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Trust, Scripture, and the Spirit as Core Values of Evangelism in a Chinantec Village in Oaxaca, Mexico

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Abstract

The paper provides both a rationale for an approach to evangelism and a practical, replicable ministry model focusing on three core values (trust, Scripture, and the Spirit) in order for churches and individuals to effectively fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), particularly in cross-cultural contexts. A case study using this model in an indigenous Chinantec community in Oaxaca, Mexico, is presented. In contrast to modern evangelistic strategies that emphasize speed and numbers, this model and field example offer an alternative approach to church planting, an approach with a long-term focus and a goal of mature disciples and healthy churches.

Key Words: cross-cultural evangelism, discipleship, church planting, Mexico

This paper will not present a foolproof, silver-bullet strategy for successful evangelism. In fact, it will do the opposite by acknowledging the great effort and commitment required to engage in biblical evangelism. This term is often misconstrued, but Stiles (2014) proposed a helpful, amplified definition, “Evangelism is teaching (heralding, proclaiming, preaching) the gospel (the message from God that leads us to salvation) with the aim (hope, desire, goal) to persuade (convince, convert)” (para. 5). The transformative message of the gospel is the critical foundation on which God’s salvific mission advances in the world as people from all nations are evangelized and discipled according to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). The following case will offer a description of a viable biblical approach to evangelism in a specific context—namely, a small Chinantec village in the Sierra Norte region of Oaxaca, Mexico. To maintain the privacy of the villagers, the name of the mission location will not be identified. The following introduction provides an overview of some key characteristics of the village to offer proper context for the analysis that will follow.

To begin to provide some context for the location, it is important to understand the linguistic nature of the village. The Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI, 2020), Mexico’s census bureau, reported that there were over 100,000 speakers of Chinantec in Mexico at the time of the last census. While it is not the largest linguistic group in the country, there is a substantial number of Chinantec speakers in our region of Oaxaca and the place where we work. The Summer Institute of Linguistics in Mexico (SIL Mexico, n.d.) explained more about the Chinantec languages:

Chinantec languages, which together form one of several language families in the Otomanguean stock, are spoken in the northeastern part of the state of Oaxaca (especially in the districts of Ixtlán de Juárez, Tuxtepec, and Choapan). There are about 14 mutually unintelligible varieties of Chinantec, due in part to the mountainous nature of the region. (para. 1)

As is often the case in rural Mexico, the Chinantec people whom we serve are bilingual in both Chinantec and Spanish. The people in the village generally are not literate in Chinantec; rather, they typically speak Chinantec and Spanish but only read and write in Spanish. This widespread form of bilingualism will inevitably continue since there is no bilingual school in the region, which is a service available in other parts of Oaxaca. Thus, villagers live a fluid linguistic experience in which they use

Chinantec and Spanish simultaneously for different purposes. While a handful of elderly people may feel more comfortable with Chinantec, most villagers navigate both languages seamlessly. This presents a specific linguistic environment for evangelism.

In addition to distinct linguistic considerations, the Chinantec culture in the village is compelling because of its strong collectivist nature. The American Psychological Association (n.d.) described collectivism in the following way:

a social or cultural tradition, ideology, or personal outlook that emphasizes the unity of the group or community rather than each person's individuality. Most Asian, African, and South American societies tend to put more value on collectivism than do Western societies, insofar as they stress cooperation, communalism, constructive interdependence, and conformity to cultural roles and mores.

This aspect of cultural life in the village is expected by other Mexicans, who have grown up in the same tradition, but collectivism, especially the pervasive form present in rural communities, can cause significant culture shock for missionaries who are more accustomed to individualistic societies. The noticeable differences between collectivism and individualism are further emphasized by the autonomy given to indigenous communities by the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States. Among other things, indigenous communities like the Chinantec village have the right to decide their internal forms of coexistence as well as social, economic, political, and cultural organization (Article 2). While the intentions are good, such autonomy can be considered controversial by some missionaries and human rights workers, as it indirectly enables villages to maintain collective unity while sometimes overlooking individual rights that are guaranteed by the constitution, such as religious freedom.

