

CONNECT!

Building Authentic Relationships

*We're Christ's representatives.
God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences
and enter into God's work of making things right between them.
We're speaking for Christ himself now:
Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.
How? You ask - In Christ.
God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong,
so we could be put right with God. (2 Corinthians 5: 20-21)*

Sunday morning input and small groups discussion
Term:1 2019

CONNECT

Build authentic relationships with others

The life of Jesus was marked by relationships!

Genuine, listening, caring, encouraging friendship!

How do we connect well with others in our
neighbourhoods and networks?

10:00am & 6:00pm Sundays Diamond Valley Baptist Church

MORNING SERIES TERM ONE

CONNECT! BUILDING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Sunday	Sunday Topic	Small Group discussion
3 Feb 2019	Week 1 Introduction to building relationships.	
10 Feb	Week 2 Listening like Jesus did Principle: 1 Be a good listener.	Luke 5:27-32 & 2Cor 5:20-21 Who are the people I am to attend to carefully?
17 Feb	Week 3 How to start a lasting friendship. Principle: 2 Learning about a person's life.	Acts 17:16-34 & 1Cor 9: 19-23 What can we learn about understanding others?
24 Feb	Week 4 Strengthening a friendship. Principles: 3-4 Showing careful interest in what is important to others.	John 4: 1-30 An example of Jesus in a deep conversation.
3 March	Week 5 We are all unique. We have different gifts and personalities – So, what makes people tick?	Romans 12:1-21 & James 4:1-10 In what ways can we be sensitive to each other and our other friends?
10 March (Labor Day)	Week 6 Blessing people around you. Principle: 5 Responding with a willing servant heart	Mat 25: 31-46 In what ways can we bless our friends?
17 March	Week 7 Praying for others in conversation	Luke 10: 5-6
24 March	Week 8 So, what does it mean to be a 'witness?'	Matt 5: 13-14, 1 Peter 3: 15 Dig deeper into what it means for us to be witnesses
31 March	Week 9 What if someone asks me to explain the Good News?	Rom 6:23 & Acts 2 So what's a simple way of understanding the good news?
7 April	Week 10 Discerning the Times: Understanding their worldview	We can't assume that those around us share the same beliefs. How do you dialogue with those wh hold other views? Acts 17
14 April Palm Sunday	Jesus' Last week before Easter	
21 April Easter sunday		

TODAY I MET A MAN
BUT NOT REALLY.
RATHER, OUR PATHS CROSSED.
THE PRIVATE PATHS OF OUR OWN
SEPARATE WORLDS MADE A JUNCTURE
AND WE WERE THERE.
WE TOLD OUR IMPERSONAL NAMES
AND SHOOK EACH OTHER'S HAND
WARMLY AND FIRMLY – TO CONVEY
OUR INTEREST
WHICH WASN'T THERE.
WE SHARED OUR VIEWS
ON THE WEATHER, POLITICS,
THE LATEST NEWS
AND OTHER FOREIGN THINGS
WHICH WERE NOT THERE.
AND WHEN THE CONVERSATION LAGGED,
WE SAID:
"WELL, GLAD TO HAVE MET YOU"
"SAME HERE"
WE LIED, SMILED, EXTENDED OUR HANDS
AGAIN, AND PARTED –
GLAD TO BE ON OUR SEPARATE WAYS
FROM OUR LITTLE MEETING.
TODAY I MET A MAN
BUT NOT REALLY.

(AUTHOR UNKNOWN)

Week 1 Introduction to building authentic relationships.

⇒ What are the ingredients of a healthy relationship?

⇒ What do we mean by 'authentic' or 'genuine' Relationships?

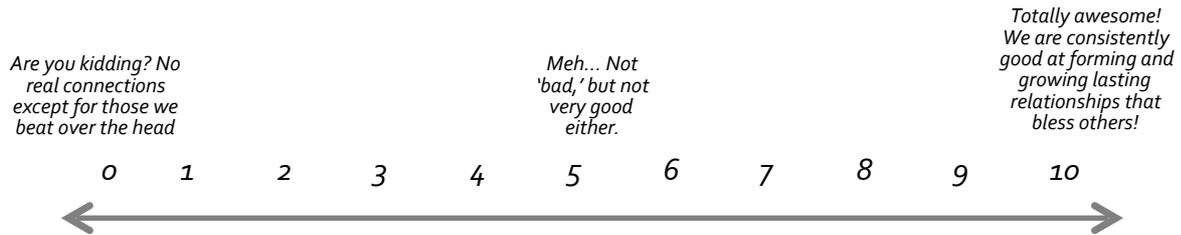
"Lasting and meaningful relationships are formed when we reveal ourselves to others and others reveal themselves to us."

⇒ Why is it important to mission, to focus on cultivating relationships?

- God's N
- Human N
- Our N

Authentic Relationships

⇒ How well do we build relationships outside of the church?
What mark would you give (below) and why?



⇒ In What ways can we build meaningful, lasting relationships?

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Authentic Relationships

Stephen Covey says in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*:

"... Write down your key roles. If you haven't really given any serious thought to the roles in your life, you can write down that immediately comes to mind. You may want to list one or more roles as a family member – a husband or wife, mother or father, son or daughter, a member of an extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. You may want to list a few roles in your work, indicating different areas which you want to invest time and energy. You may have roles in the church or the local community too ..."

Our roles in life tell us how we relate to others; they help us identify natural relationships. They indicate our responsibilities, priorities and the extent of our influence. These are (usually) the people we serve and who invest in us.

