



ACE of hearts

Authentic
Community
Engagement

TOPICS

1. Deeds that Speak
2. Belong
3. Decide
4. Begin
5. One Another

1. Deeds that Speak

... Being good news in the community

GOAL OF THIS SESSION

To identify the kind of actions that speak the good news and what qualities of leadership get us there.

SCRIPTURE

“Faith without works is dead.” James.1.22-27; 2.14-17. True Faith is seen in concrete action.



INTRODUCTION

St Francis, an authority on outreach if ever there was one, is often quoted these days as saying: ‘Evangelise everyone, if necessary use words.’ Problem with that is that St Francis was a preacher and singer and he never said it. Why is that desire to justify ‘works without words’ so popular?

WHAT CONSTRAINS US?

- a. FROM INSIDE: Churches are easily distracted to doing churchy things instead of Kingdom things. It is a dangerous mistake. **Q: What is the difference?** Here is a study that will help us.
- b. ON OUTSIDE: Some people have had a bad experience off church, or a religious antagonism, so we feel we can’t speak our gospel. However, our deeds can speak.

EXERCISE: (30’)

These three passages below describe the love-deeds and social policies that most represent the Kingdom of God. Each group today will look at one passage only (you can do the rest yourself later). Here is what you do:

- Read the passage out loud twice.
- List on paper the things that the Lord is saying we should be doing. Simple list, just write it.
- Consider: Why are these specific actions such good signs of the Kingdom, do you think? You do not have to agree on this, just share your wisdom. Maybe imagine what life would be like *without* that action happening.
- Now, imagine, what might each of those particular actions or behaviors look like in your context in your area today? Be particular and specific, and do not just make a broad-brush statement. Allow the wisdom of scripture to guide your thoughts. Write these down and we will share our findings in the group when we come back together in twenty minutes.

Matthew 25. 31-44

Isaiah 65. 17-21

Luke 4. 16-21

DISCUSS TOGETHER

Come back (when called) to share your thoughts.

Question to discuss - How can your church look like Mathew 25? How can your social justice policy look like Isaiah 65? How will the churches act together to look like Luke 4?

Take your time with this discussion. Do not try to finalise all the fine points on this matter

Some Tips on Making a Difference in Church and Nation

- Gather in the experiences of those most affected by the issue we are addressing
- Where do you see things like this in the Bible? What does it teach?
- Resolve to not be quiet, do not favour friends and family.
- Connect with others who deal with this issue and ask for their wisdom, but do not give away your part in action.
- Is it the right time for Protest or Process? These have different timing and skills.
- Seek a conversation with those with power to affect this issue. Ask them their view on what you have discovered. As you become more experienced, or better networked with others in the field, you will know what to ask for.

LEADERSHIP STRENGTHS FOR THE LONG HAUL

1. What do we mean by leadership?

Leadership is a personal trait or skill, it is an action (verb) taken together rather than a role or one person (noun).

What's the difference between leadership and management?

People can lead from the foot of the table (outward and upward influence), not just from the head of the table (the role).

Inspire and equip, express and reflect.

2. Leadership Strengths

Leadership, from a group perspective, is the collection of strengths that are needed for its healthy functioning. The *Leadership Strengths* needed to be going somewhere, or to bring about change in a group, organization, family or community, are:

- Engage effectively with others (listening, networking and building trust platforms for action...based on strengths, hopes and things that energize)
- Develop shared and owned directions (looking to the future, exploring options, giving shape to shared hopes and passions, helping people find their place and contribution to those directions).
- Create a secure base from which to move forward (quality systems, reliable clear communication, a positive environment, keeping the heat on but not too hot).
- Move to and sustain action (Timing, decisiveness, pacing change, persistence and holding fast, on-going learning).
- The inner challenges of leading:

- work avoidance;
- keeping to our purpose;
- sharing power: an expanding pie not a scarce commodity.
- Moving with our strengths, not fearing our weaknesses.

Further reading in Peter Kaldor "Lead with Your Strengths", NCLS Publishing

THINKING FURTHER

Sustainable leadership

Are you flourishing in leadership and life, at the moment? Are you run dry? What wells do you have from which to draw the water of the Spirit? Do you have:

- Strong spiritual foundations
- Clarity of life purpose
- A good sense of self
- Living authentically and with integrity
- Strong relational foundations
- Good balance and boundaries
- Physical, mental and spiritual self care.
- Ongoing support persons that you really listen to.

Do you know how:

- To leave it with God and go have fun/sleep?
- To receive gifts of kindness from others?



