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Overview

This week will cover a basic/foundational overview of the Gospel. This will be a great time to learn about the meta-narrative of Scripture and serve as a way to teach the story of the Gospel, thus equipping the students with an understanding of and an ability to actively share the Gospel.

- What is the Gospel?
- What are the implications of the Gospel in our lives?
- How do I view all things (decisions, actions/reactions, relationships, etc.) in light of the Gospel?

Week 1: The Gospel

Main Session Notes

Week 1: The Gospel

Resources

Sharing Your Story

Austin Stone Community Church

The following pages will help you reflect on and consider the story of God's work in your life. Doing so is great preparation for telling this incredible story to others.

Step 1: Identify life and heart themes

Step 2: What my life was like before I met Christ

Step 3: How I realized I needed Christ

Step 4: How I committed my life to Christ

Step 5: The difference it has made in my life

Step 1: Life and Heart Themes

Looking at the list of life and heart themes, circle the themes that were present in your life before your relationship with God became meaningful. This list is provided to get you thinking about your life before God.

Life and Heart Themes

Worries/Anxiety Inner Peace
Guilt/Shame Claiming "no condemnation"
Anger/Temper Patience and Love
Emptiness/Lack of Purpose Purpose in life
Grief Comfort and Joy
Stress/Burnout Power for living
Low Self-Esteem Significance to God
Poor Health Strength to go on
Disappointment Trust in His good plans
Insecurity Confidence and security

Regrets..... Redemption of the past
 Discontent/Always Busy Contentment and Peace
 Fears Faith to face my fears
 Loneliness..... He's always with me
 Addictions/Habits Power to change
 Self-Centeredness Love for other people
 Despair/Depression Hope
 Cheap Thrills Real, lasting happiness
 Boredom with My Life Adventure with God
 Fear of Death Assurance of heaven
 'Something Was Missing' Sense of fulfillment
 Bitterness & Resentment Freedom from my past
 Pain of Rejection God's unconditional love
 Marriage Problems Changes in my marriage
 Financial Problems Changes in my finances
 Business Problems..... Changes in my business

Step 2: What my life was like before I met Christ

- What common circumstances in your life would an unbeliever identify with?
- What were your attitudes that an unbeliever could identify with?
- What was most important to you?
- What substitute for God did you use to find meaning in your life? (sports/fitness, success at work, marriage, sex, making money, drugs/alcohol, having fun, entertainment, popularity, hobbies)

If you've been a believer since early childhood, then reflect on this question: "What are some difficulties or challenges that God has helped you face that could serve as a connecting point, as a window of grace, with a nonbeliever?"

Step 3: How I realized I needed Christ

- What significant steps led up to your conversion/rededication?
- What needs, hurts, or problems made you dissatisfied with the way you were living without God?
- How did God get your attention? What motivated you?

Step 4: How I responded to Christ

- What specifically did you do as a response to the faith God placed in your heart?
- Where did it happen?
- What did you say in your prayer? Be specific.

For the early childhood believer... How did you ask God to help you? How did you ask God to get involved?

Step 5: The difference He has made in my life (refer to the life and heart themes above)

- What benefits have you experienced or felt?
- What problems have been resolved?
- How has Jesus changed you for the better?
- How has Jesus changed your relationships? Give a current example.

Now that you have walked through your story, who could you share it with?

Are there any people that you know who you know do not know Jesus? Look for opportunities to share your story with them.

Week 1: The Gospel

Tacticals & Practicals

Share your grace story.

Before I met Christ I.....

Then I realized.....

When Christ called me.....

Now I am.....

Overview

The character of God has always been consistent with sending—the sending of Jesus, sending the Holy Spirit, and sending His people. In the Old Testament and New Testament, we see God constantly wanting to use His people as the sending agents of His grace and love. The Israelites had that opportunity, but continued in inward devotion. Even the New Testament church had to experience persecution and martyrdom before they dispersed into a broken world.

- How has God's nature/character revealed that He is a sending God?
- What does it mean for me to be "sent"?
- How am I to love and lead others in light of this truth?
- What fears/insecurities/areas of apathy do I have, which contradict God's sending nature and call on my life?
 - How do I repent of these areas?

Main Session Notes

Week 2: Character & Sending Nature of God

Resources

Living On Mission

Coram Deo

“Instead of worrying about how we DO church, we need to start BEING the church. I’m convinced that as we start giving ourselves to community and embracing the mission God gave us, our churches will take notice. They will begin to get excited about what God is doing, and they’ll want to get in on it. The church won’t change through criticizing or complaining, and certainly not through complacency. It will change by us living in missional community.

The inevitable question is: “How?” I am tempted to list a bunch of things that you should do, but activity is not necessarily a valid measure of spirituality. So instead, I want to suggest some of the “rhythms” of a mission-driven community. How should living on mission feel?

