



step **3.**

Establishing Relevance.

Developing
Relationship

Showing
Respect

Establishing
Relevance



BIBLE STUDY

Luke 15:1-10

What do the parables of the lost sheep and coin tell us about God's attitude to lost people being found?

To what extent do we share that same attitude and how could we demonstrate it more fully in our context?

Luke 15:11-32

What is at the heart of the younger son's actions towards his father? What does that tell us about the offence of our sin when we reject God?

What does the younger son experience emotionally when he leaves his father? Track the changes in his emotions as the story unfolds. How does this help us understand the state of mind of someone who is lost?

Why does the son think he should ask to be a hired servant who earns his keep rather than a son who is within the family again? Why else do people today misunderstand grace and think they need to pay their way to God's favour?

What does the image of the father waiting for his son to return and then running towards him (not the done thing in that society for someone of his standing) tell us about God's compassion for the lost? How should that shape our motivation for evangelism?

How does the father put right the offence his son caused? How much more is this shown in the cross? What does it feel like to be restored in this way?

Why does the older brother react as he does? How do verses 1-2 help explain this attitude? How do we see that attitude in ourselves and others today? How can we get more of God's passion for the lost each day?

*'Women and men are no longer satisfied with the thesis, "I think therefore I am". They want to touch and taste, to hear and smell, to hold and to be held. They want a faith and a community of faith that embraces all the senses, not just the intellect. Unless we are willing to radically rethink how we "do" church in order to facilitate those relationships with God and with one another, there's little hope of satisfying the spiritual hunger of the gathered community of God, let alone attracting the spiritually hungry who experiment with a whole host of alternative forms of spirituality.'*¹

Once upon a time, there was a church for ducks. And all the ducks would gather, quack their way through some hymns, fluff up their feathers and pray duck prayers, and then listen to the preacher duck. One Sunday, the duck waddled to the front and preached a rousing sermon. He said, “Ducks! We have wings! We don’t have to waddle, we can fly!” After the talk, the ducks filed out past the preacher duck who was standing by the door. One by one they thanked the preacher duck for a rousing sermon and then all waddled home without thinking of flying ever again.

We don’t want to be a church for ducks—hearing about radical change but never changing. In Ephesians 3 Paul prays for Christians he cares for very deeply. His prayer is that they won’t just know *about* Christ but that they’ll allow that knowledge to have a profound impact on them, to change them and inspire them to action. He prays that the Ephesians will live in the fullness of God’s power and grace, demonstrating and experiencing:

- Deep inner power (v. 16)
- Wide, fully extended grace (v. 18)
- Whole-measure Christlikeness (v. 19)
- More than they can imagine (v. 20).

Paul prays that the Ephesians won’t be satisfied with surface Christianity. He knew the Ephesians, and their needs, very well—he’d spent three years with them. He knew they had a good grounding in faith and a solid knowledge of the Bible and systematic theology. But he also knew that if they stopped at that they would only ever be semi-formed Christians. So his prayer is that God will do immeasurably more in them (vv. 20-21) and that they will be filled to the fullness of Christ (v. 19).

Our role in announcing the good news of Jesus is to connect people to the living Lord Jesus rather than just telling them a theory about Jesus. When we explain its relevance clearly, people will understand that the gospel is good news for everyone.

Because.

People fail to see the relevance of faith to daily life.

It's almost a given that our society is increasingly secular and 'post-Christian'. Since that idea requires us to measure devotion to God rather than simply church attendance, it's a difficult concept to substantiate. There have been plenty of secular-hearted people throughout history who have attended churches and many who have said they were Christians when they didn't love Christ at all. What we can say with certainty today is that the distinction between secular unbelievers and Christ worshippers is becoming increasingly clear because there's a much smaller middle ground of 'secular churchgoers'. People who don't want to go to church don't go to church. The gap between 'the church' and 'the unchurched' is getting wider and wider. For many, the issue isn't that church is boring—church just isn't an issue at all. Christianity is irrelevant for a whole new generation because it's unknown, and it's unknown because, like *The Lost World* in the *Jurassic Park* movie, people have never visited church or engaged meaningfully with Christians. People aren't reaching the conclusion that the good news of Christ is irrelevant because the gospel has lost its power for people. Rather, the power of the gospel is lost on people. People are so deceived that they see Christianity as having a lot to do with restrictive morality and very little to do with real life. As Callum Brown's analysis of Christianity in Britain concludes: 'what emerges is a story not merely of church decline, but the end of Christianity as a means by which men and women, as individuals, construct their identities and their sense of "self"'.² People have rejected the framework of Christian principles for so long that it's often difficult for them to understand what is talked about in churches without a remedial class in Christianity. Christians need to be trained in TCFL—Teaching Christianity as a Foreign Language.

Isaiah 9 describes the problem: people are in darkness and experiencing the gloom of distress (v. 1), the deathly shadow of troubles (v. 2), and the burden of oppression (v. 4). There is a clear need and a clear solution: the mighty God will come as a great light (v. 2). His everlasting rule of justice and righteousness (v. 7) will be like the joy of harvest time after a long hard winter (v. 3). The light of Jesus won't just give a bit of light to some people for a little while—he will shatter the power of darkness (v. 4) and cast the tools of darkness into the fire (v. 5). The light will totally replace the darkness forever (v. 7). John says the same thing about the light in the first chapter of his Gospel. Jesus is the light who shines in the darkness (John 1:5), both as the creator of light (v. 3) and as the Saviour who restores the light of life in relationship with God (v. 12).

