Excerpts: Chapters 13, 12 & 11
(not for reprint)

SPIRITUAL WAYPOINTS
Helping Others Navigate The Journey

© by Bob Whitesel

With Interviews and Personal Stories from ...

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Bil Cornelius
Mike Franzese
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Dan Kimball
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Ron Sider
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Len Sweet
Al Tizon
Stan Toler
and Lauren Winner
Acknowledgements

“Anyone who sets himself up as ‘religious’ by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.”

- James 1:26-27 (The Message)

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INTRODUCTION: WAYPOINTS, GPS AND GEOCACHING.

U.S. government satellites have created a Global Position System (GPS) that allows users of hand-held GPS units to track their position within 30 feet. In addition, increasingly smaller GPS units now allow hikers, bikers, commuters and tourists to individually track their journeys with remarkable precision.

When using a GPS unit, a location that a traveler wants to remember can be designated a “waypoint.” The GPS unit will assign a precise longitude and latitude coordinate to this waypoint. This location can then be shared, so that others with GPS units can find the exact location too.

As an avid hiker, I find the capability to designate and share a waypoint a useful metaphor for marking one’s spiritual journey. When a person on a spiritual journey encounters a special place on their route, they can designate it as a waypoint and share it with others. Through marking and sharing spiritual waypoints, fellow travelers can share the joys as well as note the similarities in their journeys.

In addition, in the sport of “geocaching,” hikers post waypoints (in GPS coordinates) to lead other inquisitive trekkers to a hidden stash or “cache.” While the stash may include any combination of valuable and odd paraphernalia, the enjoyment lies in the ability to follow waypoints to a treasure. In similar fashion, the waypoints on our journey lead to a cache where immeasurable good fortune awaits.
FOREWORD:

WAYPOINTS: Two Complementary Books

In this book you will encounter the spiritual waypoints of leading thinkers such as Sally Morgenthaler, Tony Campolo, Shane Claiborne, Dan Kimball, Len Sweet and others. And, the reader will personally know many people who are on this spiritual quest. To help all travelers navigate the journey, I have written two complementary books:

Book 1:
SPIRITUAL WAYPOINTS: Helping Others Navigate The Journey
- **Topic:** This is the book you are reading which introduces and explains “Spiritual Waypoints,” and includes the stories of well-known leaders.
- **Purpose:** Written for the “helper” who wants to assist other travelers.
- **Style:** Longer, including an exploration of each “waypoint.”

Book 2:
WAYPOINTS: Navigating Your Spiritual Journey.
- **Topic:** A short companion booklet.
- **Purpose:** Written for the “seeker” (first half) and the maturing disciple (second half).
- **Style:** A self-help book, it helps travelers understand their spiritual quest. Shorter and inexpensive, it can be given away

BONUS:
THE WAYPOINTS COURSE

Book 2 includes a schedule and agenda for a 17-week “Waypoints Course” allowing readers to join together in groups to share their travel experiences and encourage fellow trekkers. Churches and religious organizations have told me that they want a weekly course that can help their leaders better understand their spiritual journey and how they can help others. In addition, travelers new to the journey can take this course as an introduction to the basics of Christianity.

START WITH THE BOOK YOU ARE READING...

But, if you are new to the idea of “Spiritual Waypoints” start with the book you are reading. This book is an introduction and explanation of each of the spiritual waypoints that lie behind ... and ahead.

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Waypoint 13:
AWARENESS OF THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GOOD NEWS

“A journey is best measured in friends, rather than miles.”
- Tim Cahill, author and founding editor of Outside Magazine

Traveling Before Knowing

It was a question Dan had not heard before, but which intrigued him. For several months a young Hindu girl had been attending the church Dan pastored. A gifted poet, she approached one of the church staff with an offer to host a “poetry slam” at the church. An informal event where attendees share poetry in front of a crowd, this poetry slam would none-the-less be an official event of the church. “It seemed like a fun night for people to have together, so the poetry slam was held and it turned out to be a successful event,” recalled Dan.

Dan’s reaction to let the poetry slam emerged from years of listening to the faith stories of church attendees. Having people who aren’t yet Christians involved in the life of the church community is a significant form of outreach for this church in Santa Cruz, California. “They aren’t in teaching roles or in roles of spiritual leadership – but there are many ways for people to get involved in the church community – even as a non-Christian,” declared Dan. “I remember one guy, he was really skeptical of Christians for a long, long time. In fact, the only reason he came to church was because he liked a girl who attended here. The relationship was totally the motive. But, through being a part of the church community he grew in his awareness of the Gospel and Jesus. It took time, but eventually he put his trust in Christ. You come to know Christ through His word and through seeing the gospel lived out among His people.”

Another church attendee recently pulled Dan aside in the church hallway. “It was the same story,” remembered Dan. “Friendship without pressure, building trust - eventually the person came to the larger worship gathering because their friend was a part of it. The person related to the vibe of the community – and eventually they put saving faith in Jesus. It doesn’t happen with everyone of course. There are many who don’t put faith in Jesus. But the ones that do, it seems the pattern overall is the same.”

Dan’s desire to not rush, manipulate or incentivize the process has allowed attendees to become aware of the Good News through the faith community and God’s working in their hearts. “I came to understand this by listening to their stories. Before anyone is baptized, I meet with them to hear their story. And, over and over again I hear about how they became participants in our community before they knew Jesus. One person who is not a Christian recently helped with a project
doing some gardening around our church. She then hangs out and gets to know other Christians who are part of our church as they serve together. This past Sunday I talked to her as she introduced me to two friends she brought to the worship gatherings who also aren’t Christians. She isn’t a Christian yet, but I have hope.”

“It almost feels like popcorn,” continued Kimball. “You put something in the pot, it starts simmering as misconceptions are broken down, and then in God’s timing a new life breaks out. Some may not ‘pop’ so to speak, but over time others do. God can do anything, but it seems that today He is using a more communal way to help people navigate their spiritual journey.”

Dan Kimball’s approach has led to amazing growth at Vintage Faith Church, amid the often skeptical culture of Santa Cruz, California. “Don’t get me wrong, the basics of what it means to be a Christian must be taught, grasped, wrestled with, and a person must have a transformation experience. But, often times the church doesn’t realize that this takes time and presses for a decision too soon. Providing ways for those interested in Jesus to join in our community and even serve together gives them an opportunity to grow without pressure. It gives them a chance to experience people who love them, and who live out their lives authentically as those who follow Jesus.”

Waypoint Characteristics:

_Signs of Travelers at Waypoint 13_

*Spiritual Curiosity.* Wayfarers at this point are usually inquisitive, curious, perplexed and frustrated by all things spiritual. They have been drawn to investigate further their initial experience with the Good News at Waypoint 14. But they may bring with them the skepticism about religion that is rising in North America.²

And, at Waypoint 15 some travelers have not yet grasped the differences between varying religious viewpoints. They may be drawn to investigate the occult, mysticism and other religions. Once spiritual curiosity has been stirred, they often launch full bore into multiple religious directions. Though natural, their openness to varying viewpoints challenges Christians.