LIVING IT OUT

Sometimes I wonder if our attempts at “outreach” come off like a sales pitch. I mean, it seems like we are always asking our friends and neighbors to come to our meetings and read our books and watch our movies. We may genuinely love them, but I can see how they might feel as though we just want them to sign the dotted line.

Missional community affords us the opportunity to make our outreach more personal—more reflective of our love for people—because people get to see the gospel lived out in the context of our actual life. That means leaving behind our safe, Christian subculture to remind ourselves what it is like to be human.

Humans go to concerts, parks, coffeehouses, neighborhood parties, and even (gasp!) bars. They spend time talking with friends. They live life. Christians, for the most part, have traded normal living for the subculture version: Christian concerts, Christian coffeehouses, Christian parties, and so on. It’s time to reject this isolationism. We need to plug back into the reality of the human community around us. Living in friendship with believers and unbelievers

and talking about Jesus are ways that show His relevance to real life in the real world. In this way, outreach becomes a natural function of relationship. You can't be friends with someone and not tell them about the faith that defines you.

It might sound like I'm attacking "outreach events." I'm not. I'm a cheerleader for just about anything that brings attention to the gospel of Jesus. Nor am I against initiating spiritual conversations with people. There is almost always some degree of intentionality in meaningful dialogue. I'm only pointing out the power of relational outreach that missional community creates.

So missional community gets us thinking less about, "How can we get people to come to us?" and more about, "How can we live out faith and love for one another among people?" We become an outward-facing community, constantly thinking of natural ways to engage the culture around us—together. At some point we even stop having to refer to "natural ways to engage the culture" because it actually becomes natural.

INVITING IN

In a community driven by mission, every gift is essential, because *living out* quickly leads to *inviting in*. The natural thing to do when you have friends is to introduce them to your other friends. That's how friendship works. As we engage people and culture by *living out*, we will form friendships with people of all walks of faith and life. Inviting them in is simply introducing these friends who are outside the kingdom of God to other sets of friends who are inside the kingdom. This sort of "cross-pollination" happens in living rooms and backyards and concert venues, not only in church buildings. This is what makes the kingdom of God a city shining on a hill as opposed to a really great fort hidden in the woods somewhere. There needs to be a balance of living out and inviting in.

MAKING DISCIPLES

As we begin to live out and invite in, we'll see people begin to understand who Jesus really is and perhaps fall in love with Him. And we'll want to help them become the kind of people who are at home in the kingdom of God. After all, we're interested in making disciples, not just converts.

A disciple is the kind of person who is committed to God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven; the kind of

person whose character is being fully renovated by the Holy Spirit; the kind of person who is learning to live for God's kingdom and glory. At the risk of belaboring the point, this kind of transformation doesn't happen solely through a cloistered life of contemplation. It happens in community. God uses our interactions with others to shape us into the people He longs for us to become.

Making disciples isn't something we drift into. It requires some sort of approach or path or process. At the very least, this may look like a more mature follower of Jesus helping a less mature one along. Beyond that, it might be a Bible study or discipleship material or a course in theology. But these tools—or any tools—must not become indicators. Discipleship is relational in nature. Classes don't make disciples; communities do.

This is exactly where many churches have erred. They have allowed structures to give the orders instead of taking them. As a result, we are left with monuments to what church once was rather than a robust movement of people living on mission. What started out as a training ground for street orphans (Sunday school) is now a classroom where Christians absorb more information so they can obey less. What started out as a tool for shaping converts into disciples (church membership courses), now ensure that the families who transferred from the church down the street can repeat our mission statement.

A good strategy for disciple-making is like a good blues guitar solo. Blues music is about creativity. As long as the bass riff and drum line remain constant, a blues guitarist can improvise however he pleases. What matters is that a solo is played, at the right time, and in a way that serves the mission of the song. But once you script the solo and make it an end in itself, you no longer have the blues; you have manufactured pop music. And once you make your discipleship strategy an end in itself, you no longer have missional community; you have a constipated church.

Week 2: Character & Sending Nature of God

Tacticals & Practicals

“Decoding UT”

When you think of UT, what is the first place that you think to go?

What does “UT” initially bring to mind?

CULTURE

1. What do students do with their free time? Where do they hang out?
 - a. Restaurants?
 - b. Coffee shops?
 - c. Places on campus?
2. If you had to label the UT campus with a genre of music, what would it be (take into account the different parts of campus)? What clothing do different people groups wear?
3. What evidences of God’s grace (benevolence, protection, etc.) do you see at UT?

