

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship



2016-2017 Bible Study

Because Christ's Love Compels Us...

Table of Contents

Lesson 1 - What does it mean for Christ's love to "compel" us? 3

Lesson 2 - Christ's love compels us to live on mission 8

Lesson 3 - Christ's love compels us to advocate for justice 11

Lesson 4 - Christ's love compels us to become a new creation 15

Lesson 5 - Christ's love compels us to a ministry of reconciliation 19

Lesson 6 - Christ's love compels us to be His ambassadors 22

Meet our Bible Study writer, Michael Cheuk



Michael Cheuk has worked as a campus minister, an associate minister at University Baptist Church (Charlottesville), and as senior minister at Farmville Baptist and again at University Baptist. After nearly 20 years in congregational ministry, he is currently taking a sabbatical. He holds degrees from Rice University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the University of Virginia. He serves on the board of Baptist Center for Ethics and recently completed a three-year term on the Ministries Council of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He is also certified as a Christian leadership coach. His hobbies include reading, photography, singing, and cooking. He and his wife Beth have been married for 24 years. They have a daughter who is a freshman at VCU and a son is a sophomore at Albemarle High School. Michael blogs at MichaelKCheuk.com.

What Does It Mean for Christ's Love to Compel Us?

Reference verse:

2 Corinthians 5:14a (NIV). For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all.

Takeaway Statement:

Christ love "compels" us, not by coercion, but by surrounding and drawing us together to urge us on.

DIG

- When you hear the words "compel" or "compulsory," what thoughts or words come to mind?
- Are those thoughts and words positive, neutral or negative?
- How does the word "compel" relate to your understanding of God and Jesus Christ?
- We are Baptists who believe in freedom. In Dr. Walter Shurden's classic *Four Fragile Freedoms*, he argues that since the early 1600's, Baptists believed in four basic freedoms: Bible freedom, soul freedom, church freedom and religious freedom. As Baptists who believe in freedom, is it contradictory for us to be "*compelled* by Christ's love"?

DISCOVER

In the original Greek language, the word *sunecho* ("compel") is used twelve times in the New Testament. Spend a moment to consider how this word is used in these passages. In every example below, the word *sunecho* ("*compel*") is translated by the italicized words. You might consider breaking your class into groups to read several of the passages, discussing how the words in italics deepen their understanding of the word "to compel," and then briefly reporting back to the whole class.

1. Matthew 4:24 (KJV): They brought unto him all sick people that *were taken* with divers diseases and torments...
2. Luke 4:38 (KJV): Simon's wife's mother *was taken* with a great fever...
3. Luke 8:37 (KJV): Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they *were taken* with great fear...
4. Acts 28:8 (KJV): And it came to pass, that the father of Publius *lay sick* of a fever...
5. Luke 8:45 (NIV): "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and *pressing* against you."
6. Luke 12:50 (NIV): Jesus, speaking prophetically about the coming days: "But I have a baptism to undergo, and what *constraint* I am under until it is completed!"

Go to Resource Page 7 for a list of these Bible passages that you can cut into strips to hand out to your small groups.

7. Luke 19:43 (NIV): From when Jesus weeps for Jerusalem: “The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and *hem* you in on every side.”
8. Luke 22:63 (KJV): When the soldiers mocked Jesus prior to His crucifixion: And the men that *held* Jesus mocked him, and smote him.
9. Acts 7:57 (NIV): From the stoning of Stephen, when the Sanhedrin can no longer bear to listen to his testimony: At this they *covered* their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,
10. Acts 18:5 (KJV): Describing Paul’s evangelism to the Jews and Greeks in Corinth: And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was *pressed* in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.
11. Philippians 1:23 (ESV): From Paul’s passage about how “to live is Christ, and to die is gain”: “I am *hard pressed* between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”
12. 2 Corinthians 5:14 (NIV) For Christ’s love *compels* us, because we are convinced that one died for all . . .

Let’s spend a minute reflecting on a few of the main uses of *sunecho* in these passages. What can these passages teach us about how Christ’s love “compels” us?

- A third of these passages are about sickness or fear. When you’re getting a cold or a stomach virus, do you have a choice in the matter? (*There might be a variety of opinions on this – and that’s a good thing.*)
- The universal experience of being sick might be one of our most shared experiences of being *compelled*. Once we are really sick, we might be compelled to have a fever or to rest, etc. Setting aside the aches and pains of being sick, how do you like being compelled? (*Again, some people might argue that you can resist this compulsion through medication or “mind-over-matter” thinking. Welcome that discussion.*)
- Of course, we think of sickness (and compulsion in general) in negative ways. But could we think of them in more positive ways? ... We all know of bad viruses, but what about a good “virus”, like a virtuous cycle? ... Could we imagine the love of Jesus “infecting” us with a drive to love, or a drive to do good? Discuss.

