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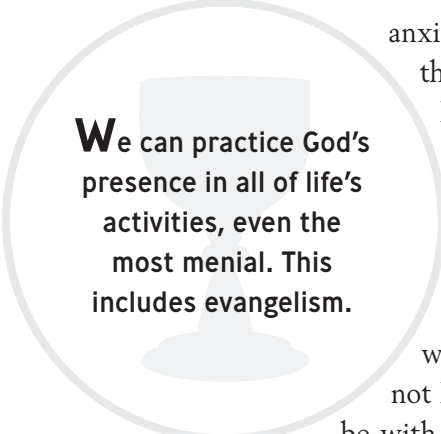
I) MISSING OUT

We Christians are an active lot.

We serve in many areas of ministry—we staff homeless shelters, produce Christian media, build schools, send missionaries, hold prayer meetings, and sing with worship teams. Some of us, usually a minority with the “gift” of evangelism, even tell others about Jesus. If activity were the standard, we would all hear His commendation, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”¹

But activity alone is not the standard of the Christian life—even good activity. And it never has been. In the ministry of Jesus we encounter an interesting scene:

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are



We can practice God's presence in all of life's activities, even the most menial. This includes evangelism.

anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”²

We suspect that most American Christians would identify with busy, hardworking Martha, not Mary, who has simply chosen to be with Jesus. Though we theoretically know that we too ought to spend time at the feet of Jesus, in practice we feel hurried and hope that He will somehow understand. After all, “the work” has to get done, and there will be time enough to “practice His presence” later. So we resume our busy lives and ministries, and hardly ever encounter Jesus on the way.

For such people, this book will come as good news. *Really good news.* That’s because, while stopping our lives to listen to Jesus can sometimes be extremely helpful, we don’t have to cease all activity to hear or see God. We can experience His presence as we serve Him—especially as we do evangelism. And that presence not only will keep us going in the often hard work of evangelism, it will keep us going, period. Brother Lawrence, who washed pots for medieval monks, knew that we can practice God’s presence in all of life’s activities, even the most menial. This includes evangelism.

A WAY OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD

Yes, this book is about evangelism and discipleship, but on an even deeper level it is about the presence of God in the life of the

believer. In fact, this volume is about the *sacrament* of evangelism. Those Christians who hold to certain kinds of sacramental theology believe that God is present in the sacraments. Whatever our doctrine about various sacraments, of course, such an approach prompts us to look for signs of God elsewhere, too.

In this book, however, we are not advocating our own position on any of the sacraments of the Christian church. We are offering a way of looking at life and the world that is open to God's presence everywhere. This approach is called *sacramental*.

Such an approach has become more accepted among evangelicals in recent years. Many Christians, particularly evangelicals, are fascinated with sacramental and liturgical approaches to faith, even if sometimes we are not too sure how biblical they are. Books on "ancient" Christianity are both common and popular.

A SACRAMENTAL APPROACH

But what does *sacrament* really mean? As the University of Notre Dame's Office of Campus Ministry states, the word "sacrament shares its roots with sacred, meaning 'filled with the presence of God.' Catholics believe that the whole world is filled with God's presence in everything from the majestic to the mundane. Whenever we respond to the gift of God's presence (sometimes also called God's grace), we call that mutual effort—God's grace and our response—sacramental."³

Yet there is no biblical reason that Protestants cannot also see the world sacramentally. We too believe that He is omnipresent, or everywhere present at the same time. Those who take a sacramental approach understand that God is always near and ever able to minister His grace, whether we are washing pans or telling

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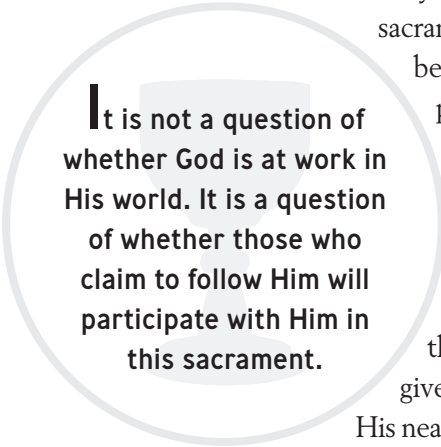
others the good news. If we do, like Jacob, we will awake from our sleep of busyness to murmur in awe, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.”⁴

A sacramental approach to life and ministry is solidly biblical. Moses discovered it at the Red Sea with the armies of Egypt ready to attack. David found God was with him when He responded on a dusty battleground to the taunts of Goliath. Daniel found God in the den of lions. Jeremiah, abused and abandoned by men, clung to God’s promise of constant companionship. And Peter, witness to the resurrection, preached with boldness on that Pentecost Sunday because he knew the Spirit of Christ was with him.

As with Peter, so with us. Evangelism is a sacrament. Those who practice it find that God is always showing up. Of course, He

is already *there*, but those engaged in this sacrament begin to see Him regularly

because their eyes are open to His presence. They practice His presence in their prayers for family, friends, and coworkers—even when those prayers are repeated year after year, seemingly unanswered. Hearts full of concern that others know the love and forgiveness of God keep us mindful of His nearness as we pray. Those concerned



It is not a question of whether God is at work in His world. It is a question of whether those who claim to follow Him will participate with Him in this sacrament.

that others in their world discover the grace of Christ tend to be alert to the daily evidence of God’s activity around them. They see Him when they build a relationship, when they take a risk, and when they are rejected. They also see Him when a dear friend becomes a new follower of Christ.

