family bonds for true identity and security. How are traumatic events handled in your family? Share how your faith has been shaken by some traumatic event? Share how your faith has been strengthened by some traumatic event?

6. Engaging God's Purpose for Your Life – Week Six

- a. Learn to look beyond yourself and difficult personal circumstances to discover the purpose of God for your life. How do you normally deal with difficult circumstances? Do you turn inward and brood or do you turn outward and process them with others? What events have happened recently that have shaped your life or changed the direction of your life? How has God played a part in those events?
- b. Learn to make decisions based on God's purpose and the gifts and passion in your life. What is the main passion of your life? What do you enjoy doing most? List several things you enjoy and evaluate how they may relate to ministry either in the church or in the world. Find out if God is working in any of the areas of your passion and join him there!
- c. Seek to walk a balanced life between family and ministry so your children will embrace God's call and ministry for their lives. In what ways is your family your ministry? How does your passion and

gifting relate to your family and the marketplace?  
Log your time and see what the balance of focus in  
your life is.

7. Engaging the Call of God – Week Seven

- a. See God as a missionary God full of grace desiring the redemption of all the nations of the world. How does seeing God as a missionary God change your perspective of Him? If the only way the people of this planet will hear the truth of Christ depends on you as an ambassador of Christ how does that change your life? List several ways you see God at work in your community. List some ways you see God at work in your family network (brothers, sisters, relatives, etc.).
- b. Focus on being motivated by your love for Christ and his mission and not by the expectations or praise of others. How much do the opinions or expectations of others control your actions? Are you willing to take risks even if your family and friends disapprove? List some areas where God is asking you to take a risk. List the consequences if you were willing to act on those risks.
- c. Be guided by God's standards of success and not the world's system of success? How would you define success for your life? What are the expectations of success you experience from your family and peers? Describe what would happen if you pursued God's model of success.
- d. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit even if it means leaving a successful ministry or job. Have you become comfortable in your current ministry or job? When is the last time you took a risk at work or in your ministry? Have you allowed yourself to shift to a maintenance mode instead of a visionary mode? List several changes, that only with God's help, you could accomplish.



## **Leaving the Comfortable Middle (Thirteen Weeks)**

This section is more of a personal reflection time, which will lead to action and should end in evaluation. You may want to process these questions with your accountability group or bible study group. If you focus on just one sub-point each week it will take you 13 weeks to process them all. Each sub-point will help you discover your passion and explore the possibilities of ministries in your areas of passion. Each point in the first section, "Discovering The Edge," will move you from inward orientation to outward orientation in your personal life and ministry. The second section "The Cost of Risk Taking," will help you embrace the cost and pain of engaging in ministry. The last section, "Capitalizing on Circumstances," will open your eyes to those moments when God wants to use you to be his hands and feet in critical situations.

### **1. Discovering the Edge**

- a. Consider leaving the comfortable middle to share the truth of God's Word with a broken world. Has your life settled into a routine you enjoy? What are the safety factors you rely on in your life? What is the worst that could happen if those safety factors were removed? List those factors and begin to pray for faith to deal with them.
- b. Consider sharing Christ or the Word of God with a neighbor. When is the last time you intentionally tried to share Christ or minister the Word to someone in your community? What do you believe would be the reaction of your neighbor? List the possible reactions of your neighbor and begin to pray about how to respond to them.
- c. Begin to explore the possibilities of doing ministry within the church. What are the most critical areas of need in your church? Why do those needs exist? List some ways you could practically assist in meeting those needs. Prioritize them alongside

your gifts and passion. List some consequences of trying to meet those needs.

- d. Explore some ways you could engage your neighborhood. Who do you know in your neighborhood? Who are leaders in your community? Go to the principal of the elementary school in your neighborhood and ask him/her to share the critical needs of the families in your community. Evaluate if any of those needs could be met with your gifts and passion.
- e. Identify the para-church or missional organizations at work in your city or community. What are the areas of ministry they are addressing? Are they areas for which you have a burden? Ask if you could shadow one of their workers for a day to see ministry in action. Identify any areas that relate to your gifts and passion.
- f. Begin a prayer walk in your neighborhood asking God to show you what ministries you could provide. What are the boundaries you should consider for your walk? Why? How many people do you know in those boundaries? Begin to learn the names of each person on your block and then the next block. Begin to pray for each person by name.

## 2. The Cost of Risk taking

- a. Be willing to sacrifice your place in the comfortable middle to share the Word of God in difficult contexts. How comfortable are you in sharing the Word of God with your friends? How comfortable are you in sharing the Word of God with your neighbors? What would it take for you to become comfortable in sharing the Word of God? Make a list of all the passages of scripture you know dealing with comfort, hope and faith.
- b. Embrace the pain and brokenness of this world to unleash the transforming power of God to bring healing and hope. Are any neighbors or relatives

dealing with pain or brokenness? Do you know any of them close enough to call or visit and share a word of comfort from the scriptures? Develop some specific steps you can take to meet that person's needs. Choose one or two scriptures you want to share in these settings and memorize them.

- c. Exercise sacrificial love to draw men and women into the kingdom of God. What would be the consequences if you shared a word of comfort or hope with a neighbor or friend? What kind of time and energy would it take to make a visit and share a word of comfort? Are you willing to get more involved if the need is greater than you thought? Examine your schedule and see how much time you invest on yourself and on others. List some of the benefits if this person was drawn into the kingdom of God or closer in their walk with God.

### 3. Capitalizing on Circumstances

- a. See circumstances as a way to discover new avenues of ministry. Has anyone in your community or church experienced a traumatic event in their life? What kind of network of support do those people have? Could you see yourself as one of the people who could become part of that support network? List some ways you could help provide support for that person. What would be some long-term implications of becoming part of a supportive network?
- b. Use the traumatic events in your life as a tool to help others. What traumatic events have occurred in your life? What have you learned about faith and hope during those difficulties? List the ways you have grown because of these events. Develop a testimony or witness you can share with someone about trusting God during suffering.