Religion is a sensitive subject in Mexico. As many might know, "Mexico has the globe's second-largest number of Catholics" (Lipka, 2016, para. 1). It is common knowledge that the arrival of Christianity was a tumultuous process in which Spanish conquistadors mingled political and spiritual aims to convert the native Mexican people, who held a drastically different worldview. Understandably, the initial evangelistic environment was unhealthy and inevitably, over time, led to a distorted, syncretic form of Christianity—Mexican Catholicism. INEGI (2021) calculated that nearly 80% of the Mexican population currently identifies with the Catholic religion. For evangelistic purposes, we identify people in the Chinantec

village as superficially reached, which is defined as “few evangelicals, but many who identify as Christians [Professing Christians > 50%]. In great need of spiritual renewal and commitment to biblical faith” (Joshua Project, 2022, Superficially Reached section). Analyzing the implications of this status helps us determine approaches to evangelism in the village.

This introduction has briefly examined some key components of the Chinantec village where we work. It is necessary to consider the linguistic, cultural, and religious context to better understand our approach to evangelism. Yet it is important to clarify that we do not stop at evangelism; rather, we view evangelism as just the beginning. Dever (2021) asserted that when we consider the apostles’ work in the New Testament, “the story of the gospel spread is the story of the churches being spread” (25:44). The innate connection between evangelism and church planting will be a central focus of this paper. And this focus emphasizes quality and sustainability over numbers and speed in the task of evangelism. Thus, this paper will propose an approach to evangelism that centers on three core values—trust, Scripture, and the Spirit—with the hope of providing a guide that other churches and individuals can adapt as they seek to fulfill the Great Commission.

First Core Value of Evangelism: Trust

To engage in effective and sustainable evangelism that results in the establishment of a church, it is necessary to build trust with others, which involves developing genuine relationships, learning about peoples’ contexts, and caring about the whole individual. To start, we will address the first point about genuine relationships as an essential component of gaining people’s trust. In the evangelism and discipleship literature, we often read of Christians seeking to find the next best strategy that will create more conversions more quickly. While the vision for more conversions is admirable, a desire for numbers and speed should not overshadow the goal of developing true, lasting friendships with those to whom God has called us. This often will require focusing on a core group of people, much like Jesus did as he taught his original disciples and the subsequent modest group of believers that he left on earth to continue his work (Acts 1:15). As Rhodes (2022) observed, “Ever the long-term thinker, Jesus prioritized healthy over huge” (p. 56). Being concerned about the health of our relationships builds trust with people as we seek to form meaningful friendships with them, demonstrating that we are genuinely concerned about their well-being.

In the Chinantec village in which we work, a distinct feature of our ministry is the focus on building strong relationships with people as a

foundation for evangelism that leads to church planting. One tool that we use is an evangelism guide designed by Storyweavers Global. According to the organization, “The Storyweavers approach to biblical storyweaving opens doors, enriches our conversations, and breaks down barriers in ways that feel natural, and that build friendship, trust, understanding, and hope—all using personal and Scripture-focused stories” (Storyweavers Global, n.d., Personal Evangelism section). In short, this interactive approach helps Christians develop strong relationships with people by emphasizing the importance of listening, empathizing, and relating others’ stories to Scripture with the hope that they will begin a new life in Christ. Because the approach is primarily oral, like natural conversations, it is possible to build relationships while performing mundane tasks. It is not uncommon to share the gospel while eating at a friend’s home, walking together on the road, and even building furniture with someone. In essence, we are always “on call” and ready to teach about the hope God offers to each person (1 Pet. 3:15). As Scott (2016) rightly assessed, “This generation has learned to worship in the church but seems unwilling to worship in the world” (p. 32). The author was referring specifically to college-aged students, but the pervasive complacency witnessed in many churches affects all ages. Thus, it is important to remember that serving God and serving others happens anytime and anywhere and requires Christians to move well beyond the church walls. Because of this approach, there is now a small group of Chinantec villagers who gather for regular Bible studies with both oral and written features. And these people are truly friends, due largely to the ongoing effort to build their trust through patient, heartfelt relationships and conversations that connect the gospel to their everyday lives.

One component of befriending others involves developing trust by honoring their culture as we seek to evangelize. To learn about how people live and why they say or do certain things, we must do life with them. Of course, one can always conduct a broad, formal survey of a community, and we have done so. But to truly get an insider’s view, we must spend ample time getting to know the people and their culture, including their customs and worldview. Paul fully embraced this concept by becoming a “servant unto all” (1 Cor. 9:19). And despite our tendency to focus on the negative parts of others’ lives, we cannot truly gain others’ trust until we value the positive aspects of their culture as well. McConnell and McKinley (2016) asserted that as we intentionally “experience life firsthand—living, working, and socializing among local people—you may begin to see a rich tapestry of life and culture” (p. 145). And as we engage with others by valuing their culture, we understand better how to share the gospel with

them and what implications it will have for their lives.

