

## A STUDY OF JOHN C. MAXWELL'S USE OF THE BIBLE

This work is excerpted from Dr. Eric Weathers' doctoral dissertation at The Master's Seminary which is titled *Work in a Manner Worthy of Your Calling: Practicing Biblical Principles in the Marketplace*.

### Introduction

Church leaders must understand that the redeemed in the marketplace long for godly mentors to encourage them to work worthily of their calling. Pastors must recognize that many believers sacrifice discernment for ideas that sound biblical and perhaps, could help their careers reflect a prayer to trust Christ during their working hours. Genuine believers want to be dedicated to serving in the marketplace in the sincerity of their hearts as unto Christ Himself, doing His will from their heart (Eph 6:5–9). They also long to mentor younger believers to do the same. The challenge is to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). God’s authoritative word is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (3:16–17). Biblical authors wrote at the behest of the Holy Spirit so that God’s people would know Him and serve Him in accordance with His inerrant intent. Therefore, a believer’s study of extra-biblical material must be discerned and measured in light God’s inerrant Word. This chapter is an overview of how John Maxwell uses the Bible to persuade his audience. The reader should be attentive to how he interprets biblical texts which may drive his audience toward unintended applications.

Since John Maxwell declares the Bible is his primary source for his leadership principles,<sup>1</sup> the reader must exercise discernment (2 Tim 4:1–5). One must remain attentive to his methods to interpret biblical texts to determine a literal historical/grammatical hermeneutic

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<sup>1</sup> Maxwell, *The Maxwell Leadership Bible*, inside dust cover.

(LHGH).<sup>2</sup> This work presents examples of Maxwell's interpretation of specific texts and provides a brief LHGH to demonstrate biblical authorial intent for the same passages. Each example will help the reader recognize that Maxwell's teachings can lead many astray because he does not apply sound hermeneutical principles to uncover the single meaning of a biblical text,<sup>3</sup> and because he trusts in extra-biblical revelation, visions, and conversations with the deceased that ultimately persuade his audience toward applications not substantiated by a biblical writer's intent.

How can Maxwell's dependence on clairvoyant conversations with dead people serve any value for believers? What should be a biblical response to Maxwell's method of interpreting Scripture? This study will answer those critical questions and provide biblical refutation to Maxwell's interpretative errors.

### **John Calvin Maxwell**

In secular, and in some evangelical circles, John C. Maxwell is recognized as a leadership rockstar. *Inc. Magazine* awarded him the number one position among the top fifty leadership and management experts in 2014.<sup>4</sup> He holds the distinct honor as a *New York Times* bestselling

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the scope of this work a detailed study of hermeneutics is not provided; however, many LHGH examples are given. If the reader is interested in learning more about this topic he or she is encouraged to do so. Helpful resources are: MacArthur and Mayhue's *A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 134–5; Kaiser's *Toward and Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*, and Zuck's *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth*.

<sup>3</sup> "Proper hermeneutics are the interpretive rules applied by exegesis in order to find the single meaning God intended to convey in the text. By employing the hermeneutical principles of literal, grammatical-historical interpretation, the student can understand this meaning. *Exegesis* can be defined as the skillful application of sound hermeneutical principles to the biblical text in the original languages with a view to discerning and declaring the author's intended meaning to both the immediate and subsequent audiences. In tandem, hermeneutics and exegesis focus on the biblical text to determine what it said and what it originally meant." John MacArthur, and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 134–5.

<sup>4</sup> Jeff Haden, "Top 50 Leaders and Management Experts." *Inc.*, May 12, 2014, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://www.inc.com/jeff-haden/the-top-50-leadership-and-management-experts-mon.html>.

author,<sup>5</sup> and was singled out as the number one leader in business by the American Management Association.<sup>6</sup> One of Maxwell's books positions him as America's expert on leadership and, he personally speaks to several hundred thousand people every year. Additionally, top business leaders of Fortune 500 companies, The United States Military Academy at West Point, National Collegiate Athletic Association, National Basketball Association, and the National Football League are just a few of influential audiences to whom he has spoken.<sup>7</sup>

### Education

Though Maxwell rarely refers to the nature of his college and advanced degrees, he is well known as, "Dr. Maxwell." He received a bachelor's degree from Ohio Christian University in 1969,<sup>8</sup> a Master of Divinity from Azusa Pacific University, and a Doctor of Ministry from Fuller Theological Seminary,<sup>9</sup> "and five honorary Doctorates of Divinity from schools including the California Graduate School of Theology and Liberty University."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John C. Maxwell, *Small Town, Huge Dreams*, <http://www.johnmaxwell.com/my-purpose>, accessed November 30, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> American Management Association, "American Management Association Cites 30 Most Influential Leaders," 2/20/2015, accessed November 30, 2017, <http://www.amanet.org/news/american-management-association-cites-30-most-influential-leaders.aspx>,

<sup>7</sup> John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 1999), 157.

<sup>8</sup> After diligent research, a reliable primary source that mentions the subject in which Maxwell earned this degree could not be found. Many on-line sources suggest a Bachelors in Theology.

<sup>9</sup> Wikipedia, *John C. Maxwell*, accessed November 30, 2017. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_C.\\_Maxwell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_C._Maxwell),. Regarding Fuller Theological Seminary, the reader is highly encouraged to read George Marsden's book, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1987. Marsden's work shows the history of Fuller and how their rejection of inerrancy had a detrimental effect on the institution's ability to train pastors using a literal, historical/grammatical hermeneutic. See also Harold Lindsell, "The Strange Case of Fuller Theological Seminary" in *The Battle for the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> Mira Pavy, "Seven things you need to know about John Maxwell," *The Sojourn: Campus News Indiana Wesleyan University*, October 13, 2015, accessed November 30, 2017, <http://www.thesojourniwu.com/seven-things-you-need-to-know-about-john-maxwell/>

## From Small Church Pastor to Great Church Leader

Dr. Maxwell's first pastorate was in Hillham, Indiana. His inaugural service netted a total of three people: himself, his wife and "an old lady" named Maude.<sup>11</sup> Maxwell admits he loved that church and that he had "a dream to build a great church" but did not know how to do it. Resolved to "build a great church," Maxwell determined to study how great men built great churches. Maxwell reasons:

I know they'll teach me how to build a church because it was my dream and so I got the list of great churches in America and the pastors of these great churches and I began to slowly talk to them or call them on the phone and they didn't know who I was. I said my name's John Maxwell, I have a little church, but I have a dream of building a great church and I'll give you a hundred dollars if you'll give me thirty minutes of your time.<sup>12</sup>

Maxwell's resolve appeals to man rather than the authority of Scripture. A biblical desire to build the church would take into consideration a study of New Testament letters like 1 Thessalonians demonstrate how model churches with model pastors function. A study of 1 and 2 Timothy, even Titus, reveals what to look for in the kind of men God wants as leaders in the church. Positive and negative examples of biblical and unbiblical churches are found in Revelation 2–3 where the reader learns about what Jesus looks for in a church. Those two chapters, reveal the kinds of teachings and activities for which Jesus commends the churches in Asia Minor. Bible students are shocked to read of the heretical doctrines for which Jesus condemned some of those churches and are instructed to avoid committing the same sins.

