

CROSSINGS

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Clarity

It was brutal. It was exhilarating.

I'm talking about Bible study last night. With six young adults of my congregation.

I invited them to have a look at something I was working on. To give me feedback. Did they ever!

At our meeting in August, the Board of Crossings asked me to write a brief intro to the Crossings Method for our website, in order (among other things) to open up our treasury of text studies to a wider audience. I thought I was nearly finished with it. I thought I would just bounce it off the young adults, maybe get a few suggestions, collect my kudos, and send it in.

I pitched it to them this way: I want this introduction to be really clear. I want to be using language that is truly accessible. Perhaps eighth grade reading level? Public language. Not insider language. This is not for people who are already into Crossings. I do not want it to seem cool or clever. Just want to get the point across.

My editors were four men and two women: water engineer, packaging engineer, wine distributor, editor, IT consultant, online head hunter. (Not actual, like in Papua New Guinea, just matching people with jobs.) No matter their background or training, they all chimed in once we got going.

Two weeks ago, I introduced them to the Crossings Method using "A,B,C,1,2,3" terminology (see below). They really took to it. They made some sharp observations, such as (headhunter Sarah) "So, it's like, when you get down to C in your life, you should look over to 1?" "Yes, that's it!" And (editor Courtney) "I don't care that it's holistic and systematic, but I am really taken by the fact that the Crossings Method is relevant and joyful!" (There went half my title and a few paragraphs.)

My friends liked my use of "A,B,C,1,2,3," and they liked a few other things. (They loved "external, internal, eternal," but want me to save it for later.) They seemed to enjoy rooting out words like "holistic" and "systematic" (hey, I like that one!) and helping me chop sentences and paragraphs down to size. They asked me to take out the Bible references—what was I trying to do, prove something? All right, but can I leave them in quotes if they are quotations? Okay. But out went puns and other wordplays, neologisms, redundancies, other-ways-to-put-its, appeals to authorities, etc. One joked about my starting out with ten pages and being down to four now! Another asked, "So, what's your thing with commas?"

So it went. An hour and fifteen minutes on two and a half pages. Whew.

The terminology I use in the brief introduction is different from what you have seen before. (I assume about our newsletter readers that you are familiar with our ways of talking.) I'm trying to increase access to a wonderful product—the Crossings Method. I am afraid we often limit interest and access by the ways we talk. I'm as guilty as anyone.

I would be happy to receive your comments as well, whether you have been steeped in the tradition or are new to it. My e-mail address is pastorfelde@indylutheran.org.

I am sending the "primer" or brief introduction as it stands at the moment, knowing it still needs work. I am not including an example I worked out. But hey, I won't see my "editorial staff" for two weeks, and I've got to move along. They haven't been able to get their hands on the last half of this. But see what you think.

Could we make the Crossings Method a common household utensil?

marcus felde

Crossings Method: Bible Study that is Relevant and Joyful (A Brief Introduction)

Pastor Marcus Felde, Ph.D

The Crossings Method is a way of studying the Bible which always centers on the gospel in order to increase our hope, renew our faith in God, and deepen our love of others.

The Bible is a thick book with a rich diversity of characters, events, topics, perspectives, and moods. It contains histories, prophecies, poems, proverbs, and other sorts of material, written by many authors. You will find awe, beauty, craziness, dreaming, exploration, family trees, gore, humor, inspiration, judgment . . . the list could go on and on. Some passages look meaningless. What use is: “The middle bar, halfway up the frames, shall pass through from end to end”? But some verses impact us immediately: “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?”

Because of its variety, the Bible can be a confusing book. It may impress us as contradictory, mysterious, or irrelevant. Does it even have a unifying theme which we can identify? Or is it a grab bag from which we are supposed to just take what we want? What role should this puzzling book play in our lives?

The Crossings Method describes a pattern which can guide us as we read. Keeping this pattern in mind, we can see that the pieces of the Bible make sense. It is *not* impossible to sum up what the whole thing is about! But the Bible does not merely present a picture for us to see. It wants to *do* something to us. Although the Bible is about other people, it is meant *for us*. Which is to say, it is relevant to our lives.

But if it is intended for us, how do we apply what it says? Do we read the Bible until we come across a clear instruction, and then put that on our “to do” list? Could the Bible be boiled down to a list of rules and commands? What about stories? Does each one have a moral to it which can guide our lives? And what about the fact that so much coverage is given to the killing of Jesus? What good is that story?

The most common way to apply the Bible to our lives (to make it relevant) is to favor the parts of the Bible which tell us what to do or not do, such as the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule. I asked my students in Papua New Guinea what their favorite book of the Bible was. “Proverbs!” Why? Because it is so easy to apply its wisdom to one’s life.

As complex as life is, and as complicated as Scripture is, we should not be surprised that many people prefer to boil it down to a few rules. Fact is, we really should all try harder to be good people. The world would be a

better place if everyone would just do what the Bible says about loving others.