- c. Unleash God's blessing and presence in whatever setting God has placed you. Have you experienced change lately? What has been the impact of that change on your emotional and spiritual life? Write out some lessons you have learned in dealing with change. List some ways you could use what you have learned with others.
- d. Face crisis by embracing your identity in Christ and moving from the comfortable middle to take a stand at the edge of faith. What is the worst thing you are facing in your life right now? How has this affected your relationship with Christ and with others? Write out some promises God has placed in His word that directly give you comfort. List some reasons why you should trust God's character during this time of pain and suffering. Think through the benefits of choosing to trust Christ rather than trusting your own strength.

I hope you will discover some exciting things about yourself, your walk with Christ and your potential for ministry through this study and your interaction with others. The next chapter will provide some ideas of how take the next steps to become a spiritual edgewalker in the global community.

## **14**

### **Spiritual Edgewalking in the Global Community**

The study of the Old and New Testament spiritual edgewalkers provided many of insights on how they engaged the global community. They brought spiritual transformation to the various sectors of their society. These spiritual edgewalkers took a prophetic stance and spoke effectively to their culture with the Word of God, which in turn brought about change and transformation. They also demonstrated excellent communication skills on the technical and personal level to engage their society.

It is my desire in this chapter to create an opportunity for you to examine and cultivate your own approach to spiritual edgewalking in your global community. This will be one of the greatest adventures you will ever experience. As you move out from the comfortable middle to walk on the edge of faith, you will experience the power and presence of Christ in new and refreshing ways. You will discover God's purpose and passion within your life and find great reward in exploring new and exciting ministries in the global community.

I would suggest that you do not do this on your own but that you find a partner or partners to work with in developing a strategy to become engaged in the global community. If you examine the New Testament you will see that the growth of the early church was the result of teams doing ministry. In our post-modern culture we have become very individualistic and tend to do things by ourselves instead of with others. Church planting and missionary work are beginning to become team based in their approach to mission. The church is also becoming more team based in its leadership style. These are excellent changes that will help all of us from bearing too much of the burden of ministry and burning out. Begin now to pray that God would bring someone alongside of you or allow you to come alongside of someone else to blend your gifts and abilities and see the potential for ministry together.

Warning! The questions in this chapter are not for the faint of heart. They are designed to penetrate through the façade we adopt by living in the comfortable middle. If you are serious about becoming a spiritual edgewalker proceed, at your own risk. The first part of this section explores some preparatory steps that one must take before engaging the sectors of our society. Spiritual edgewalkers must take a prophetic stance in their community and learn some communication skills before they encounter the sectors of their global community.

### **Process:**

This is not a sprint. Remember we are asking God to bring transformation to our lives. We are beginning the process of stepping out on the edge and beginning to engage our global community. There is internal and external work to do. I would suggest that you read through all of the sections to get an overview. Then choose a section you would like to work on.

### **Taking a Prophetic Stance:**

As a spiritual edgewalker, you can bring transformation to your sphere of influence by looking beyond the circumstances of life and earnestly seeking to understand God's purposes in the events of daily life. To be effective you will need to speak a clear word from the scriptures into the critical issues of your day. These statements and questions are designed to help you begin that process of taking a prophetic stance in the world.

1. Learn to look for God at work behind the scenes of daily life in times of chaos to experience stability and hope.
  - a. When you read the newspaper or listen to national/international news do you look for God's hand at work behind the scenes or do you just react to the decline of humankind?
  - b. Do you see the chaos of the global scene as a sign of hopelessness or do you see it filled with opportunities for the power of the gospel of Christ to work?

- c. Can you identify the ways that the current earthquakes and tsunamis have opened doors for Christian workers to enter closed countries? List several ways God is opening doors in your city for sharing the Good News of Christ.
- 2. Become prophetic by sharing the Word of God boldly.
  - a. How confident are you that the Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, and is able to penetrate to the heart and soul of humankind?
  - b. How would you describe the power of the Word of God? Identify some ways God has brought transformation to your personal life.
  - c. Share some ways that God's Word or the Gospel of Christ has brought change to your community or city?
- 3. See men and women in the world as created in the image of God and bestow on them value and dignity.
  - a. When you see someone who is a white-collar criminal, drug user, prostitute or murderer do you see them as disgusting or revolting or do you see them as one of God's majestic creations who has been warped by the fall and sinfulness?
  - b. Do you tend to blame the poor for being poor or do you look behind the scenes and examine the systems that perpetuate poverty?
  - c. Identify several criminals that have been transformed by the Gospel of Christ and are now being used for kingdom work.
  - d. List several verses that speak of God's perspective on the poor and those in prison.
- 4. Utilize your spiritual core values to keep yourself focused and not sidetracked by compromising your lifestyle.
  - a. How many Christian workers or leaders do you know that have fallen in the last two years?
  - b. What have been the various causes for Christian leaders to compromise their lifestyles and fail in ministry?

- c. Identify the spiritual core values you believe keep you from compromising your Christian lifestyle.
  - d. Identify someone in the body of Christ you are accountable to for consistency in your spiritual walk.
- 5. Consistently review your personal and family history to maintain your spiritual and cultural identity so as not to be assimilated into the dominant cultural context.
  - a. How would you describe your lifestyle in contrast to the current cultural context?
  - b. What spiritual heritage do you remember from your childhood?
  - c. Do you tend to live two lives by splitting – living one life with Christians and another life in the world?
  - d. Identify some ways your lifestyle is different than the cultural context of the world. List some ways the current culture has eroded your spiritual vitality.