2. Belong

So many ways to help someone to belong

Newcomers must be incorporated into the Body of Christ even before their fruit has formed. Most people do explore church while exploring faith. “Belonging” comes before “believing”. We all need each other for encouragement to be strong, and we all need each other for teamwork to be effective.

- **Matthew 28:20** — baptism into discipleship.
- **1 John 2:9** — conversion to Christ and openness to others who love him are the two wings of a bird.
- **1 Cor 12** — the differing gifts as part of the Spirit’s one work.

GOAL

To raise our awareness of what to expect as a person makes their first entry to a church or small group and how to be sensitive and supportive.

EXERCISE

Discuss (a) and (b) all together, then form small groups of five or six to give an answer to question (c). (15 mins) If time is short, go straight to (c). Write on the board as you go.

a) Remember an experience when you were new in some new place, church or club or party at someone’s house. What happened? How did it feel? For how long did you feel uncomfortable? What happened to make you feel comfortable, if anything. *(20 mins)*

(b) From that experience, how much time do you think it takes before newcomers to church feel ‘strange’, before they have decided to never come back? *(5 mins)*

(c) So, what can we do to help newcomers to understand and feel at home in our church and in their faith. *Make two lists: Helpful and Not Helpful.*

(d) More detailed: what unco-ordinated activity and what organized things like small groups or Sunday meetings are helpful/not helpful for welcoming and integrating newcomers?

DISCUSSION

The best integrating of newcomers takes place when it is not ‘organised’.

Why do you think that is so?

Notes (about this exercise)

Some people like to use this exercise as an occasion to complain about some aspect of the church or its leadership. Explain that helping people to belong is primarily an everybody function, not just the job of leadership. Much can be done before any leaders are approached to initiate changes.

CONCLUSION

To nurture a new believer involves all five of the following...

Be a mentor: one-to-one weekly contact with an older person (over a period of 12-18 months) for sharing and prayer — and Bible Study too if there are no others studying Christian basics in the small group mentioned below.

Find them a task that helps them to give expression to their faith, fellowship with others and opportunities for thinking about what they are doing. Not too heavy a responsibility.

Establish them in a small group where the basics of the faith can be worked through by each person and where ongoing support is given and received. Only later invite them to enter a small group of longer established and more knowledgeable Christians.

Introduce them to a church community to become and belong in, where they will be accepted and given room to grow. Most of the time, they already know your church, but sometimes it is necessary to nurture this link and gently nurture commitment.

Introduce them to three to five Christian friends with whom they relate easily by interest or family life-stage — either in your church or elsewhere.

If you have already done the above exercise in the Workshop *'Hearts on Fire'* you may prefer to this

BIBLE STUDY OPTION

1. **Matt 18.1-6** Who gets the “millstone” treatment? So, the care of those who are little of faith, or new in faith, is high on God’s priorities. Do I give this level of care to new people?

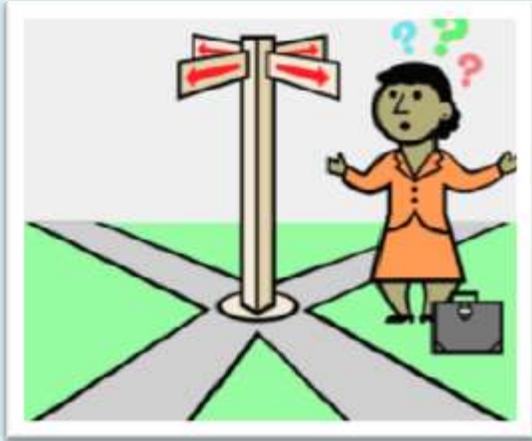
2. **Romans 15:1-2 Bias to the Weak.** Who are the weak? New to the faith, new to the church, struggling in life in some way – all these are God’s bias.

This passage urges the church to **begin where people are** and **not** to demand conformity, to impose rules which will break their spirits, to demand ownership of the denomination, or go along with everything we are already doing.

The first question is: What in fact will nurture their faith in Christ?

The aim is not to keep such little ones dependant but to give them the supports and spaces to be built up into strong ones. To do that, the strong ones surrender their own desires. They have the capacity to feed themselves to some degree. It means giving up something you really like, something you feel is important but which is not the first question.

The second question therefore is: What in your church do you need to give up?



3. Decide

There are many ways to help someone to decide to follow Christ and many ways to make that decision.

GOALS OF THIS EXERCISE

- To see what someone is doing when they make a decision
- To show how many ways there are to help someone in a decision
- To see that this is how decisions for Christ is made
- To learn many ways they can become more sensitive and supportive towards them in that process.

This is a broadening exercise, so not good to go too early in training.

