

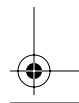
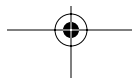
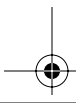
## ENTER THE GALLERY

One night last year, I walked into a meeting late and no one noticed. It was a Christian gathering well underway at a local university. I strolled right in, and not a head turned in my direction. It wasn't because the students weren't friendly; they're usually quite welcoming. It wasn't because folks didn't know me; quite a few did. It wasn't that there was a lot of noise at the moment; in fact it was quite still. All eyes were on a young woman up front. She had no training as a speaker, yet she held every ounce of their attention. She was doing this by simply telling them her story.

Outwardly a together person with a strong faith, she had been secretly struggling with anorexia. And she'd been losing. But God had broken into her life with power and begun to heal her mind and heart. As she told of her struggle and of God's touch on her life, those of us listening leaned in and got even quieter. We knew we weren't hearing some vague religious words; this was real. This was Janine, our friend, and God had saved her.

So often, if the truth be told, the gospel message is just another sermon to be endured. But the story of Janine's good news got our attention. Where is that power when the gospel is usually spoken? The gospel should be that compelling every time it is heard. This is a book about finding that power, letting it touch our lives and energize our message.

What makes words like Janine's so riveting, so clear and powerful? When we hear these stories, we know we are hearing something real. We can tell that these people, who are just like us, have been touched by something big. And when they tell us their story, we feel we can almost touch it too.





These people end up speaking the gospel with clarity and power, not because of any training but because they are talking about what they themselves have experienced and come to understand. That's the way the gospel first broke into the world. Here's how the apostle John says it:

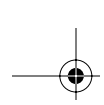
That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-3)

We proclaim what we have seen, heard and touched. To speak the gospel with the clarity and power it deserves, we need to let it touch us. John (the apostle) and Janine (the student) were both touched by the power of the gospel, and they knew it. A deep reality had a hold on them, and they could name it: Jesus. Making that connection gave them a clear and powerful message to share. It sounds simple, but many Christians are missing that dynamic connection of life and gospel. And it is paralyzing our witness. But we need more than being touched by the gospel. We need to understand what has touched us.

### MISSING THE CONNECTION

I think I can help you see this in a group of college students I knew. It was a fine Saturday morning at the George Washington University in D.C., and there they were, sitting in a classroom, waiting for me to teach them. What would draw busy college students to a seminar on a Saturday morning? Desperation. They needed help, and they knew it. They had a deep desire to proclaim what they “had seen and heard.” They knew God was good and Jesus must be good news for their friends. But they felt their words were powerless. What they proclaimed often didn't seem to be real life, but some boring, irrelevant, religious verbiage.





They had been touched by “that which was from the beginning,” and they would be able to proclaim him, but first there were some connections they needed to make. Two signs of the critical disconnection were clear in the first five minutes.

In those first few minutes, before I taught them anything, I wanted to see what they had already. I had them pair up and share the gospel as they knew it. I was paired with Jim. He obviously believed in God, but it was painful to watch him try to explain it. I felt like I was watching him rummage through a drawer of unorganized photos, occasionally drawing one out at random and commenting on it. He had the experiences with God, but he did not know how they spoke the good news.

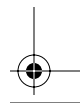
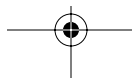
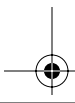
Others in the room had been very well trained. They quickly and cleanly produced a standard gospel outline, complete with diagram. But there was little power there, for all the clarity. That outline didn’t touch their lives and didn’t promise much connection to many of their friends either. It was like a picture from someone else’s album, an experience not theirs or from so long ago they had all but forgotten it. They had a picture to paint, but it wasn’t rising up from within them.

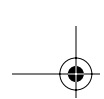
Jim had stories of God’s work, but he didn’t know how to connect them to the gospel. The well-trained students had an outline, but they hadn’t connected it to their own stories—and they knew it would not connect with the lives of their friends either.

These believers needed more than an outline or a personal story from years ago. What they needed was a way to understand how God had touched every part of their lives. They needed both to have the experiences with God and to be able to see how those experiences were connected to the good news of Jesus. They needed to have pictures of his work in their own life’s album, and they needed to know how to open that up for others. They needed the life of the gospel and the words to picture it.