### **Cultivating Communication Skills:**

As a spiritual edgewalker you can become transformational through your communication with those around you. Engaging others in a conversational or dialogical way that creates space for the presentation of the Gospel takes skill and practice. The following statements and questions will provide some ways for you to grow in your communication skills.

1. Develop a balance between technical and relational skills when sharing the good news.
  - a. Do you tend to share the gospel as a presentation or as part of your heart?
  - b. Are you more interested in getting the gospel message right than sharing the Christ of the gospel?
  - c. Write out what you feel are most important points in sharing the gospel of Christ.
  - d. Identify the key reasons why a person would want to hear the gospel of Christ.



- e. Name several people who present the gospel effectively. What makes them effective?
- 2. Share the gospel with the compassion and care of a nursing mother.
  - a. Do you share the gospel out of a sense of duty or because you love Christ as a friend and want others to know Him?
  - b. How would you share Christ with someone if you really loved Christ as well as the person to whom you were sharing?
  - c. Identify some specific ways you can love the person with whom you want to share the gospel. What actions would demonstrate your love for that person?
  - d. Write out as many specific things that you love about Christ. Why are these important to you?
- 3. Present the word of God in a way that allows space for discussion and debate, so others can explore the truth. Create space where differences and disagreements can be explored.
  - a. When you share the gospel with someone who is religiously or theologically different than you, is it like a chess match in which someone has to win?
  - b. When you discuss your faith with someone with whom you differ are you open to changing your beliefs?
  - c. Identify some beliefs you hold as non-negotiable. These are the bedrock of your faith.
  - d. Identify some beliefs you are working on or not sure about and are still in the process of formation.
- 4. Embrace differing theological issues instead of separating and criticizing them.
  - a. What can you gain by discussing different theological issues?
  - b. What is the risk of discussing different theological issues?

- c. Identify the things that make you afraid of testing your faith.
  - d. Share what gives you assurance in your faith.
- 5. Engage the variety of worldviews by discovering common ground and then offering creative theological and philosophical alternatives for consideration.
  - a. What are some positive traits of other religions?
  - b. Why is Islam one of the fastest growing religions in the United States?
  - c. What makes it so attractive?
  - d. Identify some things Christians have in common with Islam.
  - e. Identify some things unique to Christianity.
  - f. Share what shapes your worldview. How is your worldview different from people in other countries?
- 6. Embrace the communication styles of the context in which you wish to share the Gospel.
  - a. How is the communication style of the Rap culture different from mainstream culture?
  - b. What would you have to do to penetrate the Rap Culture?
  - c. Identify some issues the music of our current culture is trying to address.
  - d. List some ways the scriptures deal with the issues you have just explored.
- 7. Engage each new cultural context with the gospel of Christ and the gospel about Christ.
  - a. What are the important characteristics of the kingdom of God?
  - b. How was the gospel Jesus preached different than what we preach?
  - c. Identify passages of scriptures that describe the values and characteristics of the kingdom of God.
  - d. Locate several passages of scripture that tell us what we should say about Christ when we present the gospel.
- 8. Create space within other religious systems to explore the uniqueness of Christ.

- a. Do you believe Jesus is the only way to get to heaven or are there other ways?
  - b. Do you believe other religious systems contain truth and if so how do we know it is truth?
  - c. Identify some biblical passages that demonstrate God's inclusive love for humankind.
  - d. List some scripture passages that demonstrate consequences for not embracing Christ as savior.
- 9. Demonstrate flexibility in methodology of sharing the Good News to engage the cultural context, but never compromise the message of the Good News.
  - a. How have preaching and the worship service changed in your church over the past five years?
  - b. Make a list of the changes in your church over the past five years. Why do you believe they changed?
  - c. Identify the good and bad results of changing the methodology to reach a postmodern culture.
  - d. What are the pros and cons of using technology in your worship services?
- 10. Demonstrate a balance of exposition of the text and its relationship to application in daily life.
  - a. How much of what you hear through preaching and teaching in the church is focused on the head and heart or the hands and feet?
  - b. What percentage of what you know in the Christian life do you put in practice?
  - c. Identify several ways you responded to last week's sermon.
  - d. Identify scriptures that focus on action rather than just faith.
- 11. Graciously respond to personal attacks to create space for continued dialogue.
  - a. How do you react when someone of another culture or religion criticizes you?
  - b. Does your reaction grow out of your need for self-affirmation or does it come from your security in Christ?

- c. Share several instances where you were criticized for your faith.
- d. Identify some ways you can overcome anger in responding to those who criticize your faith.

Now that we have explored the ways in which to take a prophetic stance and improve our communication skills it is time to focus on the various sectors of the global community. There are four major sectors of the global community that spiritual edgewalkers must engage if lasting transformation is to take place. Spiritual edgewalkers must learn to distinguish between the private and public sector and discern the powers in the political and spiritual sectors.

### **Private Sector:**

You can become a spiritual edgewalker in the areas of your sphere of influence. These are areas that you uniquely have access to and where you can introduce the transforming power and presence of Christ.

1. Demonstrate integrity in the marketplace to gain a place of favor so you can share their story of faith.
  - a. What is a good definition of integrity?
  - b. How consistent are you in your walk and talk in the work place?
  - c. Identify someone you believe has integrity. What are the characteristics of their life?
  - d. Identify areas in your life where you need to be more consistent in your walk and talk.
2. Create space through consistent living where faith issues can be explored and embraced by observers.
  - a. Do people ask you why you are different from others around you?
  - b. If people watched your life would they know you are a follower of Christ?
  - c. Identify some ways in which the consistency of your behavior demonstrates your love of Christ.
3. Unleash the resources you have access to or are under your control to serve the purposes of the kingdom of God.

