

PERSPECTIVE

SEPTEMBER 2015



A Window Into the
Gospel and La Florida

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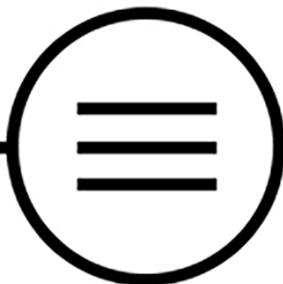
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A Window Into the Gospel & La Florida

For the past few years our church has partnered with a local church in the Dominican Republic to reach mountain villages on the western end of the country, in a region known as La Florida. The brothers and sisters of the Central Mennonite Church (CMC) in San Juan de la Maguana, a large city not far from La Florida, have proved to be faithful partners in gospel ministry. Usually twice a week they send a few church members into the mountains—an arduous, one-hour journey over rocks and through creeks—to befriend, evangelize, and disciple their rural neighbors.

CMC is taking responsibility for their non-Christian neighbors. Catholics first reached the island of Hispaniola, where the Dominican Republic rests, upon the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the fifteenth century. Unfortunately, as one faithful Dominican pastor put it, the Dominican Republic in particular and Latin America in general never benefited from the Reformation of the sixteenth century. As a result, the religion of the island is a toxic mixture of works-based Roman Catholicism and voodoo.

In early August of this year I had the privilege of accompanying a team from Mount Vernon to join our CMC partners for a week of evangelism in La Florida. The landscape was breathtaking, the travel difficult, and the fellowship encouraging. These mountain villages may not be in the 10/40 window, but they are filled with farmers and families who have either never heard of Jesus or think of him as little more than a vending machine—an easy means to spiritual blessing or financial support. Their knowledge of the gospel is impoverished. Thankfully, due to the investment of CMC in San Juan and Christians sent out from our own congregation, the spiritual landscape of La Florida is changing.

What was it like to be a part of this ministry for a week? For most of the trip I kept a journal, hoping to paint a picture with words to help me remember what I saw. I kept this journal for myself, not expecting to publish these thoughts—which explains why I missed a full day and why each day is incomplete. Still, upon further reflection, it seems wise to share it with you. What follows is my description of a few days in the villages of La Florida. As you read it, maybe you'll think to pray for Ultimo and his neighbors in the days ahead.

I'm thankful to be at a church like Mount Vernon that has a heart for the nations, and grateful to Jesus Christ who gave me the opportunity to go and speak and pray. Here is a little peek into the gospel at work in La Florida.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

Saturday afternoon our team arrived at the airport in Santo Domingo, the capital city of the DR. We gathered our suitcases filled with sunscreen, Columbia sportswear, malaria pills, and wet wipes before embarking on a three hour journey to San Juan de la Maguana, a much smaller city of approximately 100,000 nestled near the feet of the western, central mountains of the DR, a stone's throw from Haiti.

We plopped into a very comfortable bus filled with plush seats and Arabian drapes and eventually ate fried chicken at an old but clean gas station. That evening we pulled into San Juan to find a missionary house waiting for us. Imagine a men's college house complete with a lack of furniture and looking a bit like a Spanish villa. Men downstairs, women upstairs, no hot water, no paper in the toilets (apparently the pipes in the DR are too small). The place had no amenities but none were expected or needed since we aren't here for comfort but evangelism, and this house is simply a place for food and sleep and conversation.

On Saturday night I went to sleep early in my top bunk with my own sheets and a fan blowing a breeze across the room. I put the finishing touches on Sunday's sermon before falling asleep.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2

On Sunday after a nourishing breakfast of eggs and papaya we piled into two trucks for a ten-minute drive to CMC. A congregation of roughly 100 gathered to enjoy a service of lively songs and short prayers. In plastic, white chairs lining the floor and under fans fixed to the wall, we engaged in corporate worship with our Dominican brothers and sisters. I preached from 2 Samuel 24 attempting to drive home the reality of sin and drawing our attention to a Savior who paid the ultimate price to save us from the sword of God's wrath. After the message, we said goodbye to new friends, gathered our belongings at home base, and enjoyed a rice and bean lunch before heading out for our first glimpse of La Florida.

