



Shaped by the Gospel Lesson 7: Loving the City Part 1

2 Minutes of Silence

Watch Introductory Video:

Loving the City is about a theological approach to ministry in a secular, globalized 21st century culture. It's a roadmap for anyone engaging a changing culture, religious pluralism, and increased hostility to Christianity

Notes:

What is contextualization?

You might deduce that it means to place something in its context. Or you may be familiar with the term from missionary work, where it is used to describe the process of translating the Bible and making it understandable in a culture where biblical concepts might be completely alien.

Tim Keller describes contextualization by giving an example everyone can relate to: Have you ever heard a boring sermon?

The sermon may be doctrinally correct and the preacher well-meaning. But perhaps it goes on for two hours—and the listener is culturally conditioned to lose interest after thirty minutes. Perhaps the preacher shows no emotion, or too much emotion, and his listeners become uncomfortable. Perhaps the examples or illustrations used have no bearing on the listener's everyday life, or worse, alienate him or her.

Keller defines gospel contextualization as "giving people the Bible's answers ... to questions about life that people in their particular time and place are asking, in language and forms they can comprehend." Sound contextualization means translating and adapting the communication and ministry of the gospel to a particular culture without compromising the essence and particulars of the gospel itself. When we contextualize faithfully and skillfully, we show people how the baseline cultural nar-

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olution and fulfillment in Jesus.

The implications are vast—whether we are preaching, teaching, pastoring, sharing our faith, discipling, working cross-culturally or cross-generationally, or if we simply find the culture changing around us. Understanding the culture and assumptions of the people around us is a lifelong task that requires us to be open, curious, and both humbled and emboldened by the gospel.

Goals for the next 6 weeks

- Develop self-awareness about your own and your church’s cultural assumptions
- Understand what contextualization is and isn’t, and where we find this idea in scripture
- Become aware of what aspects of our culture to affirm and challenge

Discuss:

Keller defines contextualization as:

1. giving people the Bible’s answers, (which they may not at all want to hear) to questions about life 2. that people in their particular time and place are asking, 3. in language and forms they can comprehend, and 4. through appeals and arguments with force they can feel, even if they reject them.

Unpack the four parts of Tim’s definition of contextualization. Which elements do you tend to do best? Which do you tend to skip or overlook?



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Discuss as a class:

"John Stott's book on preaching, Between Two Worlds, likens Christian communication to building a bridge from the Scriptures to the contemporary world.¹ Some sermons are like "a bridge to nowhere." They are grounded in solid study of the biblical text but never come down to earth on the other side. That is, they fail to connect the biblical truth to people's hearts and the issues of their lives. Other sermons are like bridges from nowhere. They reflect on contemporary issues, but the insights they bring to bear on modern problems and felt needs don't actually arise out of the biblical text. Proper contextualization is the act of bringing sound biblical doctrine all the way over the bridge by reexpressing it in terms coherent to a particular culture "

When you as an individual or when we as a church speak about the Bible, are we more likely to create a "bridge to nowhere," or a "bridge from nowhere?"

What makes you suspect this is true? What factors or beliefs contribute to this tendency?

Watch Video: How Contextualization Works (15 minutes)

Timothy Keller defines contextualization, gives an illustration from his own ministry, and unpacks what we can learn from the Apostle Paul.

Notes:



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Discuss as a class:

What are some of the baseline cultural narratives of our community?

Where might we be in danger of under-adapting as a congregation

Where might we be in danger of over-adapting as a congregation?

Which is the greater threat?

Have you ever had an experience like Tim describes, when you got direct and immediate feedback from someone who was confused or offended by your presentation of the gospel? Do you think this came from the gospel itself, or the way you were presenting it?

Homework

Pray: Pray for the lord to reveal more of our culture's desires and values. Ask God for conversations where people express these desires.

Read: Biblical Contextualization
(pages 49-65)
Active Contextualization
(pages 66-88) only 5.5 pages a day!



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