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Signature:

Phillip Lee

Date

SOIL: A Study of Sin, Self, and Salvation

By

Phillip Lee
Doctor of Ministry

Candler School of Theology

Dr. Kendall Soulen
Project Consultant

Dr. Jennifer Ayres
Director of DMin Program

Abstract

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By Phillip Lee

Modern, secular Christendom is suffering from a lack of discipleship that tills souls in such a way that produces holistic spiritual health. While many pulpits turn into platforms and pastors evolve into influencers and personalities, the people in the pews suffer silently under dim lights and loud music. SOIL is a response to this problem, aiming to complement preexisting discipleship groups with an innovative paradigm of sin. This paradigm evokes an exposition of one's self, guided by historic views of concupiscence and a framework for practicing confession. This practice paves a way for souls to enter back into a kind of "good" that once was, will ultimately be, but is desperately yearned for today. These tools and utilities are collated into a digital, online platform, accessible by anyone from anywhere at <https://soil.study>.

SOIL: A Study of Sin, Self, and Salvation

By

Phillip Lee

University of Colorado at Denver, 2009
Reformed Theological Seminary in Atlanta, 2017

Project Consultant: Kendall Soulen, Ph.D.

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Table of Contents

1.1 Introduction: Ministry Context	1
1.2 Introduction: Pivots During the Pandemic	2
Data 1.0 Project Roster	4
2.1 The Problem: An Indictment of Evangelical America	5
2.2 The Problem: A New Spiritual Proletariat	8
3.1 The Solution: SOIL	11
4.1 Excavating Sin	13
Figure 1.1 Definitions	13
Figure 1.2 Architecture	14
4.2 Excavating Sin: An Example from the Workplace	15
4.3 Excavating Sin: Affections, Desires, and Malice	17
Figure 1.3 Sin Paradigm	19
4.4 Excavating Sin: Repentance and Redemption	19
4.5 Excavating Sin: Application	21
Figure 2.1 Printable Paradigm	21
4.6 Excavate Sin: Case Study	22
5.1 Exposit the Self	24
5.2.1 The Seed and the Birds: Exposition	25
Paradigm 1. The Seed and the Birds	25
5.2.2 The Seed and the Birds: Illustration	26
5.2.3 The Seed and the Birds: Application	27
5.3.1 The Seed and the Sun: Exposition	28
Paradigm 2. The Seed and the Sun	28
5.3.2 The Seed and the Sun: Illustration	29
5.3.3 The Seed and the Sun: Application	30
5.4.1 The Seed and the Thorns: Exposition	31
Paradigm 3. The Seed and the Thorns	31
5.4.2 The Seed and the Thorns: Illustration	31

5.4.3 The Seed and the Thorns: Application	32
5.5 Practicing Confession	33
Figure 3.1 Layers of Confession	34
Figure 3.2 Concentric Cycles of Confession	36
6.1 Exegete Salvation	38
Figure 4.1 The Bridge to Life: The Problem	38
Figure 4.2 The Bridge to Life: The Solution	39
Figure 4.3 The Cross Chart: Progress	40
Figure 4.4 The Cross Chart: Work	42
6.2 Exegete Salvation: An Addiction to Works-Righteousness	43
6.3 Exegete Salvation: The Courage to Be	45
Figure 4.5 The Cross Chart: Be	46
6.4 Exegete Salvation: The Kalos Paradigm	47
Figure 5.1 Arenas of the Christian Life	49
Figure 5.2 The Kalos Paradigm	51
Figure 5.3 Major Dangers in the Kalos Paradigm	52
Figure 5.4 Nuanced Dangers in the Kalos Paradigm	53
6.5 Exegete Salvation: Summary	54
7.0 Conclusion	56
Appendix I: Healthy Discipleship Contexts	59
Appendix 1.0 Healthy Discipleship Group Parameters	60
Appendix II: Metaphysical vs. Existential	63
Bibliography	66

1.1 Introduction: Ministry Context

In March of 2020, a new, visionary pastor of a historic church hailing from a globally recognized and renowned family of churches, created an associate pastor position for me to oversee the English-speaking, next-generation Asian-American young adults and develop a new, English Ministry for any and all in a similar demographic. The church was strategically located in the heart of a technology center called Bellevue, just a few minutes from Redmond—a city submerged by Microsoft’s headquarters, extension campuses, and its more than 40,000 employees. Tech-industry leaders like Amazon, Expedia, and Nintendo have also established headquarters in the area, competing with the rest of FAANG¹ for real estate and city influence. The result is a massive, circulating wave of millennials from across the world who move into and out of the area for their chance to work at one of the biggest, most prestigious, and most competitive technology companies in the country—and the vision for my relocation was to create a targeted English Ministry that would capitalize on the familiarity of the long-standing first-generation church (called Bread of Life Christian Church in Seattle) and implement second-generation, Westernized practices of ministry to reach a continuously growing and changing demographic of Asian-American tech-workers and tech-students.

Prior to the pandemic, Bread of Life Christian Church was composed of 180+ active members who primarily commuted from the neighboring cities—most of whom had at least one family member working for a major technology company. The congregation was highly educated and even more economically mobile as travel between the U.S. and mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia, and/or Singapore was easy and common. The English Ministry (or the

¹ That is, Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, and Google

ingredients to create the ministry) included three families, one part-time staff, and three key volunteers who oversaw worship, administration, and small groups. Attendance for the English-speaking side of the church enveloped middle schoolers, high schoolers, college students, and working professionals together in one space wherein those who were older would lead and command the culture of the ministry for the younger. These groups met regularly mid-week for fellowship groups and would participate in Chinese-speaking, churchwide events annually (e.g. Chinese New Year, Christmas, churchwide retreats, network conferences, etc.).

1.2 Introduction: Pivots During the Pandemic

My first Sunday at the church, following numerous preliminary meetings over Zoom, e-mail, and during my candidacy trip, was met with a dramatically different outset: where I had once candidated at a vibrant, active congregation, I had arrived to a masked, fearful, anxious, and reserved remnant. During our first staff meeting, the church decided to pivot online due to the expected spread of COVID—a disease still unfamiliar in the U.S. but already feared by the many congregants who had homes, families, and businesses in China, Taiwan, and South East Asia. This first pivot was prior to resolving one of the major threats discovered during an initial SWOT of the church: no one captained congregational communication and churchwide news travelled sparsely, often with confusing or contradicting details. As such, some members showed up in person the following week to closed and locked church doors, while others joined a Zoom call that was disorganized and disorienting as details for decisions to be made were yet to be finalized. The result was an immediate disengagement from over 40% of the pre-pandemic members. Over the course of six months, these members opted out of our

discombobulated Zoom meetings to watch well-produced online worship experiences.

Similarly, small group engagements began to wane as disorganization and untrained small group leaders could not manage consistent meeting times, curricula, and direction. Within the first six to eight months of the pandemic, the English-speaking congregation was reduced to 20% of its initial engagement, including each small group leader and key volunteers. The only leader who remained was the part-time staff member.

As a result, after much prayer and consideration, the following pivot was made to reframe the context of ministry and, for myself, the purpose behind why I sensed God’s calling to the Pacific Northwest at such a time as a pandemic: instead of keeping people involved in a particular ministry, my calling was to minister to the people God would make present. The results were two years spent with a group of women and men faithfully gathering in one or more of the following ways:

1. Sunday Worship: This was a “large” group online meeting with one-directional communication inclusive (host to audience) of liturgical worship and preaching.
2. Midweek Life Group: This was a “small” group online meeting with multi-directional communication, leaning heavily on group discussion, individual sharing, and Bible studies.
3. Bi-weekly One-on-Ones: These one-on-one (or, at most, one-on-two) meetings took on a more counseling and coaching posture, investigating struggles unique to individuals and exploring Family of Origin issues along with past and current traumas.

This group of women and men varied in age, race, education, and spiritual background. With participant permission, the following data was collected:

Name	Pronoun	Age	1	2	3	De-C	Un-C	O-C	N-C
RM	He	33				X			

TO	He	32			X	X			
JL	He	28	X	X	X				
JT	She	25	X	X	X				
KL-1	He	25		X	X			X	
KL-2	She	22		X	X	X			
HL	She	23		X	X			X	
ST	She	22	X	X					
ZM	He	22		X	X		X		
CL-1	He	22	X	X	X				
CL-2	He	22		X	X	X			
JC	He	18	X	X	X				
ET	He	18	X		X				
JX	He	18	X		X				
SC	He	17	X	X					
CC	She	15	X	X					
AG	She	15		X					X
TL	She	17		X			X		

Data 1.0 Project Roster

In this chart, numbers 1, 2, and 3 refer to one of the three types of engagement previously mentioned. “De-C” refers to “de-churched” wherein a participant self-identifies as having gone to church for more than one year in the past and is no longer an active part of a church *and* no longer believes in the tenets of Christianity.² “Un-C” refers to “un-churched” wherein a participant self-identifies as someone who is not currently part of a church but still believes in the tenets of Christianity. “O-C” refers to “other-church” wherein a participant is a member of a church that is not my direct ministry context. Lastly, “N-C” refers to a participant who self-identifies as someone who has never visited a church, regardless of her or his beliefs.

The pivot from ministry planting and development toward person-to-person, life-on-life, online discipleship brought to surface a stark realization: throughout the course of my 17 years

² For this project, these tenets are summarized by the Apostles’ Creed.

in vocational ministry in now three major U.S. cities, I am beginning to see a crisis in discipleship. People are simply not being disciplined, despite a growing desire for and definite need for more discipleship. In their 2015 report on “The State of Discipleship,” the Barna Group identified that “People are lonelier, more distracted and more tethered to their screens, and searching for meaningful lives.”³ The study found that only 20 percent of Christian adults are involved in some sort of discipleship activity. The impact of this crisis exponentially compounded by an isolating, disturbing, and painful pandemic, illuminates the profoundly problematic consequences of a discipleship-less Christianity in the modern American Church.

2.1 The Problem: An Indictment of Evangelical America

American political analyst Yuval Levin identified a particular assumption in what is now popularly called “Evangelicalism”: “And yet, because the very bulk of social conservatives in America are practicing Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox Christians, and because their social conservatism—their attachment to traditional views about morality—is often an inseparable extension of their religious convictions and commitments, it is reasonable to tie a discussion of the state of American social conservatism to a discussion of the state of traditionalist American Christianity.”⁴ Levin continues by noting that “[these] Americans were attached to a vague cultural conservatism mostly because of the seemingly broad consensus around it, rather than by a deep personal commitment. As that consensus, like most forms of consensus in our national life, has frayed, their attachment has weakened.” What is then born out of the fray is

³ “New Research on the State of Discipleship,” 14 March 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/>

⁴ Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 157-158.

arguably what Charles Taylor would consider as symptomatic of a secular age. Taylor writes, “...in our ‘secular’ societies, you can engage fully in politics without ever encountering God, that is, coming to a point where the crucial importance of the God of Abraham for this whole enterprise is brought home forcefully and unmistakably. The few moments of vestigial ritual or prayer barely constitute such an encounter today, but this would have been inescapable in earlier centuries in Christendom.”⁵

While such a distinction may seem and sound like liberation for many, Mark Sayers suggests otherwise:

“In the democratic, egalitarian spirit of our day, we hold in suspicion positions of social authority, yet we submit to the power of peers... We have moved from a culture based upon hierarchy to a peerarchy. Ironically, we flee from relational distinctions and boundaries, yet without these traditions and boundaries we become mired in codependency.”⁶

Sayers says elsewhere that the resulting secular world has become a “construction site where walls—physical, cultural, and spiritual—are being simultaneously erected and torn down. All in an effort to keep the chaos at bay, to reach for the purity of a utopia, to find a sense of home, and security.”⁷ As if to dethrone one tyranny only to erect another, secularism—and its particular impact on the local church—seems to be creating and successfully capturing a new kind of Christian culture, reminiscent of Alexis de Tocqueville’s famous indictment of despotism.⁸ Called “cancel culture” in some spaces or, in its inverted form, a “fear of missing

⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) 1.

⁶ Mark Sayers, *Facing Leviathan* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014).

⁷ Mark Sayers, *Strange Days* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017), 45.

⁸ “Under the absolute sway of one man the body was attacked in order to subdue the soul; but the soul escaped the blows which were directed against it and rose proudly superior. Such is not the course adopted by tyranny in democratic republics; there the body is left free, and the soul is enslaved. The master no longer says: “You shall think as I do or you shall die”; but he says: “You are free to think differently from me and to retain your life, your

out” (FOMO), it seems that this now secular age has indicted the American Church in its inability to conform and, in response, whether with intention or without, the Church has crippled in compliance in order to remain a part of the age.

In his climactic work, Habits of the Heart, Robert Bellah provides the following insights regarding the self in a modern, secular age:

“Clearly, the meaning of one's life for most Americans is to become one's own person, almost to give birth to oneself. Much of this process, as we have seen, is negative. It involves breaking free from family, community, and inherited ideas. Our culture does not give us much guidance as to how to fill the contours of this autonomous, self-responsible self, but it does point to two important areas. One of these is work, the realm, par excellence, of utilitarian individualism... The other area is the lifestyle enclave, the realm, par excellence, of expressive individualism.”⁹

In ages passed, utility and expression did not equate to identity but, as Charles Taylor identifies in A Secular Age, family and heritage rooted one's sense of self. The role of the local church, therein, was to curate families and cultivate a profound sense of community—the very thing Sayers argues the modern soul seeks, even in its attempt to disenfranchise the church out of distaste for its political affiliations. Rodney Stark provides a glimpse of the church's former role in the age:

“[Christianity] revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and the impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers,

property, and all that you possess; but you are henceforth a stranger among your people. You may retain your civil rights, but they will be useless to you, for you will never be chosen by your fellow citizens if you solicit their votes; and they will affect to scorn you if you ask for their esteem. You will remain among men, but you will be deprived of the rights of mankind. Your fellow creatures will shun you like an impure being; and even those who believe in your innocence will abandon you, lest they should be shunned in their turn. Go in peace! I have given you your life, but it is an existence worse than death.” (https://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/DETOC/1_ch15.htm)

⁹ Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press), 83.

Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.”¹⁰

The clear pivot in the modern church is to now emphasize expressive individualism at the expense of Her historically radical collectivism. An audit of one year’s worth of sermons given at the largest 100 churches in America reveals a stunningly similar pattern, reflective not only of the priorities of the modern American Church but a culture in modern American Christendom, emphatic of a kind of individualism that borders isolationism in a jarring attempt to placate the despot of secularism.¹¹

2.2 The Problem: A New Spiritual Proletariat

Perhaps the greatest cost of the Church’s pivot toward secularism is Her renegotiation of who occupies the pews and who commands the pulpit. Where once there was no distinction, as the Apostle Paul would write, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him”—now there seems to be a great distance and unbridged chasm.¹² With the rise of the “digital platform,” perfected by social media and a globalized world connected by the internet, it has arguably never been easier to become more than an under-shepherd to God’s sheep but an altogether different

¹⁰ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 161.

¹¹ “Largest Participating Churches Revisited,” 14 March 2021, <https://outreach100.com/largest-churches-in-america>.

¹² Romans 10:12 English Standard Version

class of Kingdom Citizen: an influencer.¹³ As pastors now command platforms instead of pulpits, the pews seem to be no longer filled with people but a new kind of proletariat: a monochrome workforce necessary to build the pastor's popularity and to contribute to his or her multi-thousand dollar wardrobe from head to toe.¹⁴ This proletariat remains entirely replaceable and perpetually unknown, hidden under the dim lights of an auditorium and muted beneath a thundering sound system. Cycling through personal problems and pains, these people are often called upon only when it befits and benefits the platform—a platform that is often too preoccupied with itself to enter into the messy myriad of the many who place their trust in the power provided to their pastor.¹⁵

In response to this now widespread, commonly found culture in churches across America, Rosaria Butterfield notes, "I think that churches would be places of greater intimacy and growth in Christ if people stopped lying about what we need, what we fear, where we fail, and how we sin."¹⁶ As a result of its co-opting of secularism and the supremacy of individualism, the modern American Church seems to be housing many who are suffering from an inability to be known, despite the increasing popularity of their pastors. Similarly, Stanley Hauerwas makes the following reflection: "I fear that much of the Christianity that surrounds us assumes our task is to save appearances by protecting God from Job-like anguish. But if God is the God of Jesus

¹³ Allie Jones, "When an Influential Pastor Becomes an #Influencer," 25 April 2019, 14 March 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/9kxyq7/when-an-influential-pastor-becomes-an-influencer>.

¹⁴ Sarah Bailey, "Preachers and their \$5,000 sneakers: Why one man started an Instagram account showing churches' wealth," 22 March 2021, 14 March 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/03/22/preachers-sneakers-instagram-wealth/>

¹⁵ Perhaps it is for this reason that most of the Top 100 Largest Churches in America failed to address racial inequality, to lament the murders of God's beloved, Black sons and daughters, nor boldly proclaim or actively participate in measures meant for reparation, reconciliation, or communal restoration.

¹⁶ Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014)

Christ, then God does not need our protection. What God demands is not protection, but truth.”¹⁷ For this reason, it has never been more necessary for another pivot in American Christendom, well envisioned by Howard Thurman:

Some say, “Do this, do that,” / Or, “Give up your goods. Hold nothing back / And free yourself to find your way.” / Again, “Commit your way to something good / That makes upon your life the great demand. / Place upon the altar all hopes and dreams / Leaving no thing untouched, no thing unclaimed.” / And yet, no peace... / “what more?” I ask with troubled mind. / The answer... moving stillness. / And then / The burning stare of the eyes of God / Pierces my inmost core / Beyond my strength, beyond my weakness, / Beyond what I am, / Beyond what I would be, / Until my refuge is in [God] alone. / “This... This above all else I claim,” God says.¹⁸

While it may seem to some that Thurman is calling hearers to a sort of heroic self-sacrifice,

Barbara Brown Taylor argues that Thurman is actually inviting listeners to the opposite:

“Thurman was telling me how little peace there was in following familiar calls to faith. Even a man like him, who lived his whole life straining every nerve to do his best, could find himself at the dead end of a false road, wondering what happened.”¹⁹ If the American Church could follow Thurman into a necessary spiritual biopsy, diagnosing the detriment of secularism’s expressive individualism and returning to its ancient expressions of beautifully fractured fidelity, perhaps a resurgence not unlike those of the Great Awakenings can return saltiness and light to the people and pews, even at the cost of a popular pulpit or prestigious platform.²⁰ In a

¹⁷ Stanley, Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir* (Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012).

¹⁸ Gregory Ellison, *Anchored in the Current* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ For this reason, the SOIL project intentionally implements ancient expositions of Scripture complemented by Augustinian expressions of confession and spiritual formation.

recent interview with Christianity Today, Matt Chandler, president of the global church-planting organization Acts29, summarized this opportunity as so:

“I see an opportunity around expressive individualism. I think that we’re seeing right in front of us the breakdown of the promises the world makes. We have a real opportunity to step in and answer the questions the world is asking. The whole idea that you can define yourself and solve yourself, I think people are starting to realize that’s not true. I think that the churches can step into this space if you’re willing, but I think we’re going to have to be smart about it and we’re going to have to be kind about it.”²¹

3.1 The Solution: SOIL

In Matthew 13:1-9 (cf. Luke 8:4-15), Jesus presents a now popular parable of a seed finding growth in four kinds of soil. In Matthew 13:18-23, Jesus explains that three times more often than not, the seed of God’s Word, fully and intrinsically capable of producing powerful and duplicative growth, fails to take root. Thomas Aquinas provides the following summary:

And it is to be noted, that as in the bad ground there were three degrees of difference, to wit, that by the way side, the stony and the thorny ground; so in the good soil there is a three-fold difference, the hundred-fold, the sixty-fold, and the thirty- fold. And in this as in that, not the substance but the will is changed, and the hearts as well of the unbelieving as the believing receive seed; as in the first case He said, "Then cometh the wicked one, and carrieth off that which is sown in the heart;" and in the second and third case of the bad soil He said, "This is he that heareth the word." So also in the exposition of the good soil, "This is he that heareth the word." Therefore we ought first to hear, then to understand, and after understanding to bring forth the fruits of teaching, either an hundred-fold, or sixty, or thirty.²²

²¹ Daniel Silliman, “Wanted: Church Planters. Reward: \$50,000,” 11 January 2022, 14 March 2022, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/january/acts29-50k-matt-chandler-interview-driscoll-timmis-abuse.html>

²² “Golden Chain Commentary on the Gospels,” 14 March 2022, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/gcc/matthew-13.html>

It is arguably unmistakable then, that Jesus intends to teach His followers about the importance of tilling the soul, represented by the soil, so that the seed, ripe with a reality that best benefits the soil, can flourish. John Calvin expositors, “The general truth conveyed [here, is that] the doctrine of the Gospel, when it is scattered like seed, is not everywhere fruitful; because it does not always meet with a fertile and well cultivated soil.”²³ In other words, Jesus provides in this parable a solution to the problem of the platform found in too many popular churches: while many personality-driven churches attempt to peddle a Gospel that needs no peddling for the purpose of somehow making it more palpable, Jesus teaches that the problem in flourishing exists with the soul, not the seed; therefore, what good is it to invest so much in making the seed more appealing when the lack of flourishing—beyond numbers, dollars, buildings, and followers—is here attributed to unplowed, unmet, untilled souls?

As a response to this parable’s innate commission, the church’s growing secularization, and the desperate need amongst many for redemptive transformation, the following supplemental discipleship tool has been carefully and prayerfully crafted to aid preexisting discipleship and spiritual formation contexts (small groups, men’s and women’s groups, youth groups, recovery groups, etc.) to find their souls tilled by the hands of the Spirit, the truths of God’s Word, and the love of a local church. In light of the central role the parable of the seed and sower plays, this tool is appropriately called SOIL and is fueled and founded on the following mission:

SOIL is a supplemental discipleship tool designed to study and till the soil of the soul by excavating sin, expositing the self, and exegeting salvation.

²³ Ibid.

4.1 Excavating Sin

SOIL necessitates a particular framework that exegetes Jesus' parable in a uniquely impactful way. This framework begins, however, with a potentially new and novel understanding of sin—not as an act of “missing the mark” but as a condition of misaligned affections. While many passages from Scripture do well to articulate this framework, 1 Peter 2:1-3 provide the clearest illustration:

¹ So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

In common Church contexts, verse one reads like a typical, religious imperative to lean heavily on behavioral piety; however, in context with chapter one's emphasis on the nature of being born-again—a cosmically gracious act of God through the propitiation and redemption of Jesus Christ—it would seem hermeneutically inconsistent to suggest that an advocate for Christ's sufficiency in salvation would pivot towards Christ's inability to sanctify. The Apostle Paul suggests the same with: “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”²⁴ As such, to best discern Apostle Peter's imperative in chapter two verse one, it benefits the reader to define the terms he has chosen to use:

Word	Greek Root	Definition
Malice	κακία	Nature or circumstance (Mounce) of evil; commitment to evil
Deceit	δόλος	Deceit; adulteration of truth
Hypocrisy	ὑπόκρισις	Dissimulation; stage-playing

²⁴ Galatians 3:3 English Standard Version

Envy	φθόνος	Envy or jealousy
Slander	καταλαλία	Speaking against

Figure 1.1 *Definitions*²⁵

In this format, a pattern crystalizes that provides far more than a list of sins to “put away” or avoid; rather, the Apostle seems to be providing an architecture for sin itself. This architecture is best illustrated when the order is reversed so that what is most obvious (the act of slander) is positioned as a visible fruit while the motivators beneath the act are excavated beneath as roots, until one reaches the core of not just the act of sin but the condition of sinfulness itself:

Word	Greek Root	Definition
Slander	καταλαλία	Speaking against someone
Envy	φθόνος	Wanting what someone else has
Hypocrisy	ὑπόκρισις	Acting like someone I am not
Deceit	δόλος	Believing a lie as a truth (or vice-versa)
Malice	κακία	Desiring as good what God calls evil

Figure 1.2 *Architecture*

To provide an additional layer of clarity, definitions in Figure 1.2 have been simplified from Figure 1.1. The resulting display of 1 Peter 1:1 reveals that sin is not so much a behavioral failure but a condition of broken desires: the behavior of slander is a fruition of an envy that is nurtured by a hypocrisy, found in deceit, and ultimately rooted in malice.

²⁵ Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1895).

4.2 Excavating Sin: An Example from the Workplace

Following Figure 1.2, consider the following hypothetical situation: John slanders Jane at work because Jane received a promotion that John believes is undeserving. At lunch, John tells his coworkers that he is a far better performer than Jane and that Jane does not do her job as well as he does, suggesting that he was the rightful person for the promotion. In this instance, the modern secular Church may identify the behavior of John's slander as the sin; however, according to the paradigm provided by the Apostle Peter, the text would consider why John was led to slander to begin with. The text quickly identifies that John slandered Jane because he was jealous or envious of her promotion—he desired what she ultimately received while, simultaneously believing she did not rightly deserve what she received. The behavioral sin of slander has suddenly deepened into an internal reflection of value and personhood—John believes Jane is a person who does not deserve the promotion and the loss of the opportunity has lessened the value of his life; John believes he is a person who deserves the promotion and that such a promotion would bring value to his life.

If John's slander was ultimately because of his envy, then where does John's envy come from? The passage proceeds to portray John's envy coming from a form of hypocrisy. Much like the Apostle Peter's audience in the first century, John is assumed to be a self-identifying Christian (someone who is, as described thoroughly in chapter one, "born-again"). As a born-again Christian, therefore, John would be considered a co-heir with Christ and, by faith, a recipient of the fullness of righteousness and wealth that Christ has achieved through His earthly ministry, sacrificial death, and supernatural resurrection. In other words, John's value has been maximized to the extent of Christ's own divine value, having been made a new

creation.²⁶ In slandering Jane, however, John has not only conveyed the presence of envy but his envy reveals an existential form of hypocrisy: John is not living like he is truly maximized in value because of Christ's finished work on the cross; rather, John is living like there is still value to be gained—and in this instance, gained by means of a promotion. As such, John is living like someone he is not; John is living as a hypocrite.²⁷

What started as a seemingly simple act of slander at work has suddenly revealed a dramatic compromise in John's system of value and existence—and yet, the paradigm in the passage dives even deeper as it considers where John's hypocrisy comes from. In doing so, the Apostle Peter reveals that an existential crisis in one's identity cannot but come from any other place but a compromise in truth's reality. For John to slander Jane means he must have allowed himself to believe that he was not who Christ has claimed him to be and, therefore, needing more value in life, leading him to slander Jane. This allowance, with its existential and value-system compromises, extends from a crisis in truth: for John, he did not believe that Christ's work was, in fact, true, such that he allowed himself to believe that a lie (that he is not maximally valued) to become a kind of fundamental truth that would create the opportunity for envy and, in turn, permit the behavior of slander. In other words, John's hypocrisy was rooted in deceit and deception—the belief that a falsity is true and that a truth is not true.