In the back of our 4x4 truck, under the blazing heat of the Dominican sun, we made our way to the mountains. Much of the road was paved as we drove past rice fields lined by an aqueduct enjoyed by swimmers cooling off on a sunny day. Looking out at the lush mountains, I could blink and think I was in the Pololo Valley of Oahu. Only here no signs of civilization could be found—no snow cones and convenience stores. Instead we passed pink shacks decorated with live pigs and goats and owned by farmers happy to make their way on mules. We roared through the valley, under thorny trees and poisonous cacti, across two rivers running shallow in the summer drought.

The first stop of the day was El Guarico, a small village whose main homestead is owned by a man named Ultimo. His name, in Spanish, means “last.” His parents named him this because they were sure he would be their first and final child. But in God’s providence his parents were wrong and his mother went on to have six more children—evidence of God’s sense of humor or his parents’ lack of foresight. He is a man pushing 55, his small eyes and smaller mustache framing a gentle face. In shorts and a tank top he greeted us, eager to show off his home and prove it no stranger to guests. I met too many family members to remember each name, but a strong young woman, no older than 40, with white teeth, a studied grin, and a clear sense of authority made sure each visitor had enough chairs for a small break. On a tiny concrete slab inside a useful gate designed to keep the pigs near the creek, we turned down coffee, assuring her our visit would be very brief—a down payment toward a full week of conversation.

We said goodbye to Ultimo’s brood, promised a swift return, and made our way, quite literally, through the river to drop off supplies at our second destination, a village called La Sabana. Compared to the homesteads of El Guarico, this village seemed a veritable city, 70 huts strong. We saw two-dozen kids playing with old tires in the street. Dust saturated the air, filling our lungs as we prayed. The days ahead would provide an opportunity to see Tranquila’s idol house. We said goodbye, promised to return, and prayed our truck’s radiator wouldn’t overheat. Thankfully it didn’t and, after a return voyage

to our temporary home, we went back to church where Bryan opened up Luke 16 and walked us through Lazarus and the Rich Man. When all the singing was done—this time with English subtitles on the screens overhead—we visited with the younger, Sunday evening crowd, dressed to the nines. We stayed to laugh and pray and visit together and to share that great Christian blessing known as fellowship. Frankly, it felt a lot like our Sunday evenings at Mount Vernon.

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Another day came to an end, this one marked by a thicker film of grit, and I went to sleep hopeful for a full and fruitful Monday.

MONDAY, AUGUST 3

Our leaders (Ricky & Bryan) divided us into two groups—a group for each village. I was sent to El Guarico with our interpreter, Ronnie, and two

other Dominicans—one who started learning English just seven months prior but could already translate, though not very well, so I found myself turning to Jake Chandler for assistance. Diane Hughs was also on our team, always cheerful and always thoughtful to keep the conversation on spiritual matters. Georgian Branan, full of energy and determination, came with us as well. She regularly apologized for her poor Spanish, seemingly unaware that behind those red glasses she wore is a woman whose zeal and love impressed us. Joel Roberts and his daughter Grace came too, her red hair lighting up the jungle. Then there was my daughter Rachel, quiet and recovering from a cold, but eager to roll up her sleeves and get to work. She and Grace would play with the kids for hours later in the day.

We made the same journey to El Guarico. The roads were a little busier as we passed more than a handful of Dominicans who stared at the pasty-white Americans driving by in their large trucks. Ronnie, our Dominican guide and an elder of CMC, picked up two workers in the first town on the base of the mountain. Young, wiry, men dressed in designer jeans and Jordan caps—hardly the attire I expected from a pair who would spend the day putting a kitchen on a hut in a far away village. They were finishing up a project started by the Peace Corps, probably not an unusual ending to a humanitarian story. Our destination came into sight with Joel competently at

the helm of the vehicle. We dropped the workers off at the fork in the road. Ricky and the white truck carried them on. We had our sights set on El Guarico.

Little changed the fifteen hours or so since we'd left the previous day. Up the short but steep path we climbed through Ultimo's gate. Six feet away sat his blue and pink hut with a metal roof and three rooms. One for supplies—perhaps even serving as a town store. The other for gathering, a simple square room with one table in the middle. The inside of the final room could not be seen—perhaps an oasis of privacy in a world where discretion is in short supply since life is lived out-of-doors. Pictures were pasted on the outside wall—not in neatly bound photo albums on an inner shelf—for all to see and, perhaps, to miss family who had left to start a new life in the place simply referred to as “La Capital”—Santo Domingo. Another house in Ultimo's homestead serves as a kitchen, another seemed to store 1,000 chairs, they always had enough for visitors. The edge of the homestead housed the cooking fire where hot embers smoldered in the middle of an old, used tire. Besides a couple of motorcycles and a portable television, there was nothing to signal the twenty-first century had arrived. Nothing, that is, except one young man's Batman snow cap, a wintery item of clothing he wore comfortably in 90-degree weather.