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<sup>11</sup> John C. Maxwell, "#2043 – Put Your Dream to the Test I – How to Go From Believer to Buyer (03 May 09)," *The Message*, accessed November 28, 2017, <http://www.hourofpower.org.hk/data/readdata2000/readeng-2043.html>.

<sup>12</sup> John C. Maxwell, *Hour of Power vom 10.08.2014*, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://hourofpower.de/cms/media/hourofpower/gottesdienste/2315e.pdf>, as of November 30, 2017, this link was no longer valid; however, I have a hard copy of this article.

Rather than giving diligent attention to Scripture, Maxwell received advice from, according to his calculations, great men who built great churches. After receiving counsel from these unnamed pastors Maxwell states, “I’d just lay my head on the steering wheel and I’d pray, and I’d cry like a baby, and I’d say God if You did that for them, You can do that for me. If You helped them build a church, You can help me build a church.”<sup>13</sup> Maxwell went from “being a believer of a dream to a buyer of the dream.”<sup>14</sup>

In 2014 Maxwell recounted those early days as a small church pastor during a speech on Robert H. Schullar’s *Hour of Power* television program. In that speech, Maxwell mentioned nothing about a diligent study, or mining of God’s authoritative Word to demonstrate to his listeners that he accurately handled the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15).<sup>15</sup> He gave no indication that he truly believes that all Scripture is breathed by God Himself and is profitable, adequate to equip man for every good work (3:16–17). The transcript does not indicate a dependence on Scripture to advise him about how to build a great church. Instead, he gives undue weight to extra-biblical revelation, that is, revelation as a source more profitable than Scripture.

Specifically, Maxwell claims he received revelation from God after reading Schullar’s book: *Move Ahead with Possibility Thinking*. He admits that as he read Schullar’s words, “the greatest churches are yet to be organized” he recalls, “the Spirit of God speaking to me and say John, he means you. You can build a great church for God.”<sup>16</sup> Maxwell suggests that God exegeted

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<sup>13</sup> Maxwell, “#2043 – Put Your Dream to the Test I.”

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> As the Teaching Pastor at Christ Fellowship Church, it stands to reason that Maxwell supports the church’s faith statement concerning the authority of Scripture which states that the “Bible is infallible and inerrant. Because it is inspired by God, it is the ultimate source of truth and is relevant to our every day life.” Considering that statement, it is unclear how Maxwell can depend so heavily on extra-biblical revelation. Christ Fellowship, “What We Believe,” *Christ Fellowship*, accessed November 30, 2017, <http://gochristfellowship.com/new-here/our-beliefs/>.

Schullar's words concluding that Schullar's authorial intent was for John Maxwell to build a great church.

When modern people claim that God speaks to them, whether knowingly, or unknowingly, they give such communication equal authority as the sixty-six books of the Bible, thereby placing themselves on equal par with the biblical writers whom the Holy Spirit used to communicate God's Word (Heb 1:1–2). Concerning the dangers of extra-biblical revelation John MacArthur states, "it is a return to medieval superstition and a departure from our fundamental conviction that the Bible is our sole, supreme, and sufficient authority for all of life. It represents a wholesale abandonment of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*."<sup>17</sup>

In the quest to practice biblical principles in the workplace one must be biblically discerning, lest, like Eve, he or she may be found deceived by entertaining false hopes (Gen 3:13).<sup>18</sup> *Sola Scriptura* is not a hallmark of Maxwell's ministries or his businesses.<sup>19</sup> Instead, he dangerously relies on dreams, visions, and even conversations with the dead.

A dependence on revelation outside the sixty-six books of the Bible results in conflicting, contradictory directives found in statements made by those who say that God speaks to them. Case in point, after his appearance on the *Hour of Power*, while addressing people at *Hillsong Conference 2015*, Maxwell informs the masses, "I would never ask Him [God] for a big church,

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<sup>16</sup> Maxwell, "#2043 Put Your Dream to the Test I."

<sup>17</sup> John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 116.

<sup>18</sup> The word "תִּשְׁתָּחֵל" "deceived" Hifil, perfect, 3MS in Genesis 3:13 means "cheat," "deceive," and in the nif: pf. תִּשְׁתָּחֵל means to "entertain false hopes." Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, HALOT* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 728, electronic format.

<sup>19</sup> John MacArthur, ed., *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016). See Nathan Busenitz in his chapter, "The Ground and Pillar of the Faith" for his treatment of the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*. Busenitz defines *Sola Scriptura* this way: "Scripture is perfectly true and that it stands alone as the ultimate authority for determining what the church is to believe and to teach," 129.

and I would never ask Him for a list that every pastor has on their list.”<sup>20</sup> Here is the problem: that statement is contrary to Maxwell’s claim to have cried while asking God to help him build a big church. It also conflicts with his above claim to have developed a list of pastors who he committed to give a hundred dollars in exchange for thirty minutes of their time. If what Maxwell told the people at *the Hillsong Conference 2015* is true, then his interpretation of Schullar’s book and the perception that God spoke to him about building a great church cannot also be true.

Maxwell’s pastoral career eventually took him from the small town of Hillham, Indiana to a prestigious position as the Executive Director of the Wesleyan World Headquarters.<sup>21</sup> In 1981, he received an offer to be “the leader of the largest church in the Wesleyan denomination,” Skyline church near San Diego, California.<sup>22</sup> Maxwell admits that the staff at Skyline were good people but not strong leaders. After three years he states, “I had completely cleaned house, leaving only two on staff out of the original group.” Fewer than ten years later the church was three times the size and grew the annual budget from \$800,000 to over \$5 Million.<sup>23</sup> When Maxwell departed Skyline in 1995 he says that “leaders from around the country sought to hire my key staff members.”<sup>24</sup> Maxwell is currently the Teaching Pastor at Christ Fellowship Church

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<sup>20</sup> John C. Maxwell, “John Maxwell – Evangelism,” *Hillsong Church*, Hillsong Conference 2015, at the 9:49 mark, last accessed November 30, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/164671370>.