INTRODUCTION

Some people decide for Christ quickly, some slowly by gradually increasing acts of surrender. The actual decision is not the beginning nor the end of the decision-process.

How can we actually help people without smothering them and without starving them of support?

This exercise will **use our own practical experience** of making an important decision so that we can see how to be a good helper.

LEARNING EXERCISE - IN GROUPS OF FOUR (20 MINS)

Think of an important decision you have made in your recent life, something which would affect your life significantly, or what others think of you. eg. moving house, choosing what to study, choosing which child to send for higher education, getting new clothes, buying new equipment, where to hold family celebration, how to spend your time off work.

Note: DO NOT discuss 'becoming a christian' or deciding who to marry - these are too complex to be helpful.

Explain your decision, now step back and answer this question. What were the factors that first raised the question (BEFORE); what helped you to actually make the decision (DURING) and what helped you after the decision was made to live with the decision (AFTER)?

Come Back all Together (20 mins)

Go around lots of people and hear their answers to the question above. Write it up until it fills the top half of the board, all the factors that they were able to list.

Steps in the Discussion

(a) How long did your decision process take? (Write up a few answers, ranging probably from an hour to 20 years!) So ... the kind of process we are talking about can vary a lot, but the principles listed here apply anyway. This comes from our own experience. Deciding for Christ is the same.

(b) Big Question: Look at each column in turn and ask: Where are the similarities between what is in this column on the board and a decision to become a christian? *Give one example taken from the top of the list. People will need some think-time before answering.*

(c) *(Write these answers on the bottom part of the Board.)* What have you learned about the many ways you can help in each stage of the decision process to become a Christian – before, during, after?

CONCLUSION

We have just learned about 20 or 30 things we can do to be more supportive towards our friends and acquaintances in helping them decide for Christ. They are really good ways that are normal and appropriate in our culture.

Notes about this exercise

How can we actually ask them to commit? Ask for suggestions. We will recite one or two, just to break the ice on hearing ourselves say it. You can change later it if they want to, of course, find your own words.

BEFORE?	DURING?	AFTER?
<u>MY HELP</u>	<u>AT THIS</u>	<u>STAGE?</u>

GOING FURTHER

- Perform some random deeds of kindness.
- Note down some ways that **you** know will apply to you and how you can become more supportive in the decision process.



4. Begin

There are so many ways to help someone to begin the journey as a disciple in Christ.

GOAL

To describe clearly and simply the practicality of starting out as a follower of Christ.

INTRODUCTION

As your love progresses with another person, you will find it is time to ask “Are you ready to start following Jesus Christ yourself?” OR ‘Can I ask you: Where are you up to now with all this?’ OR “ Have you thought about being baptized?”

Participants must realise that faith-sharing will bring people to a point where someone wants to be a Christian. It is often a surprise, and other times you can see it coming for weeks! For some this is done in one big decision, for most it is a series of many decisions gradually coming to belong somewhere new. Either way, this exercise grows an essential skill.

KEY QUESTION1

What helped you to start off being a Christian?

Leader tells their own story and then collect others' ideas.

Do this briefly If you can remember what happened to you, that might help but it might not help somebody else. Remember, God deals with each of us by name.

It is most important that the **Five Loves** suggested in this exercise be explained. An unchurched person needs a clear and genuine way to start, free of complex concepts and too many expectations.

KEY QUESTION2

This is an exercise in explaining discipleship. Imagine you are talking about all this to someone who is not from a church background and now it feels like they might want to become a Christian. They ask you:

“What does God want from people.”

Answer simply. *Groups of three or four, one to takes notes. (10 mins)*

Write up people's answers on the left half of the board only in the framework of the Five Loves: Love with God, Love with neighbour, Love one another, Love of enemies, Love the world.

What practical suggestions can you make so that this person can make a start in these five areas right now or within one week from now?

Write on the right half.

Love God = say a prayer of surrender now, tell someone you trust that this is what you have done.

Love One Another (Church) = meet with some Christians regularly and help one another, support the movement.

Love Neighbours = Do you know someone who needs help? Go do it or come with me and do it.

Love Enemies = any reconciliations needed? Racism? Anyone need counselling?

Love World = bigger picture, environment = live more simply?

Unless they have begun all FIVE, they have not done any more than begin discipleship. They have opened the door but not gone through it. Each one of these five requires a conversion of sorts.

