

Speaking of Jesus Pt. 5: Chaplains for a Challenging World

By Colton Conrad

What is a Chaplain? For most of us, we know of Chaplains who directly support a hockey team, regiment in the armed forces, or a particular hospital or prison. Chaplains are in a particular place, with the goal of caring for the lives and of the people they are given to care for. They have a particular sense in which they are the connection of that group to something transcendent - to the God who gives meaning, purpose, significance, and comfort. In our culture, many do not know God, and even more do not know a follower of Jesus personally. Wherever you are, that means that you may be the first and even primary way someone will see what a life lived in Jesus Christ is like. It's a big responsibility, but it's one that the Holy Spirit calls us to and empowers us for.

Open Up

1. When you think of a Chaplain, what do you think of? Who do you think of? What characteristics set them apart from others?
2. Who is someone you would consider "wise", and why?

Dig In

Read Colossians 4:5-6 & 1 Peter 2:12

3. How does a person "walk in wisdom toward outsiders?" What are some ways that someone who doesn't know Christ see someone walking in a "godly" way - doing what is right, not just what works, and see *wisdom*?
4. In the past, people often used the logic of: *Truth* (This is true), *Belief* (If it's true, then you must believe it), *Praxis* (If you believe, now you must live it). Sam Chan argues that with postmodernism today, there is another, more effective sequence: *Praxis* (The Christian Life is livable - it is wise, it makes sense of our world), *Belief* (If it's livable, then it is also believable), *Truth* (If it's believable, then it's also true.)

This means that people need to see our lifestyle. We need to make friends, need our Christian friends to become friends with our non-Christian friends. We need to be part of the same community, so that our non-Christian friends see how the Christian life works, so they can discover that it's livable, then believable, and then true.

How can we *live with* - *not just visit* - our non-Christian friends?

Write It Down and Put it Into Practice

Make a list of the different spheres in your life that intersect with non-Christians (i.e., your neighbours, your co-workers, your classmates, your fellow Soccer Moms, your pick-up hockey guys, your favourite coffee-shop frequenters, etc.)

Now, what do you know of them? Write down some of the things you know about them (i.e., what they like, who their spouse is, what their major is, what classes they like, what kind of coffee they drink at the rink, where they work, the names of their kids)

Take some time to pray this week about each of those people. Do they know Jesus? If you frequently see them and they don't know Jesus - you, just by caring, can be their Unofficial, Defector Chaplain! Be intentional to find out something new about them, or a way you can pray for them next you pass them by. Take an actual interest in them!

Dig In (Again!)

Ajith Fernando, in his book *Sharing the Truth in Love*, says that "humble servanthood" is an important feature of people sharing the message:

"The Bible is clear that those who proclaim the lordship of Jesus are servants of the people to whom they proclaim this message. Paul told the Corinthians, "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5). He also said, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible" (1 Cor. 9:19). Our model is Jesus, who "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). This principle of servanthood has numerous applications to evangelistic ministry today."

5. In your daily or weekly routine, how are you a servant of those to whom you want to reach with the message of Jesus?
6. We spoke of knowing people's names, taking an interest in their life, being available and ready to pray with them, and being a calm, non-anxious presence as a few ways we can adopt a posture of a chaplain - someone intentionally seeking to humbly serve. What

are some other practical ways we can serve others, and how might you, or your small group, engage in those together?

Engaging the Existential Cries and Storylines of Those We Care For

In our message, we looked at how, as Chaplains in a Challenging world, questions are a great way to help people consider a new perspective and draw out their motive, hurt, or address a cultural assumption in conversation.

Many people have what is called an “*Existential Cry*” or a “*Storyline*” that they are seeking to fulfill in their lives. An existential cry is how a culture expresses a longing for transcendence, meaning, community, love, freedom, forgiveness, intimacy, uniqueness, connection, usefulness, approval, harmony, wisdom, and redemption, and peace. Chan argues that many want peace in their lives. As an example, he would respond that the forgiveness of Jesus is what can really bring us peace - peace with God and one another.

Tim Keller also addresses how every culture has a storyline that seeks to answer the big questions in life, like: “How should things be? Why are things not the way they should be? What would set things right?”

Sam Chan, in his book *Evangelism in a Skeptical World* looks at those questions and sees that the only way there will be a happy ending for those storylines is if they find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. As a Chaplain, we can *listen, understand, and empathize* with these storylines, and then pray about how to show people that without Christ, no matter how they live they can’t achieve the happy ending they are looking for. “We can show them how Jesus gives them a far better ending than what they were wishing for.”