The next few of the passages that use the word “compel” refer to images of being surrounded, such as the miracle-seekers surrounding Jesus or the soldiers watching guard over Jesus or the Jewish leaders pressing their hands over their ears (when they didn’t want to listen to Stephen’s words).

- When you think about things pressing in on you in your life, is that a good thing?
- On a Sunday night, when you face the work week or pressures of a new week, what sorts of things surround you or press in on you?
- How might we open our eyes to see that God’s love and mercy are also surrounding us?

The last use of this word in these texts is being compelled or drawn to something, as when Paul was compelled to share his testimony about Jesus or when Paul felt almost equally drawn both to the idea of living with Christ and to the possibility of dying with Christ.

- Is it better to be “compelled” by something or “drawn” to something?
- When we say that a story or a rationale is “compelling,” is that a negative thing?
- When we are compelled to do something, do we have a choice in the matter?

Read or paraphrase the following story:

In 1521, the Protestant reformer Martin Luther was called before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V for a formal meeting. Luther thought it was an opportunity to defend his teachings and writings that had critiqued the church’s practices such as essentially “selling” forgiveness. But instead of being asked to explain himself, Luther was told by the emperor to recant (or to “take back” and deny his criticisms of the church). As part of his reply to the emperor, Luther said, “I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.”

- What was the emperor compelling Martin Luther to do in this story? [Recant.]
- What was Luther’s conscience compelling him to do? [Stand firm in his convictions.]
- Did Luther have a choice in the matter?

We have a choice in how we respond to the demands of our life. Because Luther was *compelled by* or *drawn to* a deeper conviction, he refused the lesser authority of the Emperor and responded instead to the greater authority of God.

Consider the use of the word “compel” in this quote from CBF missionaries Matt and Michelle Norman, who minister in the Barcelona, Spain metro area with immigrants and international students from North and West Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. They say, “We are *compelled* to join God in this work to serve and to share the good news of Christ with many whom have not heard, and to live life together with people who will grow in Christ and serve the world.”

- What do you think the Normans mean when they say they are “compelled” to join God in serving immigrants and refugees in Spain?

More about CBF missionaries
Matt and Michelle Norman:

[http://www.cbfolk.org/?
page_id=792](http://www.cbfolk.org/?page_id=792)

[http://
www.cbfindernationals.org/
Personnel/
MattandMichelleNorman/
tabid/8772/language/en-US/
Default.aspx](http://www.cbfindernationals.org/Personnel/MattandMichelleNorman/tabid/8772/language/en-US/Default.aspx)

We have discussed several uses of the word “compel.” Sometimes this word suggests that we don’t have a full choice. The key to understand this word is balance. “To compel” is a strong force – like when we almost can’t resist feeling symptoms when we are sick. But the Bible reminds us over and again that God gives us freedom, even the freedom to sin or turn away. Whatever our choices, God’s love and mercy are always surrounding us, which we learned is another use of the word “compel.”

- When the Bible tells us that “Christ’s love compels us,” does it mean that Christ’s love forces us into *compulsory actions*?
- Does it mean that Christ’s love is merely interesting or *compelling*?
- Is it someplace between the two?

Let’s try to hold all these images of “compel” together. Let’s remember that in the best possible way, we have been infected by the love of Jesus! Let’s remember that God’s love surrounds us and presses in on us! Let’s be so moved by Christ’s sacrifice for us that we are drawn to a deeper commitment. Responding to Christ’s sacrifice for us, may we be *compelled* to do the right thing. Looking past the world’s cries and orders, may we respond most fully to the call of Christ.

DO **What are your takeaways in this discovery of the word *sunecho*?**

Possible takeaways:

*Being compelled by Christ’s love is not being coerced against our will.
Being compelled by Christ’s love is more than just interesting or “compelling.”
Being compelled by Christ’s love inspires and draws us further into the hands of God.*

- What will you **do** in light of these takeaways?

*The call to action for this lesson may not necessarily be an external action.
The first call to action may be to rest in Christ’s love in order to gain a greater appreciation for what Christ has already done for us.*

Christ’s love led him to die for *you* and to die for *all*.

- What are your feelings in response to this truth about Christ’s love?
- How compelling is that for you?