NEEDS

1. After talking to students, what do they perceive as their greatest needs?
 - a. Socially/relationally?
 - b. Intellectually/educationally?
 - c. Physically?
2. What do you think are the greatest areas of brokenness?

SPIRITUAL CLIMATE

1. What are the students' impressions of church/God?
2. Does there seem to be a predominant religious influence on those you talked to?
3. What would change if the gospel brought renewal to the UT campus?

Overview

This section is about the doctrine of total depravity. It is necessary to have an accurate and biblical view of humanity before proper worship can take place. Even a brief look at the minor and major prophets exposes the Israelites' consistent and constant theme of self-absorption, rebellion, and self-centeredness. In essence, we see an elevated view of how humanity has and currently does see itself—thus, worship of God wanes and is found lacking. Part of the process of following Jesus' lordship and leadership is identifying our idols.

- What does total depravity mean?
- Where does my life refuse surrender to Jesus' Lordship?
- What are my idols that need to be confessed, repented of, and I need to be held accountable to extracting?
- What are the idols that my family, school, and city have been bowing down to and what does it mean for me to repent on their behalf? (See Nehemiah Chapter 1)

Main Session Notes

Week 3: Man (Brokenness & Idolatry)

Resources

UNLOCKING FREEDOM: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

LOCKING UP YOUR FREEDOM

GALATIANS 4:8-20

GETTING STARTED

Have you ever tried to fix a problem, only to find out that your “solution” made the situation worse?

DIGGING IN

In Galatians 4:8-10, Paul is saying that biblical morality and religion (v. 9) can be just as enslaving as an outright pagan life and immoral practices (v. 8). In what ways would they be the same? In what ways would they be different? Can you think of some ways that moral and/or religious slavery might be worse?

Why would a person choose to live as a slave obeying a master in fear rather than as a child relating to a Father in love? What does this say about our personal insecurity? What do we do to try and earn God’s approval? List some ways we try to earn favor with God even after He has freed us and called us His children?

Why is the distinction between knowing God and being known by God important (v. 9)?

How would embracing your identity as an adopted heir of the King of the universe change the way you viewed the “elementary principles of the world” (v. 3, v. 9)?

Religious people often think of wrong as “doing immoral things,” but idols of the heart are “good and basic things elevated into being ultimate things” (Keller). So, idols can have either a religious or a non-religious bent, but both are equally deficient.

What kinds of things do people seek to give their lives meaning, worth, significance, or salvation? It might be easiest to do this by answering the following question: Some people look to _____ to give their lives meaning—to justify their lives and save them – to give them what they should be looking for from God. Can you list ten common idols?

Try to list some that are religious and some that are non-religious.

LIVING IT OUT

Look at the list below (under “Identifying Our Idols”) and pray and ask God to help you discern your heart. (This is a very valuable exercise, but it will take some time and will likely need to be done individually apart from the group.)

After personally reflecting on the idols of your heart, how would you respond to the following:

I sometimes look to _____ to give my life meaning, worth, or significance rather than looking to my identity in Christ as a child of God.

In light of your personal brokenness, what is one way that you could seek to trust your identity in Christ rather than seeking to find your meaning in something else?

Identifying Our Idols

The following is a diagnostic tool to help you identify your idols. Pray and ask God to help you discern your heart. This exercise will work best if you have time to let your mind roam freely through your personal experiences and feelings as you think about your life.

Answer the following:

If you are angry, ask, “Is there something that is too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am angry, because I am being blocked from having something I think is a necessity when it is not?”

Write down what that might be.

If you are fearful or worried, ask, "Is there something that is too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so scared, because something is being threatened which I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be.

If you are despondent or hating yourself, ask, "Is there something that is too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so 'down,' because I have lost or failed at something which I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be.

Circle the thoughts below that are lodged in your heart.

- Power idolatry: "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I have power and influence over others."
- Approval idolatry: "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I am loved and respected by _____."
- Comfort idolatry: "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life."
- Image idolatry: "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I have a particular kind of look or body image."
- Control idolatry: "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of _____."
- Helping idolatry: "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – people are dependent on me and need me."

- Dependence idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – someone is there to protect me and keep me safe.”
- Independence idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone.”
- Work idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I am highly productive and getting a lot done.”
- Achievement idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I am being recognized for my accomplishments, if I am excelling at my career.”
- Materialism idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions.”
- Religion idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I am adhering to my religion’s moral codes and accomplished in its service and activities.”
- Individual person idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – this one person is in my life and happy there and/or happy with me.”
- Irreligion idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and with a self-made morality.”
- Racial / Cultural idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – my race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior.”
- Inner ring idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – a particular social grouping or professional grouping or other group lets me in.”
- Family idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – my children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me.”
- Relationship idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – Mr. or Mrs. ‘Right’ is in love with me.”
- Suffering idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – I am hurting, in a problem – only then do I feel noble or worthy of love or am able to deal with guilt.”
- Ideology idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if – my political or social cause or party is making progress and ascending in influence or power.”