- a. What resources do the business or agency you work for have that could help others?
  - b. Who oversees those resources? How would you approach that person to ask that they be released for ministry?
  - c. Identify two missional agencies these resources could help.
  - d. Identify any obstacles that would prevent your business or agency from providing these resources for ministry. Develop a plan to deal with them.
- 4. Do not view money as neutral but combat materialism by releasing your financial resources through the church for missional ventures. Learn to resist the compromising power of materialism and popularity.
  - a. What percentage of your finances do you set aside for ministry?
  - b. Is that amount equal to or less than the amount you spend on Starbucks, cosmetics, golf, or other items for self-gratification?
  - c. Identify a specific portion of your finances you would be willing to use for ministry.
  - d. Where is God at work through your church? Would you be willing to share your financial resources there?
- 5. Hold your possessions loosely and make them available for kingdom work.
  - a. Have you committed your possessions (home, furnishings, personal treasures, car, etc.) to Christ?
  - b. How freely do you share your possessions with others?
  - c. Identify some of your possessions that could be used for ministry.
  - d. Select one of those possessions and use it this week for ministry.
- 6. Embrace the pain, sadness and difficulty of the world with the restoring power of the cross.
  - a. In your sphere of influence who is facing brokenness, pain and suffering?

- b. What resources do you have that would ease their situations?
  - c. What obstacles prevent you from sharing those resources with someone who is in need?
  - d. Establish one step that would allow you to release your resources into the pain and suffering of someone you know.
- 7. Utilize your walk and talk to share the gospel of Christ and the gospel about Christ. Do not split your life between secular and sacred but discover your call is to love Christ and to share him in whatever occupation or setting God has placed you.
  - a. Has anyone ever mentioned the uniqueness of your life in the workplace or among your non-Christian friends?
  - b. Do you tend to fit in to please those within your circle of friendship or work partners?
  - c. What would be the worst that could happen if you shared with your workmates or friends the center of your life was your faith in Christ?
  - d. Identify someone in your work environment or sphere of influence with which you would feel comfortable to share your personal faith journey.

### **Public Sector:**

Your life impacts the public arena. You are part of a greater community where you have the opportunity to blend your gifts and abilities alongside a host of others to bring transformation and hope.

- 1. Engage the power of the community of believers to face obstacles. Seek the prayer and support of the body to overcome the spiritual and physical obstacles that seek to destroy you.
  - a. Do you have a circle of friends you share your struggles with or do you try to face obstacles alone?
  - b. Do you call friends to help you get a task done or do you feel it is easier to do it yourself?

- c. Identify one situation in the last month when you called friends to help you with a task or problem.
  - d. List the benefits of having others join you in overcoming obstacles.
- 2. Celebrate the works of God to be reminded of God's faithfulness and power and to lift his name in the world
  - a. Do you take time to celebrate God's victories or answers to your prayers?
  - b. Do you do that in private or do you share with others.
  - c. Reflect on the past week and identify some of the ways God has intersected your life in a special way.
  - d. Identify three other people with whom you will share these encounters.
- 3. Value highly your connection to the body of Christ but do not use the body of Christ to fulfill your own personal visions or dreams.
  - a. When you go to church do you expect to be ministered to by others or do you anticipate ministering to others?
  - b. What do you do when the church does not meet your needs?
  - c. Identify three areas in the church where you can make a positive difference.
  - d. Select three people from your church you will encourage this week.
- 4. Become faithful to Christ and your brothers and sisters by not shrinking back from the challenges and risks of ministering with others.
  - a. How do you respond when someone asks you to join them in a ministry?
  - b. What are the challenges and risks of joining them in a ministry?
  - c. Identify the obstacles and benefits of joining someone in a ministry?
  - d. Do you believe God can overcome the obstacles, so you might experience the benefits of ministry?

5. Volunteer to play a variety of roles to see the Body of Christ grow and the kingdom of God expressed in the world.
  - a. What are the top five areas in which your church or ministry needs to grow?
  - b. Do your gifts and abilities relate to any of these areas?
  - c. Identify several ways you could make a difference in helping your church or ministry grow.
  - d. Would you be willing to step out of your comfort zone and work in an area that isn't your greatest strength?
6. Commit yourself to reconciliation and the unity of the Body of Christ. Become a bridge-builder to overcome barriers so the body of Christ can be inclusive rather than exclusive.
  - a. Have you experienced any barriers or felt excluded from the Body of Christ?
  - b. What has been your response to feeling excluded?
  - c. Identify some steps that could bring reconciliation and inclusion to the Body of Christ.
  - d. What role could you play in being a bridge-builder or reconciler in this area?
7. Complement the other spiritual gifts at work in the body of Christ.
  - a. What are the major spiritual gifts at work in the Body of Christ you can identify?
  - b. What would you identify as your spiritual gift(s)?
  - c. In what way does your spiritual gift(s) fit into what God is doing in the Body of Christ?
  - d. Select one or two ways to use your spiritual gift to strengthen the ministry in the Body of Christ.

**Political Sector:**

As a spiritual edgewalker you can bring spiritual transformation by engaging the systems of our society with the values and power of the kingdom of God.

1. Place your faith in the power of the living God to overcome or tame the rulers and authorities of this world



- a. How big is your God; how much can you trust Him?
  - b. Can the political structures bring physical and spiritual transformation to our society?
  - c. Identify several ways the church can bring physical and spiritual transformation to our society.
  - d. Select one of those ways in which to get engaged.
2. Confront the oppressive and discriminating systems of this world by embracing your identity with the living Christ.
  - a. How do you feel when you are discriminated against?
  - b. How do you cope when you face discrimination?
  - c. Identify from the scriptures the relational terms Christ uses to describe His followers.
  - d. In which one of those do you find the greatest comfort?
3. Transcend the discrimination in the world by committing yourself to diversity in the new community.
  - a. Describe the unity and diversity of the Body of Christ with whom you associate?
  - b. Does the Body of Christ with whom you associate speak to the discrimination in the world?
  - c. List some ways in which you could help create diversity with the Body of Christ.
  - d. Select one of those ways and identify some first steps.
4. Demonstrate sacrificial love to overcome the barriers of racism, classism, and sexism. Do not be afraid to demonstrate your allegiance to include the outsider, the outcast in the family of God.
  - a. Is there someone in your fellowship of believers that you feel uncomfortable sitting next to or inviting to your home?
  - b. Is that feeling a result of cultural, ethnic, racial or class differences?
  - c. What is one act of love you could do that would make a difference helping that person feel included in the Body of Christ?