The church sometimes overreacts, humiliates and/or banishes such inquisitiveness. Instead we must see them as normal explorers on a spiritual journey, and expect their curiosity. Churches can best help travels by encouraging discussion, inquisitiveness, disagreement and even prying. And thus the church must not be defensive, closed or inauthentic, for in doing so it can belie that it has the truth the traveler seeks.

*Frustrated By Language.* Another sign a traveler is at Waypoint 15 is that they can be confounded by the language of Christian culture.
Christians frequently employ terminology that is not broadly understood. Terminology such as “sanctification,” “the Kingdom of God,” and “the blood of Christ” can express grand concepts in concise terms. But to those newly introduced to the journey, these terms may be too much, too soon. The result is that travelers may feel that the ardor of the journey, coupled with learning a new language, is too much to bear. In addition, not knowing the terminology may make the traveler feel ignorant, in the dark, naïve and possibly excluded.

Churches must undertake the task of adapting their terminology to the metaphors of the hearer, without sacrificing content. Action 13.2 will describe how to create metaphors that are equivalent to images in the traveler’s world. Finding and utilizing such equivalent metaphors is a challenging task. But it is part of every missionary’s work, and in North America’s cultural mosaic it must be the work of every church.

*Travelers Are Accepted ... But Not Accepted Enough.* Travelers at W13 often feel they are being courted by Christians, but when they try to volunteer the church often tells them they are not yet ready. This is the frustration that Kimball observed and sought to address. Some churches feel that God’s intention is to only utilize Christians to serve the community. While this should be true in distribution of the sacraments and certain religious ministries (c.f. Acts 6:1-3, 14:23, 1 Timothy 5:17), the Scriptures are replete with examples of those who traveled with a faith community and even assisted it prior to partaking in that community’s faith (c.f. Joshua 2, Ruth 1, Matthew 2, 9).³

A popular Christian musician once told me he only employed Christians in every aspect of his musical recordings. This might be an appropriate strategy if Christians were being excluded because of their beliefs and his action was designed to bring parity. But to me it seemed that many non-Christian musicians missed an opportunity to work alongside and learn from this gifted Christian artist. Kimball is focused on ensuring this does not happen at the church he pastors.

**Actions That Help W13 Travelers**

*Action 13.1: We Journey With Them, And They With Us*

At Vintage Faith Church wayfarers are encouraged to participate in administrative tasks. Most churches reserve administrative involvement for those who have experienced new birth. Yet, such involvement can be an important learning opportunity for three reasons.

a. It helps people at W13 recognize they have God-given gifts.
b. It helps people at W13 to understand that a community of faith is there to support them in their service to others.
c. It helps people at W13 see participation in the community is not reserved for only a privileged group. This keeps a church from developing elitism.

It is also best if their volunteer opportunities are directed toward serving those outside of the church, rather than serving the church. This is because a
person at W13 may have only recently departed a realm of inequalities, injustices, deprivations and oppression. Therefore, to them the organizational needs of the church will pale in comparison. They can easily, and rightly, be offended when we ask them to clean up the church, arrange chairs in the sanctuary or paint a nursery. Though these organizational tasks are necessary to support outreach, to the wayfarer these connections can be too obscure. Instead, it is important to let the wayfarer become involved in volunteer actions that help people at waypoints the volunteer has recently experienced. The needs of others are fresh in their mind, as is the difference they’ve experienced by moving forward on their journey.

Still, two caveats must be considered.

a. First as Kimball noted, some activities require a level of spiritual maturity, sensitivity and/or organizational history that the volunteer at Waypoint 13 may lack. Therefore, it becomes important for leaders to tactfully guide the person into appropriate volunteer opportunities.

b. Secondly, many wayfarers do not want to volunteer. Many may be reeling from disappointments, resentments, oppression, etc. and thus only desire our assistance, not our recruitment.

At Waypoint 13 it therefore becomes essential for the Christian to move slowly with fellow travelers, never manipulating or forcing them. The Holy Spirit is the one that draws a person on this journey (John 16:8-9) and thus the faith community must ensure that we assist, but not replace the Holy Spirit.

**Action 13.2: Translate the Good News**

At the same time that the traveler is growing in a knowledge of the Good News, the Christian is often bombarding the traveler with a specialized language. Earlier in this chapter we saw how travelers can become frustrated with a Christian’s cryptic language.

To underscore such communication break down, a Christian troubadour named Larry Norman created an imaginary dialogue between a Christian and a person at Waypoint 13. “Have you been saved?” began the Christian. The traveler replied, “I fell out of a canoe at camp once, and the lifeguard rescued me.” “No, I mean have you been born again?” continued the Christian. “I don’t believe in reincarnation,” came the traveler’s answer. “Have you been washed in the blood,” replied the Christian in growing exasperation. “Ugh! I don’t think I would want to,” came the wayfarer’s astonished response. After which the flustered Christian blurted out, “I’m trying to tell you the Good News!” “What’s that?” came the traveler’s hopeful reply. “You’re going to hell,” retorted the Christian, and the conversation ended.4

This narrative illustrates how Christian musicians have grappled with translating their message to a non-church culture. Though we do not want to change our message or its content, Christians helping those at W13 must translate the Good News. Missionaries and Bible-translators spend years honing their skills in translating truth without sacrificing content. But regrettably, most Christian leaders in North America rarely try. With the growing mosaic of cultures and sub-
cultures in North America, coupled with a large unchurched population that is unfamiliar with Christian terminology, churches must begin to learn from missionaries and translators the important skills of translating the Good News. The following are four basic steps for translation.

**Step 1: Decide what are the essential principles that must be translated.** For a person at Waypoint 13, headed toward Waypoint 12 (grasp of the implications of the Good News), this means explaining that the Good News holds promises as well as requirements. Jesus reminded his hearers of these requirements, but also reminded them that they are not odious nor overwhelming, stating “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). Initial principles that should be broached at Waypoint 13 include, but are not limited to, God’s unconditional love, (John 3:16, etc.), that wrongdoings destroy lives and separate us from God (Romans 3:23, etc.), how Jesus bore the penalty for our wrongdoings (Romans 5:8, John 14:6, etc.), in order that we might have a better life here and ultimately eternal life (John 17:3, 1 John 5:13, etc.).

**Step 2: Put the basics of the Good News into the language of the hearer.** This step is best accomplished by a team. And, it is good to have non-church goers involved, so that through dialogue, questioning and discussion an up-to-date translation is created. While non-church goers should not have veto power, their involvement helps ensure that the translation is relevant and accurate. In addition, the Christian must be careful not to be offended or affronted by another culture’s terminology. Anthropologist Eugene Nida recalls how the tribal people of Papa New Guinea had never seen a lamb, and thus the phrase “Look, the lamb of God” (John 1:29) was confusing. Yet, in their tribal culture they raised and valued pigs in similar fashion to the way ancient Israelites prized sheep. The missionaries therefore translated John the Baptist’s declaration “Look, the Lamb of God” as “Look the Pig of God.” To many Christians this is distasteful, for most Christians are sensitive to the Jewish repulsion to unclean animals such as pigs. However, Papa New Guineans have no knowledge of such aversion, and because they value their swine so greatly, Jesus was to them the cherished, sacrificial “Pig of God.”