<sup>21</sup> John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 109.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, (110–1).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, (111–2).

in Palm Beach, Florida where he shares pastoral leadership responsibilities with Senior Pastors, Todd and Julie Mullins.<sup>25</sup>

### Crossing over to the Secular Business Community

As Maxwell transitions to the business world one must to keep in mind his claim that his “major source of leadership principles has always been the Bible, the Word of God.”<sup>26</sup> However, when business leaders ask him where he gets his leadership material, he first tells them they do not want to know, which compels them to ardently press for an answer. Finally, Maxwell breaks under pressure and says that “every single one of them [leadership principles] is from the Bible.”<sup>27</sup> This conviction compelled him to become the Executive Editor of the *Maxwell Leadership Bible* which he created to explain “what a godly leader is and how God is glorified when we accept our roles as leaders and empower others to do the same.”<sup>28</sup>

As a believer in search of how to work in a manner worthy of his calling and as one who longs to practice biblical principles while on the corporate clock, one must determine if Maxwell’s Bible teaching is clearly supported by a LHGH, and whether his teachings are derived from a careful analysis of the biblical texts. Does he present a clear understanding of the biblical author and his primary audience? The reader must determine whether what the original author intended for his original readers is consistent with Maxwell’s conclusions and suggested applications.

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<sup>25</sup> Christ Fellowship Church, “Our Pastors,” accessed, November 30, 2017. <http://gochristfellowship.com/new-here/our-pastors/>.

<sup>26</sup> Maxwell, *The Maxwell Leadership Bible*, inside dust cover.

<sup>27</sup> Maxwell, “John Maxwell – Evangelism,” *Hillsong Church*, Hillsong Conference 2015 at the 29:42 mark.

<sup>28</sup> Maxwell, *The Maxwell Leadership Bible*, inside dust cover.

Notwithstanding Maxwell's confession, two sources conflict with whether the Bible is his major source of leadership principles. His favorite books are *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie and *As a Man Thinketh* by James Allen.<sup>29</sup> Another source reveals that *Move Ahead with Possibility Thinking* by Robert H. Schuller greatly impacted his life. Addressing Schuller during an *Hour of Power* television broadcast, he informs him that, "I have a place in my office where I have books that have greatly impacted my life. And this book is one of them, in fact Dr. Schuller; two of your books are in that section of my library. You're the only author in the world that I have two books that have greatly impacted my life and this is one of them."<sup>30</sup> Due to the limited scope of this work the theological teachings of Robert H. Schuller cannot be addressed sufficiently. The point in mentioning Schuller is to demonstrate that he had a significant impact on Maxwell's approach to methods for interpreting the Bible.<sup>31</sup> One must exercise great caution when consulting works by these men who use the Bible to their own ends to persuade their audience to apply Scripture in a way the original authors never intended.

Maxwell recalls sitting in the boardroom at Skyline Church when he, once again, received extra-biblical revelation from "God," saying, "I am about to change you, and cross you over into the secular business community."<sup>32</sup> Moments later he says, "I followed that calling as

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<sup>29</sup> Pavy, *Seven things you need to know about John Maxwell*.

<sup>30</sup> Maxwell, "#2043 Put Your Dream to the Test I."

<sup>31</sup> For further study regarding Robert Schuller's positions on the Bible, the reader is encouraged to consult his works. One book that sheds light on his hermeneutical methods is: Robert H. Schuller, *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 45. Interestingly, Schuller questions, "Can anything be above Scripture?" responding to his own inquiry, he writes, "Yes, the Eternal Word transcends the written Word. Christ is the Word made Flesh. Christ is the Lord over the Scriptures. The Bible must not compete with the Lord of glory."

<sup>32</sup> Maxwell, "John Maxwell – Evangelism," *Hillsong Church*, Hillsong Conference 2015 at the 11:17 minute mark.

quick as I could.” Here again, Maxwell places his perceptions of God speaking to him on equal footing with Scripture.

Maxwell recounts occasions of when people inquired about why he left the ministry, reasoning that “I wasn’t a business man at all, I was just a pastor trying to help churches and pastors.”<sup>33</sup> This calling from “God” into the business community meant that he could no longer use biblical illustrations; in his words, “Everything I used, I couldn’t use anymore, I mean you just can’t go to KPMG and Microsoft and say, ‘in the word...’ Every illustration I had was a biblical illustration, and that went down the tubes.”<sup>34</sup> Maxwell, suggested that he can make his light shine better if he could simply wordsmith a biblical worldview properly for the secular marketplace. In his words, “God helped me understand that principles, incredible life changing biblical principles, that if I package them correctly and if I put them out before them that I’d really be able to make my light shine, I’d be able to shake the salt and so I began to look for ways to do that.”<sup>35</sup> Reading through Maxwell’s secular books reveals that, while his light shines, his biblical illustrations did indeed go “down the tubes.” It is very rare to find Maxwell correctly packaging any references to the Bible, even as he claims that the Word of God is his major source of leadership principles.

When Maxwell appeals to the Bible in his secular books it is important to observe whether he “packages” sections of Scripture consistent with the author’s intent. In one book, he conceals his Scriptural quotes so that one unknowingly reads God’s Word unless he or she flips 165 pages to the endnotes to discover one of two Bible citations in the entire book. Note how

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 11:54.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 12:10.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 12:34.

Maxwell uses Proverbs 29:18 as he writes about how leaders need “a visionary compass,” “not only can a team fail to thrive without a vision—it cannot survive without it. The words of King Solomon of ancient Israel, reputed to be the wisest man who ever lived, are true: ‘Where there is no vision, the people perish.’ Vision gives team members direction and confidence, two things they cannot do without.”<sup>36</sup> This is where careful consideration of authorial intent is important to believers longing to practice biblical principles at work. First, Maxwell’s method of biblical interpretation concludes that Solomon is “reputed to be the wisest man who ever lived.” However, applying a LHGH reveals that God emphatically speaks of Solomon’s wisdom, saying, “there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you” (2 Kgs 3:12). Second, the question Maxwell’s reader must ask of King Solomon’s text in Proverbs 29:18, is whether Solomon warned his original audience about leadership failure through lack of vision toward success in the marketplace? Using Maxwell’s method of Scriptural interpretation, should the reader conclude that Proverbs 29:18 instructs team members to have vision and direction so that their teams will not fail?

In context, Maxwell’s method for interpreting Scripture leads him to apply a meaning to the word “vision” to a twenty-first century audience that is utterly foreign to the Hebrew word King Solomon used before 900 B.C., Maxwell writes, “Great vision precedes great achievement. Every team needs a compelling vision to give it direction. A team without vision is, at worst, purposeless.”<sup>37</sup> From a twenty-first century business perspective, it is critical for management to have a crystal-clear understanding of their company’s core competencies. To guarantee

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<sup>36</sup> John C. Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 96.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

enterprise success, great leaders strive to ensure their employees understand their mission and objectives. However, Maxwell's appeal to Proverbs 29:18 as a proof-text for sound leadership and corporate success betrays King Solomon's intent.