The circle began to form: our Georgiana, a couple friends from CMC who knew little English, and beside them sat Cabral, a relative of Ultimo. Cabral has only one hand—one can only imagine what happened—a sharp machete, an animal bite, a clash with the poisonous cactus? Cabral appeared to be married to Belkis, a woman in her 30s who seemed thrilled to be in the company of Americans and with a smile so wide it could have been sewed onto her face. She demanded we drink coffee and when Ronnie told her I preferred tea, she eagerly went to a great deal of trouble to steep a cup for me from herbs grown in a nearby garden. Cabral told me that it would make me sleepy, and perhaps if I wasn't in such an interesting place I would have dozed off. The circle continued with Ronnie, myself, Columbino—Ultimo's aunt, and Denaires, a woman around 40 who sat with us while caring for her kids. Diane and Joel finished the circle. Santos, the young man in the Batman cap and Jake sat just outside, their proximity giving every indication the two would become fast friends.

We spent the next several hours in this oval. The conversation ranged from the fruit in the garden—papaya, banana, pomegranate and avocado—to the

names of everyone's children and the location of everyone's hut. Eventually, our young Dominican leader, Ronnie, brought the conversation to the Bible. Over coffee and the best tea I've ever had, we spoke of Jesus. Ronnie invited me to tell the story in Mark 2 where Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic only to be labeled a blasphemer by the Pharisees. The residents of El Guarico are not yet addicted to Netflix. Their attention span is long, and they patiently listened as I spoke of Jesus as the great healer and Savior and as Ronnie cited Luke 16 and told them of the destination of Lazarus and the Rich Man. We pressed for no decisions. Joel shared his own testimony, and then we enjoyed each other's company, a band of new and old friends (many from Mount Vernon had been here before) experiencing what might best be described as southern hospitality.

They set lunch out for us in the largest hut just off our circle, Ultimo's home. The grey walls decorated only with the words, “Mami,” “Papi” and perhaps the names of children. Ultimo's daughter, Argentina (the one with the studied grin), took command of lunch preparation—a simple meal of beans, rice, and hard-boiled eggs. Ultimo made sure that each plate had enough food to feed three people before he let us return to our seats. Soon it was time to go. La Sabana awaited us.

Jake, Santos, and I set out over the mountain for this larger village only a fifteen-minute walk away. The view afforded by the hike was well worth the sticky sweat. These villages are nestled in country few are privileged to see and, not surprisingly, Santos passed by without giving his beautiful homeland a second glance. Thankfully, unfamiliar with the terrain, Jake and I walked with dropped jaws.

La Sabana lacks the charm of El Guarico. Trash lines the streets. One shack reads “BANCO,” a sign for the ubiquitous blight of the lottery. Here more residents stare awkwardly at the white visitors on their way to entertain and teach their children for an hour of VBS. We made it to the hut with an open, covered space furnished with a dilapidated pool table. Now, at least today, the table held the backpacks and water bottles of missionaries eager to speak big, gospel truths to little, Dominican hearts.

About 25 kids ranging from 3 to 14 gather around while Georgiana ably tells the story of the Creator God. She smiles as she talks and we hope the children can understand, through the interpreter, just how much she loves the God she's describing. Children can never fully

sit still, but these Dominicans exceed the capabilities of most of their American counterparts. Video games and cartoons, iPads and movies have yet to rob them of that great gift of common grace known as the attention span. They listen and follow along as Ricky leads in song. They are clearly entranced by the gregarious man who returns each year with little more than a hug, a song, a picture for them to color, and a word about the God he won't stop sharing.