PRAY 

Give thanks for Christ’s love. Give thanks for Christ dying for us and for all. Pray for ways that Christ’s love can draw us in and urge us on.

RESOURCE PAGE FOR LESSON 1

Reproduce this page and cut along the dotted lines. Break your class into small groups and distribute one section to a small group to discuss how the words in italics deepen their understanding of the word “to compel,” and then briefly reporting back to the whole class.

✂.....

Matthew 4:24 (KJV): They brought unto him all sick people that *were taken* with divers diseases and torments...

Luke 4:38 (KJV): Simon’s wife’s mother *was taken* with a great fever...

Luke 8:37 (KJV): Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they *were taken* with great fear...

Acts 28:8 (KJV): And it came to pass, that the father of Publius *lay sick* of a fever...

✂.....

Luke 8:45 (NIV): “Who touched me?” Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and *pressing* against you.”

Luke 12:50 (NIV): Jesus, speaking prophetically about the coming days: “But I have a baptism to undergo, and what *constraint* I am under until it is completed!”

Luke 19:43 (NIV): From when Jesus weeps for Jerusalem: “The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and *hem* you in on every side.”

✂.....

Luke 22:63 (KJV): When the soldiers mocked Jesus prior to His crucifixion: And the men that *held* Jesus mocked him, and smote him.

Acts 7:57 (NIV): From the stoning of Stephen, when the Sanhedrin can no longer bear to listen to his testimony: At this they *covered* their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,

✂.....

Acts 18:5 (KJV): Describing Paul’s evangelism to the Jews and Greeks in Corinth: And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was *pressed* in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

Philippians 1:23 (ESV): From Paul’s passage about how “to live is Christ, and to die is gain”: “I am *hard pressed* between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”

2 Corinthians 5:14 (NIV) For Christ’s love *compels* us, because we are convinced that one died for all . . .

Christ's Love Compels Us to Live on Mission

Reference verse:

2 Corinthians 5:15 (NIV). And he (Christ) died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Takeaway Statement:

Christ's love compels us to live not for ourselves but for Him. We live for Him by joining in the mission of God in the world.

DIG

- When you hear the words, “living for Christ on mission,” what are your thoughts?
- Two hundred years ago, a “mission field” was often understood as some place far away from home, like China or Africa. Where are the “mission fields” today?

DISCOVER

Setting aside our “church” definition of missions, what is a mission? Think of the movie *Mission Impossible*'s famous opening words, “Your mission, if you choose to accept it...”

Key passages:

1 John 4:9

John 20:21

John 1:14a

- What are some synonyms or a quick definition for a mission?
- Is a mission meaningful without someone assigned to work on or complete the task?

Let's take a quick look at two brief verses that discuss God's mission and who is assigned to advance this project.

1 John 4:9 (NIV) 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

John 20:21 (NIV) Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

- In these verses, who initiates the mission to save the world?
- Who is first sent on this assignment?
- Who joins the mission later?
- Why does this order matter?
- What are your thoughts about this statement: “The Bible is a record of God being on mission.” Do you agree or disagree?
- If we are called to join with God on this mission, what does that look like?

- There are a number of ways for us to join with God on mission. Some are more comfortable than others. Which of these three statements would you agree with most?
 1. Giving to missions is the best way to be on mission with God.
 2. Doing missions (like serving in a ministry or participating in a mission trip) is the best way to be on mission with God.
 3. “Being on mission” (living every day in our community with a mission mindset) is the best way to be on mission with God.
- Are some of us called to just one of these? Is each Christian “on the hook” for all of these?

Surely, there were a variety of ways to accomplish God’s mission of love and reconciliation. And yet one of the verses we read earlier reminds us that God sent Jesus into the world. God’s mission is not done from afar, but within the world.

Let’s look at another verse to explore this idea further. In John 1:14a, the gospel writer testified: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

In Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*, he translates John 1:14 as: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”

One aspect of Jesus’ mission was leaving his heavenly home, moving into our neighborhood, and becoming “flesh and blood” with us. Jesus was familiar with our experience, our struggles, our pain, our hopes, fears and dreams. Christ loved us enough to truly know us.

- How well do we know our neighbors?
- How long does it take to truly know our neighbors’ struggles, pain, hopes, fears and dreams?
- How can we become “flesh and blood” among our neighbors at home, at work, at play?
- We’ve heard a lot of troubling news in the last year about mistrust or danger in our communities. What does it look like for us to “move into the neighborhood” more fully so that we can be part of the solution?



What are your takeaways in this discovery of a God who is on a mission, and of a church which is then sent to join in that mission?

