



# Living and Discipling in a Western Culture

Staff Training Weekend January 2020

# 1 Introduction

## SLIDE 1

The Western culture we are living in is impacting us as Christians and an understanding of this culture is important as we live out our faith in Jesus and disciple others. (If you are ministering to internationals this will still be relevant because you are living in this culture.) This is not a sermon; this is a training session; I will be providing you with a lot of information which should be useful in many ways but today we will use it as the basis for a focussed practical discussions you will have in small groups. So, don't worry if you don't catch all this talk as your group discussion will focus on a few issues that I think are important to us. The notes you have should largely reflect this talk but does include additional information.

## SLIDE 2

Imagine if you decided to become a missionary to some foreign country. When you arrive, you would know you were in a different culture because of the language and customs you are immersed in. Because you want to communicate the Gospel, you would study the language, history and culture. You would also look to the Scriptures to determine what elements of the culture you can adopt or utilize. This would challenge your own cultural conditioning that you have brought with you from your home culture.

But many of us have grown up in our western culture and never experienced the radical challenges that occur when we change cultures. However, we are in a mission field and our attitudes should be the same as if we are in a foreign culture. But it is more difficult for us to free ourselves from our cultural conditioning: (there is a Chinese proverb that says if you want to know about water don't ask a fish). But nevertheless, we must examine our culture and ourselves in the light of Scripture within this limitation as we seek to be true to our calling as ambassadors of Christ.

Our western culture is having a huge impact on how we raise our children, how we relate, how we witness, how we disciple and much more. It is likely that most of us are following some aspect of our culture in opposition to the Gospel.

## SLIDE 3

As we consider our western culture and the kingdom culture, we should consider how we live, how we evangelise and how we disciple. The focus of our small group discussions will be on the practices we are building into those we are discipling but there are other implications you may want to note down as we go through this presentation.

## SLIDE 4

I will be giving you some background on our culture and then lead us to focus on two major areas I think we need to address in discipling which I have termed **Open to Christ** and **Open to Community**

## 2 What Changed?

### SLIDE 5

We can all sense our culture is changing but this change has taken place over a 500 year period.

Charles Taylor posed the following question:

*“Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”*

Taylor believes it is not the catalogue of beliefs that has changed but it is the underlying, unquestioned assumptions, the plausibility structures that have affected theistic belief.<sup>1</sup>

### SLIDE 6

Taylor goes through the 500 year history but in summary some of the major factors that effected the change from 1500 to today include:

- Reformation, enlightenment, revolutions, science, politics, deism, the impact of the destructive religious wars, and psychology.

### Slide 7

To understand the change, we first introduce two important ways of viewing the world. The first is called the transcendent frame which is an outlook that acknowledges and senses the spiritual world of supernatural forces that is beyond (or transcends) the physical world

### Slide 8

The second way of viewing the world is called the Immanent frame which is a purely materialist outlook that sees the natural world of physical objects as all there is to reality, in the process dismissing, as it were, the possibility of ‘something beyond’.

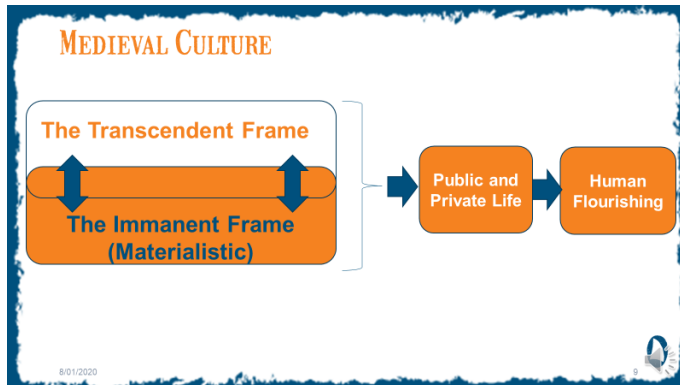
So let’s now look at the change that has occurred from the Medieval to Western Culture in visual form

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor’s approach is to try and tell the story of how we got here – it is narrative rather than analytical as he attempts to come to grips with what it’s like to live in our secular worlds.

## SLIDE 9

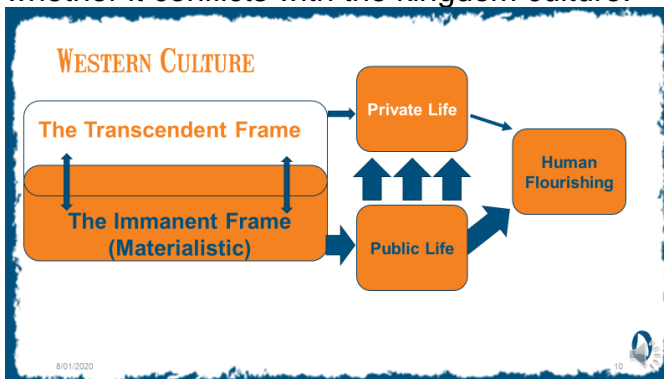
- In the medieval world, the transcendent realm (which is the world beyond the material world) was acknowledged and felt and it affected both the private and public spheres of life. Human flourishing, what it means to live well, was understood in this broader context.