**THE RESOURCES OF SCRIPTURE**

The New Testament writers can help them, and many of us, make this





connection of gospel and life. In this book we will be letting them teach us how the gospel touches every area of our lives. And if we listen, they will point the way to how we can speak a gospel that can also powerfully touch the lives of the people around us.

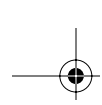
These first believers heard, saw and touched a Word of life that met them at every level of their lives. The one Lord had moved among them and touched them in many ways, giving them many gospel stories to tell, many sides of his glory to wonder at. They encountered him and came to understand what he meant in their lives, and so they had a powerful story to tell. And they found powerful ways to tell it.

#### COLORFUL LANGUAGE

The living Lord inspired living language, and lots of it. To understand and tell of Jesus, those early followers told stories, borrowed terms and picked up metaphors that helped them grasp what Jesus had done. They were not interested in abstract theories of religion, but in life. British evangelist and scholar John Stott says, “‘Images’ of salvation (or of the atonement) is a better term than ‘theories.’ For theories are usually abstract and speculative concepts, whereas biblical images of the atoning achievement of Christ are concrete pictures and belong to the data of revelation.”<sup>1</sup> Our “data” from the Bible are vibrant images of Jesus and his work in our lives. The first disciples found a real-life Savior and told of him in concrete, real-life ways.

The first witnesses give us a variety of vivid and concrete pictures. Sometimes they tell us stories. In the Gospels they show us incidents in Jesus’ life and things he said, stories carefully chosen to show his character and the nature of his work. Sometimes, in the letters, they work with extended metaphors. And sometimes they simply bring in terms that conjure up associations for us. For example, to say “Savior” to a Jewish audience would bring to mind the God who brought his people up from Egypt with “a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 4:34). A Greek would imagine a semi-divine hero figure coming to the rescue. Both would have associations, mental pictures and feelings aroused by these





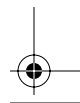
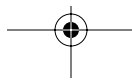
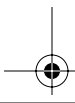
words. These believers took up the common palettes of their cultures and used them to portray the new thing they had seen in Jesus.

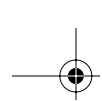
Let's take a look at Ephesians, where Paul uses several images to talk of God's work in Christ:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. (Ephesians 1:3-8)

Paul here is overwhelmed with the fullness and diversity of God's gifts in Jesus. It's not hard to imagine his eyes shining as he begins to speak of this amazing reality he has experienced. We have "every spiritual blessing in Christ." As he shows us just some of them, we see a quick parade of images and associations. The Father "predestined us to be adopted as his sons." We could attach a detailed, theological description to the adoption that happens in Jesus, but we are first called to consider a direct and wonderfully warm analogy with a concrete event in our natural world. A child is taken into a family "in love" because the parents have decided—and are glad—to do it. This is the central picture painted in this passage.

But it is not the only association called up here. We also have "redemption" through his blood. The same reality is being described, but from another angle. We are purchased or ransomed out of a bad situation, like Israel rescued from Egypt or a slave whose freedom is bought. But even the expansion needs to be expanded. The redemption is also a "forgiveness," another picture of blessing. *Forgiveness* is an accounting word. The Jews had used this picture for a long time to think of sin; sin





meant you owed God, big. But he wanted to release you and cover over your debt.

This witness, Paul, seems compelled to use a rich variety of images when he speaks of Jesus. Only by using these together can he tell the story of the one event that touches our lives in so many ways, an event that gives us “innumerable benefits.” In the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, the church is taught to pray “we remember his blessed passion and precious death, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension; rendering unto thee most hearty thanks for the innumerable benefits procured unto us by the same.”<sup>2</sup> It seems that the “riches of God’s grace that he has lavished on us” are simply too big for one word or one image.

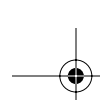
#### A GALLERY OF GOSPEL IMAGES

And Paul is just one writer, beginning one letter. The reality that had touched these pastors and evangelists was big, as big as the need of the whole world. Jesus had touched these people in many ways, so they had many sides of the good news they could tell.

