

The big idea in a sentence

*“Baptists have always emphasised Jesus as the One that we are called to follow, the One who reveals God to us, and the One through whom God is reconciling all things – the **centre** of who we are and all we do.”* - The Values Project Video

Key: To become a **Jesus centred** movement our inner worlds must be renovated to match exactly the pattern of Jesus’ inner world and our churches must be aligned exactly to his kingdom vision.

Suggested Scripture passages

Rom 6:17-18, 23

Mat 4:18-22

Eph 3:16-17, 20-21

[John 15, 17; Rom 6 & 7; Eph 1, 3; Col 1, 3; Phil 3; Heb 1, 12] 3. **Key**

points to draw on

Mat 4:18-20

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, **follow me**,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

- Jesus takes the initiative, he calls us. His incarnation, discipleship invitation, modeling of the abundant life and subsequent death, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Spirit, intercession and promised return and rule, are the incredible glories which define us and occupy our hearts.
- Responding to this invitation to follow Jesus we embrace his rule of life and we are caught up in his cosmic and eternal work; we become new people forming new communities. We serve His Father’s kingdom, working, praying and suffering as His will “is done on earth as it is in heaven”.

Rom 6:17-18, 23

Thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your **heart** the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness ... the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul’s testimony of a changed humanity.

- *“You used to be slaves to sin, you have ... become slaves to righteousness.”*

- A miracle was happening in Rome and in all the major cities – Phillipi, Ephesus, Antioch ...
- Using an every day image (vs 19) from his world Paul explains this extraordinary phenomena. People who were so desperately shackled to destructive and damaging ways of living have become blissfully dominated by wonderful new thoughts, emotions, habits and relationships.
- Their ways of living – and forming community together – are cracking the very foundations of illegitimate political power and cosmic evil (Rom 8:19-21, 1 Cor 15:24-28, Col2:15).

And how does this happen?

- Through a radical identification with Jesus (dying & rising; Rom 6, Col 3). By allowing his ‘pattern of teaching’ – his wisdom and habits and power – to captivate our allegiance.
- Through a mentorship with Jesus. We apprentice to him (like an eager student learning a trade) until prayer becomes a life-giving conversation with Abba (Mt 6:9, Jn 17), until Bible reading causes our hearts to burn within us (Lk 24:32), until the kingdom of God becomes our priority, and God’s will is done on earth – through our ordinary interactions, routines, habits and ordered emotions (Jn 14:12, Rom 14:17).
- *Goal:* That our internal world (thoughts, emotions, will) becomes exactly like Jesus’ inner world; so that our external behaviours will also mirror him – his character, witness, power and servanthood. That our experience of enslavement to the powers of this age (idols, dominions, addictions) would be broken down as we become overwhelmed with God’s forgiving, healing, life-renewing love (Eph 3:18-19) and bound to his perfect wisdom and will (Rom12:2).
- As followers of Jesus become new humans (Jn 3:3, 2 Cor 5:17) and form communities (ecclesia = church), these gatherings have the capacity to display Jesus’ life-giving qualities in dramatically magnified ways. Characterised by unity, they display kingdom values so vividly that Paul was able to describe them as the ‘body’ of Christ. Anything less is a failure of mission (Eph 4:13-16).

Dallas Willard offers a helpful metaphor

“The human heart, will, or spirit is the executive center of a human life. The heart is where decisions and choices are made for the whole person. That is its function. This does not mean that the whole person actually does only what the heart directs, any more than a whole organization actually does precisely what the chief executive officer (CEO) directs.” (Dallas Willard. “Renovation of the Heart.”)

- Think of your heart as the CEO of a company called YourName, Inc. Your heart is the God breathed part of you that is commissioned to lead and bring your soul into alignment with God’s wisdom and law. But even if it wants to lead well, it struggles. Here’s why.
- Imagine a board meeting at which all your vice presidents – VP Thinking, VP Emotions, VP YourBody, VP SocialConnections – are debating each other and defying the CEO. Chaos reigns.
- Your heart (spirit/will) shrinks in despair – it finds itself ‘enslaved’ (Rom 7:22-25). This is the desperate condition of our broken world.
- What the heart needs is a mentor and saviour. Jesus has put up his hand for the job; he longs to mentor God’s willing children. Jesus’ life is the model, his habits are the required rule of life, his forgiveness opens the way and his spiritual power is the indescribable gift we so desperately need to get unstuck and to begin the journey of sanctification towards maturity.