From the top of the hill, La Sabana is a cluster of huts littered along a steep road. Manaya descends from his home overlooking the town. He's a friend of our team, a man who once ran a brothel, now only a bar, and he identifies himself as a child of God. He's wearing a black cap that shows he volunteers for the La Sabana police. He proudly shows me his badge, which proves he is officially responsible for law and order. Manaya seems glad to see us and announces he's taken the week off to visit with us more. When I asked him what it meant to be a Christian, he didn't have much to say other than he tried to live a good life. I encouraged him to read Mark 7, about sin coming from the heart. He readily agreed.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5

After rising at 6am, enduring a cold shower, and tackling the book of Jonah, which I'm going to start preaching when I return to Atlanta, we ate a breakfast of fresh fruit and chicken enchiladas—an unusual but delicious combination.

Today we are joined by Miguel Shaul, a friend of Mount Vernon who moved his family to San Juan years ago to labor for the evangelization of the DR. We are also joined by an elder of CMC, Roberto Bautista, an engineer. He shared what I now call the Dominican Smile—a gentle countenance under black hair dotted with specks of grey. As we meet for the second time, he thanked me for the Samuel sermon and mentioned his appreciation for the exegesis and his surprise at my youthfulness. I replied that the grey in my own beard contradicted his surprise, but he would have none of it. Later in the day, I saw him carrying a baby from the village of La Sabana, and I was filled with gratitude to see an elder working hard to build up a culture of evangelism in his church. Miguel is a doer. He started a robust parachurch ministry and is an entrepreneur by nature. He clearly loves adventure and he looks much more comfortable riding in the back of a truck than I do.

This morning Ultimo made it clear there would be no gathering until lunchtime. We divided up with Miguel, Omar, Joel, Diane and I taking a short hike to a neighboring homestead. After crossing two creeks we ran into an elderly man who told us, according to Miguel, that we are no better than he is. Most of his rambling statement was apparently jibberish and Miguel attributed it to either mental illness or, perhaps, the demonic. The leaves stuck in this man's nose confirmed at least one of these diagnoses.

The homestead we reached introduced us to the first refusal for a visit. While hanging out her laundry to dry, a woman yelled at us that she was receiving no visitors. Three younger women, we noticed as we looked into her yard, walked ceremonially around an idol house—five crosses sitting around a pile of rocks under an awning. After marching around they stopped to make the sign of the cross and bowed. The whole ritual is evidence of Roman Catholicism mixed with voodoo. We prayed.

Then we left for a homestead owned by Ultimo's brother, José. He was in the field while his wife and daughter served us coffee. His wife seemed glad we were there, but had no interest in joining us next door for lunch. Her husband finally arrived and showed the Dominican Smile, but he looked tired. Miguel introduced me as a pastor. We asked him if he knew what that meant. José replied from under his New York hat that a pastor bosses people around. I laughed and gently corrected him with the truth that only Jesus is the boss. He seemed to understand.

After lunch, we gathered into our oval. After two days of Bible teaching a larger crowd had come. At one point or another, everyone from our team shared a story, a thought, an idea from Scripture. No one asked, but there seemed to be an expectation that since I was a pastor I would speak. I walked them through the story of the woman at the well. They seemed engaged though no one had questions at the end. However, when I told them that if anyone wanted an audio Bible they should grab a hold of me afterward, Belkis and Denaires immediately raised their hands. Miguel suggested that on Thursday, our last day in the village, I should talk about the difference between knowing about God and knowing God.

Up at La Sabana, Manaya was ready to discuss Mark 7. We talked about the difference between murder and anger—fundamentally nothing since both sins spring from the heart. I illustrated for him the idea of

substitution whereby Jesus takes our sin and guilt upon himself while his righteousness is accounted to us. I explained our need for a new heart. Manaya was clearly struggling to understand how he could be accepted by God, not for what he has done but for what Christ has done for him. By the end of the conversation he may have understood better. I told him that members of CMC would come and walk through the Bible to show him how to live the Christian life every day. He humbly said, “I need help.” That was a good sign.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 6

Up again at 6am. The nights have been quite bearable. I’ve yet to sleep a whole night through, but I’m sure that would come with time. We left late because Bryan couldn’t find the key to the truck. It turns out it was in his backpack the whole time, but his backpack resembles Dr. Who’s tardis—it’s unclear whether anything that enters will ever reappear.