**Spiritual Sector:**

The goal of a spiritual edgewalker is to share God's transforming power with new believers, so they move toward maturity and strengthen the Body of Christ.

1. As a follower of Christ seek to be discipled by someone older in the faith while you are discipling someone younger in the faith.
  - a. Do you have a Naomi or Mordacai type person in your life who can share their faith journey with you?
  - b. Do you have someone with whom you can share your faith journey?
  - c. Identify some turning points in your life in which God brought transformation.
  - d. List the growth steps you experienced during those transformational times and share them with your disciple.
2. Seek to become both teacher and learner in the same context.
  - a. Do you listen for God to speak through those who are closest to you?
  - b. Are you willing to share what God is saying to your closest friends?
  - c. List some insights you have learned from your Christian friends.
  - d. Share what God has been teaching you with someone who is close to you.
3. Learn to find common ground on which to develop dialogue where Christian beliefs can be clarified and corrected.
  - a. How do you develop your Christian beliefs; what sources do you rely on?
  - b. With whom do you test your current beliefs?
  - c. Write out the Christian beliefs you believe are most important to your Christian walk.
  - d. Share these with one of your closest Christian friends.

4. Become deeply committed to the new community of Christ where your friends can experience and learn to demonstrate kingdom values.
  - a. How would you describe your commitment to the local church?
  - b. What kingdom values have you learned through the ministries of your church?
  - c. Identify those in your neighborhood who would benefit from learning these values.
  - d. Develop a strategy for introducing these values to your neighbors.
5. Look beyond failure in new believers or potential believers and extend God's grace, patiently allowing the Holy Spirit to work.
  - a. How do you normally handle the failure of a Christian friend or new believer?
  - b. How do you want other believers to treat you when you fail?
  - c. What would grace look like if extended to someone who had just failed?
  - d. Identify some grace steps you can extend to someone who has failed.
6. Develop an allegiance to, and do not give up hope of spiritual transformation for non-believers and disobedient believers.
  - a. How long did God pursue you before you trusted him as your savior?
  - b. What role do you play, if the Holy Spirit transforms men and women?
  - c. Are you willing to trust God and live by his timeline for the transformation of others?
  - d. Identify someone who needs transformation and begin to seek how God would use you to intervene in his or her life.

There are many other areas or sectors to explore as spiritual edgewalkers. I hope you have begun the process of engaging Christ in a fresh way and engaging the world by leaving your

comfortable middle by stepping out on the edge of faith. I am confident that you will experience a new level of God's presence and power in your life. I will say with Paul: *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6 NASV)*

## **Appendix A**

### **Characteristics of Old and New Testament Edgewalkers**

For your convenience, the following summary lists are taken from the chapters on the Old and New Testament men and women. Each of these characteristics helps to build an incredible profile of spiritual edgewalking. Many of these characteristics can be applied to your daily life and help you on your journey as a spiritual edgewalker. These lists would make excellent discussion points for any group interested in walking on the edge of faith and experiencing a fresh awakening in their spirit. All these actions or behaviors have great implication for our Christian lives. As we become familiar with each characteristic it will help shape our behavior in the marketplace and in the church.

#### **Spiritual Edgewalking profile in the life of Joseph:**

1. Are born in the crucible of pain and suffering.
2. Look beyond themselves and their personal circumstances to discover the purpose of God for their lives in serving others.
3. Willing to sacrifice their place in the comfortable middle to share the Word of God in difficult contexts.
4. Become prophetic by sharing the Word of God boldly.
5. Willing to leave the comfortable middle to share the truth of God's word with a broken world.
6. Unleash God's blessing and presence in whatever setting God has placed them.
7. Demonstrate integrity in the marketplace to gain a place of favor in which they can share their story of faith.
8. Create space through consistent living where faith issues can be explored and embraced by observers.
9. Resist temptation by developing a listening spirit to God's voice through His Word.
10. Ground their integrity in biblical values and not circumstances.

11. Utilize spiritual core values to keep them from compromising their lifestyle.
12. Create space within other religious systems to explore the uniqueness of Christ.
13. See God as a missionary God full of grace desiring the redemption of all the nations of the world.
14. Unleash the resources under their control to serve the purposes of the kingdom of God.

### **Spiritual Edgewalking profile in the life of Ruth and Naomi:**

1. Engage pain and tragedy by trusting God as their source of power and comfort.
2. Confront the oppressive and discriminating systems of this world by embracing their identity with the living God.
3. Transcend the physical discrimination in the world by committing themselves to the new community.
4. Ground their identity in "Imagio Dei" and seek to discover and use the gifts and talents.
5. See men and women in the world as created in the image of God and, therefore, bestow on them value and dignity.
6. Walk a fine line between independence and interdependence when they rely on the counsel of God and the new community to guide our decisions.
7. Overcome poverty and helplessness by developing interdependent relationships in the new community.
8. Demonstrate sacrificial love to overcome the barriers of racism, classism, and sexism.
9. Exercise sacrificial love to draw men and women into the kingdom of God.
10. Seek refuge under the wings of their redeemer when faced with overwhelming problems.
11. Are not afraid to demonstrate their allegiance to include the outsider, outcast and the sojourner in the family of God.

