Coffee: a Key to Healthy Church

Mike Davies 2 August 2018



It has often been said, jokingly, that Joshua Generation Church (JoshGen) was built on coffee! By this we mean that a significant part of building the values and ethos (the 'DNA') of JoshGen was done over a cup of coffee. We never tried to disciple people from the pulpit alone, neither did we leave the work of discipleship to the elders. Every member was involved in loving, correcting, encouraging and rebuking each other. As we seek to build healthy churches around the world, this is an area of church life that is critical to our success. Of course, coffee does not have to be involved in this process, but it does help.

> 'Truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is sentimentality'

Discipleship Principles

Over the years I have learned a number of principles that have really helped me in this area, especially when it comes to having 'more difficult' conversations – like when we need to 'point out their fault' (Matthew 18:15-20). Here are some things I have found very helpful in this kind of conversation:

1. Be Courageous

One of the hardest things for us to do is to break out of our culture and comfort zones and into the values of the Kingdom. A number of people I have spoken with over the years about the necessity of 'coffee times' have argued that this 'just isn't part of our culture!' Well, it wasn't part of mine either, but it is part of the culture of our King. It also takes courage to speak when we know this could result in conflict, and correction often brings conflict. Remember, Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peace**makers**', not 'Blessed are the peacekeepers'. Unity is not the absence of conflict, but rather conflict is sometimes necessary to bring true unity.

2. It is Just as Important to Encourage as to Correct or Rebuke

If the only time we meet with somebody to speak into their lives is to bring correction, then we will be ineffective. People are unlikely to listen and respond well if they are only ever receiving a correction or rebuke from us. It is encouragement that often opens the heart of a person.

3. Check Your Own Heart Before Addressing Another Person

First remove any log in your own eye before addressing the speck in another's (Matt 7:5). Ask yourself if your desire to chat is about making life easier for yourself or helping the other person to walk closer with Jesus. Sometimes what irritates or offends us about the other person is not their issue but ours! Our aim is not to make people more like ourselves, or more like how we wish them to be, but to help them become more like the Lord Jesus.

4. Pray First

We have no right to speak into the life of another unless we have first brought it to the Lord. We have no right to judge another man's servant! Only if we are representing Him will our words and actions carry spiritual authority. Sometimes it is possible that the Lord will tell us to wait before speaking – after all, He is often very patient with us.

5. The Right Venue

If we are going to be talking about deeply personal issues, or things that could be perceived to be embarrassing or emotional, then a busy coffee shop where we are constantly being interrupted by waiting staff is probably not the best place. Likewise, an office setting can seem impersonal, even confrontational.

6. Choose One Thing

As a general principle (which I have occasionally broken), it is best to address one issue at a

time. Imagine if the Lord revealed to us all the ways in which we fail all at once: we would be broken! Instead, He generally addresses one area of our lives at a time – we would be wise to do the same, for otherwise we risk breaking the person we are speaking to instead of building them up.

7. Build a Bridge of Trust

I cannot drive a 10 ton truck over a bridge with a 1 ton limit. Likewise the level of relationship and trust I have with a person will largely determine the 'weight' of the issue I can deal with. Attempting to address issues where sufficient trust has not been built is more likely to result in a serious and possible permanent breakdown in relationship. It should be easier to speak into the life of a friend than into the life of a stranger. Likewise, people will hear us more easily if we have proven trustworthy, credible and loving.

8. The Love Sandwich

We need to speak the truth in love: a friend of mine once said, 'Truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is sentimentality'. This is why we speak of a 'love sandwich'. Start the conversation by telling the person how much we love and value them, and how loved and valued by the Lord they are. It is for this reason that we want to help them by speaking into an area that needs adjustment or correction. Then address the area of concern before ending with much love and encouragement. Remember: if a person receives what you are saying, it is likely they will be feeling vulnerable, embarrassed, discouraged or broken at this point. We need to leave them in a place of faith and hope and of feeling loved. We want to help bring conviction, not condemnation. We want to set them up for success.

9. Call Sin What It Is

If the conversation is about addressing an area of sin, it is helpful (I would suggest necessary) to call sin what it is. We have a tendency to dumb down our sin by renaming it or minimising it. I remember speaking to a man who had been involved in a sexual relationship outside of marriage with a girl in the church. He used language like, 'We are clumsy in our relationship', 'We crossed boundaries' or 'We fell'. There is truth in all these statements, but they are not the whole truth. Whilst we are not there to bring judgement or condemnation, we do want to help lead people to repentance, and we can only truly repent when we acknowledge the sinfulness and seriousness of what we have done. In 2 Sam 12:1-14, Nathan names David's sin against man and against God, and David confesses it as such. Of course, it is just as important, then, to communicate about the mercy and grace of God.

10. Point Them Forward

What is the next step for this person? Having pointed out an area that needs change, how can we set them up for success? I have been addressed about areas in my life that I had no idea were there! How can I fix it if I cannot see it? Help the person to recognise what needs to change and then help them to put things in place to ensure their success. There may be failures moving forward, but where these occur, remember that 'Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant□or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things'. (1 Cor 13:4-7)

11. Feedback

What we say and what a person hears can be two completely different things! There is so much room for misunderstanding and offence, especially when speaking of matters that become emotional. In order to minimise misunderstanding, confusion and even false accusations, I have found it useful to ask the other person to summarise the conversation we have had. I ask them to tell me what they have heard, what they think (whether they agree with what has been said) and what action they wish to take going forward. If this is different to what I have communicated, then I review, correct, re-emphasise etc. Remember that most people react emotionally rather than intellectually in such circumstances, and often over-react (for example, 'You said I am a complete failure'). Help them to hear correctly and to respond in a godly way, rather than reacting in a fleshly way.

12. Follow Up

A responsible surgeon will never simply operate on a person and then never see them again! Likewise, when we have been involved in 'heart surgery', it is incumbent upon us to follow up on that person over the next season, to walk with them and ensure that they come to a place of complete healing, without infection or complications.

> '..whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins'

We are given great encouragement in James 5:19-20 to have these difficult conversations, because 'if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins'. Of course, it is not always simple and straightforward. The person we speak to may disagree with our perspective, may turn it around and accuse you, may become

offended and leave etc. In such cases, the best route to follow is that outlined in Matt 18:15-20 – but that is for another article.

Some key Scriptures to meditate on:

- Proverbs 27:6 & 17
- Ezekiel 33:3-9
- Matthew 18:15-20
- 2 Timothy 4:2
- Galatians 6:1
- Luke 17:3-4