**Step 3: Keep modifying and improving your terms.** Translation is an ongoing process because the meaning of words can change, as well as our understanding of them. Thus, translated terms must be updated and modified in an ongoing fashion, from Waypoint 13 forward. The Christian must gather regularly with others to discuss and improve the translation of the basics of the Good News. Too often, churches ignore the need for updating their terminology, becoming mired in language from earlier and outdated renditions. A result is that wayfarers often view the church’s terminology as outdated, obsolete and often incoherent.
Step 4: Sift out the bad and keep the good. Each culture has elements that run
counter to the Good News of Christ. Yet, at the same time each culture has elements
that are consistent with Christ’s Good News. For example, postmodernism
emphasizes that people should not just talk about changing the world, but actually
be engaged in changing it. Karl Marx famously intoned “philosophers have only
interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” The result has
been that postmodern influenced young people exhibit a growing concern for
changing the plight of the poor. This is also a major element in Jesus’ Good News, for
example when He proclaimed in the Nazareth synagogue, “The Spirit of the Lord is
on me, because he has anointed me, to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent
me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to
release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). Thus,
this postmodern passion for helping the needy should be lauded.

But, there are also elements of a culture that can run counter to the Good
News. For example, premarital or extramarital affairs can be viewed by postmodern culture as a
natural and recurrent part of life. But, this runs
counter to the Biblical injunction against pre- and extra-martial sex. The Message paraphrase crafts a
good translation of this Biblical injunction, “Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual
intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a
firm line against casual and illicit sex” (Hebrews
13:4). Thus, when translating the Good News, a
translator must be careful to not deemphasize nor
obscure God’s commands and expectations.

When elements of a culture run counter to
the Good News, and others are in agreement with it, what should be done? Eddie
Gibbs has provided a helpful metaphor in the image of cultural “sifting.” Sifting
separates out unwanted elements from wanted elements, most notably in cooking
where a mesh strainer such as a colander will sift out impurities. The task of
explaining the Good News to wayfarers at Waypoint 13, also carries the
requirement that we sift between elements of a
culture that go against Christ’s news and those that
do not. To not fully explain God’s expectations is to
misinform and ill prepare the traveler. Some Christians avoid the task of doing this, perhaps because
championing God’s requirements is awkward in comparison to lauding His rewards.
But both must be undertaken. A leader who is not ready to sift elements of a culture
and tactfully explain what can be retained and what must be abandoned, is not
ready to travel forward with the wayfarer.

An Interview With Dan Kimball
Pastor of Vintage Faith Church, Santa Cruz, California
Whitesel: You told the story of a talented Hindu poet, who volunteered to host and organize a poetry slam. And, you let her do this before she had experienced new birth. Aren’t you afraid that a person could unintentionally do sometime egregious or morally wrong while representing the church?

Dan Kimball: If it was a teaching role or an event that placed her in a position of spiritual authority, then we wouldn’t have let her lead that. But because it was a fun event and there were also Christians in our church helping out, it was fine. It got her involved and it allowed her to meet other people in our church.

Whitesel: Did you always see evangelism as a journey, where non-Christians often travel along with the church before they are ready to go deeper?

Dan Kimball: I didn’t understand this at first. As a High School pastor 15 years ago I did regular altar calls. It was more like, as soon as people get in our building then present the gospel so they can respond right away. God moved in a lot of people’s hearts, so I don’t think this was ineffective. But I think today we have a shift in culture and people that has occurred. The church has lost its voice in most places and isn’t trusted. So we have to build a lot of trust first, before people will listen to our message. That’s why when people are part of a church community, trust is built and they are then more open to really hearing what Christians believe and why.

Whitesel: Let’ make sure our readers understand. You do believe in a point of decision, where a person becomes a new person in Christ.

Dan Kimball: Certainly. For most people there still is a decision point where they pray to put faith in Jesus. But I see the road leading up to that decision as more slow, often unfolding in community, and guided by the Holy Spirit. Churches need to be a place where such non-Christians are expected and welcomed into community before they are even Christians. Again, they should not take on role of spiritual leadership if they aren’t yet Christians. But they can become a regular part of the church community in various ways. As they do their hearts soften and are more open to the stumbling block of the gospel. We never hold back on teaching the hard and difficult things. This is not a water-things-down approach or seeker approach. It is almost the opposite, as we can directly talk and teach about difficult doctrines and things people may not like to hear about, such as the reality of hell or that Jesus is the only way of salvation. But as they are in community, then people are more receptive. It is the Spirit who changes someone’s heart – but we still have our part in setting up the missional environment and culture in our churches.

Questions for Group or Personal Study

1. What volunteer opportunities do you have at your church that could be undertaken by a gifted and willing person who was not yet a Christian?
   • List three such jobs that primarily serve non-church goers.
   • Create a job description for one.
   • List two people who have the knowledge and skills to undertake this job.
Select people that you know personally, and
Select people who have attended the church at least once in the past year.

- Begin to pray that God will open an opportunity for you to reach out and invite one of these two people to join the church in its efforts to meet the needs of others.

2. What translation of the Bible do you use when communicating with an unchurched person?
   - Does it use language that is more familiar to you, than to them? If so, what will you do about this?
   - List six ways that you can employ understandable terminology in your communication.

3. Look up three of the passages below in the Bible translation you customarily use. Then, look up these passages in four other translations. Be sure to use at least one “paraphrased” translation. What did you learn from this exercise? How will this exercise help you better explain Biblical passages to non-church goers?
   - Matthew 22:37-40
   - Matthew 28:18-20
   - John 4:21-24
   - Acts 2:40-47
   - 1 Corinthians 4:20
   - Ephesians 4:11-16
   - 1 Timothy 1:5

4. What terms do you use that may not be familiar to non-church goers? List four terms in each of the following categories. Then translate a total of six words (two from each category) into terminology that is more newcomer-friendly.
   - **Places.** What are some names for places in your church that may not be readily understood by those who are not regular attendees? Do you have a narthex, baptismal, parlor or nave?
   - **Liturgical structure.** Do you use words in your order of worship that may be confusing to non-church goers? Do you have benedictions, invocations, sacraments, the Eucharist, vespers, consecrations, etc.? While some visitors may be intrigued by the mystery of uncommon terminology, if not carefully explained such terminology may confuse the traveler.
   - **Verbal communication.** Do you use terms in your explanation of the Good News that are uncommon in the non-church goers’ vocabulary? Do you talk about regeneration, justification, sanctification, atonement, deacons, etc.?
Footnotes:

3 Richard Peace makes a well supported argument that the conversion of the Twelve disciples was a slow turning process (unlike Saul/Paul experienced). This would support the idea that travelers at Waypoints 6 and higher can participate significantly in the community of faith, as Jesus’ disciples did with him. See Conversion in the New Testament, pp. 253-281.
4 Larry Norman (1972), Dialogue [musical performance], Explo 72, Dallas, Texas.
5 For more about cultures, sub-cultures and how to spot the differences see “The North American Cultural Mix” in the author’s Preparing for Change Reaction: How To Introduce Change in Your Church, 49-71.
6 Translating between cultures is an ongoing and complex endeavor. The four principles noted are a brief codification of translation theory. For additional insights see Lynne Long, ed., Translation and Religion: Holy Untranslatable (Topics in Translation), (Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters Limited, 2005) and Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, The Theory and Practice of Translation (Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).
7 This process if often called “dynamic equivalence” (Eugene Nida, Message and Mission, (New York: Harper, 1960), 139-140. Dynamic equivalence describes a phrase that is equal to another phrase, hence the word “equivalence.” And, it indicates a term that has some elasticity, meaning that it conveys varied aspects of an entity. A prized pig has a dynamic equivalence with a treasured lamb, for the hearer can picture in their mind the many actions and incidents that accompany raising a pig or a lamb. Though Nida preferred the term “functional equivalence” to dynamic equivalence because function carried the idea of effective equivalence (1960:194), this author prefers “dynamic equivalence” for it conveys that our translated words must carry imagery of the original term, with all of the original’s elasticity, animation and metamorphosis.
9 Eddie Gibbs, I Believe in Church Growth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 120.
10 I noted in an earlier book, Inside the Organic Church: Learning From 12 Emerging Congregations (2006), that many postmodern youth people are drawn to iconography, liturgy and mystical terminology because it puts back into the church some of the mystery that many churches have abandoned. However, emerging churches that use such ancient images and language, are careful to explain it’s ancient meaning in modern terms. See for example the use and explanation of the icons called Directions® at Mars Hill Church in Grandville, Michigan (21-30); the use icons labeled Lifeshapes® by St. Thomas’ Church in Sheffield, England (1-12); and the use of updated lectio divina in pan-Wesleyan churches in Listening to God Through 1 & 2 Peter by Tim Guptill (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2006).
WAYPOINT 12:
PERSONAL RELEVANCE OF THE GOOD NEWS

Existence is no more than the precarious attainment of relevance
in an intensely mobile flux of past, present, and future.”
- Susan Sontag, writer, activist and critic

Mitford, Mermaids and a Master in Divinity

Lauren, a self-described nerd, had an insatiable appetite for all things spiritual. A religion major, she had grown up in a Jewish home which provided a foundation for her spiritual sensitivity and quest. Yet, along her route there had been three events, waypoints, that now were culminating in Lauren’s most momentous decision. “It all happened while I was going to school in New York. I was caught in a process of moving from the intellectual to the personal in my view of Christianity. I had several experiences that kept turning my attention to Jesus. I gradually, crossed over from an intellectual understanding of the Good News to a grasp of the implications of the Good News for Lauren.”

“The first thing that really hit me Bob, was that God would come down to earth in human form,” continued Lauren. “That got me thinking that if this Christian God was real, then this was pretty great: a God who cared enough about His creation that He would come down and join them. That really hit me.”

“A second event happened in my sophomore year. I had a dream in which I was kidnapped by mermaids and lived underwater with them. I have wacky dreams all the time, but most of the time they mean anything. But this one seemed to have a message. I was rescued, by a figure whom I eventually realized was Jesus. When I awoke I was sure that this dream was from God. Some people have a datable conversion, but for me this dream was a second event in route to a gradual change.”

“Finally, the summer before my senior year college I was going on a vacation and writing retreat. While waiting for my friends in a bookstore I picked up a couple books in the Mitford Series. The novels are set in a fictional town and the main character is a fictional priest named Father Tim who hangs out with his neighbors. I was totally hooked. I read them six times. Though these were not set in New York City (where I lived), they had spiritual resonance for me. These fictional people seemed to be living lives that were pervaded by faith. The stories helped me became aware that although I was religiously observant and in a lot ways organized my whole life around Judaism, my life wasn’t really infused with a life of faith or God.”

“That was the third element Bob. At first I realized God was personal and cared about everyone, including Lauren. Then I saw that this personal relationship resulted in God wanting to rescue me from my captivity to myself. And finally, I saw that God has a wonderful life for you if you infuse that life with faith and God.”

“To sum it all up,” concluded Lauren, “I do not have a story about a datable conversion. On the one hand, my change was dramatic because I was Jewish. And,
there was a quite dramatic process in that. But on the other hand, I can’t say there is a moment when it clicked and a conversion took place. But I can tell you when I was baptized. That I have a date for... but the Good News broke upon me over time.”

Lauren eventually enrolled at Duke University to pursue her Master of Divinity degree. Today she is an author and professor at the Duke University School of Divinity. “But,” says Lauren, “I am here today because through a series of experiences God broke into my life and became more relevant.”

Waypoint Characteristics:

*Signs of Travelers at Waypoint 12*

*The Personal Trekker.* At this point the journey becomes terribly personal for the traveler. The trekker begins to realize that the Good News has ramifications for them personally. For Lauren it was the recognition that God was a personal God, and had sent His own offspring into Lauren’s world to rescue her from herself. The implications of this for Lauren’s personal journey fostered a huge impact.

*The Traveler Caught Between Two Opposites.* At this waypoint the traveler will often experience diametrically opposed forces between Christianity and their former worldview. While the Christian may wonder why this bothers them so, to the traveler they are crossing over an all-encompassing threshold. The traveler is comparing and contrasting their former worldview with an emerging Christian perspective. They will need time to make comparisons, assessments and conclusions.

Actions That Help W12 Travelers

*Action 12.1: Understand a Post-Christian Worldview*

The very word post-Christian requires some definition. The term post-Christian indicates in part that today we live in an age where Christianity is not the dominant belief system, nor the religious culture. The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) indicates that the majority of North Americas consider themselves religious, but do not necessarily embrace a Christian belief. Researchers of American Church History note that at one time much of North America embraced a Christian worldview, though there were various permutations and factions. Yet, the dominance of the Christian worldview has dissipated, and it can now be said that North America is in a post-Christian era. Darrell Guder states, “rather than occupying a central and influential place, North American Christian churches are increasingly marginalized, so much so that in our urban areas they represent a minority movement. It is by now a truism to speak of North America as mission field.”
There have been numerous attempts to describe this post-Christian milieu. However, for succinctness let me tender six basic (but not exhaustive) characteristics of a post-Christian milieu.  

1. God, if He exists at all, is just an impersonal moral force.
2. The Bible is nothing other than a book written by humans.
3. Humankind basically has the capacity within itself to improve morally and make the right choices.
4. Happiness consists of unlimited acquisition of material, knowledge, experience, etc.
5. There is no objective basis for right and wrong.
6. If a person lives a “good life,” then eternal destiny is probable.

Each of these distinctives must be understood and addressed by the Christian who travels along with others Waypoint 12. Therefore, Action 12.2 will address the importance of dialogue and companionship. And, Action 12.3 will discuss how each of the above distinctives can be addressed.

Action 12.2: Discuss the Post-Christian & Biblical Worldview.

The metaphor of a journey reminds us that a trekker will encounter fellow travelers, guides and hosts along their way. Yet, the church has lost her way in creating dialogue with travelers who embrace a post-Christian worldview. Richard Peace regrets the church has lost this art of companionship, and thus he suggests the church must renew her efforts to assist, engage and travel with wayfarers with divergent points of view. Here are three guidelines for reviving the lost art of journey companionship.