### **Spiritual Edgewalking profile in the life of Daniel:**

1. Know who they are and to whom they belong to if they are to resist the conforming pressures of this world.
2. Learn to look for God at work behind the scenes of daily life in times of chaos if they are to experience stability and hope.
3. Are grounded in the Word of God to test the cultural norms of society.
4. Place their faith in the power of the living God to overcome or tame the rulers and authorities of this world.
5. Define daily life through committed prayer and devotion.
6. Engage the power of the community of believers to face obstacles and trials in daily life.

### **Spiritual Edgewalking profile in the life of Esther:**

1. Embrace the pain and brokenness of this world to unleash the transforming power of God to bring healing and hope.
2. Face traumatic events by looking to physical and spiritual family bonds for true identity and security.
3. Consistently review their personal and family history to maintain their cultural identity and not be assimilated into the dominant cultural context.
4. Learn to resist the compromising power of materialism and popularity.
5. Face crisis by embracing their identity in Christ and moving from the comfortable middle to take a stand at the edge of faith.
6. Willingly encounter the powerful forces of cultural assimilation on a daily basis.
7. Learn to face their fears and share them with others.
8. Seek the prayer and support of the body to overcome the spiritual and physical obstacles that seek to destroy them.
9. Create space where confrontation and dialogue can be explored.

10. Celebrate the works of God to be reminded of God's faithfulness and power and to exalt his name in the world.

**Spiritual Edgewalking profile in the life of Paul:**

1. Show sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus.
2. Live with a creative balance of using available technology and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
3. Utilize the available cultural places for communication to share the good news of the kingdom.
4. Embrace the communication styles of the context in which they wish to share the Gospel
5. Demonstrate a balance of exposition of the text and its relationship or application to daily life.
6. Present the word of God in a way that allows space for discussion and debate, so others can explore the truth.
7. Graciously respond to personal attacks to create space for continued dialogue.
8. Demonstrate flexibility in methodology of sharing the Good News to engage the cultural context, but never compromise the message of the Good News.
9. Engage the variety of worldviews by discovering common ground and then offer creative theological and philosophical alternatives for consideration.
10. Demonstrate a balance between technical and relational skills when sharing the good news.
11. Share the gospel with the compassion and care of a nursing mother.
12. Embrace the pain, sadness and difficulty of the world with the restoring power of the cross.
13. Model authenticity of the Christian life for new believers through consistency of their walk and talk.
14. Mentor young Christians like a parent to move toward maturity in their Christian walk.



### **Spiritual Edgewalking profile in the life of Prisca and Aquila:**

1. Move from one culture to another without losing their identity and assimilating but retain their identity and engage each new cultural context with the gospel of Christ and the gospel about Christ.
2. Integrate their spiritual lives into the market place.
3. Do not split their lives between secular and sacred but discover their call is to love Christ and to share him in whatever occupation or setting God has placed them.
4. Can be both teachers and learners in the same context.
5. Are followers of Christ who are being discipled by someone older in the faith while at the same time discipling someone younger in the faith.
6. Demonstrate in-depth skill in expounding the word of God by exploring diverse theological positions.
7. Embrace those who differ theologically and are willing to dialogue, expound and engage the differing theological issues instead of separating and criticizing them.
8. Learn to find common ground on which to develop dialogue where doctrine can be clarified and corrected.
9. Are willing to play a great variety of roles to bring men and women into the kingdom of God and equip them for ministry.
10. Are deeply committed to the gathering of believers into new communities where they can experience and learn to demonstrate kingdom values.
11. Value highly their connection to the body of Christ but do not use the body of Christ to fulfill their personal visions or dreams.
12. Are motivated by their love for Christ and his mission and not by the expectations or praise of others.
13. Do not buy into the world system's model of success as their standard for ministry.
14. Do not stay in the comfortable middle but walk at the edge of culture where risks are taken so that the

transforming power of the gospel can be released through their walk and talk.

15. Are faithful to Christ and their brothers and sisters in Christ and do not shrink back from the challenges and risks of ministering with others.

### **Spiritual Edgewalking profile in the life of Philip:**

1. See circumstances as a way to discover new avenues of ministry.
2. Use their multicultural background to bridge to marginalized people.
3. Embrace prejudice and discrimination by using it as a base for creative ministry.
4. Demonstrate confidence in the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to overcome spiritual counterfeits offered by the world.
5. Commit themselves to reconciliation and the unity of the Body of Christ.
6. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit even if it means leaving a successful ministry.
7. Walk a balanced life between family and ministry so that their children will embrace God's call and ministry for their lives.
8. Live consistently, not splitting between private and public life.

### **Spiritual Edgewalking profile in the life of Barnabas:**

1. Hold their possessions loosely and make them available for kingdom work.
2. Are moved to compassionate acts by the needs of the poor.
3. Do not see money as neutral but combat materialism by releasing their resources through the church for missional ventures.
4. Leverage their reputation to help outsiders to become insiders in the family of faith.
5. Become bridge-builders to overcome barriers so the body of Christ can be inclusive rather than exclusive.

6. Volunteer to play a variety of roles to see the Body of Christ grow and the kingdom of God expressed in the world.
7. Utilize their gifts to build up and strengthen the body of Christ.
8. Find out where God is at work and join him there with their gifts.
9. Complement the other spiritual gifts at work in the body of Christ.
10. Utilize their walk and talk to share the gospel of Christ and the gospel about Christ.
11. Look beyond failure in new believers or potential believers and extend God's grace patiently allowing the Holy Spirit to work.
12. Share their allegiance and do not give up the hope of spiritual transformation for non-believers and disobedient believers.