## SLIDE 10

In our current culture, the immanent (or materialistic) frame governs public life and human flourishing is publicly defined in this exclusively humanist and materialistic view. The transcendent perspective is forced into the private world, but the private world is heavily influenced by the pervasive public culture

This loss of the transcendent perspective is having an impact on us as followers of Christ. In many ways we can be following unhelpful aspects of our culture without realising it. Indeed, we may even be propagating the immanent (materialistic) frame. We certainly need to see how we can more thoroughly embrace the transcendent Biblical frame. To do this we must reveal some of the immanent (materialistic) frame that we may be absorbing and determine whether it conflicts with the kingdom culture.



We do not have time to go through this story, but I will highlight the main emergent perspectives.

### 3 The Transcendent Frame (of Medieval Culture)

#### SLIDE 11

- **Nature points beyond:** The natural world pointed beyond itself to what was more than nature. There was the perspective of a cosmos of spiritual and material reality rather than just a universe with the material world pointing to a higher reality.
- **Society grounded in higher reality:** Society was seen to be grounded in a higher reality, a heavenly kingdom and this affected public policy
- **Enchanted:** People lived in an enchanted world that was alive with “presences” and were open and vulnerable. This “enchanted” world is filled with supernatural spirits and demons and God and these forces are active on the person

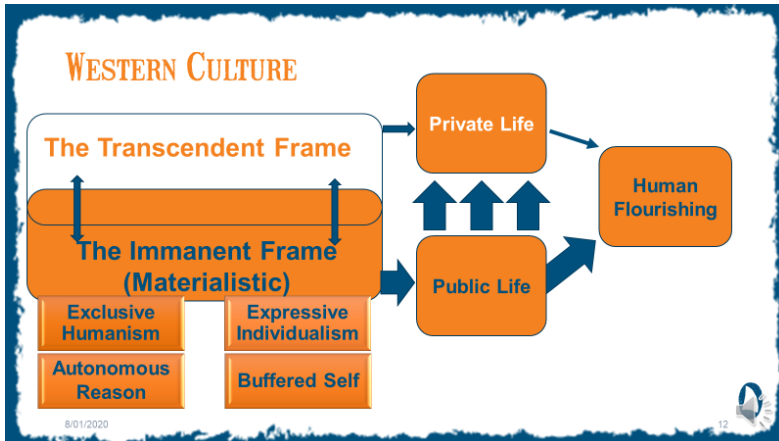
*“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil,”*  
Gerard Manley Hopkins’s

This perspective has been largely lost and the world is seen within the immanent frame.

### 4 The Immanent (Materialistic) Frame

We perceive ourselves as operating largely within the immanent frame and our first consideration is often not from a transcendent perspective.

#### SLIDE 12



There are two major aspects of this immanent (or materialistic) frame that we will examine each of which has a significant subpoint. The two areas are Exclusive Humanism with a subpoint of Autonomous Reason and Expressive Individualism with a subpoint of the Buffered Self. We will define each of these as they flesh out the immanent frame.

#### SLIDE 13

So, what is the immanent frame? One of the key changes has been the growing acceptability of a materialist outlook that sees the natural world of physical objects as all there is to reality, in the process dismissing, as it were, the possibility of ‘something beyond’. In other words, we inhabit a material world only with no room for what we call transcendence.” So, we are more closed to the supernatural Christ.

## 4.1 Exclusive Humanism

The first major aspect of the immanent frame is exclusive humanism.

### **SLIDE 14**

Exclusive Humanism is a perspective that accounts for meaning and significance without any appeal to the divine or transcendence. The theistic accounts of meaning and significance are replaced by beliefs that we humans define by general human principles.

While humanism is an affirmation of humanity and the worth of human life (something Christians can agree with), exclusive humanism believes that human flourishing (what it means to live a good life) can only be defined in the physical world and not in anything beyond life. God is removed from the present. While God may still exist, He is uninvolved in the affairs of man and so has no bearing on human direction and decisions.<sup>2</sup>

One aspect of exclusive humanism is autonomous reason. I wanted to highlight this aspect as I wonder if we are over-emphasising reason in our discipleship. We will look at this further but first let's understand autonomous reason.

