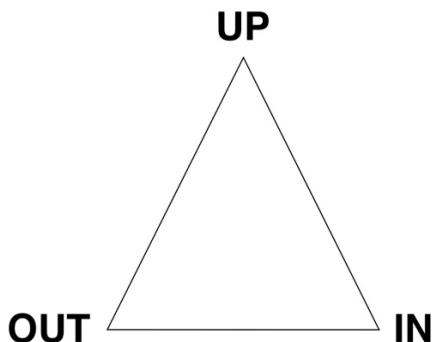


Relationships

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Author, pastor and ministry leader Mike Breen of 3DM Ministries likes shapes. He likes to use the shape of a triangle to describe the 3 kinds of relationships a Christian has. It looks like this:



UP is our relationship with Jesus, IN is our relationships with one another in His church, and OUT is our relationships with those who do not have a relationship with Jesus or His church. I wanted to borrow this image because SOP has some great opportunities coming up to work on all three kinds of relationships.

UP: *Unfollow?*

All too often we want people to be who we want them to be. Take Tim Tebow. Many just want him to be a sports star. Football, baseball...we just want to see Tebow excel in professional sports the way he did in college. We want touchdowns and home runs. That's what we *expect* of him. And then...he ruins our expectations. He kneels on the ground, bows his head and prays. He puts "John 3:16" on his eye black. He openly confesses his faith in Jesus and shows love to others who wouldn't otherwise get, like sponsoring "Night to Shine". He's not just a sports celebrity; he's a Christian. For some, this makes it hard to be a fan. He's upset the apple cart and you're thinking about deleting him from your Twitter account.

This can happen to you in your relationship with Jesus. You think you've got Him pinned down, you think you know what's He like and why you should trust and follow Him...and then he upsets the apple cart. He does stuff that doesn't seem rational. He says things that blows your mind. HE makes it hard to hear those words that come out of His mouth: "Follow Me!" Instead, you're thinking, "After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him." (John 6:66)

Our Sunday sermon series for Lent, *Unfollow?*, will focus on that very thing. We'll be exploring various accounts in the Gospel of John in which Jesus takes our



expectations of Him, His work, His life, and our discipleship, and turns them all on their heads. We'll also discover just how far Jesus goes to make us His followers, and to keep us following Him into eternity, rather than having us click the "unfollow" button.

How's your relationship with Jesus? This series will help strengthen that relationship.

IN: *Life Together*

The thing with the English language is that some of our words can be mistaken in their meaning. An example of this is the word "you". This word can have two meanings. It can mean "you" in the singular, one person or individual. Or it can mean "you" in the plural, many people or a group of individuals. This can be confusing or even misleading. (I suppose therefore, when pressed for clarification, many people will take on a southern drawl and say "ya'all" to indicate that they meant plural!) During worship, whenever I say the words "Jesus died for you" or "Jesus rose for you" or "Jesus loves you", I often don't clarify the meaning of "you", and people are forced to make up their own meaning.

What do you hear when you hear those words? Do you hear "Jesus died for, rose for and loves *me*?" Do you hear these words, even though you are surrounded by a sea of people hearing the exact same words? Do you think they are hearing the same thing? When you, singular, think that "everything is all about me", that's the sinful nature talking. Yes, Jesus died for, rose for and loves you, but if you cut it off at the singular, that can have devastating consequences. It becomes all about you and Jesus. Church activities are just another way to get what you want. It all becomes about your choices and personal preferences. Never mind the person sitting next to you. Never mind every other person surrounding you. Never mind that Jesus died for, rose for and loves you, in the *plural*.

That's what the Church is. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1Corinthians 12:27) That "you" is plural. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1Peter 2:9) That "you" is plural. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:13) That "you" is plural. The Church is not a bunch of singular "you's" but one, plural "you". The Church is not a bunch of "me's", but one "we".

But how do we live as the body of Christ when we are so focused on the individual members? How do we "build up" the one temple of the Lord when all we think about is the single "bricks"? How do we live together as a "we" when so much in our world, our lives and ourselves shout out, "what about me?" That's the focus of our mid-week Lenten series, *Life Together*. Based on the book of the same name written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, this series will also be digging into sections



of 1 Peter, as well as focusing on the passion account of our Lord. Here we will discover the joys, struggles and power of our relationships as the one body of Christ, the Church, the “life together” that Jesus redeemed us to and for.

How’s your relationships with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? This series will strengthen those relationships.

OUT

Our Tuesday evening Life Group has been focusing on sharing your faith with others. We started out by going through the book *Just Words* that details many biblical “metaphors” for the good news of Jesus Christ. Next, we are going through the short book *How to Share Christ Confidently*, which deals with the number one reason many Christians fail to share their faith: fear. Throughout this Life Group, I’ve been encouraging everyone to share the faith in situations where people would really love to hear the good news of Jesus. I have been amazed at some of the wonderful ways group members have come up with in sharing Jesus!

Yet, I realize that this Life Group is more of a “laboratory”, a safe place among fellow Christians where we can go through “scenarios” of what might come our way. I know that the actual times the Lord places in front of us to share our faith will not be so cut and dry. The people who do not know and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior and are not darkening the doors of our church will not be so easy going if we share our faith with them. They might reject us. They might have questions or criticisms that we might not be prepared to answer. They may make fun of us and our “delusional” faith. Even for myself, as well as for the group, I feel that we have two options: we can play it safe and keep it in the group, or I can echo the words of Jesus: “Behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.”

Unless...

Think about the meaning behind these words: “We need to earn permission to talk about our hope in Christ or struggles with God.” Another way of putting it is “gain a hearing”, or “they won’t care what you know until they know that you care.” Sharing your faith in Jesus Christ with those outside the faith becomes a whole lot easier when you have a *relationship* with that person. Not merely an acquaintance, but a good, authentic relationship. Not a relationship whose sole purpose is to “win them for Christ”, but one where you really care about this person, sharing their joys and their burdens, in which you show the love of Christ in deeds also, not only just with words. Does this make sharing your faith fear-proof? No. Does this mean relationships are the silver bullet for 100% acceptance of your faith sharing? No. But, if you have a relationship with Jesus, and a relationship with others, then why would we expect any less when it comes to those outside the faith? Relationships DO matter.



How's your relationships with those outside the faith? Maybe there will be an upcoming series that will strengthen those relationships, but you don't have to wait!

So, as you look at the triangle above, what relationships are strong? What relationships need work with the help of Christ? As we enter this season of Lent, my prayer for you, me and all disciples of Christ is that you repent, turn to Jesus for forgiveness, trust in His love and sacrifice, and live out your faith by strengthening your UP, IN and OUT.

God's peace in Christ,

Pastor Roberts