Don’t have a goal in mind. For many Christians the goal of companionship is to lead the traveler to a new birth. But, as we have seen in the forgoing chapters it is the Holy Spirit’s role to draw wayfarers to this waypoint (John 16: 8, 9). Thus the church’s role conversation, not conversion; assistance not damnation. The church must resist the temptation to be goal orientated, for we know not the length nor the route of the fellow traveler’s journey. When Peter asked Jesus about the apostle John’s destiny, Jesus reminded Peter that his role was to be faithful and to feed Jesus’ sheep (John 21:156-25). Destiny is in God’s hands, but accompaniment is in ours.

Respect post-Christian and even anti-Christian worldviews. For honest and candid discussion to emerge, respect must be the foundation. If a Christian joins a traveler on the journey and the Christian only lauds their own journey and the primacy of their route, then the traveler will feel the Christian has no respect, nor understanding, for the wayfarer’s personal passage.
Understand that modern culture is fascinated with spirituality. Though there is a growing agnosticism and atheism in North America, still almost 3 out of 4 people say they are interested in spiritual things. Yet, many may have divergent belief systems to Christianity. Thus to foster authentic dialogue, the Christian must show respect and reverence for different religious beliefs.

**Action 12.3: Explain the Relevance of the Biblical Worldview.**

The above list of post-Christian beliefs deserves an extended discussion beyond this book. However, to begin to addressing each, I have below tendered suggestions, ideas and books. These can be the starting place for the leader that wishes to increase his or her knowledge of the relevance of the Good News.

**Resources to Answer a Postmodern Worldview**

1. **God, if He exists at all, is just an impersonal moral force.**

2. **The Bible is nothing other than a book written by humans.**
   c. Research: Biblical scholar F. F. Bruce has stated that critics of the Bible’s text have uncovered no variants that affect any historical fact or belief on which Christianity is founded.15

3. **Humankind basically has the capacity within itself to improve morally and make the right choices.**

4. **Happiness consists of unlimited acquisition of material, knowledge, experience, etc.**

5. There really is no objective basis for right and wrong.

6. If a person lives a “good life,” then eternal destiny is probable.

Resources to Support a Biblical Worldview

To aid in this dialogue, the five elements below of a Christian worldview are accompanied by applicable Scriptures, suggestions, ideas and books.

1. There is one God, Creator, who actually exists in space and time.
   b. Books: “Why I Believe the God of the Bible is the One True God” in Why I Am a Christian,29 Faith on Trial by Pamela Binnings Ewen, The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel (these books are also useful with the following four elements).

2. Humankind, because of a willful act of disobedience became severed from a personal relationship with the God who made him and her. The consequence is that humankind has become imprisoned and most live a self-seeking life with no possibility on their own of restoring this lost communion.
   b. Books: Tears of God by Fr. Benedict Groeschel,30 Know Why You Believe by Paul E. Little,31 and Epic: The Story God is Telling by John Eldridge.32

3. Jesus Christ, a human being who actually lived on earth, is God’s Son who has provided, through His death and resurrection, the only way for humankind to be restored to fellowship with God.

4. The Bible is a valid witness to eternal spiritual truth.
   a. The Good News: Psalm 119, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Jude 3, etc.

5. Restoration of fellowship between God and humankind requires an acceptance by humans of the free gift God offers, but only on the terms that God has provided.
   b. Books: “Why I Have Made Jesus Christ Lord of My Life” by J. P. Moreland in Why I Am a Christian39, Brad Kallenberg’s Live to Tell,40 The Sacred Romance by Brent Curtis and John Eldredge,41 and the classic treatise Peace With God by Billy Graham.42
   c. This point will be discussed further in the remainder of this book, especially along the journey between Waypoints 11 and 4.

An Interview With Lauren Winner
Author and Duke Divinity School professor on Christian practice, the history of Christianity in America, and Jewish-Christian relations.

Whitesel: How did the Good News become relevant to you?
Winner: What seemed relevant at first was the doctrine of incarnation. I was Jewish and I was grasped by the notion of incarnation, meaning Jesus came in the flesh to relate to us. Even before I was personally attracted to Christianity, I thought on an intellectual level that this was totally great that God might become a person so he can fully understand everything we are experiencing. I was in college studying religion, and I envied this way of understanding God. The idea of the incarnation really grabbed my imagination.

Whitesel: How did this unfold in your life?
Winner: I really experienced this change through an extended process. There was the idea of the incarnation, the dream of a rescue and the community depicted in the Mitford novels. But, that doesn’t mean there are not “the” moments for other people. But, in my own life my encounter with God was a developing thing. And, it continues. If one’s life is long, then there will continue to be these moments, almost mini-epiphanies, where God breaks into our personal life. I would be scared if I didn’t think that God wanted to barge into our lives now and then.

Whitesel: Have these mini-epiphanies happened again?
Winner: There was a moment five years after my conversion. My mother was ill and she was in the hospital. And, I thought ‘this world is really not like it is suppose to be!’ Illness and suffering are not suppose to be in this world. And then I experienced a personal awareness of the brokenness of the world, summarized by the intense environment of that hospital wing. The whole peace of the Christian story became relevant to me, more than it had before. This was another example of a mini-epiphany, where God broke into my life to remind me who He is. Every year or so there will be another such experience where I will encounter a real doctrine in real life. And the Good News becomes relevant to me again and again, and again.

Whitesel: How do you explain this to others?

Winner: I simply try to tell people about my friendship with God. I don’t dwell too much on my conversion. What I dwell on is the many ways in which God continues to make me his friend. Jesus calls His disciples no longer servants, but friends. What do we need to be God’s friend? Following my colleague Sam Wells, I say that God gives us everything we need to be His friend. So when I try to "explain" this to others, I am just as likely to talk about the Lord’s Supper -- the place we come to eat with one another and to eat with God, a place where God draws near to us. Or I will talk about the moments when Scripture has seemed so alive to me it practically glows. Or I will talk about the ways some of my Christian friends have at times stunned me with their self-sacrificial generosity, their ability to love well. All this, it seems to me, is part of the ongoing-ness of conversion, of the ways we continue to be made into Christians and into friends of God.

Questions for Group and Personal Study

1. When was the last time your church leadership discussed the tenets of Christianity? Do your leaders have a good grasp of these basics? Ask four leaders to give you as many of the five basics of Christian belief, and then compare them with the list in this chapter. Are some missing? What will you do about this?

2. Pick one of the following elements of a post-Christian milieu and develop a Bible study that explains the Biblical perspective on this element.
   a. God, if He exists at all, is just an impersonal moral force.
   b. The Bible is nothing other than a book written by humans.
   c. Humankind basically has the capacity within itself to improve morally and make the right choices.
   d. Happiness consists of unlimited acquisition of material, knowledge, experience, etc.
   e. There is no objective basis for right and wrong.
   f. If a person lives a “good life,” then eternal destiny is probable.