Being in the dark is never an option you'd choose on a permanent basis—unless you're a bat. John says the light is Jesus, who made all things. From the beginning, his light of life has been shining. But the tragedy is that many people remain in the dark. Why? John mentions several reasons:

1. They don't understand the nature of the light

What does light do? It allows us to see. Coming out of darkness into light is like arriving at a place in the dark and opening the curtains in the morning to see a wonderful view of the sea or mountains. What does Jesus offer to do? He restores our sight so we gain a true perspective on life (v. 4)—through Jesus we can see the reality that we were created in the image of a loving, purposeful God. He enables us to see that life is not a random stumbling in the dark. The problem is that if you've never known light you don't realize you're in the dark. Unless you've been introduced to the reality of light, it will seem irrelevant to you. People are in darkness because they think they're OK without God—he's just for religious people in need of a spiritual crutch.

2. They don't recognize the source of light

Everybody puts their trust in something—the depressing reality is just how often people trust in imitations of the true light that ultimately offer no light at all. If sparkling diamonds are a girl's best friend, the Great Light of the world won't be. As long as we worship idols, we won't recognize the Creator and source of light in the world (v. 10). People are in darkness because they don't recognize Jesus as the light.

3. They don't want to face the light

Light puts darkness in its proper perspective. In God there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5), and in his light the dark evils of our lives are laid bare (John 3:19–20). Light and dark do not mix. People are in darkness because they hate the implications of light—'don't you dare judge me'. As Paul says of the Jewish leaders in Rome when he quotes Isaiah:

'For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.' (Acts 28:27)

In the film *Moulin Rouge*,³ Nicole Kidman sings, 'Diamonds are a girl's best friend'. But this material girl is really in darkness, and when the crowds are gone and she's alone, she sings: 'I follow the night, can't stand the light. When will I begin, to live again?' But the only way out of the darkness is to turn to the light. Church is a lighthouse—a gathering of many individual lights into a shining city on a hill that points out the dark of the world, connecting people to the reality of the Light of the world.

We don't need to make the gospel message relevant—by its very nature it's relevant! What we do need to do is work on ways to connect people with the gospel's relevance.

Therefore.

Create a strategic process.

Jesus said to them, 'Do you still not understand?' Mark 8:17-21

We learn from Jesus that blindness often lifts gradually as God removes different blocks to sight. In Mark 8, for example, though the disciples have seen so much of Jesus, he asks them, 'Do you still not see?'. It takes time for their blindness to lift and for Peter to see who Jesus really is and declare him as the Christ. That's often the experience of people today—instead of hearing everything in one sitting and believing there and then, faith is often a gradual dawning as people's ability to see Christ's grace and truth is restored.

The Because Approach sees the journey to faith as a process. The starting point is Mark Mittelberg's⁴ illustration using what is known as 'the bridge diagram', which explains our spiritual predicament of being on the edge of a chasm. In the diagram, people are staring at the problem of sin, which leads to death. They're separated from God with no prospect of being able to bridge the gap by their good works, since no one can never be good enough for God. The good news is that God loves us so much he sent his Son to pay for our sin so we don't have to. Christ's death on the cross is the bridge of life that brings us into restored forgiven relationship with God.



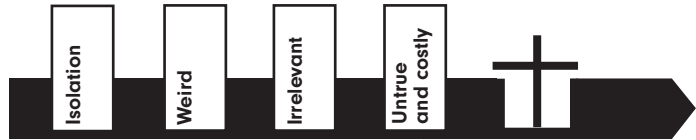
But Mittelberg points out that this diagram assumes that people are staring at the problem of sin and crying out for a bridge back to life in restored relationship with God. In fact, people aren't staring at the chasm—and they're not even aware it exists most of the time. They live for the moment, as if unconcerned with the future and God.



The reality is that many people live life thinking there's nothing to worry about. 'I'm not that bad, God and I will get along just fine when we meet.' But it's a fatal blindness. And, what's worse, there are barriers that stand in the way of people seeing the truth.

The barriers people have to exploring faith are increasingly basic, or further back in their understanding. Rather than asking questions of truth, for many people faith isn't even a question or is something 'long gone' and relatively unknown.

The barriers to faith



The Because Approach identifies the barriers to faith and starts with people much further back in their understanding and interest.

The isolation barrier. As people live increasingly fluid and busy lives, they become increasingly isolated and lonely. One result of this is that many don't have meaningful relationships with Christians and therefore have little idea what Christianity is about.

The weird barrier. People often have false impressions of Christians, shaped by various media. The perception can be that Christians are weird extremists or sad individuals who need a spiritual crutch.

The irrelevant barrier. Many reject Christianity, saying, 'It's lovely you have your faith but I don't need it' or 'It's just not my thing.' Our role is not to 'make Christ relevant' but to help people see his relevance in action.

The untrue and cost barrier. People may see the relevance of faith, but they also need to see the truth of Christ and the Bible. Understanding inherent truth, and not just acceptance based on need, is vital in evangelism. When they don't understand the objective truth of the gospel people hear the message of Jesus but then, like the rich man (Matt. 19:16-22), they walk away when they realize the cost.

The journey of faith



The step-by-step process of the Because Approach helps people move along the journey towards faith by removing each barrier in turn.

Relationship breaks down the isolation barrier. Jesus didn't just give a gospel outline to people and run off. He got to know them, asked questions, and shared life with them. He built trust. They saw the authenticity of his words lived out in ongoing relationship.

Respect breaks down the weird barrier. Jesus' Great Commission is to go and make disciples. That 'go' mentality sees every day as an opportunity to demonstrate the light of Christ and the distinctive lifestyle shaped by the gospel.

Relevance breaks down the irrelevant barrier. The crowd often turned away after hearing Jesus because they missed the relevance of his teaching. Salvation comes as they grasp that Jesus is a doctor and they are the sick in need of his medicine.

Response breaks down the untrue and cost barriers. Jesus spoke in parables until his disciples understood. But then he moved to teaching plainly about the cross, the resurrection, and the response of taking up our cross.

Therefore.

Add connection events.