But do we need the Bible to tell us that? We’ve heard that advice elsewhere. The author Aldous Huxley, for example, wrote that the best advice he could give people, after researching the matter for forty-five years, was “be a little kinder to each other.” That is not rocket science.

Trouble is, there is no end to the task of telling us what we ought to do. No one is ever good enough. “You must be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.” We must always try harder and do more. Pretty soon, we can find ourselves avoiding the Scriptures because they seem to be hounding us. Jesus accused Bible teachers in his day of binding heavy burdens on people, hard to carry, and not lifting a finger to help carry them!

When we use the Bible to make ourselves into better people we can also find ourselves making comparisons, criticizing others, becoming smug, or cutting ourselves off from others. Jesus was death on those behaviors. He preferred the company of outright sinners. He had a good time with them (“The Son of Man came eating and drinking!” he said). He gave them gifts of forgiveness, joy, peace, and salvation.

Bible study which only leads to a conclusion about what *we* must do or not do misses the crucial point. Bible study should show what God has done for us, especially by sending his son Jesus Christ to be our savior. “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus did not come to make us do something for *him*. He came to do something for *us*. That notion shocked people when he first said it. It still shocks us.

And it may seem irrelevant. But it is not irrelevant, because what God has done in Christ is what gives people the things we need the most: forgiveness, freedom, hope, joy, peace, unity, and love for others. It is all well and good to know how we ought to act. But it is better by far to allow God to place his Spirit in us, so we can live as his children.

The Crossings Method keeps before us the central fact of Christian faith: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel tells us Jesus came to serve us. To open our eyes. To give us strength. To save us from death. To feed us. To enlighten us. To forgive our sins. To heal us. You name it. Those are all ways of

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expressing the same thing: Jesus saves. That is the upshot of the Bible, and it is meant to transform our lives. So, because the Crossings Method ties the Bible to our lives while keeping the Gospel central, I call it “relevant and joyful.”

The Crossings Method never allows us to forget the Good News that God is at work in us to accomplish what is pleasing to him. True, Jesus tells us to “love one another”; but he makes clear, before he takes another breath, that he provides the impetus and power for our love, adding “as I have loved you.” “We love because he first loved us.” Jesus is not merely a teacher or example of true love, his love kick-starts ours.

The purpose and the strength of the Crossings Method is to allow the gospel, which is “the power of God for salvation,” to dominate our study of the scriptures so that God’s love can work in our hearts to bring us joy and peace, in order that our faith may be active in love.

Principles behind the Crossings Method

The Crossings Method looks at the Bible in a way that is shaped by certain principles. In order to practice the method, it is essential to know these principles.

First: **A Christian’s primary reason for studying the Bible is that it serves to give us faith in Jesus Christ.** That is the Bible’s “reason for being.” That is a great purpose, since it is through faith in Christ that the world regains its hope and God’s people are moved to love.

Second: **Scripture has two messages, law and gospel.** They seem to work against each other, yet somehow they cooperate to do God’s work.

- **On the one hand, God denounces sin and condemns sinners.** He tells us we are lacking in three departments: faith, hope, and love. This spells doom. When we read this sort of message in the Bible, we are hearing God’s **law**.

- **On the other hand, God loves sinners and forgives sin.** He restores faith, hope, and love to those who are lacking. When we read this sort of message in the Bible, we are hearing the **gospel**.

Sorting out the mixed messages of law and gospel is essential to understanding anything the Bible says. We cannot comprehend any of Scripture without knowing that the dying and rising of Jesus Christ resolves this problem. Forgiven, we live. Forgiven, we love.

Third: Both the law and the gospel work on three levels. Distinguishing between these levels is a very helpful aspect of the Crossings Method.

On the one hand, **the law** speaks critically of our failures. The law

A. Accuses people of doing, saying, and thinking bad things toward each other.
B. Blames those actions on our not having faith in God.
C. Warns us that because of our sin we are doomed -- separated from God.

The gospel also works on the same three levels, except positively. The gospel tells us that

1. God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, because of his death and resurrection.
2 The Holy Spirit gives us faith in that promise.
3. God works in us which is pleasing to him.

Notice that law and gospel work in reverse directions. The law leads off by criticizing our behavior and ends by making us despair. The gospel begins by offering us hope and leads us to love. The gospel rolls back what the law does to us.

(Although it's bad outline form, I use letters for law and numbers for gospel to accentuate how distinct the gospel is from the law.)

Fourth: The law and the gospel are both true, all of the time. According to the law we are sinners; but the Holy Spirit makes us saints through the gospel. Lutherans say that we are at the same time sinners and saints. But the word which determines God's judgment on us is the gospel. Gospel trumps law. But the trip through A-B-C-1-2-3 is not one we take a single time. We must die daily to sin, and rise daily to new life through the gospel.

Thus the Bible has one purpose, accomplished through two words from God which operate on three levels, as long as we live.