3. Pick one of the following elements of a post-Christian milieu and develop a fictional dialogue that tactfully and Biblically engages a person holding these perspectives. Write this dialogue down, limiting yourself to two pages.
   a. God, if He exists at all, is just an impersonal moral force.
   b. The Bible is nothing other than a book written by humans.
c. Humankind basically has the capacity within itself to improve morally and make the right choices.
d. Happiness consists of unlimited acquisition of material, knowledge, experience, etc.
e. There is no objective basis for right and wrong.
f. If a person lives a “good life,” then eternal destiny is probable.

Footnotes:

3 The Mitford novels are a popular series of fictional novels about spirituality and relationships written by Jan Caron.
8 Richard Peace labels this the “lost art of witness,” but his article is essentially about the interpersonal dialogue of the Good News that results from companionship or community. Because Peace is writing for a Christian audience in the journal, *Word and World: Theology for Christian Ministry*, his labels are valid. But, because I am attempting to translate these concepts for a Post-Christian environment I have chosen to translate “the lost art of witness” as the “lost art of companionship,” since companionship conveys not only accompaniment but also engagement. For more information see Richard Peace, “Holy Conversation: The Lost Art of Witness,” (Saint Paul, Minn.: Word and World Publishers, 2002), vol. 22, no. 3, 255-263.
20 Randy Alcorn, Money, Possessions, and Eternity (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003).
22 C. S. Lewis, God in the Dock; Essays on Theology and Ethics (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).
23 Normal L. Geisler, Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1988). This book will be helpful at all stages, but even more so at this one. A classic and comprehensive treatise, it may be a bit difficult for the causal reader but it is filled with well conceived insights.
29 Geisler and Hoffman, ed.s, Why I Am a Christian, 87-104.
31 Paul E. Little, Know Why You Believe (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008).
Waypoint 11:  
POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD LIVING THE GOOD NEWS

“God enters by a private door into every individual.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Barnabas of the Family

“How did it come to this?” wondered Mike. One day, NBC News Anchor Tom Brokow was calling Mike the “the prince of the Mafia,” and the next day he was beginning a sentence in the prison’s notorious hole. “You can’t get much lower than spending three years in the hole,” remembered Mike. “But it was there I began to see that God had a plan for me. I read my bible backwards and forward looking for answers. And, I began to write in prison. Nothing earth shattering, but I began to write. And, I found I had a talent for it. And before I went into prison people said I was a brilliant business man. But it was in prison that I realized that God had made me a people person. That’s what I am Bob, not a businessman, but a person who likes and wants to encourage people.”

Not long before Mike went to prison he began to grasp the implications of the Good News. “I met this beautiful woman, and I fell in love. But, then I realized she was in love with someone else! She was in love with Jesus! She talked to him daily, asked for his guidance through prayer. Bob, that was something I had never seen! I grew up in a Catholic home but I always saw Jesus as a person in the Bible, not someone you could talk to and make the navigator for your life! But in Cammy I saw how Jesus wants a personal friendship with us. It began to change in my attitude about Jesus, and His Good News. In that hole I realized I wanted, I needed that personal friendship with Jesus.”

Soon Mike, the once “prince of the Mafia” from New York's Colombo crime family, had committed his life to Jesus Christ. “Boy, did that take some guts,” recalled Mike. “I was raised on the streets. And on the streets surrendering to Jesus was a sign of weakness. You wouldn’t broadcast it, you would hide it! But Cammy is for real, her family is real and Jesus is real to them. It came to a head, and I had to publically make a choice. I labored for months and months on my journey to that decision. I’d go to sleep thinking one way and then wake up thinking the other way. My wife, her mom and their pastor were patient, but also very firm in their faith. Jesus became my hero and when I made a decision to follow Him all the other terrible things that I feared started to work out.”

Today Michael Franzese is the author of the autobiographical books Quitting the Mob, Blood Covenant, The Good the Bad, and the Forgiven, and I’ll Make You an Offer You Can’t Refuse. Once dubbed “The Prince of the Mafia,” Mafia’s youngest and most financially powerful superstar is now a spokesperson for Jesus. “I’m a Barnabas-type person Bob: an encourager. I can relate to people from all walks of life. I don’t know what it is, but God seems to be able to reach people through how I communicate. I’ve known that I could connect with people since I was in the family
business. It was an asset that I used in the Mob, but God meant me to use it for Him. And, you can’t ignore His orders.”

Waypoint Characteristics:

At Waypoint 11, the traveler is growing with an increasingly positive attitude toward the act of accepting Christ and joining His community. Yet, this is a very fragile and complicated waypoint. As noted earlier, media and popular culture may have painted a pessimistic picture of the Christian lifestyle. Therefore, the Christian community must be prepared to patiently, unwaveringly and loving help the traveler gain an authentic picture of a faith community, as well as the person God intended the traveler to be.

Signs of Travelers at Waypoint 11

_The Lost Traveler._ This is a traveler who has exhausted all other road maps. Like Mike Franzese, the trekker may be at the end of their options. It is here the faith community must begin to help the traveler understand the direction and basics of this new route. Yet, often at this waypoint the church will feel compelled to remind the hiker of the errant paths he or she has taken. However, one of the lessons of the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is that the unwavering older brother should celebrate the return, not reprimand it.

_The Returning Traveler._ Other travelers may be returning to the road map of their youth. Again, it becomes tempting for the faith community to disparage the years the trekker has squandered. Still, the Parable of the Prodigal Son reminds us that the faithful older brother should not only celebrate his own faithfulness, but also celebrate his brother’s recovery. Jesus concluded this parable by putting the spotlight on the trekker’s return, saying, “His father said, ‘Son, you don’t understand. You’re with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he’s alive! He was lost, and he’s found!’” Luke 15:31-32 (The Message).

Actions That Help W11 Travelers

SWOT is an acronym for a helpful analysis tool. Though often employed to analyze businesses, it’s holistic nature makes it a good tool for understanding a person’s aspirations, fears, hopes and dreams. Each of the letters of SWOT stands for an area that must be studied. And, when a community of faith is helping a traveler at Waypoint 11 gain a positive attitude toward living the Good News, it is critical to look at these four areas.

_11.1: Empower Strengths_

“S” in the acronym SWOT stands for strengths. These are strengths that each person possesses. Leadership researcher Peter Northhouse believes such strengths
can be traits, abilities, skills or behaviors. Traits are inherent and natural qualities with which a leader is endowed. Abilities are aptitudes developed by experience. Skills are means and methods for carrying out leadership responsibilities. And behaviors are what people do with the traits, abilities and skills they have been given. Though we will discuss their differences more in the next chapter, for this chapter the reader should keep in mind that a person’s giftings include things they are born with (traits), things they learn through experience (abilities and skills), and the behaviors that result.

There is little doubt that everyone possesses strengths in some traits, abilities, skills and behaviors. Yet the Scriptures indicate that a full unleashing of such gifts awaits a new birth experience that originates in God’s Spirit. Such strengths and gifts testify to the goodness of the divine Giver. Speaking to the Corinthian church, Paul states:

God’s various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:

- wise counsel
- clear understanding
- simple trust
- healing the sick
- miraculous acts
- proclamation
- distinguishing between spirits
- tongues
- interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, The Message).