The assortment of images that these writers used makes the Bible like a gallery. It is a place where we can wander and see many portrayals of God’s saving work. Each image tells the gospel story: what Jesus did and how it affects our lives. Each one gives us a different angle, together giving us a complete picture of the work of God in Christ.

We have a many-sided gospel to know and proclaim. New Testament scholar Leon Morris calls it a “multifaceted salvation, one which may be regarded in many ways and which is infinitely satisfying.”<sup>3</sup> Infinitely satisfying. The Bible’s gallery of gospel images is going to be the key for us in this book, as we explore how to become more alive as witnesses. The many images of God’s work will show us the many ways he can touch our lives. As we are touched in more ways by the gospel, we will see more ways it can touch the people around us. As we see the gospel more clearly, we can picture it for others more clearly. Receiving more life from God, and clear words and pictures to describe that life, we will be able to speak his message with more clarity and power.





### ONE LORD, ONE FAITH

Before I go on talking about how this whole gallery of gospel images speaks to us, I want to make this clear: All these images and expressions are of the Christian gospel. By that I mean they talk about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The world doesn't need more fancy or even artful religious speech. No generic poetry about God will do, no matter how moving. "That which . . . we have seen with our eyes" is a definite reality, and his name is Jesus. He is our message, and we are not free to change it: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:8).

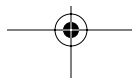
Strong words, but good to remember as we think about speaking the gospel into a world that often rejects it. It is very tempting to change our message so that it becomes more pleasing. But we can't do this; we are bound by our Subject, the one we know and love. We must speak about him truly and hope that our hearers see the beauty in him that we do, and come to him to gain life.

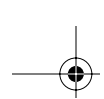
Of course, there is no need to change the gospel or invent new ones to connect with our lives or those of our friends. Even at first glance, the richness of "every spiritual blessing in Christ" looks like it will provide fertile soil for as much expression as we would like. While the truth bends to no one, it has something to offer everyone.

### THE APOSTLES' FOOTSTEPS

So we have a Savior who is the center of the gospel, and we have a gallery of images that show us who he is and what he has done for us. The New Testament authors have led the way for us. They have known him, let him work in their lives and then proclaimed this One they have come to know. So, to follow them in knowing and telling the gospel, we have to follow this path. We have to take these three steps: We have to let the gospel touch us, we have to rightly name the work of God in us as gospel, and then we can take that living and relevant word to our world.

*Step 1: Experiencing the gospel.* First, we must take the gospel in.





This happens when someone first becomes a Christian, but it also then begins to become a way of life. For example, one night I realized I was seeing a grown Christian man yelling at a seven-year-old girl. He was saying that she better not go rearrange those toys, and she was yelling back that oh yes, she would. Red-faced and loud-voiced, the man threatened physical punishment to the girl. Yes, that's how I found myself that evening, fighting with my daughter over what small plastic things did or did not belong to her. Somehow, in anger, I had moved out of parenting and into bullying. I sent us both to our rooms to cool down.

Ashamed by such behavior, I plopped down onto my bed and began to talk to God. But when I turned to him, acknowledging my sin, I found him telling me that I was already forgiven. I'd violated my position as father, made a mockery of manhood and ought to be given the boot. But I wasn't. He didn't drag me out like a criminal; he drew me near like a son. Now, to be honest, I did get a fatherly talking-to. But I was safe and accepted, even while I was reprovved and corrected. (He does fathering right.)

So, ready to do better next time, I tried again. But it wasn't a week later that I lost my grip again, this time while helping with homework. I'd blown it, again. The hard truth was slowly becoming clear: I'm not completely in control of myself. Somehow anger had a grip on me. I couldn't beat it without help. So I prayed to my Savior for power to break the pattern I'd set over the years. I'd gotten myself into something I couldn't get out of—by myself at least. I needed rescue. And he has come, and over time he is showing me how to take on a new life with new patterns. When I'm about to pop off at one of my girls, he gives me freedom to step back, count to ten and react calmly. Someday, I am confident, he'll even grow the new life in me to the point where I can consistently use my anger well.

