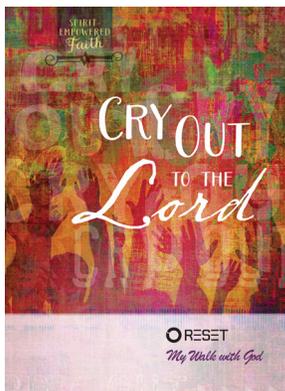




Concentric Circles of Concern

This article, excerpted from *Cry Out to the Lord*, is entitled “Concentric Circles of Concern” by Oscar Thompson.



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In the early days of the church, the gospel of Jesus Christ spread through authentic and meaningful relationships. It wasn't through campaigns, creative marketing, advertising, or going door to door. The gospel moved in waves of concentric circles, just like the waves created from a rock that's thrown into a pond move out in all directions, rippling further and further away. The gospel is most effective when it begins within our own heart and has its way in our marriage, family, friends, and community—in that order.

If you read through the New Testament, you will see the centrality of relationship. It is nothing profound, but it is just as natural as anything can possibly be. If something is genuine in my life and your life, the natural thing to want to do is to share it with those we know. “Relationship” is the most important word in the English language.

SHARE with Others in Community

Rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15, NASB).

Reflect on your own experience of coming to follow Jesus. Can you recall the family members or friends who were there to tell you about the love of Jesus or who shared the gospel with you? Perhaps there was a specific person or group of people who were living examples of Christ's redemption. Reflect on your gratitude for this amazing experience with the Lord.

I feel grateful when I remember how God brought _____ into my life to show me and tell me about Jesus. Without him or her, I don't know where I'd be today.

Share your responses with a prayer partner. Celebrate with one another about God's provision for His people.



EXPERIENCING THE PATTERN

Think of this pattern: Seven concentric circles on a whiteboard. These circles are like a target with a bull's-eye in the center—concentric circles. The circles represent the different relationships of our lives: circle 1) **self** circle, 2) **family** circle, 3) **relatives** circle, 4) **friends** circle, 5) **neighbors and associates** circle, 6) **acquaintances** and 7) **person X**. The gospel moves on these contiguous lines—on lines of relationship.

I believe that God holds us responsible for everyone he brings into our sphere of influence. Unfortunately, though, many of us who study evangelism seem to go from circle one out to circle seven in order to salve our consciences because there are ruptured relationships in circles two through six that we prefer to skip over.

When we have ruptured horizontal relationships with people, we also have a ruptured vertical relationship with God. It is not that we do not know the Lord. It is just that He is not really Lord of our lives. We are not willing to let Him be Lord of everything. We are not willing to accept, love, and forgive people on His conditions. With person X, our lifestyles do not have to be consistent. We can talk to person X and then be on our way. There is nothing wrong with telling person X about Jesus. We are supposed to do that. God will bring many strangers into our lives. However, if we cannot tell people in circles two through six about the Lord, we are hypocritical. We are play acting. We are unreal people. If our relationship with the Lord is genuine, we will want to share the good news of Christ with those closest to us.

God holds you responsible for every person who comes into your spheres of influence—into your concentric circles. There are people in all of your circles whom you touch every day, and you do not even see them. Some of them are cantankerous; some of them you do not like; and some of them you really do not want to love. Yet, they are there in relationship to you. They are there for you to love—to meet their needs—so the Father can draw them to His Son Jesus

Quietly whisper this prayer: *You are my Lord, and I long to know You. Jesus, You are my...*

Now ask Him: *Because You are the Lord of my life, what other priorities, activities, or things do I need to change so that I might better know You?*

Be still and listen for Him to speak. Yield these things to **Him. Whatever Jesus asks of you, give it to Him.**

For instance: *I know there are things in my life that have become a distraction and are keeping me away from You. I am ready to surrender my...*

When you're ready, make your sincere declaration: *Lord, I want to know You more. I want to love You and serve You!*



As we exercise our spiritual gifts and direct others to this gateway to supernatural power, we will be on our way to personal and national revival. God's people are the keys to this awakening in our time. The church must rise up and lead on!

How do we do this? Joel 2:12–13 says: *“Even now—this is the Lord’s declaration—‘Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Tear your hearts, not just your clothes, and return to the LORD your God.’ For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in faithful love, and He relents from sending disaster.”*

This will be the next great move of God! God's gateway is prayer and fasting. Coming humbly before God is God's gateway to spiritual power and spiritual breakthroughs. The stage is set. Desperation is at an all-time high in our generation. Most churches are missing demonstrations of major spiritual power. Most Christ-followers are lacking the manifested presence of God in and through their lives. God has our attention. A remnant of us must be desperate before Him. We must take action now to pray and fast. When we do, we will ascend the holy hill before God. *May God have mercy upon us and bring on the next great move of God.*

SHARE with Others in Community

After you have sensed God's leading in your life, engage the strength of community—plan to tell another person about how God wants to bring change to your life. Your words might begin like this:

I sense that the Lord wants me to change in these ways...
I am committed to praying more consistently about...
I am committed to fasting and prayer as I...

LOVE Others in Community

Finally, ask God to make these changes and then show you how to more effectively demonstrate His love to others:

Change me, Lord, to become more like You. By Your Spirit, make me more encouraging, attentive, or compassionate, so that I might better reflect Your love. Change me, heavenly Father.