Applying a LHGH to the text we find that the word "vision" in Proverbs 29:18 requires that we must consider its context concerning the urgency of discipline. In verse 17 Solomon issues an imperative to parents to correct, teach and raise<sup>38</sup> their son biblically for a specific purpose: "so that he will give you rest."<sup>39</sup> In this case, parents are motivated to correct their son so that he will cause them to rest and to make them glad,<sup>40</sup> even to "delight their soul" (29:17). The Hebrew word for "delight" carries a connotation of delightful food and appears only two additional times in the Hebrew Bible: Genesis 49:20 and Lamentations 4:5. The meaning in each case deals with "delicate food, dainties."<sup>41</sup> The implication for moms and dads who refuse to raise their son in accord with Biblical precepts, is that he will not know the importance of tending to the needs of his aging parents.<sup>42</sup> So, in verse 18, when that happens, "the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the law." In other words, when the Bible is not correctly taught to subsequent generations there is "no vision," meaning, there is no declaration of God's Word, no forthtelling, or preaching of God's written revelation resulting in sons who run wild,

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<sup>38</sup> "יָסַר," HALOT, 419.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31*, The New International Commentary On the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005), 444.

<sup>40</sup> "מְעִדְנִים," HALOT, 679.

<sup>41</sup> Wilhelm Gesenius and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, "מְעִדְנֵי-מֶלֶךְ," *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003), 491, electronic format.

<sup>42</sup> Waltke, 445.

and uncorrected, undisciplined, ill-informed sons ignoring their aging parents. Clearly, a study in context demonstrates Maxwell's application of Proverbs 29:18 does not meet the LHGH test.

### **Maxwell on Evangelism**

Maxwell dreams of "impacting the world and changing lives one at a time."<sup>43</sup> His dream compels him because personal growth and development "has the power to change us individually, connect communities, be a catalyst to corporations, and transform countries around the world."<sup>44</sup>

When considering the great commission in Matthew 28:16–20, Maxwell's passion is at odds with Jesus's command to make disciples. Boldly announcing his life's purpose Maxwell states, "You see, my passion in life is growing and equipping others to do remarkable things and lead significant and fulfilled lives. There's no greater mission for me. There's no higher goal than to help others realize their significance and potential."<sup>45</sup> Here is the problem with Pastor Maxwell's statement: the ultimate mission for a pastor is not to equip saints to leadership significance and fulfilled lives, but to train them to do the work of the ministry until they attain the unity of the faith (Eph 4).

The believer who hungers to work worthily of his calling, and longs to practice biblical principles in the workplace, will be disappointed to see Maxwell's methods of biblical interpretation reveals that he frequently has an application in search of a Bible verse. He often appeals to *The Message Bible* (MSG), at best a contextualized paraphrase of the Bible and at worst a misguided Bible commentary. Maxwell combines this work with alluring applications

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<sup>43</sup> Maxwell, "My Purpose: Small Town Huge Dreams."

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

that appear to have biblical authority, but lack authorial intent. Such is the case with his attempt to evangelize unbelievers with Ephesians 3:14–20. Maxwell’s method causes him to misapply this passage from the MSG to pray for himself and the readers of his book, *No Limits: Blow the cap off your Capacity*.<sup>46</sup> Maxwell suggests from Ephesians 3:14–20 that,

In 2016, I sensed that my phrase for the year was “God Room.” Those two words led me to Ephesians 3:14–20. Throughout the year I prayed using the words of that passage as my guide while praying for myself and others. The result? I’ve had a year like no other. At nearly seventy, my capacity has enlarged and my ROI from speaking, writing, leading my companies, and partnering with others has been incredible. It’s been my greatest year ever.<sup>47</sup>

It is important for believers to pray for marketplace workers. Praying for fellow workers in the truth is honorable and encouraged. The Apostle John prayed for Gaius in 3 John because he wanted him to be prosperous, because Gaius supported missionaries, strangers who proclaimed the name of Christ. John says, “we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth” (3 John 8). He prayed for Gaius’ success in the world of commerce in order to increase his capacity to be a fellow worker in the word of God that leads the lost to salvation. Yet, notice that the way Maxwell prays for his readers is much different than the way John prayed for Gaius: “I want the same for you.” Specifically, he prays for their capacity to increase, that their ROI at work would be high, that their friendships flourish. He prays for subsequent years to be their best<sup>48</sup>—all derived from a mistranslation of Ephesians 3:14–20 from *The Message Bible* which positions verses 14–17 this way: “My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to

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<sup>46</sup> John C. Maxwell, *No Limits: Blow the Cap Off Your Capacity* (New York: Center Street, 2017), 268.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 267–8.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in.” Here is the problem: Maxwell’s method of biblical interpretation avoids a LHGH which causes him to construe that this passage was addressed to unbelievers, in so doing he isolates these verses with disregard for Paul’s authorial intent and indifference for his original audience whom Paul identifies as faithful saints in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:1). Believers who look to John Maxwell for biblical answers concerning how to evangelize the lost in the workplace must notice how he uses the MSG to contextualize or modernize the passage. His method for biblical interpretation causes him to apply it to unbelievers, he prays that they will know God if they simply open their hearts to Him and ask Him into their lives.<sup>49</sup>

Notice that the MSG translates *toutou karin* (τούτου χάριν) (3:14) as “my response.” An accurate translation is, “for this reason.” Applying LHGH reveals that the first Greek word is a demonstrative neuter pronoun<sup>50</sup> and the second Greek word means “on account of, because of, for the sake of.”<sup>51</sup> These two words introduce the reason for which Paul bows his knees to the Father. To glean Paul’s intent, context must be consulted.

Paul frequently begins sentences only to interrupt himself with a different direction. Notice that in Ephesians 3:1–2, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he quickly discerns that prayer, at that point in time, was not as important as educating his readers about the mystery of Gentile salvation, which he discussed in chapter 3. He told them God’s purpose for saving them was so that in ages to come He would glorify Himself by showing the riches of His grace

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 1077.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., “χάριν,” 1469.

and kindness to those who are in Christ (3:7). He informed them that believing Gentiles are God’s workmanship (2:10) fellow heirs, fellow members of the same body, fellow partakers of the promise with the believing Jews. Paul prayed for them to know that they have bold and confident access to the Father (3:12) so they should not be depressed about Paul’s imprisonment because his tribulations are their glory (3:13).