Specific action steps:

GIVE to those who are on mission officially as CBF field personnel.

There are those who respond to the call to formally take on the role of a missionary. The love of Christ compels them to uproot themselves from their homes and move and live long-term away from their family of origin. In the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, they are our CBF Field Personnel who serve in

various countries and in the United States. Perhaps your family, class, or congregation has a personal connection with one or more of these CBF field personnel. If not, consider making a connection! You can read their stories here: <http://www.cbf.net/missions/fieldpersonnel/>.

These good folks would be happy to introduce themselves and their ministry to your group via Skype, their newsletter, or perhaps a video that they have prepared to tell their stories.

We can also support the mission work of our field personnel by giving to the CBF Offering for Global Missions <http://www.cbf.net/missions/ogm/> and “adopting” a CBF field personnel member.

DO missions by going on short-term trips here or abroad. Participate in mission opportunities like Mission Madness, Mission Kids, Mission Exchange, Mission Immersion Experiences, PASSPORTmissions, etc.

For the more adventuresome, consider making a trip to assist field personnel in their ministries in the US or overseas. You can learn what it means to have a “missionary mindset” from these sorts of experiences and bring those lessons back into our own communities.

BE on mission wherever you are by adopting a “missionary mindset.” Learn how our field personnel adopt a missionary mindset and lifestyle.

Take prayer walks in your neighborhoods around your home and around your church. Talk to neighbors to discover the needs, the challenges, the “pinch points” of your community.

At work, home, and church, set aside your to-do list for a moment and remember to enjoy and deepen your relationships.

PRAY

Give thanks to God for being a missionary God, whose love sent Jesus to live among us. Pray that God will show us where we can join in Christ’s work.

Stephen Porter is the CBF’s Global Missions Coordinator. Watch Steven Porter’s introductory video and consider showing a portion (perhaps the first half) with your class:

<http://www.cbf.net/identity/who-we-are/staff/leadership-profiles/porter/>

At the 1:46 minute mark, Dr. Porter talks about what he is truly passionate about in global mission.

Christ's Love Compels Us to Advocate for Justice

Reference verse:

2 Corinthians 5:16 (NIV): So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

Takeaway Statement:

Christ's love forms us together to advocate justice for the marginalized.

DIG

Open with a “Family Feud” type game. Ask your class to name the top four groups of people that the Bible repeatedly challenges believers to protect. See if your class can name all four before they get 3 strikes. (*The poor, widows, orphans, and foreigners.*)

The Bible clearly directs us to show mercy and work for justice on behalf of marginalized people. In Biblical times, these four groups (the poor, widows, orphans, and those from other lands) were emblematic of the vulnerable. They are what Pastor Tim Keller calls that society's people with the least social and economic power of their day.

- Has this list of “vulnerable groups” changed today?
- What other groups we should add to this list? (Be respectful of one another's opinions since this topic can be tricky!)

DISCOVER

The Bible challenges us to show mercy and to do justice, with a particular eye for the vulnerable. Here are three of the many, many scriptures that remind us of our obligations to the outsiders or downtrodden. (Consider asking volunteers to read the three verses.)

Key passages:

Micah 6:8

Zechariah 7:9-10

Proverbs 31:8-9

- Micah 6:8 (NRSV) ⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?
- Zechariah 7:9-10 (NIV) ⁹ “This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. ¹⁰ Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’
- Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV) ⁸ Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. ⁹ Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

However, not all Christians agree about what justice and mercy should look like or what specific steps would be the most effective or appropriate.

- What are some of the challenges for churches that have significant ministries to show mercy to people in need?
- What are some of the challenges for churches that speak out for justice?

For one way to consider these questions, read or paraphrase this story by Francis X. Meehan, published in William J. Bausch's *A World of Stories for Preachers and Teachers*, p. 320.

Once there was a farming town that could be reached only by a narrow road with a bad curve in it. There were frequent accidents on the road, especially at the curve, and the preacher would preach to the people of the town to make sure they were Good Samaritans. And so they were, as they would pick the people up on the road, for this was a religious work. One day someone suggested that they buy an ambulance to get the accident victims to the town hospital more quickly. The preacher preached and the people gave, for this was a religious work.

Then one day a councilman suggested that the town authorize building a wider road and taking out the dangerous curve. Now it happened that the mayor had a farm market right at the curve on the road, and he was against taking out the curve. Someone asked the preacher to say a word to the mayor and the congregation next Sunday about it. But the preacher and most of the people figured they had better stay out of politics; so next Sunday the preacher preached on the Good Samaritan Gospel and encouraged the people to continue their fine work of picking up the accident victims—which they did.