### **Autonomous Reason**

#### **SLIDE 15**

Autonomous reason assumes we can know the truth by reason alone (which is an unquestioned faith!). Reason is the final arbiter of all truth claims. Reason will allow us to master the world and build paradise or Utopia on earth (reason is the saviour; a future world of "goodness" replaces heaven). Reason is even sufficient to determine social values based on certain perceived fundamental human principles (which are really taken from Christ).

In large part this is due to the impact of science which has a mechanistic view of the universe arises. The Enlightenment eliminated purpose from science (which is only about cause and effect), and all scientific research was regarded as pure in that it was 'value-free' and 'neutral'. With this mechanistic view there are many who even think that through the scientific method we can answer life's big questions.

Religion was assigned to the realm of values. Since it rested on subjective notions and could not be proved correct it was relegated to the private world of opinions and divorced from the public world of facts. So, there was a division into a public world of facts and a private world of values. All claims to the meaning of human life were regarded as mere subjective preference and have no place in public life. The public space is regarded as a neutral space with respect to religion (but this is certainly not the case).

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<sup>2</sup> The experience of the church corruptly dominating life has led to man taking control of their destiny in the belief that they can produce a better outcome. A recognition of a diversity of faiths (initially protestant and roman catholic) produces a more generic deism that defines God in ways that are not threatening to social cohesion.

Two important developments emerge:

- There is a shift to the mind as the source of meaning
- A new self-understanding of our social existence, one which gave an unprecedented primacy to the individual

One would have to say that given the recent history of western civilisation a certain over confidence marks exclusive humanism. The major weakness of science is that it does not offer any self-contained moral framework. (A major weakness is that science does not offer any self-contained moral framework. It is for this reason that universities and hospitals have ethics committees). Society can only remain stable when there is widespread agreement on the foundational values. While the foundational values were originally from Jesus, these values are first given exclusive human meanings and are now being eroded as there is no reference to Christ. In addition, overall society is being emptied of power that comes from the transformation of the Spirit of God and values such as grace and forgiveness are greatly weakened as they have no substantial human basis. It appears we are living beyond our moral means. If anything looks irrational, it's the notion that we are our own best hope.<sup>3</sup>

## 4.2 Expressive Individualism - The Age of Authenticity

### SLIDE 16

The second major aspect of the immanent frame is expressive individualism.

### SLIDE 17

We are now in what has been termed the age of authenticity where being authentic to yourself, described by the term expressive individualism, is the perspective.

Expressive Individualism is the view that each one of us has their own way of realising our humanity and that we must express it rather than conform to models imposed by others (especially institutions or communities). Expressive individualism would have us look deep into our hearts to discover our inner essence, who we really are inside, and then express that to the world. Here are a few aspects:

### SLIDE 18

- **Self-Definition:** Every person has the right to feel, believe, and think about themselves however they so choose. Everyone is seen to be free to define their own course
  - If anyone challenges your behaviour or attitude, you'd claim that your life story is no one else's business.
- **Self-Discovery:** One of the tasks of life is to find yourself – to discover who you are or to decide for yourself what kind of person you want to be. Primarily done by looking internally.

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<sup>3</sup> The Christian faith, on the other hand, is always concerned with the questions of purpose and meaning. We recognise that we need enlightenment; we are not the light.

- **Self-Fulfillment:** The way to fullness of life and fulfillment and happiness is self-expression.
  - Anything that gets in the way of self-exaltation or self-fulfilment is a problem.
- **Authenticity:** Expressive individualism is seen as being authentic to yourself
  - Following your heart, the true inner you
  - It construes our relationships with others as a threat to authenticity.
- **Self “Judgement”:** The individual is in the best place to determine how well they conform to their own values. They are freed from any external moral judgement.

Gender identification is an example where a person’s inner sense of who they are trumps everything else and everyone else must conform to their self-definition.

## SLIDE 19

### Consumer Identity- Expression and Display

Our identity is self-determined and often displayed by our consumer choices. Our consumerism may take the form of abundant purchases or it may be in a more refined way (e.g. coffee shop selection). The marketplace is where we find the stuff to fulfil our lives and to build our “unique” identity. Consumption is validating our lives and giving us a sense of who we are. This is obviously a very lightly held identity.

### The Privatisation of Faith

So now faith is internalised and self-discovered, and as a consequence there is an explosion of different superficial beliefs (which has been termed the Nova Effect). We recognise there are a diversity of beliefs in the world and so we can be non-committal, seeing this as a positive characteristic. As a result, no-one has the right to impose their religious views on anyone else and everyone should keep their views private. This pluralism and fragmentation further decays publicly shared values.

Any faith view is tolerated so long as it remains private. No one religion is correct, and it is assumed that the suppression of religious expression will maintain harmony. There is an intolerance towards anyone that does not conform to this creed. This tends to re-enforce a faith with no wider implications than personal salvation.

