

Docent Research Group

Book Summary for *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*



Chapter One – The Best of News: A Reason To Get Up In The Morning¹

Tripp begins the book by asking a question: “What is the best news you can imagine?”² Winning the lottery? Marrying your dream girl? A profitable career? What are you currently building your life around? What inspires you to get out of bed every day? This book is about answering those questions and explaining “the best news a human being could ever receive”.³ Tripp adds, “It is about something so significant that it makes everything we do worthwhile, even though we are just flawed people in a broken world.”⁴

This book is not about good principles for living but good news that has happened in history. It is about the Gospel of Jesus Christ—God’s good news to the world.

God created the universe in perfect harmony. Adam and Eve walked in unifying fellowship together with God and with creation. Life was perfect without physical death or relational conflict. But Adam and Eve rebelled against God and sinned against him. Their sin “altered every thought, desire, word, and deed.”⁵ Death and suffering entered the world and the relationship of God with humanity and humanity with each other was broken. But God responded with grace, and “controlled everything [in history] so that someday he could fix what had been so horribly damaged”.⁶ He sent his Son, Jesus. Mark 1:15 records Jesus proclaiming that the kingdom of God has arrived at the perfect moment in time and that the good news has come to the world. All that was prior to the coming of Jesus was not purposeless, but purposefully moving toward God’s action in Jesus. God had promised through the patriarchs, priests, and prophets of the Old Testament that he would bring restoration and redemption, and in Christ he did.

The kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurated did not arrive politically and externally, but personally and internally. Jesus said that the kingdom is “within you” (Luke 17:20-21), which means that “the primary battle would be fought and won in human hearts.”⁷ Jesus came to deal with the sin that broke men and women’s fellowship with God and with each other. Jesus came

¹ Paul David Tripp, *Instrument's in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 1-16.

² Ibid., 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁷ Ibid., 4.

to call humanity to repentance away from self-absorption to himself. It is impossible to escape or defeat your sinfulness, which is why “the coming of the King is the best of news”.⁸ Change is no longer a pipe-dream with Jesus. He brings redemption to humanity so that men and women may glorify God and love one another.

Jesus is not offering strategies and principles to live by. He is offering something greater, Himself. Tripp states, “We must not offer people a *system* of redemption, a set of insights and principles. We offer people a *Redeemer*.”⁹ All change that discards Jesus or treats Him as secondary is not the change the world needs. The world does not need therapy. It needs Jesus. The Bible is God’s story “about people who are rescued from their own self-sufficiency and wisdom and transported to a kingdom where Jesus is central and true hope is alive.”¹⁰

The reason therapeutic principles are not sufficient to deal with the human condition is because the root condition of humanity is sinful. Men and women do not sin accidentally as morally-neutral individuals that need only be rehabilitated. Humans by nature are sinners. Behavioral change is not enough. Heart-surgery is required. Therefore external how-to’s and a good conversation may be helpful, but will not heal the human condition. Tripp states, “[Jesus] is our only hope. He has conquered sin on our behalf! He willingly offers us his heart-transforming, life-altering grace!”¹¹

Sin is similar to cancer, only much worse. It is “the ultimate disease, the grand psychosis.”¹² It is everywhere and you cannot conquer it on your own. We all feel its effects—physically, spiritually, emotionally, relationally, etc. Tripp identifies three aspects of sin: it breeds “*rebellion*”¹³, “*foolishness*,”¹⁴ and an “*inability*”¹⁵ toward righteousness.

Sin is willful *rebellion* against God. You are born with it. You have no choice on whether you will be a sinner or not. It is simply who you are. Tripp defines this rebellion as “the inborn tendency to give in to the lies of autonomy, self-sufficiency, and self-focus.”¹⁶ It is also *foolishness*. It causes you to distort reality by believing that you define your own reality. This “distorts our sense of identity, destroys relationships, retards growth, and derails change.”¹⁷ Finally, it “renders us *incapable* of doing what God has ordained us to do. This *inability* colors every situation and relationship of our lives.”¹⁸ Sin makes it impossible to do what is right before God and your neighbor: “In short, we need God.”¹⁹ The good news is that God did not leave humanity in its self-centered sinfulness, but came to redeem and rescue. God’s gospel changes

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

and restores humanity with himself and with one another. He works redemption, and makes sinful men and women instruments in his hands.

Chapter Two – In The Hands Of The Redeemer²⁰

You are meant to be God’s instrument not God’s conduit. A conduit is “a passive channel connecting one thing to another”, while an instrument “is a tool that is actively used to change something.”²¹ Tripp states, “God has called all of his people to be instruments of change in his redemptive hands.”²² God is the only one who changes anybody, but he uses anybody to be his tools of change. In fact, “*he uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things in the lives of others.*”²³ Every single one of God’s people is to be an instrument of redemptive change. The model of ministry that Tripp is calling for is one in which “*God transforms people’s lives as people bring his word to others.*”²⁴ This is not God’s call to church leaders, but God’s call to all believers. Ephesians 4:11-16 shows that church leaders are meant to be the equippers of the wider body of Christ to become instruments of change, not the change-agents themselves. Like the human body, the body of Christ only grows when “each part” does its work.²⁵ God calls you to be his instrument and desires that you join his work of change in the world.

The way in which you, as God’s instrument, become a catalyst for change is described in the second half of Tripp’s model for ministry statement. Namely, people are changed as members of God’s church “bring[ing] his Word to others.”²⁶ Scripture changes people. This does not just occur on Sunday mornings through the pastor’s sermon, but Scriptures are to be spoken and applied into the day to day of your life and within your relationships with others. Your life and your own local sphere matters because you are a part of God’s redemptive plan and purpose for the world.

Isaiah 55:10-13 establishes the life-giving power of God’s word. The Word of God “changes what it touches, producing beauty and fruitfulness in people’s lives.”²⁷ Tripp derives two main realities from these verses: first, we are God’s “covenantal children” who God has promised to bless and be with; second, the change God gives points back to his own glory because he produces the change.²⁸ The kingdom of God operates through God’s word extending through God’s people for the healing and fruitfulness of the hurting and broken.

How do you speak God’s word into other people’s lives? Should you just start quoting verses at everyone you meet? The Bible is not to be used as a “spiritual encyclopedia: God’s complete catalog of human problems, coupled with a complete list of divine answers.”²⁹ If worry is your

²⁰ Ibid., 17-35.

²¹ Ibid., 18.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 18.

²⁴ Ibid., 19.

²⁵ Ibid., 20.

²⁶ Ibid., 21. Emphasis subtracted.

²⁷ Ibid., 23.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 24.

husband's problem you don't just pull out all the verses on worry, quote them to him and tell him to memorize them thinking that you have done your work as God's instrument. The Bible wasn't written in a topical fashion to solve every felt need with a particular verse or immediate problem in your life. No doubt God can use particular verses and stories powerfully in and through your life, but biblical counsel must be connected to the overarching theme of Scripture. Tripp elaborates:

Being truly biblical means that my counsel reflects what the entire Bible is about. The Bible is a narrative, a story of redemption, and its chief character is Jesus Christ. He is the main them of the narrative, and he is revealed in every passage in the book.³⁰

A person's deepest problem is not necessarily the most broken circumstance or biggest sin of the day, but "that we seek to find our identity outside the story of redemption."³¹ Your biggest problem is not that you yelled at your daughter last night, but that you are a self-centered person more committed to your own glory than to the glory of God. The overarching biblical story of God in Christ coming to redeem sinners from self-sufficiency is the only thing that is big enough for *that* problem. Tripp states, "Lasting change begins when our identity, purpose, and sense of direction are defined by God's story. When we bring this perspective to our relationships, we will have a dramatically different agenda."³² Every Bible verse and every Bible story is to be related to what God has done in the person and work of Jesus Christ to properly interpret its greatest meaning and bring lasting change.