# Chapter Notes

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## Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> William Irwin Thompson, *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light : Mythology, Sexuality, and the Origins of Culture* , (Palgrave MacMillan; Reprint edition May 1, 1996)

<sup>2</sup> Nina Boyd Krebs, *Edgewalkers: Defusing Cultural Boundaries* (Far Hills, NJ.: New Horizon Press, 1999) p.8

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 2

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 73

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 135

<sup>6</sup> This is my popularized version of the five expressions of Richard Neibhur's *Christ and Culture*

<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B Eerdmans, 1998) p. 73

Guder goes on to say: *The church growth movement has profoundly influenced the North American Church, but it has failed to address equally a number of issues. One was anthropology: the church growth movement tended to assume the neutrality of culture and accept the brokenness of the world as normative. Another issue was sociology: it often treated culture as something beyond us that we could consider a commodity, target, and reach. A third was ecclesiology: church growth tended to view the church primarily as a social organization that could be planted, marketed, and managed*

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 92

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 93

<sup>10</sup> Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelism and the Subversive Memory of Jesus* (Philadelphia,: Fortress Press, 1984) p. 8ff

<sup>11</sup> Guder, *Missional Church* p. 88

<sup>12</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) p. 81-117)

## Chapter 2

<sup>13</sup> The course syllabus for IS-520 can be obtained online at [www.mbseminary.edu](http://www.mbseminary.edu)

<sup>14</sup> Duane Elmer, "Trust: A Good Start on Cross-Cultural Effectiveness." *Trinity World Forum* 1 (Spring 2000)

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- <sup>15</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998) p. 4
- <sup>16</sup> David Bosh, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) p. 390
- <sup>17</sup> George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, *The Church Between Gospel and Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) p. 66
- <sup>18</sup> Alan Roxburgh, *Crossing the Bridge* (Costa Mesa, CA.: Percept, 2000) p.31-44
- <sup>19</sup> Lovett H. Weems Jr. (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 1993) p. 103
- <sup>20</sup> Alan Roxburgh, *Crossing the Bridge* (Costa Mesa, CA.: Percept, 2000) p.38
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 40
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.44
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.43

### **Chapter 3**

- <sup>24</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *Longitudes and Attitudes* (New York, NY.: Anchor Books, 2003) p. 3
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 3
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.3-4
- <sup>27</sup> Don S. Browning, "Globalization and the Task of Theological Education in North America' in *Theological Education* 30: Suppl. 1 (Autumn 1993): 15-28.
- <sup>28</sup> Daniel O. Aleshire "Words and Deeds: An Informal Assessment of Globalization," *Theological Education* 35, No. 2 (Spring 1999): 28
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 28
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 28
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 28
- <sup>32</sup> William E. Leshner and Donald W. Shriver Jr, "Stumbling in the Right Direction," *Theological Education* 35, No. 2 (Spring 1999): 13
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 13
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 13
- <sup>35</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God*. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2001) p. 28
- <sup>36</sup> Fumitaka Matsuoka, "The Changing Terrain of 'Globalization' in ATS Conversation," *Theological Education* 35, No. 2 (Spring 1999) 18

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 18

<sup>38</sup> Edgewalkers Institute – Cynthia Kemper, Founder of Edgewalkers Institute.

<http://www.edgewalkers.com/edgewalking/founder.html>

<sup>39</sup> Friedman, "Longitudes and Attitudes," p. 5

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 5

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 6

## Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup> Nina Boyd Krebs, *Edgewalkers: Defusing Cultural Boundaries* (Far Hills, NJ.: New Horizon Press, 1999)

<sup>2</sup> "We don't 'get over' the deepest pains of life, nor should we. 'Are you over it?' is a question that cannot be asked by someone who has been through 'it,' whatever 'it' is. It is an anxious question, and asking for reassurance that cannot be given. During a lifetime there are many pains, many griefs to be borne. We don't 'get over' them; we learn to live with them, to go on growing and deepening, and understanding, as Joseph understood, that God can come into all of our pain and make something creative out of it." Madeleine L'Engle, *Sold Into Egypt* (Wheaton, IL.: Harold Shaw Publishers 1989) P. 199-200

<sup>3</sup> Ronald S. Wallace, *The Story of Joseph and the Family of Jacob* (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2001) p. 3-4

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p. 3-4

<sup>5</sup> Operation Timothy is an Evangelistic one on one bible study produced by CBMC Publications, 665- East Brainerd Rd. Suite 100, Chattanooga, TN 37421

<sup>6</sup> Walter Brueggemann "'Exodus' in the Plural (Amos 9:7)" in *Many Voices One God, Being Faithful in a Pluralistic World* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press 1998) p. 15-39

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.19

## Chapter 5

<sup>8</sup> Joan D. Chittister, art by John August Swanson *The Story of Ruth, Twelve Moments in Every Woman's Life* (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2000) p. 2

*"The story as it is told is a simple one: It is the story of two women – one old, one young – both childless and vulnerable, both marginal to the systems around them – who find*

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*themselves dealing with limited resources, deep pain, a hostile world, and great concern for the situation of the other. It's a familiar situation for most women today who find themselves left to survive in a system to which they do not have full access"*

<sup>9</sup>Sakenfeld "Ruth" p. 32

<sup>10</sup> *"In reflecting upon Ruth's commitment to a new people and a new geographic location, Asian-American theologians have highlighted the danger of using Ruth's decision as a warrant for an assimilationist melting-pot view of the proper role of immigrants to the United States (Sano, p. 299). In fact, the story of Ruth does not claim that she totally assimilates or abandons her cultural identity. The repeated references to her Moabite ancestry point not only to resistance in Bethlehem, but also to her legitimate claim to participate as a Moabite in the life of the Bethlehem community. Ethnic particularity is not denigrated by the story as a whole. At the same time, Ruth's migration and her claim to Naomi's geographic home offer encouragement of pilgrimage imagery to immigrants of our own time as they strive to do God's will in their adoptive land. Ibid., p. 32*

