

**Session 3: “Calling the Right Plays as Cultural Underdogs.”**

- Identify the major cultural, ministry, and missional issues. What are we up against?

Consider:

- Ministry, apologetic, and ethical issues:
  - *Authority and ultimate meaning:*
  
  - *Personal identity issues:*
  
  - Following from those issues, of course, is the *redefinition of marriage and family.*
  
  - *National cultural and identity issues:*
    - *National identity*
    - *Religious freedom*
    - *Immigration*
  
  - *Dignity of life and the culture of death:*
  
  - *Politics of anger and fear:*
  
  - Finally, *the environment and creation care.*
  
- Missional/outreach issues:
  - *The changing fishing pond.*

1. Per Gallup, in 1948 religious preference (and that may refer only to a cultural or family tradition) was: Protestant: 69%, RCC: 22%, and none/other: 9%. In 2015, the percentages were: Protestant or “Christian”: 47%, RCC: 23%; none/other: 30%.
2. Per David Olson in *The American Church in Crisis*, actual U.S. church attendance (not just preference) in 1990 was 20.4% (including RCC) and will be 14.7% in 2020 (including RCC). In Texas it is 18%. At this rate, it will be down to 10% by 2050.

So, what does your “fishing pond” look like? What do we notice in 2015?

1. The percentage of lostness is increasing significantly.
2. But, let me suggest a more realistic 2015 pie:
  - *Changing strategies and methodologies.*
    - 1948:
      - Born-again/saved/disciples of Jesus: Church attenders minus lost church attenders plus saved but not in church = 50%
      - “Open” to the gospel (Cultural Christians, drop-outs, etc) = 41%
      - “Closed” = 9%
    - 1990:
      - Born-again/saved/disciples of Jesus = 20%
      - “Open” = 50%
      - “Closed” = 30%
    - 2020:
      - Born-again/saved/disciples of Jesus = 15%
      - “Open” = 45%
      - “Closed” = 40%
    - 2050:
      - Born-again/saved/disciples = 10%
      - “Open” = 40%
      - “Closed” = 50%

Consider some of the outreach methods/language/strategies we have used over the last few decades:

- *Changing expectations.*

■ Developing a biblical and missional game plan.

- *First, determine your HOW YOU WILL BE as you deal with the issues; that is, commit to the right attitude, the right approach, and the right actions.*

1. Be like Jesus: Imitate and model the attitude of Christ –

- Phil. 2:1-11.

If one wants to argue that this refers primarily to relationships within the church, then . . .

- 1 Pet. 2: 11- 17.

And the one that set the tone early on . . .

- Luke 6:31-36.

*Bottom line:*

2. Be like Jesus: Understand, teach, and model the approach of a kingdom citizen –

1) Remember that you are first a Kingdom citizen.

2) Remember who the real enemy is.

3) So, remember how we to treat our human enemies.

4) Finally, to repeat what was said earlier, remember the Golden Rule.

3. Be like Jesus: Take and model his actions. How did Jesus deal with some of the issues and people he encountered?
- *Second, decide WHERE YOU WILL START; that is, correctly state the issue.*
    - a. Identify and state the issue clearly.
    - b. Work at separating emotions, cultural preferences, politics, and Biblical principles.

So, a few principles:

- i. Know your Scripture. Develop a sound Biblical theology.
  - ii. Know your own culture and sub-culture.
  - iii. Know and listen to other cultures.
  - iv. Hold to your political convictions, but hold to them with humility.
  - v. In all areas, the Golden Rule applies.
4. *Third, determine WHAT YOU WILL SAY; that is, develop a comprehensive Biblical response.*
    - a. Verbalize what the Bible says directly.
    - b. Verbalize other related passages.
    - c. Work on a Biblical theology.
      - i. Advantages:
      - ii. Disadvantages:
    - d. Consult other resources!

