

Begin Again
Week #4: Relational

Brian Kelly had a problem. He was 4-8 as the head football coach at Notre Dame. It wasn't a strategy issue. It wasn't a personnel issue. **It was a culture issue.** Strategy, mission, vision, all when colliding with a culture that is in conflict with that strategy, mission, or vision will always lose. **Coach Kelley needed a culture change.**

We know what God wants us to be. Outwardly focused. That's why we have the target, **"Be a bridge, build a bridge."**

- **Be before you do.** We need to be ambassadors, human bridges who represent Jesus where we live, work, and play. **Then build bridges into people's lives and into our city that they can walk across to know God.**
- **But if we have a culture that is inward focused,** consumer oriented, that's when this mission and vision comes up against that culture. **The culture will win** and it won't even be a good fight.

One of the ways to change culture is to articulate values that direct our behavior. That's where...**Core Values** come into play. These are **words that describe the kind of culture we want to have** so that we can be a bridge and build a bridge. These are **boundaries** that tell us when our actions or attitudes are going to keep us from achieving our goals.

Here are the first two. If you want to hear more about these, just get on our **website** where you can listen to these sermons.

1. Real or authentic. Willing to **expose your brokenness to other broken people.** Allow people to **come here as they are.** But understanding that, being real is also accepting who God wants to make me into.

The next logical value after real is...**2. Ready to be changed.** Ready to change means you know that you are an **apprentice,** disciple of Jesus. **He is the master. so you need to watch him, see how he does it. and then obey.** It's not about doing **what is natural.** It's about transformation.

Now back to Coach Kelley's culture problem. At the end of that horrible season, he interviewed all of his players. The message he heard over and over is, **"you're never here, we don't know you and you don't know us."** Coach Kelly changed how he coached. He came to early **morning lifting** and ate meals with his players.

The next season, the strategy hadn't really changed, the players are pretty much the same, the coaches didn't get smarter, but the product on the field is completely different. They are ranked in the top 10.

What changed is that coach Kelly remembered that it's about relationships. He made that a core value which changed behavior. And what followed was a culture change. **Notre Dame football became...
Relational.**

Being relational is the only path to life transformation that happens when we are "real" and "ready to change."

What would it mean for us to live out this core value?

Let's start at the center with Jesus. our master, we are his disciples/apprentices and...**It's the way Jesus operated.**

Here's the problem with churches: they love to focus on Jesus' words while ignoring how he operated. Accepting Jesus is about not just listening to what he said, but also copying his strategy.

Jesus did very little preaching to crowds in comparison to the hours he spent with 12 men.

His ways are charming and simple, so we ignore them and decide to **preach his words separate from his strategy.** It was cultural. He wouldn't do it that way in 2020.

Preaching to a crowd isn't relational because there's too much distance. Jesus preached to **announce his Kingdom** and then he showed it to those who came close enough. **Preaching didn't bring the exponential movement**

of the faith across several continents in one generation. It was one reaching one, one teaching another to obey.

Preaching is about storytelling, nudging, prodding, casting vision, unity of message. but it was never a substitute for Jesus being relational and can't be for us.

Let's look again at what Jesus said when he **commissioned us** to continue what he had started. He said this to those following him, **not to a huge crowd of fans.** **Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20**

He is telling them to **pass on what he told them as he lived life with them.** And at the same time saying, "I'm still with you, right there beside you, **in an ongoing master apprentice relationship.** He said this to **11** whom he had poured his life into and told them: *Go do the same.*

Being relational is not only how Jesus did it but...**It's how we join Jesus' mission,** by not simply accepting what he said but by how he operated

Definition of a disciple from last week... A disciple is someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus and is committed to the mission of Jesus.

Sitting in a conference on discipleship a few years back. The central theme was that it is intentional, relational, biblical and repeatable. It hit me. **That's what they taught me at Young Life** in Anderson, Indiana. I was drawn to that. I was good at that. **I'm feeling that old feeling, passion, draw, and energy.**

Then it hit me..."There's nothing wrong with me." This is what God wants me to do. This is what **his mission** is. This is what I'm good at.