Notice that Paul used the same phrase again, “For this reason,” in Ephesians 3:1. Here, Paul initiated prayer for the faithful saints (1:1) known as Gentiles (3:1)—he prayed for believers. As indicated, the phrase “for this reason” in 3:14 refers to the same phrase, “for this reason” in 3:1; which drives the reader further back into chapter two,<sup>52</sup> where Paul revealed that God Himself is peace for believers (2:14) who, though formerly dead in their sins and transgressions, were made alive in Christ through God’s gift of grace and faith (2:1–8).

In contrast with Maxwell’s petition for unbelievers, Paul prayed for believers who God already saved by grace through faith. Without regard for Paul’s authorial intent, Maxwell (again taking his cue from the MSG’s last words of Ephesians 3:17), prayed that “Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in.” LHGH reveals that this phrase is not found in any Greek biblical manuscripts—it is a complete fabrication. A simple reading of Paul’s prayer reveals that he asked God to grant faithful saints continued strength dispensed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Rom 1:4; 15:19; 1 Cor 2:4; 1 Thess 1:5).<sup>53</sup> His prayer is that the Holy Spirit would grant this strength to these faithful saints “in the inner man” (εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον). Concerning this phrase Spiros Zodhiates notes:

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<sup>52</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament*, vol. 10, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 208.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

The inner man, mind, soul or spirit of man (Rom. 7:22; Eph. 3:16). As used by Paul, the inner man means the mind or soul considered as being renewed and strengthened by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 4:16). With the noun implied, *hoi é̄sō*, those within, the Church, i.e., the Christians (see 1 Cor. 5:12); the opposite of *hoi é̄xō* (1854), those that are without.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, Paul employed the opposite of “inner man” as he addressed believer’s behavior with “outsiders,” “non-Christians.” (1 Thess 4:12),<sup>55</sup> which is the exact opposite of Ephesians 3:16.

Notice Maxwell’s citation of the MSG’s mistranslation of Ephesians 3:18 which states, “Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.” From this text, Maxwell’s method for interpreting the Bible leads him to conclude that “when Scripture says that God’s love has breadth, it means that God’s love includes everyone. God loves everyone—of every faith.”<sup>56</sup> Ephesians 3:18 does not say “God’s love has breath,” therefore, this passage cannot be construed to indicate that God loves every one of every faith. Maxwell’s interpretation borders on the heresy of universalism, the teaching that all people regardless of what they believe will be saved.

This is the reason a LHGH is so critical. Maxwell’s interpretative appeal to the MSG causes him to leave out key words inspired by the Holy Spirit and used by Paul to convey His intent for his original readers, and by extension—Maxwell’s readers. LHGH reveals that Paul wanted believers “to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ” (Eph 3:18–19a, NASB). Paul’s original audience

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<sup>54</sup> Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 662.

<sup>55</sup> Frederick W. Danker, et al., “ἐξω,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 354.

<sup>56</sup> Maxwell, *No Limits*, 270.

were believers, they were faithful saints (see Eph 1:1). Commenting on Ephesians 3:18 Harold Hoehner notes,

Here, as earlier (1:1, 4, 13, 15, 18; 2:19, 21; 3:8), the ἅγιοι, “saints,” refers to believers and not angels. Growth in the individual believer cannot occur in isolation but must be accomplished in context with other believers. Furthermore, true growth cannot occur by association with only certain believers, ones preferred because they are of the same socioeconomic, intellectual, or professional status. Paul prays that it might be accomplished in association with *all* the saints.<sup>57</sup>

Maxwell’s interpretation demonstrates a misunderstanding of Paul’s intent for Ephesians 3:18 which could lead his readers to potentially believe that “God loves everyone—of every faith” and therefore, ostensibly saves every one of every faith.

Watch how Maxwell attempts to demonstrate the veracity of his interpretation, he once again appeals to the confusing MSG. This time he sets his sights on John 3:16: “This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.” The New American Standard Bible translates John 3:16 as: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Making use of a LHGH reveals that the word γὰρ (for) is an explanatory conjunction in Greek,<sup>58</sup> “this use indicates that additional information is being given about what is being described. It can often be translated *for, you see, or that is, namely.*”<sup>59</sup> Since Jesus employed the words “for God so,” it is important to see what He intended for Nicodemus to understand which then leads the modern

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<sup>57</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 486.

<sup>58</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 673.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

reader to know what Jesus meant by what He said. The word “so” is not an adjective describing how much God loved the world, it is an adverb which is “used to express a correlation between two elements in a clause.”<sup>60</sup> Wallace demonstrates the word “so” is a “comparative (manner): *as, just as, in the same way, thus, or in this manner* (suggests an *analogy* or *comparison* between the connected ideas or tells how something is to be done).”<sup>61</sup> In context, the idea is that in the same manner the Israelites looked at the lifted bronze serpent in Moses’ hands to save their temporal lives (John 3:14; Num 21:9) so, in the same manner, must people look to God’s unique Son for eternal life. The word “whoever” in John 3:16 simply means “all,”<sup>62</sup> and the word “believes” is a Greek present active participle, indicating on-going continuous action. Only those believing in Jesus have eternal life. This then, is the result of their on-going continuous belief, “Eternal Life,”<sup>63</sup> which carries an entirely different meaning than the MSG’s “lasting life.”

With careful observation, LHGH reveals God’s purpose for giving His Son is found in the second occurrence of word “that” in John 3:16. Defining “that” as a purpose conjunction, Wallace brings further clarity, stating that God “gave his only Son, in order that everyone who believes in him [should not perish but should have eternal life].”<sup>64</sup> Wallace points out that this purpose conjunction demonstrates the “purpose for which God gave his Son and not the purpose

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<sup>60</sup> Albert L. Lukaszewski, gen. ed., Correlative Adverb in *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament Glossary of terminology*, (Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2007), electronic format.

<sup>61</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 761–2.

<sup>62</sup> Zodhiates, “πᾶς,” *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 1124.

<sup>63</sup> Wallace, 620–621.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 676. Brackets by Wallace.

for which God loved the world.”<sup>65</sup> He gave His Son for the sole purpose that all those believing in Him would not perish.

Maxwell’s methods of biblical interpretation demonstrate a misunderstanding of the authorial intent of Ephesians 3:18. Therefore, his teaching could confuse naïve readers to believe a universalistic salvation message that “God loves everyone—of every faith” and so saves every one of every faith. The error of such an interpretation is countered in Jesus’ interaction with people who believed something about Him, but their faith was not saving faith. In John 2:23–25 “many believed in His name, observing his signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them.” In other words, Jesus did not believe their belief was saving faith and one of them was Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews and the teacher of Israel (3:1, 10) who would neither see or enter the kingdom of heaven unless he was born again from above (John 3:3, 5).