This morning we decided to stop at some other towns that our MVBC teams visited in the past. The drive was therefore longer and scarier. At one point Rachel counted six rivers that we crossed. As our hosts in El Guarico and La Sabana prepared one last lunch for us, our team traveled toward the top of the mountain, to one of the highest known villages where we met a man who gave us a toothless, Dominican Smile. He is an older man and his children have all left his village. His wife died 20 years ago. He showed off a kitchen that was in the works, and as Ronnie and I stood in the shade of this concrete hut, our new friend, clearly a leader in this village, talked to us about the difference between evangelicals and Catholics. Evangelicals, he said, give good counsel while Catholics simply claim the faith of their parents while living godless lives. Perhaps he was simply playing to his audience. It’s hard to tell. The tendency for so many here is to tell visitors what they think they want to hear.

Our next stop was El Coroso. Like the previous town, there are no known believers living here. The dominant religion is the same voodoo-laced Roman Catholicism. Their “church” looks like a Roman Catholic altar. The main difference is the townspeople set out chairs near this altar for the mountain spirits to sit and rest.

Finally, we made our way to a town that may have one believer, a man by the name of Porphilio who is 103 years old. Bryan talked to him about Jesus—he’d heard it before and claimed to be a follower, led to the Lord by

one of CMC’s pastors, Tony. As we prayed over Porphilio we prayed the gospel with the hope he is truly born again.

Our last stop was the familiar village of El Guarico. My team had to do without Ronnie or Miguel. Our interpreter, Alex, had never visited the village before. I wasn’t sure what would happen without an established, Dominican leader to manage our stay. We ate quickly, rice and delicious chicken. Then the largest group of the week gathered for the teaching. I spoke for 45 minutes, summarizing the storyline of the Bible. They didn’t understand simple terms like “Messiah,” or “sacrifice.” The Old Testament was a mystery to them. I walked through everything as clearly as I could, trying to explain the difference between knowing God and knowing about God. I borrowed J. I. Packer’s illustration from the beginning of his famous book where he talks about the difference between someone who actually travels the road and someone who just looks at the road from the balcony. I encouraged them to be travelers on the gospel road. I wanted them to understand that they needed the Bible to live the Christian life. I spoke as simply as I knew how, comparing the richness of the Bible to an ocean so full of fish that you could go fishing endlessly and never come up with an empty net. I explained the Old Testament as a message about a people’s need for a king with the power to take care of our greatest problem, our sin. And then I read from 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12, where Paul talks about what it looks like to live as a Christian, every day:

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us to impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been

taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Ultimo, Santos, Cabral, and José all listened carefully. I prayed that God would convert these men and use them to lead this village. The women generally seemed more eager to learn. Columbino asked for an audio Bible and Denaires expressed special appreciation for our visit. Belkis continued to smile and the children continued to play the games taught to them by Rachel and Grace. Overall, we told them that we came because Jesus is our King and he calls us to tell others about him, and one day we are hopeful they will do the same.

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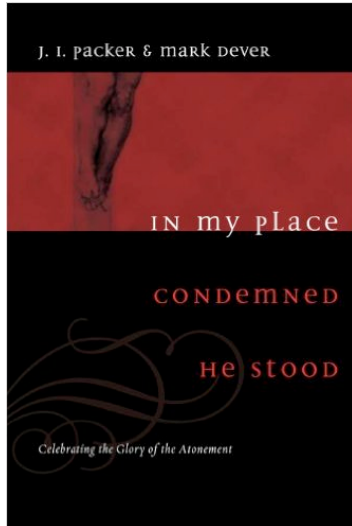
I could have written much, much more and the memories from the other members of the MVBC team are just as colorful and helpful. Again, pray for some of the names you've read about here, and consider how God might use you to bring the gospel to the nations.

~Aaron Menikoff

In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement

Written by J.I. Packer and Mark Dever

Bookstall Price \$15



In the book, *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, authors J.I. Packer and Mark Dever address the concern for the recovery of the central biblical doctrine of the atonement. They set out to combat what they call “anti-redemptionism,” which is the attitude in theological circles that the redeeming work of Christ in the atonement is unimportant. Dever and Packer believe much modern preaching and teaching in many evangelical institutions, especially churches, has become marked by anti-redemptionism. To combat this, the authors give much attention to

what the biblical doctrine of atonement is centered around—God’s work through his son, Jesus Christ, on the cross on our behalf. They believe, as I do, that the suffering of Christ on the cross was an act of “penal substitution.” The book discusses this doctrine and the historical and theological challenges it faces and lays out for the reader why this doctrine is central to the work of Christ on the cross.