**Step 2: Naming grace.** Looking back on my story, I find myself naturally doing the same thing Paul did in Ephesians. In my life as a Christian, I see the many spiritual blessings in Christ, the many different sides of the gospel gift. And they come to me as different images of salvation.





In these situations with my daughter, I experienced the security of *sonship*, *rescue* from bondage and the gift of *freedom*; I recognize these now. I felt daily *forgiveness* and *new life* growing in me; now I know where they come from. This is not some nameless, generic grace given to those who once completed the gospel transaction. All these terms come from the gallery of gospel images. This is the gospel itself, working in my life today.

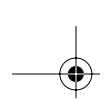
In fact, whenever I find myself rescued from some bad situation or habit, it is the power of Jesus' *salvation* that has lifted me. Whenever I experience release from sin or guilt or oppression, it is the *freedom* purchased by Jesus that I am experiencing. Whenever I know the homecoming welcome of the *Father*, I realize that it is the life and death of Jesus that is holding that door open for me. The richness of this gallery of gospel images drives home to me that all of the grace I know is found in Christ and that his grace is sufficient for me. My Christian life is the story of my ever-deepening experience of the gospel. I don't receive the gospel once and then move on to deeper teaching. My life's joy and work is to keep receiving, keep submitting to this wonderful gift. As Jesus said, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:29). And the whole gallery gives me great help and joy in that lifelong work.

This is how Paul described our job as disciples: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6-7). My call as a disciple, as one who was once saved, is to allow the Savior to completely work out his salvation in me. I am to put down roots into that same gospel I received and to build my life squarely on it. The call is to travel deeper into the halls of his grace in Jesus, to learn from the images there of "every spiritual blessing in Christ" and to let that truth shape my life.

And a life full of the gospel will produce a gospel full of life.

**Step 3: Proclaiming what we have seen and heard.** So, I let the power of God touch my life, and I then name it as the power of God in Christ, as the work of the gospel. Now I have a lot more gospel to speak; as I expe-





rience all these blessings that flow from the cross, I have much more to say. And I can do it with conviction. When I talk with my neighbor Kurt about our lives and struggles, I don't have to begin back with my high school days to talk about God's power. I can take our lives right now, as dads, and talk about how Jesus gives me strength to get through the day.

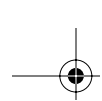
I think back to that seminar I led and the students who came because they knew there had to be a better way to share the good news than what they had. I recall the student whose testimony was like a drawer-full of unlabeled and unorganized photos. Our speaking of the gospel doesn't have to be a rummaging around in the drawer of our life, sorting through unlabeled, generic God-experiences that we think only other Christians would understand. We can come to see all these experiences as blessings of the gospel; they all come through Jesus. So each of those experiences with God, seen through the Bible's gallery of images, can be a testimony of the gospel's power.

I think of the other students who reproduced their clean gospel outlines. They are no longer stuck with one outline that made sense at one point in their lives and occasionally becomes helpful again. They can now see all of their God-stories as gospel-stories. Knowing my whole life with God to be the work of the gospel in me, I now have a living and present Lord to speak of. Like a melody weaving its way through a piece of music, the truth of that outline, and more, weaves through my life, right up to today. I have every wonderful thing he has ever done for me, seen in light of the Bible's images, to speak as gospel. When I couldn't see how the gospel connected to most of my life, it was hard to speak it with clarity and power. But now, as the truth of these images becomes real in me, they can come out in my witness. I can now tell the many sides of God's good news to those who need it.

**EVERY BLESSING MEETS EVERY NEED**

As I see Jesus meet all my need, I can see how he meets the need of the whole world. The good news we know is good news for everyone. The various gospel images show how "every spiritual blessing in Christ"





meets every spiritual need I have—and every need *we* have. I now have an entire gallery of images, of ways to proclaim Jesus. I can meet many people at many places, even if their lives and journeys are not like mine.

Being limited creatures, we can't hear all the sides of the gospel at once—even if we want to. We resonate with some part of it at first and then grow to understand more and more. And what strikes us first can be different from person to person. Now seeing the whole gallery, I don't have to bring people through the exact same understandings I had; an image of Jesus that I understood later may be the place where they first meet him. So, different images in the gallery not only fill more and more of my life with grace, they also can reach out to a variety of people.