7. So, what are the existential cries of the people around you (maybe on that list you created)? How do the people who don’t know Jesus and live around, try to answer those big questions? What questions might you ask them to prompt a discussion on those things?

Asking Questions

In the message, we looked at how as Chaplains in a challenging world, questions are a major help to draw out the motives, the hurts, and the assumptions of those we are caring for. Asking clarifying questions can help us not get stuck in a defensive corner, without being rude or

mean-spirit.

Consider the below dialogue as an example of how to ask clarifying questions. Ask, as you read this, “How would you ask questions differently than the Christian here? What are some of the questions or statements you are likely to hear from those in your city?” (This is half an excerpt from Randy Newman’s *Questioning Evangelism*, and half of Pastor Colton’s. You can find more of these in his book.)

NON-CHRISTIAN: *I don’t think anyone has the right to say that their religion is right, and someone else’s is wrong. I think that all religions are right.*

CHRISTIAN: *I’m not sure I understand. Can you explain that to me?*

NON-CHRISTIAN: *What do you mean?*

CHRISTIAN: *Well, I used to believe that myself—that all religions were right and that no one’s faith was better than anyone else’s.*

NON-CHRISTIAN: *So, what happened to you?*

CHRISTIAN: *Someone challenged me to think about it a little. I started finding out what different religions believed. I found that religions that disagree on such basic things can’t all be right.*

NON-CHRISTIAN: *They don’t disagree about basic things. They just disagree about unimportant things like what kinds of clothes to wear or whether to worship on Sunday or Saturday or some other day.*

CHRISTIAN: *I disagree! Different religions differ on major things.*

NON-CHRISTIAN: *Like what?*

CHRISTIAN: *Like what God is like or if there even is a god. Or what we humans are like, what the whole meaning of life is, whether we’re supposed to try to connect with God (or whatever) through action or by withdrawing. And then there’s the whole thing about the afterlife. Do we go to heaven, or do we just die and that’s it? And what difference does any of this make? You’d be amazed at how different the answers are to those questions.*

NON-CHRISTIAN: *Whoa. Slow down. Those things are all so theoretical. When it comes to things that are down to earth, like loving your neighbor, all religions agree about that, don't they? And they all basically lead to the same place, like some kind of heaven, right?*

CHRISTIAN: *Not really. For example, should we care for people dying in the streets, the way Mother Teresa did, or should we let them die so we don't mess up their karma, the way her Hindu critics did? Or how about this, Hinduism and Christianity don't believe in the same overarching problem and solution. Hindu's believe that the supreme reality is Brahman, personified by different gods that are all an extension of one reality, not a distinct identity. There isn't a "loving God" or even the goal of eternal life. The goal is to be liberated from the cycle of reincarnation and merge into the oneness of Brahman, where the illusion of the distinct and unique self disappears. Those goals make a big difference in how you approach questions like loving your neighbour, then if you believed in a loving God who you could know personally and who entered into the hurt of our world to redeem it and make it new.*

NON-CHRISTIAN: *Well, okay. I wish we could all just believe simply what science says and forget the supernatural realm all together.*

CHRISTIAN: *Well, why love your neighbour at all then? Where do you find your grounds for believing that humans are of inherent value, dignity, and worth?*

8. What are some other ways you can answer questions your friends and coworkers might ask with a question to help them see things from a different perspective?

Example: *How can a loving God send people to hell? You might ask, do you believe in hell? How do you think someone would get to heaven or hell?*

Try thinking through some questions for these two questions as well:

- *Doesn't Religion cause violence?*
 - *How Could a Loving God allow so much suffering?*
9. Sam Chan outlines 4 questions that help people arrive at a new perspective when talking about our culture's questions about our faith:
 1. What is it that you want? *Here they can describe what they are looking for.*
 2. Why is this important to you? *This reveals the deeper issue that's driving them.*
 3. Why do you think we see things differently? *This helps them see things from our point*

of view.

4. What would it take for you to trust me? Or Jesus? Or the Bible? *This reveals the real roadblock standing in their way of believing the gospel.*

Pray

Take some time to pray for the people you see each week or month. Write down some of the things you know about them and what you could pray for and consider keeping a card in your pocket as a reminder to pray for them.

Take a moment to ask God to grow your compassion for the people around you. Ask God to grow in you a concern for them that will see you reaching into their lives. Pray for wisdom in how to do that as well.

Pray for different ways that you and your other Christian friends can serve those around you and embody humble servanthood.

Pray for boldness and the wisdom in how to lean into disagreement with positivity and insightful questions when you engage in sharing the message of Christ this week.