Another example of faith that does not save is found in John 8. Jesus told “those Jews who had believed Him, if you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of mine; and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31–32). However, in John 8:40 those same “believers” sought to kill Jesus and in verse 44 Jesus tells them they are from their father the devil—Jesus was not a Universalist.

### **Maxwell on the Woman at the Well**

John Maxwell’s conclusion that “God loves everyone—of every faith”<sup>66</sup> is not derived from an isolated method of biblical interpretation. Appealing once again to his method of extra-

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 668.

<sup>66</sup> Maxwell, *No Limits*, 270.

biblical revelation, he draws from an imaginary clairvoyant conversation between himself, his deceased mother, and the Samaritan Woman at the well, a woman who has been dead for nearly 2,000 years. The dead Samaritan woman allegedly told Maxwell and his mother that “perhaps the most surprising thing of all is that Jesus values you, no matter what you believe.”<sup>67</sup> A simple reading of John 4 reveals nothing that authenticates Maxwell’s interpretative method of clairvoyant conversations.

Maxwell’s extra-biblical conversation with the woman does not resemble the clear reading of the text. In Maxwell’s telling of the account, the woman says nothing to the mother son duo about Jesus drawing the line between true and false worshippers (John 4:23). Maxwell’s imaginary woman at the well says nothing about the kind of worshippers the Father seeks to be His worshippers (4:23). Nowhere in the dialogue does he ask about Jesus insisting that “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth” (4:24). Rather than appeal to Jesus’s clear teaching in the text, Maxwell contrives that the woman told him God “values us no matter what.”<sup>68</sup>

In contrast to Maxwell’s method of biblical interpretation, a clear reading of the Bible’s account shows that Jesus led this woman to salvation. A LHGH demonstrates that Jesus’ conversation helped her recognize the devastating consequences of her sin which brought her to repentance and subsequent evangelism of the men in her village. Jesus valued her, like He values all people caught up in idolatry, but He gives them sound doctrine so that they can renounce their idolatrous religion and worship the Father in spirit and truth. However, Maxwell’s imagined,

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<sup>67</sup> John C. Maxwell, *Wisdom from Women in the Bible: Giants of the Faith Speak Into Our Lives* (New York: Faith Words, 2015), 141.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

counter-biblical conversation with the Samaritan woman, that Jesus loves people no matter what they believe, conflicts with His self-declared hatred for false doctrine. One must ask how can Maxwell's appeals to clairvoyant conversations motivate his audience towards success in the marketplace serve any biblical value for believers? What should be a biblical response to Maxwell's method of interpreting Scripture?

### Jesus Hates False Doctrine

God hates false doctrine. In Revelation 2:6 Jesus compliments the church of Ephesus because they "hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans," about which He says, "I also hate." The Greek word for "hate" appears forty times in the New Testament, this is the only one where Jesus says, "I hate." While it is true that Jesus does not say he hates people holding an idolatrous faith, Maxwell's interpretation that Jesus "loves every one of every faith," without further clarification, could deceive false converts into thinking that, apart from repentance and an embracement of the gospel, that Jesus may love their faith. Quite the contrary, Jesus says, "I also hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans." Time and space prevent further study about the Nicolaitans, but one thing is clear, Jesus hates their faith, He hates their deeds, and He hates their teachings.<sup>69</sup>

Applying LHGH to Revelation 2 reveals the deeds and teachings of the peddlers of the kind of faith Jesus hates. These false teachers believed and taught some in the Church in Pergamum to commit acts of immorality (2:14–15). The church of Thyatira contained some who had a faith consistent with a kind of faith the Nicolaitans taught. Contrary to Jesus loving their faith, He tells them, "I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts

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<sup>69</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 147.

of immorality” (2:20). Jezebel, and those she deceived, were not like the repentant woman at the well who turned from her immorality. Those holding a faith repugnant to Jesus did so even after He gave them time to repent; however, Jesus says, they do not want to repent of her immorality (2:21–22). This is the kind of dedicated love Jesus extends to people holding to false doctrine, but, Maxwell’s teaching from Scripture does not call people, whom Paul refers to as “children of wrath,” dead in their sins and transgressions, to repentance (Eph 2:1–8; Matt 4:17), at least not in his clairvoyant conversation with the woman at the well.<sup>70</sup> Once again, I ask, how can Maxwell’s appeals to clairvoyant conversations with dead people motivate his audience towards success in the marketplace serve any biblical value for believers? What should be a biblical response to Maxwell’s method of interpreting Scripture?

### **Maxwell on the Book of Ruth**

Maxwell describes an occasion when he awoke early,<sup>71</sup> writing, “the pull of God was especially strong this morning, and I have a profound sense of anticipation, but I’m not sure what God is up to or what He has in store for me. I ask God to speak to me and to direct me in prayer.”<sup>72</sup> God does not speak to people in prayer, people speak to Him in prayer. God speaks directly to people through the all-sufficient sixty-six books of the Bible. Nevertheless, Maxwell, describing his “vision,” tries not to be distracted by his busy schedule. Rather than opening a reliable Bible translation to adequately equip him for every good work, his method for receiving

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 135–7.

<sup>71</sup> John Maxwell consistently appeals to extra-biblical revelation as he invites his readers to feel like they are present with him when he converses with men and women in the Bible. In his book *Running with The Giants: What Old Testament Heroes Want you to Know about Life and Leadership*, he imagines that he dialogues with the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11. His imagination runs wild, but he presents the conclusions to these conversations with specific action items for he and his readers to follow.

<sup>72</sup> Maxwell, *Wisdom from Women in the Bible*, 1.

revelation from God goes beyond the authority of the Bible to God speaking directly to him. Maxwell explains, “I want to quiet my mind and be open to whatever God has to say.”<sup>73</sup>

Maxwell reveals that during this vision his thoughts were of his mother who died in 2009, but then his head suddenly starts to swim, try as he might, he cannot open his eyes, he sees flashes of light like stars while his ears ring. Finally, with his eyes open, he is “standing in a beautiful meadow filled with pink flowers on a sunny day.”<sup>74</sup> Maxwell notices his deceased mother next to him and hears her calling his name. He asks his mother if they are in heaven. Her answer, “of course, dear.”<sup>75</sup> Maxwell recounts that he was about to cry again and asks his mom “Are we going to see Jesus?” She responds with an apologetic “No.” Instead, Dr. Maxwell is in heaven to meet some “amazing women—each a giant of the faith.”<sup>76</sup> The first remarkable woman he meets is Ruth.