I once had a classmate named Marissa with whom I was taking some public health classes. One day after class, as we talked over the problems of the world, she finally exclaimed, "So many of our systems are just broken and destructive. We need to change . . . everything! . . . the way whole nations work!"

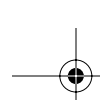
I said, "I know. But no system is going to work right, if the people in it aren't good."

She eagerly leapt on this idea, "Yes! That's another real problem: the moral problem."

Right there, I could tell that Marissa was ready to hear about the kingdom of God. This is an image that Jesus took the lead in using, and Marissa was in a place to be reached by it. She knew that the whole world needed an overhaul, an overhaul that included a new people within it. If I had tried to show her a picture of God's work that dealt only with personal guilt and personal freedom, it would have been too small a picture. Forgiveness of the debt of personal sin would have sounded good, but it wouldn't have been enough to cover the evil she saw. Any solution for the world—and any Savior—would have to be world-sized. The kingdom of God is a picture that shows a new people in a new and just order, brought by someone big enough to make it work.

Bobby, on the other hand, was not in a place where he was looking at the whole world. He had a much sharper need, much closer to home.





Addicted to drugs, trying to get a degree and having to work his way through school—his life was a blur. As I spoke with him, his testimony was as run-on as his life seemed to be:

Yeah, I would take speed to stay up all night and then I would go to class and then sometime in the afternoon I'd find myself driving to work, but I didn't even remember getting into the car but I had to go, I thought I probably had to work late that night—no wonder I was depressed at the same time I was running around like crazy. . . . I feel like I'm coming out of a fog.

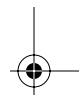
We stood talking in the midst of a Christian group at his college that had loved and listened (and listened some more) to him. The picture he had gotten of Jesus was one of a kind Lord who had forgiven all his offenses and a strong Savior inside him who could break the grip of the addiction that held him. This was good news he could see he needed. These were vivid images that made sense of what his life was—and what it could be.

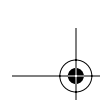
Knowing all the sides of the gospel, being familiar with that whole gallery of images, we can be confident that we have good gifts to give to any of our friends. Jesus really is good news for everyone we meet.

### LETTING PICTURES BE PICTURES

So the gallery of gospel images calls deeply to each one who enters its halls, and it gives them much to say to their world. But the breadth of the collection is not only an opportunity; it's also a safeguard. It is not safe to use just one image alone, not even a favorite one.

We are presented with these images of Jesus, each showing some truth about him. Each of them has a role, a place where they excel and people to whom they speak most clearly. We'll see that much more as we go on and look at each image in detail. We should know at the start, though, that as each image has a strength, it also has limitations. As we go through this gallery of gospel images, we must keep in mind what we're doing. We are looking only at images. Each one is like a special





mirror, catching one side of his glory. They show their nature as images by being two-dimensional. These are not the living truth in-the-round; they reflect the One who is. They catch one side of his glory, but they also have flat sides where they just don't help us. When we look at these images, we need to be as aware of their flat sides as we are of their clear messages.

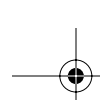
One way to go wrong is to focus on just one image to build our life, our witness or our church around. If we do, we begin to think that the gospel is as limited as our one image of it is. We think of the gospel as ending where the image does. We get caught by the flat sides.

In my own story, the law court of God was a powerful image. One bad night as a teen, I was left alone to consider the mess I had made of my life. I felt my wrong weighing on me. I also felt a righteous God looking at me, and I had nothing to say. But when I gave up to him, I suddenly found that he wasn't counting all that foolishness and evil against me. I felt my justification in God's court well before I knew the theology behind it.

But the law court image is both wonderful and flat. I began to realize that while I was given God's stamp of approval, my life was still riddled with sin. And it wasn't going away very quickly. Would I always be actually rotten inside, even though my heavenly paperwork was in order? And I wasn't only uneasy about *me* seeing my sin; I knew God saw it too. I knew God sees people as they actually are. What did he *really* think of me? The Bible did say I would eventually become a better person, more pleasing to God. But was that as sure and certain, and as free, as the gospel?