## SLIDE 20

Where there is a spiritual element to life it takes on an individualist perspective. For example, Robert Bellah talks about a Sheila Larson who is a young nurse who describes her faith as "Sheilaism."

*"I believe in God," Sheila says. "I am not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice." "It's just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think God would want us to take care of each other."*



So the view is that I can discover and understand God, so God is sort of within me. No-one else or our history informs me. Any firm commitment to God and His purposes is to be avoided as it is unhelpful to my individual desires.<sup>4</sup>

We are more closed to Christ and Community as we focus internally.

### 4.3 Buffered Self

#### SLIDE 21

In order to be this real individual, we must buffer ourselves from any external influences. This is termed the Buffered Self. We have built into ourselves buffers from God and from other people.

So individualism can also be viewed as the buffered self which is when the self is insulated in an interior mind, no longer vulnerable to the transcendent and less “open” to any community. By disengaging from external influences, we can then be masters of our own direction. So, we can discover truth within ourselves without reference to any externals. This change occurred only recently - Before ww2 to find yourself, you would go outside of yourself to go within but now to find yourself you go within to find out who you are. (The narrative changes from duties to desires, sacrifice to self-assertion, responsibilities to rights.)

Any organisations are seen to constrict my life journey and are therefore to be entered into in only a non-committal manner. (Robert) Bellah has suggested that a lot of people live in rather superficial lifestyle enclaves rather than genuine community.

*“A lifestyle enclave is formed by people who share some feature of private life. Members of a lifestyle enclave express their identity through shared patterns of appearance, consumption, and leisure activities.”*

But it has been noted:

*“Each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart.”* Tocqueville

## 5 Immanent Impacts

#### SLIDE 22

We are surrounded by human accomplishments re-enforcing this pervasive secularism Consider for example all that you experience during a typical day or perhaps when you are driving to church or work

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<sup>4</sup> To affirm the goodness of material life then there is a significant cultural shift from talking about sin to talking about sickness. There is a shift from responsibility to victimhood because it is assumed that we are perfectly alright as natural beings. In fact, the spiritual can be seen as pathological, part of the problem that represses nature.

## SLIDE 23

Here are few things we have lost through the dominance of the immanent frame we live in:

**Loss of Transcendence:** We are more inclined to view the world in purely materialistic terms and can easily have the perspective that God is not involved in our daily affairs. We will often revert to actions we can take with only a limited acknowledgement of God's presence and action. We lose a sense that humanity's end transcends its current configurations and thus lose a sense of "participation" in God's nature. The sense of mystery fades as the focus becomes on our own abilities to achieve our goals. (God's providence is no longer inscrutable but is an open book easily understood). We will struggle to perceive the spiritual world around us.

**Loss of Openness to Christ:** Our individualism inclines us to approach Christ on our terms to fulfil our desires rather than being open to His purposes and perspective. We will struggle with the spiritual disciplines.

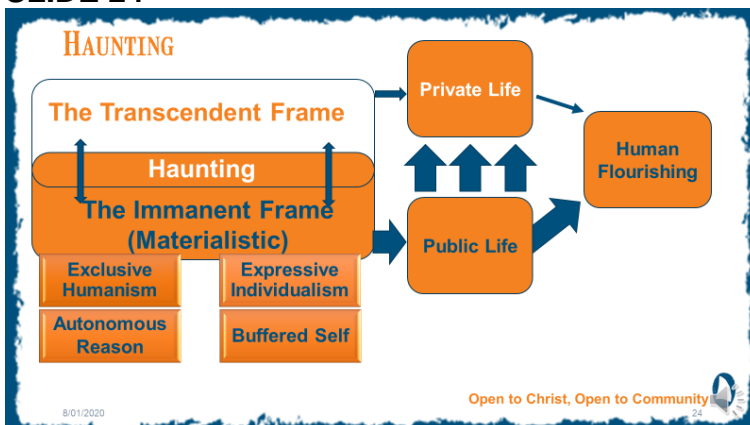
**Loss of Openness to Community:** Our individualism also means we distance ourselves from others in order to fulfil our internal desires. We will struggle to be fully engaged in a faith community.

**Redefined Human Flourishing:** Human flourishing is about what it means to live the good life, and this is now defined within the physical or natural world. Flourishing is now a self-determined happiness. Depth to life is provided by the accumulation of experiences enabled by prosperity. Progress is seen as increasing choice (associated with freedom), health and leisure all enabled by prosperity. Purpose is relocated to ordering this world for mutual benefit with an emphasis on economic benefit. God's goals for us are reduced to our embracing this idea of mutual benefit. (The ordered peaceful and productive economic activity becomes the model for behaviour). We will struggle to see the good life as anything beyond our personal happiness and freedom.