Now the question should be asked, “Why should I read this book?” If you want to have a basic biblical foundation for what the atonement means in your life and in the church, I recommend this book. It gives a thorough view—biblically, historically, and theologically—of what God did for us through Jesus on the cross. This doctrine is crucial to understanding the Gospel. The book counters the popular and thoroughly unbiblical notion of “divine child abuse.” At the end of the book, another collaborating writer, Ligon Duncan, provides one of the most exhaustive bibliographies dealing with the doctrine of the atonement I have ever come across. Duncan also provides several other lists of books and materials for those interested in additional reading on this subject. This book has greatly helped me and has reminded me of what Paul reminded Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

— RECOMMENDED BY MARVIN DORSEY

Excerpts from the Book

1

“The wrath of God is as personal, and as potent, as his love; and, just as the blood-shedding of the Lord Jesus was the direct manifesting of his Father’s love toward us, so it was the direct averting of his Father’s wrath against us.”

—The Heart of the Gospel, p. 35

2

“Any biblical understanding of the atonement must take into account our having been united to Christ by faith, adopted and regenerated in him.”

—Nothing but the Blood, p. 109

3

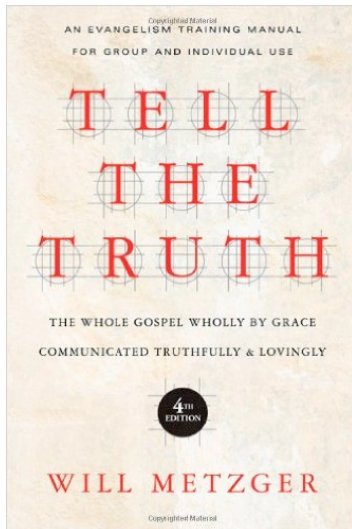
“Christ’s death for me calls and constrains me to trust, to worship, to love, and to serve.”

—What Did the Cross Achieve?, p. 97

Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel Wholly by Grace Communicated Truthfully & Lovingly

Written by Will Metzger

Bookstall Price \$18



What is evangelism? What is the content of our message? What is the foundation of evangelism? How do I practically share the message of the gospel? These are all questions Will Metzger seeks to answer in his book, *Tell the Truth*. Offered as an evangelism training manual for group and individual use, *Tell the Truth* teaches readers how to present the “whole gospel, wholly by grace, communicated truthfully and lovingly.” Part one seeks to clearly define evangelism and the gospel from a God-centered perspective in a me-centered generation. Naturally,

Metzger spends significant time articulating what the gospel is not. He also describes at length what genuine salvation and gospel-transformation should look like. Part two illuminates the foundation for evangelism—grace. Metzger shows how grace is the distinguishing element between Christianity and every other religion. He emphasizes God’s sovereignty in the gracious, saving work of salvation. Metzger also makes peace, quite helpfully with the God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, borrowing much from J.I. Packer’s classic, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Part three gives the call to evangelize while giving lengthy, helpful, practical teaching on how to evangelize.

There are many books on evangelism. There are many *great* books on evangelism. Though it is not necessary that every book on the subject be able to distinguish itself from another, Metzger’s book does in a couple ways. Of the books I’ve read on evangelism, it gives the most practical advice on how to evangelize (Part three). It also helpfully lends itself to a book study, Sunday school, or small group environment. I was most blessed by Part one of the book. Metzger describes the landscape of our generation and encourages us to understand and preach the whole gospel. I think this is particularly good for us as Southern Baptists to hear. As a denomination, we have often struggled to keep our gospel message from being poisoned by worldliness and nominalism.

– RECOMMENDED BY ZACK DiPRIMA

Excerpts from the Book

1

“It is a global problem: ‘saved’ Christian young people who are merely adapting externally to the patters of their church culture. Churches who are operating on the principle of “presumptive regeneration,”...presuming children of Christian parents are born again as long as they conform outwardly and have a head knowledge of scripture.”