Finally, in diagnosing the very core of John's behavior, the paradigm in the passage roots John's broken value-system, existential identity crisis, and detrimental compromise of truth in one singularity: desire for what God calls evil. According to the Apostle Peter, all sinful behavior

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17 English Standard Version

²⁷ Bullinger and Thayer clarify that ὑπόκρισις often referred to actors in a play during Jesus' time.

is ultimately rooted in a version of soulful affections that has gone awry; it is out of the seed of one's deepest affections—what Martin Luther once called “worship”—that fruit is forged. That physical, palpable, and visible thing that, according to Jesus in Matthew 7:15-20 (cf. Luke 6:43-45), quantifies the goodness or evil of a tree ultimately stems out of deep desire and soulful affection—and when that affection is given to what God deems evil, there is but malice.

Altogether, the Apostle illustrates that sin is not so much a series of behaviors but a system no different than a plant that grows from a seed that is rooted deep beneath a visible surface

4.3 Excavating Sin: Affections, Desires, and Malice

In his best-selling book called *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Peter Scazzero discusses a similar paradigm for sin as that found in 1 Peter 2:1, writing the following:

“In our honest moments, most of us will admit that, much like an iceberg [or a tree and its fruit], we are made up of deep layers that exist well beneath our day-to-day awareness. [As an illustration of an iceberg shows], only about 10 percent of an iceberg is visible. This 10 percent represents the ways we conduct ourselves and the changes we make that others can see. We are nicer people, more respectful. We attend church and participate regularly. We ‘clean up our lives’ somewhat by addressing any issues with alcohol and drugs to foul language to illicit behavior and beyond. We begin to pray and share Christ with others. But the roots of who we are continue unchanged and unmoved. Contemporary spiritual formation and discipleship models address some of that 90 percent below the surface. The problem is that a large portion...remains untouched by Jesus Christ until there is a serious engagement with what I call ‘emotionally healthy spirituality.’”²⁸

Scazzero continues by identifying several common manifestations of emotionally unhealthy spirituality and, in doing so, similarly points to the necessity of evaluating and investigating sin

²⁸ Pete Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Publishing, 2017), 17.

in such a way that one’s deepest desires and affections surface as the ultimate culprits beneath any and every act of sin.

Historically, scholars and pastors throughout the world have argued for a similar understanding of sin. Most notably, Saint Augustine devoted much of his writing to expounding on the details of altered affections and disordered loves as the root of all sin: “For we agree that all wrongdoing becomes such only by passion (*libidine*), namely, by a desire (*cupiditate*) that is blameworthy.”²⁹ Timo Nisula explains that,

In *de libero arbitrio*, Augustine and Evodius discuss the topic of love. They agree that evil acts emerge from a flawed love of such things that could be lost unwillingly (*inuitus amittere*). They also agree that this love, or *libido*, is the source for all evil acts... *Libido* as a form of love for temporal goods is thus sin, and the exact opposite of happiness.³⁰

Perhaps it is for this reason that the greatest commandment by which all other commandments hinge is nothing less than, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”—as if Jesus also saw the root of all sin woven into one’s affections, desires, and malice, His command stretching forth from Deuteronomy to the Gospels remains unchanged.³¹ Under these assertions, the following “Sin Paradigm” summarizes the excavating architecture 1 Peter 1:1 provides:

Layer	Condition
Slander	The observable act of sin
Envy	The underlying value motivating that act

²⁹ Timo Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), 151.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Matthew 22:37 (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5) English Standard Version

Hypocrisy	The identity expressed by holding to that value
Deceit	The lie purchased as truth in order to appropriate that identity
Malice	The ultimate desire motivating that purchase and perpetuating the lie ³²

Figure 1.3 *Sin Paradigm*

4.4 Excavating Sin: Repentance and Redemption

Throughout numerous conversations regarding one’s response to a behavioral act of sin, I have found that most people—regardless of their beliefs—often respond with a sense of perpetual guilt or overwhelming shame. While Scripture accounts of many who respond in similar ways, healthier accounts of holistic repentance convey a pain and remorse contrasting guilt and shame. For instance, in Psalm 51, David repents of his grievous sins inclusive of coveting, adultery, idolatry, murder, and deception amongst others. In response, however, David exclaims,

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, / according to your steadfast love; / according to your abundant mercy / blot out my transgressions. / ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, / and cleanse me from my sin! / ³ For I know my transgressions, / and my sin is ever before me. / ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned / and done what is evil in your sight, / so that you may be justified in your words / and blameless in your judgment.³³

³² I have found that it is not for a lack of truth that a person pursues sin but a desire to deny that very truth. For instance, it may be known knowledge and even evangelized truth that having an affair is wrong. It is not for a lack of this knowledge that one has an affair; rather, it is out of an abundance of desire that the truth is denied (or a deceit is believed) and the Sin Paradigm sprouts the act of an affair. Additionally, it is to made clear that the root of sin in this paradigm is not desire itself but malice—that is, desire for what God defines as evil—or what Augustine calls “disordered loves.”

³³ Psalm 51:1-4 English Standard Version

For David, his sin is contextualized as a relational impediment, not merely a religious infraction. This notion is further conveyed later in the Psalm when David sings, “Hide your face from my sins, / and blot out all my iniquities. / Create in me a clean heart, O God, / and renew a right spirit within me.”³⁴ The king clarifies that the root of his sin is but an unclean heart, riddled with affections and desires for something other than the “face” of God—language of intimate and relational apology.

In this, SOIL’s first mission not only excavates sin to provide a new paradigm of what sin itself is—but in doing so, SOIL also recontextualizes repentance and how one ought to respond to sin. For many who have struggled with the same behavioral sin for long periods of time, it may seem deeply discouraging if not demoralizing to continue witnessing and/or falling victim to a pattern of perpetual sin; however, more often than not, I have found that Christ-followers who remain stuck in a pattern of sin often are stuck in a cycle of behavior-guilt-behavior or behavior-shame-behavior. With this new Sin Paradigm, Christ-followers can focus on that which David focuses on in Psalm 51 and travel beyond one’s behavior into the bottom of one’s heart, where lies the affections (and, therein, possible addictions) that perpetuate long-term behavioral sins. When sin becomes about relational affections, a response far healthier and more catalyzing than guilt or shame tends to surface—a concern for the welfare and health of an actual relationship that necessitates communication, investment, and even compromise. These essentials are often inaccessible to many Christ-followers who only view their sin as a behavioral and not relational.

³⁴ Psalm 51:9-10 English Standard Version

4.5 Excavating Sin: Application

To invite participants into a place of reflection and response, SOIL provides an empty paradigm for discipleship contexts to complete together, along with intentional questions to populate each layer:

	Layer	Questions	Response
Fruit	Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did I say? • What did I do? 	
Roots	Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did I seek value? • What did I find valuable in the act? • What makes me feel less valuable? 	
	Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who was I trying to be? • Why don't I love who I am? • Who does God see me as? 	
	Truth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the lie I told myself? • What was the lie I bought myself? • What truth(s) did I disbelieve? 	
Center	Desire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did that behavior promise to satisfy me? • Why am I unsatisfied? • What do I deeply desire? 	

Figure 2.1 *Printable Paradigm*

In previous small group contexts, this paradigm, complemented with additional reflection questions, have dismantled numerous misconceptions about Christianity and have overhauled several spiritual journeys that have been riddle with toxicity.

4.6 Excavate Sin: Case Study

In one instance, participant KL-2 shared a faith journey deeply damaged by an unfortunately common narrative in many Asian-American Christian communities. KL-2 grew up with a mother who equated service to and particularly sacrifice for the local church as a measure of one's spiritual maturity. Intersected with a legalistic interpretation of spiritual gifts, KL-2's mother diligently sought, even at the expense of marital or familial health, to continue to serve more and more at her local church, hoping for God's awarding of spiritual gifts and God's perpetual favor on her and her children's livelihoods. KL-2's father, on the other hand, had a deep distrust for the local church and equated his righteousness with his tithes—if he had faithfully tithed each month, then the church (and perhaps God therein) would not be able to ask of him to serve, to get involved, and certainly not to come under accountability. The result for KL-2 was a perspective of God that was fearful, distant, cold, calloused, and demanding of absolute piety and fidelity. Struggles with doubt let alone loneliness, gender identity, sexuality, and meaning were entirely suppressed under the fear that God would remove a sort of “hedge of protection” from her and her family if she had allowed herself to engage such issues.

With an introduction to and continual invitation into the sin paradigm, KL-2 began to shift in her understanding of self, of God, and of His Word. Complemented with courageous souls who were willing to share in depth their struggles and stories, the sin paradigm slowly dislodged KL-2 from a binary perspective of God and began to cultivate a far healthier understanding of human imperfection and Gospel redemption. Meeting regularly (bi-weekly) over the course of one and a half years (on top of her midweek engagement) provided me the privilege of seeing her dramatically change as her prioritized her intimate relationship with her

heavenly Father over a distant fear of a deity beyond her. Recently, KL-2 shared her securities, in the midst of the many mysteries and uncertainties that awaited her post-graduation. In doing so, she pointed to promises in Scripture made by a God who is not just providential but richly, intimately, and profoundly personal, able to handle her fears and anxieties, capable of carrying her worries and woes—and all without disfavor or disappointment.

5.1 Exposit the Self

Responding to 1 John 2:16, Pope Paul VI produced the *Paenitemini* wherein Augustine's diagnosis of sin's center—affections and desires—were given a threefold order called “Triple Concupiscence,” wherein all sin stems from one or more of the following affections and desires:

1. The concupiscence of the flesh
2. The concupiscence of the eyes
3. The pride of life ³⁵

While attributed to many, the *Paenitemini* seems to exact most of its study of Triple Concupiscence from French theologian and friar Réginald Marie Garrigou-Lagrange, who in his magnum opus introducing the profundities of eternal life, published the following distinctions for each desire in the trifecta:

1. Harmony between soul and body
2. Harmony between God and soul
3. Harmony between body and the world ³⁶

Whereas Pope Paul VI seemed to take a more pragmatic view of Triple Concupiscence, Garrigou-Lagrange leaned heavily on Augustine's *triplex cupiditas*, wherein each of the affections or desires summarizes an intrinsic and existential need for harmony, wherein one's desires are at peace with the self, God, and the world.³⁷ Each of these affections are also found in one of the three types of soil that Jesus presents in the parable of the seed and sower, wherein the “good” soil is a soul that has found threefold harmony. For this reason, the second

³⁵ “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” 14 March 2022, <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/>

³⁶ Timothea, Doyle, *The Three Ages of the Internal Life* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1948), 206-213.

³⁷ Augustine attributes the origin of these desires as coming from or appropriations of the existential nature of Satan (Nisula, 173).

section of SOIL attempts to exposit the self, entering into the disordered affections at the root of stricken souls suffering from an absence of flourishing.

Tilling the Soil of the Soul

Using Matthew’s account of the parable and Jesus’ explanation afterward, the following paradigms are presented by the tool, along with reflection points and questions, to aid participants in expositing their own selves in response to completing a Sin Paradigm chart for a recurring, sinful behavior:

5.2.1 The Seed and the Birds: Exposition

Condition of Soil		
<p>“And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them... When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.” (Matt. 13:4, 19)</p>		
Conflict	Consequence	Concupiscence(s)
Disharmony between self and God	Skepticism and Fear	Control
		Power
		Providence

Paradigm 1. *The Seed and the Birds*

The first soil Jesus presents in the parable has been traumatized by a victimization wherein the evil one has robbed the individual of deposits of God’s Word and truths. The result is naturally a disharmony between the self and God, wherein the individual is likely skeptical of

a repeated trauma and, therefore may discount spirituality altogether or remain skeptical about formalities in the nature and behavior of God, uncertain of God's character in key life events, and altogether wary of a supernatural God outside the safety of one's understanding. As such, this soul may be riddled with desires for control, fears of losing power, and a focus on remaining in a position of providence wherein the individual can see the landscape of one's beliefs in contrast to any infiltrating thoughts on God.

5.2.2 The Seed and the Birds: Illustration

ZM grew up in a mainline denomination from childhood. From an early age, he had heard about Biblical principles while attending children's ministry programming and youth ministry programs. As he entered college, however, his generally unconflicted life began to meet a myriad of complexities, challenges, hardships, and traumatic change, inclusive of a loss of friends who had formerly held pivotal roles in his identity. During a Bible Study studying historic views on sins of omission and commission, the example of a prayerless life was used as an example of a common sin of omission. In response, ZM recognized that, perhaps for the first time in his life, he had been guilty of a sin he did not know was a sin—and that he had indulged in a generally prayerless life. With permission, ZM and the small group traveled into the Sin Paradigm and considered the root desire beneath a prayerless life. While many theories and thoughts surfaced that provided ZM with much content to reflect upon, it was clear that beneath the practice of prayerlessness was a general skepticism of God's capacity to create change. Instead, it seemed more pragmatic, particularly in light of the experiences he had undergone in college, to leverage logic and planning to better control his circumstances and

situations than to lean on God's wisdom, provision, or providence. For ZM, he had found more security and safety in holding onto control than relinquishing providence onto God for fear of having to rightly face each traumatic experience and invite God into those experiences, let alone confront his own limitations and the reasons beneath and behind why God permitted some things to happen and other things to not.

