

CENTRAL

NEWS

News Letter from the CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION



Summer 2019

'PROCLAMATION' can feel a loaded word when used in a religious context.

According to one dictionary definition it means 'a public or official announcement dealing with a matter of great importance'. While this seems to echo what we imagine the task of someone like John the Baptist, the early disciples or the Apostle Paul were, in our present cultural context it *can* seem a little strident, preachy, even insensitive.

upon where someone is on their personal journey.

When thinking of 'Proclamation' our minds might well be drawn to large scale Billy Graham style events, or street preachers, or Alpha courses etc, and we will all have our views on what 'works' today. My sense is that as valuable as these may or may not be, the greater challenge is to move us beyond a

was 'lived' and that proved itself within the struggles of day-to-day life.

It may be that in a church culture that can perhaps be overly dependant upon the professionals, with programmes, techniques, courses, videos and high powered events, the simple truth is that **the way we live in genuine relationship with others has the most persuasive impact.** Our prime mission is after all among those with whom we spend most of our time, at work, home and play. And how we live - simply, kindly and thankfully - will hopefully give us a 'hearing' when those 'moments' arise when we are invited to give a reason for the faith we have.



PROCLAMATION

In this edition we look at another of the 'fruitfulness indicators' from the Mission Review edition

The Mission Review uses the 'PROCLAMATION' word understanding its baggage, but still believing that we mustn't lose sight of Jesus' call for us to be witnesses. Thus the Review asks churches to reflect upon "if, when and how is something of the message of the way of Jesus being communicated?" It acknowledges that this happens in a variety of ways both verbal and non-verbal, and needs to be contextualised (appropriate to a people group) and will happen at different levels depending

reliance upon 'experts' to a re-discovery of a personal confidence and naturalness when talking about our faith. While the Scriptures do speak of large group conversions, it is still probable that the vast majority of those that turned to Christ in those first centuries did so in ones and twos, as neighbours, friends, shop keepers, servants and masters talked and lived a faith that proved contagious. It appears right from the beginning that there was no easy fix or substitute for a faith that

Finally then, some thoughts on how we as individuals might grow in this area in which we so often feel inept.

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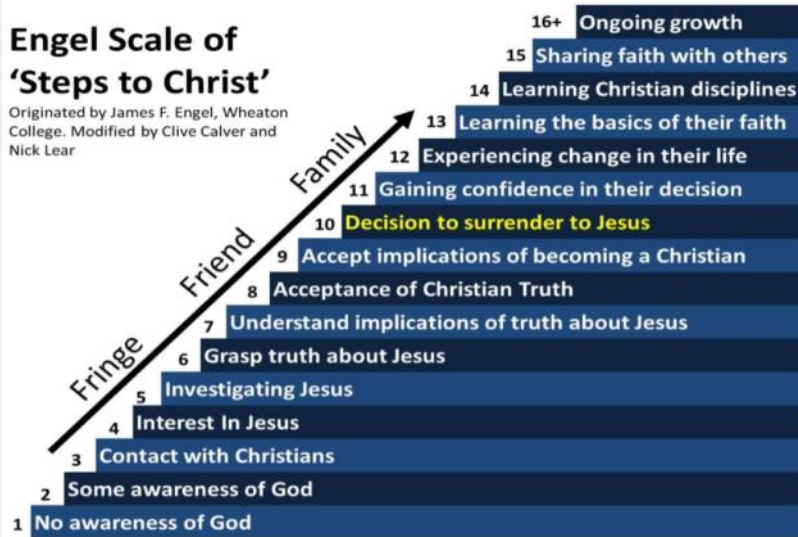


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1. Appreciate that everyone is on a journey. The Engel Scale (see image) has been around for several years, and despite perhaps appearing somewhat rigid and linear, still has something important to say. It helpfully reminds us that coming to faith & growing in discipleship is a journey not a moment, and that *our* role may simply be to encourage someone to take one step on that journey. This takes the pressure off the feeling that one has to say *everything*, and indeed hints that the real skill may be in knowing when to stop talking as less is often more.

Engel Scale of 'Steps to Christ'

Originated by James F. Engel, Wheaton College. Modified by Clive Calver and Nick Lear



church army is a good way to reflect upon this.

4. Remember that our prime calling is to those we live, work and play with. Church life can so easily become overly inward looking, sometimes seeming to be more about keeping the church going than bringing 'the Kingdom of

subject' whatever that may be. A basic social skill applicable here is understanding that the right to be heard only comes from being genuinely interested in someone, and really *listening* to them!

God' to the culture in which God has placed us. The missional challenge is to be Christ's touch, presence, voice, salt & light, wherever we may find ourselves. The London Institute of Contemporary Christianity (L.I.C.C) DVD course 'fruitfulness on the frontline', is a good way to explore this further.

Colin Pye

3. Know YOUR story! On review days when it comes to considering this subject, attendees are sometimes asked to talk to one another about why they are a Christian and continue to be so. They are given one minute. Once they get over the shock of the challenge, the hubbub is often very loud. It appears that most of us DO have a story, but rarely stop to think about it. The faith pictures video course by the



2. Learn to listen. We have all experienced being turned off by individuals that just want to talk about themselves and 'their pet



TREES OF FRUITFULNESS



balls show the fruit (statistics if you like); the green leaves are

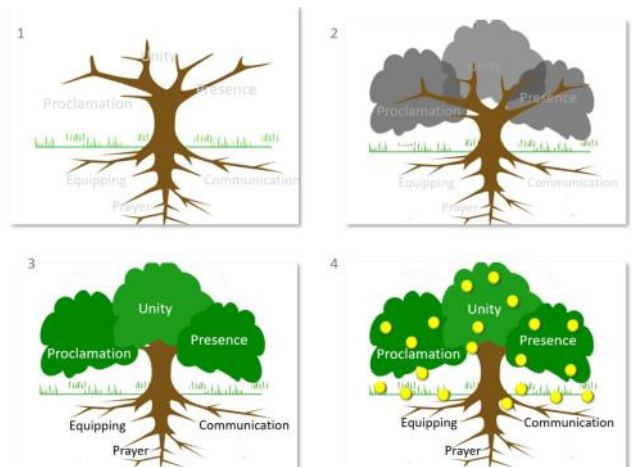
and encouraged by creative prayer, effective communication and appropriate equipping.

what might be called the key mission edges where the faith community rubs shoulders with the wider world (Unity, Proclamation, Presence). The brown trunk & roots reminds of the essential supporting nature of prayer, effective communication and the need to equip people in their mission.

So, the obvious question is *'which image most reflects your church situation & what would it take to become a more fruitful church?'*

We thought it might be helpful to have a more *graphic* way to understand and express the 'fruitfulness indicators' from the **mission review**. It didn't take a genius to go from 'fruitfulness' to a 'fruitful tree' and behold the image above developed.

The thought is that to have a fruitful church community it is helpful to give careful consideration to these various elements. All are needed. A church is more likely to flourish as it seeks to grow in proclamation, presence and unity, supported



To explain: The whole image represents a fruitful church at its best. The yellow

PROCLAMATION, PROPHECY AND CREATIVITY

It's Sunday morning, 10am. Our Sunday morning service starts in 45 minutes about 5 minutes walk down the road. This week however, I'm going to have brunch in one of our local establishments, and I've brought my watercolours and some postcards. I'm going to see what God does.

If you had told me 18 months ago that I would be using my creativity to proclaim the gospel I would have laughed. You see, in terms of



evangelism I've given it a go – street corners, door knocking and big events- but I never felt comfortable. I would watch those who I considered to have an obvious gift of evangelism easily strike up a conversation and ask really interesting questions, from which a whole discussion about salvation would open up. It just never worked for me, I'm an introvert, chatting and speaking to strangers is way out of my comfort zone.

So how did I get to this point? For some time now, Father God has been gently whispering to me about creativity. I've always been known as someone who is "creative" but for me creativity is more than just

about being "artistic" or "crafty." Creativity is needed in industry, education, healthcare, politics, business and the media, to

name but a few. Strategy is important, ingenuity is key and creative thinking outside the box enables us to show God's love & compassion and mercy to the world by cultivating innovative ideas about how we can most effectively proclaim the gospel. It's something I want to champion in my own church family and beyond.

In my own journey, I've struggled with how my own artistic creativity fitted into my Christian faith. It's not a journey I've done alone. Those whispers were voiced to my Pastor, and graciously and gently he's allowed me to explore this and provided opportunities where I've been challenged to make the whisper grow so loud it couldn't be ignored any longer. It has required me to be intentionally courageous, which has not been easy. However, as I have become more assured of my identity in Christ, and who He has created me to be, I've realised that if I am prepared to take the risk, avoid the comparison trap and rely on Him rather than my own performance, then I can trust Him to open doors that I never imagined. We are all created uniquely, with specific gifts and talents, and each of those gifts and talents are given to fulfil His master plan of reconciliation and relationship – it just took me a while to realise that all I needed to do, was be me.

Back to brunch. As I sat and painted, two members of staff came and opened up a conversation about art and their own personal experiences. Later, they both returned and picked out a watercolour

postcard they liked. I said a silent prayer and asked God what He wanted me to write as a word of encouragement on the back of the ones they had chosen. I finished up and went over to each staff member and gave them the postcard they had both been drawn to. I then went onto explain the prophetic word I had written on the back. They were each overwhelmed, and I could see Father God touching each of them, uniquely speaking into their own situations and lives. A picture really does paint a thousand words.



Bio: Steph Phillips is married with two children and attends Amphill Baptist Church in Bedfordshire. She has a heart for cultivating and championing creativity in order to encourage Christians to carry the Kingdom into their spheres of influence.

On the days when she is not engaged in family life or some sort of art or craft, she can be found using her other creative gifts in the area of healthcare.



Steph Phillips

LOOK WHO'S TALKING JESUS

For at least as long as I have been part of the church but most likely longer we have had multiple services celebrating and declaring the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. This year though we decided to throw a party for the community; inviting friends, neighbours, colleagues, family members to join the celebration. We had a bouncy castle, Easter egg challenges, face-painting and crafts, as well as tasty pulled pork rolls. At events like these, one of the pastors typically would thank people for coming and would utilise that moment to present a gospel message and invite. Whilst I still agree that that approach is still important, we did things differently again this Easter.



One of our members approached me about half way through the party to ask when 'the talk' was going to take place. I replied by saying it already is. Seeing the puzzled face, I encouraged her to look around the party and see how people were 'talking' the Jesus story all over the place. The number of folk that had, and took, a gospel sharing opportunity that afternoon was more than we have had in a long time.

This recount of Easter is part of the journey we are on as a church to equip and release each person in the church to be a disciple-making-disciple;

releasing folk to share their story of God in their lives with those around them. As a leadership team we have recognised that, whilst a strength of our church over many decades has been what has been proclaimed from the pulpit, many who sit or have sat in the pews (well seats now) may have felt ill-equipped to talk about Jesus with those who are far from God. In light of this,

there has been one thing that we have increased and another that we have adapted:

An intentional increase in training and equipping opportunities. In 2018 49 people attended the various evangelism training sessions that we put on as a church. This was more than attended evangelism training in the previous four years put together. So far in 2019, 38 folk have gone through either a 'Following and Fishing' course or the 'Talking Jesus' Course centrally with a number of others also going through the material in smaller groups or one-to-one. Some of the folk that attended the training

in the last two years are now offering people prayer and sharing the Gospel with folk on the street each month.

An adaptation of our teaching ministry. As a church we always want to remain true to good solid teaching from Scripture, but we have decided that we will teach in such a way on a Sunday to equip people to be sharers of the Jesus message. We have made this change in a few ways:

- 1) Attempting to use from the platform the language of the people that we are aiming to reach.
- 2) Explaining concepts and not assuming prior biblical knowledge. While this is helpful for any un- or de-churched guests to be able to access what is being said, it also provides accessible language, illustrations and analogies for the Christian to then use in their own conversations.
- 3) Increasing the occasions we invite people to become a Christian after a sermon, anticipating a response, helpfully models ways of leading someone through steps of faith in Jesus.

We are in the early steps of following what God has been asking us to do but it is an exciting and so far really encouraging journey to be on, seeing people talking Jesus and sharing their faith and the hearers responding.

Stephen Walker-Williams (Gold Hill + Hope Community Church)



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