We fill life with alternatives to Christ that replace our need for Him.

## 6 Haunting (Cross-Pressure Space)

### SLIDE 24



Nevertheless, there is a haunting presence of the spiritual. (It is a feeling of being caught between an echo of transcendence and the drive towards immanentization.)

### SLIDE 25

There is a feeling that something is missing which typically leads us to fill this gap with an endless pursuit of things or experiences. It is captured in the phrase “I don’t believe in God, but I miss Him.” There is a discomfort with materialism and its attendant reductionism that emerges on occasions. For much of the time most people are ensconced in a relatively untroubled way in their secular position, but we look for those momentary occasions of openness.

*. . . the sense that there is something more presses in. Great numbers of people feel it; in moments of reflection about their life; in moments of relaxation in nature; in moments of bereavement and loss; and quite wildly and unpredictably. Our age is very far from settling in to a comfortable unbelief. Charles Taylor*

(While we have found that these never satisfy, we think that we have not have the right experience. For some these feelings may mean they are more open to other “religious” experiences often these are sought in human terms (mindfulness) or eastern/new age religions or the individual self-determined religions.)

*If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. C.S Lewis*

### SLIDE 26

Taylor says that the haunting is most keenly felt in:

- **Our human agency:** The sense that we aren’t just determined, that we are active, building, creating, shaping agents
- **Our moral obligations:** We have higher spiritual/ethical motives that don’t reduce to biological instinct or base drives
- **Our aesthetic experiences:** Art, nature moves us because of a sense of meaning; these are not just differential responses to pleasure

(These are not adequately explained in a strictly physical view of the world. This is generally perceived not a logical inconsistency but a felt inconsistency. Novels, films, songs, nature, etc can influence us in ways that are beyond intellectual (reasoning) understanding.)

Also, the haunting may be felt in the following ways:

### SLIDE 27

- **Emptiness:** The crowning of self has created a crisis, because in placing everything in our self, we soon discover “a terrifying sense that while all we have left is the self, the self unfortunately does not amount to too much.” David Wells
- **Isolation:** Isolation and loneliness become more common, in part because people resist relationships that include obligations that may infringe upon their understanding of personal freedom and autonomy.

- **Conformity:** In contradiction to the underpinnings of individualism, people end up being like everyone else!
- **Exhaustion:** The endless rediscovery of one's unique self and its expression is both enslaving and exhausting
- **Superficiality:** The disconnection from their deeper selves, community and nature can feel demeaning

These felt aspects of haunting open avenues for evangelism and discipleship where we can displace the confident “spin” of closed (materialist) accounts. Human beings crave meaning, satisfaction, identity, justice, hope and community, and the Christian faith provides abundantly for those yearnings.<sup>5</sup>

## 7 Technology Impacts Belief

### SLIDE 28

There are a few further aspects of our culture that are worth noting which are coming out of our technology:

- **Distracted Generation.** We quickly move from news to social media to games and this weakens our ability for introspection and reflection. There is a compulsion to engage in social media which can trump real priorities. When we engage in the word and prayer we will operate in a distracted manner.
- **Thin beliefs.** Beliefs are readily picked up in social media and can just as readily be dropped. Cause are adopted uncritically. Nevertheless, people express these views strongly and by expressing these views socially they are adopting an identity. The reason that beliefs are held lightly is that what is truly important to us is how this impacts our identity. (We will subconsciously ask the question how is this belief of benefit to me? Would this improve the quality of my life?)
- **Contradictory beliefs.** Because there is no coherent framework for people adopting beliefs, people hold contradictory beliefs. There is a weakening in debate because views are not deeply considered, and anger replaces discussion. Since the beliefs come from internally, opposing views can be dismissed. There is a significantly reduced influence of reason indicating alternatives to reasoning should be considered in discipling.
- **Shallow Identity.** Identity is superficial and easily changed. The expression of identity (which may be, for example, through consumerism) can be more important than the lifestyle. Note that the Christian faith can be dismissed as just a shallow identity unless it is deeply embraced.

Note that this is counter to autonomous reasoning.

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<sup>5</sup> Note that for Christians, there is also a haunting that is expressed in doubt. We are aware of the contestability of our beliefs – this can drive us to hold our beliefs close to ourselves and we will need ongoing reassurance. We are more likely to relate to “doubting” Thomas.

## 8 Christian Examples of Syncretism

### SLIDE 29

It is easy for us to adopt aspects of this western cultural mindset. You will have picked up some aspects already but here are a few areas I would like to highlight that we need to be conscious of in our discipling.