When encountering a wayfarer that has arduously traveled a spiritual journey, churches can easily be put off by the demeanor, appearance, habits and opinions of the traveler at Waypoint 11. Yet, every person has redeeming strengths, and it is the Christian community’s task to nurture what God has planted. Helping travelers at Waypoint 11 means helping them uncover their fledging strengths, to see these gifts were given by God, and that they still await His full empowerment. The following two actions will assist in that process.

Action 11.1A:
Help the traveler recognize the diversity of God’s gifts.
The Scriptures describe a variety of God-given gifts. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 along with secondary lists in 1 Corinthians 7, 13-14, Ephesians 3 and 1 Peter 4 describe many of the “gifts of the (Holy) Spirit” that God uses to empower people for service and ministry. Here is a brief, yet annotated list:

1. **Administration**: Effective planning and organization (1 Cor. 2:28; Acts 6:1-7).
2. **Discernment**: Distinguishing between error and truth (1 Cor. 12:10; Acts 5:1-11).
3. **Encouragement**: Ability to comfort, console, encourage and counsel (Rom. 12:8; Hebrews 10:25; Timothy 4:13).
4. **Evangelism**: Building relationships that help travelers move toward a personal relationship with Christ (Luke 19:1-10; 2 Timothy 4:5).
5. **Faith**: Discerning with extraordinary confidence the will and purposes of God. (1 Cor. 12:9, Acts 11:22-24, Hebrews 11, Romans 4:18-21)
6. **Giving**: Cheerfully giving of resources without remorse (Romans 12:8; 2 Cor. 8:1-7, 9:2-8; Mark 12:41-44).
8. **Intercession**: Passionate, extended and effective prayer. (James 5:14-16, 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Colossians 1:9-12, 4:12-13).
9. **Knowledge**: To discover, accumulate, analyze and clarify information and ideas which are pertinent to the well being of a Christian community. (1 Cor. 2:14, 12:8, Acts 5:1-11, Colossians 2:2-3).
10. **Leadership**: To cast vision, set goals and motivate to cooperatively accomplish God’s purposes (Luke 9:51; Romans 12:8; Hebrews 13:17).
11. **Mercy**: To feel authentic empathy and compassion accompanied by action that reflects Christ’s love and alleviates suffering (Romans 12:8, Matt. 25:34-36; Luke 10:30-37).
12. **Prophecy**: Providing guidance to others by explaining and proclaiming God’s truth (1 Cor. 12:10, 28; Eph. 4:11-14, Romans 12:6; Acts 21:9-11).
13. **Helps**: Investing time and talents in others to increase other’s effectiveness (1 Cor. 12:28, Rom. 16:1-2, Acts 9:36).
14. **Service**: A tactical gift that identifies steps and processes in tasks that result in ministry to others (2 Tim. 1:16-18, Rom. 12:7, Acts 6:1-7).
17. **Wisdom**: To have insight into how to apply knowledge (1 Cor. 2:1-13, 12:8. Acts 6:3, 10; James 1:5-6, 2 Peter 3:15-16).
19. **Miracles.** To perform compelling acts that are perceived by observers to have altered the ordinary course of nature (1 Cor. 12:10, 28; Acts 9:36-42, 19:11-20, 20:7-12; Rom. 15:18-19, 2 Cor. 12:12).

20. **Healing.** To serve as human intermediaries through whom it pleases God to restore health (1 Cor. 12:9, 28; Acts 3:1-10, 5:12-16, 9:32-35, 28:7-10).

21. **Tongues.** There are various explanations of this gift. For instance it can be to speak (a) to God in a language they have never learned and/or (b) to receive and communicate an immediate message of God to his people.\(^\text{12}\) Another option is that this can mean an ability to speak a foreign language and convey concept across cultures\(^\text{13}\) (1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 14:13-19, Acts 2:1-13, 10:44-46, 19:1-7).

22. **Interpretation:** To make known a message of one who speaks in tongues.\(^\text{14}\) And/or it can mean “those who help build bridges across cultural, generational and language divides.”\(^\text{15}\) (1 Cor. 12:10, 30, 14:13, 26-28).

23. **Voluntary poverty.** To renounce material comfort and luxury to assist others (1 Cor. 13:1-3, Acts 2:44:45, 4:34-37, 2 Cor. 6:10, 8:9).

24. **Celibacy:** To remain single with joy and not suffer undue sexual temptation (1 Cor. 7:7-8; Matt. 19:10-12).

25. **Martyrdom.** Ability to undergo suffering for the faith even to death, while displaying a victorious attitude that brings glory to God (1 Cor. 13:3).

There is no Biblical reason why some of these gifts are not given in some measure before conversion, awaiting the regenerative experience to unleash them with divine empowerment. Therefore, the Christian community should look for signs of such pre-empowered giftings in travelers at Waypoint 11, and then move to Action B.

**Action 11.1B:**

Explain that new birth will unleash and empower these strengths.

A Christian community can help a traveler grasp that along with new birth will come divine empowerment for good deeds. And, these good deeds will rise from the traveler’s traits, abilities, skills and behaviors. People today often suffer from poor self-esteem, yet God’s intention is that each person has gifts to contribute to the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7, 1 Peter 4:10). Christian communities should be a place where travelers with such emerging giftings discover that:

1. Gifts, as listed in Scripture (i.e. above), are from God (Romans 12:5-6, 1 Corinthians 12:18, 1 Peter 4:10).

2. These gifts were given so that travelers can serve others (Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:7, 18).

3. The full empowerment and release of these gifts occurs following new birth. (1 Peter 4:10).
Action 11.2: Offset Weaknesses.

“W” in SWOT stands for personal weaknesses. A Christ-like community can help travelers grasp that new birth (W7) and growth in God’s new community (W5-W0) can result in the traveler overcoming personal weaknesses. The Scriptures promise that:

- “Don’t you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don’t care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don’t qualify as citizens in God’s kingdom. A number of you know from experience what I’m talking about, for not so long ago you were on that list. Since then, you’ve been cleaned up and given a fresh start by Jesus, our Master, our Messiah, and by our God present in us, the Spirit.” 1 Cor. 6:9-11 (The Message).
- “Don’t panic. I’m with you. There’s no need to fear for I’m your God. I’ll give you strength. I’ll help you. I’ll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you.” Isaiah 41:10 (The Message).
- “Is anyone crying for help? God is listening, ready to rescue you.” Psalm 34:17 (The Message).
- “And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.” Luke 12:29-31.
- “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:13.

Action 11.3: Capitalize on Opportunities.

“O” in SWOT stands for “opportunities” and God’s Good News is that His intentions are to help His offspring make the most of opportunities. Scriptures state:

- “Be ready with a meal or a bed when it’s needed. Why, some have extended hospitality to angels without ever knowing it! Regard prisoners as if you were in prison with them. Look on victims of abuse as if what happened to them had happened to you.” Hebrews 13:1-4 (The Message).
- “Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all’.” Mark 9:35.
- “Anyone who sets himself up as ‘religious’ by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.” James 1:26-27 (The Message).
- “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11.
• “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” Matthew 25:34.