But other images in the gallery reassured me, once I realized they were gospel too. I realized that he not only *justified* me in a legal sense but also put a new kind of *life* in me. He not only let me off the hook from his judgment but also *set me free* from the power of sin. Once an enemy, I was *reconciled* and *brought near*—I had not been left on my own to try to become good. The unmerited grace of God started me on the journey, and that “grace will lead me home.” The rest of the gallery told me the rest of the story—and set my heart at ease.





### THE GALLERY AND THE CALL OF JESUS

So the gallery of images guards us from errors that would eat away at our lives. It shows us the fullness of what God has done. It also shows us the fullness of what he will do as we follow him.

Remember Marissa, who was ready to hear the gospel portrayed as a call to God's kingdom? She would also have to realize things about following Jesus that the kingdom imagery is not strong on. Repenting from rebellious self-rule and bowing the knee to Jesus and his order is a beautiful way to start—but she'd need more help. There are deep internal changes required of a citizen of the kingdom. Images of the gospel as forgiveness and new life would come along and help her there.

And Bobby would learn that freedom from bondage was just a beginning of the gospel's call to him. The image of freedom, while sharp and clear, does not answer the question of "free for what?" The shape of freedom is described more in the sonship given us or the new way of the kingdom, which he did begin to embrace with passion. He wasn't free to do whatever he liked. He began to live for others and learn about how to serve the poor and oppressed; he took up a kingdom-shaped freedom.

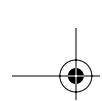
So, once the gospel has gone deep in us and then gone out to others like Marissa and Bobby, it will go down deep in them also. And once the gospel is taken in and understood by them in turn, it will flow back out to others.

### BOTH/AND

In this chapter, you've seen me switch back and forth between how the gospel speaks to Christians and how it speaks to those outside the church. I will keep on doing this throughout the book. This may bother you. You may want to know, "Is this a book about Christian growth or Christian mission?" I can only answer, "It is a book about the gospel." The gospel calls to us all. Christians cannot go out in mission if they are not growing in the gospel they are preaching, and that gospel will not come to anyone without calling them to a lifetime of growth in Jesus.

God is relentless in his drive to give everyone all the life they can pos-





sibly receive from him, and the gospel has not yet finished its work, even among God's people. I don't know any believers who are done learning how to believe. So the gospel is as much a call *to* the church as it is a call *from* the church. Christians and those outside the church are all called to the same table—the one Host satisfies all hungers. Our job as messengers is to call our neighbors to share the same cup and loaf that give us life. So, to be true to both you and the gospel, in these pages I can only show how he feeds us all. And the Bible's gallery of gospel images excels at showing his abundant provision for the whole world.

#### THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE

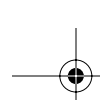
When that provision touches us and we come to know it, we sing his praises in all the language that God has given us in his Word. Listen to Athanasius, a fourth-century bishop and great defender of orthodoxy. Near the beginning of his classic *On the Incarnation*, he tries to succinctly summarize the work of Christ, but his language overflows, and he has to use a number of images from the gallery:

Since it was necessary that the *debt* owing from sin should be paid again . . . he offered up his *sacrifice* also on behalf of all, he yielded up his temple to death in the stead of all, in order firstly to make men quit and free of their old *trespass*, and further to show himself *more powerful even than death*, displaying his body *incorruptible* as the *first fruits* of the resurrection of all.<sup>4</sup>

Like the apostles he followed, Athanasius was compelled by this amazing Savior to reach for the whole gallery of images to speak the gospel. And then, at the end of his book, after considering the wonder of what Jesus has done, he steps back to look at the work of this Savior and confesses he is speechless:

In a word, the achievements of the Saviour, resulting from his becoming man, are of such a kind and number that if one should wish to enumerate them he may be compared to men who gaze at





the expanse of the sea and wish to count its waves. . . . All [his achievements] alike are marvelous, and wherever a man turns his glance, he may behold on that side the divinity of the Word, and be struck with exceeding great awe.<sup>5</sup>

“Exceeding great awe.” This great father of the church knew well the value of words, defending the church against heresy, helping craft the Nicene Creed and facing several periods of exile for clinging to unpopular ways of preaching Jesus. But he didn’t worship the words; instead, he used the words to worship Jesus and to lead others to worship him. Athanasius knew the deep awe that comes from seeing what God has done, and he engaged his mind to understand it. Having the experience of God’s saving power and also having that rich biblical vocabulary to speak the gospel, he could stand up and speak with a power that changed his generation and left a mark on history.