Early on at Saint James we did a series preaching through Luke. Each week we filmed ‘vox pop’ interviews with people on the street, asking questions related to that week’s topic. We began the series with a sermon focusing on the reliability of Luke’s Gospel and defending the authenticity of the Bible. Our vox pop question was, ‘Do you think the Bible is a special book?’ We expected the answer ‘No, because it’s unreliable, etc.’ But, to our surprise, everyone answered ‘Yes’—they thought it was special. When asked why, they said things like, ‘because it’s God’s words’, or ‘it’s stood the test of time’. But then, when we asked the question ‘Do you read the Bible?’ everyone replied ‘No’. When asked why, they said, ‘because it’s in a language I don’t understand’, or ‘because it’s not of interest to me’, or ‘because I’m not into big old dusty books’. After conducting these interviews we changed our approach to our service. The issue people had wasn’t as much the accuracy of Luke as it was the relevance of such an old book—even one as special and highly regarded as the Bible.

Gateway to relationship
but standing at a distance

Connection to
relevance

Further exploration of faith through
evangelistic course or group

Connection events tackle issues of relevance and bridge the gap between people having spiritual conversations and thinking about Christianity as an interesting philosophy and people understanding that faith in the living God of the Bible brings life-giving salvation. Regular connection events provide opportunities to take spiritual conversations to the next level with people with whom you’re already talking about these questions. If the culture of the church is invitational, then it will be natural for members to bring people they’ve met to events. Regular connection events are also an easy entry point for people living in the area who see publicity about the church or look at the website but are unsure about coming to a service ‘cold’ or don’t think that’s their ‘thing’. There are several types of connection events:

A. Connection events with a training element

Courses or one-off events responding to felt needs make excellent bridges to evangelistic courses. So, for example, you can quite naturally invite people at a toddler group to a parenting course, and then you can invite them to come to a daytime evangelistic course. Ideas for connection courses include:

- Parenting, marriage preparation, marriage enrichment

Ideas for one-off topical events include:

- A talk on something like beauty, work-life balance, or stress
- A discussion about a book (or film or play) that communicates a message about contemporary life or other issues.

B. Connection events with a social element

These provide good opportunities for people to taste what Christian faith is about and meet Christians in a neutral, relaxed setting. Such events usually have a particular focus that draws people to come.

For example:

- A concert, comedy night, dance, film screening, play, etc.
- A meal
- A cultural activity such as wine tasting, or fitness and lifestyle events.

These become connection events when they also include a point of spiritual connection to give those who attend a clearer idea of what Christianity is about and why it's worth investigating further.

For example:

- A 'pause for thought' during a concert, comedy night, or dance
- A talk or testimony after a meal
- A short talk, panel interviews, or discussion time after a film screening or play that compares and contrasts the Christian perspective on the issues raised
- An invitation to a course during a cultural event, or perhaps a short testimony.

C. Connection events with a conversation element

One connection event Saint James Clerkenwell has pioneered for the past ten years is what we call 'The Conversation'. Topics we've covered so far include advertising, American politics, architecture, identity and wellbeing, design, matters of life and death, the credit crunch, journalism, Darwin, and superhero movies.

The Conversation is like a TV current affairs programme. It aims to be:

- A discussion event allowing different views to be expressed by different people:
 - Leading commentators, through pre-recorded video interviews and panel guests
 - The public, through vox pop interviews
 - A Christian, through a short 'view from the vicar' talk
 - The audience, in a question time.
- An informative event that presents a topic in a well-researched, coherent manner and clearly gives the biblical framework in attractive contrast to opposing views.
- A conversational event that starts with the issues people are already talking about and allows them to pose questions to the panel during the question time and then continue discussions over a meal afterwards.

The Conversation demonstrates the distinctives of a biblical perspective and the foundational principles underpinning the gospel message. It therefore:

- Gets past defeater beliefs or suspicions about Christianity
- Isn't what people expect at a church event and so grabs their attention
- Is a great opportunity—through 'the view from the vicar' talk slot and during the question time—to show the contrast of faith in Christ and how the gospel holds true in the face of accusations or differing beliefs.

What are the benefits of The Conversation?

- It takes unbelievers and their defeater beliefs seriously. At The Conversation we make a point of inviting secular experts to have a say, either through pre-recorded video interviews or by coming to the event itself to be a speaker or panel member.
- It equips church members to engage in similar conversations with their colleagues and friends as they learn how to apply biblical knowledge and answer the questions their friends and colleagues are asking.
- It makes our Christian life visible. After the hour-long presentation, the evening continues with a professionally catered meal and people sit around tables and continue the discussion while they eat. In addition to building community and relationships between our members, it creates a relaxed and easy atmosphere in which our unbelieving friends or colleagues can get to know our Christian family with whom we share life.
- It puts faith back in the public arena. Inviting a friend to The Conversation on an evening when the topic is of interest to them not only shows that we're interested in the things they're interested in, but it also demonstrates that, as Christians, we live every aspect of our lives in the context of our faith.

Could a ministry like The Conversation be of benefit to your evangelism strategy?⁵

D. Connection discussion events

Some people find that a less structured discussion group is a helpful stepping stone to a systematic gospel course. This kind of group can meet very naturally in a neutral venue such as a corner of a coffee shop or a room in a pub or in someone's home.

There are several possible formats for discussion:

- An open question time and discussion with a facilitator
- A short talk on a big question or a testimony followed by discussion
- Bible studies on a topic such as Jesus' attitude to people; Jesus' leadership style; the Bible's attitude to work and rest; the Bible and science; the Bible's teaching on values; the Bible's teaching on other religions, etc.
- A reading group with friends who are not yet Christians who are willing to read and discuss a book about Christianity or about a Christian. These discussions may give you opportunities to share your faith.

'Our society values skeptics who question everything over faithful people who trust. You can be as stupid as a cabbage as long as you doubt.'⁶

It's vital that churches provide opportunities for spiritual seekers to explore faith without having to first sign up to a culture that's alien to them. The use of discussion groups in neutral venues will help, though the first hurdle is often communicating to the seeker that he or she can trust that these activities will genuinely encourage questioning and be non-judgemental.