5.2.3 The Seed and the Birds: Application

The following are questions to help discern whether desires fall into this category of soil and soul condition:

- Set 1. These questions are intended to identify a Cosmic Watchmaker perspective of God, concluding that He is callous, immovable, and distant:
 - How do you think God thinks of you?
 - Do you think God *likes* you?
 - How does God think of the world?
- Set 2. These questions are intended to consider one's need for control:
 - What is root cause of your worst mistakes?
 - "The boy came upon the large wooden door and opened it, only to find..."
How would you complete the story?
 - Do you wrestle with regrets? Why?
 - How often do you wish you didn't say or do something?
- Set 3. These questions are intended to engage one's addiction to possessing power and/or fear losing power:
 - Which is worse and why: losing the ability to walk or to see?
 - Who is someone you admire and why?
 - What is at least three things you'd like to accomplish in your lifetime?
 - How do you respond to failure?
 - How do you respond to accidents?
 - How do you differentiate between perfection and excellence?
 - Which is worse: a dark room or a messy room?

5.3.1 The Seed and the Sun: Exposition

Condition of Soil		
<p>“Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away... As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” (Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21)</p>		
Conflict	Consequence	Concupiscence(s)
Disharmony between self and self	Anxiety and Shame	Approval
		Authenticity
		Acceptance

Paradigm 2. *The Seed and the Sun*

The second soil Jesus presents in the parable suffers from a lack of depth intersected with arid exposure. Jesus explains that this soul has the capacity to endure—as it endures for a while—but is unable to persevere beyond that endurance as it has “no root in [itself].” The soul recognizes its capacities but ultimately fails to capitalize on its abilities, as it knows not what it is able or capable of. The result is a disharmony between the soul and the self, wherein the soul is unsure about the self’s ability as a result of one’s experience of failure—an indicator that the self may not have competent abilities. For this soul, an experience of failure and/or the perpetual lack of encountering one’s abilities looms louder, longer, and over an experience of God-given joy., sending the soul into a cycle of anxiety (“Am I doing the right thing?”) and/or shame (“Am I the right person?”). Often times, this soul seeks to satiate its desire for approval,

so that by means of it, there can be a sense of authenticity and validity—that one is not the failure the self deems itself to be.

5.3.2 The Seed and the Sun: Illustration

TO grew up in a conservative Christian home, attending church regularly throughout his childhood and youth. In college, TO began actively engaging in his local church, leaning into positions of service and leadership. Following college, TO worked his way into a prestigious company, utilizing his gifts in communication, charisma, and complex analysis towards numerous back-to-back promotions. TO eventually entered a romantic relationship that quickly led to a brief marriage, traumatically ended by an affair. The experience dislodged TO from key relationships, healthy life rhythms, and ultimately, his career. As a result, in one-on-one contexts, TO shared how he no longer knew himself apart from his failure—and, as a result, he carried constant anxiety about the meaning of his life, compounded by cultural shame. His efforts that followed were entirely devoted to winning the approval of others and rediscovering a sense of genuine self.

Though KK is much younger, she had a similar upbringing. Despite her knowledge of Biblical concepts like forgiveness, divine providence, and cosmic closeness, KK carried almost a similar kind of anxiety and shame, despite not carrying a similar kind of failure. Instead, KK was so afraid of *potential* failure that she exhibited almost the same kinds of desperation for human approval, personal authenticity, and tribal safety as TO, despite how different their circumstances seemed. For this reason, KK had devoted most of her time and energy towards maximizing the reception promised by her community. In other words, for both individuals,

failure (either in its manifested or potential form) conquered any ability to hold onto autonomy, constantly pushing each individual to act outside of their own selves, to make decisions at the cost of their authenticity, to play a part they felt uncomfortable playing, and obliterating any notion of flourishing outside that failure (or fear of).

5.3.3 The Seed and the Sun: Application

Often considered incredibly terrifying, exposure of one's failure can create a myriad of complex concupiscent's and addictions therein. The following are reflection questions to help participants consider their own:

- Set 1. Fear of Exposure
 - What are ways you hide yourself from others?
 - What are ways you hide yourself from your own self?
 - Do you like yourself?
 - Would you feel guilt if you like something about yourself?
 - Do you feel you have permission to like yourself?
 - Do you hate yourself? Why?
 - The Bible says that God knows our thoughts—how does this make you feel? Perhaps scared, angry, or curious?
 - Do you think God would dislike you if you liked yourself?

- Set 2. Fear of Failure
 - Are you the mistakes you've made or the successes you've achieved?
 - Where did this mindset come from?
 - What if everyone around you knew your failure? Would you be more happy or less happy? More confident or less confident? Why?
 - What if no one around you knew your failures? Would you be more happy or less happy? More confident or less confident? Why?
 - What exactly is failure?
 - Have you failed?
 - What did you do in response?

5.4.1 The Seed and the Thorns: Exposition

Condition of Soil		
“Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them... As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” (Matt.13:7, 22)		
Conflict	Consequence	Concupiscence(s)
Disharmony between self and the world	Distrust and Tribalism or Isolation	Security
		Safety
		Community

Paradigm 3. *The Seed and the Thorns*

The third soil in Jesus’ parable depicts a soul that is suffering from disharmony between the self and the world around it. Thorns infiltrate and even attack the seed that is sown, indicating a clash between the intrinsic nature of the seed and the undermining nature of the “world.” When a soul encounters this kind of disharmony—that is, when the soul is confronted with the counter-cultural nature of the seed in opposition with the culture at hand—there grows a distrust in the world around the soul or a distrust of the efforts and works of a world outside of one’s tribe and the security, safety, and community therein. If there are no tribes found or forged in light of such opposition, the soul tends to isolate within itself.

5.4.2 The Seed and the Thorns: Illustration

CL-1 and CL-2 are unrelated but have had similar upbringings in semi-Christian households. As both young men entered college, their conservative ideologies given to them during adolescence suddenly clashed against the “liberalism” of their school and its students.

Suddenly their stance and practices on alcohol, premarital sex, drug abuse, violence, justice, sexuality, gender, and truth itself were questioned by their peers. As such, for CL-1, a disharmony began to dislodge him from his traditional Christian beliefs as his faith began to deconstruct. For CL-2, his faith became more radicalized. Both CL-1 and CL-2 responded to the confrontation of their faith by entrusting themselves to other thinkers, friends, and community members. Following a year and a half of meeting together in a discipleship context, however, the two responded seemingly in opposite ways.

Beneath both of their responses, however, it seems clear that the disharmony between the way the world was supposed to be (in accordance with how God *should* rule and reign in it) and the way the world was created such a disruptive experience that both young men turned towards tribalism or isolation: for CL-1, the deconstruction of his faith pushed him further into isolation as he began to distrust God and the Church that claimed to know Him. For CL-2, the extremity of what he had been exposed to caused him to tribalize, investing himself into the radically conservative Christian thought and practice. For both, the desire of safety and security motivated what followed—and for both young men, the challenge to find God in the grey became increasingly difficult: either God must be or God just isn't.

5.4.3 The Seed and the Thorns: Application

The following questions are meant to produce a sharing of personal testimonies so as to better determine if one's soul is suffering from the disharmony found in this particle condition:

- Consider the vast array of Christian support for Donald Trump's presidency. Be specific as to why you disagree with this support or agree with this support?

- Would you vote for a candidate who was not a Republican? Would you vote for a candidate who was not Democrat? If so, why or in what instance?
- Is our culture getting worse or getting better? How do you know? How would God answer this question? How is your answer different or similar to what you think God would say?
- In regards to trusting others:
 - Can you generally trust people? Why or why not?
 - Who do you most trust and why?
 - Who do you least trust and why?
 - Who would you say are your “people”?
 - Where or with whom do you feel like your beliefs are safest from scrutiny?
 - Do you avoid or block people who disagree with you? Why or why not?

5.5 Practicing Confession

Prior to moving to the third section of the discipleship tool and exegeting salvation (that is, “good soil”), it is important to highlight a key feature necessary for efficacy: SOIL will be published online as a free resource for discipleship contexts; therefore, in light of the varying types of small group cultures and rhythms that define different contexts, the key ingredient to maximizing the tool’s impact is confession—providing information and answering questions with authenticity and accuracy so that the group can work together in tilling one another’s souls. For this reason, SOIL includes the following paradigm for practicing confession:

In James 5:6, the apostle gives the following imperative: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” The operative word “confess” (ἰάομαι) refers to the process of surgically curing ailment and giving someone a renewed cause

to live.³⁸ Tertullian summarizes the impact of this word with: “[Regarding confession, some] flee from this work as being an exposure of themselves, or they put it off from day to day. I presume they are more mindful of modesty than of salvation, like those who contract a disease in the more shameful parts of the body and shun making themselves known to the physicians; and thus they perish along with their own bashfulness.”³⁹ Confession, therefore, is not simply exposure to information but it is the serious means by which an individual can experience profound and radical freedom from the complex roots of sin and the conflicts present in any of three unfruitful states of soil. For this reason, the following model helps walk souls into a increasingly deeper encounter and experience with the radical provisions of confession:

Type of Confession	Description	Example
Honesty	I am able to share personal information.	My name is Rebecca. I am divorced. I am afraid of flying.
Transparency	I am able to share my thoughts and feeling regarding the personal information shared.	I do not like how short I am. I wish I married someone else.
Vulnerability	I am able to answer personal questions in response to information shared.	“Did you know you were lying?” “Do you regret making that decision?”
Liberty	I am no longer afraid of my personal information; I am empowered by what I share.	I was abused as a child, was hurt in this way, but have found hope in this truth.

Figure 3.1 *Layers of Confession*

³⁸ Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1895).

³⁹ “On Repentance (Tertullian),” 14 March 2022, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0320.htm>.

Honesty is the first level of confession wherein an individual is able to share personal information that does not impact her or his level of anxiety, shame, or fear. Sometimes, this information can be given to establish power or position in a conversation (which, as discussed, is a reflection of a disharmony and one of the three states of soil). As such, it can be positive for someone to exhibit and practice this kind of honesty as the antithesis to honesty is lying or isolation. It is vital for groups to be able to invite honesty and not invoke honesty by creating an atmosphere that is warm and welcoming for truths to be shared.

Transparency evolves from honesty as an individual is able to not only increase in her or his ability to share personal information but, more importantly, to share how that person feels and what that person thinks about said information. It is one thing for a participant to share that she is divorced—it is an entirely different thing for that participant to share that she is struggling with, regretting, remorseful of, or unable to cope with a divorce. In this sense, some participant may seem able to be daringly honest; however, unable to be transparent (ex. “I grew up with strict parents” vs. “I am struggling with the trauma created by my strict parents”). Transparency adds emotion to the information given at the honesty stage.

Vulnerability is the next evolution of confession as it builds on top of honesty and transparency. As the word itself is indicative of exposure, this level of confession *intentionally* enables others to ask questions about information and emotion shared by means of honesty and transparency. If, for instance, an individual shares that he is wrestling with feelings of failure in light of a wayward child, it is an act of vulnerability and practice of profound confession for that individual to allow others in the group to ask more questions about information and emotion. Often times, this practice stretches one’s capacity for honesty and

pushes the limits of one’s transparency—and, therefore, must be practiced in the context of relational safety, trust, and confidentiality. In doing so, with the integration of prayer, the hope of practicing vulnerability is an encounter with an epiphany: a cathartic resolution discovered in the person, the power, the plan, and/or the promises of God.

Lastly, liberty is the ultimate experience of confession wherein a participant is able to not only be honest and give information, not only transparent and provide information, and not only vulnerable by allowing questions, but this individual is able to do so in such a way that the information and emotion can now be used for a reason.

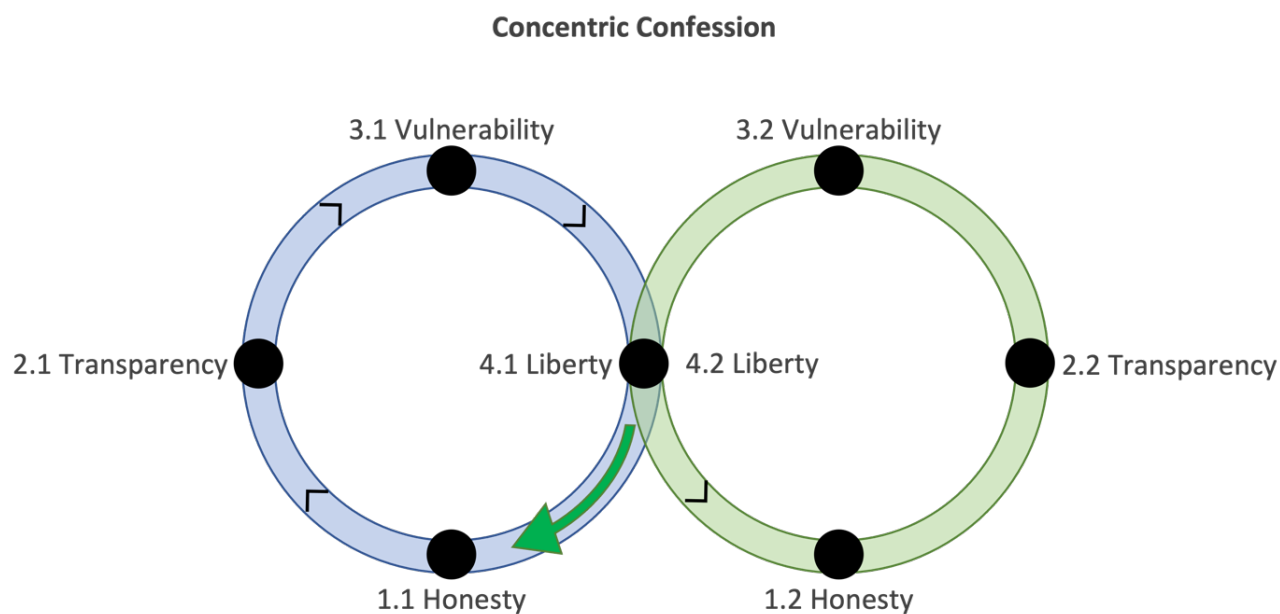


Figure 3.2 *Concentric Cycles of Confession*

For instance, in a support group setting, a newcomer may share that she was abused as a child, conveying bold honesty. After a handful of meetings, the group member then spends the next few sessions sharing how the abuse made her feel throughout her life. Then, after a few more

meetings, the group member can then invite others to ask questions and help her deepen in her processing and recovery. Though not guaranteed, for this illustration, several weeks of practicing vulnerability provides the group member with an epiphany. Beginning the following week, the group member may want to branch out and start a new group wherein she openly shares her story of trauma, mourning, learning, and healing. The story once shared in anxious honesty is now leveraged as a conduit for another's liberty, as well as a means to further practices confession in other areas of life. SOIL calls this process "concentric confession."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ In light of the engagement necessary for an impactful experience and practice of confession, see Appendix: Healthy Discipleship Contents