I always felt like there was something wrong with me because I couldn't grow this church. I did what they told me to do instead of what Jesus told me, the idea of attracting people and then keeping them fed and happy. I couldn't preach and program in such a way as to attract consumers. The jury has come back and I stink at that. Here's my epiphany, "I've spent too much time trying to ministry like people told me to instead of how Jesus said it is to be done.

All I needed to know, I learned in Young Life. They said, "earn the right to share Jesus with students because you share your life with them."

Here's the verse that they taught me in Young Life as they taught me about relational, incarnational, Jesus style ministry. ⁷ **As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but instead we were like children (gentle) among you. Or we were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children.** ⁸ **We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too.**

⁹ **Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached (means proclaim, not simply a sermon as we know it) God's Good News to you.** ¹⁰ **You yourselves are our witnesses—and so is God—that we were devout and honest and faultless toward all of you believers.** ¹¹ **And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children.** ¹² **We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory. 1 Thess. 2:7-12**

Do you see all of the relationship language? He uses family images like brother, sister, mother and father. Those are the primary relationships of life and he uses them to describe his ministry.

What does it mean for us to be relational? It's about being a spiritual mother.

This is not about being female, nor is it about yelling at busy stressed out moms.

- Those two phrases “like a child or gentle” and like a mother feeding and caring for her children go together. Paul was gentle and caring for these young Christ followers like they were his own kids.

This is not a call for mothers to be relational, sharing Christ with their own kids. That is assumed.

It's about the kind of gentleness, care, and nourishment a mother would have for her kids but for someone else.

Who's going to do that for someone who isn't their own family, but they need it? Or who is going to be the youth leader, children's leader. who affirms and speaks into what mom and dad are doing at home. Who's going to do that in a bridge group?

What does it mean for us to be relational? **It's about being a spiritual father.**

Yes, Paul is a man. but this one isn't about being male. **It's about a role.**

“And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children.” The next phrase is the explanation of a father's role.

“We **pleaded** with you, **encouraged** you, and **urged** you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory.” 12

A father pleads, encourages and urges them to live in a way that reflects God accurately.

“Plead” is to call to one's side so that you can exhort or encourage.

Sounds like a coach pulling a kid off to the side and telling him, you missed that block. You know what needs to be done. You've done it in practice, now take a breath and go out there and put that kid across from you on his back so you can look up and see Jimmy running untouched into the end zone. Now get back out there.”

“Encourage” can be to light a fire if needed or calm them down

“Urge” is to exhort by God’s name, him as a witness.

These three words are all very similar in meaning.

Again, it’s someone who is willing to be a spiritual father or coach. **We coach sports, teach our kids how to hunt, tutor them in math, demonstrate car maintenance...because someone showed us how to play and now we are passing that along.** What does that sound like? The great commission.

- **Someone needs to be a spiritual father for other people who aren’t theirs.**

We need spiritual parents at Eagle Ridge Church of God! Not parents who are spiritual, but people who are passing along what Jesus has given to them.

You don’t have to be light years ahead. **You can lead if you are just a little ahead.** Sometimes that’s even better because the person you are being a mother or a father to, **know that the standard isn’t so high that they will never make it.**

We cannot live up to “Be a bridge, build a bridge,” unless there are people who are willing to rise up and take this responsibility.

This is the heartbeat of a spiritual parent. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, Galatians 4:19

There’s a pain, an ache in your heart for you to have the life of Christ formed in your life, his life living in **harmony** with your life.

Who around me wants a spiritual parent?

You only have to be a little bit ahead...