<sup>11</sup> Nina Boyd Krebs, *Edgewalkers: Defusing Cultural Boundaries* (Far Hills, NJ.: New Horizon Press, 1999) p. 110

<sup>12</sup> *"Ruth finds herself at odds with her culture, her country, her religion and her role in life. One by one, she chooses against each of them. A Moabite, she makes the decision to go to the Jewish town of Bethlehem where race and religion will marginalize her forever. A follower of Chemosh, she professes faith in the one God, Yahweh. A marriageable young woman, she opts for independence with another woman rather than set about finding a man to care for her. Ruth has discovered what it is to be the self that God made and nourishes and accompanies on the way." Chittister "The Story of Ruth" p. 29*

<sup>13</sup> Romans 5:6-10

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., P. 40

<sup>15</sup> Sakenfeld "Ruth" p. 24

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## Chapter 6

<sup>16</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson – Daniel, *The Communicator's Commentary*, Ed. Lloyd. Ogilvie, (Waco, TX.: Word Publishing, 1988) Pg. 34-36

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 34-35

<sup>18</sup>[http://www.4reference.net/encyclopedias/wikipedia/nabu\\_uimanni.html](http://www.4reference.net/encyclopedias/wikipedia/nabu_uimanni.html)

<sup>19</sup> Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary, 1994

<sup>20</sup> Ferguson, "Daniel" pg. 35

<sup>21</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY.: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc. , 1943) p. 86-87

<sup>22</sup> "As they heard their names called day after day, it was an additional temptation for them to yield to the pressure to think of themselves as citizens of Babylon rather than Jerusalem, to forget the rock from which they were hewn and the pit from which they were dug." Ferguson, "Daniel," p. 36

<sup>23</sup> Nina Boyd Krebs, *Edgewalkers: Defusing Cultural Boundaries* (Far Hills, NJ.: New Horizon Press, 1999) p. 6

<sup>24</sup> Ferguson, "Daniel," p. 36

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p. 36

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 112

## Chapter 7

<sup>27</sup> "The Book of Esther is one of five Old Testament books which were called by the later Jews "Megilloth" the other four being the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations and Ecclesiastes. The name "Megilloth" signifies rolls, or volumes, and was probably given to these books because each was read in the synagogue on a special feast day, and was for convenience on such occasions written on a separate roll. Of the five, that of Esther was the most highly esteemed, being sometimes styled simply "Megillah," or the volume. It was read on the day of the feast of Purim, and was elevated to a place above other sacred books, except those of the Pentateuch." Rev. William Taylor, *Ruth the Gleaner and Esther the Queen* (New York, NY.: George Doran Company, 1919) p. 97

<sup>28</sup> Nina Boyd Krebs, *Edgewalkers: Defusing Cultural Boundaries* (Far Hills, NJ.: New Horizon Press, 1999) p. 64



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## Chapter 8

<sup>1</sup> The Athenians were famed for two things: their religious fervor, since they erected statues to all the gods and even to an "unknown gods". . . their love of dialogue, searching always for some new idea (Acts 17:19). R. K. Harrison, *Major Cities of the Biblical World* (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1985) p. 25

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.26-27

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 29

## Chapter 9

<sup>4</sup> Acts 18:2, 18-21, 24-28, Rom. 16:3-4; I Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19 ?

<sup>5</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor's calculation of the maximum size of thirty or forty members for a house church congregation rests on the premise of a free-standing villa. His more recent work considers the possibility that the shop space on the ground floor of a tenement building might be used for a "house church" such as Prisca and Aquila sponsored in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome; it might accommodate a group of ten to twenty believers. Robert Jewett, *Paul the Apostle to America* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Know Press, 1994) Pg 77

<sup>6</sup> Ivoni Richter Reimer, translated by Linda M Maloney, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 1995) pg 210.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.210

<sup>8</sup> These women are given chapters in her book. See Table of Contents vii, viii

<sup>9</sup> *Onesiphorous (profitable)-- a Christian from Ephesus who befriended the apostle Paul <2 Tim. 1:16-18; 4:18>. Not only did Onesiphorus minister to Paul while the apostle was in Ephesus; he also ministered to Paul during his imprisonment in Rome <2 Tim. 1:17>. Onesiphorus overcame any fears he had for his own safety to visit and minister to Paul in prison. Unable to repay Onesiphorus for his "mercy," Paul prayed that he might "find mercy from the Lord in that Day" <2 Tim. 1:18>, referring to the Judgment Day.* Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers in Biblesoft PC Study Bible Reference Library

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## Chapter 11

1 (Barnabas, "son of exhortation," or possibly "son of Nebo"): This name was applied to the associate of Paul, who was originally called Joses or Joseph <Acts 4:36>, as a testimony to his eloquence. Its literal meaning is "son of prophecy" (bar, "son"; nebhu'ah, "prophecy"). Compare word for prophet in <Gen 20:7; Deut 18:15,18>, etc. This is interpreted in <Acts 4:36> as "son of exhortation" the Revised Version (British and American), or "son of consolation" the King James Version, expressing two sides of the Greek paraklesis, that are not exclusive. The office of a prophet being more than to foretell, all these interpretations are admissible in estimating Barnabas as a preacher<sup>11</sup> (Standard Bible Dictionary in loc.).

2 Marva Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God*. (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing) pg. 110

3 Ibid. Pg. 113

4 Jacques Ellul, Translated by C. Edward Hopkins, *False Presence of the Kingdom*. (New York, NY.: Seabury Press, 1972) pg. 47-48

## Chapter 12

<sup>15</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2002)

## Chapter 13

<sup>16</sup>See appendix for the complete list of characteristics.