- In this story, the church clearly is doing an excellent job with “acts of mercy” – responding to people in crisis. Is that enough?
- What do you think about that church’s decision to “stay out of politics” and just continue “their fine work of picking up accident victims”?
- If the church advocated for straightening the road, would they be helping others or themselves – or both?
- If the church or some members of the church advocated for straightening the road, what risks or problems might they encounter?

Most churches find it easier to agree on ministries of mercy than on speaking prophetically about justice. Let’s face it, the biblical prophets weren’t always popular with people or leaders!

Speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves and defending the rights of the poor and needy often requires “speaking truth to power” and advocating for legislative and structural changes that might go against the interests of the rich and powerful. Our ministries often focus on “comforting the afflicted.” But true justice sometimes requires “afflicting the comfortable.”

- In the story we just read, who was “comfortable”? The mayor? The preacher who ducked the issue? The congregation that avoided a challenging conversation?

Our focus verse for today is 2 Corinthians 5:16 (NIV): “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.”

The world’s most common way to regard other people is “us vs. them.” This way of thinking may also show up in the above story. Those of us in the church are taking care of them, the ones who had accidents on the road. Or it might be, “I’m careful on that road, so that’s their problem, not mine.” This sort of thinking is the world’s way of regarding others.

But God regards humans not in terms of “us vs. them,” but “I am with them.” When Jesus entered time and space as a human, he showed us how we, too, can enter into the experiences of others. If we regard others with God’s eyes, perhaps we’ll see that we are all interconnected. Perhaps we’ll see that if we straighten the road, the accident we prevent *might be our own*. Perhaps we’ll see that the costs and burdens of *not fixing* the road might land directly – or indirectly – on us. Or perhaps we’ll take ourselves out of the equation, considering others as better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3).

God asks us to do justice. It’s not always easy. Sometimes, we do not want to “rock the boat.” It’s much simpler to prefer comfort over hard work and difficult conversations.

But there are many injustices in the world. Not all of them are politically divisive, but all of them could benefit from the wisdom that both political parties (or other perspectives) might offer. Let’s not just comfort the afflicted. Let’s afflict the comfortable – starting with ourselves.



What are your takeaways in this discovery of a God who loves and defends those with the least economic and social power?

Specific action steps:

LEARN more about the work of justice and advocacy by the CBF.

CBF Advocacy is rooted in the same spirit and call that motivates our mission endeavors: to demonstrate the love of Christ by loving our most neglected and marginalized neighbors. As Christians dedicated to service, we often encounter situations and issues in need of a strong voice.

As you listen to the following description of the values and practices of CBF’s advocacy program, what words or ideas resonate with you or challenge you?

- CBF Advocacy is: Individual *and* systemic. Global *and* national. State *and* local. Relational. Nonpartisan. Unapologetically rooted in the Gospel. Cooperative across religious, political and racial divides.

- CBF Advocacy seeks to: Promote civility. Develop new ways for individuals to follow their passions within CBF life. Compromise when it leads to progress. Speak out on behalf of others and encourage others to find and use their own voice.
- CBF Advocacy is not about: Passing resolutions and finding the “right” side of political issues. Selecting issues from the top down and forcing them upon churches and pastors. Asking churches to get involved in partisan politics by endorsing or opposing candidates for office.

One advocacy issue that CBF is involved in is Pay Day Lending. **WATCH** two videos that explain pay day lending: <https://cbfblog.com/2014/07/01/payday-lending-how-should-the-church-respond/>

CONNECT with CBF Field Personnel Greg and Sue Smith of LUCHA Ministries, who work among Latinos in the greater Fredericksburg, Virginia area. Based on the biblical call of justice and mercy for the marginalized of our society, LUCHA Ministries promotes a holistic approach to the needs and challenges of the immigrant community. <http://www.luchaministries.org/>

PRAY

Give thanks to God for being a God of love and justice. Pray to have eyes to see the injustice suffered by those on the margins of society, to have the heart to be moved to action, to be the voice, the hands and the feet of Christ to advocate for justice.

Watch a 45 minute video of a presentation by Stephen Reeves, CBF’s Associate Coordinator of Partnerships and Advocacy, recorded at a CBF of Virginia’s “Feast of Faith” on November, 2014.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XMMbS1yTxw>

LESSON 4

Christ's Love Compels Us to Become a New Creation

Reference verse:

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Takeaway Statement:

Christ's love forms us into a new creation, one that draws from our past and looks ahead to the future.