Answer these diagnostic questions:

What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about the most? Why?

What, if I failed or lost it, would cause me to feel that I did not even want to live? What keeps me going?

What do I rely on to comfort myself with when things go bad or get difficult? Why does that comfort me?

What do I think most easily about? Where does my mind go to when I am free? What preoccupies me?

What unanswered prayer would make me seriously think about turning away from God?

What makes me feel the most self-worth? What am I proudest of?

What do I really want and expect out of life? What would really make me happy?

Summary: Now that you've answered the questions above, look for common themes. Write below what you think are your functional masters. What things tend to be too important to you?

Tacticals & Practicals

LAB assignment:

Get to know the spiritual state of the campus by choosing some of these questions, maybe re-wording them, and asking them of fellow students at UT. Once you gather your responses, reflect upon what said responses may mean about how you should communicate the gospel to the UT campus.

Overview

The Spirit of Jesus Christ resides in the heart of every believer. Jesus tells His disciples that they can do "even greater things than these" by the power of His Spirit. But, the sad fact is that most Christ-followers have never experienced anything close to what Jesus claimed and promised. The Scriptures show tremendous works of God's Spirit that are preceded by times of fasting and prayer. A partnership with God is required. He calls us, leads us, and empowers us. We are to obey Him.

Every Christian is called to (1) walk in humility and obedience to the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit and (2) know how God has wired them to be used powerfully by the Holy Spirit.

- What does it mean/look like for me to let the Holy Spirit work in me and through me?
- What does it practically look like to be Spirit-filled daily?
- What are my spiritual gifts?
- How can I *best* be used to glorify God with my spiritual gifts?
- Am I being used for God's missional movement, or am I walking in selfishness and apathy with regard to my spiritual gifts?

Week 4: The Holy Spirit

Main Session Notes

Resources

The Church– the greatest force on Earth

Rick Warren

“The Church is the most magnificent concept ever created. It has survived persistent abuse, horrifying persecution, and widespread neglect. Yet despite its faults (due to our sinfulness), it is still God’s chosen instrument of blessing and has been for 2,000 years.

The Church will last for eternity, and because it is God’s instrument for ministry here on earth, it is truly the greatest force on the face of the earth. That’s why I believe tackling the world’s biggest problems – the giants of spiritual lostness, egocentric leadership, poverty, disease, and ignorance – can only be done through the Church.

The Church has eight distinct advantages over the efforts of business and government:

1. The Church provides for the largest participation.

Most people have no idea how many Christians there are in the world: More than 2 billion people claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. That’s 1/3 of the world’s population! The Church has about a billion more people than the entire nation of China.

For example, about 100 million people in the United States went to church this past weekend. That’s more people than will attend sporting events in the United States throughout this year. The Church is the largest force for good in the world. Nothing else even comes close.

2. The Church provides for the widest distribution.

The Church is everywhere in the world. There are villages that have little else, but they do have a church. You could visit millions of villages around the world that don’t have a school, a clinic, a hospital, a fire department, or a post office. They don’t have any businesses. But they do have a church. The Church is more widely spread – more widely distributed – than any business franchise in the world.

Consider this: The Red Cross noted that 90 percent of the meals they served to victims of Hurricane Katrina were actually cooked by Southern Baptist churches. Many churches were able to jump into action faster than the government agencies or the Red Cross. Why? The Church is literally everywhere, and Christians who could provide help to the Gulf Coast communicated with Christians in need of help so relief could be sent immediately.

3. The Church provides the longest continuation.

The Church has been around for 2,000 years. We're not a fly-by-night operation. The Church has a track record that spans centuries: Malicious leaders have tried to destroy it, hostile groups have persecuted it, and skeptics have scoffed at it. Nevertheless, God's Church is bigger now than ever before in history.

Why? Because it's the Church that Jesus established, and it is indestructible. The Bible calls the Church an unshakable kingdom. In Matthew 16, Jesus says, "I will build my Church and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." All the powers of hell—in other words, no hurricane, no earthquake, no tsunami, no famine, no pandemic, no army will ever conquer the Church established by Jesus Christ.

4. The Church provides the fastest expansion.

Did you know that every day 60,000 new people come to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? By the end of today, thousands of new churches will be started throughout the world, and that will happen tomorrow and the next day and the next.

In one country that is closed to traditional Christian missions, more than 60,000 house churches have been started in one province by the work of lay people, no different from the people who fill your church sanctuary every weekend.