Tripp outlines three other central themes to the Scriptures and God's redemption story:

God's sovereignty – God is sovereign over all things in the universe without exception. He has a purpose for "his world and the people in it."³³ He is accomplishing his redemptive plan to call a people to himself in everything that he does. This brings encouragement to your both your best and darkest days because God is in control and working his good purposes even in the things that are difficult to understand. Tripp gives some more practical implications of the sovereignty of God:

Every time you love your enemy, you are resting in the sovereignty of God. Every time you speak lovingly and softly in the face of someone else's anger, you are choosing to rest in the sovereignty of God....Because he rules, nothing you do in obedience to him is ever futile.³⁴

God's grace – God is both powerfully sovereign and overflowing with radical grace. Even in response to the first sin of Adam and Eve, he did punish, but also acted with abundant grace, prophesying that the seed of woman, Jesus, would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15). Tripp describes grace as "the thick rod of rebar that courses

³⁰ Ibid., 27.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 28.

³³ Ibid., 29.

³⁴ Ibid., 31.

through the concrete of the biblical story.”³⁵ Throughout the biblical story, God’s people repeatedly sin yet he consistently responds in grace. The fact that God is gracious means that your deepest problem, namely, sin, has already been taken care of. It also means that as a recipient of grace you should pour out grace into your relationships with others.

God’s glory – Everyone was born desiring attention from others. Every baby and toddler desires your undivided attention for their own glory. They want their hunger satisfied, their bed time on their terms, and to stick their fingers in the light socket, even though it would harm them. This continues throughout life and increases in much more horrifying ways, destroying marriages and other relationships—“we crave glory that does not belong to us, and we step on one another to get it.”³⁶ Every man and woman is a glory-thief, because God is the only person in the universe truly worthy of glory. Tripp states, “We were made for his glory, and we are called to display his glory in everything we do.”³⁷

From these three themes Tripp defines the mission of the people of the kingdom: “to teach, admonish, and encourage one another to rest in his sovereignty, rather than establishing our own; to rely on this grace rather than performing on our own; and to submit to his glory rather than seeking our own.”³⁸

Chapter Three – Do We Really Need Help?³⁹

You need help. In fact, it’s not just you, everyone needs help. Whether you are in a difficult relationship, struggling with a particular sin, or dealing with the suffering of being sinned against—you need help. God has sent help, not by a how-to book, but in the person of Jesus. Through the foundation of the biblical framework—Creation, Fall, Redemption—personal ministry is understood by the way God works redemptively in the world.

Genesis 1 reveals that before sin entered the world Adam and Eve, though living in perfection, still needed help. Needing help is not an effect of human sinfulness, but human creature-liness. Tripp states, “[Adam and Eve] were created to be dependent. God had to explain who they were and what they were to do with their lives.”⁴⁰ When God spoke to them the “first instance of personal ministry in human history” took place.⁴¹ Contrary to other parts of creation humanity was dependent upon the revelation of God to glorify him properly. Men and women are “revelation receivers”.⁴² Without the Fall, every man, woman, and child still needs God’s help, and God gives it through his revelatory word.

³⁵ Ibid., 32.

³⁶ Ibid., 34.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 35.

³⁹ Ibid., 37-55.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

This means we are “*interpreters*”⁴³ as well. You spend your life interpreting what happens to you, what people say to you and whether you accept or reject the revelation of God. God has given everyone the ability to think and to interpret the world around them. How you think matters! Tripp writes, “Our thinking conditions our emotion, our sense of identity, our view of others, our agenda for the solution of our problems, and our willingness to receive counsel from others.”⁴⁴ God’s word gives “a framework for generating valid interpretations that help us respond to life appropriately.”⁴⁵

Another integral part of being human is that you are a *worshiper*. You do not merely interpret facts and receive revelation, but your heart has desires and motivations to serve something or someone. Tripp states, “God intended worship to be the motivational core of our lives.”⁴⁶ Tripp points out that there are only three possible options for a person: serving God, serving something else or serving self. If you are not serving God you are stealing worship that should be his alone. What/whom you serve is what/whom you worship.

Since the human condition is to be constantly interpreting, worshipping, or rejecting/receiving God’s revelation, all of life “is counseling or personal ministry”.⁴⁷ Human relationships consist of sharing, interpreting experiences and the giving and receiving of counsel. Therefore you are a counselor and you are being counseled. You are an influencer and you are being influenced. What matters is whether “that counseling is rooted in the revelation of the Creator.”⁴⁸

Counseling is never morally neutral. Counsel is always either rooted in the revelation of the Creator or the self-sufficiency of man. At the Fall, our first parents took counsel from another counselor besides God, the Serpent—Satan. Satan sought to tempt Eve to distrust and doubt God and trust herself. Ever since Adam and Eve believed the Serpent and their own ideas over God’s, humanity has had a propensity toward foolishness. Sinful men and women walk in practical atheism rejecting the revelation of God and his word, given over to many other ideas and worldviews that interpret life anyway but God’s way.

Even Christians who have trusted God’s revelation in Jesus, who has born the punishment for their sin, still need help. God has given the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to lead believers into truth, but this is not all God has done. God has also ordained that Christians participate in community, engaging in personal ministry one unto another. Hebrews 3:12-13 establishes the critical importance of having people in your life to warn you against the daily deceitfulness of sin. Tripp draws out a progression of sin within the hearts of believers from these verses, which move from sin to unbelief to turning away to a hardened heart. One does not engage in an adulterous relationship overnight, it starts with sinful temptation, then a steady prioritizing of the promises of lust over God’s command to remain pure, then moving on into physical compromise through sinful sexual behavior and ultimately culminating in a sinful sexual relationship. Every Christian has areas of sinful blindness that remain and are in need of the help of others to see

⁴³ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 46.

them. Due to this, Tripp gives two important qualities for every Christian: courageous honesty that “help[s] them to see what they need to see”, and humble approachability that accepts help and is not defensive.⁴⁹

Chapter Four – The Heart Is The Target⁵⁰

Human response is determined internally by the heart, not by external circumstances. Scripture confirms that the most important part of being human is the inner person of the heart (Eph. 3:16). The heart is who you are, and describes your “spirit, soul, mind, emotions, will, etc.”⁵¹

In Luke 6:43-45, Jesus explains that the reason people do what they do is because of their heart. He uses the metaphor of a tree and its fruit to describe the nature of person. The type of tree determines the type of fruit that is produced. Tripp draws out two conclusions of Jesus’ metaphor: first, “fruit equals behavior”⁵², which means that words reveal heart-problems; secondly, “the roots of the tree equal the heart”⁵³, which means that sinful behavior can only be changed by changing the sinful condition of the heart.

How foolish would it be for a person to go out and staple beautiful, crisp apples to an apple tree that consistently produced pulpy and wrinkly apples? Obviously the fresh apples wouldn’t do to well being stapled to the tree, but, more importantly, why not just get a new apple tree? Sadly, this is how many people have interpreted human behavior: just staple new behaviors on a person without fixing what is fundamentally a heart problem. Behavioral change is not enough when a heart transplant is needed. Personal ministry and counseling must seek to go after the human heart and not simply focus on behavior.

Scripture passages like Ezekiel 14:1-5 and Romans 1:21-25 lead Tripp to believe that the central problem in the human heart is that it worships idols and exchanges the truth for a lie. Idols of the heart are “anything that rules me other than God”, and sinful hearts naturally exchanges the worship of the Creator for the worship of the creation.⁵⁴ Therefore sin is “moral thievery”, stealing what rightly belongs to God, and “spiritual adultery”, loving something else more than God.⁵⁵ Everyone has a worship problem because everyone is both a worshipper and a sinner and naturally turns to worship that which is undeserving of worship. Humans don’t just make bad choices and occasionally engage in bad behavior—their very desires and motivations dethrone God in an attempt to enthrone themselves. Within the heart of every person something is horribly inverted and wrong. Tripp states, “Sin is much more than doing the wrong thing. It begins with loving, worshipping, and serving the wrong thing.”⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 57-74.

⁵¹ Ibid., 59.

⁵² Ibid., 60.

⁵³ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Idolatry is rarely obvious. It is not necessarily bowing down to a sculpture in your back-yard; rather it “operates in the subtle shadows of the thoughts and motives of our hearts”.⁵⁷ Idols may operate under the radar, but they are always influential. Tripp elaborates, “*Whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over the person’s life and behavior.*”⁵⁸ This means that “choices and actions” always reveal the idolatrous desires of the heart.⁵⁹ Another way to look at this theme is through the lens of Jesus’ famous phrase: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). Your treasure controls your heart, and your heart controls your behavior.⁶⁰ This truth demands the following questions: What’s your treasure? What desires control you?