DIG

Take a few minutes to talk about “then” vs. “now.” Depending on the comfort level of your group, you could play a game like Pictionary or you could simply chat about how chores and technology have changed over the years.

Discussion items might include TVs, telephones, computers, or how we dry our clothes. (Some might remember using an operator, or simply dialing 4 digits of the telephone number for local numbers; many people can remember having black-and-white TVs with just a few channels; many of us can remember life without computers, etc.) If your group is more adventuresome, you could play Pictionary with phrases like “rabbit ears on a TV set,” “car phone,” “clothes line,” or “floppy disk.”

- Continuing our discussion of “then” vs “now,” what are a few changes you’ve noticed in Baptist or U.S. churches in general, or in our church in particular?
- If God makes a “new creation” out of individual believers, should our churches be marked by change as well?
- In what ways has your own life and attitudes changed or stayed the same since you became a Christian and a “new creation”?

The process of becoming a “new creation” is not all change. There are parts of our personality and values and experiences that are timeless and individual to each of us, even as the spirit continually works within us to form us and create space for new life.

DISCOVER

Key passages:

Matthew 9:14-17

Psalms 78:1-4

Let's first begin by looking at the new – how Jesus himself brought new ideas and challenged past ideas of what it meant to be “religious.” In the Gospels, Jesus and his disciples often faced criticism from those who perceived them to be breaking with the treasured traditions of the Jewish faith – be it fasting, keeping the Sabbath, or attitudes towards sinners, tax collectors and Samaritans.

Read or ask a volunteer to read Matthew 9:14-17 (NIV): ¹⁴ Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵ Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. ¹⁶ "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. ¹⁷ Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

- What was Jesus trying to teach about change and new ideas in this exchange with the disciples of John?
- What implications, if any, does this passage have on our church practices today?
- In considering renewing traditions and practices of the church, what is the "wine," the important value, discipline, or belief that we should try to preserve?
- Is it easy to set aside old wineskins or traditions?

Now let's consider what Psalm 78 teaches about valuing the "things from of old."

Read or ask a volunteer to read Psalm 78:1-4 (NIV): My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. ² I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old-- ³ things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. ⁴ We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

Just because Christ's love compels us to become a new creation, we do not have to reject or denigrate the traditions, practices and contributions of previous generations. Knowledge of what God has done in the past provides a foundation for a new generation to step into the future.

- How can the next generation hear from the older generation about the praiseworthy deeds the Lord has done in the past?
- How can we discern which valued traditions and "things from of old" are still relevant and meaningful in our current day?
- How can we glean from the wisdom and experience of elders as we consider new approaches or changes?
- How can the older generations hear from the next generation about possible new wineskins to carry and share the unchanging gospel in a new age?



What are your takeaways in this discovery of Christ's love that forms us together to a new creation?

Specific action steps:

SCHEDULE a time and a place to host an intergenerational dialogue between senior adults and youth or young adults. Invite senior adults to talk about various church programs and practices “back in the day.”

Supplies needed:

Butcher paper or easel pad

Tape or easel

Markers

Other requirements:

Open-hearted listening

Genuine curiosity

Empathy

Have them answer the questions below, and ask the youth and young adults to write down the answers on butcher paper and respond to what they hear.

- What programs and worship practices were/are meaningful to them in nurturing their faith?
- What were some “new” programs or songs or events that were introduced in the church that became meaningful?
- Why did we do things the way we did? What needs did those programs meet?
- What factors in society worked for or against the success of those practices and traditions?
- What values and beliefs were those programs and practices trying to preserve and pass on?
- What can we learn from other generations about living out our faith in today's world? What can they learn from us?

Reverse roles, and invite youth or young adults to answer the above questions and have the senior adults respond to what they heard.

Together, the various generations might answer these questions:

- What did we hear from the other generation that resonated with us? What can we learn from them about our faith?
- What are our hopes and dreams for our faith and lives as growing Christians? How are those hopes and dreams similar or different than the ones that other generations have for us?
- What values and beliefs are important to us as we strive to live out our faith? What programs and worship practices can nurture and preserve those values and beliefs? How might those programs and practices be similar or different than the ones mentioned by the other generation?

CHOOSE one “old” way of thinking, practice or system recorded on the butcher paper and brainstorm specific steps how that “old” way can be transformed into a “new” way of embodying, preserving and living out our Christian faith today.