Why is fast expansion important? If you've got a problem that's growing at a rapid rate, then you need a solution that will grow even more rapidly. For instance, HIV/AIDS is growing at an incredibly fast rate in the world. Yet thank God, the Church is outgrowing the disease, so more and more believers can help minister to those with HIV/AIDS.

If we're going to tackle global giants like poverty, disease, or illiteracy, then we must be part of something that's growing faster than the problem. The Church is doing just that!

5. The Church provides the highest motivation.

Why do any of us do what we do in ministry? It's not to make money, not to make a name for ourselves and not for duty to our

nation. We do it out of love. Jesus stated it as the Great Commandment: “Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.” We wouldn’t do the hard work required to tackle these global giants for money, for fame, or for anything else. It just wouldn’t be worth it; we’d quit before the end.

We’re motivated to keep at the hard work of ministry because we love God, and our love for God compels us to love other people. It is love that never gives up; it is love that keeps moving forward despite the appearance of impossible odds; and it is love that outlasts any problem.

6. The Church provides the strongest authorization.

God authorized the Church to take on global giants, such as spiritual lostness, egocentric leadership, poverty, disease, and ignorance. With God’s authorization, the outcome is guaranteed to be successful.

When you know that God has authorized you to do something, you don’t worry about failure because God doesn’t sponsor flops. If God says we’re going to do it, it’s going to happen. It is inevitable. In fact, the Bible teaches that God will give us His power to complete the task. This is God’s way-ordinary people empowered by His Spirit.

7. The Church provides the simplest administration.

The Church is organized in such a way that we can network faster and with less bureaucracy than most governmental agencies or even well-meaning charities. For instance, the organizational structure at Saddleback, which is based on the New Testament model, holds that every member is a minister. Each person in our church family is encouraged to use his or her own S.H.A.P.E. (Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experiences) to do what God has called him or her to do. There is no bureaucracy or hierarchy. There isn’t a single committee, and the process doesn’t require a long list of approvals.

The old wineskin of command and control won’t work well in the 21st century. The organization of the future is the “network.” And there’s no better worldwide network than the Church, where every member is a minister and empowered to do what God wants done.

Consider it this way – tens of millions of Christians in millions of small groups that are part of churches around the world can take on the global giants with no other authority than that given from Jesus Christ. In other words, we have God’s permission and we have God’s command to do it. There is no need to seek permission from anyone else.

8. The Church provides for God's conclusion.

Since we believe the Bible is God's Word, we already know the end of history. Jesus said in Matthew 24: "The good news about God's Kingdom will be preached in all the world to every nation, and then the end will come." It is inevitable and unavoidable.

When you consider these advantages, think about the exponential explosion of ministry when millions upon millions of small groups in millions upon millions of churches organize in such a way that each person can do their part in attacking the five global giants.

What do you think could happen if God's people prayed against these global giants, prepared for action against these giants, and then moved through faith to tackle these giants?

We may look at these problems and think, "These are too big! How could we possibly solve them?"

But with God, nothing is impossible – and if we all work together as His Church, we'll see these giants fall just as Goliath fell when faced with David's obedience to God."

Week 4: The Holy Spirit

Tacticals & Practicals



SPIRITUAL GIFTS

READ

Romans 12:6-8

1 Corinthians 12:4-10

1 Corinthians 12:28-30

Ephesians 4:11

1 Peter 4:9-10

From these passages, you should have been able to identify these spiritual gifts:

Administration

Apostleship

Discernment

Encouragement

Evangelism

Faith

Giving

Healing

Helping

Hospitality

Interpretation

Knowledge

Leadership

Mercy

Miracles

Pastoring

Prophecy

Teaching

Tongues

Wisdom

What are your top three?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

If you aren't quite sure, continue to read through scripture and spend time in prayer about how God has crafted you. Perhaps He simply wants for you to dive into multiple areas of service with your church/ministry and start figuring it out.

HEART

READ

Colossians 3:23-24

ASK

What moves you? What are your deepest desires?

What types of people are you drawn to?

What needs can you meet?

What great cause will you help accomplish?

ABILITIES

READ

Romans 12:6-8

ASK

Where do I naturally excel?

Adapting
Administrating
Analyzing
Building
Coaching
Communication
Competing
Computing
Connecting
Consulting
Cooking
Coordinating
Counseling

Decorating
Designing
Developing
Directing
Editing
Encouraging
Engineering
Facilitating
Forecasting
Implementing
Improving
Influencing
Landscaping

Leading
Learning
Managing
Mentoring
Motivating
Negotiate
Operating
Organizing
Performing
Pioneering
Planning
Promoting

PERSONALITY

ASK

1. How do you relate to others?
 - i. Are you outgoing or reserved?
 - ii. Are self-expressive or self-controlled?
 - iii. Are you cooperative or competitive?