And yes, I do mean this for you high school and middle school students. What if you stopped looking at what Matt and the other leaders can do for you and look to be that spiritual parent for those coming on Sunday nights

who aren't following Jesus. **Instead of worry about whether you are getting what you need out of it, come ready to lead your friends.**

What are you going to do about it? **Or simply have them read what you are reading in the bible and ask two questions.** "What is God saying to you?" "What are you going to do in order to be obedient to what God is saying to you?" That's teaching them how to hear his voice and **"teaching them to obey."**

You could start your own bridge group. Simply take the outline, discuss the sermon, read the scripture and then ask those two questions.

The first step is so complicated. They only teach this in seminary. This is high level Christianity and I'll probably get in trouble for telling it to regular people who haven't gone pro in Jesus. You say, "Let's get together for coffee. **I'd like to get to know you better.**" Then you see if this person is receptive to having Christ formed in him or her.

What does it mean for us to be "relational?" **It's about sharing my life, then God's truth.**

What we are tempted to do is to share all the things we believe, what we are for, and what we are against and then if you fit all of that then I can have a relationship with you. If you believe Jesus is God...

- Social issues
- How you vote
- Sexuality/morality
- Racial justice issues

Once someone fits, then we will have a relationship with them. And yet, Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners!

If God's people behave this way, we cannot be ambassadors or bridge builders.

The first two (mother and father) demand life, then truth. They demand a relational approach, not a program, or a professional who preaches to them.

"We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News, but our own lives, too." 8

When I read this verse and then wrote a paper in order to become YL leader I said, "I can do that." **You can do this, you were created to be relational.**

Teaching the word separate from the context of a relationship will not have the staying power because it's theory. The power of "The Word" is that it lands in relationship.

What I've just done is to describe Jesus. Jesus was the word became flesh. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

It was God living with us that built a bridge so that we could know God. It is you and me living with people. Being incarnate that will be the bridge for them to walk across to know and experience God. The word literally becomes flesh when you enter into a relationship with people.

Jessica's Christmas card and Vickey's facebook message. Robin and I poured our lives into them. **We were so immature** and did and said so many things wrong. **We didn't even really know what we were doing** other than "they had become dear to us" and we wanted Christ to be formed in them. **And in their 30's they are telling us what our lives meant to them.**

Matt plays online games with kids that he used to have in his school in Arizona. He's sharing his life with them still.

Everything will be about relationships not simply an outcome. **Worship team** should be about relationships. **Children's ministry** should be about relationships. **Youth**, relationships. **Outreach...relationships. Making disciples...relationships.**

Your role will no longer be just invite people, try not to sin, come sit and listen and the staff will do the rest.

Jesus did not try to get thousands of people into a coliseum at Rome so he could proclaim the gospel on a platform of power that was already recognized by the world around him. He did not "restore the Kingdom to Israel" in a way that made sense to his Jewish contemporaries. He focused instead on a handful of disciples. He focused on loving those the Father placed before them, both for the sake of love itself, and to reveal the generous heart of God. He focused on humanizing those whom God the Father had placed before him, on treating them with honor, on hearing their stories, and on proclaiming the reign of God in them, around them, and through them. Our work, like Jesus' work, is simply to love others—those people Jesus has placed (or will place) in or life, not to save the world. In other words, life as an adopted child of God always leads to life as an ambassador of the Kingdom of God in the life we are already living. *Learning to Live and Love Like Jesus*, Brandon Cook pg.46

Being relational as you follow Jesus will cost you something

It will cost you comfort. To be relational will cause us to cross cultural boundaries instead of sitting in here asking those outside to do the hard work. **We will cross boundaries like city versus country, blue collar versus white collar, black versus white, Democrat versus Republican, liberal versus conservative...**

Ask a person of color what it's like to live in primarily white Midland, MI.

It will cost us something. We will divert more time and resources into relationships, which are not linear or predictable. **At Beaverton** it will cost you something. It's not back to the way things were.

It will cost you something. You will divert more time and resources into relationships...

Take the first step...

- 1. Take one step toward someone who can influence your faith.**

A phone call just to talk, coffee...

Join a bridge group with someone you can influence your faith.

- 2. I will contact _____ who doesn't know Christ**

For me this is David and Sue