LEARN how CBF is creating a Young Baptist Ecosystem to foster a new generation of Baptist leaders. Through programs such as seminary scholarships, internships, annual retreats, and pairing young people with field personnel on mission around the world, CBF is joining with God to raise up leaders with eyes to see the “new creation” that God is forming the church into. For an overview of these programs, see: <https://cbfblog.com/2014/11/04/creating-a-young-baptist-ecosystem/>

PRAY 

Give thanks for Jesus Christ, who is “the same, yesterday, today and forever” for making “all things new.” Ask God for wisdom and courage to participate in God’s ushering in a new creation.

LESSON 5

Christ's Love Compels Us to a Ministry of Reconciliation

Reference verse:

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (NIV) All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation .

Takeaway Statement:

Christ's love forms us together, so that we may have unity in Christ, intentional community and cooperation with each other in the midst of diversity.

DIG

According to the Miriam-Webster dictionary, "reconciliation" is the act of causing two people or groups to become friendly again after an argument or disagreement.

- What areas in our world, in our country, in our church, in the political arena, or in our personal lives are in need of reconciliation? (Perhaps in light of the events of the last years, it might be easier to list groups that *don't* need reconciliation!)
- What obstacles prevent individuals and groups from reconciling with each other?

DISCOVER

Key passages:

Romans 5:10

Ephesians 2:13-16

Ask a volunteer or two to read the following Bible passages:

2 Corinthians 5:18-19, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

Romans 5:10 (NIV) ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

- In these two passages, who initiates a ministry of reconciliation?
- Imagine you've had an argument. Is it harder to initiate a reconciliation, or is it harder to respond to the initiator? (Or are both simply hard?)
- What does reconciliation involve, on either side?
- What did Christ do to bring reconciliation between God and human beings? (*One answer, of course, is that Jesus died for our sins. But as we discussed a week or so ago, another is that Jesus entered into our world.*)

- What is the “message of reconciliation” and how do we spread this message?
- Can we bring reconciliation to strangers? (In other words, can I move to a new town and say, “Hey, everyone, let’s get over your differences and work together!”)
- In light of that, what is the first task of a ministry of reconciliation? (*One possible answer might be to first build relationships so that you can influence people and communities toward reconciliation. Another might be that “reconciliation begins at home” – we must first start by reconciling with those in our own circle.*)

Read: Ephesians 2:13-16 (NIV) ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

One of the most contentious issues faced by the early church was the question of inclusion of Gentiles (non-Jews) into the Christian community. Since most early Christians were Jews (who believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah), the church wondered if Gentiles must become Jews (be circumcised, follow the dietary laws and ritual regulations) before they could become Christians.

In this passage from Ephesians, the writer argued no, Gentiles did not have to convert to Judaism first before they could become Christians. The text reminds us that Jesus took down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles.

On the cross, Jesus reconciled both groups to God, and created in himself one new humanity out of the two. The goal was unity and cooperation in the midst of diversity of backgrounds, beliefs, and practices.

- How might some early Christians have welcomed this view? How might others have resisted this view?
- What groups today are separated by walls of hostility?
- What does a ministry of reconciliation look like amidst these groups?
- St. Augustine once said: “In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.”
 - ◆ What are the essentials of the Christian faith that requires unity?
 - ◆ What are the non-essentials of the Christian faith that allows liberty, diversity and differences?
 - ◆ How might all groups display charity in all things?

- In light of recent events, do you have any recent stories to share of unity between distrustful groups?
 - ◆ Do you know of politicians who can reach across the aisles?
 - ◆ Have you heard of police officers who have shown or received community support in the last months? (One example happened in July in Missouri, when in light of the recent shootings of police officers, the Kansas City Black Lives Matter group cancelled a planned protest and instead organized a picnic with police <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/07/19/kansas-black-lives-matter-holds-picnic-police-instead-protest/87299934/>.)
 - ◆ What influence or relationships do you and your church have that can break down walls of hostility?

DO  **What are your takeaways in this discovery of Christ’s love that compels us to a ministry of reconciliation?**

Specific action steps:


THINK about a situation (in your life, in your family, at work, at church), where reconciliation is needed. What one step can you take as an individual or as a group toward breaking down the dividing wall of hostility?

Since reconciliation begins with God, **PONDER** on the ways that God through Christ is not counting our sins against us. With that in mind, **PRAY** about ways that you can also not count the wrongs against those who sinned against you.

LEARN about CBF’s *Illumination Project*

<https://cbfportal.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/illumination-project.pdf>

launched at the General Assembly in Greensboro, NC in June of 2016. It is a movement to foster conversations to shed light on difficult questions. Like the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in the last passage we read, the goal is not always unanimous conclusions, but a cooperative spirit. That might be a good guiding principal for all our relationships!