List some of the people with whom you connect, including who are not part of the church community, who you could befriend more authentically.

As you build a relationship – listening to them – what are their areas of interest? What are their concerns; achievements, aspirations? How can you better serve, encourage and pray for them?

What time do you need to allow? What is meaningful for them?

Role	People I relate to:	Priorities:	Effectiveness?

For Your Small Group:

1. **Review:** What's one thing you took away from last week's input?
2. In what ways can we find the time to attend to the relationships that ought to be significant to us?
3. Read **Luke 5:27-32** & **2Cor 5:20-21**: What do you learn about our 'relational' mission? How can we be Jesus' ambassadors to tax collectors? Who are our tax collectors?

Week 2 Listening like Jesus did

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Communication is:

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38% -

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For Your Small Group:

1. **Review:** What's one thing you took away from last week's training?
2. Read these quotes – in what ways can we master the art of attending and hearing?
 - *"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."* Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*
 - *"There's a lot of difference between listening and hearing."* G.K. Chesterton
 - *"To answer before listening – that is folly and shame."* Proverbs 18:13 (NIV)
3. Think about the table on the previous page - who are the people I am to attend to carefully? Share with each other and pray for the relationships.

Week 3 How to start a lasting friendship.

⇒ What do cross-cultural missionaries do when they engage in a new culture?

⇒ Paul listened and observed culture. Acts 17: 16-34

⇒ What does it mean to '*become all things to all people?*' 1Cor 9: 19-23

PRINCIPLE TWO – LEARN ABOUT THEIR L

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For Your Small Group:

1. **Review:**
 - a. What is Principle: 1?
 - b. Recall the pictures and questions of Principle: 2
 - c. What's one thing you took away from last week's training?
2. Read Acts 17: 16-34. What can you learn about Paul the missionary? How is his approach different to that of Peter's in Acts 2?
3. The seven pictures or questions can be used simply to get to know another individual – but they can also be adapted to be seven questions that a missionary or an anthropologist might study carefully about a new culture or tribe. Which **names** are genealogically connected to others? How do people live in their **homes or villages**? How does **family** function here? What sorts of **work** people do and how is it divided? Where else do they **travel** and why? What place does art or music or literature or leisure have? And of course what they think and **believe** about their world-view? Pretend you are a new missionary team in your neighbourhood – what have you learnt? What are the gaps?
4. John 1: 14 in The Message says: "*The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.*" What does it mean for us to be incarnational in our ministry – to move into the neighbourhood?
5. Consider the table on page: 6. How are you going in your care of the friends God has given you?

Week 4 Strengthening a Friendship

⇒ "Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human." — Henri J.M. Nouwen

PRINCIPLE THREE - SHOW GENUINE I

Cultivate the six 'Conversational E s.'

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*"It is not the breadth but the depth of the question.
We learn more in 5 minutes of listening than two hours of talking."*

*"I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who." R. Kipling*

PRINCIPLE FOUR - LEARN WHAT IS I TO OTHERS

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*"The heart has its reasons which reason knows not of." Pascal
"The time you invest to deeply understand the people you love brings
tremendous dividends in open communication". Covey*

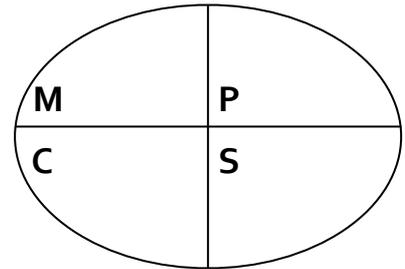
For Your Small Group:

1. **Review:**
 - a. What is Principle: 1?
 - b. Recall the pictures and questions of Principle: 2
 - c. What was Principle: 3? What were the six conversational expanders?
 - d. Recall the 'heart' pictures and questions of Principle: 4
 - e. What's one thing you took away from last week's training?
2. **Read John 4: 1-30.** Here's Jesus in a deep conversation with a Samaritan woman. Imagine what might have been (1) the Challenges, problems, frustrations and (2) the dreams and goals (3) the quiet achievements and (4) maybe, places she drew inspiration?
3. The **Principle: 4 questions** should become part of how we regularly pray and care for each other. What are the CFC's we are each facing? What dreams and goals is God revealing (big or small) this week? What achievements (victories) are we praising Him for? How have we been inspired to grow? **Note:** These are also discipleship questions of each other as we spur one another on and hold each other accountable! Discuss how this might become a part of your group's life.
4. How are you practicing and internalising these principles? They will feel a little clunky at first! The goal is for these areas to become second nature as we care for one another in Jesus name.

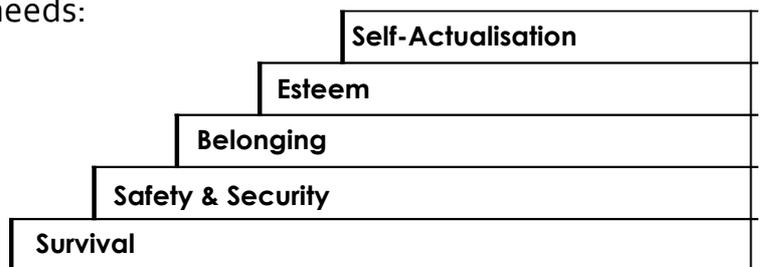
Week 5 What makes people tick?