Tripp gives the following five applications for personal growth and ministry:

1. Our hearts are always being ruled by someone or something.
2. The most important question to ask when examining the heart is, “What is functionally ruling this person’s heart in this situation?”
3. Whatever controls my heart will control my responses to people and situations. God changes us not just by teaching us to do different things, but by recapturing our hearts to serve him alone.
4. The deepest issues of the human struggle are not issues of pain and suffering, but the issue of worship, because what rules our hearts will control the way we respond to both suffering and blessing.⁶¹

Chapter Five – Understanding Your Heart Struggle⁶²

Since the Fall, conflict is a relatively common human experience. Conflict comes to marriages, parent-child relationships, work, church, etc. It is impossible to avoid it. James 4:1-10 describes how and why conflicts take place.

Conflict starts in the heart; chiefly in the heart’s desires. Tripp comments, “We do not respond to people and situations in the same way because we do not bring the same heart to them.”⁶³ Conflict does not only take place because of one individual’s desire against another individual’s desire. It takes place because different desires wage war within ourselves. Beneath our external relational conflicts we battle our own internal personal desires.

Desires determine your actions, and there are many desires within your heart. Tripp states, “Control is the purpose of war. So it is with our desires, which fight for control of our heart.”⁶⁴ He continues, “James is saying that our horizontal desires (for people, possessions, recognition, control, acceptance, attention, vengeance, etc.) compete with the Lord for the rule of our

⁵⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 71.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 72.

⁶¹ Ibid., 71.

⁶² Ibid., 75-94.

⁶³ Ibid., 78.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 79.

hearts.”⁶⁵ Which desire will rule you? The desire to set up your own personal kingdom for your own glory? Or will you submit to God’s kingdom and let him rule in your heart for his glory? James is not saying that all desires are inherently evil. In fact, he is primarily discussing inordinate desires that may essentially be well and good but should never have control over your heart. The problem is not desire, but when legitimate desires usurp God’s throne in your heart. For instance, desiring relaxation after a long day is not evil, but the way you respond when you don’t get it may be evil.

Conflict “*is rooted in spiritual adultery.*”⁶⁶ Tripp explains, “If adultery is the sin of giving someone the love I have promised another, then I am a spiritual adulterer wherever I give the rule of my heart to someone or something other than God.”⁶⁷ When inner desires wage war within and explode upon your relationships, you are not just sinning against another person but against God. You are committing spiritual adultery with God not merely engaging in relational conflict with someone else. However, there is good news. God is a jealous member in the conflict seeking to fight against other lovers and win your heart. Tripp states, “James says more. This jealous God is a giver of grace, the most powerful weapon in the war for the heart. God’s grace gives us power to say no to powerful desires.”⁶⁸ There is grace in your conflicts, because God is involved in your conflicts. Tripp elaborates:

Jealous grace doesn’t simply focus on the forgiveness of the past and the hope of eternity....It reminds us that we can win the one war that must be won, the war for the heart. His jealousy for our hearts is not a threat, but our one true hope. Our God is eternally unwilling to share our hearts.⁶⁹

How does the heart become captivated by desires? Desires are not static they are dynamic—they grow. Therefore one must be vigilant over one’s desires that they not trump the desire for God. Tripp outlines four ways that good desire morphs into sinful desire:

- First, the good *desire* of *I want* something becomes the *demand* of *I must* have something. When this occurs no longer do I merely want something, but “I must have what I have set my heart on and nothing can stand in the way.”⁷⁰ In this condition the other person become a means to what I want whether they like it or not and conflict ensues.
- Second, *demand* becomes a *need*. *I must* have becomes *I will* have. Tripp states, “Perhaps no word is used more poorly and improperly than the word *need*.”⁷¹ No doubt that things that I truly need (air, food, etc.), but many times needs reflect out of control desires.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 84.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 85.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁷¹ Ibid., 87.

- Third, *need* transitions into relational *expectations*. *I will* have becomes *you should* help me get it.
- Fourthly, relational expectations lead to personal disappointment. *You should* have helped me get what you want but *you didn't*. Tripp states, "...much of our disappointment in relationships is not because people have actually wronged us, but because they have failed to meet our expectations."⁷²
- Lastly, experiencing disappointment ends in punishing the person who disappointed. Since you *didn't* help me get what I wanted, what I thought I needed, *I will* punish you. I'm upset because you didn't achieve what I wanted in my personal kingdom. You did not grant me what my heart was enraptured by.
- This sinful growth of desire is not only damaging to relationships with others, but is an assault on the glory of God. Idolatrous desires have created love for something else in the place of God and in the place of others, thereby breaking the two central commandments of loving God and neighbor. Tripp states, "Problems in relationships are rotted in problems of worship so James's advice is clear: 'Start with God.'"⁷³

The chapter concludes with a discussion of Galatians 5:13-26, which shows that Christian's are "either shaped by indulging the sinful nature or by self-sacrificing love."⁷⁴ It also lays the foundational internal war of every individual Christian between flesh and Spirit. You have a choice feed the flesh or feed the Spirit. When that frustrating moment with your spouse comes are you going to react with a fleshly response or a spiritual response? Are you going to submit to the kingdom of God or assert the kingdom of self? There is Gospel hope in moments like this because you have been *indwelt by the Holy Spirit*—you are controlled by the Spirit not sinful desire; and you are *in union with Christ*—Jesus death did not make your salvation possible, but made it certain; therefore change is possible and it is coming. There is hope in personal conflict and in personal idolatry because God is redeeming you and is changing you. And there is hope in your personal ministry as God's instrument of change to other people's conflicts and other people's idols, as you place yourself in the wider "story of a war and a Savior king."⁷⁵

Chapter Six – Following The Wonderful Counselor⁷⁶

The chapter looks at the event and implications of the incarnation of Jesus Christ—the Wonderful Counselor—for believers. Tripp states, "God has called us to nothing less than *incarnating Christ* to others."⁷⁷ The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are not only to be believed, but to be modeled throughout your life. Tripp underlines the importance of understanding the incarnation as an event, an agenda, and a calling:

⁷² Ibid., 88.

⁷³ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 95-112.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 97.

Event – The historical event of the incarnation is critical to the Gospel—God in Christ came to earth to show himself through the person and work of Jesus. Before the implications of the incarnation are to be modeled, the event of the incarnation is to be understood and trusted.

Jesus has made God known to the world (John 1:18). He displays the glory of God to sinful men and woman who seek their own glory. One of the great problems of sinful humanity is that they cannot see God, and in Jesus God has made himself known to the world. Tripp writes, “The incarnation gets right to the heart of this struggle because it confronts people with the one thing that can make a lasting difference, the glory of God. The revelation of God in his awesome glory is the only thing that exposes the utter emptiness of all the other glories we crave.”⁷⁸

One of the ways that Jesus makes the glory of God known is by being full of grace and truth. Jesus is the “central character of the great story of Scripture” and he exhibits “the central theme of the story”, namely, grace.⁷⁹ Therefore grace is to be a central attribute of the Christian life and ministry. Your life is meant to be an agent of God’s grace pointing others to the forgiveness and change that is found in trusting Jesus. Jesus is also the truth of God and the “ultimate exposition of how God intends people to think and live.”⁸⁰ Truth is not a set of principles to live by or a philosophy to understand but is embodied in the person of Jesus. As Jesus related to people with grace and truth, in a similar way you are to relate to people with the combination of grace and truth and point them back to Jesus.

Agenda – The incarnation of Christ sets the agenda for ministry. The church is an incarnational community that reveals the grace and truth of Jesus. John 17:20-23 make clear that it is through the unity of the church—across personality types, gender, race, and social class—that God makes Jesus known. Tripp states, “Maybe the best way to think of the incarnation is an ongoing event: God made known, no longer in the physical presence of Christ, but in the glory of his work through his people as we live incarnationally.”⁸¹ The agenda of every Christian should be to minister in such a way that Jesus is revealed to the world.

Calling – In 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2 Paul shows that the incarnation of Jesus is a call for the church to live as God’s ambassador. Tripp comments, “The job of an ambassador is to represent someone or something....He stands in the place of the king (or the government of his country) wherever he is, whatever he is doing.”⁸² If you are a Christian God has called you to represent him 24/7 in every relationship and in every place. In marriage you’re an ambassador, in work you’re an ambassador, in leisure you’re an ambassador, etc.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 99.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 100.