For example, the analysis in the introduction explained that the Chinantec villagers exist within a bilingual, collectivist, Catholic context. Therefore, to value their bilingualism, we encourage our friends to use both Chinantec and Spanish during Bible studies, and we utilize Chinantec resources, such as audiovisual Bible lessons from the Global Recordings Network and videos from the Jesus Film Project. Furthermore, in terms of honoring the villagers' collectivism, we understand that we cannot schedule Bible studies on days when there are obligatory community meetings, and we must anticipate lower attendance on days when all the men are away in the forest collecting copal (a resin used for incense). Additionally, we recognize that any public ministry initiatives must first be approved (and possibly rejected) by the town authorities. Lastly, despite significant concerns with Mexican Catholicism, we accept the limited scriptural knowledge that villagers already have and try to build on it—a concept that will be discussed in more detail in the section about Scripture. In addition to these broader cultural considerations, we must also appreciate the small things, like their food, as we try to become “all things to all men” like Paul (1 Cor. 9:22). On one hand, the villagers have served delicious soups, tacos, and even fresh deer and wild boar dishes, but some food has been more difficult to appreciate, such as *empanadas* filled with tadpoles and *moronga* (blood sausage). Yet food is a fundamental aspect of daily life, so by participating in mealtimes and humbly and graciously eating what has been prepared, we show our willingness to befriend the villagers by immersing ourselves in their context. That way, we may present the gospel in a contextually appropriate way.

Moreover, when we immerse ourselves in the regular rhythms of peoples' lives, we can better win their trust by gaining a more accurate and holistic understanding of these individuals. While we always prioritize peoples' spiritual need and the literal proclamation of the gospel, we acknowledge that human existence is multifaceted. Each person has a unique life, distinct experiences, complex feelings, profound thoughts, and various needs. For that reason, evangelism must integrate words and deeds. We remember that faith and works are complementary (James 2:17). Likewise, our good works can lead others to glorify God (Matt. 5:16). Unfortunately, many Christians shy away from this extension of verbal evangelism. Telling people that Jesus loves them is a lot easier than showing it for months or years amidst various obstacles. Anyabwile (2012) affirmed the need to truly invest in peoples' lives by emphasizing how we should relate to the people to whom we are called to minister:

We belong among the people to such an extent that they can be called on to honestly testify that our lives as messengers commend the message. We should be so frequently among them that we smell like them, that we smell like their real lives, sometimes fragrant but more often sweaty, musty, offensive, begrimed from battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. (para. 8)

In short, holistic evangelism focused on the whole person inevitably implies a long-term commitment involving time, energy, money, and teamwork.

Practicing holistic evangelism in the Chinantec village involves deeds that validate our words. For example, we have gained a reputation in the village for the manual labor that our team provides when possible. Such labor can include a variety of odd jobs, such as building quick, small pieces of furniture, transporting materials and provisions from other towns, delivering important documents like copies of birth certificates from the district registration office, welding, and providing basic mechanical or electrical services. These jobs are sporadic and are not our main priority, but we try to be available for people when they need assistance. Regarding carpentry, because of our background in this field, we have even trained villagers to make their own wood products, and one young man began his own part-time carpentry business. This man serves the entire community and specializes in fine woodworking.

While our team possesses a variety of skills that enable us to perform tangible acts of service while we evangelize, we recognize our limitations. For example, we had to enlist the financial support of a church in the United States to purchase two solar-powered water pumps for two families' fields, and we once brought a doctor and a psychologist to the village to address some specific issues that individuals were experiencing. Furthermore, we are currently planning trips for short-term mission teams from the United States, who can hopefully perform some community service projects in the village this year. As we evangelize the village in a holistic way with an active, living faith, we inevitably gain the respect of those we serve. Some villagers have opposed the "new religion" that we bring, but other villagers, even nonbelievers, have enthusiastically defended us by publicly asserting, "They help everyone, not just Christians, and work for the benefit of the community." By valuing people, immersing ourselves in their lives, and meeting their real needs, we earn their trust because our gospel message is backed by tangible evidence of our faith.