1. Why think about this?

2. Temperaments



3. Maslow's ascending hierarchy of needs:



4. Love languages:



5. What do I need to learn about my friends?

For Your Small Group:

1. **Review:** What's one thing you took away from last week's training?
2. Think about and list the varied approaches and care that Jesus took to different people he met.
3. **Read Romans 12:1-21 & James 4:1-10** It takes maturity to put one's own desires and needs last and focus on others in all their diversity. What do these passage teach us?
4. Think about the different temperaments or love languages in your small group – and then amongst your friends. How will understanding this help us better to serve them?

Week 6 Blessing those around you

⇒ Hebrews 3: 12-15; Colossians 3:13; Galatians 6: 2 & 10 We need to care for and encourage one another

PRINCIPLE FIVE – RESPOND WITH A S..... H.....

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For Your Small Group:

1. **Review:**
 - a. Review all 14 pictures going back to the nameplate!
 - b. Review last week's Principle: 5 with its three pictures and questions
 - c. What's one thing you took away from last week's training?
2. Read **Matthew 25: 31-46**. What are the different practical areas of service that demonstrate worship of Christ? And who are the 'least of these' in our times? What might be a modern paraphrase of the ways to serve listed here?
3. Think about your small group: How can encouragement, the 'mean-dog' and conversational prayer become second nature to us? And to the friends we listed on page: 6?

Week 7 Praying for others in conversation

Praying for People of Peace?



1. Why pray for people you build a relationship with?

James 5:16-17 "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective..."

2. What is a person of peace?

Luke 10: 5-6 ""When you enter a home, greet the family, 'Peace.' If your greeting is received, then it's a good place to stay. But if it's not received, take it back and get out. Don't impose yourself."

See article on next page.

3. In what ways can you pray for someone in a conversation?

4. What might be some do's and don'ts?

5. Practicing the 10-second prayer

"The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom but trembles when we pray." Samuel Chadwick

For Your Small Group:

Read and discuss the following article.

Understanding Jesus and “Persons of Peace” by Mike Breen

We often talk about the “Person of Peace” strategy that Jesus clearly outlines in Luke 9 & 10 and then see playing out in the rest of the Gospels and in the early church. Admittedly, this can be difficult to wrap our minds around if we have only ever seen blitzkrieg evangelism used. Understanding that Jesus meant for evangelism to be deeply relational and keenly strategic seems a bit off if you’ve never seen it done before.

Ben Sternke is in one of our 3DM Learning Communities and posted this thought today on Persons of Peace and how Jesus used them. Notice how Jesus only asks his disciples to do what he does himself.

I wonder how many times we ask people in our church to do things (be missional, tithe, pray often and deeply, engage in healthy community) that we don’t do ourselves? Jesus only ever asked things of his followers that he did first and modelled for them.

Just a few thoughts from the story of Zacchaeus from Luke 19.

Jesus spotted Zacchaeus because of the ridiculous effort he took to see Jesus. Climbing a tree hardly seems a dignified way for a grown man to behave, especially a very wealthy man.

A man who climbs a tree to get a glimpse of you is a Person of Peace (see Luke 10). Jesus recognizes this and simply invites himself over to Zacchaeus’ house! This means that Jesus is on Zacchaeus’ turf, where Zacchaeus is comfortable. Jesus is allowing Zacchaeus to serve him and show him hospitality. He eats the food Zacchaeus gives him and simply hangs out there for the afternoon.

Eventually the simple presence of Jesus brings Zacchaeus to repentance. He gives away half of his possessions to the poor and vows to pay back four times the amount of whatever he’s cheated others out of. Jesus then announces what has just happened: “Today salvation has come to this house.”

To drive the point home, Jesus uses his interaction with Zacchaeus to illustrate and reiterate why he has come: “to seek and save what was lost.”

May we also continue to do the same things, following in the footsteps of our Master.

- . Find the person of peace, the person who is open to you, interested in you, likes you, wants to be around you.
- . Go to *their* turf, where they’re comfortable.
- . Allow them to serve you, show you hospitality.
- . Spend intentional time with them, and
- . Be ready to do the works of the Kingdom and speak the words of the Kingdom (in appropriate ways).

Because if we love Jesus, and we love people, we’re going to want to make that connection. If we find ourselves feeling lacklustre about helping people get to know Jesus, we are suffering from a lack of love. Either a lack of love for people (we’d rather maintain our pride than risk looking foolish), or a lack of love for Jesus (we really don’t think he’s worth knowing).

But if we believe that Jesus did come to “*seek and save what was lost*,” and that being with him to learn from him how to be like him is the path to human flourishing, we will want others to come to know Jesus. Jesus himself gives us a wonderful way to do that relationally, naturally, organically.

- What’s the Spirit saying to you?
- What are you going to do about it?

Week 8 So, what does it mean to be a witness?