Here is the problem: A careful reading of the four chapters of the book of Ruth clearly shows that Maxwell’s vision conflicts with the biblical account of the real Ruth. Ruth purportedly teaches Maxwell many things about her life and one does not have to read far into the story to notice that portions of his vision are opposed to a clear LHGH.

First, Ruth, a Moabite, tells Dr. Maxwell that her father arranged her marriage to Mahlon. If this is true, then the writer of Ruth is mistaken, and the authority of Scripture is suspect. Ruth 1:4 clearly states that the men “took for themselves Moabite women as wives.” The word “took” can also be translated “lift up” or “carry.”<sup>77</sup> The men performed the action of “taking,” “lifting

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 2–3.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>77</sup> “נשא,” HALOT, 724.

up,” or “carrying” their wives into marriage. They did not receive their wives through an arranged marriage. Daniel Block points out that Judges 21:23 employs the same word for “took” which “speaks of marriage by abduction: with the consent of the rest of the Israelites, the Benjamites forcibly seized the dancers at Shiloh and *took* them as wives.”<sup>78</sup>

Second, during Maxwell’s extra-biblical revelation, Ruth informed him that her and Mahlon “had been married for a short time, so short that God had not yet given us children”<sup>79</sup> by the time Mahlon died. If, during Maxwell’s vision, Ruth said that, then how is it that Maxwell did not think to write about Ruth 1:4–5 which mentions the men and their wives lived there “about ten years” and then they died?

Third, Maxwell reports from his vision that Ruth appeals to the blessings of food from the harvest in Deuteronomy 24:19–22, but he did not ask her about the likely reason for the drought that probably drove the family to abandon their land in Israel. The book of Ruth finds its roots directly in the Pentateuch (Gen–Deut). The first verses of Ruth mention a devastating famine in the land. God issued blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. While the author of Ruth does not overtly insist that the famine is the result of disobedience, God is clear that rejecting His ordinances has consequences. He warned Israel in Leviticus 26:19–20 that: “I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. ‘Your strength will be spent uselessly, for your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit.’”

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<sup>78</sup> Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth*, The New American Commentary 6, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 628–9, electronic Format.

<sup>79</sup> John C. Maxwell, *Wisdom from Women in the Bible*, 5.

Based on the above passage and Deuteronomy 28:32–33, 49–52, Block surmises that the deaths of the men came as a result “of the spiritual crises in the land.”<sup>80</sup> Deuteronomy 7:3–4 brings even more clarity about Naomi, Mahlon, and Chilion’s disregard for the Torah. God instructed the Israelites to not intermarry with the people of pagan nations because they would turn their hearts away from following Him to serve other gods. When this happens, God says, “then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.” The men were married to Ruth and Orpah for about ten years, then died without having children. The Hebrew word for “left” in 1:3 and “bereft” in 1:5 is used in the context of the three men in Naomi’s family dying and of her surviving. The three times this word occurs in Judges are in the context of judgment and survival from judgement. Out of the twenty-nine times this word is used in the Torah, twenty-seven occurrences deal with judgment and surviving judgment.

Fourth, in Maxwell’s vision, he repeatedly says Ruth followed her heart to do what was right. However, consistent with God’s warning in Jeremiah 17:9–10, readers should note that: “The heart is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.” Rather than instruct his readers to examine the inerrant Word of God for direction and discernment for God’s revealed will, some readers may follow their hearts, or like Maxwell, follow unauthoritative, even heretical visions. Concerning Jeremiah 17 Charles Dyer warns: “Since He knows those innermost thoughts and motives that an individual might hide from others, He can justly render to each person what he deserves. Those who forsake the Lord, ‘the spring of living water,’ will be judged (17:13).”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 609.

<sup>81</sup> Charles Dyer et al., *Nelson’s Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Word, 2001), 606, electronic format.

### Ruth: Understanding the Big Picture

Maxwell should have developed a complete understanding of Ruth through a LHGH so that he could present the author's intent for his original audience, which is the same purpose for his readers. The book of Ruth is known as a historical short story rather than a "novella" or a "tale;"<sup>82</sup> the latter two genres indicate works that may not necessarily be historical reality. The whole book screams "historical reality" and is filled with geographical locations, attestation to the main characters with normal human emotions, customs, laws, legal proceedings and a sound work ethic. Without visiting heaven with his deceased mother through dreams and visions, Matthew confirms the historical authenticity of Ruth. He could not have known to add Ruth to Jesus's genealogy (Matt 1:5) without having read this book.

While it is seemingly impossible to ascertain the author's identity, it is significantly less difficult to see several purposes for these eighty-five verses of this short story. In one sentence, the theme of Ruth is: "from destruction to restitution: God's sovereignty in action." The book of Ruth describes human behavior; it does not prescribe how people must comport themselves in like situations.

Applying a LHGH reveals that the Book of Ruth is a theological masterpiece about God's providence working in the lives of sinful people so that believers and unbelievers alike can observe God working through normal, everyday people faced with trials, disappointment, destitution and wealth. Yet despite all the chaos found in this short work, God grants unmerited favor through his steadfast love and redemption so that their physical needs are met. God extended His amazing Grace to Ruth, a Moabitees of all people, a former worshiper of Chemosh, "the detestable idol of Moab" (1 Kgs 11:7), and "the abomination of Moab" (2 Kgs 23:13).

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<sup>82</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 602.

Through God's grace and sovereignty, Ruth is the great-grandmother of King David, from whom the Lord Jesus Christ would one day be born in her town, the town of her people (1:16), the town of Bethlehem.

Had Maxwell applied a LHGH he would have focused on the last words in the book of Judges which are: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Further, the first word in Ruth is rendered "now" is a Hebrew imperfect *waw* consecutive indicating incomplete action conjoining consecutive events.<sup>83</sup> For the English mind, this is an unexpected approach to introduce a narrative, let alone an entire book. If the author intends to link the book of Ruth to the events in the book of Judges, then he chose the most expedient Hebrew grammar. Knowing the consecutive nature of Judges and Ruth aids in grasping the setting in which the events of Ruth took place. The focus on the catastrophic circumstances near the town of Bethlehem in the later portion of Judges (17–21) and also in the first chapter of Ruth is the polar opposite of the events described at the later part of Ruth. Bethlehem in Judges and in Ruth 1 leaves people perplexed as to whether the concepts of love, hope and redemption in the future are even remotely conceivable. This seemingly insignificant small town demonstrates a lawless approach to life. Contrariwise, Bethlehem in Ruth 2–4 is a society expressing Yawheh's *hesed* kind of unfailing love for one another which finds its culmination in King David from whom the ultimate redeemer, Jesus would come.

So, one may ask, how can John Maxwell's appeals to clairvoyant conversations with dead people motivate his audience towards success in the marketplace serve any biblical value for believers? What should be a biblical response to Maxwell's method of interpreting Scripture?