The Crossings Diagram

The Crossings Method arranges the six aspects of God's law and gospel in a logical sequence which explains how they work, beginning with fault-finding and culminating in life in Christ. That is not how the Bible was written, obviously. Probably no passage will follow this sequence. Yet it is always true that the law of God is meant to drive us to the gospel so that we can have life.

We study a Bible passage by trying to find out how it contributes to our knowledge of Christ. We want to know how a particular passage makes evident God's displeasure at what is wrong with us, and/or shows us what God has done and is doing to restore us. Even if a particular passage is short of one of these elements, that does not change the whole truth about God! It remains true, no matter what, that God "did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be saved."

Sometimes this sequence is arranged in a diagram with two columns (law and gospel) and three rows (the three levels). The dynamic sequence of the diagram is this: Starting at the top of the left column, going down to the bottom, then across to the right column, and back up again. In a U shape, with the turning point of the diagram at the bottom where God intervenes to save us.

Let me fill the diagram, for now, with the points as I have discussed them. When we study a Bible passage, the boxes would contain not only words of Scripture but words about ourselves.

A: God's Law tells us that we wrong one another. 	3: The Gospel results in our loving one another, as the new hope we have for Jesus' sake bears fruit in acts of love.
B: God's Law tells us that our wrong behaviors have their roots in something wrong with our hearts—we lack true faith in God. 	2: The Holy Spirit uses the gospel to inspire us to faith in Jesus Christ. This faith displaces the "something in our hearts" which was leading us to do wrong. 
C: God's Law goes even further and tells us that we are ruined because of what is wrong with us. 	1: The Gospel tells us that Jesus Christ has taken our ruin upon himself (by dying for us), and given us his life (by rising for us). We do not need to despair. 

Another way to imagine the diagram is this:

Lovelessness	Love
Faithlessness	Faith
Hopelessness	Hope

When I diagram it like this, I mean something specific by the terms hope, faith, and love. Hope is the gift we are given through our baptismal unity with the crucified Christ who was raised from the dead. Faith is faith in Jesus Christ. Love is how faith shows up for work, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

How the Crossings Method works

The Crossings way of studying a Bible passage includes four basic tasks.

First, we bring to our study our assumptions about the way God's law and gospel work in our lives to make us free and loving servants of God and one another. That is to say, we bring the pattern discussed above.

Second, we study our biblical text for evidence of those six elements.

<i>Does the text specify something we do (in thought, word, or deed) to hurt one another; that we are lacking in love?</i>	<i>Does the text show that what comes out of our new hearts is the love of others?</i>
<i>Does the text say or hint that the reason we do so is that we lack true faith in God?</i>	<i>Does it present faith in Jesus Christ as the "new heart" God places in those who trust his promise?</i>
<i>Does the text warn us, directly or indirectly, that we are doomed because of our sin? I.e., does it hold out no hope for us?</i>	<i>Does the text tell us that we have hope because of what God has done in Christ?</i>

Third, we flesh out the outline with elements missing from the text. We will probably find the missing elements are not far away, in a related text.

Fourth, we compare what we have learned from the Bible to our own life and situation. We may do this either by examining our own lives, thinking about the lives of others, or by looking at elements of our culture such as literature or movies.

*There is more to be done on this little primer. Obviously, I would like to run through a text with it, as an example. But please e-mail me your comments. My editors and I will be happy to receive them! Additionally, the 2015 seminar **Unearthing Gospel Gold** will be using this primer to teach the method as simply, usably, and practically as possible. Please invite your friends! The schedule follows.*

Unearthing Gospel Gold

Schedule

Sunday, Jan. 25

3:00 – Arrival and Registration
 6:00 Dinner
 7:00 PM Opening Worship
 7:15 Introductory Address: "Unearthing Gospel Gold"
 Thesis 62/ 95 Jerome Burce

 8:30 Closing Prayer
 8:45 Wine and Cheese Fellowship



Cathy



Jerry



Marcus

Monday, Jan. 26

7:00 am Continental Breakfast
 8:45 Morning Prayer
 9:00 Crossings Method Introduced/Revisited: Using
 the Crossings Method to reach a thorough
 hearing of a scriptural text Cathy Lessmann

 12:00 Lunch
 1:00 Crossing Contemporary Culture 1: New Yorker
 Cartoons Marcus Felde

 2:45 The Crossings Method and Me Sherman Lee
 4:00 The Crossings Method and Me Martin Lessmann

 5:30 Dinner
 7:00 Crossing Contemporary Culture 2: Football Fandom
 Steve Albertin & William White
 8:00 The Crossings Method and Me Candice Stone
 9:15 Evening Prayer
 9:30 Wine and Cheese Fellowship



Martin



Candice



William



Sherman

Tuesday, Jan. 27

7:00 AM Continental Breakfast
 8:30 Morning Prayer
 8:45 Using the Six-Step Method for Preaching panel
 10:00 "How I Learned to Trust the Crossings Method"
 Chris Repp
 11:15 Moderated Feedback Marcus Felde
 12:30 Closing Prayer
 12:35 Box Lunch



Steven



Chris

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