⁸¹ Ibid., 102.

⁸² Ibid., 104.

Many times we don't live like this. We live like our own kings with our own kingdoms. We seek to cultivate our own little kingdom and not the kingdom of God. Many times the goal is "my will be done" not "God's will be done." This is sinful. Every relationship in your life is to be recognized as a relationship given to you by God to be a steward of and to be an ambassador of Christ in. Tripp outlines the job description of an ambassador of Christ as relaying the "*message of the King*", living in and responding to people with the "*methods of the King*", and displaying the "*character of the King*".⁸³

As an ambassador of King Jesus you are to live a life not just to get people to heaven, but to appeal to their self-absorbed hearts with the life-changing message of the gospel. Tripp states, "The focus of Christ's work is to deliver us from our bondage to ourselves! This is our most subtle, yet most foundational form of idolatry."⁸⁴ God is after your heart, and he is calls you as an ambassador to be after the hearts of others that they may be set free from sin.

The rest of the chapter outlines the rest of the book. Tripp examines four ways that you can "function as God's instruments of change in another person's life."⁸⁵ He uses the following four words that "represent four aspects of a personal ministry relationship, four ways to serve as an ambassador in someone's life"⁸⁶:

- **Love** – God is a covenantal lover. He commits himself to his church and promises to shape them into the image of Jesus. This kind of love is the foundation of change, and it is the kind of love that is to be poured out to the world through the church. As an ambassador, you are to pursue strong relationships and seek authentic change within the framework of God's covenantal love.
- **Know** – Knowing someone is more than just knowing about them, but getting to know their heart—their beliefs and goals, hopes and dreams, values and desires. This is the task of an ambassador to seek to go deeper than surface issues and ask penetrating questions that probe the heart.
- **Speak** – As Christ's ambassador you are called to speak truth to your neighbor into their lives and surrounding circumstances. It asks the question, "What does God want to say to this particular person through me?"
- **Do** – Ambassadors don't just talk truth they guide others to act on the truth. You are to seek to help your friend apply the truth that God has given.

Chapter Seven – Building Relationships By Entering Their World⁸⁷

The church is "God's wonderful mess."⁸⁸ Therefore as a part of the church, you are called to a personal ministry of being involved with the problems of people's lives. Tripp states, "The

⁸³ Ibid., 107.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 108.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 115-139.

church is not a theological classroom. It is a conversion, confession, repentance, reconciliation, forgiveness, and sanctification center, where flawed people place their trust in Christ, gather to know and love him better, and learn to love others as he has designed.”⁸⁹ This requires you to view people not as projects but as persons, and to view ministry as not distributing accurate theology, but love. The hope for the world is not theology, but the love of Jesus. Romans 8:31-39 and 1 Corinthians 13 establishes the truth that hope is found not in perfect answers, but in Jesus’ perfect love. Jesus loved self-sacrificially. He did not just provide statements of truth. He got involved with the mess of people’s lives. This is the ministry you are called to also—personal self-sacrificial involvement.

Relationships are not mainly for your fulfillment. People belong to God not you. Tripp views the work of salvation as the relational foundation of ministry: justification and adoption providing the means of acceptance into God’s family and sanctification as the lifelong process of personal transformation. God doesn’t enter into relationship with you because you’ve changed, but he enters into a loving relationship with you and changes you from the inside out. In the same way personal ministry has the following practical principles:

1. God’s redemptive activity always takes place within relationships.
2. God’s first step in changing us is to draw us into relationship with him.
3. Our relationships are essential to the work God is completing in us and in others.⁹⁰

Relationships belong to God and are one of God’s means of personal transformation. I need you and you need me for change. If two people in a marriage relationship understand this everything changes, because marriage becomes hopeful in God’s redemptive grace. Husband and wife are no longer enemies asserting their own agenda, but “stand on the same side” desiring “God’s will to be done in their marriage.”⁹¹ The horizontal focus of the relationship gives way to the vertical focus of God’s redeeming love.

Tripp gives four elements of redemptive relationships, two of which are covered in this chapter: enter the person’s world, incarnate the love of Christ, identify with suffering, and accept with agenda.

*“Enter the Person’s World”*⁹²

You must identify *entry gates* in your relationships to move it “from a casual relationship to a life-changing one.”⁹³ Entry gates are not persons or problems, but “a particular person’s *experience* of the situation, problem, or relationship.”⁹⁴ You must seek to find where a person is struggling in the moment. Tripp gives four identity markers that help you find where the person is struggling:

⁸⁸ Ibid., 116.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 123.

⁹¹ Ibid., 124.

⁹² Ibid., 126.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 127.

1. Listen for *emotional* words. (“I’m angry.” “I’m afraid.” “I can’t stop crying.”)
2. Listen for *interpretive* words. (“This shouldn’t happen.” “I guess I’m getting what I deserve.” “I wonder if it’s even worth getting up in the morning.”).
3. Listen for *self talk*. (“I am such a failure.” “This always happens to me.” “I don’t have what it takes to face this.”)
4. Listen for *God talk*. (“I thought I was doing what God wanted.” “He simply doesn’t hear my prayers.” “How could God let this happen to me?”).⁹⁵

Tripp gives the following examples of entry gate questions:

- “What are you struggling with the most right now?”
- “What are you feeling?”
- “What questions do you wish you could ask God?”
- “Do you feel hopeless? Do you feel like God is asking you to do the impossible?”
- “Describe how you see God right now. What do you think he is doing?”
- “When you can’t sleep what thoughts keep you awake?”⁹⁶

Listening is critical to the process because the focus is on the person not the problem. You are not to seek to solve the problem but to love the person. The person with the struggle needs to know that you have heard the struggle, that God is there in the struggle and understands it, and that you will stand with him/her. If you do personal ministry in this way there are three ways in which their heart will respond:

1. “Horizontal trust.”⁹⁷ If you truly care about the person and ask penetrating question and exhibit love trust will develop. When trust develops in the relationship the person will open up even more.
2. “Vertical hope.”⁹⁸ If you help the person to see God as being in the midst of the pain or struggle that they are dealing with hope will arise in a seemingly impossible situation.
3. “Commitment to the process.”⁹⁹ In the first conversation with someone who is experiencing a struggle—big or small—the goal should be to just have another conversation. It is in the second conversation that a “commitment to God’s process of change” can occur.¹⁰⁰

“*Incarinate the love of Christ*”¹⁰¹

Ministry is more than words. Love is not only spoken in words but shown in action. Tripp states,

⁹⁵ Ibid., 128.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 131.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 133.

As ambassadors, we are not only called to speak the truth but to be real, living, flesh-and-blood illustrations of it. We are not just God’s spokespersons; we are examples. We are not simply God’s mouthpieces; we are his evidence.¹⁰²

Tripp believes that Colossians 3:15-17 “contain one of the New Testament’s clearest calls to personal ministry.”¹⁰³ In this passage of Scripture Paul is “reminding us that what we ‘wear’ (that is, the character qualities we put on) to moments of ministry is as important as what we say.”¹⁰⁴ How you say something is as important as what you say. Tone of voice, body language, and your entire manner is critical to incarnating Christ to the world. Tripp gives four reasons for incarnating Christ in personal relationships:

- **“It is protection for you.”**¹⁰⁵ Whatever the person is dealing with be it anger, bitterness, depression, etc. will eventually be “directed at you.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore you need to be ready to forgive and ready to respond like Christ. Also, you need to be ready to seek Jesus for forgiveness when you sin against a person that you are talking to and trust the gospel.
- **“It offers a living example.”**¹⁰⁷ Your life should reflect your advice. How you counsel should be how you live.
- **“It gives evidence of what the Lord can do.”**¹⁰⁸ If you give grace, give wisdom, and give strength to the person you are ministering to it demonstrates “that God’s calling is possible” and shows that God presence is with you.¹⁰⁹
- **“It keeps Christ central.”**¹¹⁰ You are not a guru. You are an ambassador of Christ. Your job is to make Christ look great not to make you look great. Tripp states, “The most important encounter in ministry is not the person’s encounter with us, but his encounter with Christ.”¹¹¹

Chapter Eight – Building Relationships By Identifying With Suffering¹¹²

This chapter continues the theme of *love* as a central aspect of redemptive relationships. Primarily the chapter deals with love in the context of suffering.