6.1 Exegete Salvation

In the 1970's, The Navigators published a now overly popularized illustration of a Protestant Evangelical view of salvation called "The Bridge to Life."⁴¹ This illustration looked similar to the figure below:

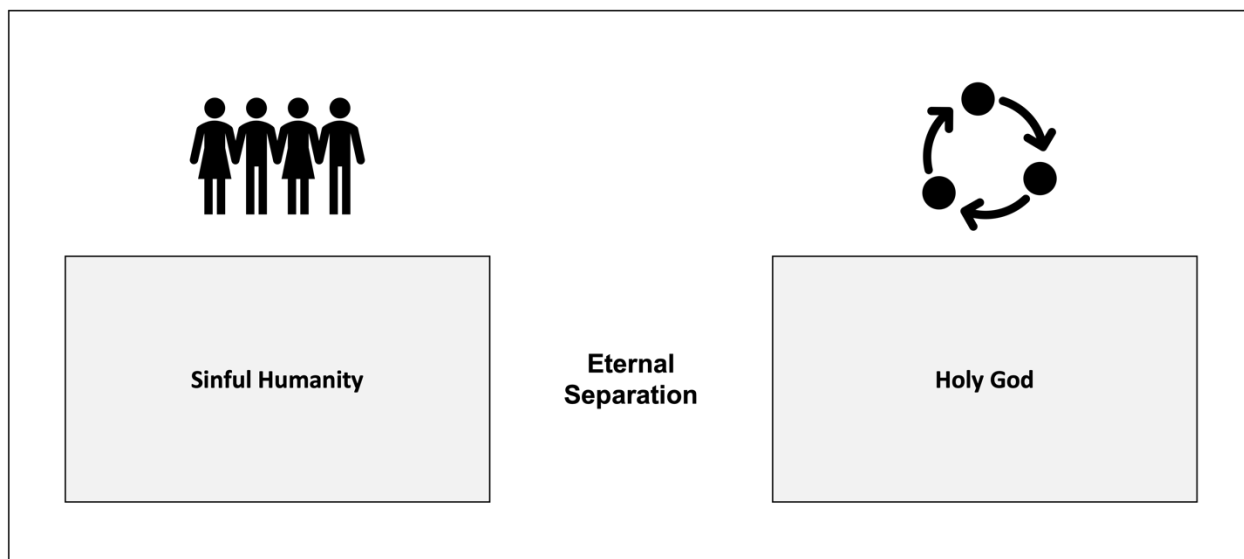


Figure 4.1 *The Bridge to Life: The Problem*

Figure 4.1 leverages passages from Scripture like Isaiah 59:1-2 to identify an impossible separation between a holy God and an unholy humanity as a result of humanity's sinful condition—a condition produced and imputed by Adam in the Garden of Eden.⁴² The work and role of Christ, as illustrated below, is that of a bridge, uniting what once was eternal separated: those who have faith in the work of Christ can now access a Holy God and, in turn, a Holy God can bless and be with a once unholy people.

⁴¹ "The Bridge to Life," 14 March 2022, <https://www.navigators.org/resource/the-bridge-to-life>.

⁴² Under a Federal Headship perspective, Adam's sin is imputed by means of his role in what is popularly called "the covenant of works"—the exclusive means to salvation that would not be satisfied until the Second Adam (ref. 1 Corinthians 15:25).

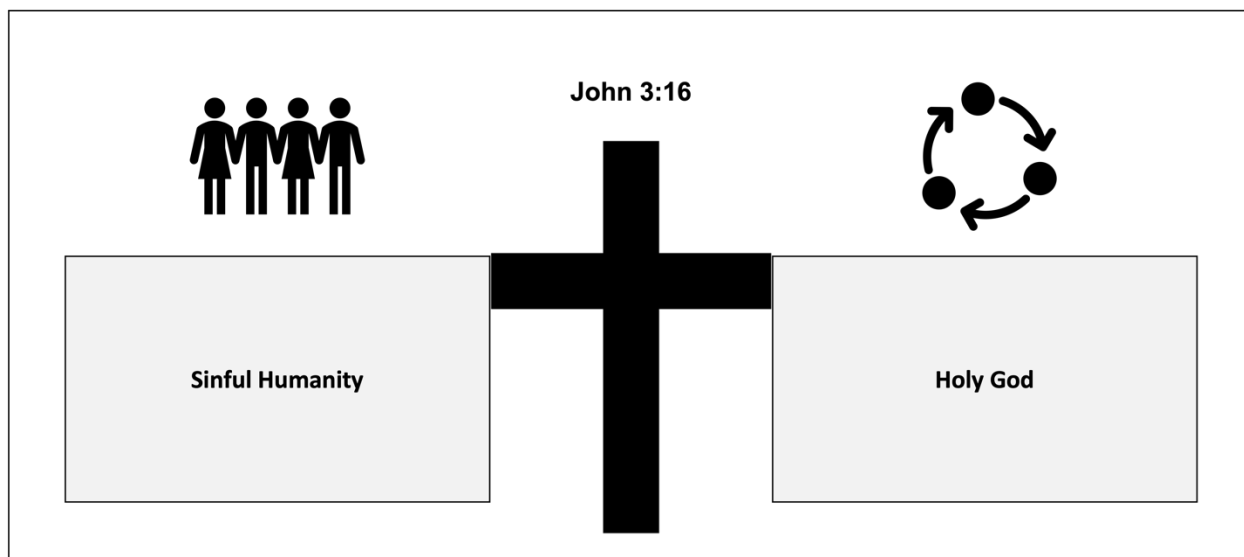


Figure 4.2 *The Bridge to Life: The Solution*

While most Protestant Christian intersections of faith would accept if not advocate this illustration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Robert Thune and Will Walker convey their concern with what follows this initial encounter with the Good News:

Many Christians live with a truncated view of the gospel. We see the gospel as the “door,” the way in, the entrance point into God’s kingdom. But the gospel is so much more. It is not just the door, but the path we are to walk every day of the Christian life. It is not just the means of our salvation but the means of our transformation.⁴³

In Colossians 1:6, the Apostle Paul teaches that the Gospel bears fruit and *grows* among those who have received it—that the work of Christ on the cross is not a historic point but a spiritual progress in the life of every Christian. As such, Thune and Walker expand on life after “The Bridge” illustration with the following:

⁴³ Robert Thune and Will Walker, *The Gospel-centered Life* (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2011), 12.

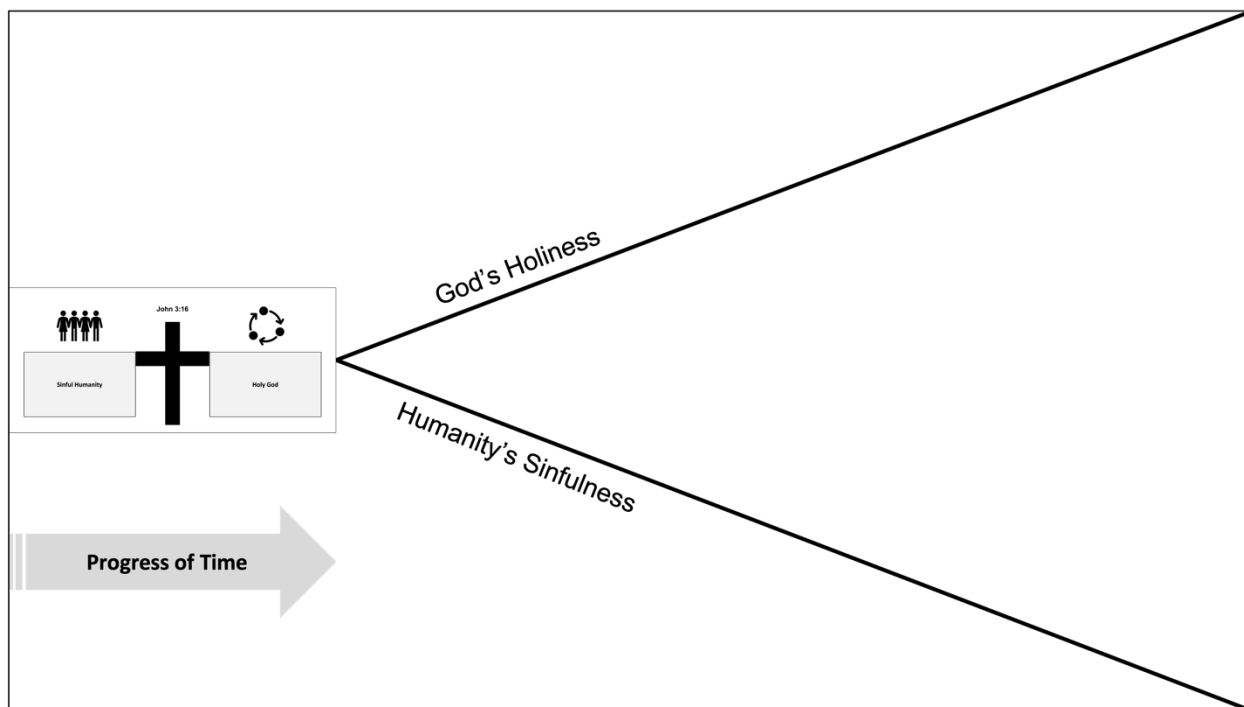


Figure 4.3 *The Cross Chart: Progress*

In Figure 4.3, one's personal conversion to Christianity is indicated by the screen shot of Figure 4.2. With the progression of time, Thune and Walker suggest that a common trend amongst Christians is a growing reverence for God's holiness juxtapose a growing awareness of one's sinfulness; as the Christian attends a local church, reads the Bible, and learns more about the attributes of God along with new aspects regarding the self, a follower of Christ often grows increasingly conscious of how sinful, in fact, humanity is and, simultaneously, how holy God continues to be. The gap that was once perceived to separate sinful humanity and holy God does not get smaller, says Thune and Walker, but actually grows wider as the reality and extremities of both fallen humanity and holy divinity become increasingly manifest. Thune and Walker explain: "It is not that God is becoming more holy or that I am becoming more sinful.

But my *awareness* of both is growing. I am increasingly seeing God as he actually is (Isa. 55:8-9) and myself as I actually am (Jer. 17:9-10)."⁴⁴

As a result, one of two responses occur: in most cases, the Christian may attempt to manufacture or fabricate a kind of moral perfectionism while keeping the initial role of Christ the same as it has been since one's conversion. Recognizing that layers of sin motivate behaviors of sin, the Christian may compensate for the growing gap between God's holiness and one's sinfulness through a mastery of religiosity, producing meritorious works that only harm the Christian's ultimate experience of Christ by limiting it. Tillich provides a powerful explanation:

"Moral self-discipline and habits will produce moral perfection although one remains aware that they cannot remove the imperfection which is implied in man's existential situation, his estrangement from his true being... The moralistic self-defense of the neurotic makes him see guilt where there is no guilt or where one is guilty only in a very indirect way. Yet the awareness of real guilt and the self-condemnation which is identical with man's existential self-estrangement are repressed, because the courage which could take them into itself is lacking."⁴⁵

Instead of entering into the layers of sinfulness beneath behaviors sin, the Christian may become an addict to moral self-discipline (or "neurotic"), repressing the root causes of sin in order to avoid a Christ that is larger than the Christ who first introduced her or him to salvation at the point of conversion; like Adam and Eve, the Christian responds to the growing gap by hiding from God beneath acts of fabricated righteousness and manufactured merit, uncourageously facing the reality of one's self and the reality of who Jesus truly is:

⁴⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁵ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 69.