E. Connection events with a listening element

One popular format for evangelistic discussion groups is a listening format. This is a style of evangelism where there is an agreement that everyone will be allowed to give their views and everyone will listen and seek to understand differences, rather than Christians imposing their view and not taking other ideas seriously. Group members take turns outlining their beliefs and unbeliefs and others ask probing questions rather than adopting a more argumentative approach. If there's more than one Christian in the group it's worthwhile having one present near the start of the series and then asking another to draw threads together by sharing their beliefs at the end.

ACTION SUMMARY

Investigate the connection points in your context by interviewing people you intend inviting to connection events (focus groups for each mission field)

- What are the prevailing world-views?
- What is their attitude to Christianity? What stops people from connecting with and exploring the Christian world-view?
- What influences them? What sorts of music, films, and TV programmes do they enjoy? What books do they read?
- What are their felt needs—physical, educational, emotional? What are their idols?
- How do they use their money and time?
- What are their most treasured possessions? What do they desire?
- How do they define and fulfil their spiritual needs?
- What topics might engage sceptics to the extent that they'd be willing to come to an event and hear a distinctive perspective?
- How might their world-view filter their listening?

Investigate the most appropriate types of connection event in your context

Refer to the suggested formats (pp. 76–79) and discuss what types of events:

- Will work socially in your context?
- Will be likely to engage and renew a sceptic's thinking rather than shutting them down or making them feel 'preached at'?
- Provide a natural precursor to an evangelistic course/discussion?

Decide on the type and frequency of connection events you'll host

For each people group within the mission fields you are to work in (p. 35) decide:

- What connection points are most effective?
- What events (pp. 74–77) will you plan?
- How will you shape the events so that they fit with people culturally?

List all the events you have decided upon

How will you link these events in an overall strategy, following each event with an evangelistic course or discussion group?

Therefore.

Link teaching activities in an integrated learning strategy.

Paul was a master connector. As we saw in our discussion of everyday missionaries, Paul didn't just learn about different cultures but lived with people in different cultures for a reason—to save some (1 Cor. 9:19–23). Paul practised incarnation for the sake of connection—he invested his time in debating, discussing, and proving the relevance of the pan-cultural message of Christ.

In the book of Acts, Luke chronicles Paul's habitual relevance-building strategy:

- In Thessalonica, every week he reasoned, explained, and proved (Acts 17:1–3)
- In Athens, he reasoned in the synagogues and in the marketplace and debated with philosophers (Acts 17:17–18)
- In Corinth, he reasoned in the synagogue and in homes for a year and a half (Acts 18:1–11)
- In Ephesus, he argued persuasively in the synagogue for three months and had daily discussions in a lecture hall for two years (Acts 19:8–10).

Paul's speech in Athens is an example of pointing people to Jesus by first establishing a point of connection with their culture:

1. He begins with the Athenians' concerns and practices, using observations on their religiousness and quotes from their poets.
2. He then highlights the inadequacy of trusting gods that humans make.
3. From there he points them to the truth of God as creator and judge of all.

Paul builds a bridge, starting with the darkness of their situation and leading them to the light of God's solution. Communicating truth with people is far more than saying, 'the Bible says so, take it or leave it'. Learning is a process of gaining insight, and it's also a two-way process. People learn by discussion, asking questions, and trying out the learning in practice. Like a pair of shoes, you can learn quite a lot by looking at them, studying the label, and comparing styles and colours, but you only know how comfortable they are to walk in by trying them on and walking in them.

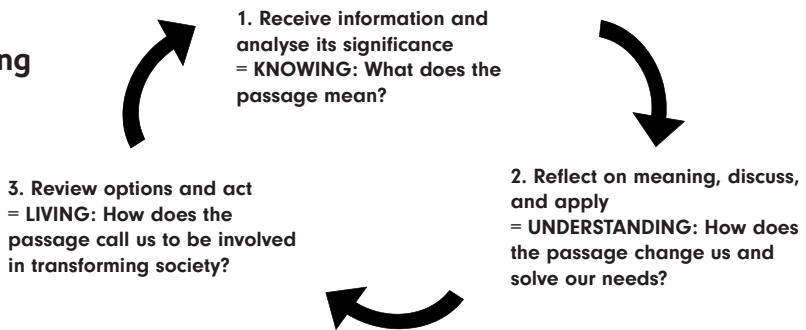
There are two methods of learning that can encourage active investigation instead of passive listening. One method is inductive study, which uses inductive reasoning to present information and discuss what it means and how it applies. Another method is Socratic teaching, which starts with group study and ends with a talk that focuses people on the key applications to take away and live out day by day.

For many people, discovering faith is a long process of exploration that involves many conversations, reading multiple books, listening to many talks, and observing lots of Christians. Missional churches, therefore, engage in ongoing and multiple learning opportunities with people.

1. Have a three-stage learning strategy

Educational science teaches us that learning is not just about the transfer of information. Learning happens when someone understands information and then applies and acts upon it. The different stages of the learning cycle take into account the different ways people learn. Information without transformation leads to stagnation. Therefore teachers give not only information but also space for people to process and apply it and then try it out. Often, truth is just theory until we put our faith in it by living it. David Kolb adds the insight that we learn not just from formal teaching but also by studying and reflecting on the experiences we have as we put theory into practice.