2. How do you respond to opportunities?
 - i. Are you a high risk or low risk person?
 - ii. Would you rather work with people or behind-the-scenes on projects?
 - iii. Would you rather follow or lead?
 - iv. Would you rather work in a team or solo?
 - v. Do you like routine or variety?

EXPERIENCES

READ

Romans 8:28-39

Look back at your past achievements/experiences/struggles/painful moments in these five areas:

- Personally
- Vocationally
- Relationally
- Educationally
- Spiritually

What has your “personal curriculum” shaped you to handle or have a unique knowledge about?

Overview

The Church is the bride of Christ. She is the great tool of God for the purpose of bringing glory to Him by living out His mission. Unfortunately, "church" has been led poorly, defined incorrectly, and abused by its people. In this section, we will look at the role and the purpose(s) of the Church. We'll also begin understanding the manner by which it is to be led and our role(s) within it.

- What is the purpose(s) of the Church?
- What does it look like to plant simple churches?
- What does proper/Biblical leadership in the Church look like?

Week 5: The Church

Resources

Critical Terms

Missional Communities: An identified and gathering people group that missionaries enter into community with, expressing their faith through spiritual conversations, and exploring truth by looking at scripture.

Missional Community Leader(s): missionaries who have established a core team and have identified a specific people group to enter into, express faith and explore truth.

They:

1. Must be Christ-follower
2. Recruit core team members
3. Lead/facilitate core team meetings
4. Receive some sort of regular coaching/mentoring
5. Lead/facilitate Bible study for interested seekers
6. Report spiritual conversations and life transformation to their church/ministry.

Missional Core Team: a team of (two or more) Christ-followers who:

1. Commit themselves to pray, study scripture and hold each other accountable to pursue God while spending time with a specific people group.
2. Invest their lives—entering community, expressing faith, and exploring truth with those in their people group.
3. Remember and rely on Jesus.
4. Report spiritual conversations and life transformation to their core team leader.

Forming a Missional Community

Step 1: ESTABLISH Core Team. Each missional community leader will form a core team of students to lead and shepherd throughout the year.

What does this look like? (*Challenging and Casting Vision*)

Leaders will...

- Help plan
- Help reach the people group
- Help recruit other team members

Step 2: ENTER Community. Make contacts and discover connections within the targeted unchurched people group.

What can this look like? (*Making Contacts/Discovering Connections*)

- Spending time in their context (studying, eating, hanging out, etc.)
- Greeting people in casual conversations
- Hosting a study night at your house
- Hosting a movie night at your house

Step 3: EXPRESS Faith. Invest in relationships and regularly share their faith.

What can this look like? (*Building Relationships/Sharing*)

- Asking for prayer requests
- Sharing an attribute of the gospel
- Sharing a story of God's faithfulness in your life
- Listening to life stories and responding appropriately
- Looking at the life of Jesus in scripture

Step 4: EXPLORE Truth. Share spiritual truths both collectively and individually with targeted people groups.

What can this look like? (*Establishing Deeper Relationships*)

- Inviting people to explore truth further, in a more formal context
- Meeting in a context that is familiar to the targeted people group
- Leading people to respond to Jesus' call on their life

What is required?

To implement a missional community, we recommend taking the following steps:

1. **PRAY.** Consider this challenge by first praying. The desire must originate with God.

2. **PEOPLE GROUP.** Identify a specific, valid people group that you and your core team can relate to and are able to enter.
3. **TEAM.** Identify a team. Each missional community must have a least two team members. Core team members need to fully understand what is being asked of them.
4. **CHURCH/MINISTRY.** Identify and communicate a ministry plan to a staff person/leader/mentor in your spiritual body. This is a time for you to bounce your ideas and your plans off of someone so that you can best establish your missional community.
5. **MISSIONAL CORE TEAM.** Establish a meeting time with your missional core team where you can begin to build team unity. Examples might include...
 - a. Meet early one morning a week to pray for missional community
 - b. Meet on site of missional community to evaluate strategy
6. **MINISTRY PLAN.** Discuss with team the means by which you are going to Enter, Express and Explore. Plan the steps that are going to be taken in each of these areas for the semester.
7. **ENTER COMMUNITY.** Establish set meeting times to enter community. The focus of this time is for you and your team to meet new people. Spending time doing what they do (studying, eating, hanging out, etc.)
8. **EXPRESS FAITH.** As you pray, move those new relationships to spiritual conversations.
9. **EXPLORE TRUTH.** Identify a weekly meeting to explore truth. Preferably, this is in scripture, but it could also be a spiritual book. This needs to start as soon as possible.