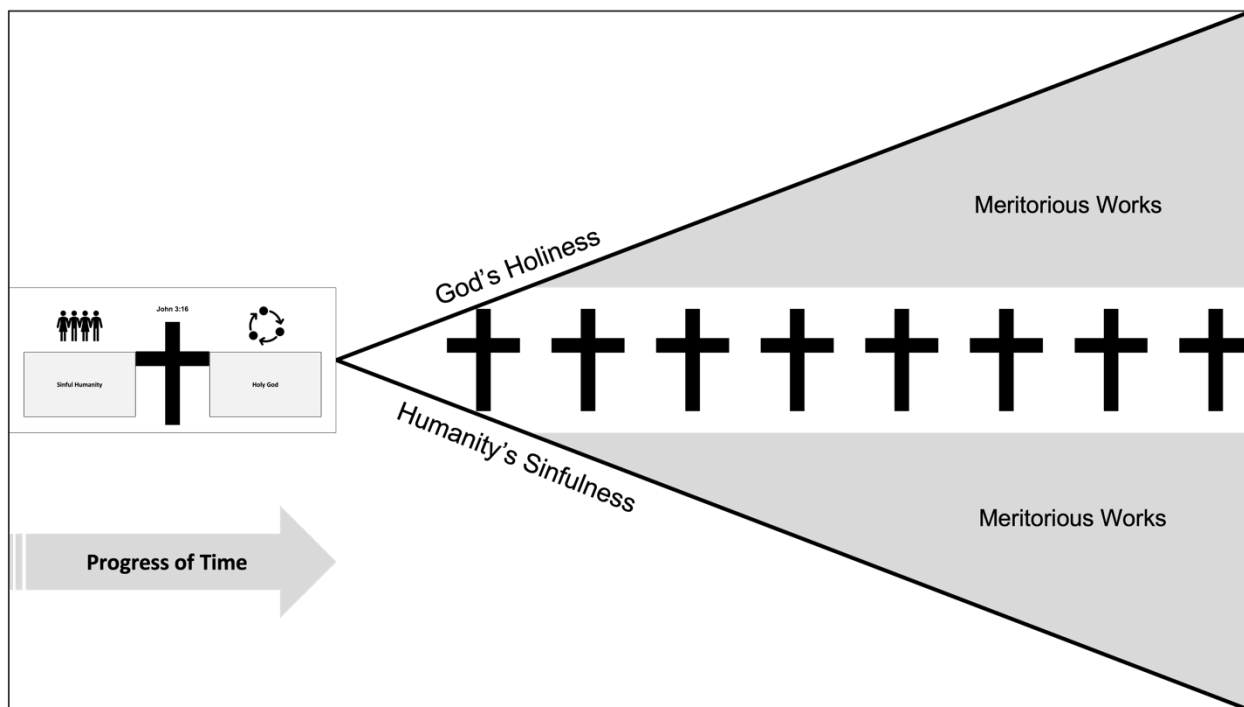


Figure 4.4 *The Cross Chart: Work*

When this framework of salvation is adopted into a congregational or discipleship settings, the product is the very expressive individualism that has wreaked such great havoc to the souls of modern Christendom. When a person is given the opportunity to hide beneath and behind what is sold as good works and what is perceived as produced (versus imputed) righteousness, the consequences are detrimental. Nisula summarizes Augustine's view in this way:

The human mind was created invisible and immaterial. Therefore, it assumed itself to "be of same nature as its Creator, thus cutting itself off by pride from Him to whom it ought to be united by love." Pride is therefore an illusory wish to be divine, in the sense of absolute independency. Finally, man's desire to be his own master and to become a self-sufficient person results in his disobedience to God and His laws. The more this desire is manifested, the deeper one is separated from the Divine Being... 'Thus, the farther the mind departs from God, not in space but in fondness (*affectione*) and greed (*cupiditate*) for things inferior

to Him, the more it is filled with foolishness and misery.⁴⁶

Augustine argues that the very affections that sprout sin through its layers is an extension of this perception of salvation. As such, despite the numerous churches that may be quantified as advocating for a salvation modeled by Figure 4.4, the reality of the damage in doing so is, in effect, an evangelism and perpetuation of the very essence of sin itself, causing Christians to simply teeter in-between one type of soil and onto another, never truly experiencing a liberating tilling that confronts humanity's natural addiction to works righteousness for fear of confession.⁴⁷

6.2 Exegete Salvation: An Addiction to Works-Righteousness

Galatians 5:16-24 contrasts the “works of the flesh” with the “fruit of the Spirit.” In this passage, the Apostle Paul notes that the works of the flesh include “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.” In contrast, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Here, considering the term καρπός is singular, virtually all Bible translations interpret the word as “fruit” and not “fruits.” The list to follow, therefore, ought to be considered as a singularity: that the Spirit is not just loving but that His love is joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled; that one aspect of the fruit the Spirit bears is perfectly interwoven with the other aspects. In traditional

⁴⁶ Timu Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), 171.

⁴⁷ As previously illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Protestant contexts, when the Christian believes onto Christ, this very Spirit is said to either have regenerated that soul onto belief or is first received and then regenerates that soul. In doing so, the Spirit produces the perfectly interwoven and multifaceted fruit that the passage provides.

In contrast, however, the works of the flesh seem to pursue the same kind of fruit that characterizes the Spirit; however, not by means of the Spirit's regeneration but by means of the individual's fabrication—as Tillich would suggest, in a neurotic manner. While the Spirit bears a perfectly interwoven love, the love stemming from the sinful flesh lacks the kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control necessary to be interwoven and multifaceted. As such, love produced and manufactured by the flesh is often perverted or extreme—or, as the passage conveys, sexually immoral, impure, and sensual. Similarly, when the neurotic flesh works to fabricate the Spirit's peace, it fails to do so in a way where such peace is interwoven with the other fruit of the Spirit—and, in turn, the flesh produces the very kind of radicalized "peace" found in division, dissension, and rivalry. In other words, the flesh is addicted to works-righteousness—instead of depending on the Spirit to produce its own fruit in the soul of those who are saved, the neurotic tries to do what only the Spirit can do (and what the Spirit is honestly already doing) in his or her own power, strength, and flesh.

This addiction to works-righteousness is captured in the very first sin itself: in Genesis 1, God Himself declares, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." In doing so, God declares supreme "goodness" upon humanity, along with the task to faith-fully remain in the goodness God has graciously engrained into the fabric of humanity. In Genesis 3, however, Satan infiltrates the garden and makes the following promise: "But the serpent said to the woman,

‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...’” Then, seeing that the fruit was “good” in their eyes, Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, giving birth the first sin in all Creation. The incredulity of the sin, however, is that the promise made by the serpent to lead Adam and Eve into it was a complete redundancy: Adam and Eve were *already* like God and possessed His declaration of goodness; however, Satan offered the opportunity for Adam and Eve to recreate that reality by means of their own flesh. Instead of having faith in the promises of God, Adam and Eve worked to fulfill that promise for themselves—and through their loins, generations upon generations of souls have entered Creation with an intrinsic addiction to the very same kind of work that cursed their first parents.

6.3 Exegete Salvation: The Courage to Be

An alternative response to the Christian’s growing awareness of God’s holiness in contrast to her or his sinfulness, Thune and Walker illustrate a radically different way of experiencing salvation, free from fabricated works-righteousness and manufactured merit:

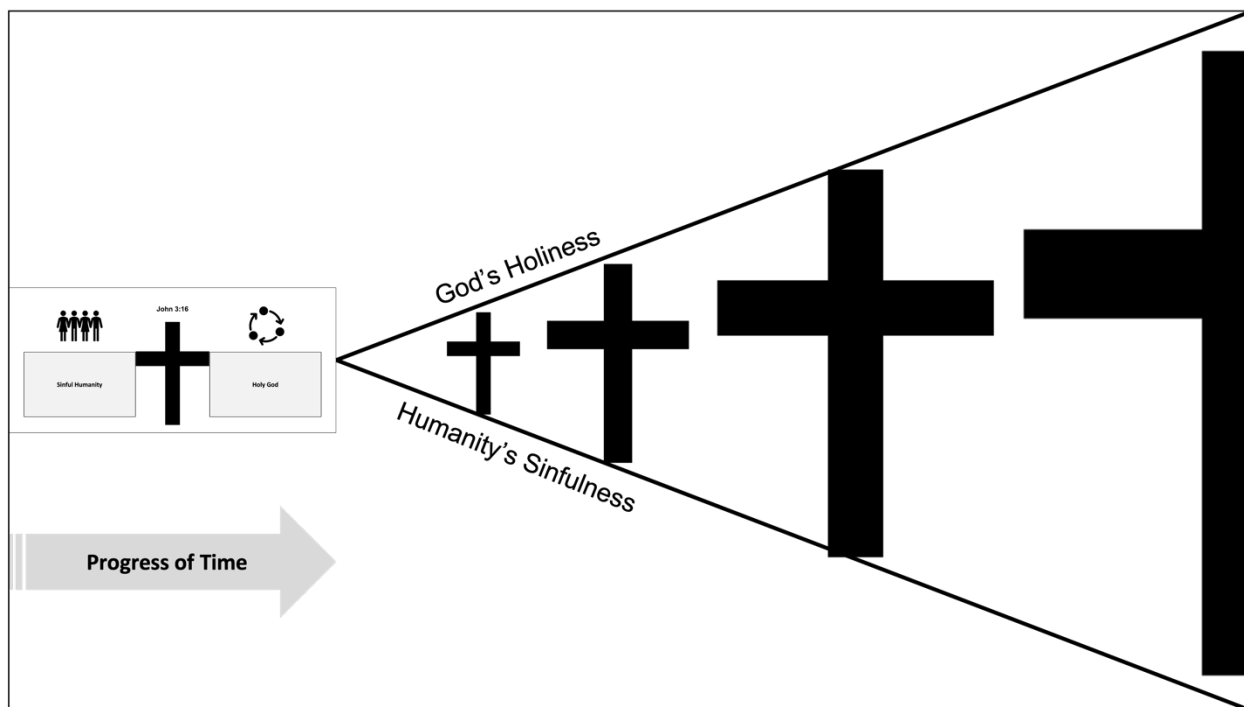


Figure 4.5 *The Cross Chart: Be*

Thune and Walker argue that a soul that has been tilled, ripe with health and ready for flourishing growth, is one that responds to the growing gap between God's holiness and humanity's sinfulness with self-forgetfulness and Christ-exultation—that as much as Jesus was once needed at the point of conversion, the Christian needs Christ increasingly more, to do the very radical work of bridging gaps and saving sinners. In doing so, the Christian discovers more—increasingly so—about who Jesus is and who Jesus is shaping the Christian to be. Instead of hiding who she or he truly is beneath artificial manifestations of an addiction to works-righteousness, Figure 4.5 displays a Christian who has discovered the courage to simply and joyfully be:

Courage is the self-affirmation of being in spite of the fact nonbeing. It is the act of the individual self in taking the anxiety of nonbeing upon itself by affirming itself either as part of an embracing whole or in its individual selfhood. Courage always includes a risk, it is always threatened by nonbeing, whether the risk of

losing oneself and becoming a thing within the whole of things or of losing one's world in an empty self-relatedness [marked by works-righteousness].⁴⁸

In his prolific book *In the Name of Jesus*, Henri Nouwen shares his experience of realizing the courage to be, modeling well what Thune and Walker illustrate in Figure 4.3:

The first thing that struck me when I came to live in a house with mentally handicapped people was that their liking or disliking me had absolutely nothing to do with any of the many useful things I had done until then. Since nobody could read my books, the books could not impress anyone, and since most of them never went to school, my twenty years at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard did not provide a significant introduction. My considerable ecumenical experience proved even less valuable... I was suddenly faced with my naked self, open for affirmations and rejections, hugs and punches, smiles and tears, all dependent simply on how I was perceived at the moment... This experience was and, in many ways, is still the most important experience of my new life, because it forced me to rediscover my true identity. These broken, wounded, and completely unpretentious people forced me to let go of my relevant self—the self that can do things, show things, prove things, build things—and forced me to reclaim that unadorned self in which I am completely vulnerable, open to receive and give love regardless of any accomplishments.⁴⁹

6.4 Exegete Salvation: The Kalos Paradigm

How does the Christian experience this kind of Christ-increasing and self-decreasing?⁵⁰

SOIL answers this question by inviting participants into the fourth soil in Jesus' parable:

“Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear... As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 143.

⁴⁹ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 26-28.

⁵⁰ John 3:30 New International Version

⁵¹ Matthew 13:8-9, 23 English Standard Version

The good soil is free of conflict and concupiscence, characterized by incredible capacities for fruitfulness and flourishing—all because the soil is now deemed and even declared as “good.” The word “good” (καλός or “kalos”) in this text has a wide array of meanings ranging from “beautiful, worthy of recognition, excellent” to “pleasing, honest, and genuine.”⁵² In the context of soil, however, the word takes on a deeper definition as the Septuagint conveys God using this very word to describe His pre-fallen and flourishing Creation:

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good... ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.⁵³

The good of the fourth soil in Jesus parable is not just good in its potential to produce fruitfulness—the good of the soil that bears fruit is, in fact, so very good because it illustrates a soil that once was, shaped into the very image of God, as God fully intended. This good soil was then breathed into, filled with a Spirit (πνεῦμα) that is of God’s own, ready to bear the very fruit of God Himself—that interwoven, multifaceted fruit that is indeed so satisfying to the one who bears it and all who delight in it.

If salvation is, therefore, much more than an act of faith in Christ’s work to convert the sinner but is, instead, the progress of Christ continually work in saving the sinner from sin, then the experience and encounter of that salvation would not only be epitomized by the fourth soil

⁵² Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1895).