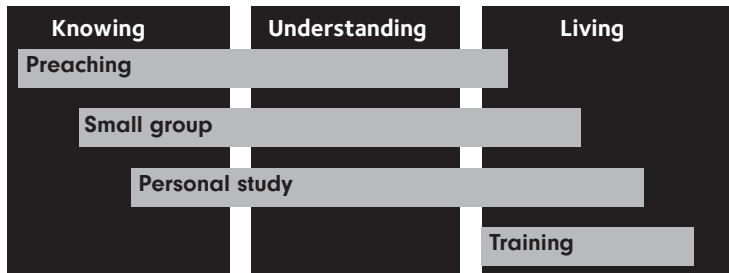
The learning cycle



The three stages of the learning cycle remind us of the need to provide a variety of learning opportunities so that people can learn facts with their heads, understand principles in their hearts, and accept Christ by his Spirit. For the many people who aren't familiar with Christianity, a vital step on the journey to faith is gaining an insight into what a relationship with God looks like in practice. The more they see the nature of a life lived in relationship with God, the more they will want the same. An unbeliever's desire to know Christ rarely comes from within but comes only after 'evidence that demands a verdict' (to use Josh McDowell's term) is presented to them by others. Churches can provide an insight into something that's received by faith. We can say, 'Come and see what the Lord has done for me', even if we can't say, 'Try it on and see if you like it before you buy it!' Churches need to teach principles, but they also need to help people to see the links between theory and practice and how scriptural principles lead to transformation in people's daily lives (see James 1:22-25).

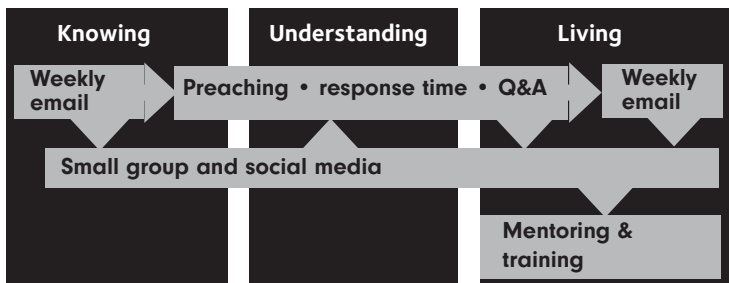
2. Adopt three-stage learning at church gatherings

Traditional learning strategy



The traditional approach to teaching in churches has involved different sermon series at Sunday services in addition to people studying different Bible passages in home groups, daily devotions, and at training courses, mentoring, and so on. That could mean people are studying five or six different parts of the Bible each week. While that approach ensures a breadth of study, the danger is a loss of depth and a lack of opportunity to dwell and mull over a passage before moving on to another one.

Integrated learning strategy



The integrated approach, on the other hand, focuses on learning outcomes and links the many different learning opportunities together into a connected process. In this way, the advantages of different teaching approaches are maximized as knowledge leads to heart change and transformation. So one integrated strategy would be:

- Send out an email or social media post giving a passage and opening question to be thinking through
- Ask small groups to be studying the passage and feeding in ideas to the preacher, or have groups take it in turns to be the prep group for an upcoming Sunday
- Preach on the passage and offer response and question time during or after the service
- Reflect on the passage in small groups and social media discussion as well as through further thinking in an email blog
- Work through the implications in mentoring and edifying friendships within the Christian community.

As we've seen, having time to process information is a vital component in the learning cycle. There are three types of reasoning: rational (tell me), intuitive (tell me a story), and concrete relational (let's go through what this looks like practically, step by step).⁷ Therefore, using methods of communication other than lecture-style talks is helpful and allows people to process. There are many opportunities to add processing time and other learning styles into gatherings:

During the service, before the sermon

Set a question for people to discuss with their neighbour that introduces the theme. This can also act as an 'ice breaker' question when combined with a greeting time.

During the talk

Preach on the passage giving the exegesis of the passage (knowing), relating it to the audience's situation (understanding), and suggesting some applications for daily life (living).

Thinking time

After the talk, give time for people to think through the message—perhaps put some questions on the screen or prepare a handout which acts as a processing tool that people can begin to fill in and continue later. Alternatively, simply have a time of quiet and invite people to come to the front and share insights (it's best for those to go through a pastor first to ensure the insights will be helpful to share with the whole congregation).

Discussion time

Give people an opportunity to discuss the sermon and theme in a more formal way in a group discussion slot during the service.

Question time

A question time is one way of incorporating a different teaching style. You can hold a question and answer session during or after the service. A question time after the service in the main meeting space is less threatening for an unbeliever than going off to another room. To save people from having to speak publicly, questions can be written down during a coffee break or collected during a song after the talk.

Making it real

Testimony is a powerful way to connect the principles outlined by the 'professional preacher' with the issues faced by the 'ordinary pew filler'. One approach is to interview people before a sermon about the issues they face through the week related to the passage or ask people to give a response testimony after the sermon which applies the lessons from the passage to daily life.

After the service

- Provide coffee afterwards so people will have a natural opportunity to chat.
- Encourage people to make comments and ask questions on social media.

3. Adopt three-stage learning in evangelistic groups and courses

A. Evangelistic courses

An evangelistic course or discussion group is an ideal supplement to weekly worship services and personal evangelism relationships. Courses or groups enable people to discuss and question the gospel explanation they've heard in sermons. The courses also ensure that people hear the whole gospel message in an ordered set of presentations.

Evangelistic courses provide a 'one-stop shop' by engaging with each part of the learning cycle and with each of the three questions at the heart of Mark's Gospel:⁸

- The talk gives the *doctrinal knowledge* on Jesus' identity (Mark 8:27–30).
- The group Bible study and discussion build *understanding* of Jesus' mission (Mark 8:31–33) and how it applies to us.
- One-to-one discussion is one way of challenging people to *respond* to Jesus' call (Mark 8:34–38). The epilogue at the end of the session, or prayer in response to the talk, in addition to extended time to reflect and pray on the weekend away, also provide opportunities to act and respond personally.

One danger of courses is 'seeker fatigue'. This occurs when an unbeliever has done the course(s) on offer at least twice and has a lot of head knowledge. One solution is to use a variety of materials, meet in different venues, and use new approaches to evangelistic courses so people keep getting fresh perspectives. For example, The School of Faith 'essentials talks'⁹ give a clear, concise and compelling presentation of the gospel in four TED-style talks in a single evening. This fits with the context of people who are only in an area for a short time, lead busy lives, and work long hours. Another option is to link such a person up with a Christian who will engage with him or her in a fresh way one-on-one.