Suffering is universal. Though levels of suffering rise and fall within individual lives, everyone is a suffering sinner. Therefore it is “common ground for personal ministry.”¹¹³ Tripp provides

¹⁰² Ibid., 134.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 135.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 136.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 136.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 137.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 138.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 138.

¹¹² Ibid., 141-159.

a biblical framework for understanding the relationship between God and suffering in the following:

1. God is sovereign over your suffering.
2. God is good in your suffering.
3. God has a purpose for your suffering.
4. God gives ultimate reasons for suffering. For instance, we suffer because of our sin and the sin of others, the flesh, the Devil, and God works suffering for the good of those who love him.
5. God's sovereignty over your suffering does not mean that sinners have an excuse or that suffering is not real and painful.

Tripp transitions into the third element of love in redemptive relationships:

*"Identify with Suffering"*¹¹⁴

As an ambassador of Jesus Christ you are called to model Jesus Christ in suffering. Tripp states, "You are a sufferer who has been called by God to minister to others in pain."¹¹⁵ You are called to minister to those in pain because Jesus Christ experienced suffering, modeled how to suffer, and ministered to others through his suffering. Hebrews 2:10-12 describes how Jesus identifies with Christians in suffering because he too suffered and is the elder brother in the family of suffering believers. There are three implications of these verses:

1. We are in the same family as Jesus.
2. We are in a similar position in the family as Jesus.
3. We share similar life experiences that Jesus experienced because of that position.

In the same way that Jesus shares solidarity with us we are to share solidarity with others. You must stand alongside people and not above them. You are a sharer in suffering not someone who is immune to it. You are sinner like those you minister too, and they must see this by your exemplifying a life of authenticity and honesty. You remain an equal with those you minister to whether they are Christians or not because the goal for everyone is always holiness.

What does it mean in Hebrews 2:10 that Jesus must be made perfect through suffering? Tripp answers, "Not only by being the perfect Son of God, but by proving himself to be the perfect Son of Man."¹¹⁶ This means that you are "being made perfect through the same process that Christ went through!"¹¹⁷ If Jesus was made perfect through suffering and took solidarity with you, how much more should you be made perfect through suffering and take solidarity with others? Tripp mentions six impacts that this incarnational solidarity has on personal ministry: it "*gives us the opportunity to make truth concrete for people*"¹¹⁸ by living a life of truth; it "*encourages people*

¹¹³ Ibid., 143.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 144.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 145.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 148.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

to depend on Christ rather than on us”¹¹⁹ by emphasizing Jesus as the change-agent not self; it “encourages humility and honesty”¹²⁰ by sharing your own struggles; it “redeems my story”¹²¹ by making the change in my life a launching pad for ministering to others; it “makes my life a window to the glory of Christ”¹²² by making clear that you are brothers and sisters in the same family with the same struggles; it “results in worship of Christ”¹²³ by pointing others to the elder brother, Jesus.

Tripp derives a model and methodology of the nature of compassion and of communicating compassion to others from 2 Corinthians 1:3-11:

The Model (2 Cor. 1:3-7)

“God is the source of true compassion.”¹²⁴ Your identity is in God not in prosperity or health or what someone else says about you. Therefore comforting others is not telling them that “everything is going to be ok” but that God will be with them and love them in the midst of anything.

“The comfort we have received from the Lord has ministry in view.”¹²⁵ Since you have received God’s comfort, you should comfort others.

“God wants us to share in Christ’s suffering.”¹²⁶ Tripp states, “Suffering does not mean that God’s plan has failed. It is the plan.”¹²⁷ Your suffering shows your brotherhood with Jesus.

“Even our suffering does not belong to us, but to the Lord.”¹²⁸ God owns your suffering and uses it for his purposes. Instead of viewing your suffering as something that belongs to you to be used how you please and responded to in the way that you want, view it as something that God has purpose for and something that God calls you to die to so that “[you] may live for him.”¹²⁹

“The redemptive purpose in all of this is hope in a fallen world.”¹³⁰ Suffering is always temporal. It is not permanent. Therefore hope is not in this fallen world and all that it offers but in the life to come.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 149.

¹²² Ibid., 149.

¹²³ Ibid., 149.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 151.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 152.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 153.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 154.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

The model of suffering that Tripp proposes is: “purposeful suffering, leading to the experience of God’s comfort, producing the ability to comfort others, resulting in a community of hope.”¹³¹

The Methodology (2 Cor. 1:8-11)

“Tell your story in a way that breaks down the misconception that you are essentially different from the person you are helping.”¹³² When telling your story of God’s redemptive work in a particular struggle make it clear to the person that you are talking to that you are flawed and have dealt with similar problems in your life.

“Always tell a completed story.”¹³³ Tripp writes, “Your story needs to include (1) a difficult situation, (2) your struggle in the midst of it, and (3) how God helped you.”¹³⁴

“As you tell your story, be honest in describing your struggles and failures.”¹³⁵ Highlight God’s grace in your struggle not your effort in overcoming.

“Be discerning and purposeful as you tell your story.”¹³⁶ Don’t explain the gore, explain the grace in your story. Show the hope not the horror.

“Always tell your story in a way that makes God the key actor in the drama.”¹³⁷

“Tell your story with humility, admitting your continuing need for grace.”¹³⁸

“Always make it clear that you are not what this person needs.”¹³⁹ You are God’s instrument of change not God.

“The goal of your story should always be worship.”¹⁴⁰ As an instrument of God’s grace your task is to help the person see God more than their troubles. The goal of telling your story is worship.

“Accept the Agenda”¹⁴¹

The final element of love in your redemptive relationship is accepting God’s agenda of change. God’s grace always leads to change. Justification always leads to sanctification. With this in mind you and those who you minister to must accept the pathway to change. In personal

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 155.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 155-156.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 156.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 157.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 158.

ministry you must “sturdily refuse to condemn” people and also “refuse to condone” sin.¹⁴² The grace God gives you is grace to forgive your sin and empower you to change *and* the grace to extend God’s grace of forgiveness and power to change to others.

Chapter Nine – Getting To Know People¹⁴³

Chapter nine deals with the second aspect of Tripp’s four words for redemptive relationships—*know*. Are your relationships casual? Does busyness keep you from going deep in your relationships with friends? Have you ever found out something that went on in a friend’s life or family hidden beneath the surface that utterly shocked you? Tripp states, “We tend to have permanently casual relationships that never grow into real intimacy.”¹⁴⁴ There are many reasons why we settle for causal relationships: two of them being that we don’t want others to really know our weakness, and we’d rather just discuss the superficial like shared hobbies or the latest entertaining movie or book. However, it is impossible to do personal ministry without the personal. Casual relationships are not redemptive relationships.

Hebrews 4:14-16 demonstrates that Jesus himself truly understands the human condition. Jesus is the great sympathizer who does not sympathize with his people from a distance but sympathizes in that he “really understands what it means to live in this fallen world.”¹⁴⁵ He knows physical suffering, relational difficulty, and sinful temptation. Jesus life was spent “thoroughly acquainting himself with all we would face as we endured life and waited for his return.”¹⁴⁶ Like Jesus you must enter into the other person’s world. Ask good questions and listen well so that you can apply the gospel to the specific person who lives in specific circumstances.

You know what doesn’t happen when you assume? Ministry. Effective personal ministry cannot exist if you assume that you know what’s going on in someone’s life. Just because you share similar experiences with someone or know fundamental theological truths about the nature of the human condition does not mean that you really know someone. Therefore, Tripp writes, “Don’t assume—ask.”¹⁴⁷ There are three ways to avoid assumption and eliminate vagueness in shared experiences that you have with the person you are ministering to:

- “*Always ask people to define their terms (What?).*”¹⁴⁸ You may read your own definition into what a person says—asking what they mean is critical.
- “*Always ask people to clarify what they mean with concrete, real life examples of the terms they have used (How?).*”¹⁴⁹ Ask them to describe what happened.

¹⁴² Ibid., 159.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 161-181.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 163.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 166-167.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 167.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 170.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 171.