Week 6: Holistic Redemption

Overview

The Gospel story in its entirety is about wholeness and redemption. It is necessary to have an eternal perspective as we live here on earth. A proper and healthy understanding of the coming of Christ (and eternity) will shape every aspect of how we love and live. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "if there is no resurrection, then we should eat, drink and then tomorrow we die." Since this is not our home, and we are not citizens of this earth, then the way that we live must be drastically different. A proper viewpoint of eternal things will directly impact our lives on earth. We start to understand that we can give this world a taste of eternal things here and now—that hunger and thirst for full redemption creates a desire in us to lead others to that understanding.

- What does Scripture say about Jesus coming back and us spending eternity with Him?
- Does the thought of heaven excite me or am I indifferent about it? (Have I been living with a proper or improper viewpoint of heaven?)
- Do I live as one who is ushering in kingdom (eternal) activity in a broken and needy world? (Again, our eternal perspective will directly reveal how we feel about eternal things being 'fleshed-out' through our lives here and now).

Week 6: Holistic Redemption

Main Session Notes

Week 6: Holistic Redemption

Resources

“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Jeremiah 29:7

A Vision for the City: The Jeremiah Paradigm for the City (Excerpts)

Eldin Villafane, Ph. D

A SECOND CITY. Our cities can be described in the words of Charles Dickens as *A Tale of Two Cities* (“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”), for there is a “second city” in all our urban areas. This “second city” is the apt classification of the former governor of New York, Mario Cuomo, at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government a few years ago (February 23, 1999). His eloquent speech, labeled “prophetic” by the secular media, underlined the plight of those living in the “second city.” A “second city” is one that increasingly must live with the deterioration, the breakdown, of its moral and spiritual foundation. I am concerned for the city—particularly that inner city reality, the “second city.” And I am deeply concerned with a Church that needs a holistic vision for the city.

A BIBLICAL PARADIGM. In view of the phenomenon of urbanization and globalization, and the problems and promises that go along with it, I need to raise a few critical questions: What is the role of the people of God in the city? What is the vision of my church for the city?

A very wise man of long ago, a man that knew a little of the complexities of the city, said: “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). The NIV reads as follows: “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint.” The absence of vision (or revelation) results in a “social meltdown,” a moral and spiritual disintegration. Individuals and institutions—including the church—that are to model and love out a vision are often themselves visionless. A vision, whether we apply it to an individual or an institution, gives direction, focuses energies, informs content and character, and sets the framework for “Seeing” and “valuing” life’s true meaning and goals. It shapes the image of self and world.

Through the years, many books and persons have inspired and challenged my work in urban ministry. Yet, time and again, I have been driven by God’s Spirit to find fresh inspiration in the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “And Seek the peace [shalom] of the city... and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace [shalom] you will have peace [shalom]” (29:7).

Jeremiah’s words are instructive here. They present a new challenge to God’s people in a new reality. You are familiar with the historical background of Jeremiah 29—the people of God are captive, exiled in Babylon. From Jerusalem, Jeremiah writes a radical letter! It addresses their question, our question: What is the role of the people of God in the city? Or, to bring it closer to home: What is the role of the Church (God’s people) in the city today? Jeremiah’s answer—I call it “The Jeremiah Paradigm for the City”—is an overarching, holistic vision for the city, one that can inspire our work in urban ministry.

Jeremiah’s answer, particularly verses 4-7, involves three fundamental theological elements critical to any theology of urban ministry. Said differently, Jeremiah’s paradigm stems from: (1) a theology of context, (2) a theology of mission/ministry, and (3) a theology of prayer (or spirituality). Corresponding to it are three key words: presence, peace and prayer.

It’s important to underline here that recent New Testament scholarship has affirmed the significance of this passage of Jeremiah for the early church and for us today. Bruce W. Winter in his *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* posits as his major thesis that of all letters in the New Testament, it is 1 Peter that considers the theme of the welfare of the city in detail (particularly 1 Peter 2:11-3:17). He further states that 1 Peter’s call to “seek the welfare of the city” is based on Jeremiah 29 as the key theological paradigm to “do good and seek peace” (3:11)—a text that informs these first century Christians of the *diaspora* to be engaged in the *polis*—the city!

A THEOLOGY OF CONTEXT. Presence: Jeremiah 29:4-6 speaks to the Church of our relationship to the city, to culture and society. Jeremiah’s words to those exiled in “wicked” Babylon are still relevant. Against the false prophets who might call for “assimilation,” “revolution” or “escapism,” Jeremiah called for “critical engagement”—for presence!

I am helped by the etymology of the word church (ekklesia). In ancient Greece it referred to the congregation or assembly of the “called out ones” to discuss the situation of the *polis*. The Church gathers to worship and to equip itself to impact the *polis*. It does not live for itself, but for the kingdom (rule, sovereignty; lordship) of God. The Church cannot be indifferent to the human needs in the city—by they physical, political, economic or spiritual. It does not hide; neither does it integrate falsely in society.