–Genuine Conversion, p.60

2

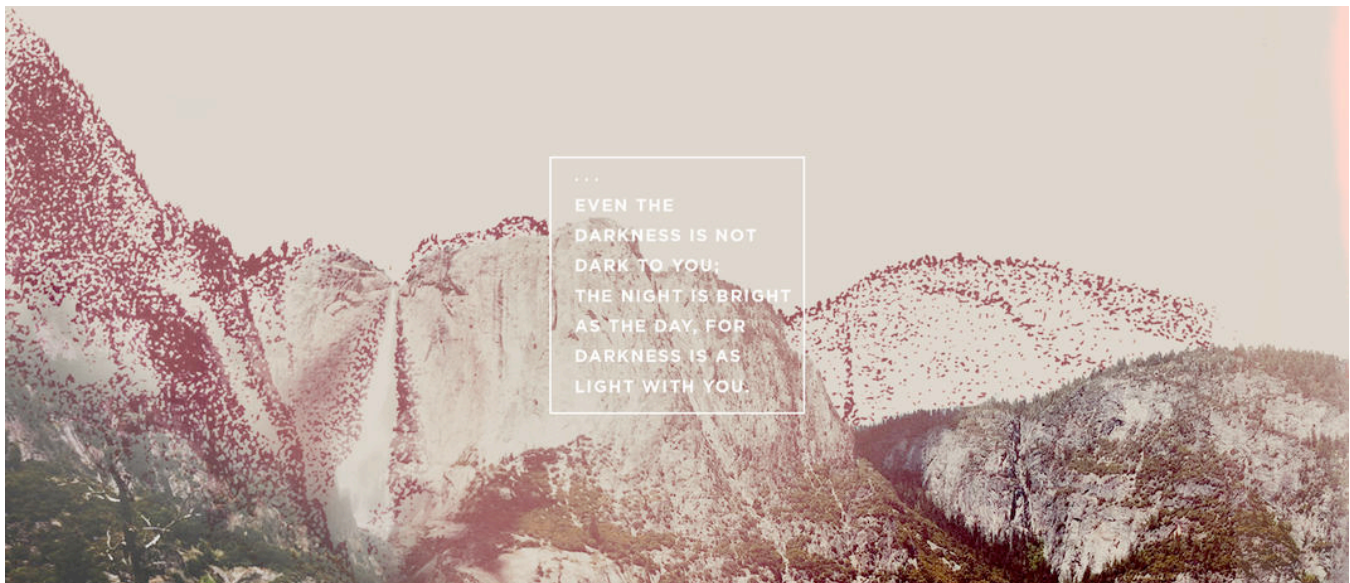
“...the quickening grace of God in salvation completely exalts God. Grace is God-honoring and humanity-humblng. A clear understanding that success in evangelism is a result of God’s initiating grace frees the evangelist from false guilt when conversions have not happened.”

–Sovereign, Saving Grace, p.163

3

“God leads Christians as they act. Nothing can substitute for doing. Too long have we followed an individualistic model rather than an apprenticeship model in evangelism.”

–Bloom Where You Are Planted, p.227



If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is a light with you.

— Psalm 139:11-12

The theme of Psalm 139 continues to run throughout vv. 11-12. It is both exceedingly terrifying and comforting that God's presence is inescapable. In verse 7, David asked, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?" The emphatic answer is nowhere.

In vv.11-12, David ponders if there is any escape from it in darkness. If he could just retreat under the shroud of darkness then maybe he will escape the presence of the Lord. But that, too, will be futile. For the Lord is light and in the light of his presence and infinite knowledge, he sees and knows us as though we are completely exposed in the sun's brightness at noonday. "Darkness is not dark to you" (v.12a). Such contradiction of terms can be said only of the Lord, who is the Creator of all things. Thus, there is not a single creature whose life and ways are truly hidden or unknown to the Lord.

As a Christian, this is a sobering reminder that there are no hidden sins. That which you may think is hidden is laid bare in the light of God's presence. You need not try to hide it but confess it. Bring it to the light. Seek forgiveness, and you will find your heavenly Father eager and ready to forgive through Jesus Christ.

This is also a word of comfort to those who have been abused and experienced the ravaging effects of sin under the shroud of darkness. No injustice committed against you, no harm done, no foul word spoken, no hand raised, is unknown to your heavenly Father. One day he promises that such injustices will be exposed and justice will be exacted. Until then, pray and trust your heavenly Father, who sees you and is compassionate and merciful.

Where will we go to flee from the Lord's presence?
Nowhere. You can't. You shouldn't try. You should run
into it by faith in Jesus Christ.

— BRAD THAYER

Graphic courtesy of The Verses Project. For more devotional material and memorization tools, visit www.theversesproject.com.



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH