

Living Towards Believing

- seeking life choices that point towards truth

FAITH AND VALUES

“What kind of person do you want to be?”

Living from a Jesus perspective is a call to the ethics of the Spirit, hallmarked by freedom and rooted in life-giving values ...

Remember that the single most important ethical question that you can ask is, “What kind of person do you want to be?”

We have already argued that authentic values are ‘the gospel’ they are the ‘good news’ demonstrated. Authentic life-giving values ...

- Point towards their source in God
- Find incarnation and demonstration in spiritual and godly people
- Are given unique power, presence and purpose through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus
- Can become a reality in the life of each individual person, through the experimental faithfulness of faith and the empowering experience of the Spirit

Question: “Do ethics have anything to do with evangelism?”

Answer: “Everything!”

Question: “Is the popular Christian notion that the first step to encountering the risen Jesus is to intellectually accept a series of theological and philosophical propositions, correct?”

Answer: “No!”

Question: “Is faith primarily about ideas or is it really about actions?”

John the Baptist

Question:

“What then shall we do ...?”

Reply:

“The person who has two coats
share with the person who has none,
the person who has food, let them do the same ...
Tax collectors,
collect no more than is appointed to you ...
Soldiers, rob no one by violence or false accusation,
and be content with your wages”

‘So with many other exhortations
he preached the good news to the people’

(Lk 3:10-14, 18)



Jesus

Question:

“What good deed must I do
to inherit eternal life?”

Reply:

“If you would be perfect,
go, sell what you possess and give to the poor,
and you will have treasure in heaven;
and come, follow me”

‘When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful;
for he had great possessions’

(Mt 19:16-22)

Question:

“Teacher, what shall I do
to inherit eternal life?”

Reply:

“What is written in the Law?
How do you read?
... You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your strength, and with all your mind;
and your neighbour as your self”

“You have answered right; do this and you will live”

(Lk 10: 25-28)

James

Question:

“What does it profit ...
if a person says they have faith
but has not works?
Can their faith save them?”

Reply:

“If someone is ill-clad and in lack of daily food,
and one of you says to them,
‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled’
without giving them the things needed for the body,
what does it profit?

So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead

Show me your faith apart from your works
and I by my works will show you my faith

(Ja 2: 14-18)



Paul

Statement:

“The just shall live by faith”
(Rm 1: 17)

Quotation:

“The just shall live by their faithfulness”
(Hab 2: 4)

This is far more than the old debate about, ‘faith *or* works’ or ‘faith *and* works’ This is the statement that ‘faith *is* works’ ‘Works’ cannot earn salvation but ‘works’ as a demonstration of faith are at the core of salvation.

It is not simply that we live in an age in which there are so many words, there is a great deal of scepticism people are looking for much more than words.

Robert Van De Weyer

The story told in his book ‘Guru Jesus’

- *Christmas Day 1970* - Influenced by the Indian concept of the ‘guru’ he decides to live in total obedience to the commands and teachings of Jesus for six months whether or not he understands them or agrees with them. He has problems with most traditional Christian doctrines
- *9th Feb 1971* - “... my agnosticism is beginning to waver ... I also have a strong impression of an outside force working within me. I seems to have demanded my submission and I have submitted to it. I feel I have no control over it ... I say, ‘Thy will be done’”
- *27th Feb 1971* - “As a disciple of Jesus I am now bound in love to people I loathe!”
- *3rd April 1971* - “I hardly think I need wait the full six months. I am already firmly nailed to the cross of Jesus and am enjoying it enormously. I feel at the moment I am falling in love with Jesus”

“June 25th passed without my even noticing it, for I now firmly think of myself as a Christian ... But I am still a novice, and in dark apathetic moments find myself doubting my faith ... I want to be happy. Therefore I had best follow the example of someone who is himself happy. I need only read a few chapters of the Gospels to remind myself how profoundly happy Jesus was”

Question: “Is it possible to find a way of introducing people to following Jesus which links faith, values and actions together rather than focusing first on doctrines, propositions and usually rules?”

Some personal background ...

Sometime in the late 1980’s there was an item on BBC ‘Woman’s Hour’ about a man who wanted to help working class people learn to think philosophically. He set up a porta-cabin in a huge high-rise housing estate in Liverpool and ran ‘drop-in’ philosophy classes from 4-6 pm several times a week, with huge success.



As I listened to the programme I felt deep inside me the words, “Take note of this” – a feeling that has never gone away. My initial reflections on this led me to wonder if it might be possible to encourage and develop small teams of people around the country to run a series of dynamic discussion groups around ‘apologetic’ issues to help people consider the challenge of the Christian faith and discipleship of Jesus. What I suppose you might call ‘Questioning Towards Believing’ or ‘Questioning Towards Committing’.

Then in September 2004, at Bristol Workshop, following my introductory session on ethics, ‘Spirit & Freedom’, a wonderful discussion developed and I found myself saying, “Imagine a Christian introduction course that began with ‘behaving’ rather than ‘believing’?” It would begin with the premise, “This is how Christians live and behave,” that we would hope would also lead on to the question – “Why” – and the question of believing.” Again, ‘behaving towards believing’ has continued to inspire me.

VALUES AND FAITH

Initial thoughts ...

People today are not interested in the subject of doctrines and theology; they consider them as being either in the realm of ‘fairy-tales’ or obtuse philosophical speculation. However, questions around ethics and apologetics do continue to fascinate them.

The idea would be to think of having a series of ‘encounters’ (conversations, discussions in an atmosphere that is most conducive – over a meal or a pint, or whatever). A suggested series of starting points might be:

WORKSHEET

Living Towards Believing

“What kind of person do you want to be?”

Task:

- Design a ten-session introduction to life and faith from a Jesus perspective, set around a table in a home or a pub, which begins with values rather than doctrines and points towards freedom rather than legalism, it must inspire both enquiry and experiment.
- Build each session around a particular value (unless you can come up with a more creative approach)
- Following a ‘Welcome / Introduction’ session (which may or may not be built around a particular value), which life-giving values will you choose for the remaining sessions?
- Think carefully about the order in which you will introduce the values and their themes so there is a sense of progression and dynamism to the programme
- Assign a value to each session (Write them on the sheets in the appropriate spaces)
- Chose a title for each session that is both eye-catching and leads a person into the theme
- Give brief suggestions as to how you might develop each ‘value-theme’, the questions you hope it will raise and the outcomes you hope it will achieve
- In everything be as creative and interactive as possible



- Be free to continue your notes on the back of each sheet of the paper being careful to identify which session number the notes refer to
- In conclusion reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of this approach and how it might be more effectively developed.

Some suggestions for sessions might be:

1. "What kind of person do I want to be?"
2. Christians are truthful – to be anything else is a lie.
3. Christians have a passion for justice – its only fair.
4. Christians live by wisdom - not by rules and laws.
5. Christians are gentle, but strong – violence always destroys.
6. Christians have compassion – the poor, weak and helpless matter.
7. Christians live in harmony with nature – this is real connection.
8. Christians celebrate freedom – especially other people's.
9. Christians show respect – even to people they don't like.
10. Christians love sex – its about commitment, communication and fun.
11. Christians treat enemies as friends – but still challenge wrongdoing.
12. Christians share generously – greed is emptiness
13. Christians celebrate life – but they are not afraid of dying.
14. Christians are spiritual – god-knows it makes sense.
15. Christians believe – doesn't everybody?
16. Christians live *with* hope – not just *in* hope