B. Sunday evangelistic groups

In churches where the Sunday services are the entry point for unbelievers, it's important to provide opportunities for them to 'process' questions of faith. This can happen through an evangelistic course, but for some that will be inconvenient or too intense. Another way to encourage a move from knowing to understanding and living is to offer an evangelistic discussion group before the service (over breakfast), during the service (parallel with children's groups so people meet with this group instead of going to the service), or after the service. For families, meeting during the service eases the issue of childcare. It's also ideal when one adult in a family is not a believer and doesn't come to church regularly but might be willing to come to church with the family and go to a different venue where questions of faith can be discussed in an informal setting.

C. Third-space evangelistic groups

A less formal and churchy approach is to meet in a neutral and informal venue such as a pub or coffee shop where people are already used to going and chatting. Christians sometimes forget how alien a concept it can be to go to a church hall and talk about personal things. Suggestions to keep it informal include:

- If you feel it's important to give handouts, keep them very simple—maybe just with a few quotes on them rather than an outline or linear points that might impose restrictions on the conversation
- Lead a more open discussion by starting with questions people would like to raise or taking questions raised at the end of the previous session
- Use a video clip as an introduction (interviews, film clips, vox pops, etc.) if the room is equipped to show video, or maybe use a portable device to keep informal
- Start with a news item or topic raised by popular culture.

ACTION SUMMARY

Analysis and discussion of learning at church gatherings

List all the learning activities you offer members of your church regularly, including:

- Sunday activities (including talks, etc. before or after the main gathering)
- Training courses for church members
- One-off talks by guest speakers and experts on various topics
- Small group studies
- Mentoring relationships
- Email and social media
- Which of the three parts of the learning cycle does each activity involve?
- Where are the gaps in the learning cycle and opportunities to improve?
- How do the various activities link into an overall learning process?
- How much learning is passive listening and how much active learning is there?

Which of the ideas listed on pages 82–83 would be helpful to try in your context?

- Discussion: Can people ask their questions?
- Making it real: Are there opportunities to hear from ordinary Christians about how the teaching applies in ordinary life?

Action

Decide what activities you will focus on for each stage of the learning cycle and how they will link together into an overall learning process.

Analysis and discussion of learning at evangelistic courses and groups

Discuss which activities enable learning at each part of the cycle and highlight gaps.

Action

Using the ideas on pages 82–83 as a starting point, decide on evangelistic exploration activities that encourage people to go beyond knowledge to understanding, repentance, and faith. Link activities into a learning process.

Therefore.

Equip a missionary taskforce.

In Luke 16:9 Jesus teaches his followers to use all their resources to make friends who will welcome them into the new creation. The exciting vision he gives is that every day is an opportunity to invest in the eternity of the people with whom we spend time.

When Paul arrived in Philippi (Acts 16:12), he followed Jesus' mission model from Matthew 10. He didn't stand on a soapbox in the town square, shout his piece, and catch the last train out of there. He waited until the Sabbath to meet people. He knew that Philippi had very few Jews and no synagogue, and he did further research to find out where the people went to pray—by the river just outside the city walls. When he went there, he sought out the 'worthy person' or 'person of peace' (Matt. 10:11). All of this is people-centred and time-consuming. But consider the results ... Lydia, a Gentile businesswoman, responded to Paul's explanation of the gospel. But Paul didn't simply add her to his list of converts and move on. He spent time with her, prepared her for baptism, and stayed with her family for a time. In fact, we learn in verse 40 that the First Philippi Community Church met initially in her home.

The apostle Paul is clear that his mission is to people—and not just to people like himself. He tells the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:19–22) that he is so committed to people that he's willing to become like them in order to have a greater opportunity to save them. Paul's examples demonstrate how uncomfortable it can be to put people first—prioritizing people meant making himself a slave to people and engaging with the world in which they lived, regardless of whether he found that world awkward or even troublesome. Yet Paul was willing to employ all possible means and become all things in his bid to help all the people he could to pass from death to life.

Are people that much of a priority for us? Are we willing to become slaves to people who are not like us in order to bring them to life with us in eternity? That's the question the people of God faced when they were exiled from Israel to Babylon. At first, only the 10,000 leaders were sent into exile, and the prophet Hananiah persuaded them not to mix with the Babylonians. He wanted everyone to live outside the city to keep themselves separate and pure. But the prophet Jeremiah heard about this and wrote them a letter from Jerusalem (Jer. 29) to correct Hananiah's error. Jeremiah gives God's clear and surprising instruction: go into Babylon, live in Babylon, get involved in the lives of the Babylonians, and influence the culture of the Babylonians. But going—both for the Israelites and for us—takes guts. It's much easier to stay in a holy huddle. Becoming like a Babylonian in order to save some (1 Cor. 9:20) will take us out of our comfort zones. That's why we need encouragement and the power of the Spirit to go for it.

'Most gospel ministry involves ordinary people doing ordinary things with gospel intentionality. ... Evangelism is not an activity to be squeezed into our busy schedules. It becomes an intention we carry with us throughout the day.'¹⁰

We need to remember the words of 'the other Lord's prayer'¹¹ in Matthew 9:38. Jesus doesn't doubt that there's a full harvest of people open to the gospel. He doesn't tell us to pray for opportunities as much as for willing workers who will follow the call and go. It's a prayer we can ask, but it's also a prayer that may involve us as the answer.

Jesus gives four reasons for taking up his call to go:

1. He's not asking us to do anything he didn't do himself—he's shown us how and demonstrated that it's possible (Matt. 9:35).

2. We're to go out of compassion for people who are harassed and people who will remain helpless unless we, or someone else, introduce them to the Good Shepherd. Since we know the solution to their need, it would be incredibly unloving not to go and share it (Matt. 9:36).