### SLIDE 30

- **Reason:** Apologetics can use a scientific framework to reason for God. But while Christians can embrace science, science can never embrace Christianity and so we are subjecting ourselves to a framework that undermines us. For example, when Christians argue for the scientific accuracy of the Bible, they are conceding that science has ultimate ownership of the truth; they are signing their house of faith over to a modernist landlord. Another example is our use of reason and knowledge through teaching as the most important discipleship approach. This is not to say we don't use reason but is most of our discipleship centred on acquiring knowledge?
- **Inspiration:** We can inadvertently help people to obtain mere personal inspiration as they interact with the Scriptures. The term "mere inspiration" means a positive and "feel good" message intended to lift us up and restore our sense of self so we can continue on in the journey we've determined for ourselves. The result is that the historic truths of Christianity and the moral claims of Christ get pushed to the periphery of one's religious experience, while the centre gets pulled toward a more generic kind of "inspiration." So, God is perceived as our servant invested only in my personal definition of the good life. Transformation is then seen as a bringing a better life in the sense of prosperity, popularity, etc rather than a change in character and life orientation.
- **Flourishing:** We can over emphasize that God is primarily interested in our self-defined human flourishing. God's character is reformed to suit our view of flourishing. If one affirms that all that God really cares about is our personal flourishing (as defined by the individual), then aspects of Christianity begin to look untenable. Sacrifice become untenable, even unthinkable. Hence the decline of Hell – this is a form of deism. There is a need for a Biblical view of human flourishing.
- **Individualism:** Life on life in the Navigators without community can re-enforce individualism. One of the Navigators core values is the importance of the individual. But in our discipleship, we must ensure that this does not morph into individualism. Make sure we always complement any internal movement towards God with an outward expression.
- **Prayer:** It is easy for our prayer to be largely self-focussed or as a way find favour with God for our personal benefit.
- **Bible Study:** How much time do we give to application as opposed to understanding?

## 9 Alternatives to Reasoning: Spiritual Habits, Community Experiences, Godly Actions, Stories, and Aesthetics

In response to all I have said I am proposing that we strengthen our discipleship by adding alternatives to reason. When we over emphasise reasoning, we are linking our faith to exclusive humanism which can mean that disciples will likely put Christ into a humanistic context<sup>6</sup>. Here are five such approaches we can consider:



### SLIDE 31

### 9.1 Spiritual Habits

It is easy for our primary approach in discipleship is to use reason through teaching in the understanding that this will change beliefs and then behaviour. While teaching is important the Scriptures, our Nav heritage clearly indicates that practices (or habits) are important in the formation of beliefs. Hence, I am making a case for us to consider building habits into the lives of those we are discipling. The group discussions you will have will be about what these habits could be and how they may be practiced in a discipleship context.

### 9.2 Community Experiences

Many will point to a shared experience (camping, games, etc) as being crucial to opening up to faith. It is important for both evangelism and discipleship and works to counter the individualism of our culture. We will be looking at this in our small groups.

### 9.3 Godly Actions

Godly actions are crucial to discipleship and our witness (Matt 5:16). This aspect is about moral actions which include honesty, purity, etc but also include giving, helping the poor, justice for the disadvantaged. Conversion is not just about personal salvation but is expressed in our concern for our fellow humans. We want to be known for our humility and loving concern as we bring not only the words of the Gospel but also the actions of the Gospel.

<sup>6</sup> This may be one of a number of factors in why, in the Australian Navigators organisation, we lack strong connections to social justice causes, but it is arguable that this lack is re-enforcing an emphasis on reasoning and on the Gospel being only relevant for personal salvation.

## 9.4 Stories

Have you noticed how many TV ads are in the form of a story which capture an image of the good life? The use of story engages more than the reasoning process and allows people to locate themselves in the story saying, “That’s me!”. It is an emotional engagement rather than an intellectual connection. One example of the use of a story is in 2Sam12 when Nathan rebukes David by using a story about a poor and rich man.<sup>7</sup>

(We can make better use stories – our tendency to reason means we can prefer the theology of the epistles more than the stories in the Gospels. If we use stories it is more than a word by word retelling of a parable. For example, we could consider putting it into a modern context, and use words of emotion not just facts. Find stories in the media that are widely covered and determine how the Gospel fulfills the hope of the story while undermining the idols. Telling stories from our Navigator heritage is another approach. )

Good stories from within our culture can invite us into a spiritual imagining that disrupts our immanent perspective. Dialoguing with others about the story brings the felt haunting of transcendence to the surface.

## 9.5 Aesthetics

Living aesthetically is about lifting perception beyond the natural, having an environment and perspective that points to and sees the character of God in creation, art, music, etc. It inspires the imagination to consider God’s beautiful creation and love resulting in praising God. It can help us see the natural world pointing beyond, or our need for redemption or the mystery of life, for example. It can use, for example, disruptive images that promote the hauntings of transcendence.