• “Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it’s safe from moth and rust and burglars. It’s obvious, isn’t it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.” Matthew 6:20 (The Message).

• “What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we’ve been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now! God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you’ll have it all—life healed and whole.” 1 Peter 1:3-4 (The Message).

Action 11.4: Overcome Threats.

“T” in SWOT stands for “threats” and these are things that are beyond a person’s control and which they fear. Death, illness, estrangement, etc. are but a few of the threats that humans can be anxious about. Again, here are just a few Scriptures that paint an image of triumph over anxiety and adversity:

• Fear of persecution: “Fear nothing in the things you’re about to suffer—but stay on guard! Fear nothing! The Devil is about to throw you in jail for a time of testing—ten days. It won’t last forever. Don’t quit, even if it costs you your life. Stay there believing. I have a Life-Crown sized and ready for you.” Revelation 2:10 (The Message).

• Fear of death: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” 1 Cor. 15:55-58.

• Fear of hardship: “That’s why I don’t think there’s any comparison between the present hard times and the coming good times. The created world itself can hardly wait for what’s coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens.” Romans 8:18 (The Message).

• Fear of not being successful: “Don’t be obsessed with getting more material things. Be relaxed with what you have. Since God assured us, “I’ll never let you down, never walk off and leave you,” we can boldly quote, God is there, ready to help; I’m fearless no matter what. Who or what can get to me?” Hebrews 13:5-6 (The Message).
At Waypoint 11 the church must be careful to not overly romanticize nor paint a rosy picture of the future, even with Christ. The Bible states that challenges lie ahead on our route, but advises: “Friends, when life gets really difficult, don’t jump to the conclusion that God isn’t on the job. Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner” (1 Peter 4:12-13). Thus, the Christian community must realistically and authentically let the traveler know that there will be barriers, detours, and challenges on the road ahead, but that Christ and his community provide aid and strength to continue the journey.

An Interview with Michael Franzese
Author, speaker, Colombo Family member and
formerly #18 on Fortune Magazine’s ‘Fifty Most Wealthy & Powerful Mafia Bosses’

Whitesel: You grew up attending a parochial school, but it wasn’t until later that you gained a positive attitude toward the Good News. Is that correct?
Franzese: Yes, that’s right. Maybe because I was young, I never understood Jesus could be the friend and the navigator of your life. To me Jesus was a figure in the Bible. I believed He lived, but I wasn’t interested in Him calling the shots.

Whitesel: And that changed when you met Cammy, her family and went to prison?
Franzese: Right Bob. All of those things helped me understand Jesus, and that changed my attitude toward His Good News. I began to see that the Good News was that God loved you, He had given you talents you were supposed to use for Him, He could make you a better person, He would take care of you, and He had a purpose to you.

Whitesel: You started writing while in the prison hole. And, you discovered God had made you a people person, not a businessman. Did you sense that God was preparing to one day use these abilities for Him?
Franzese: That’s a great question, Bob. And, you’re correct. My testimony is not about me. It’s about God having a purpose for you and preparing you for His work throughout your upbringing. I see God as nurturing our strengths and trying to get rid of our weaknesses. I realized in hindsight that was there were so many things that God had put in my life, and He placed them there because one day He was going to use them. When people ask what is my greatest asset, they use to say it was that I was a skillful businessman. In hindsight, I don’t really think I was good at that. Instead, I am a people person. I encourage people around me to succeed and that is my most important asset: I encourage others. I thought these abilities were given to me to use for the Mob, but now I see God gave them for me to use for Him. You don’t mess with that giver.

Questions for Group and Personal Study
1. When a person possesses a gift of the Holy Spirit others usually notice it. What gifts of the Spirit do others notice in you? Were these gifts evident in some form before your conversion? If so, how?

2. What is a weakness that you have overcome? (Be careful not to share something that may be improper for the setting of your discussion.) How did others view you when you were ensnared by that weakness? And, how has Christ helped you overcome the weakness? Are you viewed differently now? Take a piece of paper and make two columns. On the left column list former unattractive characteristics, and on the right column list the positive characteristics that God has fostered in you. Ask God to help you look beyond characteristics from the left column that you see in other wayfarers. Do not condone sin, but learn to reach out to and love those who live primarily in the left column.

3. Try your hand at translating the following passage, “Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” Hebrews 13:1-3. Translate this passage in order to make it clear to a traveler at Waypoint 11.

4. Have you known someone who may have been outwardly unattractive, but inwardly possessed noteworthy gifts or abilities? Who was that person? And, how did you react? What do you think were God’s intentions for that person? And, how could you help them attain God’s best for their life?

5. What worries you most about the future? List three such things and write a paragraph about each. Then read Revelation 2:10, 1 Cor. 15:55-58, and Romans 8:18. Take each of the three paragraphs and put one in your bible at each of the these three verses. Next time you come across these passages, read the Scripture, then the paragraph, then the Scripture again. Finish by reading Isaiah 41:10, from a modern translation such as The Message: There’s no need to fear for I’m your God.

Footnot

9 For this gift there are several interpretations, c.f. Donald Gee *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1972) and Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*.
10 Here again there are several perspectives, c.f. Donald Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* and Kinghorn, *Gifts of the Spirit*.
12 For varied interpretations, see Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* and Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*.
15 For another viewpoint of this and other gifts see the United Methodist Church’s definitions in “Explore Your Spiritual Gifts,” http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.1355371/k.9501/Spiritual_Gifts.htm, 2009.
16 A person that has a spiritual gift should “expect confirmation from the Body” according to Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, 123-124.
AFTERWORD:

ARRIVAL ...AND BACK AGAIN

“Anyone who sets himself up as ‘religious’ by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air.

Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this:

Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight,
and guard against corruption from the godless world.”

-James 1:26-27 (The Message)

As the reader has noticed, the journey of the Good News never ends, it just leads to more responsibility. Successfully traversing a waypoint only affords the trekker an opportunity to help others navigate that same waypoint. My friends and colleagues have contributed their personal stories for this purpose.

A companion book:

WAYPOINTS: Navigating Your Spiritual Journey
by Bob Whitesel

To provide a clearer map of this route I have written an important companion book titled: Waypoints: Navigating Your Spiritual Journey (The Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010). The companion volume is designed to help the person who is presently struggling with the obstacles, challenges and detours of this spiritual road. This companion book is for non-Christians, new-Christians and Christian-leaders alike. If you know of someone on this journey, Waypoints: Navigating Your Spiritual Journey is the roadmap they have been seeking.

THE WAYPOINTS COURSE
by Bob Whitesel

Additionally, to help people come together and traverse this route, I have written a 17-week course that can be used in Sunday School classes, home groups, Bible studies, small groups, leadership committees and home fellowships. The companion book, Waypoints: Navigating Your Spiritual Journey, provides an agenda for each of the 17-weeks. In this course travelers will share their experiences, help others, make an impact on their community. Weekly agendas of the WAYPOINTS COURSE are included in the companion book: Waypoints: Navigating Your Spiritual Journey.

For more information on either the companion book or the course see:

www.Waypoints-Book.com