The people of God do not compromise its identity. It knows that it must be present in the city, *with* and *for* the city; yet it also knows that it is not *of* the city. The Church is present as salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16) in all affairs of the *polis*.

Moreover, a key word/concept that clarifies that Church's presence in the city is contextualization. Contextualization is the *sine qua non* of all faithful and effective urban ministry. It may be best defined by the biblical paradigm of incarnation (John 1:14; Philippians 2:5-11). While urban ministry is to serve the whole city—the neighborhoods as well as the greater metropolitan area—it begins with and contextually expresses a commitment to and solidarity with those with whom Jesus did. In the language of Leonardo Boff or Gustavo Gutierrez, it manifests “a preferential option for the poor”—for those who live in the “second city.” Urban ministry is challenged to humbly express an “*urban kenosis*.” It must struggle to empty itself of the prerogatives—prestige and power so highly valued by the world—and pitch its tent among the poor and marginalized communities in our cities.

A THEOLOGY OF MISSION/MINISTRY. Peace: Jeremiah 29:7 “Seek the peace of the city,” speaks to the Church of our mission in the city. The word and concept “peace” {Shalom} best sums up for me the mission and ministry of the Church. Scripture presents to us at least three dimensions of Shalom, three dimensions of peace that we are encouraged to seek. They can be summarized as: peace with God (Romans 5:1), the peace of God (Philippians 4:7) and (seek) the peace of the city (Jeremiah 29:7).

In the Old Testament, *Shalom* speaks of wholeness, soundness, completeness, health, harmony, integrity, prosperity, reconciliation, welfare, justice and salvation—both personal and social. The Church is an instrument, a servant, of peace in the city. It preaches and loves out the *Shalom* of God.

The essence of the gospel is *Shalom*. In Christ, peace (*eirene*, in the New Testament is a word richly informed by the Old Testament word *shalom*) has come (Luke 24:45f). The Church needs to be reminded, in the words of Peter at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:36): “You know the message God sent... telling the *good news of peace* through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.” We are exhorted by Paul in Ephesians 6:15, and I like the way the New Revised Standard Version renders it, “As shoes for your feet, put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.”

The Church must be an embodiment and an agent of Shalom in our cities—particularly in those places of brokenness and hopelessness, the “second city.” Expressed in the classical missiological categories of the Church's mission, it means:

kerygma—speaks of a church that proclaims by word and deed the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ; *koinonia*—speaks of a church that lives in fellowship and in authentic community, one that has experience and models for society “the peace of God that transcends all understanding” (Philippians 4:7); *diakonia*—speaks of a church, and of Christian ministry or service of *shalom* to hurting and broken humanity—an agent of reconciliation, welfare and injustice; and *leitourgia*—speaks of a church that celebrates and worships the Prince of Peace!

A THEOLOGY OF PRAYER (SPIRITUALLY). Prayer: Jeremiah 29:7b, “and pray to the Lord for it,” speaks to the Church of the spirituality needed to struggle and live in the city. A true urban spirituality knows the critical importance of prayer. Prayer is a radical and revolutionary act. Karl Barth states it well: “To clasp the hand in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.”

Read carefully the words of my colleague, Peter Kuzmic, Paul E. and Eva B. Toms Distinguished Professor of World Missions and European Studies, on the theme of prayer: In Eastern Europe, we have seen the hand of God bring down communism. Prayer is the strongest political power in the world. We have sometimes confined it to our personal piety and concerns, but our Savior not only meets individual needs, He is also the Creator, the Sustainer of the universe.

“He is the Lord over the nations, and He answers the prayers of His people. The evidence of God’s supernatural work throughout history shows us that prayer moves the hand of God. Prayer changes the fate of nations. Prayer brings victory at the brink of defeat. When the Church is at its weakest, it still has access to the power of God through prayer.”

A true urban spirituality knows that the struggle requires the nurturing and “caring of the soul.” Spiritual power encounters are indeed present in the *polis*. Equipped with the whole armor of God, we go out to confront the “principalities and powers.”

In the last part of this text, Jeremiah states a great truth (and a seemingly ironic appeal to “enlightened self-interest”) when he encourages them and us, “for in its peace [that of “wicked” Babylon] you [the people of God] will have peace” (7b). Our challenge is clear. We should pray and seek the peace of the city, if not for “Babylon’s” health, at least for the Church’s health!”

Tacticals & Practicals

“Getting Started”

ASK:

What is your people group?

Who will comprise your core team?

What are your first steps for accomplishing the three E’s?

-ESTABLISH core team

-ENTER community

-EXPRESS faith

-EXPLORE truth