1. What is 'witnessing?'

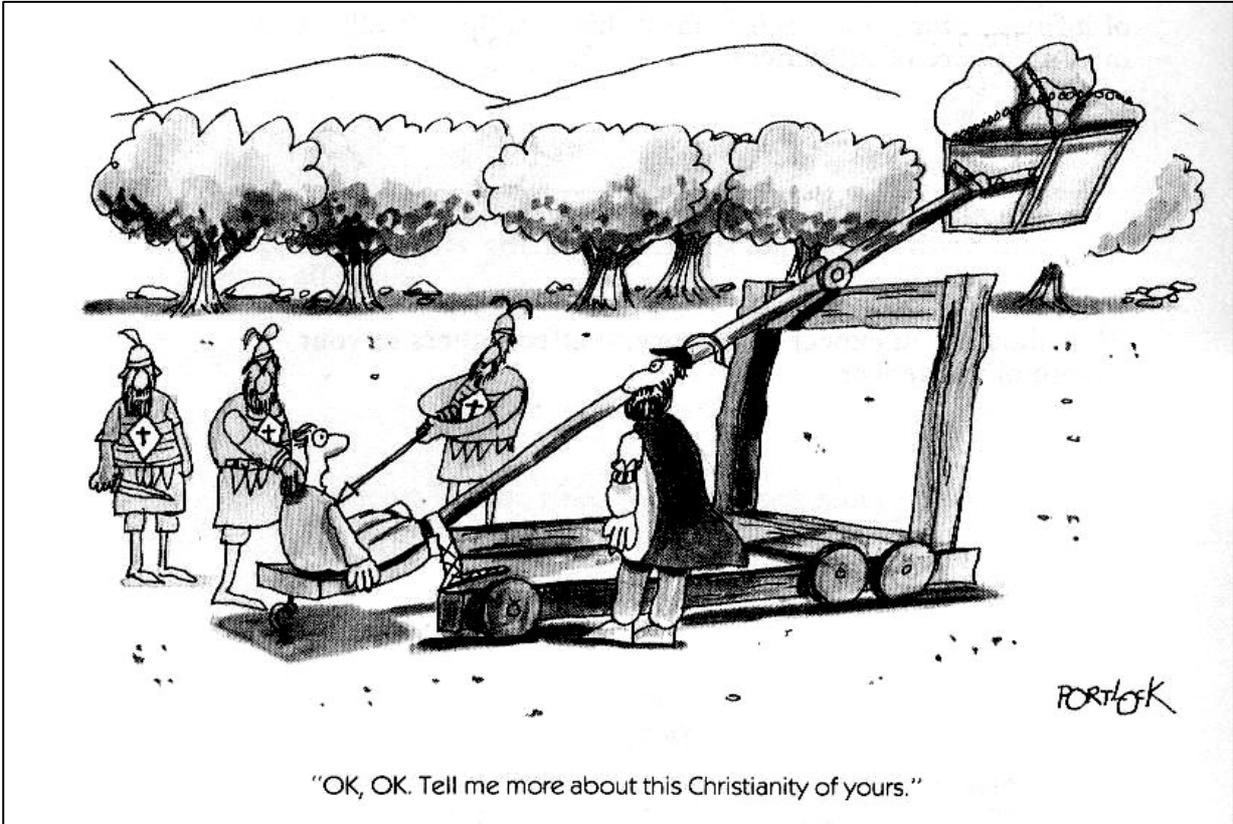
- Luke 10: 9 *'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*
- Exodus 19: 5-6 and 1 Peter 2: 9-10
- Acts 1:8
- Matthew 5: 13-14
- Matthew 28: 16-20
- Ephesians 2:11
- 2 Peter 3: 9
- Acts 4:12

2. Why is it important for us to understand?

3. How could it be – if we were effective witnesses?

- 1 Peter 2:12 *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*
- Acts 2:47 *"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*

What does it mean to be a witness?



What does it mean to be a witness?

4. What are the challenges to being effective witnesses?

5. In what ways can we embrace effective witness?

- *1 Thessalonians 2: 8-9 "Share your life not just your words."*

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What does it mean to be a witness?

6. Who are the people I need to invest myself in?

Think back to the names you listed earlier, with whom you have a key role ...

Think about the 'people of peace' God may bring across your path...

PICTURE	PRINCIPLE	QUESTIONS
PERSON RUNNING WITH ARMS OUTSTRETCHED	GO TO BE WITH THEM!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHO ARE THE PEOPLE I NEED TO INVEST IN? • WHEN DO WE SPEND TIME TOGETHER? • WHAT DO WE ENJOY DOING? • WHERE DO WE MEET?
HEART SHAPED BOX OF CHOCOLATES	LOVE THEM AND AFFIRM THEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHAT ARE THEIR STRENGTHS? • WHAT IS THEIR 'LOVE' LANGUAGE?
LEATHER-BOUND BIOGRAPHY	LEARN THEIR STORY (BIOGRAPHY)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHAT MAKES THEM TICK? • WHAT HAS SHAPED THEM? • WHAT DO THEY BELIEVE? • WHAT ARE THEIR D.C.F.C.S?
CHILDREN'S STORY-BOOK	TRUST THEM WITH YOUR STORY AND LIFE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HOW WELL DO THEY KNOW US AND OUR FRIENDS? • DO THEY KNOW WHAT HAS SHAPED US? • ARE WE 'REAL'? DO THEY KNOW OUR D.C.F.C.S?
COLOURFUL WOODEN BUILDING BLOCKS	SHARE 'BLOCKS' OF WHAT GOD IS UP TO FOR YOU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DO THEY HEAR AND SEE WHAT GOD IS DOING IN YOU? • HOW FAITH CONNECTS TO YOUR D.C.F.C.S? • SMALL BLOCKS & ANECDOTES
BUNCH OF FLOWERS	ENCOURAGE THEM, PRAY FOR THEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAN YOU PICTURE THEIR WORTH & POTENTIAL? • ENCOURAGE THEM IN WORDS AND DEEDS. • PRAY BRIEFLY & SPECIFICALLY
BEAUTIFULLY DRAWN RSVP CARD	SHARE THE GOOD NEWS: <i>R = REASSURE</i> <i>S = STORY OF GOOD NEWS</i> <i>V = VERSES FROM BIBLE</i> <i>P = PRAY WITH THEM</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARE THEY OPEN TO HEAR THE GOOD NEWS? • HAVE YOU SHARED HOW YOU CAME TO FAITH? • CAN YOU SIMPLY PRESENT THE GOOD NEWS?

