

Sharing the good news of Jesus and His Kingdom and equipping the church to do the same.



Greg West, Evangelist

Equipping Churches and Ministries

Essential training in evangelism and discipleship

BY GREG WEST

Isn't it fascinating that when the Son of God came from heaven to earth, He did not start a mega-church? He chose the 12 disciples and had female disciples among them. They were a constant part of his ministry. When He commissioned the disciples, He also commissioned you and I to: "Go and make disciples of all nations..." He did not mention small groups, but He didn't have to; it was implied. He spent three years with His disciples in a mobilized small group, all the while drawing in more disciples to His ministry. His method was apprenticeship within a small group.

As you know, I've spent many years working with churches to equip them for small group ministry. I've recently partnered with a group of people who are passionate about recovering the small group ministry modeled by John Wesley's "Class Meeting." This model isn't a Bible study. Rather, it allows the Bible to study us! We aim to recover small groups that seek to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ and obey God's Word. In our groups, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we create an atmosphere of "grace and truth." Most of the meeting time is dedicated to inviting each person to answer the question: "How is your

walk with Christ? After this, the leader either gives or prompts encouragement and guidance for each member.

In the original Class Meetings of the 1700s, non-Christians were welcome to join too. Often when we think about small groups in the church, we only think about discipleship, not evangelism. We need to also create groups that welcome seekers, doubters, the disillusioned and broken. As we welcome them into Christian community, the Holy Spirit will draw them to Christ through our love, our stories and struggles as the Spirit sovereignly works.

Our goal is to assemble 12 churches or ministries that want to have this small group training and coaching with the goal of establishing small groups that can be replicated. Our training will use Kevin Watson's book, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience*. Our heart is to recover "a vital method of Jesus" by bringing people to life-saving faith in an environment where they can help one another to deepen their love and service to Christ. In this initial launch, we are seeking churches or ministries in the Hampton Roads and Peninsula areas.

1 Minute Video: "Introducing Seedbed?"



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJuc_sD7BCY

Conversations...

BY GREG WEST

Are you sharing your story frequently? If not, ask the Lord to revive you, to awaken you to His Presence, power, grace and glory! If you want to or are sharing, here is a good framework to help: 1) My life apart from Christ 2) Coming to and encountering Christ 3) My life in Christ. Two mistakes we can make in sharing our faith are reducing faith to a formula and treating people as projects. Avoid these! Below is an example of a framework I use when meeting with someone I haven't seen in a very long time as well as some tips for having conversations with those who deny the existence of God.

Here is an example of a framework I use when meeting with someone I haven't seen in a very long time. After catching up on some life events I ask:

Me: "Are you a person of faith?"

Them: "Yeah I am, just trying to figure it out."

Me: "Cool, I'd love to tell you my story if you're up for it."

Them: "Of course."

I begin with my emptiness and my longing for something more, which made me a "seeker." I continue with my discovery of the person of Jesus as revealed in the Gospels and hearing people share how God is active today.

"This shattered my previous image of God that I had – the lazy-boy-God. You see, I believed in God, but thought that God was a distant observer; a God who got things started, did some great things in biblical times, but is now in recline position watching what's going on here on planet earth. It's hard to get excited about the lazy-boy-God. The more I read the Bible and sought God in prayer, the more I sensed a presence, an affirmation, a drawing power that compelled me to seek more."

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Conversations...

Here are some questions for someone who rejects the idea of God and may be an atheist. They likely don't want to be bothered by religion or a higher authority. Therefore, they deny the existence of God.

"Have you had any bad or negative experiences with the church or people of faith?"

This can be a whole conversation where if the answer is "Yes," you can listen and empathize with them. I have on numerous occasions apologized for the "church" when a person shares a story of hurt, abuse or betrayal by the church.

"I am so sorry that this happened. Do you see that this person/these people were actually betraying Jesus by what they did/said?"

The implication is that Jesus remains faithful and true despite His followers.

When the person doesn't seem to have negative experiences with the church and are rejecting God on a more intellectual basis I ask:

Do you believe it's more likely that everything came from nothing or that there is an intelligence behind all that is?

If the answer is "Everything came from nothing," i.e., atheism, here is a good follow up:

"So, you think things like miracles in the Bible are not real, things like the virgin birth of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus? Don't you think it takes more faith to believe everything came from nothing in contrast to there being a design and order to humanity and the universe, so there is likely a Designer and Orderer to all that is?"

Here's one more:

"You say that you don't believe there is a God. Do you deep down, hope that you are wrong?"

The answer to this question may give you an opportunity to ask them more personal questions or to share how your life changed as you came to know Jesus.

Evangelism Lessons from Ruth and Naomi

BY ASHLEY KLINE

You know the types of Christian books you see at the checkout of Hobby Lobby or in the book aisle at Target that written by popular preachers and lay scholars? I tend to be skeptical of such works due to my presupposition of such resources as being filled with "quack theology" to use the words of my theology professor and renowned Wesley scholar Dr. Ken Collins.

Ironically, I was given one such book as a gift recently, which I coincidentally enough saw at the checkout of Hobby Lobby. This work, "The Mothers and Daughters of the Bible Speak" by Shannon Bream, was a surprise as it appears to be rooted in sound theology and biblical scholarship.

The book's chapter on Ruth and Naomi struck me and brought up points about the text that I failed to recognize the significance of. The relationship between Ruth and Naomi demonstrates the importance of relationships to evangelism. Naomi and her family being in relationship with Ruth is what led Ruth to embark upon a relationship with YHWH. It was neither a priest nor synagogue leader that brought Ruth to faith, but an average, everyday family, attempting to make it through day to day by relocating to Moab following famine in Bethlehem. Ruth's faith flourished as she went through life with Naomi, a seemingly insignificant woman going through the very human experience of grief as she witnessed her family gradually perish. As Bream says,

Evangelism isn't always about a polished presentation or theological defense. Sometimes, it's just about being with another person—spending time with him or her, building a relationship, living out our faith in front of the person, and talking about God in the natural conversations that arise.

By the time Ruth agrees to follow Naomi in Ruth 1:17, she had formed a connection with Israel's God possibly equal to that of native Israelites. This is evidenced by Ruth using the proper, divine name of Israel's God, YHWH, as opposed to the generic term for god, *el/eholim*. In Psalms, it is common for the psalmist to use the term *elohim* to reference God in passages declaring distance or isolation from God (Psalm 22:1-2). When making proclamations of faith, steadfastness, praise, and worship, it is more common to see the psalmist refer to God as YHWH (Psalm 22:8,23,26-28).

When Ruth makes her oath to Naomi stating, "May the Lord punish me severely if anything but death separates you and me" (Ruth 1:17), she invokes the divine name of YHWH. We do not know whether she adopted legitimate faith simply through formal talks with her husband and other members of her new family. However, what Scripture does tell us is that Ruth spent her days sharing life with a family of those believing in the Judeo-Christian God. Somehow, by going through life with these believers, her relationship with the Lord surpassed worship of Him for the sake of her husband. This idea is consistent with the themes that permeate the entire book of Ruth. This book focuses upon self-sacrifice, faith and loyalty for their own sake rather than for the sake of adhering to social customs and coercion.

Ultimately, the book of Ruth shows us that it is not simply the job of religious leaders to shepherd and evangelize. Furthermore, we are to evangelize by merely doing life with others and exemplifying the power of our faith through our actions and relationships rather than merely through formal arguments.



Seedbed: Resources for a Great Awakening

Seedbed is a publisher and organization dedicated to providing discipleship resources for the purpose of moving people from simple mental assent to the reality of Jesus to growing in his holy love via small groups and discipleship communities. Their self-proclaimed mission is to, "gather, connect, and resource the people of God to sow for a great awakening."

To these ends, Seedbed provides print and digital resources that can be accessed offline and online. Their resources consist of Bible study plans, small-group studies,

training courses, videos, podcasts, conferences and articles. By checking the website's free resources tab, you can access a large collection of articles and videos. As stated in the title, all these resources are free! By utilizing Seedbed's Daily Text, you can also get daily devotionals in accordance with Seedbed's discipleship goals.

Furthermore, Seedbed hosts New Room conference that takes place annually. This event is hosted for the sake of bringing people together to discuss discipleship and mission. This year, the New Room conference will take place September 21-23 in Nashville, TN. The event will also be livestreamed for those unable to attend in person.