**Facing Cultural Issues – Guide for Defining the Issue**

<b>State the Issue:</b> 5. Facts 6. Statistics 7. People involved 8. Entities/organizations involved 9. Other related issues
<b>Are there any sub-issues?</b> 1. 2. 3.
<b>Who is directly impacted?</b> 1. 2. 3.
<b>Who is indirectly impacted?</b> 1. 2. 3.
<b>What does Scripture say? **</b>  10. Old Testament: 11. Gospels: 12. Epistles:
<b>What are other resources to consult?</b> 1. 2. 3.
<b>Biblical Theology Statement:</b>

\*\*As you begin to formulate a Biblical answer to a cultural storm, you will need to work hard at examining your own worldview to make sure it lines up with Scripture. Even as you address specific moral and ethical issues your people are struggling with, let me suggest that there are some foundational questions to use that can drive and orient your study, teaching, and response.

- 1) What was the Biblical ideal before the fall? This is what Russell Moore refers to in *Onward* as the “alpha point.” That is, what can we learn about God’s original purposes for:
  - a. The created order and dominion/stewardship of the earth
  - b. God’s relationship with and purpose for humans
  - c. Humankind, including human nature, human government, work, and the purpose of life
  - d. Marriage, sex, and family
  - e. Good, evil, and sin

Obviously, we gain most of our information from the first three chapters of Genesis, but we also learn from what is affirmed and confirmed throughout Scripture, especially from the New Testament. It is important to start with God’s ideal for humanity. Too often we simply throw the “thou shalt not” verses at people (true and authoritative though they may be), but without any context. This only supports to caricature of Christianity as being about a list of do’s and don’ts.

- 2) What is the Biblical eschatological vision? Or, as Moore also notes, what is the “omega point?” That is, what can we learn about God’s ultimate purposes for:
  - a. Redemption of the creation
  - b. His relationship with humans and our ultimate purpose and destiny
  - c. Human relationships
  - d. Knowledge, good, and evil

Knowing where we are headed will inform us as to how we are to live now. Understanding and teaching the redemption of creation and the restoration of all things will keep us from falling into an escapist Christianity. That is, what we do now in this life and on this earth does matter for eternity.

- 3) We need to know God’s creational purposes and eschatological goal, but what are the Biblical principles for between the times? That is, what can we learn about God’s purposes for us fallen human beings as we work and wait? Asking this question is not

without some confusion, conflict, and debate. On the one hand, we need to be careful not to underestimate and overlook God's original creational purposes (for example, the distinction and implications of male and female or dominion over the earth as stewardship). On the other hand, we need to be careful not to overestimate or over-realize the "not yet" eschatological goals (for example, expect perfect sanctification this side of heaven or withdraw into a utopian "heaven on earth" or overemphasize the effectiveness of social change).

- a. What was for covenant Israel? (Confusion and debate at times. Moral law still applies, but not the punishment! Example is homosexual behavior)
- b. What is for members of the Kingdom, already but not yet? (Sermon on the Mount – describes Kingdom citizens, impossible to live apart from Christ, cannot be lived out perfectly until the consummation of the Kingdom).
- c. What is the church called to be and do? (Paul's letters)
- d. What are the realities of life in a fallen world? That is, what "allowances" has God made due to our fallen situation (hardness of heart)? Divorce? War? When do we have to choose between the lesser of two evils? When do have to choose for the greater good?
- e. Similarly, how do we take universal and trans-cultural principles and apply them to temporal and cultural situations without compromising truth? (For example: idolatry).
- f. Furthermore, how do we distinguish between what is a non-negotiable (adultery, for example) and disputable matters left to one's conscience (alcohol consumption, for example)?
- g. What are the governing authorities called to be and do? What should be the relationship between individual Christians and the state? Between the church and the state?
- h. Are we asking the right questions?




Could it be said that the key for Christian life, ministry, and mission is holding equally to grace and truth?

- *Fourth, decide WHAT you will do; that is, implement a compassionate missional response.*
  - Why a Missional Response?
    - Being the church, being a disciple of Jesus, is not just about truth, it is about truth in action. We need to answer the “so what?” question.
    - Living between the times and looking forward to the return of Christ is a proactive waiting. We wait because he could return tonight; we work as commanded because he may wait another ten thousand years.
    - Living at the margins and in a post-Christian culture is the new normal for American Christians. Let’s not waste the opportunity. Let’s not waste any suffering, persecution, or ridicule we may have to undergo. Instead, let’s take advantage of these and figure out how to be extra salt and extra light from a powerless, minority, and marginalized position. Christians have done it throughout history and are doing it all over the world. Now, it’s our turn.
    - As we develop our missional response or plan, keep in mind what Harold Netland notes: Let it be driven by the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, and the Golden Rule.
    - Remember, and remind your people, that God is sovereign. Nothing surprises him. He has a plan. History is going in the right direction. Yes, we are deeply concerned; however, we cannot be ruled by fear (the airwaves and social media, even Christian ones, are full of fear mongers). We have to hold to the fact and the hope that Jesus is Lord, He will return, and the entire creation will be restored.