For Your Small Group:

1. Review:

- a. What does it mean to witness?
- b. What's one thing you took away from last week's training?

2. Read **Matt 5: 13-14** and **1 Peter 3: 15**. Dig deeper into what it means to be a witness. What is 'salt' and 'light' when it comes to witnessing? What sort of answer should we have ready? What sort of life will prompt the query?

3. Discuss these quotes about witnessing:

- *"People pay attention when they see that God actually changes persons and sets them free. When a new Christian stands up and tells how God has revolutionized his or her life, no one dozes off. When someone is healed or released from a life-controlling bondage, everyone takes notice." - Jim Cymbala*
- *"The Church is the Body of Christ, and the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. He fills the Body, directs its movements, controls its members, inspires its wisdom, supplies it's strength. He guides into truth, sanctifies its agents, and empowers for witnessing. The Spirit has never abdicated His authority nor relegated His power." - Samuel Chadwick*
- *"The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose." - C. S. Lewis*
- *"While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while children go hungry, as they do now I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight-I'll fight to the very end!" - William Booth*

4. In what ways can we be an effective witness?

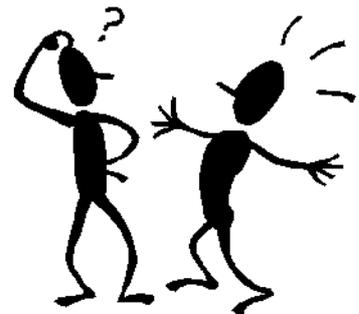
Week 9 If I have to explain the Good News?

- ⇒ Picture a friend says to you: *"I know you are a Christian; I see how you live and appreciate your integrity – but, tell me, what actually do I need to know or do to become one too? Or is it just being moral and going to church?"*
- ⇒ How would you respond? Jot down some of the points you might mention? What would you not consider as of first level importance?
- ⇒ What are the challenges in sharing an account of the gospel?
- ⇒ What resources have you found helpful?



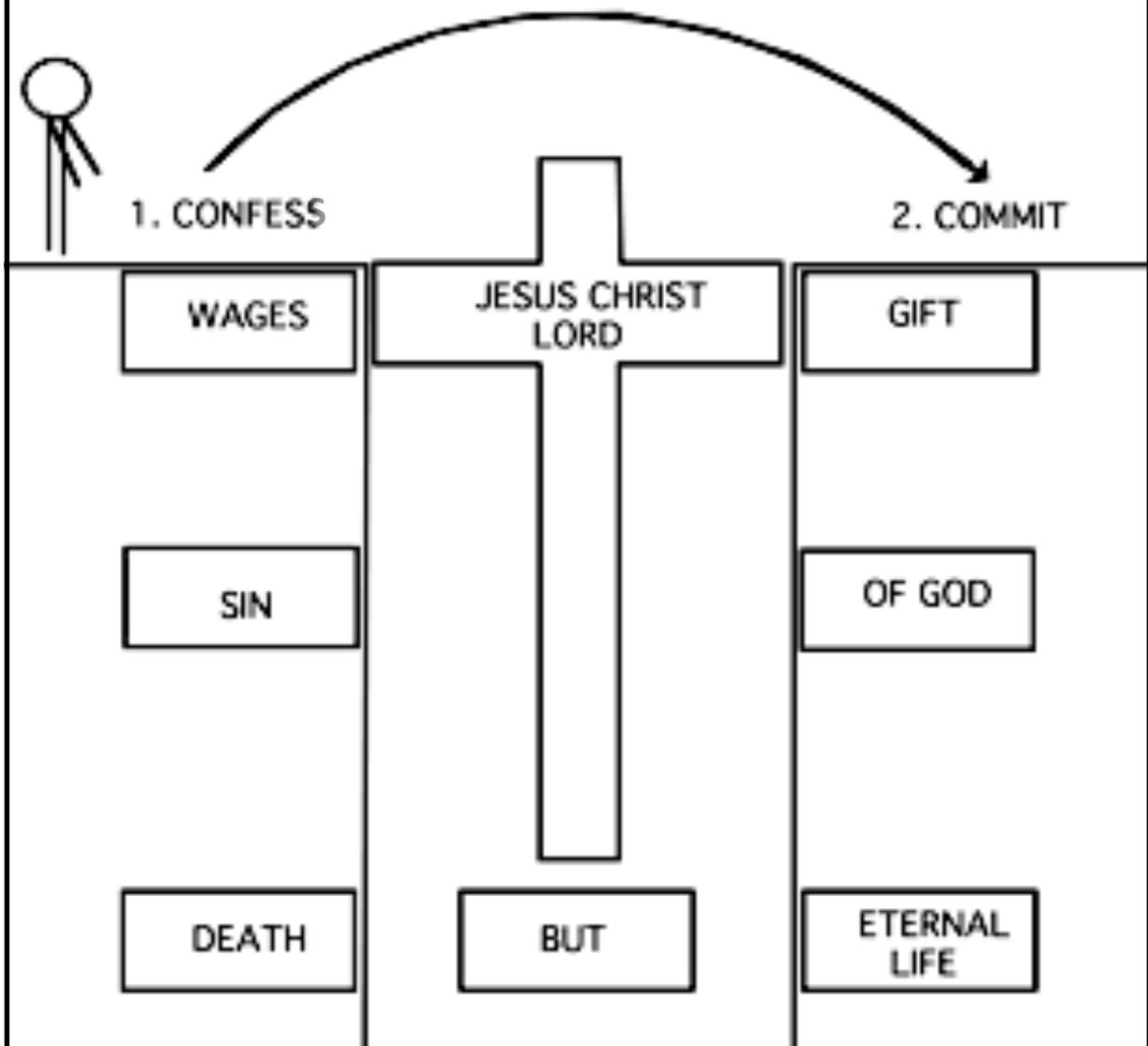
"So what actually is a Christian?"

