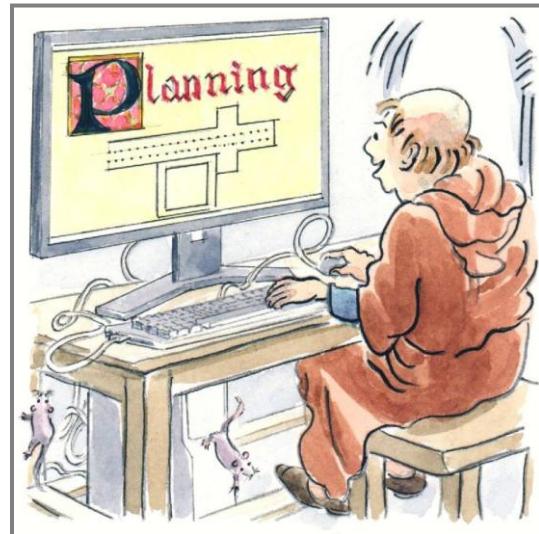


The radical values that Jesus taught

TN25 Training Notes series: Planning



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It is helpful for churches and mission agencies to define their 'values'. These describe what matters most in how they go about their life and tasks. They are matters that they are, or should be, passionate about. They define an organisational or church culture.

But before you get the keyboard out and start setting down how you see yourselves as you are, it is instructive to think if a pattern of values has already been defined. In particular, what were the values that Jesus taught to his disciples? No, you won't find these as a bullet-point summary in the introduction to your Bible, but they are clearly there in the pages of the Gospels.

Here is an exercise that you might like to copy and develop. Take one Gospel (I tried St Matthew) and read it through jotting down indicators of the value system that Jesus set for those who were his. Then study each point and group those that followed a broadly similar theme. I found I had five separate themes with three or four distinct points in each. I have added some group discussion questions on each theme.

You might come up with a different set of categories from the same Gospel. You might like to try the same exercise from Mark or Luke. But, in the hope that it may be of interest, this is what I discovered. Please email me to explain what you think about this, or what you come up with on a similar exercise.

Having carried out this exercise, the test then is put the value system into operation. The problem is that most churches do not follow anything like what comes out here. Jesus' values are far too radical for most of us, far too different from the culture of today's world, and so we prefer an easier route. See what you think.

All Bible references are to St Matthew's Gospel.

1 We are to give Jesus Christ absolute priority

- over all religious traditions (12:1-14; 15:1-11)
- over all human relationships (8:21-22; 10:37-39; 12:46-50)
- over all material possessions (6:19-24; 19:16-30)

Study the passages listed and then ask the following questions (best done in a group setting).

Q1 What might each of these three mean in practice for our church?

Q2 Which of these three is the most challenging and why?

Q3 How might each of these work out in the lives of individual church members?

2 We are to seek the approval of God rather than other people

- coming to him in repentance not because of our achievements (3:1-3; 4:17)
- approaching him in faith whatever our human status (8:5-13; 15:21-28; 21:28-32)
- dealing privately with him rather than showing off to others (6:1-8,16-18)

Again, study the passages listed before answering the following questions.

Q1 What might be the reactions in our local setting if we were to follow these?

Q2 How might we teach on these issues (in sermons or in small groups)?

Q3 What part in practice does status play in our church at present?

3 We are to be vulnerable with each other

- by forgiving each other (6:12-15; 18:21-35)
- by checking ourselves before we warn others (7:1-5)
- by seeking peace (5:9,23-24)

These might be passages for the group to meditate on with plenty of time.

Q1 What needs to change in our church if we were to fully follow these ideas?

Q2 How might these ideas apply in a church rather than an individual setting?

Q3 Are there issues in our church's life where we have not shown forgiveness?

4 We are to be clearly different in our behaviour

- by turning the other cheek (5:38-42)
- by loving our enemies (5:43-48; 6:12-15)
- by valuing everyone (19:13-15; 26:6-13)

The danger here is that we think we know these passages well.

Q1 What does 'turning the other cheek' mean in practice for us?

Q2 Who are our enemies and how can we seek to love them?

Q3 Who don't we give enough value to in our congregation at the moment?

5 We are to be radically different in our attitudes

- strength lies in weakness (5:3-12)
- life comes through death (10:39; 16:24-27)
- the least is the greatest (18:1-6)
- the last will be first (19:30 – 20:16)

Again, study the passages carefully before answering these questions.

- Q1 What in practice does it mean for us to be weak, die, be least, come last?
 Q2 What case studies exist in our church life where these need to apply?
 Q3 What does these mean for individual church members in the world today?

The problem with many sets of church values

Many churches that have written out a set of so-called 'values' end up with a statement that says, even if in between the lines:

1 We are welcoming

In my experience this often means that they are so welcoming to each other that they fail to notice the newcomer, visitor or any stranger. Beware any church that describes themselves as welcoming.

2 We are vibrant

This seems to be the in-word at present – check out church websites to see it for churches that want to be seen as worth joining. It's fine (but, for the sake of variety, can we find some other words?) you need to ensure it is true. Would a visitor agree with you?

3 We are nice

It is worth making a careful comparison between the Matthew list above and the idea of niceness. It is a very British thing but I really do not believe that Jesus was 'nice'. Nor do I believe that most people outside our churches are looking for something that is 'nice'. We have a Gospel of, literally, death and life, not niceness.

We need to get back to the values Jesus demonstrates and teaches for his Kingdom, not the ones we would choose for ourselves and think others will find them attractive. Churches in the UK seem to have veered right away from the challenge of Kingdom values.

In Training Notes TN74, *Understanding values*, I suggest three types of values in descending order of importance:

- Non-negotiable foundations
- Community principles
- Internal agreements.

Which of these three categories does the Matthew set above fall into?

The context of discipleship

You might like to consider these values for the whole church within the context of what it means for each church member to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Check out Training Notes TN91, *An MOT for disciples of Jesus*, on this website. That gives 14 tests (the final two are alternatives) as follows.

- 1 Following
- 2 Learning
- 3 Love
- 4 Character
- 5 Temptation
- 6 Community
- 7 Service
- 8 Witness
- 9 Disciple-making
- 10 Time
- 11 Generosity
- 12 Suffering
- 13 Marriage (if applicable)
- 14 Singleness (if applicable)

So how about making the Matthew list your church's values, seeking to live up to them? Could you accept that challenge?

For an example of how something of this idea was worked out in one church, see [Training Notes TN25a](#) on this website.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN25. For material on the concept of 'vision' see Training Notes TN32, *What do you mean by vision?* For 'purpose', TN48, *Let's get purpose statements right*. For 'values' see TN74, *Understanding values*, and TN142, *Values create a culture*. See also TN124, *What's the point of church?*

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN25 under Planning.

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