3. Jesus has done all of the hard work already. The harvest isn't the problem—as we've seen, Jesus tells us to pray for workers. There isn't a crop shortage, because crop growth is God's department and he never fails to deliver. The weak link in the chain is the willingness of people to do the much simpler job of going into the Son-ripened fields (Matt. 9:37).

4. The harvest field belongs to God, and he will call people to go to his fields when we ask him to (Matt. 9:38). So what are we waiting for? Our Master says to us, 'Go from village to village, go and make disciples, go into all nations. Don't just sit there—the green light is on, the harvest fields are full—go!'

The apostle Paul followed his Master's command and thus began the strategic work of planting reproducible churches. Paul demonstrates that priority in Romans 15 when he says, 'from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ' (v. 19), and 'there is no more place for me to work in these regions' (v. 23).

As Lesslie Newbigin points out, **'What, exactly, has Paul done? Certainly not converted all the populations of those regions. Certainly not solved their social and economic problems. He has in his own words "fully preached the gospel" and left behind communities of men and women who believe the gospel and live by it.'**¹²

Making people our priority will mean going like missionaries into cultural sub-groups within our networks where Christ is not known and planting gospel communities.

A church can have the most sophisticated strategies and professional programmes in the world, but without missionary members it will be rather lacking in purposefulness. The challenge for every church is to encourage existing members to have a 'recruiting mindset' so that they're always looking for opportunities to invite non-members to become part of God's eternal community. Having every Christian involved in evangelism is much more effective than a few specialists.

1. Build vision for evangelism

God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love: he cares about people who don't know their right from their left (Jonah 4:2, 11). Jesus wept as he looked over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-42), and he sighed deeply when he saw hardness of heart (Mark 8:12). Therefore seek God's heart. Teach compassion for the lost and a gospel urgency so that people are compelled to share the gospel out of love and concern. But in addition to casting a vision for the lost give people confidence that they are not just compelled by love but equipped by the God of love who sends us into a harvest field he has already prepared and equips us with the resources we'll need.

One confidence builder is to explain to people that we are all different and therefore called to communicate the good news of Jesus in different ways. We all have a particular style of evangelism that fits with who we are. Using a gift of hospitality or listening to people one-on-one is just as valuable as giving talks at big events.

2. Train everyone in everyday evangelism

Confidence in evangelism comes through training that equips people to talk about their faith in the mission fields they go into each day. There are many evangelism training resources available. The following is a summary of training offered by The School of Faith. Here are seven handy hints you can teach people about being an everyday evangelist.¹³

STEP 1: Knowing we are sent

Everyday missionaries know they are sent each day by the Lord Jesus into a mission field he has already prepared for them.

Something to consider: What is your mission field? Do you love it? Are you content and glad that God has chosen you to go into this particular harvest each day?

Something to try: Start each day with this prayer: 'Good morning, Lord. This is a day you have made, and I will rejoice and be glad in it. Please send me into your mission field today and give me opportunities to speak to people about you.' It's a prayer that the Lord of the harvest loves to answer!

STEP 2: Investing in our people of peace

Everyday missionaries recognize that they are called to invest their time in their people of peace—listening to them and spending time doing life with them.

Something to consider: Think through the ‘people of peace’ in your life—that is, the ones who are open to talking about faith and life. God has given you these specific people as part of your mission field! Are you investing time in sharing your life with them and praying for opportunities to share your faith with them?

Something to try:

• Follow the 50:50 rule

- Invite at least as many unbelievers as Christians to a social event.
- Ensure you spend at least 50 per cent of your time talking to unbelievers.

• Add another person to your day

If you’re already doing an activity, why not invite others along?

• Take up a sport or hobby

Pick an activity that involves interaction with people. For example:

- Play a team or club sport in which you partner with different people or take up a hobby that involves meeting with others to swap ideas
- Take an evening class in which you do more than just sit in a seminar room (e.g., drama or creative writing, both of which involve sharing with others)
- Volunteer with a community group or cause such as a soup kitchen, a clean-up effort, or an after-school homework club.

• Be a strategic consumer

We all have to eat food, get dry-cleaning done, and so on. When we use particular shops and service providers we build relationships with them, and as we do that those people will get to know we’re Christians and opportunities will naturally arise for us to share the hope within us.

STEP 3: Understanding our culture and responding with an alternative

Everyday missionaries understand what messages people are hearing that block out the fullness of grace and truth found in Jesus. As missionaries our role is to say ‘it doesn’t have to be that way’ and then to give an alternative view of reality framed by the gospel and shaped by what we’re learning from Scripture and applying in our lives.

Some questions to consider:

- How could what you’re currently learning in Scripture speak into the lives of your ‘people of peace’?
- What are these people’s struggles, hopes, and fears? With what presuppositions do they view the world?
- How can you respond with an alternative view that is good news of great joy to all who believe and receive?

STEP 4: Learning the art of asking questions

Everyday missionaries learn the art of asking questions. We can use questions to deconstruct people's beliefs. Questions that help us do that include:

- What do you mean by that?
- Where do you get your information from (or what is the basis of that)?
- How do you know that to be true?
- What if you're wrong?

Asking questions can reveal the inconsistencies and arbitrariness of people's logic. Questions also help people see the limits of their beliefs and give an opportunity to demonstrate how much more is found in Jesus by comparison.

Something to try: Try asking questions of people you talk to today. Use questions to help you understand some of their objections to faith and to point out the inconsistencies, presuppositions, and false assumptions in their arguments.

STEP 5: Replacing idols with the grace of Christ

Everyday missionaries challenge people who are holding on to created things for their source of security, identity, and purpose rather than the creator who made us to know those things through him. An idol is a good thing, such as a career or a possession or a relationship, that has become the ultimate thing and has taken God's role of providing worth and salvation. Everyday missionaries learn from the expulsive method that rejects an idol by taking hold of something far better. They are walking, talking, living adverts for God's goodness. Because they know the unsurpassing greatness of Christ, they show it in their lives and tell others about it.