⁵³ Genesis 1:24-25, 31 English Standard Version

in Jesus’ parable but must become the ultimate destination for all discipleship. While the act of justification remains momentary, the progress and process of that act of grace must be massaged into the soul, as the soul is tilled of its manufactured merits and compromising concupiscence, for the sake of the Spirit’s fruitful flourishing. With this mission in mind, SOIL provides a new model of salvation that, Lord-willing, reframes the Christian’s understanding of what it means and looks like to be saved, having discovered a new framework and paradigm for what it means to sin and to be a sinner. This new model, called The Kalos Paradigm, utilizes the following definitions of what many in Christendom have deemed the three arenas of the soul:⁵⁴

Arena	Head	Heart	Hands
Doctrine	Orthodoxy	Orthopathos	Orthopraxis
Definition	Right-Knowledge	Right-Affections	Right-Practices
Harmony ⁵⁵	Reconciles the self and God (Paradigm 1)	Reconciles the self and self (Paradigm 2)	Reconciles the self and the world (Paradigm 3)

Figure 5.1 *Arenas of the Christian Life*

The arenas of the head, heart, and hands simplify three interrelated areas of theological and doctrinal study that have expanded over the course of time: orthodoxy, directly defined as “right-knowledge,” is not exclusive to one’s theological study (although, it includes such study) but summarizes one’s personal knowing of God (γνῶσις or “gnosis”); orthopathos, directly defined as “right-affections,” is not exclusive to one’s passion or zeal for God (although, it could

⁵⁴ See “Appendix II: Metaphysical vs. Existential”

⁵⁵ This row reveals how these arenas relate to the three harmonies (or disharmonies) found in each condition of soil from the parable.

include both) but summarizes one's personal desire for God (ἐπιτίπτω or "to throw one's self upon"); orthopraxis, directly defined as "right-practices," summarizes the Christian's persevering integration of the orthodoxy and orthopathos possessed (a kind of προσκατερέω, or "to continually persevere with or near a person or being").⁵⁶

While the Figure 1.3 *Sign Paradigm* roots all sin in one's affections, Figure 5.1 is leveraged in the discipleship tool in order to provide an interconnected view of "kalos" and the Christian's experience of the good that has not only been returned to her or him by Christ but is being progressively developed by the Spirit. This "goodness" is not gained or garnered but grown by the Spirit through the tilling of the soul and its practice of confession and exposition of the self. As Figure 4.3 *The Cross Chart* reveals that an increasing knowledge of God directly relates to an increase (or decrease) of affection for God, so orthodoxy motivates orthopathos. In a similar manner, when a novel notion of God overflows out of one's affections for God, the change in life and behavior or the practices of such obedience can further deepen one's orthodoxy and orthopathos. As such, the three arenas of the soul leverage and necessitate one another. SOIL provides the following illustration along with additions to guard against extremities that could lead Christians back into a merit-based experience of salvation:

⁵⁶ Bullinger, Rev. Ethelbert W. *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1895)

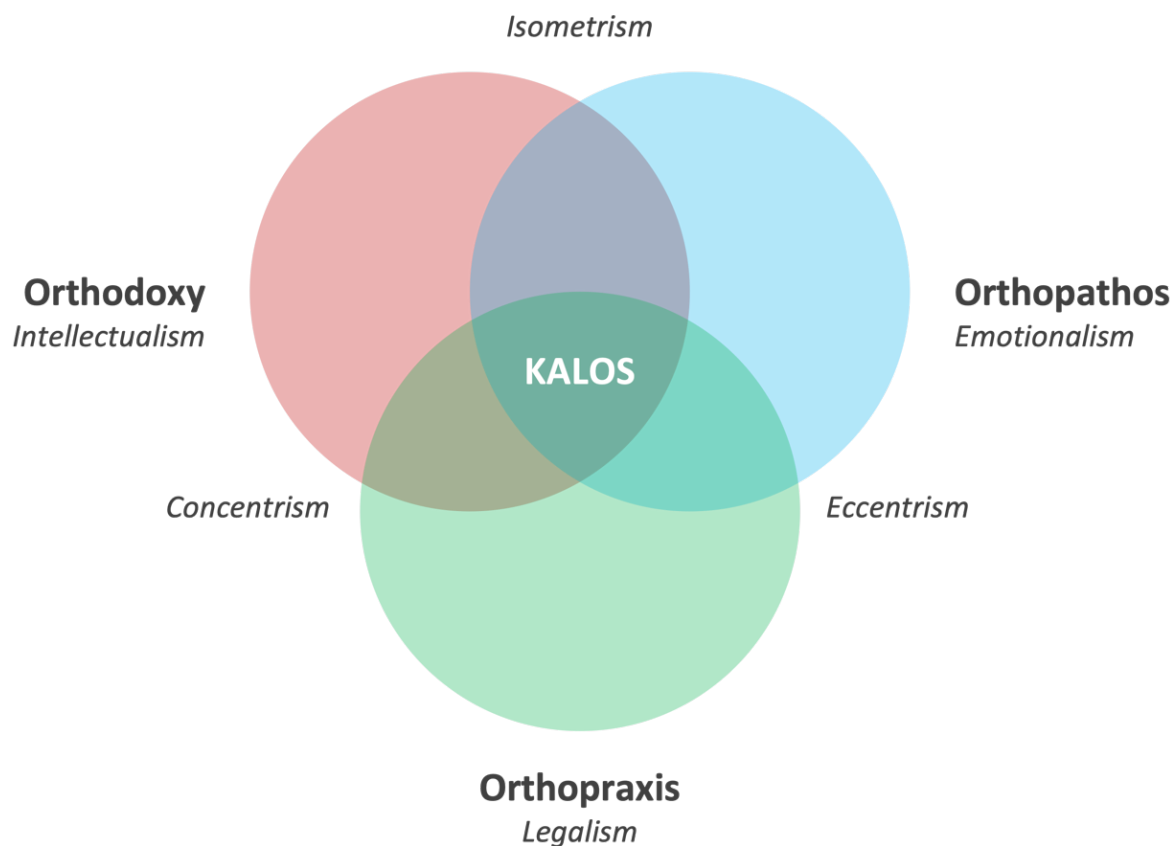


Figure 5.2 *The Kalos Paradigm*

Reconnecting to the pre-Fall and divinely declared “good” in one’s soul necessitates right-knowledge of God that procures right-affections for God that, in turn, produce right-practices that solidify and capitalize on both—and all this in increasing perpetuity. A soul centered between the three experiences epitomizes what it truly means to be “good”—a position and place where the seed of God’s Word can healthily produce fruitfulness; a posture of true discipleship.⁵⁷ In this model, however, a few key dangers are presented to help guard the soul from falling back into one of its former three conditions:

⁵⁷ See “Appendix II: Metaphysical vs. Existential” for an expansion on the notion of being “centered.”

Arena	Head (Orthodoxy)	Heart (Orthopathos)	Hands (Orthopraxis)
Extremity	Intellectualism	Emotionalism	Legalism
Example	My knowledge of God equates to my goodness; my sins are a matter of doctrine, not affection.	My passion for God equates to my goodness; God is more pleased with me when I am more passionate and vivacious for Him.	My works and sacrifices for God equate to my goodness; I know I am good in God's eyes because of the service, volunteerism, and donations sacrificed on God's behalf.

Figure 5.3 *Major Dangers in the Kalos Paradigm*

While these extremities exist throughout the denominational and institutional spectrum of American Christendom, a common symptom in many congregations and Christians is a push back of one extremity by means of integrating another, leading to dangerous “contractions” in the soul (or in souls gathered in a congregational setting):⁵⁸

Arenas	Head (Orthodoxy) and Heart (Orthopathos)	Heart (Orthopathos) and Hands (Orthopraxis)	Hands (Orthopraxis) and Head (Orthopathos)
Extremity	Isometrism	Eccentrism	Concentrism

⁵⁸ The following terms appropriate different muscle contractions that can be potentially dangerous to the entire body part if and when untreated (ex. concentric exertions can damage the muscle's ability to perform isometric or isotonic contractions, causing major functional problems to that ligament).

Definition	A soul (or souls) whose intellectualism and emotionalism dismiss any activism.	A soul (or souls) whose emotionalism leads to radical legalism.	A soul (or souls) who justifies legalism with intellectualism.
Example(s)	Our church has a strong preaching and teaching ministry as well as a powerful worship ministry along with high small group participation—but no missions, evangelism, or cultural renewal.	I am so passionate about God that I feel like I must sell all of my possessions and move to a dangerous country I know nothing about. If you are truly passionate about God, you would never wear provocative clothing.	Our denomination is one of the oldest in the world with roots in major movements in Christian History. We also claim several “saints” or respect scholars and, therefore, the services we provide are the only ways by which our churches serve.

Figure 5.4 *Nuanced Dangers in the Kalos Paradigm*

These paradigms are complemented with the following questions for personal or group reflection:

- **Preliminary:**
 - What are the three top priorities of my Christian life? Or, what are the three top priorities of my church?
 - Ask your small group to affirm or challenge your answers. Or consider, how would your local community respond to your answers?
 - Churches: if your church disappeared tomorrow, who would be most impacted? How would your community respond?
- **Head (Orthodoxy)**
 - When I think of my Christian life, how much of it is focused on intellectual stimulation?
 - Do I look down on churches that do not have a stronger preaching and/or teaching ministry?

- Do I consider churches with strong preaching and/or teaching to be “better” or healthier than churches with stronger outreach or counseling programs?
 - Who are some Christian figures that I celebrate?
 - How regular is your tithing?
 - Churches: When I think of my church, what is the first ministry of the church that comes to mind? Would my church be more concerned about my theology on race and racial reconciliation or my engagement in a protest against police brutality? Who are some figures that my church celebrates?
- **Heart (Orthopathos)**
 - How honest am I about my life to other Christians?
 - How important is it that I receive spiritual gifts?
 - Do I see others with particular spiritual gifts as more spiritual mature?
 - Do I look down on intellectuals who stress “theology” over “worship?”
 - How regular is your tithing?
 - Churches: Is my church a safe place for someone who does not speak English? For non-majority Black congregations: how would my congregation respond to my Black and Brown friends? How did my congregation respond to the public killings of Black women and men in the last six years? Why?
- **Hands (Orthopraxis)**
 - If I am honest, am I afraid of entering into overly theological conversations?
 - Do I think that Jesus was more simple-minded than complex?
 - How would I respond to a Pentecostal worship session? Would someone praying in heavenly tongues make me feel uncomfortable? If so, why?
 - Do people whose “actions speak louder than words” deserve more respect than those who I perceive as merely having words?
 - Churches: If a couple has going through a difficult divorce, how would my church respond? How does my church respond to death? How does my church respond to personal suffering? When is the last time I learned something new in a sermon or community group?

6.5 Exegete Salvation: Summary

“Kalos” began as a divine decree by God, declaring that the soil shaped into a soul-filled human being was an epitome of all that God considered to be truly good. The enemy then

exposed a vulnerability humanity possesses towards an addiction to self-actualizing, meritorious works of fabricated righteousness that cover the reality of how broken, needy, and sinful humanity actually is. When a soul comes to Christ, however, what is received therein is not simply an opportunity to cross a bridge by faith, crossing into life from death; rather, the soul receives that which it once possessed and what is graciously promised—the decree of being more “good” than those who once were but being a kind of “good” that has never been but ultimately, by faith, will be. The process of tilling the soul and the purpose of discipleship is rooted in digging into the soul, finding the altered affections therein, diagnosing the resulting addictions to religiosity, and invoking a courage for that soul to be all that Christ has claimed that soul is. Confession then, in its many variations, leads souls to a place of liberty wherein it can confess, indeed, that Christ is who He says He is as much as the self is who Christ says she or he is and will be: profoundly and beautifully *good*. Is it then essential for discipleship contexts to guard the good that God has graciously given through Christ, keeping one another from extremities and building into one another’s head, heart, and hands.

7.0 Conclusion

In his arguably brief but profound prophecy to Israel, the prophet Zephaniah begins with an indictment against Israel, calling Her people to repent and return their affections to God-alone and away from a world of works and a flesh full of fabrications. At the climax, however, of what is initially a pensive and painful judgement, is a profoundly pleasant promise from the heart of God:

¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
 shout, O Israel!
 Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
 O daughter of Jerusalem!

¹⁵ The Lord has taken away the judgments against you;
 he has cleared away your enemies.
 The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
 you shall never again fear evil.

¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
 "Fear not, O Zion;
 let not your hands grow weak.

¹⁷ The Lord your God is in your midst,
 a mighty one who will save;
 he will rejoice over you with gladness;
 he will quiet you by his love;
 he will exult over you with loud singing.

¹⁸ I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,
 so that you will no longer suffer reproach.

¹⁹ Behold, at that time I will deal
 with all your oppressors.
 And I will save the lame
 and gather the outcast,
 and I will change their shame into praise
 and renown in all the earth.

²⁰ At that time I will bring you in,
 at the time when I gather you together;
 for I will make you renowned and praised
 among all the peoples of the earth,

when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes,” says the Lord.⁵⁹

It is difficult to deny in this prophecy that of all He could leverage in this moment, God leans on the weight of His love and affections for His people to dislodge their malice and to secure their love rightly on He who first loved them.⁶⁰ Skye Jethani provides the following summary of SOIL’s ultimate intent with the following response to the Zephaniah’s prophecy:

God’s love provokes us to treasure him, and in our treasuring we discover the joyful truth that he also treasures us. Love is the beginning and the end, the origin and culmination of our relationship with God. And along the way it provokes wonder, illuminates discoveries, and ignites joy.⁶¹

How wonderful and beautiful the Church is when She returns Her affections to the only One who deserves Her utmost. How good and pleasing it is when platforms and personalities, dim lights and loud music, submit to the brilliance and beauty of a gloriously good God whose promises—often illustrated as potent and powerful seed—flourish the souls of many. So SOIL envisions a Church whose soul is tilled of its worst woes and meritorious works, entering deeply into the fathoms of freedom found in confession, liberated from false affections, and culminating into an expression of goodness that can only come from a gloriously good God and a better return to the goodness of His decreed design.

⁵⁹ Zephaniah 3:14-20 English Standard Version

⁶⁰ 1 John 4:19 New International Version

⁶¹ Skye Jethani, *With* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 162.

