

“Flourish”: Creating a Culture of Transformation
A Lifestyle of Testimony
1 John 1:1-4
3-11-18



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

Our vision...

Woodinville Alliance Church... a community where every person discovers who they really are in Christ, experiences his goodness, and shares this life-changing encounter with their world so that others might value and choose Jesus for themselves.

This new life results in a movement from Self-reliance to God-reliance, Isolation to Belonging, Fear to Trust, Duty to Delight, Insignificance to Purpose, Brokenness to Wholeness.

(4) demonstrations (*gospel-realities*) we experience:

IDENTITY—ENCOUNTER—TESTIMONY—NEW LIFE

Identity| We only discover who we are when we know who God is. If we are not settled and secured in this identity, we will spend the rest of our lives subject to other names, other labels, each meant to devalue us and desensitize us to God's love.

Encounter| we were created to encounter God; to experience his goodness and good intentions toward us. Ours is not to attempt to generate such experiences, but to expect them and to ensure that we are alert and responsive.

“Would you consider yourself to be someone who easily engages others in conversation or someone for whom such interactions are more difficult?”

“Would others consider you a good listener? Give this a try this week; ask someone a question which requires more than a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, and then commit yourself to simply listening.”

“Do you think that when Jesus asked people questions, he was genuinely concerned with their answers, or he was internally rehearsing how he might re-direct the conversation?”

“What might happen if we approached our community (places we are present) with such curiosity? What might it mean for you to be considered a welcomed-guest, instead of a religious intruder? What is some of the religious baggage that you carry into your relationships?”

“Which do you think is more powerful: unqualified love, or a theological argument? For which are you currently best prepared?”

“When is the last time that you were actually comfortable in a spiritual conversation with someone? How did that conversation allow you to better understand another so that you could see how Jesus could be good news for them?”

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to _____...”
(Luke 4) *“Who might God be wanting to offer his good news to through you?”*

“Is there a place where you seem to show up with some regularity and intentionality?” (e.g. the gym, a coffee house, the park, etc.) Practice seeing the people around you with God. Be alert for ways to demonstrate simple acts of kindness.”

We need the testimony of the community to not only share the good news with others, but become convinced of it, ourselves.

“How have you been encouraged by hearing the testimony of others in your group? If you haven’t done so, allow some space in your groups for people to share about their own faith experiences.”

Teaching Notes...

The bible is full of stories of people who did not simply “study” God, but people who desired to “know” God; to know, not just his “works, but his ways (character)” (Psalm 103:7).

Jesus linked this knowledge to the “eternal life” that we all desire [eternal: “zoe” (Gr.) life, real and genuine, which belongs to God, and shared with those who put their trust in Christ].

“This is the way to have eternal life--- to know you, the one only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.” John 17:3

Notice in the intro of John's letter, there is both *information* available to him (through senses and experience of Jesus), as well as *revelation*--- understanding of who Jesus was, which he later links to the reality of the Holy Spirit with and in us.

John is not attempting to forge a theological argument but reflect on the full-sensory experience of the love of God which has been embodied in Jesus. No second-hand information, no "rumor has it", but what he has "**heard**", what he has "**seen**", what he has "**touched**".

John defies all of our modern evangelistic techniques and strategies and simply creates in our imaginations and hearts a vision of "*fellowship*": God's own quality of life that we experience, share with one another, and offer to those who have yet to find such community.

"Knowing God" refers to the insights and understanding that we gain through encounters with him. Transformation is the life experienced as a result of the exchange.

Authentically transformed lives always seek to share what they have experienced of God with others.

It is our experiences of God which form the life we live and create the stories that we tell. We call that our "*testimony*".

Our experiences of the goodness of God will actually begin to transform our desires, so that we are less pre-occupied with our behavior. We will function out of a place where love, not duty or obligation, establishes the parameters of the relationship. **From duty to delight** (e.g. "*devote yourself only to her*": duty hears that as restrictive and suffocating. Delight hears it as an invitation to the fullest experience of love.)

The biographers of Jesus offer these scenes where he would encounter people, they would have an experience of him (which was somehow 'healing'), and they would simply share what they had experienced with others.

When Jesus healed the blind man, the blind man said: "*I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!*" John 9:25

When Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman at the well, "*She told everyone, Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did! Can he possibly be the Messiah?*" John 4:29. The people of her village later told her, "*Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves...*" John 4:42

Jesus told His disciples "... *you must testify about me because you have been with me...*" John 15:27

You can't rightfully answer the question of what God is up to in the world from within the confines of the church.

This has been a well-documented strategy for some time, though. Send out 'spies' (as in Numbers 13) to observe, bring them back for a debrief, conduct a risk-assessment, then formulate our strategy.

Luke 9-19: (10) chapters identified as the "*Travel Narrative*". In these narratives, Jesus is wonderfully conversational [e.g. table talk, hikes, responding to interruptions].

I'm assuming that it didn't feel like a "presentation". Like everyone around the table was assuming that eventually we would all 'move into the living room' for Jesus' presentation.

You can't share your testimony if you're not willing to share your life.

"We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's good news, but our own lives, too." 1 Thessalonians 2:8

In Luke 10, Jesus sends out his followers "*to all the towns and places he intended to visit.*" (1). He told them to travel light. Don't take a lot of baggage with you. He advised them to take their testimony (experience of him) into the community as if they were the *strangers* in need of hospitality. Sit down with them in their customs and eat what they give you.

Jesus says that it's precisely this posture toward the community that seems to evoke from them a "welcome". He says, as you are welcomed, you will be able to offer healing and the announcement of the life of the Kingdom made available to them (10:8-9).

Practice agenda-free listening.

As you allow others to dictate the conversation, you actually become aware of what God might be desiring to do which expands the limits of what you believe possible. You thought it was just a cup of coffee.

As Peter learned in Acts 10, each new experience, each conversation, challenges our assumptions and prejudices. At first, they are unsettling and disorienting, but if we are able to reflect on them with a certain degree of humility, we are able to see ourselves, God and the world from a different perspective.

Lose the presentation and put Jesus "in your own words".

"Taste and see that the Lord is good..." Psalm 34:8

Do good. It disrupts evil.

“Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone,…”

Galatians 6:10 [Romans 12:21]

Compassion is always disarming and able to penetrate the most skeptical of hearts because it doesn't demand a response from the one being served... not even “thank you”.

If you have to wipe the dust off of your God-experiences, perhaps it's time to get some new stories.

Undoubtedly, we all tell stories of “*defining moments*” in our lives. Experiences which have significantly shaped us. Just make sure that your faith isn't purely nostalgic.