## 10 Discipleship Response

Having this background, we now want to consider our response. There are a few major issues that emerge from this understanding of western culture that I want to suggest for our response. These are affecting those we are discipling, giving us insight into them, but they can also affect how we disciple them.

### **SLIDE 32**

First let’s review the major points.

**Loss of Transcendence:** The secular world has largely removed the spiritual and Taylor noted that there was a process he called “excarnation” where Christians have taken aboard elements of this perspective.

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<sup>7</sup> The so called new atheists they tell a story – we use to believe in childish fairies and goblins in our garden and in God but now we have matured, now we are adults we don’t believe in such nonsense but we are brave enough to face the world as it really is. Do you see the power in this story? – it has nothing to do with facts or reason.

**Lacking Deep Reflection:** We also noted that this generation is a distracted bunch and there is little space for reflection and in fact people are increasingly wired to avoid any form of reflection, filling their lives with the immediate.

**Looking Only Inside:** The disembodied mind is seen as the source of meaning and identity, and we are encouraged just to look inside us rather than to God or to other people.

**Loss of Community:** We also noted that people are buffered from deeper connections with any community

**Reason Overemphasised:** Perhaps our discipleship has over-emphasised reasoning as the critical need to deepen belief.

I am suggesting we complement reasoned teaching with practices, building spiritual habits and community experiences into discipleship so they these become a natural part of their faith journey. We want them to be **Open to Christ** and **Open to Community**.

So, it is important to note that I want you to consider is what you are doing in discipleship rather than what you are teaching. There are plenty of implications for topics to teach, stories to tell and aesthetics to utilise but we will focus on our individual and corporate habits in relation to being open to Christ and the experiences of community we foster individually and corporately.

### **SLIDE 33**

#### **The double movement**

Our culture places us individually at the centre of the universe and so we see everything as moving towards ending in ourselves. We interpret the meaning of things within our mind. Everything seems to be addressed to us – our money, our value, our choices, our image, our approval. But we should be developing a double movement that does not end in ourselves but involves a re-orientation towards God and towards people and community. (Matt5:16,1Cor 10:31). This should be a habitual practice not just a thought. So, do we Navigators emphasise just the mindset in our discipleship? Our individualism makes it even more necessary that we place more emphasis on the outward movement and the actions taken. But clearly these actions should avoid the actions seen in expressive individualism (such as building a consumer identity).

## 10.1 Open to Christ: Personal and/or Corporate Spiritual Habits

### **SLIDE 34**

Reflection/Meditation is a habit that we should deepen recognising it is not going to be easy in our distracted generation. But we know from the Scriptures and our heritage that this is a crucial way of connecting with our Father. While the habits I am about to mention will be difficult I want to challenge you to give each aspect real consideration. While we do not operate legalistically it does not mean that each habit is unhelpful. Perhaps our perspective is more affected by our desire to be free from external constraints than it is legalism.

An example of forming a habit in a disciple is to have a quiet time with a disciple and not just discuss it. So, in all the areas in relation to these spiritual practices it is about the habits you will practice in either an individual or group context.



The notes have some further information to consider.

### **Personal Reflection**

(“be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10), Jos 1:8, Ps1:1,2, Rom 12:1,2)

- Move inward to then move outward. It is likely that disciples will be focussed on themselves even in prayer and reflection. Build on this to an outward reflection on God who deals with all the inward stuff we sense. We can help people to interpret the inward movement of self-examination not as authoritative but as descriptive. So we are not trying to discover the true inner self that defines us but rather we find aspects that currently describe us.
- Foster periods of silence – our distractions can stop a deeper reflection. We are not comfortable with silence. Rather than give attention to our phone, give attention to ourselves and to God. This can create a feeling of uncertainty, of disconnection and boredom. Pascal said that boredom would have us seek some more solid means of escape. So help each other cut down on “filler” distractions. Be aware that some will see this as unproductive time.

### **Daily devotions**

- Needs to be more than personal inspiration or fact gathering. When you have this time with a disciple are you emphasising the personal encounter with God who we approach with fear and trembling? Is there an outward movement towards God and people? Do you practice meditation during this time? In prayer is there a sense that God is active and responsive?
- Consider Examen, a practice of reflecting on the day

**Giving thanks** – privately and publicly (not primarily as a witness but a genuine thankfulness)

- Publicly giving thanks is a witness that works against the privatisation of our faith. It challenges a materialist account of provision. An expression of God’s loving grace. The availability of food suggests the greatness of human mastery over nature and no thanks is required. Thanking God defies this perspective. It reminds us that there is more than just human processes involved.