Second Core Value of Evangelism: Scripture

In addition to serving others in a multifaceted way, successful evangelism requires a strong scriptural foundation, which involves immersing ourselves in the Word, replicating a biblical model of evangelism, and accepting the theology of suffering. To begin, we will explore the initial point about preparation in the Word. We cannot evangelize unless we are personally grounded in Scripture. Take, for example, the implications of the biblical truth that humans are made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27). These implications are profound and underpin all evangelistic efforts. In recognizing others as God's image bearers, we acknowledge the necessity of each person's soul to be reconciled with the Creator. Viewing people as orphaned children separated from their loving Father fuels a commitment to evangelism. Additionally, when we are convinced of the divine dignity inherent in every person, we can cross unexpected barriers to love our fellow humans. And the greatest way we show love is by evangelizing. As Piper (2019) emphasized, "Christians care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering" (5:26). So, a strong scriptural foundation for sustainable evangelism maintains a future vision. We persevere because we know the ending (Rev. 7:9). We rest assured that individuals from every people group, including the Chinantec people, will worship before God for all eternity. Thus, as we evangelize, we do so joyously with great resolve because we know that Scripture teaches that "the whole world was made for God to be present with his people, imaged by his people, known, served, and worshiped by his people" (Hamilton, 2022, p. 247). What a privilege to be part of God's beautiful story.

In our case, we spend a healthy amount of time studying Scripture as a prerequisite to evangelism. This involves both formal study in theological courses and informal personal study. While we wholeheartedly encourage formal study, we affirm that every Christian should be first and foremost a divinely enabled autodidact—a lifelong learner of the Scriptures. Sanders (2017) asserted, "The leader who intends to grow spiritually and intellectually will be reading constantly" (p. 13). We could not evangelize in our Chinantec community if we were not first convinced of our own responsibility to seriously study and understand Scripture. And this is a conviction that we aim to pass along to the Chinantec villagers. Even though they live in a primarily oral culture and are unaccustomed to reading regularly, we continue to encourage them to develop a habit of studying the Bible. And soon, we hope to offer them a mobile library through which they can gain access to more theological resources, including Christian books and films. Additionally, for villagers who might

like an alternative to the written Word, we offer audio Bibles in both Spanish and Chinantec. And our village Bible studies include multilingual resources, like audiovisual presentations and videos in both languages.

As we look to Scripture to motivate and ground us in ministry, a proper respect for God's Word will lead us to follow a biblical model of evangelism. This biblical model includes teaching people to observe all that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:20). For a comprehensive study of this topic, see *What Jesus Demands from the World* by John Piper (2006). If we are to obey the Great Commission, then our job continues beyond evangelism. We anticipate that through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, people will be persuaded. And those believers must be discipled, baptized, and gathered into a healthy church. An example of this full portrait of biblical evangelism occurred on Pentecost when the Apostle Peter proclaimed the gospel to a multitude of people who were persuaded, baptized, and added to the fledgling church (Acts 2). Piper (2006) explained, "Jesus promised to build his church. By 'church' he did not mean a building. That is never the meaning of church (ἐκκλησία) in Greek. He means he will build a people" (pp. 336-337). Thus, we evangelize with the long-term goal of planting sustainable churches full of mature, baptized disciples—particularly in churchless areas.

When we arrived in the Chinantec village at the end of 2017, there was no existing biblical church, only the local Catholic church, which until recently did not even have a permanent priest. Thus, the people were not receiving spiritual guidance. After a lengthy time of evangelism and discipleship, this year we were finally able to gather a small group together as a precursor to the mature church we believe God will grow there. We currently meet in one family's home to sing, pray, and study the Bible. There are two faithful families who attend nearly every gathering as well as other interested villagers who come regularly.

As part of a biblical model for evangelism and church planting, we aim to present God's Word in a way that is appropriate for the audience, which means we must first understand their worldview. We see this concept modeled by Paul when he presents the gospel in light of the idolatry in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). Likewise, we offer contextualized Bible studies for the Chinantec group. We are currently exploring the creation narrative, as we believe the rest of Scripture hinges on the opening pages of the Bible. Upon starting the study, the villagers immediately began making connections to their traditional ways, like the practice of giving offerings to the spirits of the mountains to ensure protection when the men collect copal in the forest. As we discussed God as the sovereign Creator of the universe, the villagers readily understood and admitted that their fear of

the mountain spirits is unbiblical and dishonors the omnipotent Creator.