NOTES about this exercise

- *Many people are shy to ask a person if they want to become a Christian. It is a special thing so they are entitled to feel timid, but not to hold back.*
- *Participants usually show they know about **loving God** in great detail but very little by comparison about the other loves. This suggests a dangerously privatised faith.*
- In some evangelism booklets, the 'prayer of commitment' is nothing but a ticket to heaven. It is shameful what people get up to after they have been 'born again' in this sense. Though the phrase sounds biblical, this is NOT Christian discipleship.
- There is no formula. The prayer of commitment needs to express where this person has come from to get to this point or it is a quite meaningless ritual.
- Going further, the 'follow-up material' may not show them what sort of life they are to live. Most often, the things they are taught are aimed at how to 'stay within the church': Bible-reading, personal prayers, church attendance and witnessing to friends. They are the means to an end, but it is *assumed* that the person knows what they are supposed to be aiming for. If that was ever safe to assume, now in these days of so many unchurched people, it should not be assumed. The five loves is a sound small curriculum in discipleship.

CONCLUSION

It is so easy to let new Christians slip and slide around because we assume so much and therefore expect too much. These exercises help people to frame their understanding quite simply and practically. Within this frame you can more easily help with assurance and temptations etc.



5. One Another

GOAL:

To make a practical bible study of the qualities of love required within the church and to respond to them with expressions of love for one another.

Each person: Choose three only of the following thirty eight verses about 'one another'.

Two of them you will give to someone with the express accompanying statement (otherwise they won't get it) that you already see this love happening in their life. Say 'thank you' for the encouragement they give you. That's all. Don't gush, no exaggeration. Love is enough.

The third one, you guessed it, is one that when you read it it convicts you of the need to change. The biggest clue is - the thing that annoys you most in others - probably about you.

Do not succumb to all of the verses, only to three. As you begin to read, ask the Lord to guide your eyes and recall to mind the persons he would have you connect with.

The point is - this is not another moral exercise but it is itself a love-one-another exercise.

Leviticus 19:11

"Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.

Zechariah 7:9

"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.

John 13:14

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

John 13:34

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:35

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Romans 12:10

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Romans 12:16

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Romans 13:8)

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

Romans 14:13

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

Romans 15:7

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Romans 16:16

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

1 Corinthians 1:10

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

1 Corinthians 16:20

All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

2 Corinthians 13:12{

Greet one another with a holy kiss.

Galatians 5:13)

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Ephesians 4:2

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 5:19

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,

Ephesians 5:21

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Colossians 3:13

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Hebrews 3:13

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Hebrews 10:24

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

James 4:11

Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

1 Peter 1:22

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

1 Peter 3:8

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

1 Peter 4:9

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

1 Peter 5:5

Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

1 Peter 5:14

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1 John 3:11

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

1 John 3:23

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

1 John 4:7

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

1 John 4:11

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:12

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

2 John 1:5

And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another.

NOTES ABOUT THIS EXERCISE:

For some this is the hardest part.

If someone has thanked you for your love, let their appreciation sink in. Let it affect you. You are doing the love of God, as God intended, genuinely. That is no small thing.

If someone whom you addressed with thanks rejects what you say or dismisses your appreciation, say: 'This is no small thing that I am saying. Please accept it.'

CONCLUSION

Meditate on this:

God's Love is like a fire –

- it is essential to our well being,
- it is warm and attracts us
- and it is hot so we recoil.

Which of these responses to God is strongest in you right now?

WHY DO THIS STUDY?

Church would be very sad if it was just an organisation, a club like all the others. Do you feel and see the love of Christ?

Is that the focus? The problem with 'church growth' talk is that we are trying to be 'church', when actually we are called to be 'Jesus'.

How can a church be confident of its authenticity in the community? Here are some exercises that will help.

- **Deeds that Speak** identifies a range of actions that speak the gospel
- **Belong** gets us past the illusion that we are very friendly and helps us find the skill to make someone welcome, belong and contributing.
- **Decide** identifies the many ways that people make their decisions and how we can be a good friend who helps that to happen.
- **Begin** helps a mentor to support a new Christian in finding their first steps forward.
- **One Another** is a bible study in the fabulous 'one another' verses that describe relational Christian community. It's a little bit different.

These are not just intellectual, 'find the right answer' small group studies. I hope your group likes to understand God and themselves at more depth.

HOW to do this Study?

In your group, you don't have to do all to topics. You don't have to do them in this sequence. You can adjust the content so that it suits your language and particular emphasis.

Other topics in the PURPLE COW WORKSHOPS for Christian small groups and THE WONDER WORKSHOPS for secular groups, can be found on <http://makesyouwonder.yolasite.com/small-group-exercises.php>

Feedback from other users of this material can be seen on Purplecowworkshops.wordpress.com

YOUR FEEDBACK from your experience will help others. Send it to idtr@westnet.com.au

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