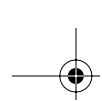
If we could only see all these gospel images clearly and know how they preach the gospel to us! How much they could enrich our life, our witness and our praise. One Charles Wesley hymn exclaims, “O, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise!” Just think—to be able to praise God in a thousand languages. Each of these images is like a language for expressing Jesus. And to speak about him truly is to praise him, because everything about him is excellent and wonderful.

When that praise is sung to those who are not in the Christian family, we call it witness. Seeing the whole gallery and knowing it clearly as a gallery of images that portray the gospel, we will have a powerful witness for the whole world.

**THE GALLERY AS STUDIO**

So here’s our task: We need to become students of the New Testament authors, learning from their skill with these gospel images. We need to sit at the feet of these masters and learn to paint for our people as well as they painted for theirs. Our role is to be something like the students of art who go to the Louvre in Paris. Every day there you can see artists,





young and old, sitting before works of the great masters with their pallets and their easels. They are learning by copying. They are taking in the greatness of the work before them and learning how to reproduce it. They want to be channels of that same kind of beauty. We need to get the art into us too, and we need to get it flowing out of us.

I saw these copyists in a magazine article and, even though I'd never met them, I was drawn in by their passion.<sup>6</sup> A retired maître d' was copying a Caravaggio because he was struck by the "palpitating beauty of the horse." I would've walked right by that painting; it wouldn't have made my heart race—at first. But this student of the masters could help me see a beauty I would never have appreciated otherwise.

Another painter was shown standing with a roomful of canvases, dozens of copies of masterpieces he had done. As he stood there with that roomful of images, I could see that he would have something to show anyone, no matter what they were interested in. I want to be that versatile and that able to connect with the people around me.

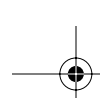
I was also drawn in by the intense concentration in the face of one young Californian artist as she worked at using the palette of the masterpiece before her. And I realized what was drawing me: the most fascinating thing about this copying process is not the paintings, but the painters. Time and time again as I saw photos of these copyists, I was drawn to them—the human artists. This process produces not only beautiful images but also captivating people, like the young woman who captivated that whole room with a simple and clear story of how God touched her life.

In our gospel gallery, the stories of Jesus are not the end product. That beauty transforms those who look at it and work with it; then they themselves become the work of art. You are to be the gallery. God's goal is an enormous hall full of living images of his truth, beauty and goodness. That will be a great witness to his glory. And true words will naturally come from his true people.

### THE PROGRAM

So, in the following pages I am not going to be giving magic words to





say. I am not going to show you how to assess your friends' need, show you how to pick an outline to match it and tell you how to deliver it so that they'll believe. What I will do instead is paint a number of these pictures clearly for you, so that you can get the gospel down deep in your mind and soul. I am going to show you how these images are good news for you and for the people in your world. In short, I am going to preach the gospel to you nine times over. By showing you the gospel through each of these nine images in turn, my hope is to sharpen your gospel vision, to build your gospel vocabulary.

After that guided tour through the work of the masters, I will give you a summary and some exercises as appendices. You can think of these as resources and lessons for aspiring art students.

My great hope is that, through more contact with this wonderful news, you will see and know the work of God more deeply in your life. Then it will be natural for a powerful gospel to come out of you. You will have engaging news that works today and great resources to help those around you hear God's call. In helping you be a deeper gospel-believer, I hope to help you be a better gospel-speaker. But first things first. The first word to eager disciples is "come and see."

So come and enter the gallery. Let it enter you. Jesus will show us who he is, and then we can sing it out to the world in a thousand languages.