Additionally, a biblical model should expound the totality of Scripture by teaching the Bible as one, unified narrative. Therefore, we pursue Christocentric messages, whether we are teaching from the Old Testament or New Testament. King (2021) claimed that a “benefit of preaching Christ from the Old Testament is being able to preach evangelistically in every sermon. You don’t have to be in the Gospels to talk about the gospel” (p. 127). In our creation study, the Chinantec villagers have been quite impacted by the Christ connections that are present in just the first few chapters of Genesis. A sustainable biblical model looks at the long-term purpose of church planting, which involves discipling believers in the entirety of Scripture.

While most of Scripture is overwhelmingly good news, other portions are harder to accept, such as Jesus’ promises about the suffering his followers will endure (for example, Matt. 5:10–12 and 10:16–18, Mark 10:29–30, John 15:19–20). When we adhere to a scriptural approach to biblical evangelism, we must expect opposition in some form because the gospel is inherently counter-cultural. Ripken (2013) reasoned, “Persecution stops immediately where there is no faith and where there is no witness” (p. 307). Persecution may manifest differently depending on the context, but obedience to biblical evangelism inevitably brings conflict. It might surprise some people to know that Mexico continues to appear on the World Watch List, which highlights the top 50 countries where Christians experience persecution each year. Open Doors (2022) explained that “in rural indigenous communities, anyone who turns from traditional religious beliefs can face rejection and punishment in the form of fines, imprisonment, and forced displacement” (para. 1). Likewise, the Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación (CONAPRED, n.d.), the national council for the prevention of discrimination, affirmed that in states such as Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Hidalgo, at the community level, there is a marked intolerance of individuals and families that leave the traditional Catholic religion (p. 4).

Unfortunately, such intolerance has started to become visible in the Chinantec village. What started as complaints from a few individuals in the village has grown to include opposition from leaders in the community. Those who oppose our work refer to evangelical Christianity as “another religion” (which is correct) and resist any changes that it might bring. The same people seemed particularly concerned when they realized that some villagers were meeting in a house to study the Bible. Such meetings go against their ingrained collectivist identity. Recently, the president of the town, who is a sympathizer but not a Christian, advised us to avoid group

gatherings and, instead, to return to making visits in individual houses. We considered his advice, prayed about it, met with the leaders of our home church, and discussed it with the believers in the village. Ultimately, we recognized that regardless of how long we try to postpone conflict, opposition will happen. Therefore, we decided to continue meeting for group Bible studies, and we are prepared for any consequences that may arise. Additionally, we (and the believing villagers) have been prohibited from engaging in any public evangelism.

If the Bible study participants had asked to pause the group studies, then we would have respected their decision. Yet, the villagers were adamant that they wanted to continue. In fact, without any prompting, they began to prepare a response in case they are questioned by the municipal authorities. Furthermore, in a recent community meeting, the Bible study participants asserted that they would continue doing what they wanted in their homes and associating with whomever they pleased. One individual exclaimed in public, “It’s my house; I can invite whoever I want.” These reactions were surprising to us because it shows a shift in their collectivist identity. While they are still devoted members of the community, they have also begun to adopt a new identity in Christ. They are committed enough to this new identity that potential suffering has not been a deterrent but rather a catalyst to strengthen their faith.

Third Core Value of Evangelism: The Spirit

This section will analyze the last core value that defines our approach to evangelism in a Chinantec village, namely the Spirit, which is unequivocally linked to prayer—prayer support and personal prayer. The first idea about prayer support recognizes that evangelism is a team effort. Evangelism, by its very nature, depends on the Spirit-anointed body of Christ. If we are to do God’s work of teaching the gospel, discipling people, and planting churches, we must be tapped into God’s power. In a famous scene before Jesus’ ascension, he asserted the necessity of the Holy Spirit to grant power for witnessing to the nations (Acts 1:8), and then,

at the beginning of Acts, an unimpressive, fledgling group of believers met in a small room, and they were scared to death. Instead of plotting strategies, discussing models, or making plans, they were “devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). And in response to their prayers, God sent His powerful Spirit on the day of Pentecost. (Platt, 2018, p. 49)

The preeminence of prayer in the life of the early church should compel contemporary congregations to rally around members who are actively

pursuing evangelism. We recognize that God has ordained Spirit-filled humans as the means through which his gospel will spread and churches will be planted. Marshall and Payne reiterated, “God’s people are the agency by which the word is proclaimed in prayerful dependence on the Spirit” (p. 90).