Appendix I: Healthy Discipleship Contexts

For many congregations, discipleship contexts often form out of a natural gathering of diverse souls into a rhythm of regular meetings. From here, many groups devote themselves to reviewing and responding to a sermon, reading and reflecting on a book, or studying a particular topic from current events or passage in Scripture. While the beauty of flexibility arguably makes these contexts the most opportune for growth, the following parameters are recommended by SOIL in order to maximize its utility:

Life on Life	The group meets regularly and rhythmically through various seasons of life without giving up on meeting together (Heb. 10:25). In doing so, each member of the group <i>must</i> commit to actively engaging with the group’s regularity and guard its rhythms. ⁶²
Face to Face	As the pandemic revealed for many, in-person human interaction cannot be replicated digitally. As Jesus would touch and be touched by those He would minister to, so these groups ought to meet face-to-face, in-person.
Eye to Eye	As helpful as it can be for Boomers and Millennials to meet together, regardless of age, group settings must meet eye-to-eye, wherein no person or persons has more leverage or authority. For this reason, SOIL is best integrated into gender-specific groups wherein participants share in a similar life-stage.
Heart to Heart	Considering its emphasis on different types of confession, SOIL is recommended for group contexts that agree on maximizing honesty so that each participant can grow towards liberty. The rule of “no hidden hearts” can be powerfully effective when modeled well by group facilitators.

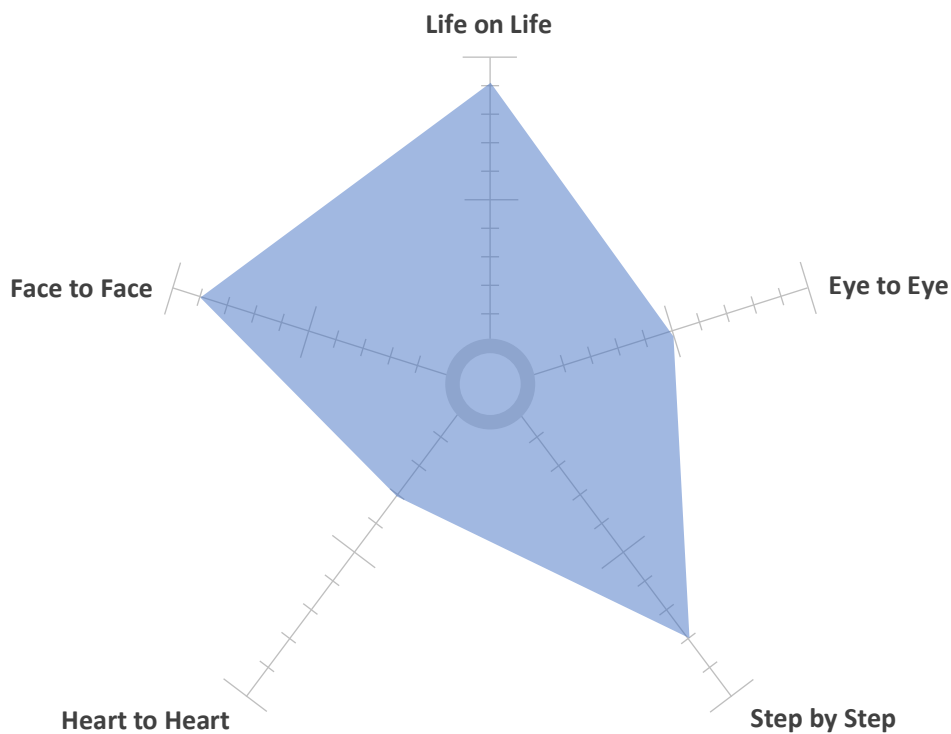
⁶² For example, some small group contexts require each member to sign and commit to a “covenant,” indicating group expectations and highlighting the gravity of one’s contribution to the efficacy of the group through one’s engagement, not only one’s attendance. This engagement includes a stern commitment to exclusive confidentiality secured by prioritized access and availability.

Step by Step	While many groups that gather become life-long friends, these groups are encouraged to remain progressive, moving forward step by step, versus slowing down and stagnating into “boys night out” or “girls night out.”
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Appendix 1.0 Healthy Discipleship Group Parameters

A helpful practice, particularly for facilitators, is to routinely measure the state of the group using the examples and model below, pivoting when possible to create a balanced, rich, and impactful discipleship group context for all involved:

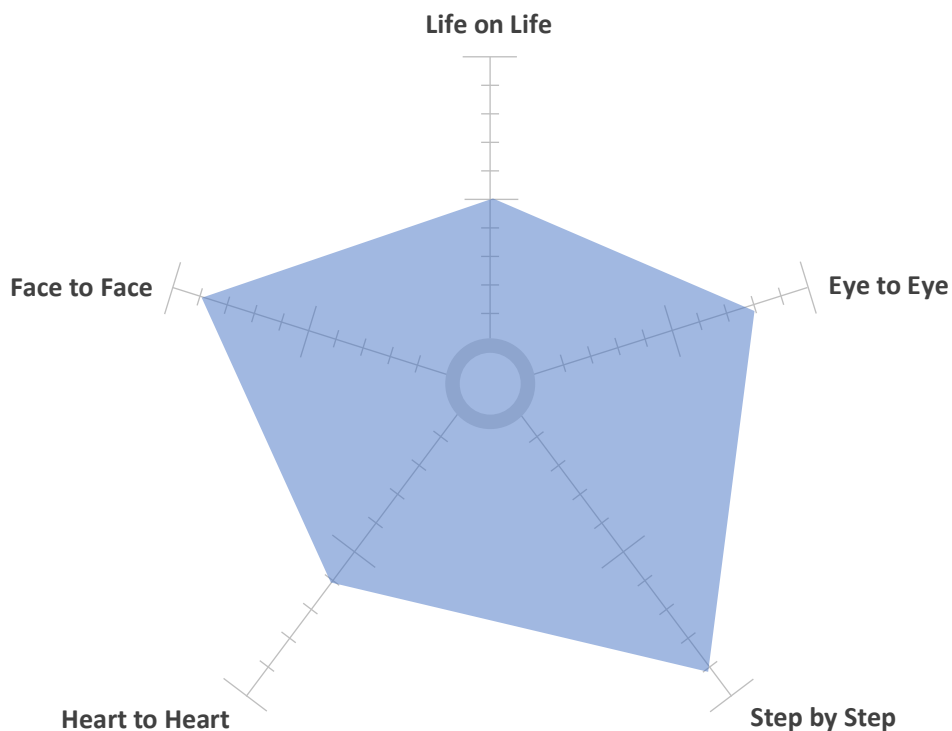
Appendix: Example One



In the example above, this particular discipleship group is strong in its regularity of meeting and strong in its intentionality when the group meets. The group also meets regularly

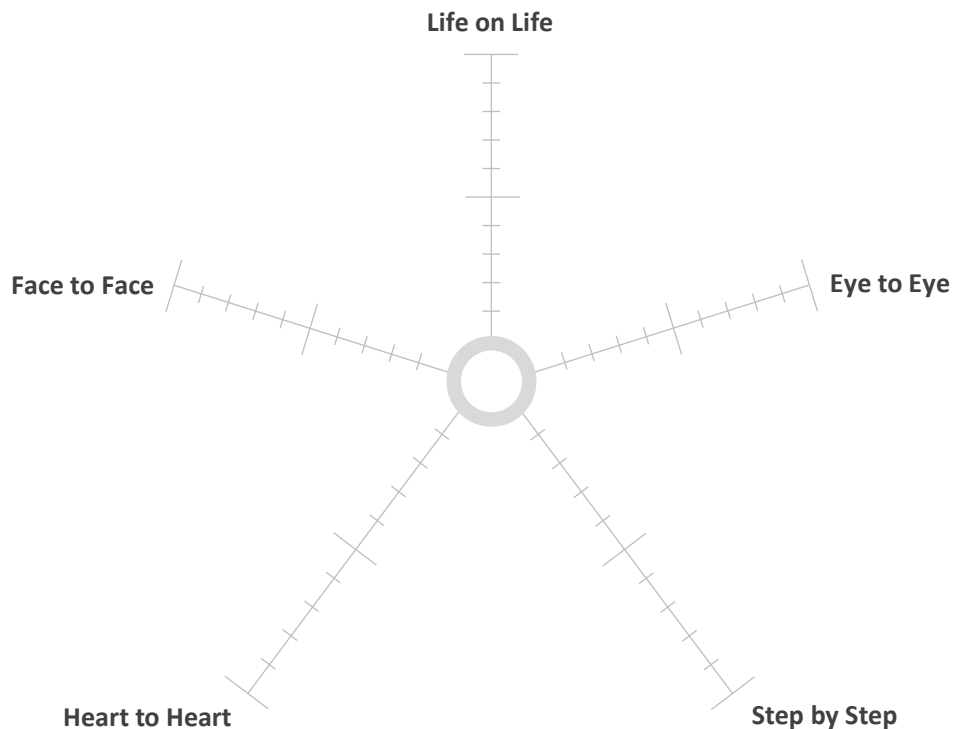
in person, strengthening the health of the group; however, the group suffers because not every member of group treats one another with respect or listens without contempt (perhaps an older member believes he or she knows better than a younger member). Similarly, the group struggles with committing to honesty and practicing confession. Facilitators can respond to the imbalance in this example by sharing more vulnerably either in group settings or one-on-one settings, inviting others to do the same or calling on group members to share their long-form testimonies over the course of several weeks. Similarly, one-on-one meetings have been most effective in encouraging group members to hold sacred the importance of seeing one another eye-to-eye.

Appendix: Example Two



In this example, the small group context is strong in its intentionality when meeting (ex. progresses through their curriculum or study) and meets in-person. When the group meets, the group excels at respecting one another and listening with care to each person; however, this group suffers from the irregularity in meeting and with being honest. In examples like these, one-on-one meetings with each member by the facilitator can help encourage each member to view their role in the discipleship group as essential while placing the significance of that group as a very high priority (ex. the work of the Spirit in these discipleship groups can sanctify the members in such a way that, in a married men's group, men become humbler and more caring spouses or more intentional and engaged fathers).

Appendix: Blank Model



Appendix II: Metaphysical vs. Existential

SOIL leverages a perspective of the soul that is differentiated from one's spirit by means of the following metaphysical distinction, rooted in Genesis 2:4-7:

On the day the Lord God made earth and sky— ⁵ before any wild plants appeared on the earth, and before any field crops grew, because the Lord God hadn't yet sent rain on the earth and there was still no human being to farm the fertile land, ⁶ though a stream rose from the earth and watered all of the fertile land— ⁷ the Lord God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life.

In this passage, God creates biologically living entities *inclusive* of “the human” based on its fundamental ingredients: topsoil of the fertile land created in 2v6. Prior to 2v7, therefore, humanity existed in the same way that wild plants and crops existed: humanity possessed anatomical, functional, biological life (called βίος elsewhere⁶³) but nothing more distinctive to set it apart from all other biological entities.

With the introduction of “life's breath” breathed into the “nostrils” of humanity, this mechanical, biological being becomes something entirely different, ready to receive God's moral stipulations in a covenant framework inclusive of blessings and curses. This breath (πνεῦμα or “pneuma”) is imparted by God into the “nostrils” (ἰσφύλαξ or “anger”; that is, the place of origin for all human reaction; human essence) of the biological being. It is not to say that the entirety of the Spirit of God imputes itself into this being; rather, an impartation is deposited, bring this formerly mechanical being to “life.” Here, the term “life” is not βίος but, instead, it is

⁶³ 1 John 2:16 cf. Mark 12:44; Luke 8:14, 8:43, 15:12, 21:4; 1 Timothy 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:4; et. al.

ζωή (“zoë”). While the former refers to the mechanism of human anatomy, the latter is indicative of something more existential—a certain experience of what “bios” and “pneuma” can encounter when motivated by God’s providence (illustrated by His “blowing” in 2v7).

As such, at the point of biological death, the “bios” may cease to function but the “pneuma” remains and, in accordance with the remainder of Scripture, ascends to heaven or descends to hell. At the resurrection, the “bios” is restored such that the “pneuma” and “bios” collectively experience the singularity of the new heavens and the new earth as an ultimate covenant blessing or the tragedies of the lake of fire as an ultimate covenant curse. Prior to the resurrection, however, the experience of “zoë” both captures the biological and pneumatic experience of the new heavens and new earth while summarizing the mission and ministry of Jesus Himself, who said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”⁶⁴ It is not for an eternal extension of “bios” that Jesus has come (see John 3:16); rather, it is for a restoration of that which once belonged exclusively to humanity but was then lost due to sin.

In Genesis 2v17, “death” is promised as a covenant consequence to humanity’s failure to meet the stipulations in 2v15; however, what death is incurred in Genesis 3 following Adam and Eve’s failure to meet these stipulations? Neither Adam nor Eve suffered a biological death. While Genesis 3:21 asserts a prototypical animal sacrifice and death, it is arguable that the death God promised was that of “zoë”—that there would be a loss of life as God perfectly intended, necessitating Christ to come and epitomize that life, preview that life through healing and miracles, as well as promise that life to those who believe onto Him by faith. As Jesus

⁶⁴ John 10:10 New International Version

teaches in John 3:16, so humanity, by faith, is given the fullness of life as God intended it to be (“zoë”), not an extension of a broken life that is (“bios”).

SOIL, therefore, understands one’s spirit to be a as metaphysical of a component to human existence as is one’s biological anatomy; however, one’s soul is an existential state of being. In its discussion of “centering” (6.4 Exegete Salvation: The Kalos Paradigm), the description of a soul centered by orthodoxy, orthopathos, and orthopraxis is an essential invitation to experience “zoë” for one’s own self and to encounter all of life as God intended it to be, prior to the fall and in preview of the coming resurrection. In this, “zoë” is the life experience of a soul that has been tilled, where the seed of God’s Word flourishes—life that Adam tasted prior to the Fall; life that Jesus displayed throughout His earthly ministry; and life that can be known powerfully, intimately, healthily, and prolifically today, even as it culminates in the tomorrow wherein God sees fit to return.

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