"Well, um, gulp..."



For the wages of sin is death, but
the gift of God is eternal life in
Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23



For the wages of sin is death, but
the gift of God is eternal life in
Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

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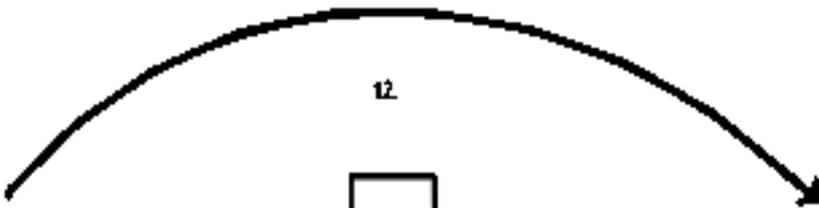
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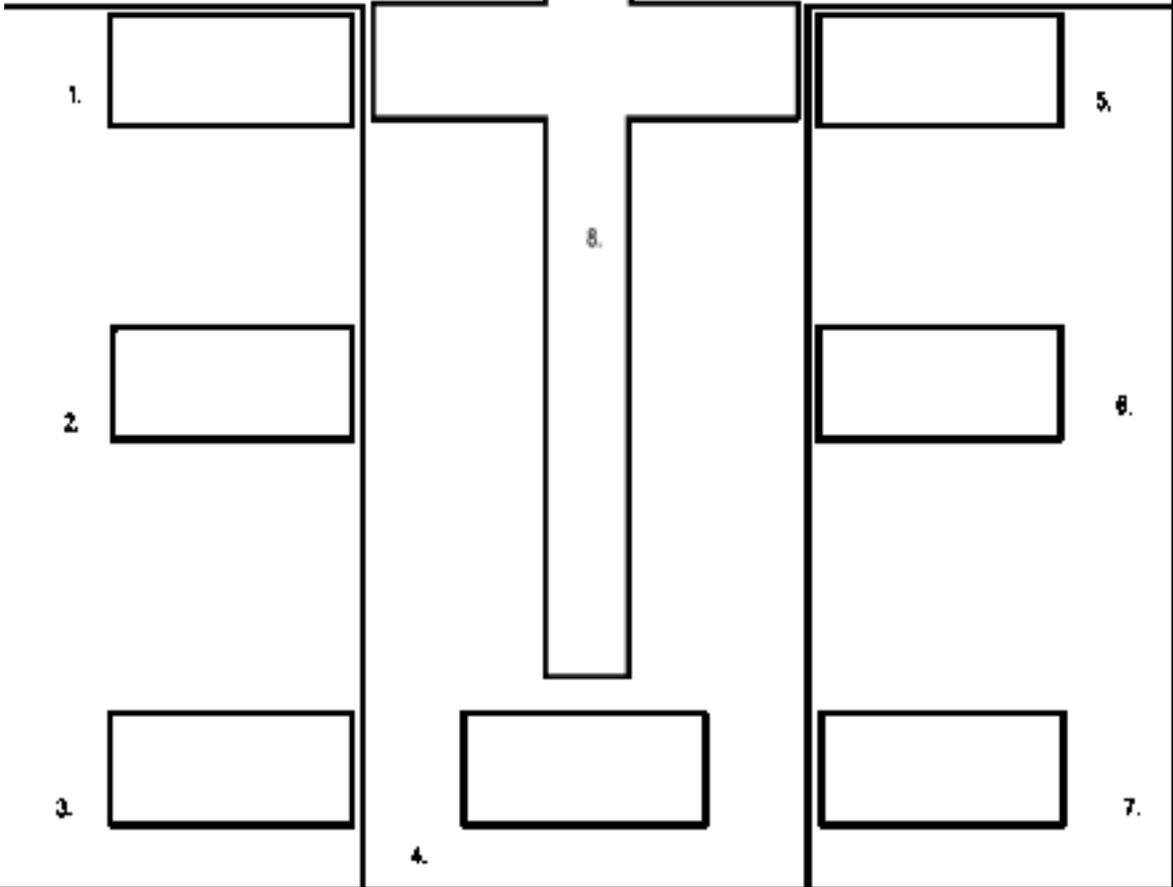
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Romans ... : ...



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For Your Small Group:

Review:

- a. Review the Romans 6:23 illustration in threes with one explaining it, another listening and asking questions and the third observing and suggesting ways to use it better.
- b. What's one thing you took away from last week's training?
- c. The idea of the 'person of peace' is an interesting idea, very helpful for witness. Read the short article through and discuss how it might apply to your situation.