**A suggested model to follow: After you have worked on identifying and clarifying the issues.**



**Facing Cultural Issues – Guide for a Missional Plan**

Addressing this issue will require: 	Prayer	Repentance/ Change in WV or action by us	Building a Relationship	Teaching/ Preaching/ Witnessing/ Counseling	Political/Social Action	Cooperation with others concerned	Ministry/ Outreach
Action Steps 							
What?							
Who?							
When?							
Where?							
How?							
How will these be evident? 							
Great Commission?							
Great Commandment?							
Golden Rule?							

Dr. Terry Coy

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

## Case Study

Oakville is a typical central Texas county seat town. It has a population of about 30,000 people, of which 60% are Anglo, 15% are African American, and most of the rest are Hispanic. The town has the usual mix of Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Church of Christ, Pentecostal, and Assembly of God churches, with a good sprinkling of non-denominational and independent charismatic type churches. There is, however, a growing population of Arab Muslims in town. They are middle to upper middle class, business owners and professionals, including two doctors. They began arriving over the last five years, a trickle at first, but noticeably growing over the last two years. Their actual numbers are still less than half a percent of the population, but their growing influence and the impact they have had on the community far outweighs their number.

Generally speaking the group has been well received into the community. Certainly, some people have expressed concern, there has been the occasional racist comment, but most people have been cautiously welcoming. The practice of the doctors has grown, the businessmen are seen as honest and hardworking, and the kids are doing well in public school, becoming more Americanized by the day. The women, however, pretty much keep to themselves and have not made much effort (or at least it appears) to have learned English or to assimilate into the community.

Over the last three months, however, the community is in an uproar. Because the Muslim group is growing, and expects to grow even more, a group of their leaders, led by the doctors, has submitted to the city a request for a building permit. They are requesting a zoning variation in order to build a Mosque on land just inside the city limits, in full view of anyone coming in on the main highway.

The city council is reviewing the request with some fear and trepidation. Legally, there is no reason to deny the variance. There is ample precedent in favor of other houses of worship. Personally, however, the council members are conflicted. Several are born again believers and faithful members of Bible believing churches. The others seldom attend church, but if asked would claim to be Christian. None have much understanding about Islam except for what they see on T.V. and read on a few blogs.

Furthermore, since the word has gotten out about the request, their phones, emails, and texts have blown up. Some people are adamantly against the zoning variation. Some don't care. Some believe it is the beginning of the Islamization of their community – give an inch and they will take a mile. A few people have argued that religious freedom applies even to Muslims.

In 30 days an open hearing is scheduled. You are pastor of FBC. What will you do? How will you help your people to formulate a Biblical response? Moreover, what kinds of doors of ministry and missions does this open? Let's go to work.

**Questions for Reflection (some Peter questions)**

1. What are the most pressing cultural issues I need to address as pastor?
2. How are these issues manifesting themselves in the life of my congregation and community?
3. What are the presenting responses I find in the community, my congregations, and in myself? (Fear? Anxiety? Anger? Hostility? Acceptance? Compromise? Apathy? Ignorance?)
4. What do I need to do as pastor and community leader to address the issue on the emotional, Biblical, theological, moral/ethical, and socio/political levels?
5. What are the potential minefields I will encounter if I wade into these issues?
6. Who else do I need to talk to, consult with, or join forces with before I address these issues, during the confrontation, and after the fallout begins?

### **Resources**

Ashford, Bruce, *Theology and Practice of Mission*

Butterfield, Rosaria Champagne. *Openness Unhindered*

Clapp, Rodney. *A Peculiar People: The church as culture in post-Christian society*

Christopherson, Jeff. *The Kingdom Matrix*

Grant, Jonathan. *Divine Sex*

Netland, Harold A. *Christianity and Religious Diversity*

Payne, J. D. *Strangers Next Door*

Raley, Matthew. *The Diversity Culture*