### **Sabbath Rest**

- Is a sabbath rest (one day per week) useful? It points away from the endless working away and doing. Rather it is a statement of us resting in the finished work of Jesus and foreshadows the rest we will have in him for eternity. **It is clearly counter cultural in that we see time does not need to be filled with productive work.**
- Consider some reflection time on Christ, time to love neighbours and our faith community, time to disengage in distractions by limiting screen time, not attending shops showing that the marketplace is not the centre of your life.

## 10.2 Open to Community: Build Community Experiences

### SLIDE 35

With our individualism, we are resistant to external influences and so resistant to deeper engagement in communities. There is also a suspicion about organisations. So, another aspect of the second part of the double movement is to seek expressions in faith communities. Our discipleship can easily be promoting individualism not as a reflection of Biblical principles but as a reflection of our individualistic culture. Hence, we need to consider that a key aim of discipleship is to deepen community engagement. Here are a few aspects to consider:

#### **Relational Skill Development**

- Hold practical sessions on conversational skills, encouragement, peacemaking, ...

#### **Connect to the wider Nav Community**

- Consider how you can communicate a positive view of the Navigators
- Invite other Navigators into your local community settings
- Recruit assistance from other Navigators to allow wider community connections
- Pray for others in the wider community
- Bring people to city wide functions

#### **Giving**

- Organise a giving project – adopt a Nav ministry in another country
- Organise a project to provide practical help to someone in the Navigator community

#### **Develop Local Communities founded on Biblical values**

- Provide opportunities to serve in the local ministry and beyond
- Create a local sanctuary of love, safety, acceptance, rest, ...
- Provide online support and encouragement communities

## 11 Conclusions

### SLIDE 36

- A very quick overview of western culture
- Additional Notes in the handout
- I have tried to give enough background so that you are able to have a richer language and better discernment regarding our culture
- The immediate aim is for us to consider our discipleship in ensuring we build into people an openness to Christ and an openness to the community of faith
- Time for group discussion to see how these habits and experiences can be built into our discipleship

This completes the presentation. Now I think you will break into small groups and discuss three topics. The first is simply to review the talk (and the notes I have provided may help in this). The second area I want you to discuss concerns how we can better disciple people within a much stronger connection to our Father. The third area to discuss is how we can improve on discipling people into a community. The important thing to do in discussion is to

review what practices we can be using discipleship as a result of the insights we now have. Finally remember that some of this information should help you as you consider evangelism a little later. Thank you.

## 12 References

I have drawn on many sources in constructing this training session. Should you want to read further material to obtain a deeper understanding of this important topics I would recommend Alan Noble's excellent book [1] as a first read followed by James K.A. Smith [2]. Mark Sayers also has a podcast "This Cultural Moment" as well as a number of books.

[1] Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, IVP Books

[2] James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Co.

## 13 Group discussion topics

### 13.1 Review the talk

Motivation: The conviction informing Bruce's talk and our discussion now is that though immersed in our culture we might underestimate how it impacts:

- our own lives including our spirituality,
- the thinking of those we seek to reach with the gospel, and especially
- our understanding of discipleship and discipling.

By way of review then, what things in Bruce's talk resonated? What didn't you understand? What might usefully be clarified? Are there some obvious implications?

### 13.2 Building habits of grace in our discipling.

Motivation: This part of the discussion might focus on the first of Bruce's major themes: **open to Christ**. The conviction here is that we might be less open than we think because we are more secular than we realise especially in relation to transcendence, i.e., the truth that God is in heaven, that He rules on the earth and that He is there for us.

One way we express our openness to Christ is through the spiritual disciplines or habits of grace. These are our 'bread and butter' of course but renewing the practice of them can be our way of saying no to immanence and yes to transcendence.

Review Section 10.1 and discuss particular habits/disciplines that help you or in which you face challenges, especially in building these into those you're meeting with.

Then think 'outside the box'. How are we doing at encouraging wonder at the created order (Psalms 19)? How/where does the Lord's Supper fit? What about sabbath rest? Baptism? Might we learn from Catholic devotional practices (e.g. Lectio Divina, Examen)? Do you already use Thomas a Kempis *The Imitation of Christ*?

### 13.3 Building the practice of community in our discipling

Motivation: This concluding part of the discussion addresses the second major theme: **open to community**. The conviction here is that we are not immune to the secular impulse to 'buffer' our lives and that in our discipling, we will encounter these 'buffered selves'. This is the mindset that says it's all about me, that holds God and others at arm's length, that's weak on communal obligations, that distrusts organisations (especially Christian) etc.

Review Section 10.2 in your notes and discuss current practices of community and how to better inculcate community in our ministries. What's working? What are the challenges? Can we do better? Go deeper etc.

Then think 'outside the box'. Could we do better at promoting the wider Navigators as a community – giving projects? stories of our heritage? short-term missions? invited speakers from other Nav ministries? How might we improve the practice of local community? What have we read in this space? Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option* for example? Others?