

CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CHURCH

Core Values Lessons for Neighborhood Gatherings

Mission: The mission of Crossroads Community Church is helping people on their journey back to God. We will do this by becoming a spiritually mature community of Christ-followers, equipping ourselves to impact the world as the presence of Christ, in order that lives may be transformed, God's purpose in the world fulfilled, and our Creator honored and glorified.

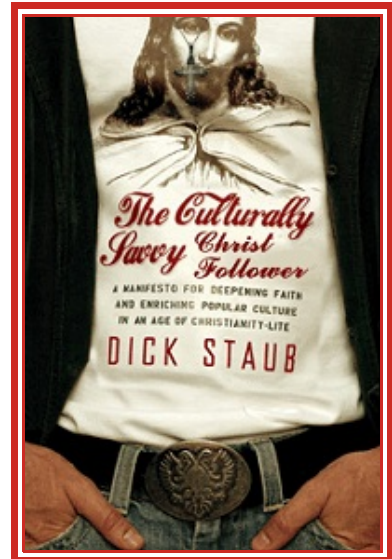
LESSON 5: CONTENDING FOR THE GOSPEL

Value: RELEVANCE — We believe the Bible provides all the necessary guidance on how Christ-followers and the Church are to be in the world; *the cultural context determines the forms which embody that presence.*



Breaking the Ice (10 minutes)

- What is your favorite ethnic food?
- If you had the opportunity to spend two weeks anywhere in the world, where would you go?



Discovering the Truth (20-25 minutes)

1 Corinthians 9:19-23; NRSV

¹⁹ For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

A few years ago the church I was serving had a young, talented person who served as a temporary administrative assistant for several months. She was in her mid-twenties and very much plugged into the culture and outward lifestyle which characterize that generation. During the time we worked together, we became friends and often dialoged about church and culture.

I asked her on one occasion to share with me her perspective on the church. After hesitating for a moment, she responded, "In all honesty, the church isn't even on my radar screen. I care about spiritual things but I'm not interested in the church." As the conversation continued, what I understood her to be saying was *the institutional church and its message are irrelevant to me and my friends*. The church isn't a part of our worldview; the church doesn't speak our language; the church doesn't understand us and we don't understand the church. The church is just another voice out there trying to sell a product I don't need and am totally uninterested in. We're like two ships

passing anonymously in the night; our journeys occupy the same time and a certain proximity of space, but they do not intersect. . . . *The irony is, this young lady is representative of persons whom God has called us to reach with the gospel.*

Back in 1997 Rob Nash, current Global Missions Coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, wrote a book entitled *Eight Track Church in a CD World*. He offered a cutting commentary on the struggle of the church to move from being a nostalgic museum memorializing a dead past to a vibrant, relevant example of the life-giving nature of Jesus.

More recently, the issue of cultural relevancy has been couched in what Ed Setzer¹ refers to as “the classic tyranny of the ‘OR’”: cultural relevance or faithfulness to the gospel.

All of us would agree that the church and its ministry must be faithful to the teaching of scripture. That is a given. We are, in the words of Jude “to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). The apostolic faith handed down to us across the generations is bedrock for those who would follow Christ. However, contending for the faith is not synonymous with supporting an institution whose methodology and organizational structures have become obsolete and whose communication of the gospel is nuanced in a vernacular and ritual no longer understood by the people whom it is called to serve or the larger culture in which it ministers.

Hence, the Bible makes it equally clear that there is a difference between the message we proclaim and the methodology and forms we employ in that proclamation. In short, the gospel must be understandable and it must be incarnated. This requires that we translate it not only into a language, but also into a culture.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:22-23, “I have become all things to all men.” Why? “For the sake of the gospel!” The apostle recognized that the message must be contextualized. It must be communicated and enfleshed in such a way that people can relate to it. In a superb article² addressing the issue of cultural relevance and contextualization, Setzer states it this way: “The ‘how’ of ministry is, in many ways, determined by the ‘who, when, and where’ of culture.”

Thus, when we say that “the Bible provides all the necessary guidance on how Christ-followers and the Church are to be in the world”, we are affirming and contending for biblical faith. And when we say “the cultural context determines the forms which embody that presence,” *we are affirming and contending for biblical faith*. The issue is not either/or; it is both/and. We must do church in a manner flexible enough to hold the new wine of the gospel for a constantly changing world.

Simply put - while the truthfulness of the gospel is unchanging, the methods by which it is communicated must be constantly changing - adapting for an ever-changing culture.

For Reflection:

1. How would you describe Paul’s approach to sharing the gospel? Do you think most Christian congregations would be comfortable with Paul as their pastor? Why or Why not?
2. What are some of the ways we might make “church” more relevant to the culture(s) of which we are a part?

¹Setzer is the author of *Planting Missional Churches* and currently serves as pastor of Lake Ridge Church in Atlanta, and as a missiologist and director of research for the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

²“Why Is Cultural Relevance a Big Deal?” See the following link to read Setzer’s article.
http://www.theresurgence.com/es_blog_2007-01-29_why_is_cultural_relevance_a_big_deal



Embracing the Truth (15 minutes)

The whole book of Acts is about relevance. The Jerusalem church expected non-Jews to come to Jesus in the context of the Jewish culture. One had to become a good Jew in order to become a good Christian. The Holy Spirit had another idea — that humankind be reconciled to God on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Period.

Thus, the story of the early church as it evolves in Acts is a story of the truth and the power of the gospel breaking out of the narrow confines of the Jewish worldview and culture. It is an exciting story in which those early Christ-followers wrestled with themselves, with those in position of authority in the church and those in position of authority in the world. It's a story about the Holy Spirit repeatedly working through the “misfits” of the early church to break down the walls which divide us, the traditions which segregate us, and the institutions which enslave us — all for the sake of the gospel, all for the sake of bringing the whole of creation into right relationship with God.

For Reflection:

1. *Get Real* — What are some things you personally struggle with in the culture of which we are a part?
2. *The Cutting Edge* — Who do you see in the society around us who is surviving on the edge of life, folks with little economic power, little political power, and not much hope for things to be any different in the future?
3. *Barriers* — What group of people are you especially aware of who need to experience God's love? What barriers exist between you and these groups?
4. *Life Situations* — How open are you to tearing down these barriers and moving out of your comfort zone to be the presence of Christ to these groups?
5. *Truth for Life* — If time permits, have one or more group member share a *truth for life* from one of the scripture passages in **For Further Study**.



Connecting (10-15 minutes)

As you share particular concerns and praises, think about some of the barriers between the church and the culture of which we are a part. Pray for insight regarding how those barriers might be overcome. Pray also for the necessary spiritual strength to personally participate in that process.

Continue to pray for the community of **Crossroads Community Church** as we give witness to God's love and grace in the culture of which we are a part.

1. Praises from group members
2. Concerns from group members
3. Share these in conversation with God

For Further Study

Acts 17:22-28

²² Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ³ For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷ so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us.

²⁸ For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

¹ Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; ³ but anyone who loves God is known by him. ⁴ Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” ⁵ Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords— ⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷ It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. ¹² But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.