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<sup>83</sup> Frederic Clarke Putnam, *Hebrew Bible Insert: A Student's Guide to the Syntax of Biblical Hebrew* (Quakertown, PA: Stylus Publishing, 2002), §2.2.3, P. 31.

## John Maxwell Companies

A brief overview of Dr. Maxwell's companies is important because his methods for biblical interpretation result in instances of misapplication of Scripture in various settings. Maxwell has written over 100 books, translated into fifty languages,<sup>84</sup> three have sold over a million copies.<sup>85</sup> Maxwell founded EQUIP and the John Maxwell Company. Combined, these two organizations have trained more than 5 million leaders globally.<sup>86</sup> The John C. Maxwell Company provides leadership development and training programs built on the timeless principles of its founder with customizable curriculum to help with the challenges associated with leadership, organizational issues and culture.<sup>87</sup>

EQUIP is Maxwell's non-profit entity which invites people "to invest your prayers, talents and financial resources with EQUIP® to develop effective Christian leaders who will reach the nations for Christ."<sup>88</sup> This organization claims that their teams have trained six million leaders in 196 nations. EQUIP associates believe that they have seen thousands of "lives changed through the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the next four years, EQUIP will prayerfully aim to see one million individuals come to Christ and experience transformation."<sup>89</sup> EQUIP declares that "with the completion of the Great Commission as their priority, these devoted leaders follow the

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<sup>84</sup> John Maxwell, "My Purpose: Small Town Huge Dreams," accessed December 17, 2017, <http://www.johnmaxwell.com/my-purpose>.

<sup>85</sup> Ohio Christian University, profile of Dr. Maxwell, accessed November 30, 2017, <http://www.ohiochristian.edu/profile/dr-john-maxwell>.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> John C. Maxwell Company, accessed November 30, 2017, <http://johnmaxwellcompany.com/about>.

<sup>88</sup> EQUIP, *Mission and Vision*, accessed, November 30, 2017, <http://www.iequip.org/about/mission-and-vision/>.

<sup>89</sup> Maxwell, "My Purpose: Small Town Huge Dreams."

leadership development model demonstrated by Jesus of Nazareth—during His public ministry, Jesus spent the greatest amount of His time training a group of leaders to impact the world.”<sup>90</sup> According to INJOY Stewardship’s website, this Maxwell entity was “founded out of the desire to not simply help churches raise money, but rather, to help churches raise more fully surrendered followers of Jesus.”<sup>91</sup> In one of their promotional videos, INJOY consultants, making use of Maxwell’s interpretative methods, used extra-biblical revelation to them from God. These consultants suggest that believers should also listen to the voice of God and let Him speak so that He [God] can say, “here’s what I want you to give for my kingdom.”<sup>92</sup>

The INJOY marketing plan suggests that they can even help churches reach people for Jesus during a capital campaign. In one of their videos, an INJOY consultant asked his listeners “if you’ve never received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, would you do so today?” The INJOY consultant mentions that at the end of the meeting they had “200 new salvations,” “people added to the kingdom,” “it was the biggest salvations weekends they’d seen.” If there were 200 people saved that weekend, praise God! However, to emphatically declare that these 200 people were saved and added to the kingdom simply because they may have “received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior” seems premature.

In Acts 2 Peter preached the gospel and indicted his listeners as Jesus’s killers. Peter confronted them with the truth that Jesus is “both Lord and Christ.” Dealing with the overwhelming weight of their sin, they responded with a question, saying, “What shall we do?”

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<sup>90</sup> EQUIP, *About*, accessed November 30, 2017, <http://www.iequip.org/about/>.

<sup>91</sup> INJOY Stewardship Solutions, *Who we are*, last accessed November 30, 2017, <https://www.injoystewardship.com/about-us>.

<sup>92</sup> INJOY Stewardship Solutions, Video Resources, “How to Reach People for Jesus in Your Capital Campaign: The Story of New Hope O’ahu,” accessed September 13, 2017, <https://www.injoystewardship.com/resources/>.

Peter did not ask them to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior that day. Consistent with Jesus’s on-going repetitive practice of commanding people to repent<sup>93</sup> (Matt 4:17), Peter issued the same imperative—he commanded each one of them to repent (Acts 2:38)! Shortly thereafter, Luke records these words “so then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” Could this type of “believism” be an isolated message among Maxwell entities? Further research reveals this is not the case.

Another capital campaign claims that “398 people gave their lives to Christ!”<sup>94</sup> Since INJOY does not post a doctrinal statement, nor preaching and teaching content about soteriology, they do not clarify, or appeal to a biblical passage to define what is meant by “giving one’s life to Christ.” Nor do they cite biblical passages articulating the need to “give one’s life to Christ” as proof of salvation.

### Conclusion

Having explored Dr. John C. Maxwell’s methods for interpreting the Bible, and teaching and preaching, his profession that the Bible is his primary source for his leadership principles rings hollow (see Chapter One for Maxwell’s treatment of Genesis 3 and Luke 16). With the application of a LHGH the reader has seen specific instances where Maxwell misapplies the Word of God. The examples cited in this work are just the proverbial tip of the iceberg, yet they

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<sup>93</sup> The verb “repent” μετανοεῖτε (*metanoete*) from the root, μετανοέω (*metanoeo*) in Matthew 4:17 is a present, active, imperative, second person plural. Therefore, Matthew indicates that Jesus’ command for repentance was an on-going directive throughout His ministry (see also Luke 13:3, Psalm 7:12, and Psalm 130:3–4). Zodhaites, defines this word as, “μετανοέω *metanoéō*; contracted *metanoō*, fut. *metanoēsō*, from *metá* (3326), denoting change of place or condition, and *noéō* (3539), to exercise the mind, think, comprehend. To repent, change the mind, relent. Theologically, it involves regret or sorrow, accompanied by a true change of heart toward God.” Spiros Zodhates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1992), 969.

<sup>94</sup> INJOY Stewardship Solutions, “Seven Practices of Churches that See Salvation in Their Campaigns,” accessed November, 30, 2017, <https://www.injoystewardship.com/seven-practices-of-churches-that-see-salvation-in-their-capital-campaigns/>.

demonstrate Maxwell's methods of biblical interpretation are a rejection of biblical authority. His lack of exegetical research, spurious extra-biblical revelation, fanciful visions, and conversations with the dead may lead some of his readers to unbiblical conclusions and applications never intended by the authors of Scripture. What should be a biblical response to Maxwell's method of interpreting Scripture? Clearly, believers should not consult Dr. Maxwell for biblical practices in the marketplace.