Some questions to consider:

Think about your 'people of peace'

- What are some of the idols that they are holding on to?
- What identity, security, or sense of purpose do these idols seem to offer?
- How do you see that these idols will ultimately fail your friends?
- How does God's grace in the gospel far exceed what these idols seem to promise?

STEP 6: Explaining your soundtrack

Everyday missionaries explain their gospel-driven soundtrack.

They are always prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks about the reason for the hope they have (1 Pet. 3:15).

Something to try: Why are you glad to be a Christian right now? Be ready to explain your hope to people in three ways:

- I know who I am: a dearly loved child of God.
- I know what I'm here for: to live for God's eternal purposes each day.
- I know where I'm going: toward the new creation with God forever.

STEP 7: Telling the story of salvation to a world in darkness

Everyday missionaries let the light of the gospel shine among their friends, neighbours, and co-workers by telling the story of God breaking into our world, identifying with us, bearing the penalty for our sin, adopting us into his family, and redeeming us along with the rest of creation. Everyday missionaries are able to explain sin and counter the assumption that we're 'good enough' with Scripture.

Some questions to consider:

As you talk with your 'people of peace', try to ascertain which of the four great truths of Scripture they seem to misunderstand:

- The foundations of God and creation
- What sin is and how it causes separation and death
- The story of redemption through grace, not good deeds
- The future dawn of the new creation and being home at last.

How can you help shed light on truths that your friends are misunderstanding?

3. Encourage a culture of missionary prayer

Missional churches catalyse every member through regular prayer for all the mission fields in which they work day by day. Strategies to encourage prayer include:

A. Partnership prayer

Paul asks others to pray for him in his evangelism, and we can be doing the same. Churches can encourage prayer for unbelievers in several ways:

- Make praying for unbelievers and evangelism a feature of every small group meeting and prayer gathering
- Interview Christians in services and prayer gatherings about their workplace mission and then pray for them
- Encourage people to form prayer triplets
- Form a prayer group that prays regularly for the mission activities of the church and the personal evangelism endeavours of individual members of the group
- Have a prayer team praying before and/or during evangelistic services and events.

B. Individual prayer

Our prayer life can quickly slide from a mission-focus to a me-focus. It's a great idea, therefore, to encourage every member of your church to write a list of all the unbelievers they are going to commit to praying for on a regular basis.

Tim Keller says, 'I urge skeptics to wrestle with the unexamined "blind faith" on which skepticism is based, and to see how hard it is to justify those beliefs to those who do not share them. I also urge believers to wrestle with their personal and cultural objections to the faith. At the end of each process, even if you remain the skeptic or believer you have been, you will hold your own position with both greater clarity and greater humility.'¹⁴

4. Establish mission field partnerships

A church will often find that particular mission fields have a dominant influence in the area and among church members. Those mission fields might include places of work or particular industries, such as finance or media or manufacturing, that are major employers in the area. They might be schools or universities that contribute in a major way to the social makeup of the area. Or these mission fields might be particular groups of people who have a significant influence on the social cohesion of the area, such as young parents or retired people. Regardless of what the mission field is, churches build evangelistic capacity by bringing people who work and live within a particular field together as a missionary partnership group.

Through regular gatherings and even weekend retreats, people in the same mission field can share stories and advice on effective evangelism in the context. They can gain industry-specific training, where appropriate, that has credibility, and they can pray for each other with mutual understanding and confidentiality as they encourage one another to see their mission field as a shared endeavour.

5. Develop an evangelism task force

A church that believes in every-member ministry will be training every member in evangelism. But in addition to being taught, a passion for sharing the gospel is often caught. One way to ensure that evangelism is on everyone's agenda is to discern those with a gift of evangelism and then equip and commission them as part of an evangelism task force whose job it is to spread a compassion for the lost throughout the whole church. In order to develop an evangelism task force:

- Observe who has lots of friends who are not yet Christians and who makes evangelistic activities at the church a priority
- Pray and ask for discernment about which members have a gift of evangelism
- Offer specific training for those who have the gift of an evangelist
- Give those who are learning to use their gift of evangelism the chance to pair up with an experienced evangelist to see evangelism best practice first-hand
- Commission evangelism task force members and explain to the whole church that their role is to encourage everyone to be doing the work of evangelism with a compassion for the lost
- Make task force members available to people who are exploring faith or to church members who would like a speaker for an evangelistic talk or discussion supper event they're organizing.

Setting up a task force to champion evangelism and plan mission events helps to keep evangelism on the agenda—especially if those task force members pass on the evangelism DNA to others through personal conversations as well as through presentations, announcements, and prayer at church events.

ACTION SUMMARY

Analysis and discussion

Ask church members about the barriers they encounter in sharing their faith day by day.

- Is it lack of confidence about knowing what to say, nervousness about starting a conversation with an unbeliever, or an unwillingness to be involved at all?
- Is their impression that evangelism is something only professionals undertake?
- In what ways has the church helped or hindered everyday evangelism?
- What training have they had before and what worked best?

Build vision for evangelism

How could a passion for the lost be instilled in people?

- Special talks and presentations
- Regular application in sermons
- Testimonies highlighting the joys of doing evangelism
- Testimonies of people who have become Christians
- Regular prayer for the lost and for evangelists on Sundays

Train everyone in everyday evangelism

What training courses or mentoring relationships would help equip people in your context to share their faith in daily conversation?¹⁵

Encourage a culture of missionary prayer

How might you build a culture of regular, frequent prayer for the lost, for the everyday missionary work of people in the church, and for evangelistic events run by the church?

Establish mission field partnerships

Discuss what mission field partnerships would be useful. How would they run?

Build an evangelism task force

How will you identify people with the spiritual gift of evangelism, invest in them with training and mentoring, and provide regular opportunities for them to engage with people who are not yet Christians?

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