WITH NO REGRETS

When we share the good news, we do not, to borrow a common expression, “take Christ” to anyone. Remember, He is already there. The sacrament of evangelism doesn’t “do anything” to God—it does something to *us*. It opens our eyes to His work and grace. Those unaware of this sacrament, however, miss the opportunity to experience participating with this omnipotent, omnipresent God as He woos others to Himself. It is not a question of whether God is at work in His world. It is a question of whether those who claim to follow Him will participate with Him in this sacrament. This book will encourage you to discover afresh the presence of God in your world and participate in the sacrament of evangelism in ways that fit who you are.

Do you want to live sacramentally, to experience God in this way? The Westminster Catechism reminds us that we are created “to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”⁵ In our hearts we know that this glorification and enjoyment are not confined to a couple of hours a week in a church sanctuary. God has told us that He is too big for any temple. His kingdom spreads inexorably, silently, in His wake. We can—indeed, if we are true to how He made us, we *must*—glorify and enjoy Him in all of life. If we don’t, we will miss out on His greatest blessings.

The sacrament of evangelism is not about getting a few more notches in our outreach belts, about following a formula. It’s about working with Him, worshiping Him, and knowing Him as we participate with Him in bringing lost, sinful, and hurting people to Himself. The work will go on, with or without you. But if you choose to stand aside, God will still work, but *you* will be the loser.

How sad life would be if we never noticed the glories of the

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sky. How regrettable never to notice the hues created by the setting sun: the pinks and oranges, the salmons and peach, the apricot and shrimp all painted against a baby-blue canvas dancing with color at the end of the day. How heartbreaking to have breathed day in and day out on this marvelous planet, whose delicate balances are themselves a gift, and to have missed seeing the moon as it faithfully traces its way across the heavens. And who could adequately describe the diamond likeness of stars twinkling over a desert sky on a clear autumn evening looking like gems gleaming in the roof of an otherwise dark, cavernous universe? Who can grasp the wonder of comets and shooting stars and galaxies? Our lives seem charged with astonishment when we encounter the northern lights—the black firmament coruscating and pulsating in colors of red, blue, and green.

The Scriptures say the heavens declare the glory of God,⁶ but many of His works—always present with us—are missed simply because our eyes are closed. Yet He is ever present and ministering grace to us. Even when His creatures rebel, He causes the sun to rise every morning and the stars to adorn the cloudless night skies.

The Bible reminds us that the earth shows God's handiwork. An eye rightly trained cannot help but notice the curling and breaking of a wave onto the beach, the pause midflight of a hummingbird seeming to defy gravity as it draws nectar from a petunia. In fact, the petal of the flower itself—with its subtle, velvety texture and aroma—is glorious. The laughter of a child at Christmas; the soaring of the eagle on high thermal drafts; the fresh, falling snow that clothes the trees after their leaves have been stripped by blustery autumn winds; here too are glories, signs pointing to God's eternal power and divine nature.⁷

HIS WORKPLACE

There are other works of God in the world, and these too declare His glory. These are works not of creation but of *re-creation*. God is at work wooing people to Himself. Tragically, judging by our sluggish growth rates, too few churches in America are putting themselves in a place where they can see—and participate in—the work of God in the world. Yet God is too big for His purposes to be thwarted by our inactivity. He can use anyone and He certainly doesn't need us. But we will miss out on the wonder of participating with Him in His workplace.

One day a board member of a certain church invited the pastor to visit his manufacturing plant. The two men knew each other fairly well, but only in church contexts. So the pastor went, not sure what he would see. Once he got there, he saw the board member, whom he considered a solid Christian, in a whole new light. The pastor first of all was amazed at his friend's company, which he had built from scratch. He employed a sizable workforce. The design of the product reflected real genius.

During the visit, employees at the factory came up to their boss and asked complex work questions. The board member answered each one with care and insight. He knew all of his factory workers by name, often pausing to ask questions about the welfare of their children, aging parents, or how the worker's team was doing in the local bowling league. The pastor said he had no clue how kind and brilliant his friend was until he spent that day with him. Then the pastor observed: "I thought I knew my friend because I knew him at church; but I never really knew him until I got to know him in his workplace."

This book will encourage you to get to know God in *His*

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workplace, to develop a sense of awe while watching firsthand as He woos people to Himself. Few activities give a sense of meaning and purpose more clearly than the privilege of leading another human being to faith in Christ and discipling that person to lead others to Christ as well.

Further, as you begin to practice the sacrament of evangelism, you will find yourself growing in spiritual maturity. What the church today finds extraordinary will become ordinary in your life—for the glory of God and your own enjoyment.

Let's get started.

Discussion Questions

- 1.** Do you frequently or infrequently observe Christians you know sharing their faith with others? What might be the circumstances that determine the frequency you observe?
- 2.** Do you think it is possible some do not tell others about Christ because they do not seem to experience Him in a vital way in their own daily lives? How might they experience Him more, and how might this result in sharing the gospel with greater ease?
- 3.** Do you think that God is interested in bringing others to Himself? If He is, do you believe He might already be active in wooing others to Himself now? What might you discover about God if you were actively participating with Him in this work?

Missing Out

- 4.** Why do you think so many Christians do not actively share the gospel of Christ with others who live in such proximity to them: coworkers, neighbors, friends, etc.?

- 5.** What could you do to encourage other Christians to participate in the sacrament of evangelism so they could get to know God better in His workplace?