A Prayer Eph 3:16-17, 20-21

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so **that Christ may dwell in your hearts** through faith. ... Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask*

or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Questions for grounding/applying in the local context

- What shape does being 'enslaved' to sin and failure take in your context? What do people struggle with and feel hopeless about?
- What would it look like (feel like) to become a 'slave' to what is right and life-giving?
- When does following Jesus become an optional extra for you? What does it mean for you to surrender to Jesus? How do you feel about an ongoing process over time of being an apprentice of Jesus?
- How can you strengthen Jesus-centred thought processes (Rom 12:2)? What enables right choices, even when you don't feel like it? What part do God's love (1 Jn 4:18), joy (Jn 15:11) and peace (Phil 4:6-7) play? How does this show itself in our bodies?
- How is this seen in how you use your time – individually and as a church community? Where is it difficult to trust that God has given you the time you need? What are the consequences for your lifestyle?
- What helps you and those around you listen to God and follow Jesus? Who can support your journey?
- What are the potential roadblocks and points of resistance to these ideas in you and in your congregation?

Stories from history, across our movement as examples of this value in practice

The Early Church displays this pattern. Jews and Gentiles alike were experiencing radical life transformation as they welcomed the gift of saving grace and allowed the pattern of Jesus' teaching (apprenticeship in words and deeds) to claim their allegiance. Empowered by God's Spirit these infant gatherings (ecclesia) quickly became culture changing communities as they suffered together 'forming Christ' in each other (Gal 4:19) and resisting the powers of empire (Eph 6:12). Their conviction that Jesus rules at the centre was so unequivocal that the declaration, "Jesus is Lord" became their creed displacing the lordship of Caesar himself.

Martin Luther King, "A Gift of Love: Sermons From Strength to Love and Other Preachings." pg. 54 "Love is the most durable power in the world. This creative force, so beautifully exemplified in the life of our Christ, is the most potent instrument available in mankind's quest for peace and security. Napoleon Bonaparte, the great military genius, looking back over his years of conquest, is reported to have said: "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I have built great empires. But upon what did they depend? They depended on force. But centuries ago Jesus started an empire that was built on love, and even to this day millions will die for him." Who can doubt the veracity of these words? The great military leaders of the past have gone, and their empires have crumbled and burned to ashes. But the empire of Jesus, built solidly and majestically on the foundation of love, is still growing. It started with a small group of dedicated men, who, through the inspiration of their Lord, were able to shake the hinges from the gates of the Roman Empire, and carry the gospel into all the world. Today the vast earthly kingdom of Christ numbers more than 900,000,000 (*2.18 Billion in 2011*) and covers every land and tribe. ... Jesus is eternally right. History is replete with the bleached bones of nations that refused to listen to him. May we in the twentieth century hear and follow his words—before it is too late. May we solemnly realize that we shall never be true sons of our heavenly Father until we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

Suggested further resources for preparation

Media:

Alpha talks, Nicky Gumble
Jesus the Game Changer, Karl & Jane Fasse New
Hearts Sermons Series at NewHope

Books:

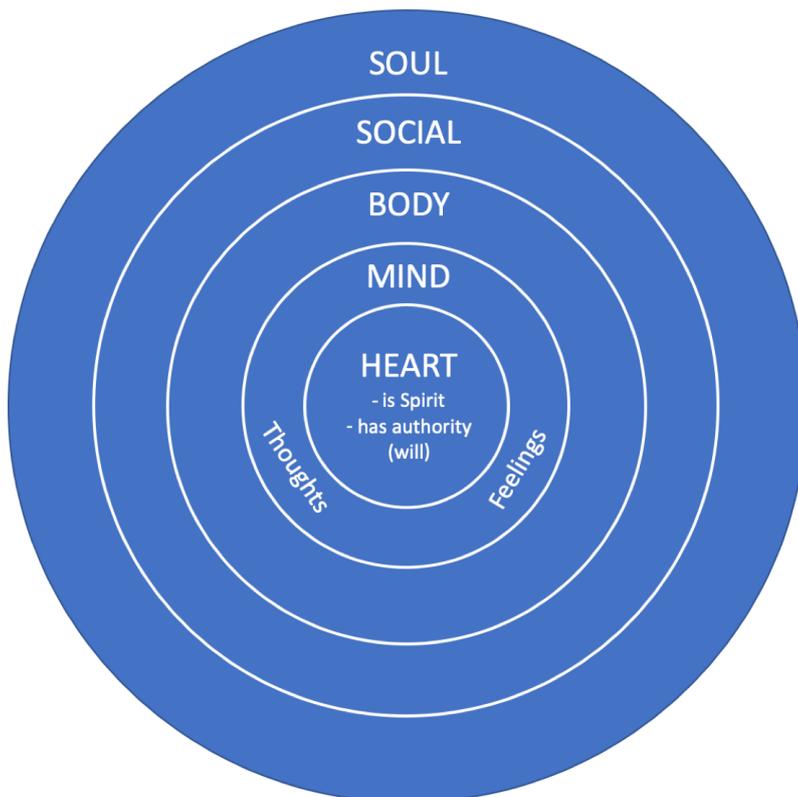
Renovation of the Heart, Dallas Willard Simply
Jesus, Tom Wright

Song:

Jesus at the Centre of it all.

Useful Diagrams:

Based on Dallas Willard



The Golden Triangle of Spiritual Growth

Dallas Willard



Rev Allan Demond and the New Hope Baptist Team – Victoria