- “Always ask people to explain why they responded as they did in the examples they have given you (*Why?*).”¹⁵⁰ Seek to discover the person’s “reasons, values, purposes, and desires” in a concrete situation.¹⁵¹

The questions you ask can be just as effective in personal ministry as the answers you give. God sends his grace to people through *answers* and *questions*. Asking biblically and gospel-shaped questions “*is doing the work of change.*”¹⁵² Tripp offers four principles for asking good questions:

“1. Always ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a ‘yes’ or ‘no.’”¹⁵³

Continuous “Yes’s” and “No’s” shuts down good communication. Good questions can’t be answered this way and “require the person to examine himself or herself and to answer in a self-disclosing manner.”¹⁵⁴ Tripp gives the following examples in a marriage scenario:

- What things in your marriage make you sad?
- What things in your marriage make you happy?
- Why do you think you have struggled as a couple?
- What do you think God is doing in your marriage right now?
- Describe the marriage of your dreams.
- What problems in your marriage do you see as your responsibility?
- Pick one area of marriage where you think you have problems. Describe what is wrong and what each of you have done to solve it.¹⁵⁵

“2. Ask a combination of survey and focused questions.”¹⁵⁶ *Survey questions* ask the panoramic and wide-lens view of a person’s life, while *focused questions* laser in on a particular area in a person’s life. *Survey questions* “help uncover themes and patterns”, while *focused questions* “uncover roots and causes.”¹⁵⁷

“3. Remember that certain kinds of questions reveal certain kinds of information.”¹⁵⁸

- Ask the *what* for general information.
- Ask the *how* to determine the manner and attitude.
- Ask the *where* and *how often* to find “themes and patterns”.¹⁵⁹
- Ask the *when* to determine “the order of events”.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 173.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 175.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 176.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 175-176.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 176.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 177.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 178.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

“4. *Ask a progressive line of questions, in which each question is based on information uncovered in the previous questions.*”¹⁶¹

Chapter Ten – Discovering Where Change Is Needed¹⁶²

Continuing on in the theme of *know* within the redemptive relationships framework, Tripp discusses how to organize the information you have gathered from a person in a biblical manner so that you can find where change is necessary. The key is to connect people to Jesus and people’s personal stories to God’s Story of redemption.

You do not always have to know what to say when ministering to people. It is ok to step back say nothing and prayerfully think about it for a few days. Sometimes it best to think about things and not seek to immediately fix it. After all, Tripp notes, “Biblical personal ministry is more about *perspective, identity, and calling* than about fixing what is broken.”¹⁶³ For instance in marriage the great need is not to resolve a couple’s marital conflict, but to show them how to “live out of an understanding of who they are, who God is, and what he is doing in their marriage.”¹⁶⁴ This requires living in the biblical framework that marriage is living “*now*” in light “*then*”.¹⁶⁵ Earthly marriage *now* points to the heavenly marriage *then* where Christ is the husband and his church is the bride. Therefore earthly marriage is prep for heavenly marriage. When marriage is lived in the light of that event present perspective gives way to eternal perspective and gives hope, because earthly marriage will never fully satisfy and was not ultimately what you were meant for.

Personal ministry must be based on good Scriptural exegesis and the exegesis of particular people’s lives. Tripp writes, “We cannot properly understand people without accurately exegeting Scripture, and we cannot properly apply scripture without accurately exegeting people.”¹⁶⁶ It is important when gathering information about a person that you seek to deal with the information biblically in order to do good biblical and personal exegesis. Tripp provides a data organizational tool using a biblical framework to understand and counsel a particular person:

“*The Situation. (What is going on?)*”¹⁶⁷ Outlining the answers to this question opens the door to understanding the person’s past and present—the person’s everyday world.

“*The Responses. (What does the person do in response to what is going on?)*”¹⁶⁸ Outlining the answers to this question gathers facts about the person’s behavior and helps reveal life themes and patterns.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 180.

¹⁶² Ibid., 183-197.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 185.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 186.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 189.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

*“The Thoughts. (What does the person think about what is going on?)”*¹⁶⁹ Outlining the answers to this question helps one understand how the person interprets their world and exposes the heart of a person.

*“The Motives. (What does the person want out of, or in the midst of, what is going on?)”*¹⁷⁰ Outlining the answers to this question helps one discover the ruling idols of the person’s heart.

Tripp suggests that as you talk to people about a particular problem, situation, or sin in their life you outline all that you hear under those four categories.

Why are emotions not included in the above categories? This is not because emotions aren’t a biblical category. The Bible is permeated with emotion and people’s emotions, and it is a major part of being human. The reason emotions are not a category is because they are a part of every category. Facts, behavior, worldview, desires, etc., all have emotional components. Tripp states, “Accurately grasping the themes and patterns of someone’s behavior includes recognizing the emotional color of everything that was said and done.”¹⁷¹ There should be an emotional flavor within every outline under Tripp’s categories because people tell their stories using emotive words and speaking with emotion (whether cold and distant or fiery and in-your-face).

Loving God and loving people requires that you seek to be patient with people taking time to ask questions, taking the time to listen, taking the time not have all the right answers, and taking the time to have several discussions so that you “bring the transforming grace of Christ to people *as they really are* in the mist of *what they are really facing*.”¹⁷²

Chapter Eleven – The Goals of Speaking The Truth In Love¹⁷³

No one wakes up in the morning longing for confrontational rebuke. In this chapter Tripp transitions to the word *speak* in redemptive relationships, and the importance of loving confrontation. Tripp defines rebuke as “bringing truth to where change is needed”.¹⁷⁴ In view of Leviticus 19:15-18 Tripp gives nine principles for biblical confrontation:

“Confrontation is rooted in a submission to the First Great Command.”¹⁷⁵ Failure to confront is failure to love God (Matt. 22:37) and recognize his lordship over relationships (Leviticus 19:15-18). Oftentimes not confronting someone in sin is because we love the relationship more than we love God. At times confrontation is necessary and a matter of obedience. It is not an option. But it is always to be done in love to God and love for the person you are confronting.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 196.

¹⁷² Ibid., 197.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 199-218.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 200.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

“Confrontation is rooted in the Second Great Command.”¹⁷⁶ The call to love your neighbor (Matt. 22:39) is a call to rebuke your neighbor (Lev. 19:17).

“Confrontation is our moral responsibility in every relationship.”¹⁷⁷ The fact that verse 17 calls for rebuking you neighbor in sin “...so that you will not share in his guilt” means that your rebuke is a moral requirement. This does not mean you go rebuke self-righteously. Tripp shows that the passage “does not assume two classes of people, the ‘rebukers’ and the ‘neighbors.’ The rebukers are the neighbors and the neighbors are the rebukers.”¹⁷⁸ Therefore you go in humility as an instrument of grace not willing to stay silent toward your neighbor’s sin.

“Confrontation is meant to be more of a lifestyle than an unusual event.”¹⁷⁹ Rebuke is to be a normative part of relationships not a unique event. If it becomes normative it also makes “interactions...more comfortable and honest.”¹⁸⁰ Speaking the truth should be a consistent part of every relationship.

“We fail to confront in love because we have yielded to subtle and passive forms of hatred.”¹⁸¹ Your response to sin is “either motivated by the second Great Command love or by some form of hatred.”¹⁸² Not confronting someone in sin because you love them is not love it is passive hatred.

“We fail to confront because we have yielded to more active forms of hatred.”¹⁸³ The context of the Leviticus passage shows that sometimes instead of confronting sin what takes place is injustice toward another’s sin, gossip about another’s sin, and revenge or retaliation against another’s sin. All of those are sinful acts not rooted in redemption. Rebuke should always be redemptive.

“Confrontation flows out of a recognition of our identity as the children of God.”¹⁸⁴ The rebuke and the rebuked belong to God. Do not forget your identity nor the identity of the one you confront.

“Proper biblical confrontation is never motivated by impatience, frustration, hurt, or anger.”¹⁸⁵ Loving rebuke should be the part of every relationship otherwise it gives the devil a foothold by bringing about impatience, frustration, hurt, or anger. When sin is not lovingly rebuked consistently in a relationship it festers.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 201.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 202.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 204.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 204-205.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 205.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 206.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 207.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 208.