PRAY  Thank God for God’s forgiveness and not counting our sins against us. Ask God for the wisdom, courage and strength to offer the same kind of reconciliation to others that has been freely offered to us in Christ.

Christ's Love Compels Us to be Ambassadors for Christ

Reference verse:

2 Corinthians 5:20a (NIV) We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

Takeaway Statement:

Christ's love forms us together to partner with others as God's ambassadors in the world.

DIG

- What is an ambassador? What are the roles and responsibilities of an ambassador representing his or her government in a foreign country?
- Does the ambassador speak or act out of his or her own power, opinions, and resources?

Have someone read 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:1 (NIV) ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ¹ As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

DISCOVER

Key passages:

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:1

1 Corinthians 3:3-9

In this passage, Paul calls the Corinthian Christians to be reconciled to God and to embrace a ministry of reconciliation. From a foundation of a restored relationship or fellowship with God and with one another, Christians are then called to be Christ's "ambassadors" and God's "co-workers."

- In what ways is a disciple an ambassador, a representative of Christ and God's Kingdom?
- What qualities and qualifications does one need to be a good ambassador?
- Another word for "co-worker" is "partner." Not only do we represent Christ, but we are also God's partners. How can we be partners in God's work? How does that tie into what we learned in Lesson 2, that God is on mission, and we are called to join in God's saving work?

Consider a hypothetical area of ministry. It could be hunger in your community or around the world. It could be disaster relief in a situation like New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina or the flooding in Baton Rouge. Think for a minute (on your own or in a small group) about what you *as an individual* could do *on your own*. No working with other individuals, nonprofits, or other organizations! What would your ministry look like?

Now think for a minute about what you could do in that same situation when *partnering with other people* through a network, nonprofit, or other organizations.

- What would your ministry look like now? What would be the pros and cons of working with others to address the problem?
- Finally, think for a minute about what you can do in that same situation when *partnering with God*, again, likely through a network, nonprofit, or other organizations?
- What mindset and resources are you tapping into?

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 3:3-9 (NIV) ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? ⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe-- as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. ⁹ For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

The Bible is honest – our “worldly” and “human” ways can make partnerships challenging. We each have our own motivations or our own sense of the best way to move forward. For Christians, the best antidote to such divisions is to remember that we – as representatives of Christ – are formed together and serve one purpose. We can do much more together than we can on our own.

- When we get frustrated with our human partners, it might be good for us to remember that God has clearly chosen to partner with humanity. Do you think God “counted the cost” of dealing with our weaknesses and failings?
- What qualities make a good partner?
- How can our partnerships represent the reconciliation we have in Christ and with one another?
- Do you have a positive memory or success story from a time when you or your church partnered with another church or organization, perhaps organized through CBF, or perhaps organized through your community?

DO  **What are your takeaways in this discovery of Christ's love that forms us together to partner with others as God's ambassadors in the world?**

Possible takeaways:

Before we can represent Christ and be His ambassador, we are invited to a reconciled relationship with God and with others. This relationship or fellowship is who we are. A partnership with God and others in God's work is what we do out of that fellowship to represent Christ and His Church.

Specific action steps:

LEARN how the CBF is partnering with other organizations to represent Christ and do the work of God's Kingdom. <http://www.cbf.net/partnerships/>

CONNECT:

- What organizations and agencies and other churches are representing and doing Christ's work in your community?
- Which of those organizations, agencies and churches might make good partners to strengthen and broaden the ministry of your church?
- How much do you know about the work these organizations do?
- How well do you know the leaders and staff of those organizations?

PRAY 

Give thanks to God for choosing us as ambassadors and representatives of Christ. Ask God to show you ways to see what God is doing in the world and partner with others who are doing the same thing in order to help bring God's new world into being.

I hope this Bible study has been a blessing to you, as it has been to me in writing it!

I would love to hear from you about how you used this study and what worked (and didn't work) for you.

Would you mind letting me know via any (or all) of these ways?

- Email me at michael@michaelkcheuk.com
- Share your thoughts on my business Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/michaelkcheuk/>
- Tweet or send a message to @MichaelKCheuk.

I hope you will also let me know what additional Bible studies or resources that I might be able to find, curate, or provide to help you in your ministry.

Your thoughts and feedback are very important to me.

Finally, if you have not done so already, I hope you will consider subscribing to my email newsletter list at <http://michaelkcheuk.com/subscribe/>

As a subscriber, you will receive weekly emails and updates from my blog. You may also receive periodic surveys asking how I might be able to provide more value to you in your ministry.

Thank you!

Michael K Cheuk