In our case, our entire home church in Oaxaca is invited to get involved in evangelism in the Chinantec village, both physically by visiting the village and tangibly by supporting the work there, as well as spiritually through prayer. For a while, we maintained a private texting group that church members could join to receive prayer requests and updates about the village ministry. As is the case with many group chats, there was minimal participation, and it was unclear if people were truly praying. Thus, this year we revised the format. We now encourage church members to prayerfully “adopt” a family from the Chinantec village. Once a church member expresses interest, he or she will begin receiving regular prayer requests about a specific Chinantec family. And through this personalized format, we have noticed more enthusiastic responses and commitment from the prayer partners. That said, we still provide general prayer requests and updates to the entire church, but by assigning specific requests to individual church members, we hope to encourage focused prayer and promote accountability.

The ongoing prayer network is especially important on the days when we feel inadequate, frustrated, or concerned about our efforts in the village. As Platt (2018) noted, “Prayer is the intersection between our inability and God’s ability” (p. 53). So prayer support is an essential motivator in evangelism as we acknowledge that God did not intend for us to work as lone missionaries isolated from other brothers and sisters. Likewise, as the church supports us in prayer, we are convinced that God will bless the prayers by using his Spirit to convict more workers to accompany us in the task of evangelism (Luke 10:2). We are excited to have welcomed new ministry workers to Oaxaca this year and anticipate more arrivals next year; it is a long-awaited answer to prayer. We look forward to the assistance that these people will provide in the village as we seek to continuously expand the evangelistic work there.

In addition to prayer support from the church, we must practice personal prayer as a sustaining foundation for long-term evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. Christians can do nothing apart from Christ (John 15:5), and prayer is our Spirit-enabled lifeline. Wright (2019) emphasized that “spiritual anointing is primarily an equipping for mission, a commissioning for service. Anointing by God’s Spirit is what enables people to do what God wants to get done. ...Before we pray so glibly

(for ourselves or others) for the anointing of the Spirit, perhaps it would be good to remind ourselves what the Bible says that will mean” (pp. 492, 494). Engaging in God’s mission is serious business. We must be willing to sacrifice and prioritize God’s work above all else (Luke 14:28, 9:23). Such demands necessitate prayer as we ask God to give us wisdom and stamina through the power of his Spirit to finish the task he has given us. Spurgeon (1963) declared that “the soul-winner must be a master of the art of prayer” and added, “You cannot bring souls to God if you go not to God yourself” (p. 246). Onwuchekwa (2018) presented an accurate analogy when he said that prayer “is the pump at the gas station that connects us to the fuel for faithful evangelism” (p. 113). Thus, a failure to pray for our evangelistic efforts shows a blatant disregard for the ordained ways in which God will accomplish his mission through Spirit-filled believers. Likewise, prayer is essential in the inevitable spiritual warfare that accompanies obedience to God’s Word. When we evangelize, disciple, and gather new believers, we are encroaching on enemy territory. We require the whole armor of God, which involves “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18). Piper (1988) further explained how prayer ought to function:

Prayer is the walkie-talkie on the battlefield of the world. It calls in for the accurate location of the target of the Word. It calls in to ask for the protection of air cover. It calls in to ask for fire power to blast open a way for the tanks of the Word of God. It calls in the miracle of healing for the wounded soldiers. It calls in supplies for the forces. And it calls in the needed reinforcements. (Section 3)

This second analogy about prayer reminds us that it is futile to attempt evangelistic work without ongoing Spirit-inspired prayer.

During our time in the Chinantec village, the importance of prayer has become increasingly clear. We offer personal prayers regularly regarding specific aspects of the ministry. As mentioned previously, recently we have experienced direct opposition from a group of people in the village. Our first instinct is to grow weary as we consider all the work that would supposedly be lost if we were forced to leave the village. We also feel sorrow knowing that the Christian villagers might be targeted. We lament the fact that our peaceful relationship with the authorities is taking a negative turn. But we find hope in the promise that if our petitions are in line with God’s will, they will be granted (1 John 5:14). We know that it is God’s will to see himself glorified in the whole earth, which includes the Chinantec village, so despite seeming obstacles, we are confident that God

will finish the work he began there. Furthermore, on the days that we simply do not know what to pray or how to pray, we are comforted to know that the Spirit of God intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26). And lastly, as we recall months and months of work in the Chinantec village and are tempted to feel that the work is moving too slow, we remember that it is God who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:7). And we see it happening—gradually, the seed that was planted years ago is growing. We hope that soon we might celebrate the first voluntary baptisms in the village. And we pray that God would raise up a Chinantec leader from the Bible study group to begin more focused pastoral training. In God’s time, the goal is to work ourselves out of a job. Thus, we persevere in prayer, recognizing that there is no match for the Spirit that dwells within us (1 John 4:4).