“Confrontation does not force a person to deal with you, but places him before the Lord.”¹⁸⁶ Rebuke is not motivated by personal punishment, but by pointing people to Jesus.

Moving forward with confrontation can be dangerously self-righteous. Therefore you must start with your own heart before you confront another so that your own motives are godly. If you do not start with your own heart before you confront someone you may become angry, take things too personal, function as an adversary toward the one you’re trying to help, assert your own opinion over God’s word, and settle for behavioral change and quick fixes instead of heart-change. In order to speak the truth in love you must guard against these pitfalls to proper confrontation.

Everyone needs loving rebuke occasionally because indwelling sin causes the following: personal deceit, the mind to move toward ungodly and unbiblical thoughts, a waterfall of emotion to overpower biblical thinking, and personal experience that clouds out a biblical worldview of “God, self, others, [and] the solution.”¹⁸⁷ One of God’s remedies to the self-deception of indwelling sin is for his people, his instruments, to come alongside and offer rebuke. However, whenever rebuke is made two goals must be kept in mind: you are one of “God’s *instruments of seeing* in the lives of others” therefore rebuke must be Bible-shaped not opinion-shaped, and you are “an *agent of repentance*” meant to lead a person away from sin and toward the grace of God in Christ.¹⁸⁸

Rebuke must always be framed with the centrality of the Gospel. Tripp states, “Confronting people should not only confront them with failure and sin, it should also confront them with the gospel.”¹⁸⁹ In light of Romans 8:1-17 Tripp outlines a few *comforts* of the gospel and the *call* of the gospel that should be given in when rebuking a believer:

- The first comfort of the gospel is that Jesus has removed the condemnation that his/her sin deserves.
- The second comfort of the gospel is that indwelling sin is not the only reality in his/her life, but that the Holy Spirit of God indwells and enables him/her to fight sin.
- The call of the gospel is that due to the work of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit, him/her are called to kill sin.

Tripp summarizes the goal of confrontation: “not to force behavioral change, but to encourage people’s new natures with the gospel.... True biblical confrontation confronts people with much more than their sins and failures. It confronts people with Christ.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 212.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 213.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 218.

Chapter Twelve – The Process Of Speaking The Truth In Love¹⁹¹

Tripp finishes up his section on *speaking* in his redemptive relationships framework showing the agenda of confrontation. He states, “Our goal is to do more than read people a list of charges from Scripture or tell them what we think of them. We want to help people understand what is wrong and lead them to repentance.”¹⁹² Tripp gives four steps that one should take when confronting someone:

1. “**Consideration**”¹⁹³ – Many times when you confront someone on a particular issue and they begin to explain their story of what occurred they are not in their own story. Godly confrontation strives to help the person “see themselves” no matter what has occurred in their lives (their own sin or being sinned against).¹⁹⁴ When confronting someone the main question that you must ask yourself in this first step is: “What does this person need to see (about himself, God, others, life, truth, change) that he does not see, and how can I help them see it?”¹⁹⁵ Tripp asks five questions you should ask a person in chronological order that you are confronting:

“*What was going on?*”¹⁹⁶ This question helps you understand what is going on in a person’s life so that you can impart truth, and it helps you find ways to communicate to them that they too are responsible for their response to their circumstances.

“*What were you thinking and feeling as it was going on?*”¹⁹⁷ This question moves a person to look at the thoughts of their own heart, and helps disarm a victim-mindset.

“*What did you do in response?*”¹⁹⁸ This question automatically helps the person you are confronting see “the connection between their interpretation of their circumstances and their response.”¹⁹⁹

“*Why did you do it? What were you seeking to accomplish?*”²⁰⁰ This question helps people see the motivations of their own hearts. Tripp states, “In asking this question, we are teaching that the heart is always serving something.”²⁰¹ It exposes the idols of the heart.

“*What was the result?*”²⁰² This final question helps the person to see that “consequences are a direct result of the thoughts and motives of the heart.”²⁰³

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 221-237.

¹⁹² Ibid., 222.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 223.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 224.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 224.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 225.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., 226.

²⁰³ Ibid.

Tripp suggests that you have the person you are confronting keep a journal that responds to this question. This should not be done in one sitting but should be written in over a time-period of a few weeks. He then takes the journal and highlights consistent themes and patterns, and eventually has the person read their journal back to him. He states, “Again and again, God has used this simple method to open people’s eyes to what is going on in their hearts.”²⁰⁴

2. “*Confession*”

Confrontation should move to confession. This step asks the question, “What does God want the person to admit and confess?”²⁰⁵ Godly confession is not easy. Oftentimes it is easier for the person who is confronted to make excuses and use a lot of “‘buts’ and ‘if onlys.’”²⁰⁶ The goal of confrontation is to move a person to confession that they have a worship problem. They are worshipping someone or something else and not God.

Those who you minister too can be very difficult. Therefore you too must consistently have an attitude of confession. Beware that you do not become better by “*confessing their sin to myself*” or become angry “*confessing their sin to God*” or become a gossip “*confessing their sin to someone else.*”²⁰⁷ Confess these feelings to God when they rise up in your own soul when engaging in the process of confrontation

3. “*Commitment*”

The first two steps were they “put off” of confrontation the final two steps are the “put on” of confrontation. In this step you ask the kind of questions that cause the person to seek to make new commitments in their life. This step asks the question, “To what new ways of living is God calling this person.”²⁰⁸ Tripp states, “People’s commitments should be God-ward and not simply horizontal bargains with the goal of an easier, better life.”²⁰⁹ Seek to guide people into commitments that are heart-commitments and not merely behavioral change. Questions that move people toward commitment are things like: Should restitution be made? What daily habits should change?

4. “*Change*”

Understanding and commitments don’t necessarily mean that a person has truly changed. This last step asks the question, “How should these new commitments be applied to daily living?”²¹⁰ Tripp comments, “If commitment focuses on the ‘what,’ change focuses on the how....Change applies new commitments to situation and relationships of daily living.”²¹¹

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 227.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 231.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 228.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 229.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 231.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 230.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 231.

²¹¹ Ibid.

Tripp ends this chapter with the methods of confrontation, which he derives from the story of Nathan's confrontation with King David in 2 Samuel 12:1-7. One of the hallmarks of this confrontation is that Nathan helps David to see what he has done by not, at least at first, directly calling him out. Instead he uses the following ways of truth-speaking:

“*Two-way communication*”²¹²: Nathan allows David to talk. The confronted is not silenced by the confronter.

“*Use of metaphor*”²¹³: Nathan uses a metaphor to help David see and know the truths about God and the sins about himself that he needs to see.

“*Self-confronting statements*”²¹⁴: Nathan lets David essentially confront and indict himself by making the connection between the metaphorical example he gave and David's life.

Chapter Thirteen – Establishing Agenda And Clarifying Responsibility²¹⁵

In this chapter Tripp explains that since change is a lifelong process it is important to establish an agenda for change and clarify responsibility. This chapter and the next describe the *do* of redemptive relationships and conclude his “**Love-Know-Speak-Do** model of personal ministry.”²¹⁶

It is important to keep the end in mind when striving for change. You must keep the final day when all change will end and you are in the presence of the Lord in mind. 2 Corinthians 11:1-3 shows how the Christian life is to be understood eschatologically. That is: “today is preparation for tomorrow, and tomorrow is preparation for something else yet to come.”²¹⁷ You must live life in the reality that you are betrothed to Jesus and life is preparing for that wedding day. Tripp states, “...your whole life is premarital counseling.”²¹⁸ Therefore you must deny all false lovers, false saviors, and idolatrous inordinate desires that keep you from loving God. The way in which you do this is by valuing *then* (the day of Christ) more than *now*. The lie of sin is that *now* is more important and more satisfying than *then*.

God has ordained the church, his people, to be instruments of redemption reminding you to live today with the ultimate Day of redemption in view. Knowing this intellectually is not enough. A good doctrine of eschatology that describes the in and out of the final day and the return of Jesus is insufficient. Having good insight about how to change is not the same as changing. One of the means that God gives to effect change because of the ease of self-deception is other people.

²¹² Ibid., 235.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 236.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 239-257.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 112.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 240.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 241.

