



Whole-life Discipleship

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to reflect on the connection between our call to whole-life discipleship and our call to creatively reach out with the good news of Jesus.

Opener

Go round the room and ask each person to complete the following statement “Being British means ...”

This study is being written at a very divisive time in British history! This question is not intended to fuel that division, but to get people in the group thinking about culture. If you think the question is going to take you down unhelpful paths, then substitute something else for ‘British’ such as your county or generation. “Being Cornish means ...” “Being a millennial means ...”

Bible study

Read Colossians 3:1-17.

Question 1

A common definition of culture is, “The way we do things around here.” A more detailed definition might be “the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.” How does Paul contrast the culture associated with the “new self” (10) with that of the “old self” (9) or “earthly nature” (5)?

Question 2

Colossians 3:11 lists various identities that might have been significant to Paul’s readers. What is Paul saying about these various identities and their cultures?

In many ways their cultures would have been vastly different. Their ways of thinking, customs and languages would have varied greatly. But in Christ (“Here”, verse 11) they have become a new people (see also Galatians 3:26-28, 1 Peter 2:9). What unites them in terms of their new identity (status before God, faith in Christ, renewed understanding, moral behaviour) matters more than what divides them in terms of their old identities.

“Barbarians” was a term of contempt used by Greeks to describe non-Greek speakers. The Scythians were a group of ancient tribes of nomadic warriors occupying Central Asia and parts of Eastern Europe – even “worse” than barbarians. But within their groups, these terms would have been terms of pride and identity (compare the use of the word ‘goth’ in recent British culture, for example).



Question 3

Why do identity and culture matter when it comes to discipleship and sharing the good news?

This is not an exhaustive list, but they matter because

- *We need to identify with other people's cultures to reach them effectively. We need to 'talk their language'*
- *Our own discipleship happens in the context of our culture(s). We are unlikely to recommend the King James Version of the Bible to a newly converted teenager, for example*
- *There are overriding cultural norms that are part and parcel of God's new kingdom that will shape how we do things. "Do not lie to each other" (9) will affect our communication of God's message, for example*

Question 4

"Let every detail in your lives – words, actions, whatever – be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way." (Colossians 3:17, *The Message*)

What does it mean to do something in the name of someone else? How would you apply that principle to discipleship and sharing the good news of Jesus? If Jesus was in the room with you now, what might he be saying?

To do something in someone's name is to represent them, or to do something with their authority, approval and blessing, and to do it as that person would. So when we ask questions of ourselves about our discipleship and about sharing the good news we might consider what Jesus would do in our place, how he might speak, and how he might act.

If Jesus was in the room with us, although we might not be able to guess the specifics, we can guess that his words would be a mixture of both encouragement and challenge.

Application

Watch the video for this session. This video is available from https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/541002/Where_do_we.aspx.

Question 5

In the video Ken lists some of the aspects that the themes of missional communities and whole-life discipleship share in common. Both

- honour what we currently do, but say that we must think beyond that
- have a soft distinction between evangelism and discipleship
- are not about a new or novel programme
- have the language of 'out there' rather than 'in here'



- have a theology that emphasises the lordship of Christ everywhere
- have the idea of not doing more in the life of our church, but doing or emphasising different
- emphasise us going to people rather than people coming to us
- ask, “What is God doing already and how can we join in with that?”
- imply a different use of language
- are about moving and changing the culture of church

To what extent do you share the view that the themes of missional communities and whole-life discipleship overlap? Where else do you see overlaps? Which phrases resonate most with you?

Question 6

“Culture eats vision for breakfast.” If culture is such a powerful determinant of change, how can we shape the culture in our church to better reflect the values of Christ?

Question 7

Think about yourself, your small group, and your church: what resources do you have already that you can draw on to move forwards with the themes of discipleship and creatively reaching out with the good news of Jesus? What resources don't you have that you might benefit from? How might you secure those?

When we stop to think, we often discover that we have more than enough in terms of resources to grow in different ways, and that what is missing is the effective use of those resources. Equally, a little bit of thought will suggest alternative resources. Could a personal mentor help with your personal faith journey, for example? Or could you ask someone outside your small group or church to help in some specific way to generate ideas or facilitate conversations and discussions?

Taking it forward

Watch the feedback video for this session. This video is available from https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/541002/Where_do_we.aspx.

Looking back over the whole series, and thinking about the central question ‘Where do we grow from here?’ in addition to the theme of this study, what *one thing* do you need to pray about and apply for yourself? What practical steps will you take to move forwards with this one thing?