A Potential Concern

Before concluding, it is necessary to further address a potential concern about our work in the Chinantec village. Not many people will argue with the second and third core values—Scripture and the Spirit—but some might not be as comfortable with all aspects of the first core value—trust. More specifically, there are some proponents of contemporary movements that promise exponential, rapid success in church planting, often at the expense of building strong bonds with people. Such proponents could argue that our approach to evangelism in the village takes too long and is not practical for successful church planting. In other words, our emphasis on building multifaceted relationships could be considered distinct from some contemporary strategies that supposedly promote faster growth yet at the same time de-emphasize the spiritual health of converts and churches. Such neglect may result in poor discipleship, weak teaching, and ineffective leadership training. Yet such advocates would question, “By investing so much time and energy in a small group of individuals, how can you make any substantial progress?”

In response to these possible concerns, we propose that it is helpful to remember the common saying, “Life is a marathon, not a sprint.” The same is true of evangelistic work. The author of Hebrews exhorts us to finish our race with patience (Heb. 12:1). While we do not intentionally try to work slowly, we acknowledge that our task is not to force religion on people but to teach the gospel with the aim to persuade, and this comes out of genuine, relevant, holistic relationships over time. Rhodes (2022) emphasized the following truths.

The Scriptural pattern doesn’t focus on speed and numbers at all costs. It doesn’t minimize the importance of language, culture, and other

human factors in ministry. It doesn't race new believers through the discipleship process, or push trained missionaries and teachers out of the way because they can't be easily replicated. Instead, the New Testament pattern depicts missionaries as ambassadors from Christ who know his message deeply and have the necessary wisdom to communicate it clearly across cultural boundaries. This wisdom cannot be reproduced rapidly, but over time it will reproduce and sustain itself. (p. 105)

We rest in these truths and eagerly await the day when the Chinantec village will have its own mature, self-sustaining, multiplying church.

We would like to present some additional evidence for the effort that it typically takes to accomplish sustainable evangelism that results in mature disciples and healthy churches. One example is an anecdote from the ministry of Hudson Taylor. When describing the workers of Taylor's China Inland Mission, a consular official reported, "the missionaries of this society have travelled throughout the country, taking hardship and privation as the natural incidents of their profession, never attempting to force themselves anywhere, they have made friends everywhere" (as cited in Pollock, 1996, p. 10). It is well known that Taylor integrated himself into the lives of the Chinese people, which gained their respect and gave him the right to talk to them as their equal, which took time and energy to achieve. Language and cultural acquisition were just the preliminary part of ministry since Hudson and his fellow workers maintained a long-term vision of seeing people converted and disciplined into mature believers and churches.

Another example is the legacy of Adoniram Judson in Burma. We know that "six years after [Judson and his wife] arrived, they baptized their first convert, Maung Nau. The sowing was long and hard, the reaping even harder for years" (Piper, 2009, pp. 96-97). What perseverance it must have taken to wait so long for a favorable response to the gospel. Judson was more concerned with heartfelt faith than superficial decisions. And from that first conversion, God blessed Judson's work exponentially over time. But Judson waited on God to bring the results and focused on quality over quantity.

To end, we will propose the following rationale for patient, relationship-oriented evangelism and church planting:

We should do what we can to work toward fruitful times and seasons, but it isn't up to us to bring them about quickly through cunning or urgency. The slow, expansive growth of a mustard seed—or of leaven seeping through dough (Matt. 13:31-33)—still characterizes kingdom

growth. We can contentedly follow the pattern of Jesus; he often avoided the crowds in order to spend time with his disciples. It was only when their maturation process was complete that he committed the growth of the church into their hands. We had better not push too hard for grandchildren before the children are fully grown! (Rhodes, 2022, pp. 75-76)

In other words, acting prematurely may sacrifice spiritual longevity in the long run. Let us not act hastily in the Lord's work.