In the rest of the chapter Tripp gives two out of four objectives that help lead people on the journey of change:

“Establish Your Personal Ministry Agenda.”²¹⁹

Biblical personal ministry applies “the principles, perspectives, commands, and themes of God’s great redemptive story to the concrete realities of a person’s life.”²²⁰ Therefore there must be an agenda to help act on what they have learned. You are God’s instrument of helping the person “do” the truth and not just “know” the truth. Tripp provides three questions to facilitate setting an agenda for change:

“What does the Bible say about the information that has been gathered?”²²¹

This question is not answered by giving the person one Bible verse to memorize. Rather it is looking at a person’s life and heart through the bigger framework of God’s purposes, and asking: “What has God taught, promises, commanded, warned, encouraged, and done that address this situation?”²²²

“What are God’s goals for change for this person in this situation?”²²³ You must call people to God’s goals for them not your goals for them. You may not like them and be utterly disgusted by their particular sin, but you should help the person to see what God wants them to “think, desire, and do.”²²⁴ What does God want this person to “put off” in their life and to “put on” in their life?

“What are some biblical methods for accomplishing God’s goals?”²²⁵

Immediately fixing what is wrong is often not God’s goal because we attempt to fix in sinful ways. You must strive to find biblical methods and means to reach God’s goals.

As receive answers to these questions from the person that you ministering to, you should list under each question the many different answers so that you can truly have a clear agenda for change in the person’s life.

“Clarify Responsibility.”²²⁶

There are generally three types of people in the world when it comes to responsibility: the “irresponsible”²²⁷, the “overly responsible”²²⁸, and the “genuinely confused”²²⁹ about what their responsibility is.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 245.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 246.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 247.

²²⁴ Ibid., 247.

²²⁵ Ibid., 248.

²²⁶ Ibid., 251.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid., 252.

Tripp speaks of an inner *circle of responsibility* and an outer *circle of concern* that help identify what a person's responsibility is. The circle of responsibility is composed of those things that God has called you alone to do like be a husband, father, and member of the church. This must be *faithfully obeyed*. On the other hand, the circle of concern are those things that you are concerned about but that are out of your control and not your responsibility like your child being saved or your wife's love. These things must be *entrusted to God*.

If the inner circle of responsibility starts to include things in the circle of concern you become a mini-messiah trying to manage and do things only God can do producing frustration and oftentimes neglecting other important things God has called you to do. If the inner circle of responsibility becomes too small you will neglect what God has called you to do and usually do so under the guise of "praying for God's will" or you will think that God has failed when really you have failed.

Tripp concludes the chapter by boiling down the name-of-the-game in the Christian life being one of trusting and obeying. Be obedient to what God has called you to do, and trust him in the things that he has not called you to do that are not your responsibility.

Chapter Fourteen – Instilling Identity With Christ And Providing Accountability²³⁰

In the final chapter Tripp continues on the *do* aspect of redemptive relationships and emphasizes that community which encourages and constructs accountability is essential to change. Tripp returns to the final two objectives that help lead people on the journey to change:

"Instill Identity in Christ."²³¹

Christians are not saved by grace and then left to themselves to change—they are given a new identity in Christ. Therefore leading people in change requires reminding them of who they are. Tripp gives this practical implication, "There is a radical difference between saying, 'I am a depressed person,' and saying, 'I am a child of God 'in Christ' and I tend to struggle with depression.'"²³² He then examines 2 Peter 1:3-9 and outlines several points of the passage that speak to the importance of identity:

- Verse 8 assumes that there will be people who are not fruitful in the Christian life because they have not truly known and appropriated who they are in Christ
- Verse 5 establishes the truth the Jesus died and rose again so that Christians would produce faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

²³⁰ Ibid., 259-276.

²³¹ Ibid., 259-268.

²³² Ibid., 260.

- The reason that Peter gives to why people don't produce this kind of fruit is because they do not know who they are.
- Verse 3 makes clear that believers have been given "everything we need for life and godliness", which means that "God supplies his children with everything they will ever need to do what he has called them to do."²³³ The verb tense in verse 3 of "have been given" establishes the truth that God provides not only what you need for eternal life, but what you need to live a godly life. Of course, you will never be perfect in this life as you wait for the life to come, but "the biblical model of waiting is not simply about what you will get at the end of your wait, but about who you will become as you wait."²³⁴
- God is after moral change in the life and hearts of believers. This occurs when God rules the heart instead of the lusts of the flesh ruling the heart. God does not remove Christians from the world but has provided for change of heart within the wicked world (see verse 4). The world is not the problem your wicked desires are the problem.
- Verses 5-8 launch the life-changing reality that when you live out of your identity in Christ you will change. You don't change by changing behavior. You change by realizing your identity.

"Provide Accountability."²³⁵

The purpose of accountability in personal ministry is not pointing out wrong but "assist[ing] people to do what is right for the long run."²³⁶ It's not standing over someone, but coming alongside them; in doing so "we incarnate the presence of the Holy Spirit who is not only *with* them but *in* them."²³⁷ It only works if the person that is being held accountable actually is committed to accountability and change otherwise it will fail.

Tripp lists five practical helps that accountability brings:

"Accountability provides structure" because life is chaotic.²³⁸

"Accountability provides guidance" because wanting to do right is different than knowing how to do it.²³⁹

"Accountability provides assistance" because change is hard to do alone.²⁴⁰

"Accountability provides encouragement" because change is hard.²⁴¹

²³³ Ibid., 262.

²³⁴ Ibid., 264.

²³⁵ Ibid., 268-276.

²³⁶ Ibid., 269.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid., 270.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

“*Accountability provides warning*” because lack of change brings consequences.²⁴²

He also lists three questions to ask yourself when holding someone accountable:

1. What kinds of ongoing help will this person need?
2. How often will I need to be in contact with him or her for change to continue?
3. Are there other resources in the body of Christ that would be helpful during this period? How can I connect this person to these resources?²⁴³

Tripp concludes the book with eight principles of the lifestyle of a redemptive ambassador:

- “We need God and his truth to live as we were meant to live (Gen. 1:26; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).”²⁴⁴
- “Each of us has been called by God to be his instruments of change in the lives of others, beginning with our families and the church (Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 3:15-17).”²⁴⁵
- “Our behavior is rooted in the thoughts and motives of our hearts. People and situations only prompt our hearts to express themselves in words and actions (Prov. 4:23; Luke 6:43-45; Mark 7:20-23; Matt. 23:25; James 4:1-10).”²⁴⁶
- “Christ has called us to be his ambassadors, following his message, methods, and character (2 Cor. 5:14-21).”²⁴⁷
- “Being an instrument of change involves incarnating the love of Christ by sharing in people’s struggles, identifying with their suffering, and extending God’s grace as we call them to change.”²⁴⁸
- “Being an instrument of change means seeking to know people by guarding against false assumptions, asking good questions, and interpreting information in a distinctly biblical way (Prov. 20:5; Heb. 4:14-16).”²⁴⁹
- “Being an instrument of change means speaking the truth in love. With the gospel as our comfort and call, we can help people see themselves in God’s Word and lead them to repentance (Rom. 8:1-17; Gal. 6:1-2; James 1:22-25).”²⁵⁰

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid., 271.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 272.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 273.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

- “Being an instrument of change means helping people do what God calls them to do by clarifying responsibility, offering loving accountability, and reminding them of their identity in Christ (Phil. 2:1-14; 2 Peter 1:3-9; 1 John 3:1-3; Gal. 6:2).”²⁵¹

If you take up the task of this book to be an instrument of change you are taking up the task of “the most important, lasting, and beautiful thing that has ever been done—redemption.”²⁵² In view of that wonderful reality, trust Jesus the Redeemer to help you be an instrument of change and incarnate him to those around you.

For further study Tripp gives five appendixes:

- ***Opening Blind Eyes: Another Look At Data Gathering***²⁵³
- ***What the Counselor Brings To The Process Of Data Gathering***²⁵⁴
- ***Strategies For Data Gathering***²⁵⁵
- ***Doctrines That Drive Homework***²⁵⁶
- ***Homework And Four Phases Of Counseling***²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ Ibid., 274.

²⁵² Ibid., 275.

²⁵³ Ibid., 277-287.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 288-300.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 301-317.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 318-328.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 329-354.