*** **

Recognising the "Person of Peace" By Ben Sternke

When we train leaders and begin to focus on evangelism, we always start with the practice of identifying "Persons of Peace."

This is the strategy Jesus seems to lay out in Luke 9-10, when he sends his disciples out with his authority to do the same stuff he has been doing (you know, "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons...").

A Person of Peace is simply someone that God has prepared ahead of time to hear the message of the gospel through you. We recognize Persons of Peace as those who welcome us, like to be with us, and attempt to serve us in some way.

Which is all fine and good in theory, but as we've been working with people on this, we've noticed what we think is a **key element to recognizing a person of peace**, without which we will remain blind to what God is doing around us.

The key we've stumbled upon seems obvious in hindsight, but it has been important for us to articulate it. The specific key we've discovered to recognizing Persons of Peace is basically this: *the willingness to risk meeting "Persons of Un-peace."*

When Jesus sent them out he told them that they would experience welcome *and* rejection. He gave them instructions on what to do when they were welcomed *and* when they were *not* welcomed.

He made it clear that to go out on this mission was to "out" yourself as a follower of Jesus, and see how people responded. Some will receive you. Others will reject you. Or worse. And until we're ready to face that, we won't find a Person of Peace.

Because there is a difference between being sent out with the authority of Jesus and just "hanging out." Jesus' disciples weren't wandering into random towns pretending they were just travelers.

They had been *sent out* by Jesus as those who were in relationship with him, to go to certain places *in his name*, representing him, with a specific message to proclaim and task to perform. Jesus didn't send them out as undercover agents. They were openly proclaiming that God's kingdom had come near in Jesus. There was nothing subtle about why they were in town.

If you go out representing Jesus (in his name, with his authority), then it's true when he says: "If they welcome you, they welcome me. If they reject you, they reject me." But if you are ashamed of Jesus or the gospel in any way, if we are unwilling to experience the same kind of scorn and opposition that Jesus faced, you won't be able to perceive the Person of Peace, because that person is primed and ready to receive *Jesus*, and you won't look like Jesus to them, because you are essentially going out "in your own name," not on behalf of Christ.

There is a line we must cross, a death we must die before we can see Persons of Peace. When we die to ourselves and embrace being identified as a "fool for Christ," we will find Persons of Peace, and we'll also find rejection and opposition, because you don't get one without the other. The good news, though, is that if we embrace this and truly go out in Christ's name, then it will be his authority that clothes us, and his power that protects us and flows through us.

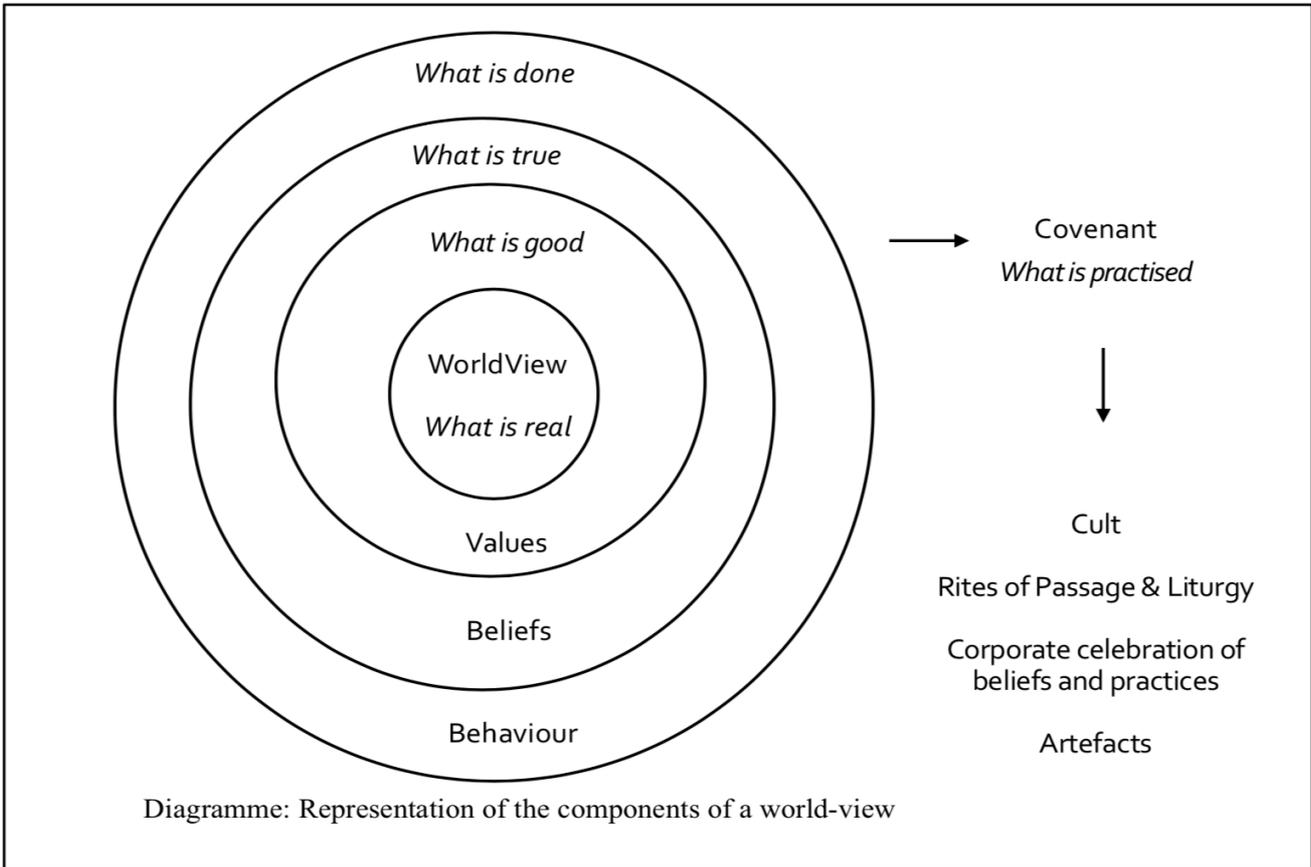
So the question I train leaders to think through (and try to ask myself!) is this:

Are we willing to cross the line and risk the scorn of the world so we can recognize Persons of Peace and thus join Jesus in the restoration and healing of people's lives?

Source: <http://bensternke.com/the-key-to-recognizing-a-person-of-peace/>

For more information: <http://simplechurch.eu/toolbox/full/recognizing-a-person-of-peace/>

Week 10 How can they believe that?



For Your Small Group:

- a. Read the following article
- b. What's an insight, question or practical application you see?
- c. In what ways does understanding a person's worldview help us in understanding their lifestyle or choices?
- d. How can we dialogue with someone with a different worldview; who doesn't necessarily agree with our morality or choices?

What Is a Worldview?

By James Anderson June, 2017

Abortion. Euthanasia. Pornography. Same-sex marriage. Transgender rights. Embryonic research. Genetic enhancement. Christians surveying the cultural landscape in the West have a clear sense that things are headed in a destructive direction. While most believers can easily identify the symptoms of decline, few feel competent to diagnose and address the root causes. There are many complex factors behind these developments, but one invaluable tool for better understanding and engaging with our culture is the concept of worldview. The sociological quakes and moral fissures we observe in our day are largely due to what we might call “cultural plate tectonics”: shifts in underlying worldviews and the collisions between them.

What is a worldview? As the word itself suggests, a worldview is an overall view of the world. It's not a physical view of the world, but rather a philosophical view, an all-encompassing perspective on everything that exists and matters to us.

A person's worldview represents his most fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the universe he inhabits. It reflects how he would answer all the “big questions” of human existence: fundamental questions about who and what we are, where we came from, why we're here, where (if anywhere) we're headed, the meaning and purpose of life, the nature of the afterlife, and what counts as a good life here and now. Few people think through these issues in any depth, and fewer still have firm answers to such questions, but a person's worldview will at least incline him toward certain kinds of answers and away from others.

Worldviews shape and inform our experiences of the world around us. Like spectacles with coloured lenses, they affect what we see and how we see it. Depending on the “colour” of the lenses, some things may be seen more easily, or conversely, they may be de-emphasized or distorted—indeed, some things may not be seen at all.

Worldviews also largely determine people's opinions on matters of ethics and politics. What a person thinks about abortion, euthanasia, same-sex relationships, environmental ethics, economic policy, public education, and so on will depend on his underlying worldview more than anything else.

As such, worldviews play a central and defining role in our lives. They shape what we believe and what we're willing to believe, how we interpret our experiences, how we behave in response to those experiences, and how we relate to others. Our thoughts and our actions are conditioned by our worldviews.

Worldviews operate at both the individual level and the societal level. Rarely will two people have exactly the same worldview, but they may share the same basic type of worldview. Moreover, within any society, certain worldview types will be represented more prominently than others, and will therefore exert greater influence on the culture of that society. Western civilization since around the fourth century has been dominated by a Christian worldview, even though there have been individuals and groups who have challenged it. But in the last couple of centuries, for reasons ranging from the technological to the theological, the Christian worldview has lost its dominance, and competing worldviews have become far more prominent. These non-Christian worldviews include:

Naturalism: there is no God; humans are just highly evolved animals; the universe is a closed physical system.

Postmodernism: there are no objective truths and moral standards; "reality" is ultimately a human social construction.

Pantheism: God is the totality of reality; thus, we are all divine by nature.

Pluralism: the different world religions represent equally valid perspectives on the ultimate reality; there are many valid paths to salvation.

Islam: there is only one God, and He has no son; God has revealed His will for all people through His final prophet, Muhammad, and His eternal word, the Qur'an.

Moralistic therapeutic deism: God just wants us to be happy and nice to other people; He intervenes in our affairs only when we call on Him to help us out.

Each of these worldviews has profound implications for how people think about themselves, what behaviors they consider right or wrong, and how they orient their lives. It is therefore crucial that Christians be able to engage with unbelief at the worldview level. Christians need to understand not only what it means to have a biblical worldview, but also why they should hold fast to that worldview and apply it to all of life. They should be able to identify the major non-Christian worldviews that vie for dominance in our society, to understand where they fundamentally differ from the Christian worldview, and to make a well-reasoned case that the Christian worldview alone is true, good, and beautiful.

The challenge is greater than ever. But we shouldn't be discouraged, because the opportunities and resources available to us are also greater now than they have ever been. In the last half-century or so there has been a remarkable renaissance in Christian philosophy and apologetics, much of which has focused on developing and defending a biblical worldview. Whatever God calls His people to do, He equips them to do (see Eph. 4:11-12; Heb. 13:20-21). The problem is not that the church is under-equipped, but that she has yet to make full use of what Christ has provided for her.

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