Therefore, for those who worry about an arbitrary timeline for evangelism, we offer a reminder about our basic task: love God and love others (Matt. 22:36-40). Such love compels us to Christ-like living through word and deed. In seeking to speed up the biblical model of evangelism, we are acting with pride. "When we do something (i.e., some 'planting' or 'watering'), we are really doing something—but God works in and through that activity to bring growth in a way that we cannot control" (Marshall & Payne, 2016, p. 90). The work in the Chinantec village is gradual, certainly slower than we would like. We work diligently and constantly evaluate our work to see if we can improve in some area, lest our own failures slow down the work. Yet in the end, as we follow a biblical model of evangelism, we find relief in the fact that God will not receive glory from humans dependent on their own effort, so we remain faithful to the task and wait on him to do what only he can do.

Conclusion and Practical Application

It is not easy to condense years of work into a concise paper about three core values of evangelism. It would likely require a book to recount the full reality of cross-cultural evangelism, discipleship, and church planting in the Chinantec village. Although brief, we hope that the evangelism approach described in this paper will encourage churches and individuals to consider their involvement in the Great Commission and evaluate how well they are integrating the three core values of trust, Scripture, and the Spirit. To end, we will recap specific ways that readers can begin to practice these values, particularly in a cross-cultural context, in their home country or abroad. The practical strategies in Table 1 below provide a starting point for engaging in biblical evangelism using specific, actionable steps that are similar to what we have practiced in the Chinantec village.

Table 1: *Practical Strategies for Implementing Three Core Values of Evangelism*

Core Values	Practical Strategies (For individual cross-cultural workers)
Trust: Developing genuine relationships, learning about people’s context, and caring about the whole individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If applicable, begin learning the new language for cross-cultural communication.• Ask appropriate questions to learn about people and their families, cultures, and worldviews.• Invite people to spend time with you outside of work or school—at a restaurant, store, market, etc.• Learn about people’s hobbies and show interest by participating.• Welcome people into your home and introduce them to your family.• Accept the invitation to visit people’s homes and meet their families.• Offer to help people with specific needs they have.• Introduce people to other sources of support when necessary.• Use your skills to provide tangible services for people, like English help, literacy tutoring, repair work, baking classes, tech support, etc.• Follow up with people to maintain ongoing communication.• Prepare yourself for long-term friendships; adjust your schedule and plans accordingly.• Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as opportunities arise to share the gospel in ways that apply to people’s lives.• Pursue gospel-oriented conversations related to everyday life.• Attend evangelism and discipleship training opportunities through a ministry like Storyweavers Global.
Scripture: Preparing oneself in the Word, replicating a biblical model for evangelism, and accepting the theology of suffering	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Study the Bible every day during your personal quiet time; aim to make connections between the Old and New Testaments.• Obtain plenty of Bible study resources, such as commentaries and sermons.• Study the Bible through regular formal courses, like independent study options offered by seminaries as well as self-paced options like the courses offered through The Gospel Coalition or the core seminars from Capitol Hill Baptist Church.• Develop a firm foundation in biblical theology, systematic theology, and hermeneutics.

Core Values	Practical Strategies (For individual cross-cultural workers)
<p><i>(continued)</i></p> <p>Scripture: Preparing oneself in the Word, replicating a biblical model for evangelism, and accepting the theology of suffering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set aside time each month to read credible theological books about evangelism and other relevant topics, such as world religions and missionary biographies. • Be available to answer scriptural questions that people may have, and when you do not have an immediate response, study until you can answer well in a contextually appropriate way. • Ensure that new believers are engaged in long-term discipleship that covers all of the Bible. The <i>Building on Firm Foundations</i> set is one option for a comprehensive Bible study curriculum. • Guide new believers in learning about the importance of baptism. • Teach new believers that suffering is normal and expected. • Support new believers who are experiencing persecution or other types of suffering. This will likely involve gaining some knowledge about biblical counseling. • In time, invite people to attend church services and, if necessary, transport them there. • In contexts where no church is present, if you feel called to plant a church, receive training in biblical church planting models, like the “Church Planting Outline” published by Radius International. Also, ensure that your home church will commission you; secure a mentor and team from your church to support you in this long-term process.
<p>Spirit: Requesting prayer support and engaging in serious personal prayer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact fellow Christians, particularly those from your home church, and propose their involvement in a prayer network. • Send regular, specific prayer requests and updates to the prayer network, ideally through personal messages rather than general group chats or email lists. • Study the topic of spiritual warfare from credible sources to prepare for inevitable struggles as you evangelize, make disciples, and possibly church plant. • Pray every day during your personal quiet time; consider a comprehensive framework like ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication). • Learn how to pray God’s Word through resources like <i>Praying the Bible</i> by Donald Whitney. • Teach new believers to do the same.

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